



the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 763

# REVELATION

## THE APOCALYPSE IS NOTHING TO FEAR

### REVELATION 1

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The marvelous book of Revelation is a prophetic vision of things to come. This first chapter makes it clear that at the center of God's plan for now, for the future, for eternity is Jesus Christ, who is presented to us in a glorious vision that emphasizes His divine attributes.

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We now set sail on our Wisdom Journey to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation.

It is not only the last book in the Bible but also the last one written by the Holy Spirit through His apostolic messengers. By the way, there is a period at the end of this book, not a comma. There is no sequel to the Bible. This is it. This is the final revelation from God.

**THERE IS NO SEQUEL TO THE  
BIBLE. THIS IS IT. THIS IS THE  
FINAL REVELATION FROM  
GOD.**

The opening verse gives us the book's title: "The revelation of Jesus Christ." This book is the declaration of the person and the power and the program of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

This word translated "revelation" is *apokalypsis*—it gives us our word *apocalypse*. It means "unveiling" or "revealing." When most people hear the word *apocalypse*, they think of the end of the world. In a sense, that is true. Rev-

elation will reveal the Lord's plans for the final events in world history.

Some see this book as a symbolic picture of conflicts that have already taken place in the early church.<sup>2</sup> Others interpret Revelation as having been fulfilled over the past 2,000 years. Still others interpret Revelation "as a series of ideals . . . related to the struggle between good and evil."<sup>3</sup>

Well, I believe we should interpret this book just like every other book in the Bible—that is, literally. These are literal prophecies, not spiritual ideals. Revelation gives us a futurist view that takes us to the end of the age.

Of course, a literal interpretation of Scripture allows for metaphor and simile and symbolism—and there is a lot of that in this book. But there is literal meaning behind the symbols and metaphors.

When Jesus said He was the Bread of Life, no one thinks He meant that He would just come out of the oven as a loaf of bread. Likewise, when He called Himself a door, no one thinks He swung open on hinges. Those symbols or

metaphors represented literal spiritual truths. In the same way, we are going to find a lot of meaning in the symbolic images of Revelation.

Verse 1 tells us an angel delivers God's revelation to the apostle John. John is the last of the twelve original apostles still living. He is now an old man, writing this around AD 95.

The revelation is actually *shown* to John in visions. He gives us eyewitness testimony. More than forty times in this book, John will say, "I saw!"<sup>4</sup>

By the way, did you know that Revelation is the only book in the Bible that explicitly offers this unique blessing in verse 3?

*Blessed is the one who reads aloud  
the words of this prophecy, and  
blessed are those who hear, and  
who keep what is written in it, for  
the time is near.*

With that, John begins a section that specifically relates, as verse 4 says, to "the seven churches that are in Asia."

Before we open their personal mail, John describes each member of the triune God. God the Father is described in verse 4 as "him who is and who was and who is to come."

Then John refers to the "seven Spirits . . . before [God's] throne." This is a reference to the Holy Spirit's perfection.<sup>5</sup> Seven is a number that speaks of completion or perfection.

Finally, God the Son, Jesus Christ, is called, "the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead" (verse 5). That is because Jesus led the way in rising from the dead and conquering

death. He is also described here as "the ruler of kings on earth," and that points us ahead to His future millennial kingdom.

John then sort of pauses and starts a little praise service here in verses 5-6. He praises the Lord, who "loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father." In verse 7 he rejoices in the truth that Jesus will one day be "coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him."

Jesus begins speaking personally in verse 8, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. So, with this expression, Jesus is declaring His eternal existence as God the Son.

Having introduced the book, John now begins describing his own suffering. Ancient sources indicate he had been pastoring the church in Ephesus, but he was exiled to "the island called Patmos" because of his testimony for Jesus (verse 9).

Patmos was a small island, and church leaders like Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria tell us John was forced to work in the rock quarries on that island. You can imagine how difficult that would have been for this elderly apostle.

John writes that on Sunday—called the "Lord's day" in verse 10—he was "in the Spirit." He was having his own little church service, when this amazing revelation from God the Holy Spirit came to him by way of a vision.

The vision begins with John hearing a voice commanding him to write what he is about to see and send it to these seven churches

in Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey. Even though they were literal, active churches, they can certainly present principles of application for any church in any generation.

John first sees “seven golden lampstands” (verse 12). We are told later in verse 20 that these “lampstands are the seven churches.” The lampstands represent their gospel testimony of light in the community.

In the midst of these lampstands, or churches, John sees “one like a son of man” (verse 13). This is the typical messianic title for Jesus Christ. This clearly informs these churches that He has not forgotten them. He is right there in the middle of them all.

John goes on to describe Jesus as wearing a robe and a golden sash, or belt. This is significant because these are the garments of Israel’s high priest; so, this is a reminder that Jesus is our High Priest.

The Lord is described as having snow-white hair, which matches the portrait of the “Ancient of Days” given to us in Daniel 7:9.

Jesus’ eyes are “like a flame of fire” (verse 14), which pictures His perfect perception and discernment. His feet of bronze (verse 15) represent His strength; and His voice, which sounds “like the roar of many waters,” describes the power and authority of His word. And beloved, Jesus will have the final word.

John then writes in verse 16, “In his right hand he held seven stars.” In verse 20 we are told the stars are “the angels of the seven churches.” The word for “angel” (*angelos*) simply means “messenger.” These messengers might very well be the pastors of the seven churches who will deliver the Lord’s messages to them.

Verse 16 also describes a “sharp two-edged sword” coming from the mouth of Jesus; this symbolizes His indestructible word. To the people in John’s day, who are facing severe persecution, this is a reminder that Jesus Christ is still in control.

Finally, the Lord’s face is shining like the sun in brilliant majesty. No wonder we read in verse 17 that John “fell at his feet as though dead.” Jesus then speaks to John:

*“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” (verses 17-18)*

How great is that? Beloved, if you are suffering at the hands of evil people, if you are facing a terminal illness, if you cannot see past today’s problems, be captivated all over again and comforted by your Lord. No person or thing can take your life apart from Christ’s knowledge and permission. And when you leave this world, no one can lock you out of heaven, for He holds the keys of eternal life. Your present life and your future home are in His hands.

**NO PERSON OR THING CAN  
TAKE YOUR LIFE APART FROM  
CHRIST’S KNOWLEDGE AND  
PERMISSION.**

How does knowing that Revelation is the final message from God influence how you approach and study this book?

In what ways does the vision of Jesus as “the Alpha and Omega” bring comfort or confidence to you in times of uncertainty?

What impact does the reminder that Jesus is always “in the midst” of His churches have on your participation and role in your local church?

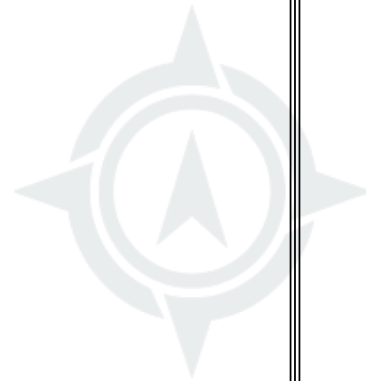


How can you remain strong and focused on Christ’s ultimate control, especially when faced with difficult circumstances or persecution?

How does John’s description of falling at Jesus’ feet in awe inspire your own attitude of reverence toward God in worship?

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Plot your Wisdom Journey.  
How would the Lord have you respond to what you’ve learned today?



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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Constable, “Notes on Revelation” (soniclight.com, 2016), 9.

<sup>2</sup>John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament, ed. John. F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1985), 926. This is known as the preterist view of Revelation.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Hindson, *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* (AMG Publishers, 2002), 14.

<sup>4</sup>Constable, 12.

<sup>5</sup>Isaiah 11:2 speaks of the sevenfold aspects of the Holy Spirit.





the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 764

# REVELATION

## JESUS KNOWS YOUR ADDRESS

### REVELATION 2

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Christ's concern for the world is seen in His priority on the church. Only when the church is faithfully following Him will the gospel have its full impact on the world. In addressing the churches in Revelation 2, Jesus both encourages believers and appeals for their repentance.

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I have heard that professional designers for billboard advertising follow something they call “the three-second rule.” Someone in a vehicle must be able to see and understand what is on the billboard in three seconds or less. The next time you are on the road, you might notice how the best billboards have messages that are short and easy to grasp in a few seconds.

We are about to open seven letters to seven churches. They were brilliantly designed by the Lord to be short letters, to the point, and easy enough to understand in just a few minutes.

Although written to specific churches in west-central Asia Minor, these letters were recorded in Scripture so that every church—and every Christian—could open them, listen to the same warnings, and enjoy the same encouragement from the Lord. Each of the seven letters is delivered by the “angel”—the messenger representing that church, more than likely the pastor/teacher.

The first letter is to the church in *Ephesus*. It is signed by Jesus Christ, described here in Revelation 2:1 as “him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands”—that is, churches (see Revelation 1:20). This is a good reminder that Jesus Christ is not some distant Savior but very active and aware of each church.

In verses 2-3 the Lord commends this church for their good “works . . . toil and . . . patient endurance.” They also pursued doctrinal purity. He says they “tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.” If only the church would put their preachers to the test of Scripture today.

Verse 6 commends their opposition to the “Nicolaitans.” This was a group of so-called Christians who justified indulging in sexual immorality. Anything was permissible with the Nicolaitans.

So far, the church in Ephesus sounds like the church you should join if you are moving into town. But not so fast.

The Lord also writes, “I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (verse 4). In other words, they have grown cold in their love for Christ and for one another. You might call them God’s frozen chosen. They were keeping the rules, but they had lost the warmth of Christian relationships.

So, here is the needed correction: “Repent, and do the works you did at first” (verse 5). They did not have to start over. They simply had to retrace their steps back to a loving relationship with Christ.

If they refused to repent, Jesus says here at the end of verse 5, “I will . . . remove your lampstand from its place.” That means they will forfeit future effectiveness. The light of their gospel testimony to the world will be turned out. Beloved, there are many churches today that hold services and have beautiful buildings, but they have no light. They are as dark as the world around them.

The next letter is written to the church in *Smyrna*. This church is commended for remaining faithful in the midst of great persecution. They had suffered under Roman persecution and from the attacks of the Jewish people in the city. And there is more to come, as Jesus promises in verse 10:

*“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation.”*

This time reference could be literal or could refer to a short period of time. I personally

think it refers to ten periods of persecution unleashed by a series of Roman emperors.

But the Lord tells them not to be afraid but to be “faithful unto death” (verse 10). Their suffering will be exchanged in heaven one day for a glorious “crown of life.” Verse 11 promises them that they “will not be hurt by the second death.” “The second death” appears four times in Scripture, all four in the book of Revelation. It describes eternal separation from God.

This faithful, persecuted church in *Smyrna* receives no rebuke, no criticism at all from the Lord. It stands as an example for suffering believers around the world today and an encouragement to “be faithful unto death.”

The third church to receive a message from Christ is in *Pergamum* (verse 12). We are told that this city is “where Satan’s throne is” (verse 13). Imagine that. Satan is prominent; in fact, he is in charge of this town. This might refer to the city’s primary worship of Asclepios, the god of healing. Asclepios was depicted as a serpent, which Christians would naturally connect with Satan, the serpent in the garden of Eden.

Add to that the fact that one of the most common names for Asclepios was “the Savior.”<sup>1</sup> Can you imagine a false god whose symbol was a snake and he is called the savior?

Well, the Lord commends this church for not denying the faith, even, as Jesus says, “in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you” (verse 13). Evidently this bold Christian was martyred in *Pergamum*.

In spite of this wonderful commendation, the church was compromising with two significant errors. Verse 14 refers to “the teaching of

Balaam” and verse 15 to “the teaching of the Nicolaitans.” These false teachings justified sexual immorality.

The Lord commands them to repent—to reject this false teaching. If they failed to repent, they would suffer the Lord’s judgment. If they obeyed, the Lord promises them “hidden manna” (verse 17). The Jewish rabbis were teaching that the prophet Jeremiah had hidden the ark of the covenant, with manna preserved inside, waiting to be discovered when Messiah arrived. So, this is an allusion to the believer indeed enjoying the blessing of the coming Messiah and His glorious kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

The promise in this verse of a “white stone, with a new name written on the stone” might refer to the Olympic games, where victorious athletes were given white stones engraved with their names. These stones essentially granted them free access from then on to events in the city.<sup>3</sup>

The next letter is addressed to the church in *Thyatira*. This church is commended in verse 19 for their “love and faith and service and patient endurance.”

That is a great start to this letter. But the Lord also has strong criticism of this local church. They have tolerated the false teaching of an influential woman, whom Christ refers to as Jezebel. He describes her in verse 20:

*“[She] calls herself a prophetess  
and is teaching and seducing  
my servants to practice sexual  
immorality and to eat food  
sacrificed to idols.”*

This woman is leading many astray, and the church has failed to discipline her. They have done nothing but turn a blind eye. Well, Jesus cares enough about them to do something:

*“I will throw her onto a sickbed,  
and those who commit adultery  
with her I will throw into great  
tribulation, unless they repent of  
her works, and I will strike her  
children dead.” (verses 22-23)*

As for those who have not followed her false teaching, Jesus charges them, “Hold fast what you have until I come” (verse 25). He is saying, “Do not compromise. Do not follow those who lead you away from the Word of God.”

I want to go back for a moment to a statement Jesus made in verse 13: “I know where you dwell.” Beloved, Jesus knows where you and I live today. Is that not a wonderful thought? Jesus knows your address.

BELOVED, JESUS KNOWS  
WHERE YOU AND I LIVE  
TODAY. JESUS KNOWS YOUR  
ADDRESS.

He knows you might struggle in the home of unbelievers. He knows your struggle to maintain a pure testimony at work. He knows everything about your neighborhood and your school and every temptation in your world.

Follow His warnings in these letters—He has written them to you as well. Stand fast for Him, and depend on Him for strength.

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How can you ensure that your love for Christ remains strong and does not grow cold like the church in Ephesus?

How would you respond if faced with persecution for your faith, like the believers in Smyrna? What does “being faithful unto death” mean to you?

Are there any areas in your life where you might be tempted to compromise, as the church in Pergamum did with false teachings? How can you guard against that?

In what ways can you “hold fast” to the truth and resist false teachings or moral compromises in your life, like Jesus commanded the church in Thyatira?

Reflecting on the fact that Jesus knows where you live and your personal struggles, how can this awareness encourage you in your current circumstances?

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *Letters to the Seven Churches* (Abingdon Press, 1957), 89.

<sup>2</sup>William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 1 (Westminster Press, 1976), 94.

<sup>3</sup>Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7* (Moody Press, 1992), 201.

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LESSON 765

# REVELATION

## DRIFTING AWAY FROM THE TRUTH REVELATION 3

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It is significant that the Lord has words of commendation for only one of the three churches addressed in Revelation 3. All had started well; only one had continued in uncompromising, faithful service. This chapter provides important warnings and guidance for all of us.

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One Bible scholar wrote this:

People do not drift toward holiness . . . people do not gravitate toward godliness . . . We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom.<sup>1</sup>

I could not agree more! This is not only a true danger for Christians but for local churches as well.

As we set sail now into Revelation 3, we find three more letters written by the Lord to three local churches. Two of those churches are seriously drifting away from the truth.

