

# The Book of Revelation

## Outline of the first three chapters

- I. The Prologue (1.1-8)
  - Title, John's role, promise of blessing (1-3)
  - Greeting (4-8)
- II. Christ in the midst of His church
  - A. The Vision of the Son of Man (1.9-20)
  - B. The Letters to the Churches (2.1 – 3.20)

## I. The Prologue

### A. Title, John's role, Promise of blessing (1-3)

*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,<sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.<sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.*

This is a *revelation* of Jesus Christ. This letter is not meant to hide the future or make it mysterious but rather to unveil the future. Using this same noun, NT writers describe Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming as the "revelation" of Christ (1 Cor. 1.7; 2 Thess 1.7; 1 Pt 1.7, 13; 4.13).

- Show to his servants Clearly show them what is about to happen so they will know it and be ready for it. He is not keeping them in the dark. He knows their need (cp. Mt 6.8) and meets their need. He's not trying to confuse us with weird stuff. John "must have believed that they would be able to understand" (G.B. Caird, 1966).

As Martin Kittle (1940) writes, John's "interest was strictly pastoral, first and last...to encourage and warn them in times of extreme urgency...nothing was further from his mind than to obscure that message for the sake of intrigue or impressiveness." However foreign this genre of literature may be for us, it was not for his hearers. John hoped to fortify and guard his hearers, not to stump them with puzzles. Persecution was too serious "to justify indulgence in speculation or entertainment."

The goal of Revelation is to bring encouragement to believers of all ages that God is working out His purposes even in the midst of tragedy, suffering, and apparent Satanic domination. It is the Bible's battle cry of victory, for in it, more than anywhere else in the NT, is revealed the final victory of God over all the forces of evil. As such, it is an encouragement to God's people to persevere in the assurance that their final reward is certain and to worship and glorify God despite trials and despite temptations to march to the world's drumbeat. (G.K. Beale 2015)

He made it known He even sent an the angel who bore witness to the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ. In fact, this angel bore witness to John of everything that he saw! There is no hiding of *anything*. *All* is revealed.

Blessing John assumes this letter is so clear that in just reading and hearing it there will be blessing. The blessing is not hard to get at; it's right there for the taking.

It is not a convoluted word, some esoteric communication that can only be understood by the few, by scholars who plumb the depths of mysteries. Vern Poythress (2000) gives examples of kids and a janitor who loved the book and of a congregation that read Revelation over several months, section by section throughout the whole book, launching into prayer and praise with each reading. Poythress says "it's not a puzzle-book, it's a picture book."

- Keep "Blessed are those...who keep what is written in it." It is expected that we will understand it and that we will *obey* it. This shows that the vivid, extraordinary visions of Revelation are not just entertainment, not just predictions of future events, but are pictures (*moving* pictures!) intended for our edification and hope – to ground us in the reality of God's sovereignty. It is written for our defense against evil.

"Revelation is a book to be *seen*" (Dennis Johnson 2001). In v. 2 we read that John bore witness to all he *saw*. Later in v 11 the angel says, "Write what you *see* in a book and send it to the seven churches." The verb "see" occurs 52 times in Revelation. This is a stunning picture book, but these are action pictures. It is more like watching a movie.

William Hendriksen (1939, 1967) begins his commentary, "Beautiful beyond description is the last book of the Bible." Michael Wilcock (1975) says that God gives his people "a gorgeous picture-book to look at...this is an acted word, a word dramatized, painted, set to music – a word you can see and feel and taste...this is meant to be used and enjoyed." Johnson: "Revelation is a book of symbols in motion."

Poythress writes, "Don't become preoccupied with isolated details. Rather, become engrossed in the overall story. Praise the Lord. Cheer for the saints. Detest the Beast. Long for the final victory." Get caught up in this exciting, action-packed book!

Caird makes the point that the spectacular imagery of Revelation may be easier to get at for those who have been exposed to surrealist art. I thought about that - many times in its weird and wild depictions, surrealism speaks to the most serious philosophical and human issues.

If the whole book was read aloud at one sitting (which would take about an hour and a half), it would have made its impact on its first hearers *as a whole*, like a poetic drama or an opera; indeed one should perhaps regard it as more like music than rational discourse. (John Sweet, 1979)

"One of the key themes of the book is that things are not what they seem" (Johnson). Weak and helpless believers, attacked and killed, are in the end the true conquerors through Jesus Christ. Christ himself is a paradox in that he is the Lamb who was slain and also the Ruler of the kings on earth (1.5); the Lamb is at the same time the Lion of Judah (5.5-6).

Revelation presents history, life, conflict, suffering, good and evil from God's perspective - the perspective of heaven. Revelation challenges us with the paradox between what we see happening on earth and the real story of what God is doing and where history is going.

The word “Revelation” (Greek: *apocalypse*) is used “in the ancient sense of ‘unveiling, disclosing’ in vivid, visual form the invisible realities and forces that drive and therefore explain the course of observable historical events...On the plane of visible history things are not what they appear, so Revelation's symbols make things appear as they are. Its surprising, paradoxical imagery discloses the true identity of the church, its enemies, and its Champion. Paradox is central to the symbolism. (Johnson).

“...all the varied imagery of his (John's) book has no other purpose than this, to disclose to the prospective martyrs the real nature of their suffering and its place in the eternal purpose of God, or, in Bunyan's language, to take them about to the backside of the wall” (Caird).

These statements frame Revelation: The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him *to show to his servants the things that must soon take place* (1.1). And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel *to show his servants what must soon take place* (22.6)

“When we find Daniel's ‘what will be in the latter days’ replaced by John's ‘what must *soon* take place” it is “to bring events which were once distantly future into the immediate present” (Wilcock). “What Daniel expected to occur in the distant ‘latter days’ – the defeat of cosmic evil and the ushering in of the divine kingdom – John expects to begin ‘quickly,’ in his own generation, if it has not already begun to happen” (Beale).

This idea that the latter days had come is expressed in many ways in the NT: Acts 2.17 (latter days); Gal 4.4/Eph 1.10 (fullness of time); 1 Cor 10.11 (on whom the ends of the ages have come); 1 Tim 4.1 (in later times – which Paul viewed were already present); 2 Tim 3.1/ 2 Pt 3.3 (in the last days, already present); 1 Pt 1.20 (Christ has been revealed “in the last times”); Heb 1.2 (“in these last days” God has spoken to us in His Son); 9.26 (he [Christ] has appeared once for all “at the end of the ages”); Jam 5.3 (you have laid up treasures “in the last days”); 1 Jn 2.18 (“it is the last hour”).

So John and the other NT writers proclaim that the end times/latter days have come in Christ and they will continue until the final coming of Christ. The kingdom of Christ is now. The ascended Christ is reigning at God's right hand (Eph 1.20-23) and will continue reigning until all his enemies are destroyed forever (1 Cor 15.20-25). Again, Daniel looked to the latter days of God's final kingdom; John is telling us, that kingdom has begun in the reign of Jesus Christ.

