The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Introduction

The book of Revelation is the only book of the Bible that comes with a guarantee: “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near” (Revelation 1:3).

As you read and study the book of Revelation, you’ll want to receive this blessing! So take a few minutes before you start to read this introduction to the study.

Purpose of the Book of Revelation

The purpose of the book is stated in its first sentence: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.” This prophetic book fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament, including those that talk about “the day of the Lord.”

It is the revelation of Jesus Christ; it reveals what the Spirit of God wants us to know about Messiah’s second coming. At that time he will “bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28) and wrath and judgment to those who “refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Salvation to some; judgment to others.

Study Goals

So much is happening in the world right now. It’s affecting what we think and how we live. Jesus called this “the beginning of birth pains” that we would experience as his coming draws near. “There will be great earthquakes,” he told his followers, “and in various places plagues and famines” (Matthew 24:8; Luke 21:11 NASB). There has never been a better time to read the Revelation of Jesus Christ!

Here are the goals of this study:

1. To be strengthened in our faith by the various ways in which the person of the Lord Jesus is revealed to us in this graphic, prophetic book of the Bible.

2. To receive the blessings promised at the beginning and conclusion of the book by taking to heart what we read and by keeping the words written in it (1:3 and 22:7). The primary goal is to know God better—not necessarily to interpret or understand all the details of future events.

3. To seek God’s will for our lives today as we view the examples of those who in days to come will lay down their lives “for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”
Sections of Study

The book of Revelation comprises a series of prophetic visions given to the Apostle John in the first century. Unique to our study of this book is the way in which it tracks the sequences of these visions, grouping them into seven sections.

The Chart (available at TheBibleWebsite.org) shows the structure of the book of Revelation. The book’s twenty-two chapters are shown across the page, with significant events pointing to the chapters where they are found in the text. The boxes above the chapters group the chapters of Revelation into the sections of our study that will serve to unlock the mysteries of this most awesome book of the Bible.

Organizing the book of Revelation into these seven sections emphasizes the “rhythm” of the prophetic visions given to the Apostle John. It serves to help understand God’s message to believers in this final book of the Bible—because there is a message here; the book of Revelation is not just about scary end-time visions. The purpose of Revelation is to glorify Jesus—to reveal and exalt him as First and Last; the slain Lamb of God and mankind’s Redeemer; the King of kings and Ruler of God’s creation…. And the message to believers is to follow the example of the faithful saints of God portrayed throughout the book who persevere through persecution, who are willing to lay down their lives for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

The Seven Sections of Revelation

To help make sense of the book of Revelation, first bear in mind that the Apostle John most likely recorded the book’s prophetic visions in the order in which they were presented to him. The book overall, from its beginning to its end, is chronological—that is (with one exception) it portrays events going forward in time. But it is also cyclical. The events it describes through Chapter 19 occur during the time of the earth’s tribulation. Different aspects of that time period are shown to John in succession, including the rule of the antichrist, the prevalence of apostate religion, the salvation of faithful believers, and the judgments and wrath of God.

As we seek to understand the meaning of the visions—and the message of the Revelation—it is important to recognize the way in which the text is divided. Otherwise we’re apt to overlook the many blessings it promises to believers today.

The visions given to John are recorded in sets. You know that the book of Revelation is replete with sevens. Seven is the biblical number of perfect completeness. (Completeness, in fact, is emphasized at the conclusion of the book, where John gives a dire warning to anyone who would add to or subtract anything from its content.) So we find seven letters, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls of wrath—seven of just about everything, from the seven lampstands among whom John first views the risen Lord, to the seven hills upon which the adulteress Babylon the Great sits.

Consequently, we are not surprised to discover seven sets of visions—seven sections, or cycles, of the Revelation given to John—into which we can group its content in order to better understand it.
Here, then, is a summary of these seven sections. (You can also access each section directly from the interactive Chart.)

**Manifestation of Christ to the churches on Earth (Chapters 1–3)**

Section One begins with the appearance of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John, who is instructed to write letters to seven churches in existence at that time. These letters are filled with promises to those who believe and obey God and who persevere in their faith.

**Manifestation of Christ in heaven to initiate God's judgments (4–7)**

Section Two begins with a heavenly scene where Jesus Christ, seen as the slain Lamb of God, receives the scroll of God’s judgment of mankind. After the sixth seal of the scroll is opened, John views another scene in heaven where he sees a large and final group of humanity whom Jesus has redeemed from the earth at the end of the age.

**Trumpet judgments destroy thirds of the earth (8–11)**

Section Three begins with the announcement of seven trumpet judgments. At the conclusion of the sixth judgment, John is told about the testimony of two godly witnesses in Jerusalem, followed by the sounding of the final trumpet and this heavenly proclamation: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.”

**Satan’s hatred of humankind manifested through the beasts (12–14)**

Section Four begins with a sign from the past, showing the devil poised to destroy Messiah at his first coming. Then it jumps ahead to the future, telling of the persecution of the followers of Christ and the deception of Earth’s inhabitants at the hands of the devil’s agents, concluding with the reaping of the earth’s end-time harvests of humans.

**Bowls of God’s wrath poured out (15–16)**

Section Five begins with seven angels given the seven last plagues as tribulation martyrs in heaven sing the song of Moses and worship God. Seven bowls of wrath are then poured out on the earth, concluding with a tremendous earthquake and hundred-pound hailstones falling from the sky, with the specter of Armageddon on the horizon.

**Mystery Babylon and the return of Christ (17–19)**

Section Six begins with John being shown the punishment of the murderous harlot Babylon, after which he hears a heavenly celebration of her destruction and an announcement of the wedding supper of the Lamb and his bride. It concludes with Christ’s return to “strike down the nations” and inaugurate his kingdom on Earth.

**Millennium and the New Jerusalem (20–22)**

Section Seven begins with the imprisonment of Satan at the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ on Earth and describes the fate of the devil and judgment of the unbelieving dead. It concludes with a wondrous description of the New Jerusalem, the eternal dwelling place of God with His people.
Section Analysis

There is a certain “shape” to the content of the book of Revelation—at least, in the way we are looking at it in this study. (It may be helpful to look at the Chart as you continue reading.)

To start with, the “great and wondrous” heavenly sign depicting the first advent of Jesus Christ is significantly located right at the center of the book. This vision of the woman clothed with the sun, as she is about to give birth to the earth’s rightful ruler, is the only view of the past in a book otherwise centered around Christ’s second coming. It is additionally significant in that it divides the book neatly in half—with the first half of the Revelation to John concluding with the announcement of the Messianic kingdom—complete with the sounding of the last trumpet.

From the center, we turn our attention next to the outside sections: the first and seventh. The first section precedes the earth’s great tribulation; it takes place in the first century (although the messages to the churches of that time continue to inform believers today). The events of the seventh and final section occur after the tribulation, after the Lord Jesus has returned.

The five central sections describe events that occur during the last days, as the present age comes to a close. Section Two, which describes the opening of the seals on the scroll of God’s judgments, leads up to the time of the tribulation, in which the remaining four central sections are set—including the trumpet and bowl judgments and the rule of the antichrist.

Now here’s where the organizational scheme of the book becomes interesting, for we notice that each of these five central sections ends at about the same time—at the end of the tribulation. For those familiar with the book, here’s a quick breakdown:

Section Two ends in chapter 7 with a vision of the saints who have come out of the tribulation. Section Three ends in chapter 11 with the announcement of Christ’s kingdom and the rewarding of the saints. Section Four ends in chapter 14 with the harvest of those who are killed when Christ returns. Section Five ends in chapter 16 after the pouring out of the final bowl of God’s wrath. And Section Six ends in chapter 19 with the celebration of Babylon’s destruction, the announcement of the wedding supper of the Lamb, and Christ’s return.

These “cycles” of visions, while generally moving forward in time, end every time with encouragement to the reader: namely, that a multitude of people will yet be redeemed, albeit at the cost of their lives; that Jesus Christ will establish his kingdom on Earth, when his servants will be rewarded and his enemies destroyed; that, in spite of Satan’s attempts to conquer the followers of Jesus, they will ripen to an eternal harvest while those who have submitted to the beast will be trampled in the winepress of God’s wrath; that all the divine judgment and destruction of the earth and its people will finally come to an end; and that at last Jesus will return to eradicate evil and bring peace to the world.
Biblical Background

As you go through this study of Revelation, passages of scripture from other books of the Bible will give you some helpful background and enable you to make better sense out of the events and visions described in the book. So be sure to flip through your Bible and read the passages. Let the Scriptures—the Word of God—speak to you!

Here are six passages of scripture that will provide you with some background to the book of Revelation:

Read Isaiah 13:6-13 > a graphic description of the day of the Lord
Read Isaiah 34:1-4 > a graphic description of God’s judgment of the earth
Read Isaiah 51:4-6 > God’s justice and salvation
Read Matthew 24:4-31 > signs of the end of the age
Read Luke 21:25-28 > more signs of the end times
Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 > a striking description of Christ’s return

The “testimony” that the Apostle Paul refers to in this last passage from 2 Thessalonians is the gospel of Jesus—the good news of salvation, which the Lord Jesus accomplished at his first coming. The book of Revelation itself is also a testimony (see Revelation 1:1-2); it is Christ’s testimony given to the Apostle John concerning his second coming.

Here are two more passages to read before you turn to the book of Revelation. (Carefully read the scripture passages and quotations served up to you throughout this study—till they speak to you personally. Take them to heart.)

Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 > encouragement to stay “strong to the end”
Read 1 Peter 1:3-9 > the coming salvation to be revealed in the last time
Manifestation of Christ to the Churches
Chapters 1–3

Note: You will benefit most from your study if, before beginning each section, you first read the chapters of the book of Revelation included in that section. Verses indicated in parentheses are for reference. Passages from other books of the Bible are also included for reference or to read—make a point to read passages marked “Read”! These scripture passages are key to your understanding of the message of Revelation.

Chapter 1 – John’s Greeting

This is “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” The book of Revelation reveals what the Spirit of God wants us to know about Messiah’s second coming. When Jesus returns he will “bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28) and judgment to those who “refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). This book is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus himself, given to John to show us, God’s servants, “what must soon take place.” It was given to prepare us for Christ’s return.

Several New Testament (NT) writers have testified that Jesus is coming “soon.” We can learn at least two things from this: (1) God is eternal, whereas we humans are, as it were, trapped in time; and (2) he wants all believers—from generation to generation—to live in readiness for the return of his Son by obeying his commands, seeking him in prayer, walking in his kingdom, proclaiming his goodness and grace, and reaching out in love to our fellow human beings with the message of his salvation. There’s plenty to do as we “watch and wait” for Christ’s return!

We will be blessed for taking to heart what we read in the book of Revelation, because “the time is near.” The goal of our study, therefore, will be to get to know God better and to appreciate what he is doing as our world enters the end times—not necessarily to correctly interpret every detail of future events.

John addressed this book of prophecy “to the seven churches in the province of Asia” (see 1:19)—just as other apostles of Christ wrote letters to various churches. In his opening remarks John mentions “the seven spirits before [God’s] throne,” a reference to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. The number seven in the Bible signifies “whole, complete, perfect” … more on the Holy Spirit later. Then John refers to Jesus with these titles:

Faithful witness: Jesus is Immanuel, God with us; God in human form, the “exact representation of God’s being” (Hebrews 1:3).

Firstborn from the dead: our risen, living Savior; firstborn of many brothers; “Christ, the firstfruits—then, when he comes, those who belong to him” (1 Corinthians 15:23).

Ruler of the kings of the earth: even now, today! (Jesus also names himself “the ruler of God’s creation” in 3:14.)
Read Psalm 2 > The Father has exalted his Son as King to rule the nations. Jesus “has freed us from our sins by his blood”—the purpose of his first advent. If you are still captive to a particular sin (see Psalm 19:13), let Jesus free you now, because times are only going to get harder. And if you haven’t yet made Jesus Christ your Savior and Lord, now is the time, as you start this study, to get right with him!

The Appearance of Christ to John

John was in Roman custody “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” The seven churches were located in seven cities clustered around the southwest province of Asia (modern Turkey). Jesus appears among seven lampstands, which represent the churches.

John describes his vision of the risen Christ, who, as far as we know, had not appeared like this to anyone before. (John writes, “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead”!) The double-edged sword John sees coming out of the Lord’s mouth is used in the Bible to characterize the powerful word of God; in this book, this sword is used to destroy God’s enemies (see Revelation19:21). Jesus names himself “the First and the Last” (he existed before Adam and lives ever after, forever); and “the Living One,” risen from the dead, who holds the keys of death and Hades (the grave, the holding place of the unrighteous dead).

Jesus instructs John to write. The descriptions of Christ here copy over to the intros of the seven letters in the chapters that follow, where they serve to identify Jesus as the author of the letters.

Chapter 2 – Letters to the Seven Churches

Ephesus
Commended for their deeds, hard work, perseverance
Condemned for forsaking their first love
Admonished to do the things they did at first
Promise to overcomers: they will eat from the tree of life

Smyrna
Commended for their perseverance through affliction and poverty
Admonished to not be afraid of future persecution, but to be faithful
Special promise: they will receive the crown of life
Promise to overcomers: they will not experience the second death

Pergamum
Commended for remaining true to the name of Jesus
Condemned for idolatry and sexual immorality
Admonished to repent
Promise to overcomers: they will receive hidden manna, and a white stone with a new name
Thyatira
Commended for lovingly and faithfully doing more than at first
Condemned for sexual immorality and idolatry
Admonished to repent, and hold on to what they have
Promise to overcomers: they will receive authority over the nations

Chapter 3 – Letters to the Seven Churches

Sardis
Commended for a few of their members who have stayed pure
Condemned for incomplete deeds, dead works
Admonished to wake up, obey what they have learned, and repent
Promise to overcomers: they will be clothed in white, and their names will be acknowledged before God

Philadelphia
Commended for enduring, keeping God’s word and not denying his name
Admonished to hold on to what they have
Special promises: they are presented with an open door of ministry; they will be kept from the tribulation
Promise to overcomers: they will be made pillars in God’s temple—with the names of God, the new Jerusalem, and Christ’s new name written on them

Laodicea
Received no words of commendation
Condemned for being lukewarm; for being wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked
Admonished to buy from Jesus refined gold, white clothes, eye salve; to heed his rebuke and discipline; and repent
Special promise: fellowship with Christ is offered to those who “open the door” to him
Promise to overcomers: they will sit with Jesus on his throne

These letters addressed the situations at local church bodies. While the letters serve to instruct us as individual followers of Christ, their messages should particularly inform pastors and elders of local church ministries. Today, particularly in the U.S., people choose which churches they wish to attend, and churches more than ever take on group mentalities. These seven letters addressed both the positive and negative behaviors that characterized groups of believers.
Learning from the Letters

Here are the behaviors for which Jesus *commended* the churches:

- Doing good deeds, and lovingly and faithfully doing more than at first
  Read Matthew 25:31-46 > The righteous sheep minister to the King.

- Working hard, and persevering—especially through affliction and poverty
  Read Hebrews 12:1-3 > Run with perseverance the race marked out for you.

- Remaining true to the name of Jesus and not denying his name
  Read Luke 12:4-12 > Acknowledge the Son of Man before others.

- Keeping God’s word
  Read John 14:15-24 > If you love Jesus you will obey what he commands.

- Staying pure
  Read Romans 6:11-23 > Offer the parts of your body to God as instruments of righteousness.

Here are some behaviors for which Jesus *admonished or condemned* the churches:

- Forsaking their first love
  Read Galatians 3:1-3 > You can’t attain your goals by self effort.

- Being lukewarm
  Deuteronomy 6:5 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

- Incomplete deeds, dead works
  Read Philippians 3:4-14 > Having no confidence in the flesh, press on to take hold of Christ.

- Sexual immorality
  Read 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 > Flee from sexual immorality.

- Idolatry
  Colossians 3:5 “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” (Consider that much of what attracts people’s attention today comes via images on their phones and TV screens.)

**Overcoming**

The many promises made “to him who overcomes” in these letters speak to individuals from all generations, including us. What does it mean to “overcome”? (Some versions of the Bible translate overcoming as “conquering” or “being victorious.”)

Overcoming has to do with obedience and faith. The prerequisite is spiritual rebirth:

Read 1 John 5:3-5 > Everyone born of God overcomes the world.
We overcome by resolutely growing in our faith—and in our faithfulness to Jesus—as we walk through this world with our hearts fixed on his kingdom. Jesus, in fact, in his humanity as the Son of Man, sets the example:

John 16:32 “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

**Overcoming means persevering.** This was a message that encouraged those of the seven churches that were experiencing persecution. At the same time, it challenged those who had strayed off course into ungodly, worldly lifestyles. In other NT books as well, followers of Christ are encouraged to remain faithful, persevere, and not lose heart:

Hebrews 3:14,6 “We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.” “…if we hold on to our courage and … hope….”

Colossians 1:22-23 “Now [God] has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.”

If you haven’t figured this out yet (!), life on Earth is all about tests and trials. For believers, the trials we face test our faith and develop perseverance, so that we become more like Christ.

James 1:2-4 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Our heavenly Father equips us to be victorious over the struggles we face in this world. But sometimes our struggle is with God—with our faith in Him and with our level of trust in His word. This happens to all of us.

There is an interesting account in the book of Genesis, when Jacob is returning with his family to the land of his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham—to the inheritance God had promised him. On the night before his return, a man approached him and began wrestling with him. As it turns out, it was not an ordinary man but the angel of God. The two wrestled all night, and as the day dawned Jacob had still not given up.

“Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome” (Genesis 32:28).

So today we struggle—in our relationships with God and with others—as we work to overcome life’s challenges and temptations by exercising our faith in Jesus. We must persevere through trials till we join the many we’ll read about in this book of Revelation, who we see singing and shouting in heaven, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God!”

**Section One**, having begun with the appearance of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John, concludes with promises to those who believe and obey God and persevere—to those who “overcome.”
Manifestation of Christ to Initiate Judgments

Chapters 4–7

Reminder: Read these chapters of Revelation before you start the study of this section.

Chapter 4 – Around the Heavenly Throne

As this chapter begins, John is transported to heaven, to the time of the end of the age. The vision of God’s throne shares some similarities with the vision shown to the prophet Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 1)—for example, the radiance of a rainbow around the throne and the four living creatures. Unique to this scene are the 24 elders seated around the throne. The seven lamps he sees here represent the seven spirits of God (mentioned twice previously):

Zechariah 4:1-6, 10b “These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range throughout the earth.”