The first letter in chapter 3 is delivered to the church in *Sardis*. The Lord signs the letter with a description of Himself as “him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars” (verse 1). Again, “seven” speaks of completeness. The Holy Spirit completely and fully discerns every situation and examines the heart.<sup>2</sup>

And that is critical here, because from all outward appearances, the church in Sardis was doing quite well. Yet the Lord says here in the last part of verse 1, “You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”

This church had a reputation for being a vibrant church. But reputation and reality can be very different. Jesus says that their works were not “complete in the sight of . . . God” (verse 2). They had a wonderful past but no vital works or ministry in the present.

They needed to wake up to the reality of their spiritual slumber. Jesus is actually appealing to them from their own history.

The fortress city of Sardis sat on top of a mountain. Three of its sides were sheer cliffs, so it was naturally protected. Centuries earlier, when King Cyrus had marched on Sardis, he was unable to find a way in. He offered a reward to any soldier who could find an entry to the city. An alert soldier named Hyeroeades watched one day as a guard up on the city wall accidentally dropped his helmet down the cliff. He climbed over the wall and

down that precipice, retrieved his helmet, and climbed back up. Hyeroeades noted the place where that soldier had climbed down. That night he led a small band of warriors up that same path; and when they reached the top, they found the city asleep and the wall completely unguarded. The city was caught by surprise.<sup>3</sup>

Centuries later, history repeated itself. Sardis fell a second time when a band of soldiers entered the city in the same way.<sup>4</sup>

It is no coincidence that *twice* Jesus stresses the idea of alertness. He says, “Wake up and strengthen what remains” (verse 2), and then, “If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and . . . come against you” (verse 3).

The church in Sardis needed to wake up to the spiritual danger of drifting from the truths they had been taught.

The next letter is to the church in *Philadelphia*. Jesus describes Himself here as the one “who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens” (verse 7). Then He says to this church, “I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut” (verse 8).

He is referring to a door of opportunity for even greater service. The apostle Paul referred to open doors of ministry. He wrote to the Corinthians, “A wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9).

I love his spirit: “I have an open door for the gospel!” How could he tell? There were many adversaries! Paul understood the principle that there is no such thing as spiritual opportunity without satanic opposition.

God opens the doors, but how do you qualify to walk through open doors?

Jesus says here in verse 8, “I know that you have but *little* power.” I love that. He does not say, “You have to have it all together.” No, just a little power. They did not have much power in themselves, but they have trusted Christ, and that is enough. Jesus commends them, saying, “You have kept my word and have not denied my name.”

In this letter, there is not one negative word from the Lord. In fact, He gives this church, and every church that follows Him, this promise:

*“Because you have kept my word  
about patient endurance, I will  
keep you from the hour of trial  
that is coming on the whole world,  
to try those who dwell on the  
earth.” (verse 10)*

This applies to the church age, beloved. For 2,000 years, the church has endured persecution and opposition. But Jesus says here the church will not suffer the “trial that is coming on the whole world.”

This is not local trouble; this is global trouble. This is a reference to the coming tribulation period, and Jesus is effectively promising His church that they will not experience this global time of tribulation.

Jesus says in verse 11, “I am coming soon.” That language points to the imminent return of Christ, when He will rapture the church away before this time of trouble, the tribulation period, unfolds on earth.

In contrast to this wonderfully encouraging letter, we have the final letter, to the church in

*Laodicea*. Jesus addresses this church in verses 15-16:

*“You are neither cold nor hot.  
Would that you were either  
cold or hot! So, because you are  
lukewarm, and neither hot nor  
cold, I will spit you out of my  
mouth.”*

Cold water on a hot day is refreshing, and hot water on a cold day is comforting. Lukewarm water is neither. “Lukewarm” is a word for compromise.

The problem is, those in this church do not realize the danger they are in. They are comfortable in a comfortable city.

Laodicea made garments that were exported all over the known world. They made the name-brand clothing of their generation. Laodicea was the medical hub of the world, where people flocked for treatment and healing. They had even developed an ointment for people to put on their eyes to help with failing eyesight. Laodicea was also the banking center of Asia Minor.<sup>5</sup>

Laodicea seemed to have it all. But Jesus has this to say to this local church that had become like its host city:

*“For you say, I am rich, I have  
prospered, and I need nothing, not  
realizing that you are wretched,  
pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”  
(verse 17)*

This is the divine Physician’s diagnosis—and it is bleak. But there is still hope. Jesus presents this threefold invitation to them in verse 18.

First, He says, “Buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich.” In other words, “Do not put your trust in your banking system.”

Second, Jesus says, “Buy from me . . . white garments so that you may clothe yourself.” He is telling them, “Do not focus on your physical clothing while ignoring your spiritual clothing.”

Finally, Jesus says, “Buy from me . . . salve to anoint your eyes.” In other words, “You have your homemade ointment for physical sight, but that is not as important as your spiritual eyesight.”

Jesus adds to this invitation in verse 20:

*“Behold, I stand at the door and  
knock. If anyone hears my voice  
and opens the door, I will come in  
to him and eat with him, and he  
with me.”*

There is still hope for this church. This text is often used as an evangelistic appeal to unbelievers, but it is actually an invitation for believers—the church—to fellowship with the Lord.

Philadelphia is the church of the open door. Laodicea is the church of the closed door. They have broken fellowship with Christ—they are keeping Him out. How many churches are doing that today?

Jesus is not breaking the door down—He is knocking. He is graciously asking for a repentant church to receive Him back into their fellowship.

Beloved, let us make sure our hearts are open to Him. Let us make sure we are not drifting away from His Word. Let us walk in fellowship with our Savior today.

<sup>1</sup>D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God*, volume 2 (Crossway Books, 1999), January 23 entry.

<sup>2</sup>See Revelation 1:4, 16.

<sup>3</sup>William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 1 (Westminster Press, 1976), 114-15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>5</sup>William Barclay, *Letters to the Seven Churches* (Abingdon Press, 1957), 94.

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Are there areas in your life where you are “drifting” spiritually, much like the church in Sardis was warned against?

What “open doors” of opportunity for ministry has God set before you, and are you ready to walk through them, like the church in Philadelphia?

Are there any areas in your life where you have become lukewarm in your passion for Christ, as Jesus warned the church in Laodicea?

Jesus stands at the door of our hearts, knocking for fellowship—are you actively making time to open the door and enjoy His presence?

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# REVELATION

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LESSON 766

## DESCRIBING THE “REAL” HEAVEN

### REVELATION 4–5

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Heaven is not only the dwelling place of God. As the apostle John’s vision in Revelation 4 and 5 reveals, it is a place of continual worship of God. The scene in these chapters challenges us to make worship a priority in our daily lives here on earth.

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There is an almost universal belief in heaven as a place of peace and rest for those who have died. Popular depictions of heaven have people becoming angels, flying around the universe, playing harps, or dancing in fields of flowers. Various world religions portray heaven as a progression from one level to another, or some kind of advancement toward deity, or reaching a paradise filled with physical pleasure.

You will notice that all these different conceptions of heaven place human beings at the center. It is all about us. The Bible, however, describes heaven primarily as the dwelling place of God.<sup>1</sup> Heaven is going to be a wonderful place for the redeemed, of course, but it is going to be a wonderful because of the glory and splendor of God’s presence.

HEAVEN IS GOING TO BE  
A WONDERFUL PLACE  
BECAUSE OF THE GLORY  
AND SPLENDOR OF GOD’S  
PRESENCE.

Now as we set sail into Revelation 4–5, this is what the apostle John writes about as he tours the *real* heaven.

Chapter 4 begins with these words:

*I looked, and behold, a door  
standing open in heaven! And  
the first voice, which I had heard  
speaking to me like a trumpet,  
said, “Come up here, and I will  
show you what must take place  
after this.”*

Following the seven letters to the seven churches in chapters 2–3, John is now shown what follows. So, this scene shifts from earth to heaven.

There is another shift here, as well, and it is critical to understand. From this point in chapter 4 until the physical return of Christ in chapter 19 to set up His kingdom, there is no mention of the church on earth. And that



is because chapters 4–19 focus on the coming seven-year tribulation. The church has already been raptured away!

As promised in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, the Lord is going to deliver His church “from the wrath to come.” The rapture of the church before the tribulation—what we call the pretribulation rapture of the church—is important to understand because the focus of these next sixteen chapters has nothing to do with the church. The focus actually shifts to Israel, as God prepares them to receive their Messiah, King Jesus, when He returns after the tribulation period is over. Much more on that later.

Here in chapter 4, John’s body remains on the island of Patmos, but he is taken in spirit to heaven to witness this incredible sight. And the first thing he sees is God’s *throne* (verse 2). And the “one seated” on it is God the Father. This is the posture of a reigning emperor and a clear reference to the ruling power of God. Beloved, God is not resting; He is reigning.<sup>2</sup>

## GOD IS NOT RESTING; HE IS REIGNING.

Next, John sees a dazzling display of light that surrounds God’s throne. John seems to have difficulty adequately describing it:

*He who sat there had the  
appearance of jasper and  
carnelian, and around the throne  
was a rainbow that had the  
appearance of an emerald.  
(verse 3)*

Verses 5–6 add that coming from the throne are “flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder” and “before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.” This is God’s power and magnificence on display.

God is not alone in heaven. Verse 4 says that seated on twenty-four thrones surrounding God’s throne are “twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.” There are a lot of opinions on who these elders are, and I only have enough time to give you the right one. I believe these elders clearly represent the church, at this point now raptured into God’s presence. Their white garments speak of their redemption; their crowns are the rewards given them at the judgment seat of Christ. Those crowns will be cast at the Lord’s feet, as we will see in a moment.

John mentions in verse 5 the presence of the “seven spirits of God.” This expression is used back in Revelation 1:4 (cf. 3:1), where it is a reference to the fullness—the perfection—of the Holy Spirit.

Then John sees “four living creatures” (verse 6). The following verses describe them as having six wings each; one has a face like a lion and another the face of an ox. Another has a face that looks like a man, and another looks like an eagle. They are like nothing seen on the earth. But they closely resemble some Old Testament descriptions of angels—like those in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. These are angels of the highest created order.

And in verse 8 they are ceaseless in their praise, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty.” At this point in John’s vision, the twenty-four elders cast their crowns

before God’s throne and begin to chant this song:

*“Worthy are you, our Lord and  
God, to receive glory and honor  
and power, for you created all  
things, and by your will they  
existed and were created.”*

(verse 11)

As chapter 5 opens, John sees God the Father holding a *scroll* in His right hand; it is described as being “sealed with seven seals.” Then, verse 2 says, “And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break the seals?’”

This scroll will be the script of God’s end-time judgments upon the earth. One commentator called it the “title deed to the world.”<sup>3</sup>

This is God’s planet. This is God’s plan. History is “His story.” He is in charge, and His plans for the universe and the future of mankind are already written down.

Just when it seems no one is qualified to open the scroll, one of the elders says, “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (verse 5).

Listen to how John describes this “Lion” standing there before the throne. He writes, “I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (verse 6). This *Lamb* is a picture of our Lord’s sacrifice and resurrection, which gave Him victory over death and Satan and the grave.

He is described here as having “seven horns,” biblical symbols of power, “and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” Again, the number 7 pictures perfect completion. Jesus has complete, perfect omniscience. He does not miss a thing!

Jesus Christ, the Lamb, takes the scroll in His hand, and this unleashes a roar of praise in heaven. The elders and the living creatures now sing a “new song.” Verse 9 gives us the lyrics:

*“Worthy are you to take the scroll  
and to open its seals, for you were  
slain, and by your blood you  
ransomed people for God from  
every tribe and language and  
people and nation.”*

Joining in this worship song are “myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” of angels (verse 11). Literally understood, more than 100 million angels are chanting this song in verse 12:

*“Worthy is the Lamb who was  
slain, to receive power and wealth  
and wisdom and might and honor  
and glory and blessing!”*

Verse 11 speaks of “living creatures,” using the Greek word *zōon*, from which we get our word *zoo*. Then, verse 13 tells us, “Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea”—*every* created being, every animal—is given the ability to join all

of creation and all the redeemed in singing praise to the Lamb of God.

Dear Christian, heaven is a real place, and this is true assurance for your weary soul today. This is a description of your future, and you will never have a sad thought again. You will think only of how joyful you feel and how thrilled you are that you are finally home, worshiping the Lamb of God who redeemed you and forgave you and gave you life in heaven forever.

<sup>1</sup>Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Mentor, 2005), 1098.

<sup>2</sup>Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7* (Moody Press, 1992), 340.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Hindson, *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* (AMG Publishers, 2002), 64.

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How does your understanding of heaven align with the biblical description of it as primarily the dwelling place of God?

How can you focus more on the glory of God rather than on human-centered ideas of heaven?

What steps can you take today to strengthen your faith, knowing that heaven is a real place prepared for the redeemed?

What “crowns” or achievements in your life can you cast at the feet of Jesus in worship and submission to His Lordship?

How can you participate in the worship and praise of God here on earth, reflecting the heavenly worship described in Revelation?

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How would the Lord have you respond to what you’ve learned today?

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# REVELATION

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LESSON 767

## THE FOUR HORSEMEN

### REVELATION 6:1–8:1

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We Christians have been delivered from God's wrath in the coming tribulation period. Yet beginning with Revelation 6, the Bible gives us details of that period that we might learn more of God's justice and grace and become more zealous in proclaiming the gospel.

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As we set sail into chapter 6 of the book of Revelation, John's vision begins to give us vivid details of the coming, seven-year tribulation period.

If you have been sailing with me on this Wisdom Journey, you know that we have come across many passages that talk about this day of the Lord, a time of unparalleled judgment coming upon the earth, when God will judge humanity, vindicate His holiness, fulfill His promises, prepare the nation of Israel for Christ's return, and—in the midst of it all—bring millions of people from every tongue, tribe, and nation to faith in Jesus Christ.

This time of tribulation, when everything seems to go crazy, is all under God's sovereign control. He will guide the nations of the world into the harbor of His perfect plan.

THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION  
IS ALL UNDER GOD'S  
SOVEREIGN CONTROL.

The church will be kept from this divine judgment by means of the rapture, which precedes the tribulation. Jesus will come *for us*, and we will be raptured to meet Him in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4); then following the tribulation, Jesus will come *with us* (Revelation 19) as He comes down to earth to establish His millennial kingdom.

So, there is no sign of the church on earth from chapter 4 through chapter 19, because these chapters describe what is going to happen between the rapture and the Lord's return to earth.

In our last session, we watched as a scroll sealed with seven seals was given to the Lamb, Jesus Christ. As each seal is opened, various judgments of God are released upon the earth. Here in Revelation 6:2, John describes what comes forth when Jesus opens the *first seal*:

*I looked, and behold, a white  
horse! And its rider had a bow,  
and a crown was given to him,*

*and he came out conquering, and  
to conquer.*

This is the first of four horsemen to appear, and this is not Jesus Christ; this is the Antichrist. He will be “crowned” by the world, which he will “conquer.” Now initially he is going to bring global peace, as the prophet Daniel prophesies.<sup>1</sup> He is going to establish a covenant that will settle the Jerusalem question and even allow a new Jewish temple to be rebuilt. And beloved, Israel is already prepared and waiting for an opportunity to rebuild their temple.

The opening of the *second seal* is described next. This second horseman brings an end to world peace. This is where the story turns ugly and blood begins to flow—and it is going to flow until chapter 19, when Jesus returns. Verse 4 says this rider on a red horse is “permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another.” The covenant with Israel will be broken, and war will envelop the world. This is when the great battle described in Ezekiel 38–39 takes place.