This is a revelation of the glory, the sovereignty and the victory of God.

- Caird translates *to v logov tou theou* (“the word of God”) as “the purpose of God” because “God never speaks simply to convey information, but always to achieve results. ‘He spoke and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm’ (Ps 33.9). So the word of God is *the* plan of God, the purpose of God for all mankind, for all creation.”

(1.4-8) The opening greeting to the churches is brimming with the display of the sovereign rule of God and of his Christ: he is the Lord of history on a throne with the fullness of the Spirit; Jesus is ruler of kings; in him we are a kingdom – we will rule; his dominion is forever; he is coming to judge the earth; he owns the beginning and the end of history and everything in between; he is the Almighty God!

(1.9-20) Jesus is displayed in his glory and strength. *He* is the one who addresses each of the churches as each letter begins with a clip of this presentation in chapter 1. He is in the midst of churches and he holds them in his hand. Judgment comes forth from his mouth (cp 19.12), his eyes search all things, nothing is hidden from him. He is the Living One who conquered Death and now has the keys of Death. Death cannot harm his own.

- (4-5) The throne room vision in these chapters sets the course for all that follows. On his throne God rules all things. Christ alone is worthy to take the scroll of history and open its seals. Yes, there is a dragon, a beast, a false prophet and a prostitute, but this is God's history headed to God's desired purpose. All opposition will be utterly vanquished and God will usher in the New Heavens and New Earth free forever of all sin and misery.
- "...the visions of destruction (6-20) are bracketed by the overarching vision of God the Creator and Redeemer (4, 5), who makes all things new (21, 22); carnage and chaos make way for the fulfillment of all men's dreams" (Sweet).

My summary of Revelation: *Jesus Christ rules history. He will finally destroy all evil, rescue his suffering people and bring them into everlasting joy.* Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15.25, "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." Revelation is telling the story of Christ's reign in heart-rending detail! There are terrible things that will take place on this earth, but still it is the story of Christ's reign, of his living in the midst of his church (lampstand) and holding the church in his hand (stars), so that his people faithfully endure to the end and become conquerors in Christ Jesus.

Revelation tells its story multiple times. There are recapitulations of extended conflict and persecution followed by final judgment and victory. Each cycle covers the same ground from the resurrection-ascension of Christ to the final coming of Christ.

- For instance, in chapters 5 and 6 Christ takes the scroll representing the history of the earth in the latter days, and he and opens the first six seals. Already, by the end of chapter 6, the great day of God's final wrath has come (see 6.12-17). Then chapter 7 gives a vision of the final glory of God's people (see esp. 13-17 which is read at funerals). Before we get to chapter 8 we've reached final judgment and the final salvation of God's people.
- The trumpets in chapters 8 and 9 repeat the cycle of the seals, then later, about halfway through Revelation, the story starts over again with the birth of Christ in chapter 12! What? The birth of Christ in the middle of the book? That's how Revelation rolls.
- Notice, the vision of final glory in chapter 7 is a microcosm of the final glory of chapters 21-22. These are parallel passages talking about the same final blessing of God's people!
- Finally, the trumpets in 8 and 9 parallel the bowls of wrath in chapter 16. Each numbered trumpet and bowl affect the same part of the world: 1 - earth; 2 - seas; 3 rivers; 4 - sun; 5 - darkness; 6 - Euphrates river; 7 - the throne room is opened. The bowls aren't adding a new episode to the trumpets, they parallel to the trumpets. We will encounter:

The Seven Seals (5-7)  
The Seven Trumpets (8-11)  
Symbolic Figures and Harvest (12-14)  
The Seven Bowls (15-16)  
The Judgment of Babylon (17-19)  
The White Throne Judgment and New Creation 20-22.8

These cycles drive the point home again and again that God rules all things and will bring about his final and complete victory for his glory and his people's everlasting good.

conflict/suffering ⇒ victory  
conflict/suffering ⇒ victory  
conflict/suffering ⇒ victory

Further things to bear in mind (Johnson)

- Revelation only makes sense in the light of the Old Testament. Beale gives these figures: 278 out of Revelation's 404 verses have allusions to the OT. There are 500 allusions altogether. Caird quotes Austin Farrer's commentary of 1964 that Revelation "reads much more like a continuous meditation on the Old Testament."  
  
"A quick look at just some of the OT allusions in the first chapter will illustrate our point. In 1:5 John alludes to Ps. 89:27; in 1:6 to Exod. 19:6; in 1:7 to Zech. 12:10; in 1:13-15 to Dan. 7:13-14 and 10:5-6; in 1:15 to Ezek. 1:24; and in 1:16 to Isa. 49:2." (Beale)
- Numbers count big as symbols in Revelation. 7 symbolizes completeness. The Lamb's 7 horns express his total power; his 7 eyes express his total wisdom. This isn't a physical description it is a proclamation of the glorious power and wisdom of Christ. There are not 7 Spirits. 7 expresses the fullness of the Spirit. 12 is the number of the people of God (12 tribes, 12 apostles) so the city in chapter 22, a picture of the people of God, is a cube 12,000 by 12,000 by 12,000 stadia. Even the thickness of the walls is 12 x 12, 144 cubits.
- Revelation is for the church under attack. Every one of the 7 letters ends with "to him who overcomes." There are vivid, fearsome portrayals of Satan, the Beast, the Prostitute and the false Prophet. Suffering is terrible. Believers lose their lives. But those who are faithful witnesses like Christ (1.5) will reign with him forever and ever (Rev 22.5).

Interpretations of Revelation

Preterist – the visions represent events that take place before the fall of Jerusalem or the fall of Rome, and can be tied to particulars

Futurist – the visions represent events that take place at the end of history and can be tied to particulars

Historicist – the visions represent chronological events that take place throughout history and can be tied to particulars

Idealist - the visions represent principles that always apply to God's people at all times and in all places. This will be our approach to the Book of Revelation.

## **B. The Greeting (4-8)**

John to the seven churches that are in Asia In the back of a study Bible you'll find a map of Paul's missionary journeys. In the Roman provinces of Lydia, Asia and Phrygia (present day Turkey) you'll find these seven cities. They are listed in a geographic order. Start with Ephesus and head north close to the coast to Smyrna and up to Pergamum. Then turn south to Thyatira and Sardis, over to Philadelphia and finally down to Laodicea. There are more churches that could be addressed, churches in Hierapolis, Troas and Colossae for instance. As Caird writes, "John chooses seven of the churches to indicate that his message is really addressed to the church at large. Each of the separate letters that follows contains 'what the Spirit is saying to the churches'" (italics mine). These letters are for all churches in all places at all times.