2 Chronicles 16:9 “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”

Included here are the first two of five doxologies: the first is spoken by the four cherubim proclaiming the holiness of the Almighty, eternal God; and the second is spoken by the 24 elders proclaiming the worthiness of God the Creator.

Chapter 5 – The Lamb

The prophesied and long-expected divine judgment of mankind is sealed in a scroll, but no one appears to be worthy enough to open it. This is a major concern, because everyone has been waiting and praying for the coming of God’s kingdom, and this cannot happen until the wickedness of mankind on Earth is reckoned with. Then John sees the Lamb of God, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne of God. He is named the Lion of the tribe of Judah (see Genesis 49:8-10) and the Root of David (see Isaiah 11:1-5). He is worthy to receive the scroll from “him who sat on the throne.”

The Lamb is described as having “seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” Together, these might signify the omnipotence (the seven horns), and omniscience and omnipresence (the seven eyes) of God. The seven spirits, then, indicate that God is everywhere present, all-seeing, and all-knowing—appropriate attributes of the One who is about to judge all of mankind:

Hebrews 4:13 “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

The 24 elders have harps and are holding bowls of incense—the prayers of the saints (compare with 8:3-5). (Note that “saints,” as mentioned in the Bible, refers to those who believe in God, the followers of Christ.)

Read Acts 10:1-4 > The prayers of a Roman centurion are received as a memorial offering by God.
Psalm 34:15-16 “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.”

Then the four living creatures and 24 elders worship the Lamb and sing a new song praising him for his worthiness (because of the sacrifice he made for their redemption) to open the seals and initiate mankind’s final salvation and judgment. They sing, “You have made them (those he had purchased with his own blood) to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (5:10).

Exodus 19:1-6 “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Take a few minutes to reread the doxology in verses 9 and 10 carefully. This is the central truth of the gospel, and the explanation for Jesus being shown to John as a slain, sacrificial Lamb. It is by means of the offering up of His Son that our heavenly Father could truly redeem humankind and form us into a righteous and holy people who would serve Him as subjects in His eternal kingdom (see 1 Peter 2:4-5 & 9-10; and refer back to Revelation 1:5-6).

There are two more doxologies in this chapter: a hundred million angels proclaiming the worthiness of Jesus, the Lamb who was slain; and all created beings in the universe singing praise to God the Father and God the Son.

**Chapter 6 – The Seals**

John watches as the Lamb opens the seals. The first four seals describe (1) military conquest, (2) worldwide warfare and conflict, (3) economic disruption and scarcity, and (4) intensifying death by warfare, famine, disease, and wild animals. The fifth seal pictures martyred saints—those who had died previously for their faith in God, foreshadowing those who would be killed during the great tribulation. These five glimpses of end-time events closely match Jesus’ descriptions to his disciples in Matthew 24:4–14, (also in Mark 13:5-13 and Luke 21:10-19). These conditions will develop as the end of the age draws near—in contrast to the specific judgments initiated by the trumpets or poured out from the bowls of God’s wrath nearer to the return of Christ.

Read Matthew 24:4-13 > Jesus describes the distress that will come upon the earth prior to the end.

The revelation of these events serves especially to inform believers today, as we are living now in the end times. As these events unfold, the prophecies in the book of Revelation should comfort us and build our faith in the One who has given us this understanding of the times we live in, that we might be watching and waiting for his return (see Luke 12:35-37). With regard to the hope and trust we have in God for our safety and well-being during these times, see Psalm 91. See also John 15:18-21 and Luke 12:4-12.
The sixth seal describes physical upheaval in the earth and sky that heralds the arrival of “the great day of [God’s] wrath” (6:17). These events were prophesied by Isaiah and foretold by Jesus:

Isaiah 34:1-4 “The Lord is angry with all nations…. All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall … like shriveled figs from the fig tree.”

Isaiah 2:19-21 “Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth.”

Isaiah 13:6-13 “See, the day of the Lord is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it…. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins…. I will make man scarcer than pure gold…. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.”

Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25-26 “…the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

The visions that John sees of the first six seals, therefore, appear to present an overview of what will be taking place at the end of the present age, as the Lord Jesus in heaven opens the scroll containing God’s judgments against godless humanity. If this is true, the first four comprise a set that describes “the beginning of birth pains” as explained by the Lord as he began to answer his disciples’ question regarding “the sign of [his] coming and of the end of the age” (Matthew 24:3-8; Luke 21:9-11). The fifth and six seals predict what lies ahead in the tribulation: martyrdom, as throughout church history, for many believers (Matthew 24:9; Revelation 6:11); and terror and wrath for those who continue to resist and reject their Creator (Matthew 24:29-30; Revelation 6:15-17).

As we read in the book of Revelation about these signs of the approaching tribulation, we must take them to heart and pay attention to the events unfolding in the world today. It would be a mistake to think that believers will be free from persecution before the tribulation begins. In fact, Jesus made it clear to his disciples before his crucifixion that persecution would be the common experience of those who follow him. See John 15:18-25 and 1 Peter 1:3-7.

Then the opening of the seventh seal (in Chapter 8) initiates the first cycle of specific judgments, which are administered by angels.

Chapter 7 – The Sealed Servants and Multitude Saved

Before the final seal is opened John sees four angels prepared to harm “the land, sea, and trees.” But before they do, another angel is sent to mark 144,000 servants of God with “the seal of the living God” on their foreheads. These men from the 12 tribes of Israel are thought to be “Jewish evangelists,” although their specific mission is not mentioned in the text. They are seen again in more detail in chapter 14 (singing with Jesus on Mt Zion!).
After this John is shown a multitude of people in heaven that will be saved during the tribulation. This is a jump ahead in time, showing the result of the testimonies of God’s servants (likely including the two witnesses in Chapter 11). Presumably, most or all of these were martyred (as also will likely be the case with the 144 thousand—see 14:3). This scene in John’s book may well comfort these saints in the future with the knowledge that Jesus himself will lead them like a shepherd through the trials they face, and bring them to the springs of living water before the throne of God (cf 22:1), where they will serve Him continually.

**Section Two**, having begun with a heavenly scene where Jesus Christ receives the scroll of God’s judgments of mankind, concludes with another scene in heaven showing the final group of humanity that he has redeemed from the earth at the end of the age.
The Trumpet Judgments
Chapters 8–11

Chapter 8 – Trumpet Judgments Affect Thirds of the Earth

When the seventh seal is opened, heaven responds with silence—a holy hush in anticipation of what is to come, now that all the seals on the scroll of judgments have been removed.

John then sees seven angels, who stand before the throne of God. They are given seven trumpets. Before they begin to sound their trumpets, however, another angel comes forward with a golden censer and stands at the altar before the throne. He is given much incense to offer on the altar, together with the prayers of all the saints. And the smoke of the incense, together with the saints’ prayers, ascend before God. Then the angel fills the censer with fire from the altar and hurls it on the earth.

As in the heavenly scene we were shown earlier (5:8), the prayers of the saints seem to figure into the counsel of God with regard to the plight of their fellow humans. (Abraham, Moses, David, and Daniel were similarly involved in intercession for their people.) There is also a sense of justice to be meted out in defense of—and to vindicate—the people of God who have suffered persecution through countless generations. The prophet Isaiah captured this centuries earlier:

Read Isaiah 26:7-11 > The righteous wait for God, anticipating the time when His judgments will come upon the earth and His fire consume the wicked.

Then the seven angels begin to sound their trumpets. Trumpets One through Four announce destruction of thirds of the earth. Trees and vegetation are burned up; a blazing mountain is thrown into sea, turning it into blood, killing sea life, and destroying ships; a star named Wormwood comes crashing through the atmosphere, turning rivers and springs bitter; then heavenly bodies are obscured and go dark. These apparently are natural phenomena delivered by the hand of God, although conceivably some might be the result of human warfare originating in space.

Chapter 9 – Trumpets 5 & 6

When the fifth angel sounds his trumpet, the Abyss is opened. Smoke rises from the Abyss, producing “locusts” directed by a “king,” the angel of the Abyss. These are scorpion-like creatures, not natural locusts, empowered to torture human beings for five months. Note that they are not allowed to harm those people who had been sealed as God’s servants (see 7:3).

The Abyss “refers to the prison where some of the demonic hordes are incarcerated, the place of severest torment and isolation” (MacArthur). Recall that a legion of demons begged Jesus not to send them into the Abyss (see Luke 8:30-31).

2 Peter 2:4 “…God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell (Greek: Tartarus), putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment…”
Jude 6 “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these [God] has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”

Afterward, the sixth trumpet is sounded and four angels who have been bound at the Euphrates River are released to kill a third of mankind. (Note the precise timing of this event in verse 15, which attests to the absolute sovereignty of God in heaven over all the affairs of mankind throughout the history of the earth!) These angels employ 200 million horsemen, whose lion-headed horses with snake-like tails breathe out plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur. This might picture modern warfare. Survivors of this sixth judgment do not repent of their ungodly practices: demon worship, murders, drugs and sorcery, sexual immorality, and thefts.

Chapter 10 – The Mystery of God

The Apostle John has been shown visions of multiple judgments coming down upon the earth. He has witnessed unprecedented destruction. Millions of people have died. Now in Chapter 10 the narrative shifts its focus to what is happening among the surviving population.

John sees a mighty angel coming down from heaven who proclaims, “There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets” (10:6-7).