The *third seal* is opened, and a rider on a black horse comes galloping into view. He brings with him famine and death. Food will become scarce; verse 6 says, “A quart of wheat [will cost] a denarius.” A denarius was a day’s wages, and that will all be spent for just a little grain.

The *fourth seal* follows, and a rider appears on a “pale horse,” which indicates an unhealthy appearance. Verse 8 explains why:

*Its rider’s name was Death, and  
Hades followed him. And they  
were given authority over a fourth*

*of the earth, to kill with sword and  
with famine and with pestilence  
and by wild beasts of the earth.*

Death comes sweeping in to take the lives of a quarter of the world’s population through war, famine, disease, and even wild beasts. Today that would mean more than two billion people will die in a matter of months. Corpses will be piled high in every city. John describes Hades following Death like a shadow, scooping up as it were the condemned souls of the dead.

This is God’s warning that death is not the end of suffering for those who reject Jesus Christ. Hades is that place where the souls of unbelievers go after death—a place of conscious suffering. At the final judgment, Revelation 20 tells us that Hades will empty its inhabitants into the lake of fire, which is eternal hell.

The *fifth seal* is then opened, and the scene shifts to heaven in verse 9. Here John sees “the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.”

This tells us that people will come to faith in Christ after the rapture. They will suffer persecution, and many will be martyred for their faith. They are shown in verse 10 asking the Lord how long it will be before their deaths are avenged. Do not miss this: these people are in heaven, but they are aware of what is happening on earth. We will talk more about that later.

Then the *sixth seal* is opened, and earth experiences one disaster after another, as described in verses 12–14. A mega earthquake occurs; the sun is darkened; the moon becomes red like blood; and the “stars [fall] to the earth,” a



reference to meteors or even asteroids pumeling the earth.

John describes the sky in verse 14 as vanishing “like a scroll that is being rolled up”—as if the atmosphere is shriveling up like paper. John writes, “Every mountain and island was removed from its place.” Whatever you learned in geography class will no longer matter!

As you can imagine, the response on earth is absolute terror. Humanity will realize these judgments are coming from God, and they will pray—but not to Him. Verse 16 shows defiant mankind “calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.’” As one writer puts it, “They would rather hide from God in fear than run to Him in faith.”<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 7 then acts as an interlude, as John pauses to describe two groups of people who are saved during the tribulation.

Verse 3 introduces us to 144,000 “servants of . . . God” who are sealed “on their foreheads.” These are Jewish converts—12,000 from each of the twelve tribes—who have come to faith in Jesus Christ after the rapture. With this passage, we can begin to see God uniquely—and primarily—working with the Jewish people during the tribulation.

We are not told what kind of “seal” they have, but we do know that they are empowered and protected by Christ. In fact, they are going to survive the tribulation, because they show up again in chapter 14. These 144,000 Jewish evangelists will be God’s ambassadors throughout the tribulation period.

The second group of people now shown to us are in heaven. Verses 9-17 describe a “great multitude.” They come “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (verse 9), and they are “standing before the throne,” shouting with joy, “Salvation belongs to our God!” (verse 10).

We do not have to wonder who these people are; John says here in verse 14 that one of the elders before the throne tells him:

*“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”*

These are people who were saved during the tribulation, but they were also martyred for their faith in Christ.

After this interlude, chapter 8 begins with the opening of the *seventh seal*. This is followed by a half hour of silence in heaven. This is a silence of anticipation for what is coming. And what is coming? This final seal contains all the remaining judgments from God. The seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowls of wrath are all contained in this seventh seal—and they are about to be unleashed on Planet Earth.

And that is where we will start on our next Wisdom Journey.

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How does knowing that God is sovereign over the tribulation encourage you to trust Him in difficult circumstances today?

How can you strengthen your faith to resist fear when you see conflicts and disasters around the world, knowing that God's plan is unfolding?

What steps can you take to ensure that you remain anchored in Christ amidst the growing spiritual deception that will precede the tribulation?

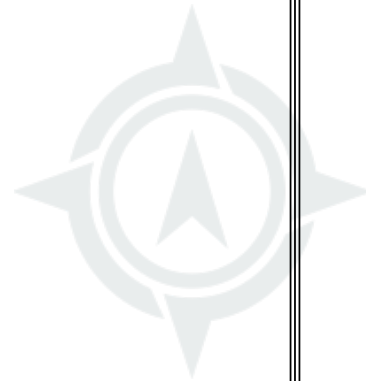
How can you respond to God's warnings today to make sure you are living with eternity in mind?

How does the imagery of judgment (war, famine, death) impact your understanding of God's holiness and justice?

---

Plot your Wisdom Journey.

How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?



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<sup>1</sup>Daniel 9:27.

<sup>2</sup>Sam Gordon, *Revelation: Worthy Is the Lamb* (Ambassador, 2000), 166.



the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 768

# REVELATION

## WHEN NATURE TURNS ON MANKIND

### REVELATION 8:2–9:1

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The tribulation judgments in Revelation 8–9 reveal not only God’s righteousness, but also the depths of human depravity. They remind us that while God chooses to use us to spread the gospel of Christ, we can never break through the hardened hearts of sinners—only God can.

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Thus far in our Wisdom Journey, we have seen the seven seal judgments unleashed upon the earth in chapters 6 and 7. Now, with the opening of the seventh and final seal in chapter 8, seven more judgments are going to be released.

Like an official waving a flag or firing a starter gun, each judgment is introduced by an angel blowing a trumpet.

We will see that the first three trumpet judgments unleash the wrath of God through nature—that is, through what we would call natural disasters. It is ironic to me that mankind has deified nature, attributing to it the knowledge and power to create all that is and virtually idolizing, worshiping, Mother Nature. Well, Mother Nature is now turned on mankind. God is going to use this idol of mankind as a means of punishment.

This *first trumpet* judgment involves “hail and fire, mixed with blood . . . thrown upon the earth” (verse 7). Beloved, there is nothing to suggest this is anything other than a literal description. I do not believe it pictures a nu-

clear war and fallout, as some do. In fact, the Greek syntax indicates this mixture is created in heaven and then thrown to earth, just like the flaming balls of sulfur that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah were thrown from heaven (Genesis 19:24).

Verse 7 records the result:

*A third of the earth [the surface]  
was burned up, and a third of  
the trees were burned up, and all  
green grass was burned up.*

By the way, this lets us know that at the end of human history, before God creates a new earth, there are still plenty of trees and green grass. And that requires plenty of rain and water and an atmosphere and the right amount of sunlight too.

The *second trumpet* sounds in verse 8, where we are told, “Something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea.” This sounds to me like an enormous asteroid that crashes into the ocean. We cannot

imagine the tsunami created by this impact. It destroys a third of the ships at sea, according to verse 9. It also turns a third of the ocean to blood, and with that a third of the ocean's creatures are killed.

Following this, the *third trumpet* sounds, and fresh water—springs and rivers—are polluted, John writes, by “a great star [falling] from heaven, blazing like a torch” (verse 10). The Greek word for “torch” (*lampas*) was commonly used for a meteor. This meteor's impact poisons “a third of the waters,” bringing death to many people (verse 11).

The celestial bodies are affected by the judgment of the *fourth trumpet*, as revealed in verse 12:

*A third of the sun was struck, and  
a third of the moon, and a third  
of the stars, so that a third of their  
light might be darkened.*

This judgment effectively dims the lights of the universe and, again, this strikes at humanity's idolatry. For centuries, people have sought direction for their lives from the stars.

Well, this judgment will put the horoscope industry out of business for good.

Following this, we are told that an eagle flies through the sky delivering a warning, saying, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth” (verse 13). Why? Because three more judgments are coming. It is time to get right with God!

Now wait! Do I believe an eagle can be made to talk? Well, I believe a donkey talked back in Numbers 22. We have already learned in Revelation 5 that all animals will be given

some ability to sing praise to their Creator. I am personally excited to find out what our creator God is going to do with the animal kingdom, which He created, especially in the coming kingdom when, we are told, a child could have a lion as a pet (Isaiah 11:6). Who knows, I might even have a pet cat one day, if you can believe that.

Then in chapter 9, an angel blows the *fifth trumpet*. John records what he saw in verses 1-2:

*I saw a star fallen from heaven to  
earth, and he was given the key to  
the shaft of the bottomless pit. He  
opened the shaft of the bottomless  
pit, and from the shaft rose smoke  
like the smoke of a great furnace,  
and the sun and the air were  
darkened with the smoke from the  
shaft.*

I believe this star is none other than Satan. Jesus said in Luke 10:18, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” Satan is given the key to the “bottomless pit,” literally, the *abyss*. This is where many demons are already confined, awaiting their final torment. Back in Luke 8:31 the demons who inhabited a man pleaded with Jesus not to send them into the Abyss.

Well, verse 3 says Satan is allowed to open this door, and John writes that from it come “locusts . . . given power like the power of scorpions.” Verse 5 adds, “They were allowed to torment [people] for five months, but not to kill them.”

These are demonic creatures, released with the permission of God to inflict torment on the human race. Mankind scoffs at the idea of a devil. They laugh at him as some little devils creature wearing a red suit and carrying a pitchfork.

Verses 7-10 give us John's description of these demons. He says they look like horses, with crowns on their heads, faces like human faces, long hair like that of women, and teeth like those of lions. They wear breastplates of armor; they have wings to fly and tails that sting like scorpions.

Verse 11 says, they're led by a king called Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek—both mean “destroyer.” This is either Satan, or another high-ranking demon under Satan's command.

Finally, the *sixth trumpet* sounds in verse 13. This releases four demons who have been bound to this point. God not only allows them to be released but also uses them to act as agents of His judgment.<sup>1</sup>

The intensity of God's judgments is increasing. If you have been doing the math, the death toll during the tribulation is just over 50 percent of the human race!

This demonic army will include “mounted troops . . . twice ten thousand times ten thousand” (verse 16). That is 200 million demons riding on horses. And verse 17 gives this horrifying description of these horses: “The heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths.” They seem to be some kind of combination horse, lion, and fire-breathing dragon.

This is not the final battle of Armageddon, when the kings of the East will march on Israel. That will come later. The armies here are not human; they are demonic and terrifying. Satan and his demons will be seen for the bloodthirsty killers they are in their hatred for humanity. And I assure you, nobody will be laughing at them then.

Now you would imagine the rest of the human race still alive would cry out for mercy and run to God, right? Tragically, that's not what we read in verses 20 to 21:

*The rest of mankind, who were  
not killed by these plagues, did not  
repent of the works of their hands  
nor give up worshiping demons  
. . . nor did they repent of their  
murders or their sorceries or their  
sexual immorality or their thefts.*

What is happening? God's wrath is being justified. This is the depth of human depravity as people refuse to surrender to their sovereign Creator.

But what a blessing it is, beloved, for us who have trusted in Christ and been saved by His grace. We need never fear the wrath of divine judgment. We will never experience this horrific scene. So, let us thank God by the way we live for Him today.

---

How does the judgment through  
nature in the trumpet judgments  
remind you of God's control over all  
creation?



What are some modern-day “idols” that people trust in more than God, and how can you guard against trusting in them?

How can you stay spiritually alert and not drift into complacency, knowing that severe judgments are coming upon the world?

How does the severity of God’s wrath in Revelation challenge your view of God’s justice and mercy?

What can you do to ensure that you are prepared for Christ’s return and that you are living for His glory?

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Hindson, *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* (AMG Publishers, 2002), 109.



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LESSON 769

# REVELATION

## PERIL ON EARTH, PRAISE IN HEAVEN

### REVELATION 10–11

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As the description of the tribulation period continues in Revelation 10–11, through the apostle John, we are given a view of events both in heaven and on earth. It reminds us that what happens on earth is by God's design, under His control, and ultimately for His glory.

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The book of Revelation has been revealing in dramatic fashion some of the events that take place during the tribulation period. People living on the earth will be defiant, even though they are experiencing the direct judgment of God. They will be unrepentant and deceived by the Antichrist so that they refuse to surrender to God. And oh, the trouble they are in with God!

As we continue on our Wisdom Journey through these next two chapters in Revelation, it should only increase our gratitude for having been rescued from this wrath to come.

As we arrive at Revelation 10, time is running out for the human race! By now, half the world's population has been wiped out.<sup>1</sup> It is almost time for the seventh and final trumpet to sound.

Before that trumpet blast is heard, John sees a “mighty angel” descending from heaven to the earth. This angel has some rather amazing features. Verse 1 says he is “wrapped in a cloud,” and has “a rainbow over his head.” This reminds us of the appearance of the

Lord, described back in Revelation 4:3, where a rainbow encircled God's throne.

We are also told that he has a face “like the sun” and “legs like pillars of fire” (verse 1). This pictures power and authority. Verse 2 adds that “he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land.” This posture suggests that his message is global.

He is also carrying a “little scroll open in his hand” (verse 2). This is not the scroll Jesus already opened back in chapters 5 and 6. This can be translated, “a small book,”<sup>2</sup> and it apparently contains information about the final judgments that are about to unfold.

Verse 3 says the angel “called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring ... [and] the seven thunders sounded.” This is an affirmation of God Himself, who has sent this angel with a divine message.

John is about to write down what the angel said, but he is stopped by a voice from heaven. He is told to keep it a secret. Wouldn't you like to know what this angel said? I would. But John is not allowed to record it. This is a

reminder that while God's Word is sufficient for what we need, it is not exhaustive. Some things are to remain hidden from us for now.

WHILE GOD'S WORD IS  
SUFFICIENT FOR WHAT WE  
NEED, IT IS NOT EXHAUSTIVE.

John then hears the angel swearing an oath, based on the truth of God being the Creator of all things. In other words, if God is indeed the Creator—and He is—you can be sure this angel is about to tell the truth. And here is his message in a nutshell: he is warning the rest of the human race that there will be no more delays as God accelerates His end-times plan.

The apostle John then becomes an object lesson for every believer to this day. He is told to eat this little book. He does, and he finds that it is sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. It tasted great, but it gave him a stomachache—the kind I get if I eat something that is too rich or sweet.

Well, this little book is sweet because it is God's word; it is bitter because it speaks of God's judgment. This is a reminder beloved, that when you share with others the Word of God, it is both good news and bad news; it can be sweet, but it can also be upsetting. We are to deliver it all.

GOD'S WORD CAN BE  
SWEET, BUT IT CAN ALSO  
BE UPSETTING. WE ARE TO  
DELIVER IT ALL.

Following this, we arrive at chapter 11, where John is given a measuring rod and told to go measure the temple—that is, the inner temple

consisting of the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. The temple he is to measure is one that is built during the tribulation. We know from Scripture there *will* be a temple built during the glorious millennial kingdom of Christ on earth (see Ezekiel 40–43), but John is measuring the temple that was effectively built by the Antichrist and is later desecrated by the Antichrist when he enters it and declares himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4).

John is not to measure the courtyard of the temple, Revelation 11:2 tells us, because it has fallen into the hands of Gentiles, who will “trample the holy city for forty-two months”—this takes place over the *last* half of the seven-year tribulation period.

That is not all that will be happening in Jerusalem. For the first half of the tribulation, two witnesses will be preaching in Jerusalem. Verse 3 says these witnesses have unique authority and power from God. And verse 5 says that anyone who tries to harm them will be destroyed by fire that comes out of their mouths. Imagine that kind of protection.