### who is and who was and who is to come

*God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.* Exodus 3.14

*Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he.* Isaiah 41.4

*Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he; I am the first, and I am the last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens when I call to them, they stand forth together.* Isaiah 48.12-13

*Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.* Isaiah 44.6-7

And see the phrase in Revelation 1.8, 17-18; 21.6; 22.13

God started everything, God brings it to its close and God rules everything in between. "First and last" is a fetching way to describe his "eternal, invincible rule" (Johnson). Who began the universe? Who will bring it to its destiny? God alone. He is our comfort and hope: "God is the sovereign Lord of all that takes place in the entire course of human history" (Mounce).

the Almighty Though this phrase occurs many times in the OT, it's found only 10 times in the NT, and 9 of those are in Revelation (1.8; 4.8; 11.17; 15.3; 17.7, 14; 19.6, 15; 21.22). It is found in 1 Corinthians 6.18 as a quote from the OT (Mounce). This is remarkable, singular use of this word is critical for the encouragement of believers in persecution, disaster, heartache and loss. Apart from his sovereignty, there is no hope whatsoever in this dark and suffering world.

seven spirits who are before the throne (see also Rev 3.1; 4.5; 5.6) The background for this description of the Spirit is from the OT: *And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it... Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.* Zechariah 4.2, 6

‘The seven spirits’ represents the Holy Spirit in “the fulness of his activity and power” (Caird), “the fulness of his operations and influences in the world and in the church” (Hendriksen).

faithful witness, *I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession* (1 Tim 6.13). As believers bear witness to Jesus and confess him in the face of persecution, they can always gain encouragement from the One who himself made the good confession as he faced eminent death.

the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth John is drawing from Psalm 89.27, and 37: *And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth... Like the moon it (his kingdom) shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies*. This is spoken to David and “extends to his descendants culminating in Jesus the Messiah... If faithful witness should result in a martyr’s death, the believer is to remember that Jesus, the ideal martyr, is also the firstborn from the dead. As the risen Christ now exercises sovereign control, so also will the faithful share in his reign (20.4-6)” (Mounce).

Christians “are called to bear the costly witness of martyrdom, trusting that in his death Christ has been a *faithful witness* to God’s way of overcoming evil: to look into the open jaws of death, remembering that he has risen as *the firstborn* of many brothers and to defy the authority of Imperial Rome in the name of a *Ruler* to whom Caesar himself must bow. (Caird)

To him who loves us Notice the present tense. He *loves* us. His is an everlasting love. He has always loved us and will always loved us, but his love was completely unveiled, bursting forth in glory through his once-for-all death on the cross which set us free from the guilt and power of sin and made us a kingdom of priests.

“freed us from our sins... kingdom of priests” From Exo 19.6. Those in Christ are the new Israel (1 Pt. 2.5-9). “Priests” indicates intimate access (Heb 10.19-22). It is because we are intimate with Him that we become his faithful witnesses in a hostile world. His people, intimate with him, reign with Him (2.26-27; 3.21; 5.10; 20.4, 6). Beale writes that we are “constituted kings together with Him.” I love Caird’s translation of “a kingdom of priests”: *a royal house of priests*. First Presbyterian Church is a royal house of priests - Christ has made us so!

You may know that *christos* (English, Christ) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *maschiach* (English, Messiah). Jesus Christ is Jesus Messiah, and it is this Jewish Messiah who is in the midst of the *lampstands - the church*, not the temple, not the synagogue! As true Israel, the church is contrasted with Jews (Rev 2.9, 3.9).

glory and dominion This is the heart of the whole book and the heart of our whole lives!

coming with the clouds (From Dan 7.13-14 and Zech 12.10.) When Christ speaks of coming in his glory and kingdom or coming on the clouds he says that some aspect of that will take place for the very generation he is speaking to (Mt 16.27-28; Mt 24.29-35). Jesus said to the high priest, “from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26.64). “From now on” indicates a *continuing process* of being at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven.

So “coming with” or “on the clouds” is not a physical description. It expresses Christ’s glorious rule that governs this world and governs his church (see Eph. 1.20-23). We see Christ coming to deal with the churches in Revelation 2.5, 16; 3.11. “The clouds” indicates his active, sovereign involvement. His activity continues throughout history. The “second coming” is actually a *final* coming concluding the whole process of comings. Dan 7.13-14 describes the authority given to “one like a son of man” to exercise end-time kingship. The beginning of this fulfillment was Christ’s resurrection and ascension and this kingship continues until the last coming.

The greeting is from the *Father* “him who is and who was and who is to come,” the *Son*, “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness...” and the *Holy Spirit* “the seven spirits who are before the throne.”

all tribes of earth will wail This is not a cry of repentance. It is shock and agony as they face the mighty Lord who comes to judge the world. This anticipates a passage like Revelation 6.15-16:

*Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”*

## **II. Christ in the Midst of His Church (1.9 – 3.22)**

### **A. The Vision of the Son of Man (1.9-20)**

*1. John’s describes his and our situation: tribulation, kingdom and endurance (1.9-11)*

*through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God...and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him... For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know...* Acts 14:22; Romans 8:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:4

These three words, tribulation, kingdom and endurance, define our life on this earth. We are a kingdom, we are priests and kings, yet we face tribulation and we must endure to the end. This is how a believer reigns in the present with Jesus. This is the paradox formula for kingship.

*Overcoming* (again, each letter ends with “he who overcomes”) has nothing to do with political or social power; it has everything to do with faithful endurance in the face of tribulation.

Being identified with Christ is the basis for the trials which confront them, as well as for their ability to endure such trials and to participate in the kingdom as kings. This form of rule mirrors the manner in which Jesus exercised His authority in His earthly ministry, *even from the cross!* Christians are to follow in His path. Like Jesus’ beginning kingship, Revelation reveals that the saints’ reign consists in “overcoming” by not compromising their faithful witness in the face of trials (Beale).

See Rev 2.2-3, 9-11, 13; 3:8; 6:9 “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne”; 7:14 “these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation”; 12:11 “they have conquered him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

Patmos John was exiled because he held to the word of God and held to its testimony of Jesus.



in the Spirit See Ezekiel's similar language (2.2; 3.12, 14, 24). It indicates a trance-like state brought on by the Holy Spirit in which God gives to John this "revelation of Jesus Christ" (1.1).

Lord's Day This may indicate the first day of the week, which name Christians gave it in the wake of Jesus' resurrection on the first day. Or, it could indicate something like a "day of the Lord," that is, the great day when John received this revelation from the Lord.

trumpet This recalls God's appearance at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19.16, 19; 20.18) and the Day of Atonement (Lev 25.8-10). The trumpet accompanies this revelation of Christ to John and accompanies Christ's final revelation to the whole world (1 Cor 15.52; 1 Thess 4.16).

write Though an individual letter is written to each church (2.1, 8, 12, 18; 3.1, 7, 14), verse 11 shows that whole book of Revelation is sent to all of the 7 churches. Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah were all told to write (Exod. 17:14; Isa 30:8; Jer. 36:2). This God's prophetic word to John.