What is this mystery of God? The following “mysteries” are among those likely referred to here: Gentiles will be saved; Israel will be saved; the believing dead will be raised to life; and Messiah will rule over all creation.

Ephesians 3:6 “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

Romans 11:25-26 “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery… Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.’”

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

Ephesians 1:9 “And [God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

Taken as a whole, these verses of Scripture picture a great body of people—Jews and Gentiles alike—brought together under the leadership of Jesus Christ for all eternity. And John is told now by the angel that this will soon be accomplished.
The Lord Jesus had prayed for this in the upper room the night before the crucifixion: “Father, the time has come. Glorify you Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people, that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him” (John 17:1-2). It is to God’s increasing glory that the human beings He created would believe His Word and come to Him, to join the redeemed in heaven and live eternally in His presence. The Apostle Paul described this as “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18).

Concerning those living in the last days, the Apostle Peter had written: “The present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly people. But ... the Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:7,9). This continues to be the heart of God to the end of the age, when believers past and present will be gathered together in Him.

As we continue reading Revelation, believers (who are named saints in the text) are characterized as those who “obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (see, for example, 12:17, 13:7, and 17:6). These are the multitude that John saw in Chapter 7 “who have come out of the great tribulation,” who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). These are among the last of Earth’s population destined for eternal life.

Accordingly, at the close of Chapter 10, before the narrative of Revelation begins to focus more specifically on events taking place in the world, John is given a scroll and told that he “must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings” (10:11). The scroll is sweet to the taste, because it speaks of the redemption of souls even in the catastrophic final years of this age; but it is also bitter, because those who are saved will be persecuted to their death, and those who are not will be lost for all eternity.

Chapter 11 – The Two Witnesses

John’s attention is now turned to the city of Jerusalem and to the temple of God. This is the first mention of the periods of time often associated with the tribulation—different ways of expressing half of seven years: 42 months, and 1260 days.

Daniel 9:24-27 “…the ruler to come … will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

These words, attributed to the angel Gabriel in Daniel’s prophecy, speak of the antichrist, who is mentioned in this chapter, although not introduced until Chapter 13.

The two witnesses who appear in Jerusalem at this time are thought by many to be Moses and Elijah—who previously appeared to the Lord Jesus and three of his disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration:

Luke 9:28-36 “Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”
The men are identified in Revelation as “the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth” (11:4). An Old Testament prophet had seen a vision of these men over 500 years earlier, which he recorded in the book that bears his name: Zechariah 4:2-3, 11-14 “[The angel] asked me, ‘What do you see?’ I answered, ‘I see a solid gold lampstand…. Also there are two olive trees by it….’ Then I asked the angel, ‘What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?’ … He said, ‘These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.’”

The powers attributed to the two witnesses here also fit the two Old Testament prophets (see 2 Kings 1:9-12 and 1 Kings 17:1 regarding Elijah, and Exodus chapters 7–9 regarding Moses). Since the time that these two men are prophesying in Jerusalem appears to coincide with the time of the trumpet judgments, we can only wonder what people are thinking concerning all the cataclysmic events taking place.

We also are not told the effect the prophesying of the two witnesses is having on the people. When the two finish their testimony, they are attacked and killed by the antichrist, only to rise and ascend to heaven three and a half days later. Their departure is followed by a severe earthquake. Whereas the trumpet judgments leave the population unrepentant (9:20-21), the survivors of this earthquake give glory to God! (11:13).

The Seventh Trumpet and Coming Kingdom

Now the seventh trumpet is sounded. Loud voices in heaven announce the coming of Christ’s kingdom, and the twenty-four elders give thanks to God: “…You have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth.” (11:17-18)

What is the picture here? There has been a huge war, killing one third of the earth’s population, but people are for the most part not repentant. The temple has been rebuilt, and the two witnesses have been prophesying. Antichrist has been active, but comes into power after 1260 days (11:3) and removes the witnesses. It is believed that the antichrist sets up “the abomination that causes desolation” in the temple at this time. Then the Gentiles take over the city for 42 months (11:2), after which Christ returns. With the sounding of the seventh trumpet we are suddenly propelled to the end of the age, when the kingdom of God is established on Earth!

These are prophetic voices from heaven, proclaiming what is about to take place (11:15). This is not uncommon wording, especially in the prophecies of the Old Testament, where the eternal perspective of heaven sometimes declares done what has yet to occur on the timeline of history. Such a declaration is made again, in fact, in the following chapter (12:10-11). What is spoken in these instances can lead to confusion for someone trying to understand the order of end-time events. Something to note, in these cases, is what triggers the announcement—what has just taken place in the reporting of events that should increase for the reader the surety of the announced outcome.
The seventh trumpet speaks of finality or completion. It is, in itself, not a judgment but the initiation of the final set of judgments: the seven bowls of God’s wrath. This is brought out in the last verse of the pronouncement: “The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come … for destroying those who destroy the earth” (11:18). What triggers the announcement of Christ’s kingdom here is the completion of the ministry of the two witnesses. Time-wise, we are in the middle of the seven-year tribulation: 1260 days in, 42 months or so left to go.

To repeat, the successful attack on the two witnesses in Jerusalem marks the midpoint of the seven-year period of tribulation. According to prophecy (Daniel 9:27) the antichrist will come onto the world stage at the beginning of the tribulation. The two witnesses will prophesy during the first half, and the antichrist will desecrate the temple and then wield absolute authority on Earth during the second half. Presumably, the trumpet judgments occur during the first half of the tribulation. The bowl judgments of God’s wrath are poured out at the end of the second half.

So, as we saw with the previous section of our study (ending with Chapter 7), this section also finishes with a look further into the future. The events described here as the final trumpet is sounded serve as a prelude to what John will be shown in the second half of this prophetic book as the earthly reign of Christ draws near. The apostle sees the twenty-four elders in heaven falling on their faces and worshiping God, thanking Him for His sovereign power as He is about to pour out His wrath upon the rebellious nations and their leaders who are destroying the earth; to reward His saints and servants who fear His name; and to judge the unbelieving dead at the end of the age.

[Regarding the organization of the book as a whole, the five central sections of the Revelation (Sections Two through Six) do not always link together chronologically, but after covering different aspects of the tribulation period, each of these sections ends with a description of what will take place at the end of the tribulation. Section Two, for example, concludes in Chapter 7 with the heavenly revelation of the multitude of people who will sacrifice their lives during the tribulation and be redeemed by Christ. Now, at the conclusion of Section Three, we hear the heavenly announcement of rewards for the righteous and of punishment for the wicked. The seventh trumpet heralds the victory of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of the world.]

One last thing to notice—a final vision John recorded as Chapter 11 comes to a close: “And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm” (11:19b). There is a similar description back in 8:5, and another ahead in 16:18. In the first instance (8:5), this description follows the opening of the seventh seal. In the second instance (11:19), this description follows the sounding of the seventh trumpet. In the final instance (16:18), the description follows the pouring out of the seventh bowl of wrath.

Section Three, having begun with the announcement of the seven trumpet judgments, concludes with the testimony of the two witnesses and this heavenly proclamation: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.”
**Dragon, Beasts, and Harvest**

Chapters 12–14

This central section of our study has some interesting features. It begins with the appearance of “a wondrous sign” (as does the following section in Chapter 15). These are additional clues for dividing the content of this prophetic book to help us better understand its message. As this section shows, the content is not strictly chronological.

The first chapter of this section begins by taking John back in history to Christ’s first advent. The second, Chapter 13, introduces both beasts—the antichrist and the false prophet—the first of which was seen already active in Chapter 11. And the third, Chapter 14, ends by giving John another view of the end-time harvest of souls, focusing on the coming judgment of the unrighteous.

Reminder: Passages from other books of the Bible are also included for reference or to read. Be sure to read the passages marked “Read”!

**Chapter 12 – The Dragon**

John is shown a “great and wondrous sign” that appears in heaven. A pregnant woman who is about to give birth is clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. This is a picture of Israel/Mary giving birth to a son, the foretold ruler of nations (see Genesis 49:10 for one of the earliest references).

Then a second sign appears: an enormous dragon with “seven heads and ten horns.” Throughout the end-time scenario, this description is used of the beast, the antichrist; here we learn its satanic origin. A third of the stars represent the fallen angels of Lucifer’s original rebellion.

The mention of 1260 days in verse six abruptly brings us forward to the time of the tribulation. A heavenly war is fought during this time, resulting in Satan losing access to heaven. (Note that in the book of Job he is shown having free access.) He realizes at this point that “his time is short.” Satan is characterized here as he “who leads the whole world astray” (12:9).

In verse ten John hears another heavenly proclamation (as in 11:15ff) announcing the coming kingdom, as the time of its fulfillment draws even closer now that the devil has been thrown down to the earth.

John learns that the devil’s first intention after finding himself hurled to the earth is to pursue the “woman,” referring to Israel, the Jewish people. But John is told that they will be protected from the devil for three-and-one-half years—that is, throughout the reign of the antichrist during the second half of the tribulation. Some possible references to this period of Israel in the desert may be found in the prophets; see Jeremiah 31:2, Hosea 2:14, Ezekiel 20:35, and Daniel 11:40-41.

Thwarted, Satan goes off to make war against “the rest of her offspring”—believers “who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”
1 John 5:11-12 “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Chapter 13 – Antichrist

Satan gives rise to the antichrist, who is described here with the same complement of heads and horns. John said, “I saw a beast coming out of the sea….” This beast is a sea monster. It is reminiscent of the enigmatic biblical creature, Leviathan. (Read Job 41 sometime, which describes this dragon-like creature. Also see Isaiah 26:20 – 27:1.)