These witnesses also have the power to withhold rain, turn water to blood, and “strike the earth with every kind of plague” (verse 6). The Antichrist and his followers will hate these witnesses, but they will not be able to touch them or harm them as they prophesy of Christ's soon coming.

Eventually, when these two anonymous witnesses “have finished their testimony” (verse 7), the Beast—and this is the Antichrist as we will see later—will finally be able to kill these men. Their bodies will be left lying in the open, and their deaths will launch a global celebration. We are told in verse 10, “Those

who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents.”

Think about that: they are going to “make merry and exchange presents.” This is like the Antichrist’s “anti-Christmas”—they have everything here but Christmas trees. But their party is not going to last very long. John continues to describe what he saw in his vision:

*After . . . three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.*  
(verses 11-12)

Everybody is stunned—they drop their cake and punch on the floor—and at that moment, the next verse tells us, a great earthquake levels one-tenth of the city of Jerusalem, and 7,000 people die. That is the end of *that* party.

But not in heaven. The scene shifts back to heaven for an encouraging vision. God knows the apostle John can only handle so many terrifying visions without a break—and we are the same way.

So, verse 15 sweeps us back up to heaven, where John hears the sound of the seventh trumpet. This trumpet contains the seven bowls that pour out God’s final acts of judgment.

And what are the redeemed in heaven doing? Well, they are not worried about the Anti-christ; they are not concerned about the power of Satan and his demons; they are not wondering if the cause of Christ is losing. No, the redeemed are singing, or chanting, and verse 15 gives us the lyrics: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

Every one of us today who believe in Jesus Christ will be part of this grand choir, celebrating in this great worship service in heaven as the sovereign rule and reign of Christ is promised again and again.

So, what do you do today in the meantime? I will tell you: rehearse this song, remember these lyrics. No matter what it looks like around you, no matter who seems to be in control, no matter how much the devil seems to be advancing, sing this song: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ [His anointed Messiah], and he shall reign forever and ever.”

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How does knowing about the coming tribulation increase your gratitude for the salvation you have received in Christ?

How does the reality of God’s impending judgment motivate you to share the gospel with others today?

What steps are you taking to keep your spiritual focus in the midst of a world that is opposed to God?

How does the ultimate victory of Christ influence how you view current challenges and struggles in the world around you?



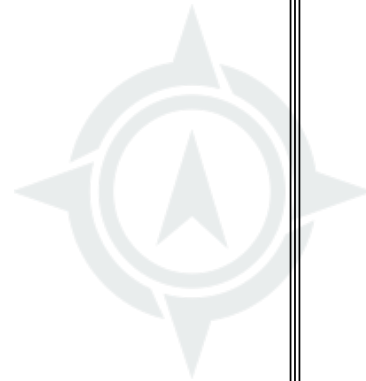
How can you rehearse the promises of God, as seen in the heavenly choir's worship, in your prayer life and worship today?

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Hindson, *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* (AMG Publishers, 2002), 113.

<sup>2</sup>Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, ed. Cleon L. Rogers Jr. (Regency, 1980), 834.

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LESSON 770

# REVELATION

## THE ORIGIN OF ANTI-SEMITISM

### REVELATION 12

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The hatred and persecution of the Jewish people throughout history is testimony to their unique place in God's eternal plan. Satan tries to destroy them in order to destroy God's plan and promises. Revelation 12 reveals Satan's long war against Israel.

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Have you ever wondered why anti-Semitism never seems to go away, why the history of the Jewish people is filled with persecution as nation after nation has exiled them or attempted to eliminate them?

The Bible actually gives us the origin of anti-Semitism. It all started when God created the Jewish nation from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—who was later renamed Israel. God established an eternal, unconditional covenant with Israel and determined that the Jewish people would become the central theme in His prophetic plan. That plan included the coming of the Messiah, who would be a descendant of Abraham.

If you take the Bible literally, as I do, the covenant promised Israel a literal piece of land, a literal kingdom, and a King who would sit upon a literal throne in a literal city called Jerusalem.

So understand Satan's thinking: If he can destroy the Jewish people, there is no Messiah. And if there is no Messiah, there is no salvation. And if there is no nation of Israel, God

will not have kept His promises for Israel to inherit their promised land with a promised kingdom and a promised throne in Jerusalem.

And that is why anti-Semitism never seems to go away.

But the truth is, we have not seen anything yet. During the tribulation period, as God begins to revive and restore the nation of Israel, Satan will intensify his attacks. We know that because of Revelation 12, where we are given an overview of Satan's efforts to wipe out the Jewish people.

Chapter 12 begins in verse 1 by introducing us to "a great sign . . . in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." The woman is called a "great sign," which clues us in that she is symbolic.

The context of this chapter clearly indicates she symbolizes Israel. The sun, moon, and stars appeared together in Joseph's dream in Genesis 37, where they represented Israel.

Verse 2 tells us this woman is in labor and about to give birth, and verse 3 introduces the great danger to her offspring. John writes, “And another sign appeared . . . a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.” We do not need to wonder who this dragon is, because down in verse 9 we read, “And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan.”

So, this vision is symbolic of Satan attempting to destroy Israel. The seven heads and ten horns will appear later in chapters 13 and 17.<sup>1</sup> But for now, let me fill in the blanks. The seven heads are the seven consecutive world empires: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and then a final, seventh kingdom, which will be ruled by the Antichrist.<sup>2</sup>

The Dragon has ten horns and diadems. Daniel 7 identifies these as ten kings who create an alliance under the Antichrist.

Revelation 12:4 says that the Dragon’s “tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.” These stars are fallen angels (see Revelation 9:1; 12:8-9). In Satan’s original rebellion against God, one-third of the angels, now known as demons, followed him.

Why is Satan after this woman who is about to give birth? Again, we do not have to guess. We are told here in verse 4 that the Dragon wants to kill the Child she is about to deliver. And who is this Child? Verse 5 tells us: “She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.” That is a clear reference to the woman, Israel, delivering the Messiah; and Satan certainly did everything he could to destroy Jesus, the

Messiah, and to oppose and discredit Him during His earthly ministry.

Satan failed, of course. In fact, the next phrase in verse 5 says the male child “was caught up to God and to his throne.” This pictures the ascension of Christ back to His throne of glory.

We are effectively told that after the ascension of Christ back to heaven, Satan turned his attention back to this woman, Israel, to try to destroy her. Beloved, this is at the root of the last 2,000 years of anti-Semitism. Even though the world does not even know why they hate the Jewish people, here is the reason: Satan is behind the scenes, motivating, manipulating, and incentivizing the unbelieving world to wipe out the Jewish people.

And Satan knows he is running out of time. Verse 6 tells us that at the halfway point in the seven-year tribulation, Israel flees “into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.” That is exactly three and a half years—the last half of the tribulation.

At this point, the apostle John has his attention directed to heaven and to a future war that takes place there:

*Michael [the archangel, Jude 9]  
and his angels [fought] against  
the dragon. And the dragon and  
his angels fought back, but he was  
defeated, and there was no longer  
any place for them in heaven.  
(verse 7)*

This is an interesting revelation. Satan had not been forbidden access to God after he first rebelled. We know from the book of Job and other passages that Satan directly accuses believers before God.

But this reference in Revelation 12:7 informs us that Satan is no longer allowed any access to the presence of God. He is kicked out for good.

And John records this shout of victory in heaven:

*“Now the salvation and the power  
and the kingdom of our God  
and the authority of his Christ  
have come, for the accuser of our  
brothers has been thrown down.”  
(verse 10)*

The devil cannot even accuse a believer anymore, and he is not happy about it at all. Verse 12 says he comes down to earth “in great wrath,” knowing “his time is short!”

He begins to pursue “the woman who had given birth to the male child” (verse 13). But God protects Israel:

*The woman was given the two  
wings of the great eagle so that she  
might fly from the serpent into the  
wilderness, to the place where she  
is to be nourished. (verse 14)*

For three and a half years, God will supernaturally protect these Jewish people, who have more than likely become followers of Christ.

The wings of an eagle symbolize the speed of God’s protection.

We are not told where this “wilderness” region is located. Many suggest it might be Petra, the ancient mountain city of Edom carved out of rock and accessible only by a narrow path between the cliffs.

Wherever it is, Satan finds out and evidently figures out a way to create a flood to drown them. John records how that turns out in verses 15-16:

*The serpent poured water like a  
river out of his mouth after the  
woman, to sweep her away with a  
flood. But the earth . . . opened its  
mouth and swallowed the river.*

God miraculously diverts the water and saves them from certain death. Verse 17 says Satan then becomes even more furious and goes off to “make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who . . . hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

You cannot study this chapter without recognizing two truths. First, Satan is unrelenting in his attacks on the Jewish people. And second, he is going to fail completely in the end.

In the meantime, beloved, submit yourselves to God. That is the way to resist the devil as you battle him today. Draw near to God, and the devil will flee from you (James 4:7-8).

The devil cannot get close to you when you are close to God. So, with obedience and confidence, let us walk closely with the Lord.

---

How does understanding the spiritual origin of anti-Semitism change your perspective on the Jewish people and God's covenant with them?

In what ways does Satan's opposition to God's promises affect how you view your own spiritual battles today?

What does this passage teach you about the importance of staying faithful to God's Word, even in the face of opposition?

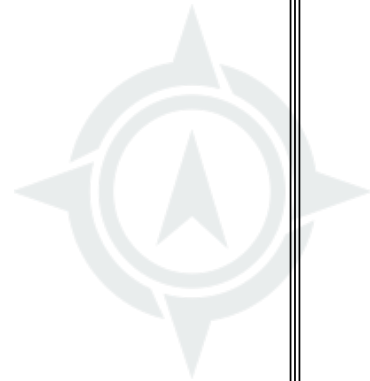
How does the vision of God's protection of Israel during the tribulation strengthen your trust in God's care for you today?

How does Satan's desire to accuse believers remind you to rely on Christ's finished work and the victory we have in Him?

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Plot your Wisdom Journey.

How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?



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<sup>1</sup>See Revelation 13:1-4; 17:7-14.

<sup>2</sup>Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22* (Moody Press, 1995), 123, 297-98.



# REVELATION

## the WISDOM JOURNEY LESSON 771

### THE REIGN OF TERROR

#### REVELATION 13

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Satan is the great deceiver, and his deception will bring into existence a political leader, a religious system, and an economy around which the world will unite. Unity grounded in that which rejects Jesus Christ, however, is destined to produce horrifying results.

---

As we set sail into Revelation 13, we find the Antichrist rising in power and global domination. As the chapter opens, we are given John's vision of his growing world power:

*I saw a beast rising out of the sea,  
with ten horns and seven heads,  
with ten diadems on its horns and  
blasphemous names on its heads.  
And the beast that I saw was like a  
leopard; its feet were like a bear's,  
and its mouth was like a lion's  
mouth. (verses 1-2)*

I must say, this is one strange beast. Elsewhere, he is called "antichrist" (1 John 2:18); he is called "the lawless one" (2 Thessalonians 2:9); he is called "the prince who is to come" (Daniel 9:26). But here in the book of Revelation he is always called the Beast.

This term suits him well because he is a cruel beast. This term represents not only him

but also his kingdom. His kingdom consists of ten kings, symbolized by ten diadems. His kingdom also is shown here with seven heads. This represents the culmination of the seven world empires that have ruled the known world throughout world history.

John also writes in verse 1 that there are "blasphemous names on [the Beast's] heads." That simply means his kingdom has one unified purpose—to destroy the work of God and any worship of the true Christ, the Messiah Jesus.

John describes this beast as having the likeness of a leopard, a bear, and a lion. Daniel's prophecy used these same images to picture the kingdoms of Greece, Medo-Persia, and Babylon respectively (Daniel 7:3-6). So what we are being told here is that the Antichrist's kingdom will combine the most powerful characteristics of these former empires.

But do not miss this: Behind the Antichrist's emerging global power is the enabling power of Satan. John writes that Satan, the Dragon, will give to the Antichrist "his power . . . and great authority" (verse 2).



That satanic power is powerfully demonstrated in verse 3:

*One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.*

The wording in the Greek language clearly indicates the Antichrist is mortally wounded—more than likely assassinated—but then brought back to life. Now obviously, this is going to require God’s permission and power delegated to Satan. This is similar to the delegated power given to Pharaoh’s magicians, who were able to imitate some of the miracles performed by Moses. As a result, those who defied God were led into deeper deception.

Keep in mind that when you see the word *Antichrist*, you typically think of the prefix “anti-” as meaning “against,” and it does mean that. But it also means “in place of.” The Antichrist is not just fighting *against* Christ; he is also attempting to *replace* Christ. With this miraculous event, he is attempting to imitate Christ’s resurrection.

And this “deceiving miracle” will have its intended effect. Verse 3 says, “The whole earth marveled [and] followed the beast.” Verse 4 says they worship the Antichrist, and in so doing effectively worship Satan.

This will not last forever. The Antichrist is given “authority for forty-two months” (verse 5). That is equal to three and a half years. You might remember that when the Antichrist first appeared on the scene in chapter 6, he was riding a white horse. He brings peace to the land of Israel, and we know the temple is

quickly rebuilt for the Jewish people. Many will believe their Messiah has finally arrived!

But as the prophet Daniel explains, the Antichrist will break that peace treaty midway through the seven-year tribulation (Daniel 9:27), and he will try to wipe Israel off the map.

Verse 6 says he will “utter blasphemies against God.” The ultimate blasphemy will be entering this newly constructed temple and claiming to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). This is described in other passages as the “abomination of desolation” (Matthew 24:15; cf. Daniel 9:27).

In addition to this declaration of his own deity, the Beast will be “allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them” (Revelation 13:7). In other words, this reign of terror will bring a bloodbath—the martyrdom of believers. John writes that the Antichrist will gain power “over every tribe and people and language and nation.”

Frankly, it looks like the Antichrist is going to win. He achieves what no one has achieved before—worldwide dominion. And the world could not be happier about it. He will be praised and worshiped by “all who dwell on earth” (verse 8)—that is, John adds, “everyone whose name has not been written . . . in the book of life of the Lamb.” Those who have become followers of Christ are going to refuse to worship the Antichrist—and many of them will die a martyr’s death.

THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME  
FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST  
ARE GOING TO REFUSE TO  
WORSHIP THE ANTICHRIST.

If this is not bad enough, a second beast appears on the scene in verse 11. It has “two horns like a lamb” but speaks “like a dragon.” He is called the “false prophet” in Revelation 19:20. Like all false prophets, he appears innocent and harmless as a little lamb, but he is directed by Satan, the ultimate deceiver.

This false prophet is Satan’s imitation of the Holy Spirit; he is the anti-Spirit, so to speak. Just as the Holy Spirit exalts the glory of Christ (John 16:12-15), so this false prophet will exalt the glory of the Antichrist. And he is going to create a global religion to unify the world in worshipping the Antichrist.

He does this by means of “great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people” (Revelation 13:13-14). Hey, it looks like the prophet Elijah has finally returned.

It is not long before the False Prophet has a statue of the Antichrist set up, more than likely, inside the temple. But this is not just an ordinary statue. Look at verse 15:

*[The False Prophet] was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.*

This appears to be another miracle. The statue actually speaks! And it encourages the killing of believers, who refuse to worship the Antichrist.

So, this reign of terror includes a global government and a global religion. But it also includes a global economy.<sup>1</sup> And that is established through the False Prophet causing everyone “to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark” (verses 16-17). This is the mark of the Beast.