## 2. *The Description (12-16)*

seven golden lampstands These represent the seven churches (1.20). The one lampstand of the temple and of Zechariah 4 has become seven. "The purpose of the church is to bear the light of the divine presence in a darkened world (Mt 5.14-16). Failing this, its reason for existence has disappeared (cf. Rev 2.5)." (Mounce)

one like a son of man Again, this recalls Daniel 7.14. Jesus is the one who has received the kingdom from the Ancient of Days. The robe and sash indicate he is a priest, the royal priest who offered himself (1.5; 5.6, 12). The golden sash indicates purity. The risen Lord who gave himself for the church is in the midst of His church, ever protecting and blessing her.

the hairs of his head were white like wool Jesus is the son of man who receives the kingdom (Dan 7), yet he has the same glory of the Ancient of Days whose hair is also like wool.

His eyes were like a flame of fire (Dan 10.6; cp Rev 2.18; 2.23 is considered a central verse of the whole seven messages to the churches; see also Heb 4.12-13)

His feet were like burnished bronze This indicates the armor of war and judgment. His mighty feet trample down any and all wicked forces.

His voice was like the roar of many waters (Dan 10.6; Eze 1.24; Ex 19.16, 19). This expresses his absolute authority and sovereignty - the voice that brought into existence the creation. And right hand indicates his sovereign rule.

from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword This isn't his saving word. It is the word that pronounces and enacts judgment. Revelation 19.15 reads, *From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.*

His face was like the sun shining in full strength This recalls Daniel 10.6 and it reminds us of Jesus' transfiguration with the three disciples (Mt 17.2). Christ is revealed as a Warrior in the

midst of his church protecting her and defeating all his and her enemies. Think of the commander of the Lord's army who appeared to Joshua with drawn sword (Joshua 5.13-15). Jesus is risen in His might as Ruler of kings and Warrior for His people.

The symbols seen by John in the vision reveal not what Jesus looks like but what he is like - his identity as the searcher of hearts, full of consuming holiness and boundless wisdom, the perfect priest standing for his people before the Father, the perfect king defending them against the devil by his invincible Word. Revelation's visions show us how things are, not how they look to the physical eye. (Johnson)

The entire description must be taken as one whole and interpreted as such. The Son of Man is here pictured as clothed with power and majesty, with awe and terror. That long royal robe; that golden belt buckled at the chest; that hair so glistening white that like snow on which the sun is shining it hurts the eye; those eyes flashing fire, eyes which read every heart and penetrate every hidden corner; those feet flowing in order to trample down the wicked; that loud, reverberating voice, like the mighty breakers booming against the rocky shore of Patmos; that sharp, sword with two biting edges going forth in judgment, the entire appearance "as the sun shines in its power" too intense for human eyes to stare at... Christ, the majestic and powerful one coming to purge his churches, yet protect and preserve his true people against all-comers and to punish those who are persecuting his elect. (Hendricksen)

### 3. *The Words (17-20)*

the first and the last He too is the sovereign over all creation from beginning to end (v. 4). "Christ is the force behind history, causing it to fulfill his purposes..." (Beale).

#### the living one...I died, and behold I am alive forevermore...keys

Whereas once Christ Himself was held by death's grip, now not only has He been set free from it but He also has the power to determine who else will be thus liberated. This verse assures believers that, regardless of what sufferings or trials they may now endure, if they persevere they will indeed reign forever with Christ. (Beale)

Not only had he burst out of the prison, he had carried away *the keys*. His followers may pass confidently in the dungeons *of death and the grave*, knowing that he holds the authority to unlock the gates and set them free. (Caird)

write therefore the things you have seen This reiterates v. 11. The next two terms describe the mix of what is to follow: things that already are and things that are to come. John is told, basically, "Write the totality of what you see, both what is happening and what will happen in the latter days."

#### the seven stars

This is difficult. It is foreign to our thinking for sure. Some have said this is the pastor of each church. Others that each is the messenger (angel = messenger) sent to each church. However, every reference to "angel" in Revelation means angel. But how can Jesus address an angel and speak of its works, many of which are evil? How can he also say, "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" if he is addressing an angel?

One possibility offered by some commentators is that each church has a guardian angel (cp. Dan 10.12-13; Heb 1.14) and that the angel is so closely associated with the church that he bears responsibility for the church and can be addressed with the concerns and even sins of the church.

Still, it's *you... you people*. Not you angel. It's better in my opinion to follow the approach of G.K. Beale and others that this terminology reminds believers that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly and that their real home is not with the unbelieving "earth-dwellers." This keeps the sense of the church's heavenly existence and identity by modeling its worship on that of the angels' worship and the heavenly church's worship of the exalted Lamb. This is why scenes of heavenly worship are woven throughout Revelation.

Ladd writes that the term "angels" "represents the heavenly or supernatural character of the church." Kiddle, "heavenly societies in his right hand, under his guidance and protection, more than temporal organizations...he sees their divine character... addressing them as angels makes them conscious of their divine character."

Dennis Johnson adds, "...the angel of each church is not literally an angel – that is, a distinct spiritual being charged with the welfare of the church. Rather, the angel is the church, viewed from the perspective of Christ's control over his churches: the stars are in his hand...Stars and lampstands both speak of the churches as reflecting the light of their King, but the lampstands highlight his presence and the stars emphasize his protective possessiveness. The glorious Son of Man, who lives among his congregations and holds their lives in his hand, has something to say to each of them."

This initial vision has shown Christ standing in complete authority over human history, yet He does so standing amidst the churches (v. 13), which are undergoing all sorts of trials and even apparent defeats (as chs. 2 and 3 will unfold). Rev. 1:12-20 shows the "Son of man" in a present position of sovereignty among the weak and suffering churches of His kingdom, bringing into sharper focus the unexpected form in which the expected Danielic kingdom has reached its initial fulfillment. (Beale)

## **B. The Letters to the Churches (2.1 – 3.22)**

### **Structure**

The letters fall into the following pattern: abcccb'a'

a and a' (Ephesus and Laodicea) are perhaps in the worst condition.

b and b' (Smyrna and Philadelphia) are the only two that are not rebuked

ccc - the three middle churches have serious problems as well

Since the beginning and middle are the important places in Hebrew structure, it shows that as a whole, the churches are perceived as being in a poor condition. "...the churches in the worse condition form the literary boundaries of the letters and the churches with serious problems form the very core of the presentation" (Beale). This is heightened by 2.23 which is the only time "the churches" are addressed except at the end of each message, and which forms a kind of controlling atmosphere for the messages.

### **Addressees**

The starting place is obviously the 7 churches because even the historical, social, cultural and religious backgrounds of their cities is brought into play. However, the number 7 is here as

always in Revelation symbolic of completeness and fullness, indicating that these messages are to be applied to the whole church in all places and in all ages. Also, each of the seven messages has this exhortation: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” meaning that each is addressed to all. The sins and struggles that these churches faced are the potential sins and struggles that every church will face. No church is exempt from this warning.