Three animals that characterize the beast had been shown in a vision to the prophet Daniel (see Daniel 7:1-6, where they represent the ancient kingdoms of Babylonia, Medo-Persia, and Greece under Alexander the Great). They are used here to show the power and authority that the dragon—the devil, “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30)—confers on the antichrist.

One of the beast’s “heads” appears to have a fatal wound, but the wound was healed (13:3). (John confirms in verse 12, in fact, that it was a fatal wound that had been healed—in context, likely by the false prophet.) Consequently, the unbelieving world is astonished at the beast and follows him and worships him—and the dragon as well. “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written from the creation of the world in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain” (13:8).

Satan empowers the beast to make war against the saints (13:7-10). These followers of Christ presumably are among the multitude of believers who come to faith during the tribulation. The prophet Daniel foresaw this: “The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place” (Daniel 11:36). It is likely that this satanic transformation of the antichrist occurs around the time when he desecrates the temple with the “abomination of desolation.” With the killing of God’s two witnesses, he comes into complete power over the inhabitants of the earth for a period of 42 months.

Read Daniel 7:7 and 7:19-27 > This “terrifying and frightening” beast “will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints.”

The prophecies given to Daniel (centuries earlier) and to John here in this chapter confirm that believers living at this time will be severely persecuted and subjected to captivity and death. There is a critical point here that we ought not miss concerning the sovereignty of Almighty God. It is He who places every individual on Earth, determining the exact time and place (Acts 17:26-27). He knows each one who believes in Him—their names are written in the Lamb’s book of life! And He determines who, among these tribulation saints, will go into captivity and who will be killed. Our heavenly Father allows all these things to happen for the good of those who love Him and have been called by Him according to His divine purpose. And nothing will separate them from His love (Romans 8:28; 38-39). So the followers of Christ are encouraged to endure patiently and remain faithful (Revelation 13:7-10).
All people living at this time will be warned not to worship the beast (see 14:9-11). But those whose names are not written in God’s book of life will worship the beast. And they will be condemned, because they refused to believe the truth. They reject Christ but willingly worship the antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 > The Apostle Paul writes about the antichrist, naming him the “man of lawlessness” who “sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”

(More detail about the influence of the antichrist on the world is given in Chapter 17, where John sees the harlot Babylon sitting atop the beast. Concerning the intrigue surrounding the rise to power of the antichrist at “the time of the end,” the prophet Daniel was given three visions, recorded in the book of Daniel in Chapters 7 and 8, and at the end of the book, specifically 11:21–12:4.)

**False Prophet**

John is then shown a second beast, one with two horns like a lamb but who speaks like a dragon. This second beast—better known as the “false prophet”—deceives the earth’s inhabitants, performing great and miraculous signs. “He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed” (13:12). “He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed” (13:14b-15). Additionally, the false prophet forces everyone to receive the mark of the beast on their right hand or forehead, “so that no one could buy or sell unless they had the mark” (13:16-17).

There are several important things to notice about this second beast. He appears as a prophet or spiritual leader performing miraculous signs. His mission is to deceive the world into worshiping the antichrist, who will be received as the world’s savior. Note that in John’s visions, the only godly persons performing signs during the tribulation period are God’s two witnesses (11:5-6). Other references to false signs and miracles include 16:13-14 and 19:20 (see also Matthew 24:24).

Concerning the lethal image created by the false prophet, recall its historical precursor: an enormous gold statue set up by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3. Then consider that image today no longer refers to statues but to pictures on digital displays, such as the ones people carry in their pockets—and with which they daily interact. Stretch your thinking a bit further and consider also the possibility of the worship of the beast being conducted—and tracked—virtually in a digital metaverse.

The false prophet also forces everyone to receive a mark on the right hand or on the forehead. This mark is literally an identification of ownership—a brand—signifying allegiance to the antichrist, the false messiah—and to the devil himself (refer to the damming consequences in 14:9-11 for anyone who worships the beast and takes his mark).
Chapter 14 – Angelic Announcements

The descriptions of the beasts in the previous chapter are contrasted here with further details of the 144,000 sealed servants of God. The wording may imply that these men, chosen from the tribes of Israel, have all been martyred. These virtuous men, “who had been redeemed from the earth” and “offered as firstfruits to God,” sacrificed their lives to “follow the Lamb wherever he goes.”

By way of contrast with what John had just learned about the mark of the beast, there is much to consider here. The seal of God on the foreheads of the followers of Christ stands out against the mark with which the followers of the antichrist have been branded. The 144,000 worship the divine Lamb of God; the others worship a man who claims to be a god. Mount Zion, upon which these believers stand, is the heavenly Jerusalem, their heavenly home (Hebrews 12:22); but “there is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast or his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name,” “and the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever” (Revelation 14:11).

Additionally, the fact that the 144,000 were “offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb” indicates that they successfully motivated others during the tribulation to follow Jesus—and to commit their lives to him rather than to the antichrist, many at the cost of their own lives.

After this, John then sees three flying angels making three announcements:

The first angel proclaims the eternal gospel to all Earth’s inhabitants. He warns of imminent judgment and admonishes people to fear and worship God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

The second angel announces the fall of Babylon, described here as having had a corrupting influence on all the nations.

The third angel warns of the dire consequences for worshiping the beast and receiving his mark. John writes, “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (14:12). Then a voice from heaven pronounces a blessing upon those who will die for their faith and their obedience to God; and they are commended for their deeds.

These three heavenly announcements serve as a final wake-up call to Earth’s inhabitants—the last opportunity for people living in the time of the tribulation to respond to God’s offer of salvation through Jesus Christ before the wrath of God is poured out on the world ruled by the antichrist. The angel’s proclamation concerning Babylon further serves to warn people not to get mixed up with counterfeit spirituality, which God will bring to an end (see 16:19 and 18:4).

These final announcements to a world under the spell of antichrist ultimately divide humanity into two identifiable groups, whose destinies are shown next to the Apostle John.
The Harvests

John now receives a vision of “one like a son of man” seated on a white cloud harvesting the earth’s ripe harvest. The “son of man,” when referring to a single individual in Scripture, almost always indicates the Lord Jesus (as in Daniel 7:13; see also Revelation 1:13, where John uses this same phrase to describe the Lord’s initial appearance to him).

Jesus had spoken in many places about the end-time harvest. See John 4:34-35, for instance, where he told his disciples to “… look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest.” “Ask the Lord of the harvest,” Jesus told them in Matthew 9:37-38, “to send out workers into his harvest field.” And in one of the kingdom parables he said, “As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:29).

This vision, then, succinctly pictures the gathering in of believers at the end of the age. Note that this harvest would include those just mentioned who had recently died in the Lord, confirming that no believers will experience the wrath of God that is yet to be poured out on the earth (compare with 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9).

Then John sees an angel coming out of the temple in heaven with another sickle. This angel is told to “take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.” The angel swings his sickle, then gathers and throws the grapes into “the great winepress of God’s wrath” (cf 19:15).

Old Testament prophets spoke of this event depicting the punishment of the wicked. Joel wrote (in Joel 3:13): “Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!”

And Isaiah spoke prophetically of God’s anointed: “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come” (see Isaiah 63:1-6).

This vision is shown fulfilled with the return of Christ to Earth in Chapter 19.

Section Four, having begun with a sign showing the devil poised to destroy Messiah at his first coming, relates the persecution of the followers of Christ and the deception of Earth’s inhabitants at the hands of the devil’s agents, concluding with the reaping of the earth’s end-time harvests of humans.
Chapter 15 – Prelude to Wrath

John now witnesses “another great and marvelous sign” in heaven. He sees seven angels with the seven last plagues, which will complete God’s wrath. And he sees the tribulation saints—“those who had been victorious over the beast, and his image, and over the number of his name” (15:2; see also 13:10 and 14:13). (As suggested at the close of the previous section, it appears here that the tribulation saints have been martyred and taken to heaven, where they are standing before the sea of glass that John saw earlier, only now mixed with fire.) They are singing “the song of Moses” and glorifying God for his righteous acts, saying, “All nations will come and worship before you!”

Read Deuteronomy 32:1-43 > the song of Moses

As you read the song of Moses in Deuteronomy, you understand why it is specifically mentioned here, as God is about to bring judgment on the nations and turn his attention once more to the people of Israel (gathering a remnant to permanently restore to the land, as prophesied throughout the Old Testament).

This song also looks forward to the millennial reign of Christ, when survivors from the nations will come up to Jerusalem to worship him (see, for instance, Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 66:18-24). The original Song of Moses ends with this verse: “Rejoice, O nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people” (Deuteronomy 32:43).

The prophets and psalmists foretold that the coming of Messiah would bring God’s judgment and justice to the earth at the same time as His salvation and righteousness. These are the two distinct aspects of “the day of the Lord” and the end of this age.

Read Psalm 94:1-7 > This could serve as the theme of the tribulation saints’ song (or the plea of the saints whose prayers we saw earlier rising up to God’s throne).

Read 1 Samuel 2:6-10 > Hannah’s remarkable prophetic prayer

Read Psalm 96 > A “new song” sung before the Lord, “for he comes to judge the earth”

Read Psalm 98 > A companion “new song” to the Lord, who “has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.”