Back in Revelation 7:3-4, God marked the foreheads of His 144,000 evangelists. So, here goes the little copycat Antichrist again. His servants will be marked as well. We are told here in verse 18 that his mark is a number that represents his name; and John writes, “His number is 666.”

Now through the years, people have tried everything imaginable to determine the identity of the Antichrist by this number. And they have come up with a long list of candidates, including the Emperor Nero, Mussolini, and Stalin. Hitler was an especially popular choice since his goal, like that of the Antichrist, was to exterminate the Jewish people. Of course, none of these was the Beast, who has yet to appear.

Forget that kind of speculation, beloved. The bottom line is the Lord did not want to give us this man’s name or He would have told us. There will come a time when the meaning of this number will obviously fit a world dictator. But when that happens, if you are a believer, you will already be in heaven, waiting to return with Christ at the end of the tribulation. You have nothing to fear from the Antichrist or being given the mark of the Beast.

Let us reject all this speculation and get on with the mission. Let us make disciples who join us in following the true Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ.

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How does the global deception described in Revelation 13 emphasize the importance of staying grounded in God's truth?

What steps can you take to ensure that you are worshiping Christ alone and not being misled by the world's priorities?

In what ways can you prepare yourself to stand firm in your faith, even if faced with persecution or opposition?

How does this passage challenge you to trust in God's sovereignty, even when it appears that evil is triumphing?

How can you encourage others who are struggling with fear or uncertainty about the future to focus on Christ's ultimate victory?

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Hindson, *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* (AMG Publishers, 2002), 149.

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# REVELATION

the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 772

## THE DARKEST HOUR BEFORE DAWN

### REVELATION 14-15

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The coming tribulation will be a dark and terrifying time on earth. But as Revelation 14-15 reminds us, God is in control of it all. It is part of the plan He is working out to bring about Christ's ultimate triumph and glory.

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You have probably heard the expression, “The darkest hour is just before dawn.” That statement has been used for centuries as a way of saying that during the worst of circumstances there is still hope. It is dark, but the dawning of a new day is just ahead.

That is certainly true for followers of Jesus Christ and especially for those who come to faith in Christ during the tribulation and must endure the world-ruling, satanically empowered, bloodthirsty reign of the Antichrist. He is called the Beast, and he partners with the demonically empowered False Prophet.

For believers living on earth through this terrible time, it could not be any darker. But here in Revelation 14-15, the apostle John gives an encouraging vision of Christ's ultimate triumph.<sup>1</sup>

We now arrive in our Wisdom Journey at that vision, which is introduced in Revelation 14:1:

*Then I looked, and behold, on  
Mount Zion stood the Lamb,*

*and with him 144,000 who had  
his name and his Father's name  
written on their foreheads.*

We met these 144,000 Jewish evangelists back in chapter 7. They were converted to Christ after the rapture and uniquely sealed by God as His special ambassadors. John sees them appearing here with the Lamb, Jesus Christ, on Mount Zion. Mount Zion is another reference for Jerusalem and the temple.

So, this is a prophetic preview of Christ's return. And guess what we find. When He returns, these 144,000 Jewish evangelists are still living and still preaching. They have survived the tribulation as promised.

At this point John also hears music coming from before the throne of God. He describes the music in verses 2-3 as “like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne.” What is even more intriguing is that “no one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed.” It is unique to them, more

than likely because of their unique experiences in the tribulation.

These Jewish evangelists are further described in verse 4 as not having been “defiled . . . with women, for they are virgins . . . [they] follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” This is not demeaning women; it simply means they had stayed single because of their global assignment; and while traveling the world, they had refused sexual immorality.

Next, three angels appear in succession, each making an announcement. These announcements give us a preview and summary of what will follow in the tribulation.<sup>2</sup> In verse 6 the first angel appears, flying overhead. He proclaims this message in verse 7:

*“Fear God and give him glory,  
because the hour of his judgment  
has come, and worship him who  
made heaven and earth, the sea  
and the springs of water.”*

Beloved, the Great Commission of taking the gospel to the entire world is not going to be completed by the church. It is going to be completed by this angel, who proclaims the gospel to “every nation and tribe and language and people” (verse 6).

The gospel message is finally delivered to every person and in every language, warning the human race of God’s judgment and inviting them to believe. This will remove any excuse from those who reject the gospel, and, unfortunately, that will be most of the world.

A second angel follows in verse 8 and announces, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.” This looks ahead to chapters 17–18 and pre-

dicts the collapse of the Antichrist’s religious, political, and economic systems.

Finally, this third angel makes his announcement:

*“If anyone worships the beast and  
its image and receives a mark on  
his forehead or on his hand, he  
also will drink the wine of God’s  
wrath, poured full strength into  
the cup of his anger.” (verses 9-10)*

In other words, if you worship the enemy of God, you will experience the wrath of God. This is also encouragement for the new believers to stand fast and endure the terrible reign of the Beast, the Antichrist (verses 12-13).

The remainder of chapter 14 describes two coming harvests. This previews what is going to unfold from chapter 15 all the way to chapter 19.

The first harvest is a harvest of grain in verses 14-16. This harvest is carried out by “one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.” This is clearly the Lord Jesus. In verse 16 John tells us that Jesus, seated on a cloud, swings “his sickle across the earth, and the earth [is] reaped.” This harvest is a metaphor for the coming judgment of the bowls of God’s wrath. These bowls are the final series of horrific events on Planet Earth.

The second harvest follows in verse 17 as an angel comes “out of the temple in heaven.” He also has a sharp sickle, and he harvests the ripened grapes of the earth. This harvest is a symbolic preview of the battle of Armaged-



don, which accompanies the return of Christ. At this battle, the vanquished armies of the Antichrist, who try and keep Christ from returning in victory, will be crushed like grapes in a winepress.

John writes, “Blood [will flow] from the winepress, as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia” (verse 20). This means blood will flow like a river for some 200 miles! Here is a terrifying irony. Those who rejected the shed blood of Christ now shed their own blood as God’s wrath comes upon them in full force.

Chapter 15 then tells us that God’s wrath is about to enter a final stage of horrifying devastation. You will remember the last trumpet judgment was introduced back in chapter 11. From it comes the final series of judgments. They are called the bowl judgments because seven angels symbolically pour out the bowls of God’s wrath upon the earth.

Now before we get back to blood and gore and judgment and death, we are given another encouraging vision in verses 2-3:

*And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire-- and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.*

This is another sweeping vision of heaven filled with rejoicing and singing. The choir this time is made up of tribulation martyrs.

They are not viewed as failures but as victors. John writes, that they “conquered the beast and its image.” They are the true winners, the victors, in this battle.

Chapter 15 closes with a vision of these seven angels getting ready to pour out the final bowls “full of the wrath of God” (verse 7) against the world that hates Him and kills His beloved.

The last verse of the chapter adds this detail:

*The sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God ... and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished. (verse 8)*

What this means is that nobody can stop the hand of God. Nobody can push a pause button on His power. This is also a tragic message because the judgment of God is unstoppable for those who reject His pardon through Christ. Have you rejected Christ? Do you really want to face the judgment of God? Do you want to risk His wrath? No, today needs to be the day of your salvation. Tomorrow might be too late.

And if you have accepted Him, your future is not judgment; it is never-ending joy. For now, it might be dark in your world, in your experience, in your personal need or sorrow, but remember it is always darkest before dawn. Jesus is coming again—it might be today.

**JESUS IS COMING AGAIN—IT  
MIGHT BE TODAY.**

---

How does the perseverance of the 144,000 encourage you to stay faithful to your calling, even in difficult circumstances?

In what ways can you “write God’s name” on your life, showing your allegiance to Him in your daily actions?

How does the warning of God’s coming wrath motivate you to prioritize sharing the gospel with others?

How can you actively resist the pressures of the world that seek to draw you away from your faith in Christ?

What specific steps can you take today to cultivate a deeper fear of God and give Him glory in every aspect of your life?

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<sup>1</sup>John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Moody Press, 1966), 213.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Hindson, *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* (AMG Publishers, 2002), 154.

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LESSON 773

# REVELATION

## THE RUMBLING OF ARMAGEDDON

### REVELATION 16

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God's end-time judgments continue in Revelation 16. Here we not only see God's infinite power at work but are also reminded of His perfect justice and the depravity and hardness of those who reject Christ.

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Have you ever noticed that even people who do not know much about the Bible seem to know about some things that are recorded in the book of Revelation? And they even have their own opinions about those things. Just mention the word *rapture*, and people will have an opinion. Mention the Antichrist, and they will have an opinion about him. Mention the number 666, and you will most certainly get a reaction.

I read some time ago that Highway 666, which ran through Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico, was eventually renamed Highway 491. Why? Was it because 666 was considered an unlucky number? No. It was because the highway department could not replace fast enough the highway signs that were being stolen! Evidently people wanted to have that Highway 666 sign as a collector's item.

There is another word in Revelation that captures the attention of the world, and that is the term *Armageddon*. Even though many people do not know what the Bible says about Armageddon, they know it has something to

do with a final battle and the end of the world as we know it.

As we set sail now into Revelation 16, John is going to begin giving us the details about the coming cataclysmic events that will wrap up the final days of civilization and culminate in the great battle of Armageddon.

In the opening verse of chapter 16, seven angels step forward carrying seven bowls. These bowls are filled symbolically with the wrath of God. And without any delay, the angels are told to pour out the bowls, delivering judgment upon judgment, as the intensity of God's wrath increases.

This *first* bowl judgment brings "harmful and painful sores . . . upon the people" (verse 2). The Greek word indicates these sores are running sores that refuse to be healed.<sup>1</sup>

Notice, too, that only those who bear the mark of the Beast and worship his image will be affected by these sores. Those who have become followers of Christ—and survived to this point in the tribulation—are spared this painful experience.

The *second* bowl, in verse 3, is directed toward the sea, which, becomes “like the blood of a corpse,” so that “every living thing” in the sea dies.

The *third* bowl delivers the same judgment on freshwater sources, “the rivers and the springs,” which John observes in his vision, “became blood” (verse 4). Note that he does not say, “they became *like* blood,” but they “*became* [literally] blood.” This is a global plague that humanity cannot survive for very long.

At this point, John hears the angel who pours out this bowl declaring God’s justice, saying, “They have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!” (verse 6). And in verse 7, a voice from heaven affirms this truth, saying, “Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!”

This is the righteous justice of God. Friend, if you have never trusted Christ, you do not want to ask God for justice; you want to ask Him for mercy. And you can, today, by calling upon the name of the Lord.

YOU DO NOT WANT TO ASK  
GOD FOR JUSTICE; YOU WANT  
TO ASK HIM FOR MERCY.

The *fourth* judgment involves the sun. Verse 9 says it will scorch people with “fierce heat.” This is true global warming!

From predictions of a coming ice age back in the 1970s to fear of global warming today, people have believed that humanity is in control of the global thermostat. It is all up to us to save the planet from either freezing or burning up.

Well, that myth of humanity’s power is finally put to rest. God is in control of the weather, the climate, the moon, the sun, the water, the icebergs, the solar system, and the universe beyond. And here, John records the truth that God is controlling His creation—it is His water, this is His planet, this is His sun and moon. And God now uses it to deliver the hammer blow of His sovereign justice.

How does humanity respond to this unbearable heat? John describes the response in verse 9: “They cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.”

As the nineteenth-century pastor Charles Spurgeon often said, “The same sun which melts wax hardens clay. The same Gospel which melts some persons to repentance, hardens others in their [defiance].”<sup>2</sup> It will be the latter in the coming tribulation.

Next, verse 10 tells us that the *fifth* bowl is “poured out . . . on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness.”

God, who controls the universe, now gives the order, and the lights go out on the Antichrist’s kingdom! The Greek text implies that whatever gives light no longer will. Even lamps, candles, and flashlights will emit no light. It is complete darkness. The Lord is mercifully showing the unbelievers that the Antichrist is not the light and those who follow him are heading for eternal, outer darkness.

And what does mankind do in the face of this supernatural demonstration of God’s power over light? Once again, they “cursed the God of heaven . . . they did not repent” (verse 11).

This brings us to the *sixth* angel. John watches as he “poured out his bowl on the great riv-



er Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east” (verse 12).

This great river is holding back advancing armies from the East. But God will dry up the waters, allowing them to march toward Israel and Armageddon—and their final destruction.

In verse 13 John sees three “spirits like frogs” coming from the mouths of the satanic trinity: the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet. The apostle explains in verse 14 that these are demonic agents of Satan sent out to gather “the kings of the whole world . . . for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.”

So, a global army following the Antichrist is rumbling through the dry riverbed of the Euphrates River. They are marching against believers—especially Jewish, messianic believers—but ultimately, they are going to march against the returning King of Kings.

Verse 16 tells us that these armies assemble at a place that “in Hebrew is called Armageddon.” *Har* is the Hebrew word for “mountain”; *Megiddo* refers to the ancient city in northern Israel that overlooks the Jezreel Valley. This is the perfect place to serve as the command center for the armies of this final world war.<sup>3</sup>

As the armies gather at Armageddon in preparation for this final conflict, the last angel steps forward to empty the *seventh* bowl of judgment from God. Verse 17 says that when he empties the bowl, a voice from the throne of God says, “It is done!” Verse 18 then adds this:

*And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth.*

On top of that, hailstones weighing about a hundred pounds each will fall from the sky (verse 21). The people of earth, including this vast human army, will be devastated by God’s supernatural use of the forces of nature.

How will the human race respond? Again, instead of surrendering to God, they curse God for what is happening.

Frankly, it is hard to picture this kind of devastation, horror, fear, and pain the human race will experience as Christ’s coming quickly approaches. Yet the most tragic fact in this text is that the majority of people on Planet Earth would rather defy and curse God than surrender their lives to Him.

Let me ask you this: Have you surrendered to Christ as your Savior? If you have not, do you really want to keep fighting against the God of creation, the sovereign King of the universe? Let me encourage you to surrender your life to Him today.

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When you hear about terms like “rapture” or “Armageddon,” how do you respond, and why do these topics seem to captivate people?



How does the warning of the coming bowl judgments affect your view of God’s justice and mercy?



How does knowing that God controls every aspect of creation influence your trust in Him during difficult times?

Why do you think some people resist God even when faced with His clear judgments? Are there areas in your life where you resist God?

In what ways can you ensure that your heart remains soft toward God, rather than hardened by circumstances or sin?

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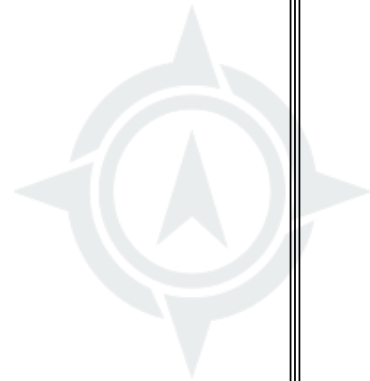
<sup>1</sup>Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* (Moody Press, 1995), 249.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Spurgeon, “The Lesson of the Almond Tree,” *Spurgeon’s Sermons, Volume 46: 1900* [Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.], 273. Ccel.org.

<sup>3</sup>See John F. Walvoord with Mark Hitchcock, *Armageddon, Oil and Terror* (Tyndale, 2007), 176.

Plot your Wisdom Journey.

How would the Lord have you respond to what you’ve learned today?



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LESSON 774

# REVELATION

## THE FALL OF BABYLON

### REVELATION 17–18

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The rebellious, human-centered attitudes evident so long ago in Babylon continue to bear bitter fruit in the lives of people today. They will become even more prominent in a future Babylon. But as that city demonstrates, all opposition to God will eventually be subdued.