### **Relationship to the vision of Christ in chapter 1**

Each letter includes a part of the glorious vision of Christ in chapter 1. The vision sets the stage and creates the atmosphere for each of the addresses. *Every address recalls the vision.*

So the vision of chapter 1 is not an abstract, disconnected vision. All that Christ is and all that he declares is fully brought to bear on the churches. He is the Lord with whom these churches must engage and every church is reminded of it. He is the Lord for all churches everywhere at all times, including us at First Presbyterian Church!

### **Relationship of the messages to the visions that follow**

There are many connections between the letters and the visions that follow. To mention just a few, the overcoming theme of each of the letters (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) continues in the following visions (12.11; 15.2; 17.14; 21.7). The “great tribulation” is mentioned in the letters (2.22) and in the visions (7.14). The sin of idolatry is addressed in the letters (2.14, 20) and in the visions (9.20-21).

It is important to see that Revelation is to be understood broadly as a letter (1.4 greeting; 22.21 parting grace). The “amen” in 22.20 reinforces the feel of a closing letter. Now, in the NT letters are written to address problems in the churches and to enable God’s people to live in light of the great redemption accomplished in Christ. All appeals to obedience are based upon who Christ is and what Christ has done. The visions that follow are meant to display vividly to Christ’s church the horrific nature of the evil that opposes God and the sure judgment of that evil, unmasking the temptation of persecution (personified in the beast) and the temptation of sensuality (personified in the great prostitute). And the visions vividly display the blessedness of continuing to trust and love and serve Christ in the midst of such temptation.

Every one of the 7 addresses contains this exhortation: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” One important thing this tells us is that the words of Christ come to us by means of the Spirit. Christ ministers to us through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus says of the Spirit, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn 16.14).

But notice the connection of these letters to the rest of Revelation. We read in Revelation 13.9 “If anyone has an ear; let him hear.” *Christ is still addressing the churches!* This is still a part of the overall letter. So the propositional exhortations of chapters 2-3 are then portrayed in chapters 4-21 through spectacular visions, what Beale calls, “visionary parables.” It’s like the churches are being told, “OK, I *told* you (chapters 2-3), now I’m going to *show* you (chapter 4-21). You read it, now you’re going to see it.” There’s the book (2-3) then the movie (4-21); they are not disconnected. It’s the same exhortation presented in a completely different way.

### **John writes prophecy in line with OT prophecy**

the words of/thus says (Greek: *tade legei* reads literally “thus says” [*legei* is a verb], though it is translated in the ESV as “the words of.”) This phrase is “a stock formula that the OT prophets used to introduce prophetic sayings from God” (Beale). It is usually, *tade legei kurios* (thus says the Lord) at times with various additions such as *pantokratōr* “thus says the Lord almighty” or *sabaōth* “thus says the Lord of hosts.”

Also it introduces new literary units as it does here in Revelation (65 in Ezekiel, 30 in Jeremiah, 12 in Zechariah and 8 in Amos). Assuredly Revelation means to be categorized as a further prophecy of God! Of the 25 or so occurrences of *thus says* in Isaiah, this one reminds me most of these descriptions in Revelation 2-3, with their formula, “the one who..”

*Isaiah 57:15* *For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.* (see also “the Lord who...” followed by various descriptions: Isa 29.22; 43.16; 44.2; 45.18; Jer 31.35; 33.2).

Conclusions:

First, this formula (*tada legei*) “demands that chapters 2-3 be seen as a group of prophetic messages rather than as mere letters” (Beale) in line with all these OT prophetic messages.

Second, the use of this formula underscores that Christ is assuming the role of Yahweh Himself.

Third the Lord of glory (1.12-20) is in the midst of the churches (1.13) and holds them in his hand (1.20) to *speak* to them (‘the words of him...’). He speaks as Lord and as Lord he speaks. He has absolute authority and he wields that authority by his word.

## The Relationship of Revelation to Daniel

Above on page 3 and elsewhere, we've talked about how Daniel announced a kingdom of God coming in the latter days and how John is saying that kingdom has come in Jesus Christ. Here we give some of the nitty-gritty details of those connections. This is a bit thick, so you can definitely skip this part if you want. But if you're interested this does show the intricate way John frames the whole book of Revelation using terminology he lifted out of Daniel. This is his way of saying, "See! What Daniel saw coming in the future is here, right now. The final kingdom that would be established in the latter days has finally been established in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ."

### 1. The Context for Daniel's explanation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream-vision (Dan 2.1-30)

King Nebuchadnezzar has a disturbing dream and demands that the wise men tell him both the dream and its interpretation. Of course, no one can; he orders them all killed. Before the decree is carried out, Daniel discovers it, requests an audience with the king and seeks God's mercy along with his companions. God reveals the mystery of the dream, Daniel rejoices and praises, and Daniel is brought to the king.

### 2. Terms in the introduction and conclusion of the Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation in Daniel 2.28-29 and 2.45

**Daniel 2:28-29** but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar *what will be in the latter days*. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these:<sup>29</sup> To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of *what would be after this*, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you *what is to be*.

**Daniel 2:44-45** And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,<sup>45</sup> just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king *what shall be after this*. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

Daniel is not talking about two different things when he writes "what will be in the latter days" (v. 28) and "what would/shall be after this" (vv. 29, 45). As Daniel talks about the dream and vision, *latter days* = *after this*. They are interchangeable, synonymous terms.

(As we move forward, a little background. There are two major ancient translations of OT Hebrew into Greek. One was done in the 3rd century BC by 72 translators, six from each of the twelve Hebrew tribes. They rounded the 72 down to 70 and called the translation, *The Septuagint* (LXX). Another translation was done by a Hellenistic Jewish scholar, Theodoton, in the 2nd century AD. It is often helpful to compare the two versions so we can better see how the Jews who spoke Greek understood the Hebrew.)

So, the Hebrew, "what will be after this" (2.29, 45) is translated in LXX as "what will be in the latter days" but translated in Theodoton as "what will be after this." *It was understood that you could use either "after this" or "latter days" because they meant the same thing.*

We see this again when Peter quotes Joel in Acts 2.17.

**Joel 2:28** “It will come about *after this* That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind (NASV)

**Acts 2.17** And *in the last days* it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh

Joel’s “after this” becomes Acts’ “in the last days.” They are synonymous terms.

So, Daniel is giving a vision of the things that must happen *in the latter days* (Dan 2.28) or *after this* (2.29, 45): a kingdom will be set up by God that will ultimately destroy all other kingdoms (Daniel 2.34-35, dream; Daniel 2.44-45 interpretation).