Hebrews 9:27-28 “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

After the tribulation saints finish singing, John looks, “and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened.” The law of God—His eternal word—comes into view. Mankind was given grace through the Son; for those who did not receive it, the law is still in effect, and its judgments will be carried out.

1 Peter 1:23-25 “the living and enduring word of God”
Matthew 5:17-20 “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

Matthew 24:32-35 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

Galatians 6:7-8 “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

Now seven angels prepare to pour out seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God. Notice also in this scene how the plague-bearing angels are attired, reflecting the holiness of God (15:6; see also 15:4 and 16:5) even as they are about to pour out catastrophic judgments on the inhabitants of the earth.

**Chapter 16 – God’s Wrath Poured Out**

In Chapter 16, John witnesses the bowls of God’s wrath being poured out on the earth. This occurs during the latter half of the time of tribulation as the antichrist and false prophet continue to rule the earth. (Altogether, the activities of the beasts are covered in Chapters 11, 13, 16, and 17—together with their defeat at the end of Chapter 19.)

**First Bowl of Wrath** Ugly and painful sores break out on the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

**Second Bowl** The sea turns into blood like a dead man, and all sea life dies.

**Third Bowl** Rivers and springs become blood.

**Fourth Bowl** The sun scorches people with fire; they curse God and refuse to repent and glorify Him.

**Fifth Bowl** The kingdom of the beast is plunged into darkness; men gnaw their tongues in agony and curse God because of their painful sores, but again refuse to repent of what they had done.

**Sixth Bowl** The Euphrates River dries up and three evil spirits go out of the mouths of the dragon, beast, and false prophet to gather the world’s leaders for battle on the great day of the Lord Almighty at Armageddon.

**Seventh Bowl** A great earthquake occurs; the cities of the nations collapse, and islands and mountains disappear. “God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath” (16:19). Huge hailstones fall upon people, and they curse God.

Note the warning to the reader in 16:15 to stay awake and be prepared. Why is this quotation interjected here in the middle of John’s vision of armies gathering for battle at Armageddon? Possibly because talk of Armageddon makes people anxious and uncertain about the future. Readers are likely to pause here and wonder what will happen to them personally—especially as they see situations in the world grow increasingly tense and threatening.
This is the Lord Jesus talking in verse 15, communicating to the reader a message similar to the warning he had given to the church at Sardis: “…if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you” (3:3). Jesus had used the same analogy when cautioning his disciples to be watchful for his return:

Read Matthew 24:36-44 > The Son of Man will come at an hour when people do not expect him.

Read Matthew 25:1-13 > the parable of the ten virgins

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 > For the followers of Christ who remain alert and self-controlled as they walk in God’s light, the day of his return should not catch them by surprise.

As we come to the end of Chapter 16, note that the destruction of Babylon the Great occurs during the outpouring of the final seventh bowl of God’s wrath. The narrative then digresses in the following two chapters to describe her and her relationship to the antichrist and her downfall. Chapter 19 then picks up with the celebration in heaven of her condemnation and judgment.

Section Five, having begun with a sign of seven angels with the seven last plagues, concludes with a tremendous earthquake and hundred-pound hailstones falling from the sky, with the specter of Armageddon on the horizon.
Fall of Babylon and Return of Christ

Chapters 17–19

Chapter 17 – The Harlot

The identity of “Mystery Babylon” remains, to date, a mystery. And this begs the question: Why is someone so insidious, who has influenced human civilization since ancient times, being revealed just now—at the very end of history, and in the closing chapters of the Bible? And why is God’s judgment of her, delayed till the very last, so celebrated by multitudes in heaven? It is truly a mystery that merits our full attention. Let’s see what we can unravel here.

She “sits on many waters”: Babylon’s influence is diverse geographically and demographically, over many peoples and nations (see also 17:15).

She is “adulterous” with world rulers, and has deceived and captivated (“intoxicated”) Earth’s inhabitants and led them astray (see also 18:23). She is called a “great prostitute” and “the mother of prostitutes,” symbolizing idolatry and false religion or religious apostasy. “Mystery” in the title written on her forehead may refer to the occult nature of the ancient Babylonian religion (see, for example, Zechariah 5:5-11 for a glimpse of this woman riding in a basket en route to Babylon). The world’s rulers, for their part, use her to their own advantage while indulging in her luxuries and immoralities (see 18:9).

She is dressed like a queen, yet holds in her hand a cup filled with shameful and detestable things. In fact, she is “drunk” with the blood of the “saints” (17:6). Together with the antichrist and the ten kings, it’s clear that she persecutes the followers of Jesus.

Mystery Babylon is shown to John riding on a scarlet beast, whose “seven heads and ten horns” pictures the antichrist (see 13:1); it also evidences a relationship to Satan, the “seven-headed dragon” (12:3) and “ruler of this world” (John 14:30). The beast she rides is the incarnation of evil, who commands the world’s worship and takes control of the world’s governance, in partnership with ten kings who will receive authority together with him (17:12).

The beast, John is told, “once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss…” (17:8). We find some curiosities here, not much talked about. The beast is apparently recognizable as a historical figure, someone who once lived on Earth and has come back into the world out of the Abyss. (To learn more about the Abyss, see Luke 8:31, Romans 10:7, and Revelation 20:1-3; see also 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6.) Note that Babylon was one of the first centers of the kingdom of Nimrod, the “mighty warrior on earth” at the time of the dispersal of nations after the flood, and the only person to be singled out with a somewhat detailed description in the table of nations listed in Genesis 10. The Babylonian Empire later dominated the world with its military power and idolatry.

So the world is “astonished” by the beast, not only because he had recovered from a fatal wound, but perhaps because he is recognized as a historic figure who has “come up out of the Abyss.” And Babylon, once a central city in the kingdom of Nimrod, now reappears in the end times, represented as an adulteress woman allied with the antichrist.
The angel who is describing this “mother of prostitutes and abominations” to John then explains the “seven heads” of the beast. They are the seven hills on which the woman sits (17:9). Here is an example of past meeting future, for the seven mountains or hills on which she sits is likely a reference to the city of Rome in Italy. The angel, in fact, says that this woman is the city—“the great city that rules over the kings of the earth” (17:18). Recall that John at this time is in Roman custody, so this would likely indicate Rome to him. (See also 1 Peter 5:13. It is generally believed that Peter, like Paul, ended up in Rome, and therefore the reference to “Babylon” at the close of his apostolic letter would likely serve as an alias for Rome so as not to risk bringing further persecution upon Roman Christians.)

It is unlikely that Babylon, as described in Revelation, refers to a modern city rebuilt on the site of the ancient capital of the Babylonian empire. See Jeremiah 50:13, 39-40: “Because of the Lord’s anger, [Babylon] will not be inhabited but will be completely desolate…. It will never again be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation.”

In fact, we ought not make the mistake of assuming that Mystery Babylon will be the outgrowth of any currently existing human institution. It is something as yet unknown, an amalgamation of world religions, perhaps, wedded in some way to governmental organizations and commercial enterprises. Babylon, as a future “great city that rules over the kings of the earth,” is distinct from “the throne of the beast and his kingdom” (see 16:10), and ultimately will be destroyed by the beast (17:16).

The angel continues, informing John that the seven heads of the beast on which the woman sits also represent seven kings. These seven kings are believed to refer to seven prominent historical kingdoms or empires, generally interpreted as Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Medo-Persia, and Greece (signified here as being fallen, or past); Rome (in existence at the time of the Revelation); and a seventh afterward. There is an eighth king, the antichrist, whom, the angel kindly reminds us, is going to his destruction! Note in Scripture that God has used all these past empires to accomplish His plans for His people. The world government under the control of the antichrist, who “belongs to the seven” (17:11), is the embodiment of all world empires.

The beast John has been shown also has ten horns, with ten crowns on his horns. These represent ten kings who “for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast” (17:12-13). These world leaders will persecute the followers of Christ (see also 13:7, and Daniel 7:24-25). The ten, together with the antichrist, will ultimately turn against and destroy the prostitute—accomplishing God’s purpose and fulfilling His word (17:16-17).
Chapter 18 – The Fall of Babylon

Another angel now appears to John announcing the fall of “Babylon the Great.” To whatever extent ancient Babylon had affected God’s people in the past, as revealed in Scripture and experienced throughout history, she has in the last days grown into something horribly wicked. The violence of her crimes will be matched by God’s swift and decisive punishment.

Babylon’s spiritual roots trace back to the city of Babel, where mankind congregated after the flood in southern Mesopotamia. To better understand God’s condemnation of this “Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth,” we will first want to review the history of that ancient city.

Read Genesis 11:1-9 > the account of the city of Babel; note the following verses:

Genesis 11:4 “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth” [as God had commanded them to do].

Genesis 11:6 “The Lord said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.’”

Human technology, guided by godless humanism, presumption and pride, would ultimately develop into the “world system.”

Genesis 11:9 “…there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.” The name Babel is derived from the Hebrew: “to confound, confusion.”

Augustine addressed the significance of Babylon in his book The City of God in the fifth century. In his view, Babylon represents the earthly city of man (that is, the world), which is engaged in an age-long spiritual conflict with the heavenly city of God (God’s kingdom).