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Jerusalem means “foundation of peace.” The name carries the promise of God’s ultimate plan for the future. While Jerusalem is the city most often mentioned in the Bible, you might be surprised to learn that the second most often mentioned city in Scripture is not Rome—it is Babylon.

Babylon, originally called Babel, was founded by Nimrod (Genesis 10:9-10). He built the city, along with that infamous tower of Babel, in defiance of God’s command to spread out and fill the earth (Genesis 11:1-9). Nimrod wanted to unite the world into one global kingdom under his rule. The city of Babylon became his political headquarters, and the tower of Babel was going to become the center of his false religion.

The Tower of Babel was the prototype of what are called ziggurats. These towers were designed with a temple on top, representing the heavens. This was the beginning of astrology, with stars and constellations being deified as having power over people’s lives. That false religion still exists to this day. The meaning of *Babel* is “confusion.” And people who follow

the religion of Babel even today are certainly confused.

Both cities, Jerusalem and Babylon, are going to be at the center of end-time events. Jerusalem represents the plans and purposes of God; a rebuilt Babylon represents the plans and purposes of Satan.

We are sailing now into Revelation 17, where John the apostle describes a new Babylon and its false religion. Some say that Babylon here is only a symbol for evil—that it represents the city of Rome. I believe we have every reason to take Babylon as a literal city, rebuilt in what is modern-day Iraq. Babylon will become the headquarters of the Antichrist.

I want to point out four characteristics of Babylon and its one-world religion, beginning in verse 1:

*Then one of the seven angels . .  
. said to me, “Come, I will show  
you the judgment of the great  
prostitute who is seated on many*

*waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” (verses 1-2)*

The first characteristic is its great *influence*. It is described here as an alluring prostitute who has effectively seduced the leaders of the world.

Keep in mind that with the rapture, the restraining influence of the church will be removed. But that will not remove the religious appetite of the human heart. The human heart is going to worship something. Here in the new “Babylon the great” (verse 5), all the false religions of the world will be joined together.

The second characteristic is her *partnerships*. Verse 3 describes her as “sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.”

We have already learned that the Antichrist’s kingdom will be the seventh world empire, which is made up of a coalition of ten kings. Verse 9 says the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. Some take this as a reference to Rome, the city set on seven hills; but if you look carefully here, these “seven heads” are kings and represent their kingdoms.

Verse 10 tells us that five of these kingdoms “have fallen.” This indicates they are past tense in reference to John. “One [kingdom] is,” and that refers to the current Roman Empire of John’s time. Then John writes, “The other [kingdom] has not yet come.” This fu-

ture kingdom will be the kingdom of the Antichrist.

A third characteristic of the new Babylon and its false religion is its enormous *wealth*. Verse 4 describes the prostitute—this false religion—as adorned in expensive clothing and gold, jewels, and pearls. The false religion of the Antichrist will dazzle the world’s attention with its wealth and beauty.

Fourth, this false system will have an evil *agenda*. Verse 6 describes the woman as “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” Her mission is not to make disciples but to murder—to martyr—the followers of Christ.

John then reveals the destruction of religious Babylon:

*The ten horns . . . and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. (verse 16)*

Simply put, this ten-kingdom federation, under the Beast/the Antichrist, will eventually decide they do not want this religious system anymore. While initially this one-world religion is useful to their cause, they will not allow it to challenge their power and that of their ruler, the Antichrist. Indeed, the Antichrist will proclaim himself God and demand that all worship him alone (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

With that, chapter 18 fast-forwards to the end of the tribulation to show us the final destruction of the city of Babylon. Chapter 18 focuses on the political and economic fall of the city.

An angel announces, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!” (verse 2). He goes on to describe how the city is becoming a wasteland for demons and wild animals.

Another voice is heard from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues” (verse 4). The great collapse is coming. Judgment is unavoidable and fully justified. Verse 5 says, “Her sins are heaped high as heaven.”

Verse 7 continues: “She [Babylon] glorified herself and lived in luxury . . . in her heart she says, ‘I sit as a queen.’” She is filled with arrogance and effectively dares God to judge her.

Well, God *will* bring judgment:

*“Her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.” (verse 8)*

With Babylon’s tragic destruction, you might think the world will finally wake up and see that they are fighting against the God of heaven. But they will not repent. They will weep and wail over the collapse of Babylon, the political and economic center of the Antichrist’s global kingdom.

Three categories of people are shown weeping and wailing. First are the *monarchs* of the earth (verses 9-10). They have lost the luxury the city provided for them, as well as their own economic power.

Second are the *merchants*. Verse 11 tells us they “weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore.” They have lost

their businesses and their benefit packages.

Third, are the *mariners*:

*All shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea . . . cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning.*  
(verses 17-18)

As they see their warehouses and markets and shopping centers all going up in flames, they never ask why. They see only what they have lost. One author explained their reaction by writing, “When money is god, and God is gone, what is left but godless grief?”<sup>1</sup>

While most of the world is crying, God’s people are now rejoicing. A heavenly voice is heard in verse 20, saying, “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!”

Beloved, although we plead with unbelievers to trust in Christ and avoid God’s final judgment, we will one day rejoice in God’s perfect justice and the vindication of His righteous character and His victorious kingdom.

WE WILL ONE DAY REJOICE IN  
GOD’S PERFECT JUSTICE AND  
THE VINDICATION OF HIS  
RIGHTEOUS CHARACTER AND  
HIS VICTORIOUS KINGDOM.

Verse 21 gives us God’s final word:

*Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and*

*threw it into the sea, saying, “So  
will Babylon the great city be  
thrown down with violence, and  
will be found no more.”*

Humanity’s united defiance of God began with Nimrod and the first city of Babylon. The final defiance of mankind will circle back to a newly built Babylon. But it will all end with Christ’s victory at the final battle of Armageddon, which we explore in the next chapter of Revelation.

<sup>1</sup>Daymond R. Duck, *The Book of Revelation*, The Smart Guide to the Bible Series (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 276.

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In what ways do you see the spirit of Babylon—confusion, false religion, and rebellion against God—at work in today’s world?

How does the reality of God’s ultimate victory over evil affect your daily walk with Him?

Are there partnerships or alliances in your life that might be leading you away from a wholehearted devotion to Christ?

In what ways are you investing your life in God’s eternal kingdom rather than the temporary wealth of this world?

How does the warning of Babylon’s judgment encourage you to share the gospel urgently with others?

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How would the Lord have you respond to what you’ve learned today?

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# REVELATION

the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 775

## WHEN THE KING FULFILLS HIS PROMISE

### REVELATION 19

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The coming events prophesied in God's Word can seem deeply troubling, but they are clear evidence, not only of human depravity, but also of God's holiness, grace, and sovereignty. In particular, Christ's return is cause for eternal praise of our Redeemer.

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We all make promises—far more than we imagine. We take a job and effectively promise to show up and work; we sign a mortgage and promise to make payments. We have every intention of keeping our promises, but we cannot control all the circumstances of life. Financial setbacks, health issues, even death might prevent us from following through.

But God does not have those limitations. When He makes a promise, it is as good as done. His promises will never fail.

Now think about this: for every biblical reference to the promise of the Lord's first coming as a babe in Bethlehem, there are eight references to His second coming?<sup>1</sup> God's clear and repeated promise is that Jesus is coming again. We can count on it!

**GOD'S CLEAR AND REPEATED  
PROMISE IS THAT JESUS IS  
COMING AGAIN.**

As we set sail today into Revelation 19, John begins to describe the return of Christ. But

first, he hears a “great multitude in heaven,” praising the Lord and shouting “Hallelujah!” (verse 1).

Verse 2 tells us that they are praising God for His judgment of the great prostitute, religious Babylon. This false, anti-Christian religion, had martyred tens of thousands of people who had become followers of Christ during the tribulation.

In verse 4 the twenty-four elders, representing the raptured church, begin singing their hallelujahs along with the four “living creatures,” or angels.

All this praise and worship in heaven increases with the great multitude's anticipation of a special event called the *marriage of the Lamb*:

*“Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with*

*fine linen, bright and pure.”*

*(verses 7-8)*

The Lamb here is Jesus Christ. The “Bride” is the church. From the perspective of John’s vision, the church has been taken to heaven at the rapture, and now the church is about to be “married” to Christ, our Bridegroom (John 3:29).

John then explains at the end of verse 8, “The fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.” God is going to reflect your service to Christ in your wedding garments—much like a graduate might wear a special ribbon on his or her gown. Your good works for Christ do not earn your salvation, but they will earn special recognition.

**YOUR GOOD WORKS FOR  
CHRIST DO NOT EARN YOUR  
SALVATION, BUT THEY WILL  
EARN SPECIAL RECOGNITION.**

The marriage of the Lamb involves the Lord’s unique union in covenant with His bride, the church. And by the way, this marriage ceremony is seen taking place in heaven during the tribulation—another key point that supports the rapture of the church to heaven before the tribulation begins.

In fact, the Lord’s treatment of the church follows the stages of a first-century Jewish wedding. The first stage is the *betrothal*. Today, the church is in the betrothal period.

The second stage in a Jewish wedding is the *presentation*. That is when the groom arrives to take his bride back to his father’s house, where he has added on a dwelling place. This corresponds to the rapture, when Christ

come and takes His church back to His Father’s house in heaven.

Next comes the *wedding ceremony*, which involves the exchange of gifts and the legal joining of the couple. This ceremony follows the judgment seat of Christ, where the Lord rewards His followers (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). So, we see here the bride at this ceremony wearing garments that represent her “righteous deeds.” Since the judgment seat immediately follows the rapture, the wedding ceremony will also take place in heaven during the tribulation period.

Following all this is the *wedding feast*, which John mentions in Revelation 19:9. An angel offers a unique blessing, saying, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And who is on the invitation list? Well, it cannot be the church, because the church is the bride. We would hope the bride has been invited! These invited guests will include all the Old Testament believers.

I agree with those who place the wedding feast at the beginning of the millennial kingdom when Christ returns, so that every Old Testament and New Testament and tribulation believer can enjoy this wedding celebration feast.

This scene is so joyful and glorious and magnificent that John is overwhelmed. He falls down to worship at the angel’s feet. But the angel says to John, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus” (verse 10).

The apostle’s attention then is riveted on the powerful *return* of Christ to earth. He records the scene, no doubt breathlessly:

*Then I saw heaven opened, and  
behold, a white horse! The one  
sitting on it is called Faithful and  
True, and in righteousness he  
judges and makes war. (verse 11)*

Christ is not just a happy bridegroom, returning with His bride, the church, and all the redeemed. He is coming as conquering King and Judge of all the earth.

He is described in verse 12: “His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems.” A diadem was not a solid crown but a cloth headband, about two inches wide. Royal jewels were normally attached to it, along with other insignia.

We know from history that after the pharaoh of Egypt defeated Antioch 160 years before the birth of Christ, he began wearing two diadems on his head; one represented his rule over Egypt and the other his rule over Asia. The fact that Christ is wearing “many diadems” points to His being Ruler over all the kingdoms of the world.

He is also seen clothed in “a robe dipped in blood” (verse 13). This portrays the battle of Armageddon where Christ is victorious. The blood of His enemies is literally splattered on His garments.

John also tells us who is accompanying Christ in His victorious return: “The armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses” (verse 14). That is you and me, beloved! We are not riding with the Lord to secure His victory, of course. He will merely speak a word, verse 15 indicates, and it will be over.

So here comes the King of Kings on His white stallion. And we are pictured riding on white horses with Him. There is no need to spiritualize this scene away. Frankly, I am looking forward to riding a white horse on that great day. The last time I rode a horse, it threw me off. Actually, I fell off, but it sounds more heroic the other way around. Well, not here; you and I are galloping from heaven in this descent to wage war on earth.

Even before the battle of Armageddon begins, Jesus calls in verse 17 “to all the birds that fly directly overhead, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh’” of this vast army led by the Antichrist. The Lord knows already who is going to win.

But what tragic irony, beloved! Those who attend the Lord’s wedding feast—believers—will be *at* the supper; those who march against the Lord will *become* the supper.<sup>2</sup>

Somewhere between verses 19 and 20—in that little white space between those two verses—the battle begins and ends, and all the Lord’s enemies are killed. We know from Luke 16 that their spirits go to Hades to await their final punishment, which will be described later in Revelation 20.

But there are two exceptions. The Beast, the Antichrist, along with the False Prophet, are “thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur” (verse 20). This is the place of everlasting torment.

For the believer the timeline is now complete: a rapture/resurrection, a reunion in heaven, a return with Christ, and now the reign of Christ on earth begins.<sup>3</sup> For the church, her days of conflict, rejection, and persecution are over forever.

No wonder the great choir in heaven is already singing here in chapter 19, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.”

<sup>1</sup>David Jeremiah, *What in the World Is Going On?* (Thomas Nelson, 2008), 217.

<sup>2</sup>Daymond R. Duck, *The Book of Revelation*, The Smart Guide to the Bible Series (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 292.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Hindson, *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* (AMG Publishers, 2002), 195.

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How does the promise of Jesus’ return impact your daily life and decisions?

In what ways are you preparing yourself as the Bride of Christ for the “marriage of the Lamb”?

Are you actively inviting others to the “marriage supper of the Lamb” by sharing the gospel with them?

What does riding alongside Christ in His victory mean to you personally?

Are you more focused on earthly battles or on preparing for the ultimate spiritual battle alongside Christ?

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Plot your Wisdom Journey.

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LESSON 776

# REVELATION

## THE COMING KINGDOM AND THE FINAL COURTROOM

### REVELATION 20

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Revelation 20 describes two very different outcomes for followers of Christ and those who reject the Savior. This is a stark reminder that decisions we make now will affect our future and that the future the Bible describes should affect the way we live today.

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Where do you want to be ten or twenty years from now? Financial planners will advise you to set goals and plan for where you want to be. Here is a far more important question for you: Where do you want to be a thousand years from now? Have you made plans for that?

As we sail into Revelation 20, this brief chapter of fifteen verses actually covers more than a thousand years of *your* future and mine.

In chapter 19 we saw Christ defeat His enemies at the battle of Armageddon, and we watched the Antichrist and the False Prophet thrown into hell. Now, in chapter 20, the attention shifts to the judgment of Satan.

Satan, however, is not cast into hell right away. John describes the scene in verses 1-3:

*I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who*

*is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended.*

The devil is now tossed into this pit—literally the *abyss*. There he is unable to “deceive the nations” for a thousand years—that is, throughout the kingdom era of Christ on earth.

And who is involved in this thousand-year reign of Christ? John continues:

*I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of*



*Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast. . . . They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (verse 4)*

Those seated on thrones are New Testament believers, Old Testament believers, and new believers who came to Christ during the tribulation and were martyred. So, by now, every believer throughout human history has been given resurrected, immortal bodies to reign with Christ (Daniel 7:27).

These are all part of what is called here in Revelation 20:5 the “first resurrection.” The “rest of the dead”—the unsaved—that is, their spirits, are in Hades awaiting the final judgment. John writes that their bodies will not be resurrected “until the thousand years [are] ended.” That is when the final judgment takes place.

So, in his vision, John sees that the kingdom of Christ has finally arrived. Old Testament prophecies describe conditions on earth at this time as returning to that which was present in the garden of Eden. Lasting peace will finally prevail. Even the animal kingdom will be brought into harmony with humans, so that a little child can play with a lion cub like he would his puppy (Isaiah 11:6).