Here are some observations we can make:

- a. In Revelation 4.1, “after this” does not mean “chronologically after chapters 1-3.” John means, “Again, in these latter days, I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven!” Therefore, all the visions that follow are in the framework of that latter day vision of Daniel 2 in which the kingdom of God will destroy the kingdoms of this world. John is saying that the “latter days” have begun and the church is in the midst of it.
- b. We read in Daniel 2.44: *And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.* Jesus came preaching that *the kingdom of God is near* (Mark 1.15 - “at hand” in the ESV). The kingdom that Daniel’s interpretation predicted has come in the person of Jesus Christ. It’s no surprise, then, that John uses the same root word for “near” in Revelation 1.3, *the time is near*. Jesus is saying the kingdom is here; John is saying the kingdom of the latter days is here.

### **3. John uses terminology in Daniel to structure the book of Revelation**

Now look more closely at the first part of these phrases that end either *after this* or *in the latter days*. They each start in the ESV with “what will be” (Dan 2.28) or “what would be” (Dan 2.29). For both verses, the Greek in the LXX is, *ha dei genesthai*, which reads literally, “what is necessary to be,” “what must happen” or “what must take place.” ESV has “what will be” and “what would be” but as you can see, it’s a definite term declaring the certainty of a future event.

This phrase, *ha dei genesthai*, is used in Daniel 2.28 and 2.29 to introduce Daniel’s description of the dream and its interpretation. John frames and structures his vision with this same phrase:

#### 1.1-18 (Introduction)

**Revelation 1:1** ¶ The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants *the things that must soon take place* (*ha dei genesthai en tachei*). Literally the things that will be soon.

#### 1.19 – 3.22 (The Churches)

**Revelation 1:19** Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and *those that are to take place after this* (*ha mellei genesthai meta tauta*). John paraphrases, using *mellei* instead of *dei* just as Josephus did in quoting the same passages from Daniel [2.28-29, 45]). Both *dei* and *mellei* have the same basic meaning of “necessary” or “must.”

4.1 – 22.5 (The Visions of Destruction, bracketed by the overarching vision of God the Creator and Redeemer in chapters 4-5 and 21.1 – 22.5)

**Revelation 4:1** ¶ After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you *what must take place after this (ha dei genesthai meta tauta)*."

22.6 (The Conclusion)

**Revelation 22:6** ¶ And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants *what must soon take place (ha dei genesthai en tachei)*." John begins (1.1) and ends (22.6) with "soon" (*en tachei*).

Goppelt, in *Typos*, suggests that Daniel 2.28 is "the guiding principle" of Revelation because of its strategic occurrence at Rev 1.1, 1.19, 4.1 and 22.6. John puts his vision within the "thematic framework" (Beale) of Daniel 2). *Daniel declared that the kingdom of God was coming in the latter days, John is declaring that those latter days have come.*

#### 4. Two other other background visions from Daniel

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14

I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. <sup>6</sup> His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. Daniel 10:5-6

Compare Daniel 7.13-14 with "coming with the clouds" (Rev 1.7), "kingdom" (Rev 1.6, 9) and "one like a son of man" (Rev 1.13) and compare Daniel 10.5-6 to the description of the risen Christ in Revelation 1.12-16

So the "stone that was cut out" (Daniel 2.34, dream), this kingdom the God of heaven would set up (2.44, interpretation), is blended by John with the vision of the son of man receiving an everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7.13-14.

*John is saying that the kingdom predicted by Daniel is now initiated in the events of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. He is that son of man, and John saw Him in His glory. The fact that John is actually viewing these as present realities shows that the things predicted by Daniel are actually taking place in John's presence! "...John views the death and resurrection of Christ as inaugurating the long-awaited kingdom of the end times predicted in Daniel 2" (Beale, Revelation).*



## The Throne Room (Chapters 4-5)

*Two-part Vision* (This outline combines Poythress and Johnson)

### I. God and His Angelic Court (4)

- A. *How do we view these visions?*
- B. *The Summons (4.1-2)*
- C. *The One Who Sits on the Throne (4.2-6)*
- D. *The Courtiers (4.4, 6-8)*
- E. *The Praises (4.8-11)*

### II. The Triumphant Lamb (5)

- A. *The Problem: A Sealed Scroll (5.1-4)*
- B. *The Lion of Judah (5.5)*
- C. *The Lamb Slain (5.6-7)*
- D. *The New Songs of Praise (5.8-14)*

Also Caird calls the 7 letters of chapters 2-3 a cover letter to prepare the churches to hear the visions that begin in chapter 4. Also, some have called the remaining part of Revelation, “the eighth letter.” Remember, this is still the address to the seven churches, and to all the church.

### I. God and His Angelic Court (4)

- A. *How do we view these visions?*

The question comes up, “Is this a real description of what God looks like or is this vision meant to communicate truth about God?” Think about this: God is infinite in his being and all his attributes. Our unimaginably vast universe is a speck of grain – it’s not even that much! God is not nor can he be isolated to one seat on a throne, so that we could say, “*There* he is; he’s right there” as though he has ceased to be the infinite God. He fills the whole universe with his presence, but that is nothing for the infinite God.

How can the infinite God be attended by 24 elders or 4 cherubim wherever he is? That is impossible. As God did with Israel, he *manifested* himself in the cloud by day and the fire by night. He gave them a picture and sign of his presence that they could see. He manifested his glory to Moses; he manifested his glory in the tabernacle and in the temple. And in the heavenly places he manifests himself to spirits, human and angelic (Rev 4-5; 7; 15; and see Heb 12.22-25; Job 1.6-12; 1 King 22.19ff).

Because God is infinite and no other being is, then God must reveal himself to angels and men. They have no capacity to see God otherwise. All revelation of God must come from him to us. We can’t explore and discover God, he must unveil himself to us.

Now some descriptions God gives are objective discourse: “God is strong.” However, since the Bible is God’s word and the Bible is God’s chosen means of revealing himself to us, objective discourse is not all there is.

God knew that poetry opens wider our vision of God. Poetry impacts our hearts and stirs our emotions. Poetry creates pictures that lodge in our souls. For “God is strong” even simple images help, “The Lord is my fortress...my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps 18.1-3), but then comes the “white-knuckle” poetry of God’s rescue in verses 7-15! These are breathtaking, shattering images of God’s power and his determination to rescue his servant. How much more effective are they than, “he rescued me!”?

On Mt. Sinai God manifested himself in real physical thunder and lightning the Israelites could see and hear (Exo 19). The Psalmist describes in his poetic lines God’s rescue surrounded by thunder and lightning (Ps 18). In John’s vision thunder and lightning peal forth from the throne. We can see in Psalm 18 and Revelation 4 an intersection of poetry and vision. The visions of Revelation have much in common with poetry as they do with music and even movies.

If thunder and lightning are crashing around you, you are hitting the deck, trying to crawl into the earth, running for your life. Thunder and lightning own the situation, and the storms in which they come violent winds and water govern the earth when they strike.

So thunder and lightning represent the sheer, uncontested, unstoppable sovereignty and power of God. But think about it. What speck of God’s infinite power is the worst tornado or hurricane, the worst flood, the worst thunder and lightning? The infinite God is revealing in terms we can understand some kind of representation of his unlimited power.