This conflict can be traced all the way back to the fourth chapter of Genesis, when Cain “began building a city” (Genesis 4:17). After the flood, when civilization was all but wiped out because of its evil, mankind nevertheless rebelled against God once again at Babel and refused to carry out His mandate to populate the earth. Driven from the plain of Shinar, developing nations began practicing diverse forms of idolatry. God’s own people, formed into a nation by the promise of God, struggled to believe and obey Him as He led them out of Egypt to establish a land of their own. They rejected God as their King (1 Samuel 8:19-20) and got Saul. Then God appointed David, a man after His own heart, to be their king; but when the Son of David came to them to redeem mankind, the religious authorities in the city of Jerusalem rejected him and had him executed.

We humans are not alone in our rejection of our Creator. There are ruling authorities in the heavenly realms as well. And while generations of humans come and go on planet Earth, these beings endure through the ages—until the time comes when God will judge them. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, our struggle is not with our fellow human beings, but ultimately with “the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). They are the actors working behind the scenes.
Jesus returned to his Father’s side, and by the end of the first century A.D., his followers were being persecuted throughout the Roman Empire. If arrested, they were generally given the opportunity to renounce Christ and pledge their allegiance to the emperor by worshiping him as well as the other gods of Rome. By 400, however, the Christian church had become the state church of the Roman Empire. Following the course of history into the Middle Ages, by the year 1000 the western church had become an ecclesiastical system that vied with European kings and emperors for political influence and control. By 1200, the Christian pope exercised authority over secular kings.

In just this brief historical glimpse, we see reflections of the conflict still to come surrounding Babylon the Great, the antichrist, and the followers of Christ in the modern world. The war against God has been going on for a long, long time. What the future holds is more of the same—only with much greater reach, intensity, and finality.

Babylon’s influence on the world is threefold: religious, political, and commercial. These three aspects, in fact, are suggested in verse three of Chapter 18: “For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries (religious). The kings of the earth committed adultery with her (political), and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries (commercial).”

**Religious:** All the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries.

False religion originated in Babel with the construction of a “tower that reaches to the heavens” (the precursor to a Babylonian ziggurat), and was systematized in Babylon, including occult and idolatrous practices (the name Babylon means “gate of god”). It is man-made religion, influenced demonically (18:2), proud and human-centered. Add idol worship, and it becomes a strange mix of humanism, spirituality, and sexual immorality (see Romans 1:18-25). It was imitated by Canaanite, Greek, and Roman cultures. As a religious system, Mystery Babylon influenced the Hebrew priesthood which opposed Jesus (see Ezekiel chapter 8; see also Christ’s condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:29-36). Church denominations today that treat the Scriptures with skepticism and are without the Spirit of God are also a product of this ungodly false religion (see verse four, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins…”).

**Political:** The kings of the earth committed adultery with her.

The political influence of Babylon originated also in Babel with the people's desire to “build a city ... so that we can make a name for ourselves” in defiance of God’s plan and commandment. The formation of 70 territorial nations (Genesis 10) after the dispersion from Babel led to diverse false religions as well as competing militaries and governments. From these, empires were formed, including Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece (Alexander the Great), and Rome—as seen in an image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (see Daniel 2; the image also featured feet and toes, which some believe represent a “revived Roman empire” with the ten kings mentioned in Revelation and also in Daniel 7:15-25). The various political alliances between religious and political leaders during the Middle Ages may well prefigure the relationship between the Babylonish prostitute and the antichrist (which ultimately ends in her ruin; see 17:15-18).
**Commercial:** The merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.

Throughout modern history, a godless world system has produced an abundance of commodities, goods, and services to meet human needs and fuel human desires. We see here in the last days that corporate leaders will join with the world’s political rulers in a global commercial system of vast scale. Note that the “merchants” are characterized as “the world’s great men” (18:23).

Mystery Babylon has been described in these pages of Scripture as living extravagantly and adulterously in the world. This might remind us of Jesus’ warning to the last church in Revelation 3, the church of Laodicea, whom the Lord characterized as being proud and self-satisfied with its wealthy lifestyle but spiritually tepid and ineffective. The Scriptures consistently censure such a lifestyle. For instance, in his letter, James issues a prophetic warning to those who are attracted by lifestyles of “luxury and self-indulgence” (James 5:1-6). The Apostle John, likewise, warns believers not to “love the world or anything in the world” (1 John 2:15-17). And in the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus himself describes how “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth” prevent people from bearing fruit for the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:22). The world, busily engaging people in continuous commerce as they scramble to meet their needs and fulfill their dreams, distracts them from an awareness of God’s abundant love, provision, and fatherly care—indeed, of his very existence (see Matthew 6:19-34). Accordingly, this chapter of Revelation focuses particularly on the commercial aspect of Babylon and its utter ruin.

At the close of the chapter, as the history of Babylon the Great comes to an end, John hears the voice of an angel proclaiming:

“Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.” “Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: ‘With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.’” “Your merchants were the world’s great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth” (18:20-21,23b-24).

Read Isaiah 26:20–27:1 > The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her (by this “mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth”) and the Lord “will slay the monster of the sea” (the beast).

In summary, these two prominent personalities in Revelation—the beast and the prostitute—are the end-time products of human and satanic conflicts with God going back to the formation of nations after the dispersion from Babel, and truly back to the pre-flood era and the Garden of Eden. Descriptions of Mystery Babylon here in the book of Revelation make reference to her “magic spell” by which “all the nations were led astray,” and to “the blood of prophets and of the saints” found in her (18:23,24). These characterizations appropriately describe the sorts of crimes she commits in the last days—but likely also describe the affects of occult and idolatrous religion through the centuries, beginning at Babel.
Chapter 19 – Celebration

After this, John hears the sounds of celebration in heaven not unlike what he heard at the sounding of the seventh trumpet in Chapter 11. This time a multitude in heaven is applauding God’s condemnation of “the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.” Then he hears shouting, proclaiming the coming of the wedding of the Lamb to his bride, who “has made herself ready.” “Fine linen, bright and clean (standing for the righteous acts of the saints) was given her to wear.” And an angel pronounces a blessing on those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

The Return of Christ

Now John sees heaven standing open and beholds the Lord himself, mounted on a white horse. Jesus is characterized by three titles:

- **Faithful and True** (see 3:14, where he is named “the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation”)
- **The Word of God** (see John 1:1, where he is described being with God at the beginning of creation)
- **King of Kings and Lord of Lords** (see 17:14, which foretells of his return)

Jesus is wearing many crowns. His eyes are like blazing fire, and a sharp sword proceeds out of his mouth, “with which to strike down the nations” (see Isaiah 11:1-5). John writes that “he treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty,” which refers back to the second “sickle” harvest in 14:19-20.

Jesus is accompanied by “the armies of heaven” (identified as the saints with the same wording as in verse eight). (Angels are mentioned as well in Matthew 25:31 and 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8.)

Then John sees “the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army” (see 16:12-16, Armageddon). The beast and false prophet are captured and “thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.” And the earthly armies are slaughtered, “killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse.”

In this passage, John also testifies that Jesus “will rule [the nations] with an iron scepter,” a statement also found in the second psalm, which you may want to read again at this time. The second psalm, in twelve verses, provides a prophetic summary of God’s response to the rebellion of the nations, including the coming of His Son in wrath and his installation as King in Jerusalem.

As we wrap up this section of Revelation, you may want to consider reading the closing chapters of several of the OT prophetic books, beginning with Isaiah. Recall that when the Lord Jesus inaugurated his earthly ministry at his first coming, he read from Isaiah 61, stopping abruptly in the middle of verse two. The balance of this verse points to his second coming with the words “the day of the vengeance of our God….” From this point to the end of the book, the prophecies of Isaiah are rich with descriptions of Messiah’s return to redeem Israel and rule the nations.
Likewise Ezekiel, after describing the return of Jewish people to the land in chapters 36 and 37, gives an account in chapters 38 and 39 of an end-time battle in which the nations attempt to invade Israel. (From chapter 40 to the end of the book, the prophet then gives a detailed account of the millennial temple.)

Daniel as well describes end-time conflict in the closing chapters of his prophetic book, beginning at chapter 10. And Zechariah, beginning in chapter 12, clearly describes the earthly turmoil and awe surrounding the return of the Lord.

Section Six, having begun with a description of the great harlot Babylon “drunk with the blood of the saints” and her collaboration with the leaders of the world, concludes with a celebration of her destruction and the announcement of the wedding supper of the Lamb and his bride, followed by Christ’s return to “strike down the nations” and inaugurate his kingdom on earth.
The Millennium and New Jerusalem

Chapters 20–22

Chapter 20 – The Thousand-Year Reign of Christ

The proclamation made in Chapter 11 with the sounding of the seventh trumpet is now fulfilled: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.”

Read Daniel 7:13-14 > The Son of Man is given authority, glory and sovereign power over all peoples and nations.

Before this happens, however, the one who persecuted the saints and led the whole world astray is locked away. The devil is imprisoned, bound in the Abyss to keep him from deceiving the nations for a thousand years.

There is little description in this chapter of this thousand-year period—the millennial reign of Christ. The focus here is on those who have been resurrected to reign with Christ. Just as John had previously seen elders seated around God’s throne in heaven, he now sees “thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge” (20:4).

Matthew 19:28 “Jesus said to [his disciples], ‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’”

The tribulation saints—those who had been martyred “because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God”—come to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years. At this point in earth’s history, all righteous people—Old Testament saints and New Testament believers, along with those saved during the tribulation period—will be living. These are all part of “the first resurrection,” as opposed to the unrighteous dead who will be raised for judgment after the millennium.