Jesus will rule from Jerusalem, where a new, magnificent temple will be built, and you, beloved, are going to reign with Him.

Over whom will we rule in this kingdom? Well, the kingdom will be populated with the millions of believers who came to faith in Christ during the tribulation and survived. When Jesus returns with us, all these believers

are simply ushered into this kingdom. Their bodies are still mortal, though Isaiah indicates that God will tweak their bodies so they will live, like Adam and Eve, for hundreds of years (Isaiah 65:20).

These mortals will marry, have children, flourish, and build nations and economies while enjoying all the kingdom benefits. The trouble is, their children will be born with that old sinful nature. And that means every person born during the millennial kingdom will have to personally accept the gospel of Christ. Sadly, as time passes, more and more will refuse to believe.

We know that will be the case because of a final rebellion at the end of the thousand-year kingdom, which John writes about in verses 7-8:

*Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth ... to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.*

Imagine, after living in the wonderful presence of Christ, that people will be deceived into rebelling against King Jesus!

This is a reminder that a beautiful environment does not erase inward corruption! Solving social problems will never solve the sin problem! A person needs to be changed from the inside out.

This final rebellion against the Lord does not last long. John writes, “Fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil . . . was thrown into the lake of fire” (verses 9-10).

With Satan put away forever, we arrive at the terrifying, final judgment of the unsaved. John writes in verse 11, “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.” This is Jesus Christ, who declared in John 5:22, “The Father . . . has given all judgment to the Son.”

The white color of the throne symbolizes the purity of this courtroom scene.<sup>1</sup> There is not one speck of injustice or partiality.

But this throne is not a little desk for dialogue. This is a throne from which will come an eternal verdict.

John adds in verse 11 that “earth and sky fled away.” This refers to the destruction of the universe prior to its being recreated brand new and eternal (2 Peter 3:10).

So, every unbelieving person from all of human history is now standing before this throne. “Standing” indicates that their bodies have been resurrected. This is the final resurrection, and they will have been given an immortal body eternally suited for hell.

Verse 13 records, “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them.” No unredeemed person will avoid this final judgment. No matter where their bodies decomposed or were buried, God will regather their DNA and reconstruct their bodies back to life.

The solemn scene proceeds in verses 12-13:

*Books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in*

*the books . . . each one of them, according to what they had done.*

God will take the time to individually justify the degree of punishment each one deserves, and that will be determined by their deeds.

All unbelievers will realize, to their horror, that God—who knows everything, who has been present everywhere—was an eyewitness to every sinful thought and deed. He has even kept a written record. God will prove to them all why they are being judged forever.

Verse 15 indicates that their names are not written in the “book of life.” This is the registry, the roll book of the citizens of heaven. John writes, “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

John calls this the “second death” (verse 14). In biblical terms, “death” never means cessation of existence; it means separation. In the first death—physical death—the soul is separated from the body. In the second death, experienced only by unbelievers, there is separation from God forever.

The truth is, we have all sinned. Our record would not look any better than those who stand condemned. But oh, let me tell you, beloved, as Christians, there is no record of our sins because every sin has been paid for by Christ our Savior. He erased our record of sin (Isaiah 38:17).

If you are not a believer, do not respond to this prophecy with apathy or anger. Do not argue with God over what He declares here. He is actually warning you ahead of time. Just answer the question: Where will you be, a thousand years from now?

Trust in Christ today. He will forgive you and deliver you from this final judgment.

TRUST IN CHRIST TODAY.  
HE WILL FORGIVE YOU AND  
DELIVER YOU FROM THIS  
FINAL JUDGMENT.

<sup>1</sup>Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, ed. Cleon L. Rogers Jr. (Regency, 1980), 858.

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What does it mean to you that believers will reign with Christ for a thousand years?

Does the final rebellion at the end of the millennium surprise you? What does it teach you about human nature?

Are you comforted by the fact that God's justice will be perfectly displayed at the Great White Throne judgment?

What is your response to the truth that Christ has erased the believer's record of sin?

How can you help others understand the significance of preparing now for their eternal destiny?

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Plot your Wisdom Journey.

How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?

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# REVELATION

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LESSON 777

## WHEN HEAVEN COMES DOWN TO EARTH

### REVELATION 21:1-8

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What is heaven like? Most of what we know about heaven is found in the book of Revelation, and chapter 21 of that book reveals that the ultimate destination of Christians is not “up there” but “down here” on a new earth.

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There is an old gospel song that includes this lyric: “Everybody talkin’ ‘bout heaven ain’t goin’ there.” That might be poor grammar, but it is correct theology. Jesus Christ Himself once said, “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

But here is something else to consider: not even everyone who is going to heaven has a good understanding of what heaven is really like. It is a place up there somewhere, and we will get a new body, never be sad again, and probably do a lot of singing.

Well, to a certain extent all that is true, but there is so much more. As you sail with me into the opening verses of Revelation 21, you might be surprised to learn that your future in heaven is going to involve life on Planet Earth.

The apostle John begins in verse 1:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and*

*the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.*

The apostle Peter explains in 2 Peter 3:10 that the heavens above, along with the earth—the entire universe—will be burned up at the end of human history. Isaiah the prophet predicted in Isaiah 65:17 that God will one day create new heavens and a brand-new earth.

John sees *the appearance of that new heaven and new earth* here in Revelation 21; and this word “new” that he uses refers to a new *kind* of heaven and earth. In other words, the new creation will have continuity with the old creation as we know it now, but it will be uniquely new.

This is like your future glorified body. You will still be you, with your personality and gifts and physical features, but you will be perfected and made immortal. So also, the earth is not going to look like the moon; it will look like the earth. It will be recognizable but different—perfected and made to last forever.

This is part of God's gifts to us, and we will be able to explore and enjoy this magnificently beautiful, recreated earth and universe. While John says here that there will be no more sea, that is a reference to the ocean. It does not mean there will not be rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water.<sup>1</sup> But the ocean is a great separator, separating nations and people today. But that will not be the case in the new earth. We who dwell on the new earth will be united spiritually *and* geographically; nothing will separate us.

Next, John sees *the appearance of the new Jerusalem*, "the holy city . . . coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (verse 2).

The heavenly city, referred to here as the "new Jerusalem," is also called the Father's house in John 14:2. It will descend and rest on a brand-new earth. Heaven, the Father's house of gold and glory, literally comes down to earth and becomes the *new Jerusalem*.

As a believer, you have been promised a dwelling place in this golden city of glory. You will have a home there forever. I imagine you will be sent out by the Lord on some exciting adventure or expedition as you explore the new heavens and new earth.

BELIEVER, YOU HAVE BEEN  
PROMISED A DWELLING  
PLACE IN THIS GOLDEN CITY  
OF GLORY.

Throughout the Bible, the redeemed are referred to as a bride. Israel is called the bride of Jehovah; the church is called the bride of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Here, this new Jerusalem is called the bride, and that is because it contains all the

people who belong to God. You might say this city descends like a golden carriage, bringing within it the bridal party of God. And John's saying, "Look, here comes the bride." She is beautifully adorned for her beloved Groom, the King of Kings.

With the descent of the Holy City, John hears *an announcement from heaven*:

*I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."*  
(verse 3)

Yes, God dwells with every believer today in the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit, but we do not see the God we worship. That is going to change. We will have face-to-face fellowship with the physical embodiment of the triune God—Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom. John wrote in 1 John 3:2, "We shall see him as he is." Our feeble faith is going to turn into perfected sight.

In verse 4, John is told some things that will not be there:

*"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore."*

You need to understand that this promise of no more tears is related to these events that



are now gone—death, mourning, and pain. You will never again shed a tear over those things. But that does not mean you will never weep for joy, or be moved to tears at the music of heaven, or weep tears of gratitude when you see your Savior. Some people seem to think that emotional tears will not exist in heaven. They will, but they will never be tears of sadness.

Next, John records *an announcement from God*, who begins to affirm what John has seen. He says, “I am making all things new” (verse 5). Then God announces, “It is done!” (verse 6). God’s new creation for the redeemed to enjoy is finished. And I personally believe we are going to watch the Lord follow the pattern of Genesis 1 in this new creation, as He says, “Let there be light,” and then He recreates light and then the planets and the stars and the animal kingdom and more. We will get to see it happen this time.

God continues in verse 6, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” That means, “Nothing was before Me, and nothing is beyond Me.” This same expression is used to describe both God the Father and God the Son (Revelation 1:8; 22:13). Both are without origin and without ending. This, of course, speaks of the equal essence of their deity.

Finally, John hears God make a promise to believers in verse 6: “To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.” I like to think of this spring of water as the fountain of youth—perpetual youth and eternal life. And God paid for it in full and now gives it, as a wedding gift, so to speak, at no cost to us.

There is another promise given in verse 7: “The one who conquers will have this heri-

tage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.” “One who conquers,” or overcomes, is not some special class of Christian. This refers to every Christian—everyone who has faith in Christ (1 John 5:4-5).

Verse 8 reminds us of those who will not inherit the blessings of heaven:

*“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”*

Now we are all guilty of crimes and sins like these. The difference is that we have asked Christ for forgiveness, and the people John mentions here wanted nothing to do with Christ. We wanted the Savior; they wanted only their sin.

### BELIEVERS WANTED THE SAVIOR; UNBELIEVERS WANTED ONLY THEIR SIN.

Those who have rejected Christ will be rejected by Christ. They will experience the “second death.” Remember, death in Scripture never means annihilation, but separation. They will forever be separated from the Lord.

If you are among those described here, without forgiveness through Christ, please listen to the Lord’s invitation today. It is an invitation the bride of Christ accepted: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Do you regularly think about what the new heaven and new earth will be like?  
How does this shape your perspective on eternity?

How do you feel about the promise of face-to-face fellowship with God? How  
does it affect your daily walk?

What earthly sorrows or pains are you most eager to see removed forever in  
the new creation?

In what ways do you currently thirst for spiritual renewal, and how does God  
satisfy that thirst?

Have you fully accepted Christ's invitation for salvation? If not, what's holding  
you back from making that decision?

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<sup>1</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Victorious* (Victor Books, 1987), 146.

<sup>2</sup>Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation: God's Last Word* (Zondervan, 1971), 400.

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the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 778

# REVELATION

## THE FATHER'S HOUSE—YOUR FUTURE HOME

### REVELATION 21:9-21

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The eternal dwelling place of God's redeemed people is mind-boggling. It is unimaginably enormous in size and decorated with precious stones of massive size and incomparable beauty. And most importantly, it will be an unending expression of God's glory and grace.

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More than a million people every year visit a home nestled in the North Carolina foothills. It was built by George Vanderbilt, grandson of Cornelius Vanderbilt, a businessman who made a fortune in railroads and shipping.

The house is called The Biltmore Estate, and it was patterned after a French chateau—a really big one with 250 rooms in all.

Vanderbilt spared no expense. Dining-room chairs were modeled after royal thrones. Private bedrooms and sitting rooms were outfitted as if for royalty. In fact, as my wife and I toured this home, we noticed a table and chess set that belonged to Napoleon.

Built in the 1800s, this mansion had every modern convenience: an indoor swimming pool, an elevator, indoor hot and cold running water, a bowling alley, and a two-story library—that is the only room I would have wanted. Dozens of landscapers and household servants kept it all manicured and clean.

In comparison to your house and mine, the Biltmore is a really big house—175,000 square

feet. But compared to your future home, it will look like a little lean-to out in the backyard.

John's Gospel records that Jesus promised His disciples He was going to the Father's house to prepare a place for all who believe in Him. And He promised He would return and take us to our new residence (John 14:1-3).

Revelation 21 describes for us some of that house. It is also called the new Jerusalem and, most commonly, heaven. This is where the spirits of believers immediately go after dying. They are ushered into this glorious place to live there forever. In his vision John has seen this house descend to the new earth.

As we sail into chapter 21 again, I must tell you that much about this amazing house still remains a mystery. God is the architect and builder, but He has kept most of it a secret. We are literally going to have to wait and see. But I can tell you this: you will never have to vacuum or dust or paint or cut the grass again.

John writes in verse 9 that an angel comes to him and says, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." As earlier in

verse 2, the city is referred to as the Bride, the faithful wife to the Lamb, Jesus Christ, because it is inhabited by all the redeemed people of God.

With that, John begins to describe our future home:

*He carried me away in the Spirit  
to a great, high mountain, and  
showed me the holy city Jerusalem  
coming down out of heaven from  
God, having the glory of God, its  
radiance like a most rare jewel,  
like a jasper, clear as crystal.*

*(verses 10-11)*

John is struck by the glory of God's light permeating the city. Jasper is a precious gem that reflects light like a crystal. And the source of this brilliant light is the "glory of God" (verse 11).

This is the brilliance of God's immediate presence in all His majesty and perfection. You might remember how the glory of God filled the tabernacle and then later Solomon's temple. That same brilliant glory lit up the sky above Bethlehem when Jesus was born and the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:9, 14).

What John sees here is the glory of God in its fullest and now eternal expression in the city of gold, sparkling and shimmering like a diamond.

The apostle then gives us some details on the exterior of the Father's house in verse 12:

*It had a great, high wall, with  
twelve gates, and at the gates  
twelve angels, and on the gates the  
names of the twelve tribes of the  
sons of Israel were inscribed.*

So, there really are gates into heaven—twelve of them. And contrary to popular ideas, Peter is not standing at any of these gates. God has assigned angels to serve as eternal greeters, not to keep people out, but to welcome them in. John tells us that on each of these twelve gates is inscribed the name of one of Israel's twelve tribes, a reminder of the central role Israel plays in God's eternal plan.

Verse 14 tells us, "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." We know Judas's name is not there. So, who is number twelve? Well, that is one of those things the Bible does not clearly reveal to us. It could be Matthias, the one selected to fill Judas's position, or it might be the apostle Paul. We will have to wait and see.

What is significant is that these two groups—the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve apostles of the church—are distinguished here.<sup>1</sup> As we have said before, the church has not replaced Israel in God's plan. God has His distinctive purposes for Israel and the church. So, with these names built into the construction of heaven, we are all going to be reminded that we were drawn to Him by grace out of every dispensation of time, whether through the nation of Israel or through the church.

The description of the city's size continues in verse 15. John witnesses an angel measuring the width, length, and height of the city at 12,000 stadia, or at least 1,300 miles. Some take

this as meaning *each* of the width, length, and height measurements is 1,300 miles. I think it more likely means that 1,300 is the *total* cubic measurement, meaning each side and the height is about 11 to 12 miles in length, which multiplied together equals about 1,300 cubic miles. Now I have never been very good at math, but I know this much: this is a *really* big house. In fact, the roof on this house would reach five miles higher than Mount Everest.

## GOD HAS HIS DISTINCTIVE PURPOSES FOR ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH.

I also think it is probable this house is not cube-shaped but rather shaped like a ziggurat or pyramid, with the four sides angling up to a point. Each floor could be a mile high, with the throne of God on the top floor. The river John describes later in chapter 22 flows from God's throne. Imagine it cascading down each floor, a mile-high waterfall. That alone would be an amazing sight.

The city's wall is 144 cubits, or about 250 feet (verse 17). This probably refers to its thickness.