In Revelation 4, the bright colors, the 24 elders, the thunder and lightning, the seven torches and the sea of glass give us pictures of the God of unlimited being, glory and power.

#### *B. The Summons (4.1-2)*

John associates himself with prophetic authority. He is summoned to the Lord’s heavenly temple just like Isaiah and Ezekiel were (Isa 6; Eze 1). John is “standing in the council of the Lord” (Jer 23.18). He is like a “privileged press-reporter...summoned to the control room at Supreme Headquarters” (Caird).

“Heaven” is likely the same as “heavenly places” of Ephesians (1.3, 20; 2.6; 3.10; 6.12) “which denote, not a place without evil, but the sphere of spiritual reality, where the masks are off and both good and evil are seen for what they really are” (Wilcock) “It is a part of the created universe, but a part which is entered by the opening of the spiritual eye rather than by any more literal form of transit” (Caird)

Remember “after this” is a synonym for “in the latter days” (above notes, pp. 14-16), meaning all of history between Christ’s first and second comings. It is *not* merely a temporal indicator.

#### *C. The One Who Sits on the Throne (4.2-6)*

“Throne” occurs 17 times in chapters 4-6. “Regardless of how rampant evil seems to run and to cause God’s people to suffer, they can know that his hand superintends everything for their good and his glory” (Beale). All judgments issue from God’s throne (6.1-8; 8.3-6; 16.17). The throne is central and everything emanates from it and is governed by it. It is all that is left in the end,

“the final reality” (Rev 20.11, Caird). Under the throne of Rome and even more ominous, the throne of Satan (2.13), this understanding is critical for their comfort and hope.

The description here has its background in the OT descriptions of God’s throne: Eze 1.26-28; 10 Exodus 24.10. The rainbow points to His glory (Eze 1.28) and to His mercy (Gen 9). The rainbow is the sign of God’s remaking the earth in the flood, and so it points to his making a new heaven and earth in the final day (21.1). The stones hint at the new creation as well as they anticipate the description of the church in the last day (Rev 21.19-21).

“...the throne room of God in Revelation 4 represents the heart of the universe, the heart of meaning, the heart of history. Revelation renews us, not so much by telling us about particular future events, as by showing us God, who will bring all events to pass in his own time and his own way (Poythress).

*the sea of crystal* (cp. Ex 24.10; Rev 15.2) Earth’s seas were a dangerous places and were readily associated with danger, death and evil. The beasts arise out of the sea in Daniel 7 and the beast arises out of the sea in Revelation 13.1. The Red Sea, occasion of God’s great defeat of Pharaoh and his army, became an an image for future victories in which it is the abode of the evil sea monster/dragon (Isa 51.9-11; Ps 74.12-15; Eze 32.2). Here in Revelation 4 (and later in chapter 15) the sea is brought to perfect calm, anticipating 21.1 where the sea is removed. This means that all evil is removed, not the oceans, from the new heaven and earth!

#### *D. The Courtiers (4.4, 6-8)*

*The 24 Elders* (OT background – 1 Ki 22.19; Dan 7.10; Ps 89.6-7; Job 1.6; 2.1). The elders speak of the church in the third person (5.10), so they don’t represent the church. They have a revelatory function (5.5; 7.13-14). They are called Elders for their wisdom, as a picture of God’s glorious counselors and advisors, after the pattern of human royalty. John spends no time explaining who they are. We see them falling down and throwing their crowns before the throne. “They are but pointers to the central majesty” (Caird).

*The four living creatures* (drawn from Isa 6.2 and Eze 1.4-21 which are based on the cherubim on the ark – Ex 25.18; 1 Ki 6.23-28; 1 Sam 4.2; 2 Sam 6.2; Ps 80.1; 99.1; also see the cherubim wind of Ps 18.10). These creatures represent the four winds and the the four corners of the earth; they are the base of God’s throne. They represent the whole creation, and perhaps more specifically, the “whole created order of animate life” (Beale). *Eyes* reflect the omniscience of God and sets the stage for their knowing administration of the judgments on mankind (6.1-8; 15.7) as servants of the Lamb.

#### Verse 8

“Lord God Almighty” equals “who was and is and is to come” in 1.4, 8, both expressing his sovereignty. Twice (vv 9, 10) we read, “who lives forever and ever.” This carries the flavor of Daniel where God’s eternity and his everlasting kingdom are emphasized (Dan 4.34; 12.7; 7.14, 18, 27) over against the temporary kingdoms of this world “that arrogate to themselves claims of deity (Dan 4.30-35; 11.36-37) and persecute God’s people (11.30-35; 12.7)” (Beale).

Also “who was and is and is to come” was used in various forms to describe the pagan gods. John’s attacks their legitimacy and authenticity with this phrase. “They aren’t sovereign, only Yahweh is!” It is a call the churches not to submit to the pressure and persecution of the pseudo-divine kings who demand they worship themselves and their pagan gods. There is one everlasting God; all other would-be gods are under the judgment of this one true God” (Beale).

Verse 11

“Will” shows that all things exist and are carried out in creation according to God’s unchanging purpose. So in the midst of maddening confusion, disruption, suffering and death, they can be confident that they are still the operating kingdom of priests to God (1.6), still conquerors by his grace (“the one who conquers”) and still destined to reign with Christ (2.26-27; 3.21).

## **II. The Triumphant Lamb (5)**

### **A. The Problem: A Sealed Scroll (5.1-4; cp Dan 12.4, 9; Eze 2.10)**

*What is the scroll and why would John weep so?*

The scroll “is God’s redemptive plan, foreshadowed in the Old Testament, by which he means to assert his sovereignty over a sinful world and so to achieve the purpose of creation. John proposes to trace the whole operation of this plan from its beginnings in the Cross to its triumphal culmination in the new Jerusalem...until the scroll is opened, God’s purposes remain not merely unknown, but unaccomplished” (Caird)

“The opening of the scroll would be not only an act of revelatory disclosure but also an act of executive authority, carrying out its edicts into action. The things written in the scroll “must take place” because they constitute God’s plan for history, culminating in the vindication of his servants and the unchallenged establishment of his dominion on earth as it is in heaven. The strong angel’s question is not merely Who is worthy to reveal God’s plan? but also Who is worthy to carry out God’s plan?” (Johnson)

“The “book” is best understood as containing God’s plan of judgment and redemption, which has been set in motion by Christ’s death and resurrection but has yet to be completed. The question asked by the angelic spokesman concerns who in the created order has sovereign authority over this plan.” (Beale)

Notice the parallelism of the hymns in 5.9-10 and 5.12.

*What do the seals and the writing mean?*

A seal is a symbol of authenticity (Jer 32.10-11; 1 Cor 9.2) and also security and privacy (Dan 12.4, 9; Rev 10.4). The seal indicates the owner’s authority and cannot legitimately be broken by another (Isa 29.11). (Because of time and money, writing was generally carried out on the inside of a scroll where the horizontal fibers ran. It was quite unusual to use both sides.)