Revelation 11:15-18 “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever…. We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign…. The time has come for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great.”

Revelation 2:26 “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations … just as I have received authority from my Father.”

2 Timothy 2:12 “…if we endure, we will also reign with him.”

1 Corinthians 6:2 “… the saints will judge the world.”
As the millennial reign of Christ on earth begins, **the people, the land, and the fortunes of Israel will be restored**, as prophesied repeatedly throughout the Old Testament. In fact, it is in the books of the prophets where we learn about this future period of Earth’s history.

Read Ezekiel 37:11-14, 24-28 > God will revive His people and settle them in their own land, and His dwelling place will be with them forever.

Read Amos 9:13-15 > They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. God will plant Israel in their land, and they will never again be uprooted from it.

Reading this scripture from the prophet Amos brings to mind what the state of the earth might be like at the beginning of the millennium. Consider the devastation that the planet will have sustained due to the outpouring of God’s wrath upon it. The land of Israel—especially around Jerusalem—will be restored, perhaps supernaturally. Jerusalem will become the focal point of the nations: “the city of our God … beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth … Mount Zion, the city of the Great King” (Psalm 48:1-2).

Read Isaiah 35:1-10 > The wilderness will rejoice and blossom, and those who have been redeemed will enter Zion with singing and rejoicing.

“And so,” wrote the Apostle Paul, “all Israel will be saved” (read Romans 11:25-27), and survivors from other nations will join the people of Israel.

Read Zechariah 2:10-13 > Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become His people.

Read Isaiah 11:1-12 > The Messiah will stand as a banner for the peoples, and the nations will rally to him.

Read Micah 4:1-7 > The people of many nations will go up to the mountain of the Lord, and he will rule over them in Mount Zion forever.

**Final Judgment**

At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released from the Abyss and allowed once again to deceive the nations. A great number of people will march against God’s people in Jerusalem, but God will destroy them and throw the devil into the lake of burning sulfur.

This prophetic glimpse into the distant future serves to teach us today that God allows the existence of evil in the world to serve His own purposes, for the ultimate good of the people He has created in His likeness, and for His everlasting glory. He gives each man and woman who enters the world the opportunity to choose good over evil—apparently to test and reveal what lies within each human heart. He will always protect those who belong to Him, and when His purposes have been accomplished, He will sovereignly put an end to all evil.

Then God will judge the dead.
Read Romans 2:5-12 > Because of their unrepentant hearts, people had been storing up wrath against themselves for the day of God’s wrath, when His righteous judgment would be revealed.

Hebrews 4:13 “Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (See also 1Peter 4:5).

Everyone brought from the dead into God’s presence will be judged “according to what they had done.” Additionally, “the book of life” will be consulted, and those “whose names have not been written in the book of life” will experience a “second death” in the lake of fire. (See 13:8; contrast with 3:4-5 “I will never blot out his name from the book of life….”)

Chapter 21 – New Heavens, New Earth, New Jerusalem

We come now to one of the most amazing chapters in the Bible. John is shown “a new heaven and a new earth.” God, the Creator of all things, is “making everything new!”

This is a moment long awaited in Earth’s history, when God will once again live among the human beings He created, as He did with our first parents in the Garden.

The Father’s heart has always been to dwell among the ones He loves:

Leviticus 26:11-12 (quoted in 2 Corinthians 6:16) “I will put my dwelling place among you…. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” (See also John 1:14.)

John hears a voice from the throne proclaiming the wonderful news: “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (21:3-4)

Then the One seated on the throne says to John, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (21:6). The ages of Earth’s history are over.

Now the Lord extends two special promises to those who read this book of prophecy. The first is this: “To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life” (21:6). This was the gift that Jesus had offered to the Samaritan woman: “the gift of God … living water” (John 4:10-14).

And then a second, personal promise: “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (21:7).

The following, however, are disqualified: the cowardly, unbelieving, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, idolaters, and all liars (21:8).
Then one of the seven angels who had the bowls of the seven last plagues comes and says to John, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (21:9). John is now shown “the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” A wonderful description of the New Jerusalem follows. There is no temple in it. The glory of God gives it light. And the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it, and “those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (21:27).

This is the heavenly city longed for by believers, Old Testament and New:

Read Hebrews 11:13-16 and 12:22-23 > God has prepared for us a city, Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.

And this is our heavenly dwelling place, in the Father’s house:

Read John 14:1-3 > Jesus is going to prepare a place in his Father’s house for those who love and follow him.

Chapter 22 – The City of God

In the new Jerusalem, the river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It waters the tree of life, which stands on each side of the river. This is the tree that once grew in the Garden, guarded for ages since mankind was expelled from God’s presence (see Genesis 3:22-24). The servants of God will serve Him now in the city of God; “they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads” (22:4).

Final Admonitions, Promises, and Invitation

As the Revelation comes to a close, the angel tells John, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place” (22:6).

Then the Lord himself says, “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book” (22:7).

The angel then admonishes readers—God’s servants!—essentially to keep on keepin’ on. If you are right with God and are doing what is right, then continue to do right. If God has set you apart as His own and made you holy, then continue to live in holy devotion to God (22:11). Readers are encouraged to persevere, to continue walking with Christ in obedience and purity of life.

Again the Lord speaks: “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done” (22:12).

Romans 2:6-7 “God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.”

Read Matthew 16:24-27 > The Son of Man will come, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.
Read Philippians 3:7-14 > Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called you heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The Lord continues: “I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (22:13). Human existence on earth is all about him, from first to last! “Blessed are those who wash their robes [in the blood of Christ by believing and trusting in Him—the righteous who do His commandments], so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city” (22:14, Amplified).

In comparison, Jesus presents a list of those who remain forever outside the City of God: those who practice sorcery (who are involved with demonic spirits); those who are sexually immoral; murderers; idolaters (that is, those who worship something or someone other than the true God); and everyone who loves to lie and makes a practice of lying (22:15).

Once again, as this amazing book comes to close, we see the grace of God displayed. He has called each one of us out from the world—and ultimately out of our earthly existence—to enjoy one another in the light of His holy, heavenly presence for all eternity. Yes, this book—this revelation of the return of Jesus Christ—is graphic and cryptic. But, as with the parables that Jesus taught, we are blessed to be among those to whom God has given wisdom and understanding by His Holy Spirit to comprehend its message.

Now look what our Lord says next to John: “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches” (22:16a). This book is for us, his church—the ones he has called out—in these last days.

And our Lord continues: “I am the Root and the Offspring of David (he created David—and became a human descendant of David), and the bright Morning Star” (22:16b).

Proverbs 4:18 “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.” This is the path we have set our feet upon. As the darkness around us gives way to daylight, the morning star shines before us to encourage us forward.

“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (22:17). This is the message of the church, Christ’s bride. The Spirit of God empowers the message—and gives life to those who receive it.

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’”
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Section Seven, having begun with the imprisonment of Satan and the millennial reign of Christ on Earth, describes the fate of the devil and the unbelieving dead, and concludes with a wondrous description of the New Jerusalem, the eternal dwelling place of God with His people—and with exhortations to keep the words of this prophetic book, to take the gift of the water of life, and to continue living righteously till Jesus comes.
Epilogue

We’re at the end of our study, and it’s hoped that you have gained a new perspective on this final book of the Bible and a greater appreciation of its message to believers today—especially now as the world begins experiencing the “birth pains” that Jesus spoke of. And this is the message: to follow him each day, to make the word of God your priority, and to be a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We recommend, now that you’ve finished this study, that you go back in your Bible to the book of Psalms and read one or two psalms each day. You’ll be amazed at the hope and expectations expressed by David and the other psalm writers—and how much of their writing envisions the end of the age, when God judges the world, bringing salvation to the faithful and punishment to the wicked. (See Luke 24:44.)

The book of Revelation is the culmination of the Old Testament Scriptures—in fact, of all human history. It declares the end of evil, and God’s everlasting goodness and faithfulness to those who love and obey Him.

Look again how this message of encouragement to believers is repeated throughout the book of Revelation, from one section of prophecy to the next:

The first section of Revelation concludes with letters to believers, promising—seven times—the eternal inheritance that awaits those who overcome this world.

The second section concludes by showing a multitude of resurrected believers who had followed their shepherd through great trials and persecutions, and their Savior who now leads them to living water and wipes away every tear from their eyes.

The third section ends with the sounding of a trumpet and the proclamation that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, who is going to reward those who revere his name.

The fourth section closes with the end-time harvest of human souls, when the wicked who had defied God’s rule and killed his saints are thrown into the winepress of God’s wrath.

The fifth section ends with the last of seven golden bowls of God’s wrath being poured out upon an unrepentant godless world.

The sixth section finishes with celebrations of the overthrow of a murderous false religion and the glorious wedding of Christ and his church, followed by Christ’s triumphant return, when he destroys the world’s armies that are arrayed against him and throws the deceivers and murderers of his people into a fiery lake of burning sulfur.

And the seventh and final section of the book concludes with evil being forever ended, the dead—who had rejected truth and followed evil—being condemned, and the saints of God being shown their eternal home with their Creator in His holy city in a new heaven and Earth.
God is just, and He is righteous. His Son is our Savior, Lord, and coming King. And His Spirit has put this remarkable book together to stir our hearts and prepare us for the days ahead.

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

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