Verse 19 adds, "The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel." These twelve gigantic foundation stones are crafted from solid gemstones! The list here includes sapphire (deep blue), agate (greenish-blue), carnelian (deep red) and jacinth (violet), among others. Imagine these gemstones, the size of train cars, serving as foundation stones for each floor of this house. The brilliant light of God's glory will pass through these different colored stones, and it will be breathtaking.<sup>2</sup> Beloved, God has

lavishly decorated your future home with beauty and color.

John now mentions two more features of the city:

*The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. (verse 21)*

Gold is so common that God is going to use it for sidewalks and streets. And these gates, each made of a single pearl, are like nothing we have ever seen! Based on the language here and the thickness of the wall, each pearl would have a diameter of 250 feet!<sup>3</sup>

How long do you think it would take for an oyster to evolve to such a size that it could produce a pearl this large? Well, there is no evolution here—and never has been. This is created by the powerful word of God.

And here is the good news: because of the grace of God, through Christ, your Redeemer, you will have a house key forever. In fact, these gates will swing open for you as you enter your future home, your heavenly home, where you have been given a place in the Father's house.

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How does the description of your  
future home in heaven shape your  
current attitude toward material  
possessions?



In what ways do you experience God's glory in your life today, and how does it give you hope for heaven?

Are you living in anticipation of your place in the Father's house? How can this truth impact your daily decisions?

How does reflecting on the brilliance and beauty of heaven influence your worship and view of God's creativity?

What aspects of heaven described in the passage excite you the most, and why?

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<sup>1</sup>Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22* (Moody Press, 1995), 465.

<sup>2</sup>Daymond R. Duck, *The Book of Revelation*, The Smart Guide to the Bible Series (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 324.

<sup>3</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker, 2002), 758.

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LESSON 779

# REVELATION

## PARADISE REGAINED—FOREVER!

### REVELATION 21:22–22:5

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As we survey the biblical revelation of our eternal home, we find it to be a place filled with God's glory and our complete enjoyment. And what could be more enjoyable and fulfilling than living in complete absence of sin and in the presence of our holy God?

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The British commentator J. C. Ryle wrote back in the nineteenth century that if someone was about to leave England to settle in Australia or New Zealand, he would want to know something about his future home. Likewise, since we as Christians plan to settle forever in that heavenly country, it is natural to seek all the knowledge we can about our eternal home.<sup>1</sup>

As we continue to sail into Revelation 21 and on into chapter 22, we are given more information about our glorious future in heaven. So far, we have learned that the Father's house, our new residence, will make Mount Everest look like a little hillside; and we have learned that the foundation stones of the twelve stories, or levels, of this house are made of precious gemstones, the size of railroad cars. While we will no longer shed tears of sorrow, I believe we will weep with joy at the grandeur and beauty of heaven and the brilliant glory of our precious Redeemer.

Here in Revelation 21:22, John informs us that there is “no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” In the Father's house, God's presence will not be

limited to a single building. His presence will permeate the entire city.<sup>2</sup> We will not have to go anywhere to worship Him, for He will be immediately present, as well as omnipresent—with us wherever we go.

Another feature that is often misunderstood is described in verse 23. John writes, “The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” People often think this new creation will not include the sun or moon. No, what John means is that within this house—in the new Jerusalem—there will be no *need* for lamps or light posts because the light of God's glory will illuminate this golden city. John has already told us that God will recreate a new universe, and that includes our solar system and all its functions as we know it—only perfected and made immortal.

Verse 24 tells us, “By its light [that is, the glory of God] will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.” Verse 26 adds, “They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.”

Heaven will not eliminate ethnicities and distinctions between the various people groups. Here they are, all entering the eternal city.

**HEAVEN WILL NOT  
ELIMINATE ETHNICITIES AND  
DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE  
VARIOUS PEOPLE GROUPS.**

Furthermore, the gates of the city “will never be shut by day—and there will be no night” (verse 25). Again, this specifically refers to the Father’s house. In ancient days, the city gates were closed for protection. But this city does not need protection because there is no more threat of danger.

What a blessing for us living in this sin-cursed, evil world to be able to look forward to a day when there is a complete absence of sin. We can leave our doors unlocked without fear of harm, ever again.

As we begin chapter 22, John describes even more of our future home:

*Then the angel showed me the  
river of the water of life, bright as  
crystal, flowing from the throne  
of God and of the Lamb through  
the middle of the street of the city;  
also, on either side of the river, the  
tree of life with its twelve kinds of  
fruit, yielding its fruit each month.  
(verses 1-2)*

This description intrigues me greatly. The reference is to one species of tree, as a collective singular. In other words, this is not one

tree, like in the garden of Eden. This is rows of trees—orchards of this tree—flourishing on both sides of the river. And they are bearing twelve different kinds of fruit every single month.

And notice the mention of “each month.” Yes, in heaven we are going to have months and, therefore, years. As one scholar has pointed out, the reference to months here indicates that the normal “orbital and rotational motions of the earth will go on . . . and that the moon likewise will continue orbiting around the earth.”<sup>3</sup>

Let’s clear something up here. The idea that “time” will be no more, comes from Revelation 10:6. There the angel says there will “be no more delay,” meaning God’s final judgments will proceed without interruption. The opportunity for people to repent is quickly passing. The King James Version translates this, “there should be time no longer.” But the phrase doesn’t mean time itself is ending or that the eternal state will be without time.

John writes that every month these trees will bear a new crop of fruit for you to enjoy. You are going to decide to walk down to one of those trees one afternoon and pick a fruit. That means you will have taste buds to savor the fruit and teeth to chew it and a body to digest it. There just will be no more cavities or digestive problems in your glorified, perfected body.

Beloved, this is paradise regained. Think about it: human history began in a garden with a river flowing through it and a tree of life, and it ends in a garden with a river flowing through it and a tree of life.<sup>4</sup> But the Bible reveals that the garden of Eden was nothing compared to the garden of heaven.

## THE GARDEN OF EDEN WAS NOTHING COMPARED TO THE GARDEN OF HEAVEN.

John also focuses on this river. He writes in verse 1 that the river originates and flows from the throne of God. God's throne is no doubt located on the top floor of this eleven-to-twelve-mile-high ziggurat—the Father's house of gold and glory.

This is a literal river. Just imagine the scene. It will flow out from God's throne and wind its way through miles of gardens and orchards on either side. Then as it cascades down, from one level to the next, the waterfalls it creates will be spectacular.

This river, while literal, is also symbolic. It is the River of Life. The water represents eternal life, which comes from God and was delivered by Jesus Christ. He alone could provide the water that gives everlasting life, and He promised that those who drink it by believing in Him will never thirst again (see John 4:13–14).

Likewise, the Tree of Life is both literal and symbolic. You might remember that the Tree of Life was placed in the garden of Eden. But after Adam and Eve sinned, they were barred from eating the fruit of this tree, lest they live forever in their sinful state (Genesis 3:24). But now the Tree of Life is back, and as John writes back in Revelation 2:7, believers will “eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

We are told here in Revelation 22:2 that the leaves are “for the healing of the nations.” This tree's presence is God's way of promising that

no disease of any kind will ever interfere with the enjoyment of life in heaven.

## NO DISEASE OF ANY KIND WILL EVER INTERFERE WITH THE ENJOYMENT OF LIFE IN HEAVEN.

Verse 3 says, “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in [the city].” By the way, this verse clearly teaches the unity and equality of God the Father and God the Son, for they are effectively occupying the same throne.

Christ's title “the Lamb” fits this context perfectly. The curse that came upon the first creation because of sin is gone forever because the Lamb of God died for you and me.

The curse will be gone, and paradise will be ours. In fact, verse 5 reveals that we will reign with Him “forever and ever.”

Beloved, I cannot imagine what that even means. But I do know that your future and mine—through faith in Christ alone—is going to be stunning, spectacular, surprising, beautiful, and glorious.

## OUR FUTURE IS GOING TO BE STUNNING, SPECTACULAR, SURPRISING, BEAUTIFUL, AND GLORIOUS.

How often do you think about your eternal home, and how does it affect your current perspective on life?

What earthly fears or anxieties will you be glad to leave behind when entering this perfect place?

How can the promise of a restored paradise motivate you to endure trials and challenges with hope?

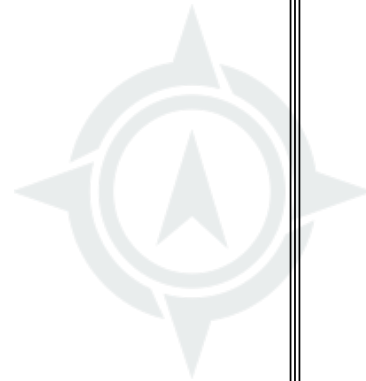


What does the inclusion of all nations and ethnicities in heaven teach you about God's love for diversity?

How does the promise of ruling with Christ forever inspire you to be faithful in your current roles and responsibilities?

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Plot your Wisdom Journey.  
How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?



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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Tyndale, 2004), 5.

<sup>2</sup>Kendell H. Easley, *Revelation*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Holman, 1998), 401.

<sup>3</sup>Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Tyndale House, 1986), 466.

<sup>4</sup>Stewart Custer, *From Patmos to Paradise* (BJU Press, 2004), 254.





# REVELATION

the WISDOM JOURNEY  
LESSON 780

## GOD'S FINAL WORD

### REVELATION 22:6-21

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The final words of Revelation remind us of the blessing we have in God's Word. They assure us of the sufficiency of the Bible and invite all to come to Christ and to look for the sure promise of His return.

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The final words delivered by someone are often their most inspiring words. We come to the closing words of the apostle John as we arrive in the last chapter of Revelation. Of course, what John has to say is not just *inspiring*; it is divinely *inspired*.

We begin in verse 6 with a *final blessing*:

*He said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."*

The speaker here is an angel. And he affirms that John's vision of the Lord is real—that what the apostle has seen concerning the future will come to pass.

The angel quotes Christ Himself, in verse 7, saying, "Behold, I am coming soon." If Jesus said that He was coming soon 2,000 years ago, today is sooner than ever! Down in verse

10, the angel says, "The time is near." And we can say with certainty today that it is nearer than ever!

This perspective creates a timeless principle that if we anticipate our future in heaven, we will begin to live in light of it! Beloved, prophecy about the future was never given to satisfy our curiosity but to develop our character and confidence as we live out our lives in the present.

IF WE ANTICIPATE OUR  
FUTURE IN HEAVEN, WE WILL  
BEGIN TO LIVE IN LIGHT OF IT!

John is so overwhelmed by all the angel has shown him that he falls down before the angel in worship (verses 8-9). This happened earlier in chapter 19; and as before, the angel reminds John that he is just another fellow servant—that God alone deserves worship.

Next, John receives some *final instructions*. In verse 10 he is told, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time

is near.” In other words, “Don’t keep this to yourself. Expound it to the church, and expose it to the world.”

These prophetic words need to be studied. I know there are many people who see Revelation as so hard to understand that they just avoid it. I know of pastors who admit they would never attempt to teach it. But this is God’s Word. Think of what we have learned in our Wisdom Journey through Revelation. Without it, we would have robbed ourselves of the full story of God’s incredible plan. And we would be robbing our world of God’s final warning of the wrath to come.

Yes, people are going to respond differently to the message of Revelation. Verse 11 says, “Let the evildoer still do evil . . . and the holy still be holy.” Put simply, people’s response to God’s Word will determine their eternal destiny.

Jesus speaks in verse 14:

*“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.”*

Do not misunderstand this. You do not get into heaven because you did a good job washing your robes; you get into heaven because you trusted the cleansing sacrifice of Christ on the cross for your salvation. That is how you inherit heaven.

The Lord continues in verse 15:

*“Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral*

*and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”*

**YOU GET INTO HEAVEN  
BECAUSE YOU TRUSTED THE  
CLEANSING SACRIFICE OF  
CHRIST.**

“Dogs” here refers to people of low character—it is a term used in Scripture to refer to unbelievers. Dogs, in the days of Christ, were wild and untamed. So, this term describes those who refused to be tamed, as it were, by the Master, the Lord Jesus. Frankly, we are all guilty of lust and lying and hatred. The question is whether we have asked the Lord to forgive us.

Beginning in verse 13, Jesus lays claim to several titles that confirm His deity. He says He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” He is declaring that He is eternally preexistent and without end. He spoke the first words, and He will have the last word! These titles can apply only to a non-created, eternally existing God, which means Jesus is claiming to be eternal—God the Son.

Then in verse 16, Jesus calls Himself “the root and the descendant of David.” He is God, but at a point in time, He also entered the human race and into the royal family line of King David. Again, this affirms that Jesus is the Son of God who became the Son of Man. Follow this thought: Only deity could originate—be the “root” of—David’s life, and only humanity could descend from David’s line; so, Jesus is both humanity and deity.

Next, Jesus claims the title of “the bright morning star.” (verse 16). By this title, He is announcing the dawn of a new, eternal day.

In verse 17 we have a final invitation:

*The Spirit and the Bride say,  
“Come.” And let the one who  
hears say, “Come.” And let the one  
who is thirsty come; let the one  
who desires take the water of life  
without price.*

We as believers are saying, “Come, Lord Jesus!” But we are also saying to our world, “Come to the Lord Jesus.” If you are thirsty, come to Him for salvation.

If you are hungry and thirsty today for meaning and purpose in life and peace in your heart, Jesus invites you to come to Him and “take the water of life without price.” There is no cost. It is free to you, because Jesus paid it all.

Some *final warnings* are given in verses 18-19:

*I warn everyone who hears the  
words of the prophecy of this book:  
if anyone adds to them, God will  
add to him the plagues described  
in this book, and if anyone takes  
aways from the words of the book  
of this prophecy, God will take  
away his share in the tree of life  
and in the holy city.*

So many religions and false teachers in our world today try either to add to the Scriptures or to take away from the meaning of the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

This is not a casual warning, and it does not apply only to the book of Revelation but to all of inspired Scripture. God never gave you an eraser to edit out something you do not like, and there is nothing missing in the Bible so that something needs to be added. To add to or subtract from God’s Word is a heaven-or-hell issue.

### TO ADD TO OR SUBTRACT FROM GOD’S WORD IS A HEAVEN-OR-HELL ISSUE.

So, do not tamper with the Word of God. It is complete; it is sufficient. It does not end with a comma; it ends with a period.

Then there is a *final promise*. Jesus says, “Surely I am coming soon” (verse 20). These are the last recorded words of Jesus: “I am coming soon.” So, remember this closing promise, beloved, and live in light of it. One day, it *will* come to pass.

To this, John adds the *final prayer* in the closing words of inspired Scripture. This prayer begins with an “Amen,” and it ends with an “Amen.” And “amen” means “So be it; it is true; I agree!” So, John prays, “Amen [it is true]. “Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen” (verses 20-21).

What a great way to end the Bible—with the word *amen*! It is all true. The Word of God and the grace of God are true. The grace of God saved us, keeps us, and enables us. And His grace will one day deliver us to our final home, where we will see Him face to face and

experience all the delights of this beautiful home—your home and mine—where we will live forever.

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE  
GRACE OF GOD ARE TRUE.

<sup>1</sup>Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Tyndale House, 1986), 486.

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How do you respond to the promise that Jesus is coming soon? Does it inspire urgency in your faith?

Are you living in a way that reflects anticipation for Christ's return, or are there areas where you have grown complacent?

How can you ensure that you are not "adding to" or "taking away from" God's Word in your personal study and teaching?

What actions can you take today to strengthen your relationship with Christ and prepare for His return?

How often do you end your prayers with a genuine "Amen," fully agreeing with God's will and purposes?

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Plot your Wisdom Journey.

How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?

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