*Why wouldn’t the One on the Throne just do it Himself? (Class question)*

## B. The Lion of Judah, the Root of David (5.5)

**Genesis 49:8-10** Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. <sup>9</sup> Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? <sup>10</sup> The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

**Psalm 89:3-4** You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: <sup>4</sup> I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations."

**Isaiah 11:1-2** There shall come forth a *shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit*...(LXX has "root of Jesse" and a "flower from his roots") <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. <sup>6</sup> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb... <sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. <sup>10</sup> In that day *the root of Jesse*, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples--of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

**Isaiah 16:4-5** When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and he who tramples underfoot has vanished from the land, <sup>5</sup> then a throne will be established in steadfast love, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness.

**Jeremiah 23:5** ¶ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

**Jeremiah 33:15-16** In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>16</sup> In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.

## C. The Lamb Slain (5.6-7)

One of the most dramatic moments in all of Scripture: the elder speaks of the *Lion* and I turned and saw a *Lamb*.

His humanity (though it is clear from his praises that he is also deity) Jesus conquered by being "slain" (vv 6, 9, 12). In Daniel 7 "the son of man" received the kingdom. Here in Revelation "Lamb" replaces "son of man." Jesus' death is kept before us throughout the rest of Revelation since "Lamb" is the predominant title from here on out (it is used 27 times in chapters 4-11).

"what he sees constitutes the most impressive rebirth of images he anywhere achieves... the Lamb is the symbol of self-sacrificing and redemptive love...it is almost as if John is saying to us, 'Wherever the OT says "Lion", read "Lamb".' Wherever the OT speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross." (Caird)

His worthiness *because he was slain and ransomed a people and made them a kingdom of priests that reign. He conquered because he ransomed his people* (v. 9 interprets v. 5).

His conquering is an example for our conquering. His people are “slain” just as he was (18.24). They conquer by the blood of the Lamb (12.11).

#### *Seven horns*

“Horns” indicates strength and rule (Ps 18.2; 89.17; Dan 7.24; Zech 1.18-21) and seven indicates again the fullness of that strength. “They are the visual equivalent of the title *Almighty*, ascribed to the Lord God” (1.8; 4.8) (Johnson). “The slain Lamb thus represents the image of a conqueror who was mortally wounded while defeating an enemy...His sacrifice “not only redeems but also conquers” (Caird).

#### *Seven eyes and seven spirits*

“Eyes” indicate wisdom, so “Christ possesses all the omnipotence and omniscience of God” (Caird). He is ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Cor 1.24). He knows His church and His promises will not fail for His church. The Spirit that was before the throne (4.5) now breaks loose into all the earth in all power and wisdom because of the Lamb (think of the unleashing of the Spirit at Pentecost!); this power is one of persuasion, convincing sinners of the love of God in Christ (Rom 15.18; 1 Th 1.5-6; 1 Cor. 2.10ff).

### **D. The New Songs of Praise (5.8-14)**

1. The praisers’ numbers increase with each of the five praises!
2. The Praised develop as well: 1-2 the One on the throne; 3-4 the Lamb; 5 the One on the throne and the Lamb
3. Structure: a bbb a. The middle three begin with “worthy.” The first and last do not.
4. The Content: 1 Holiness and eternity; 2 creation; 3 *Redemption this is the longest, most detailed and descriptive praise; it is the centerpiece of chapters 4-5.* Also the 4<sup>th</sup> praise directed to the Lamb has the most ‘receptions’ (7)

The association with creation and redemption show that redemption is re-creation and a reclamation of creation. Redemption is a continuation of the work of creation. The sovereign One who creates is the sovereign One who redeems and judges.

The prayers of the saints (5.8; cp 6.9-11).

Kingdom and priests (cp 1.5-6 with Ex. 19.6). In Exodus, “I have taken you as opposed to the nations.” Here “I have taken from every tribe, language, people and nation”!

For “reign” here compare Dan 7.13-14, 18, 22, 27. 5.9-10 and 12 constitute an enthronement of the Lamb (cp. 3.21; 22.1). These correspond to other NT passages that speak of this enthronement (Acts 2.29-35, with the giving of the Spirit; Eph 1.18-23 and its benefit for the church; 4.7-8, and the outpouring of gifts for the church; Phil 2.5.11; 1 Cor 15.20-28 with the defeat of all enemies including death; 1 Tim 3.16).

## Takeaways from the Throne Room Revelation 4-5

### **Position of chapters 4-5 in the Book of Revelation**

The vision of Christ in chapter 1 and the vision of the throne room form the frame/border for the message to the churches in chapters 2-3. We've seen how the address to each church has a "piece" of the description from the chapter 1 vision. The vision permeates the addresses and constantly sets their context in the majestic presence of Christ.

Then the churches who are being addressed hit more majesty as they are brought into the throne room of God in chapters 4-5. What follows in chapters 6-20 are multiple accounts of the history between Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> comings, but each one is told from "behind the scenes" revealing the spiritual powers, divine and demonic, that influence that history. *But the whole context for these accounts is the throne room of chapters 4-5.* It is the throne of God that governs the history of the world. (There's more about the throne below.)

Finally, notice that these accounts of history in chapters 6-20 are bound by the vision of Christ and the throne room of God on the one side, and the account of the final vision of the new heavens and new earth in chapters 21-22. It is the glorious risen Christ (ch. 1) who is the Lion and Lamb, controlling all the reins of history (chs. 4-5) and bringing it to its conclusion and transformation in the New Creation (chs. 21-22).

### **The Throne**

The "throne" is mentioned 17 times in chapters 4-5! "Throne" emblazons in a receptive heart a whole new environment in which to understand and interpret life – a whole new environment in which to live and love and suffer. Whatever terrible things the people of God face in this world (chapters 6ff), they are all governed by the one who sits on the throne and by the Lamb who takes the scroll. "...this vision of the universe governed by The Throne precedes the symbolic description of the trials through which the church must pass....A very beautiful arrangement!" (Hendriksen).

The throne-vision announces that even in all the suffering and loss of God's people God is working all things together for their good, always conforming them to the image of his dear son until he completes that work in the new creation (2 Cor 3.18; Rom 8.28, 32; Phil 1.6; Jude 24-25). The throne-vision guarantees the promise that the saints will reign forever and ever (22.5). Since God reigns absolutely and nothing can stop him from fulfilling all his purposes (Cp. Ps 9.7; 29.10-11; 33.13-17; 80.1; 99.1; 123.1-2; Isa 37.16).

You might spend several days reading through these two chapters, marking the 17 occurrences of "throne." You might summarize in your own words the reality of God's throne ruling all things in history including your own history. You might review that "throne-statement" for the next few weeks until you feel like you are looking at everything in your day and everything happening in the world, through a kind of "throne-lens." Rejoice in his sovereignty, take comfort in it, rest in his righteousness, justice and mercy.

### **The Scroll**

The scroll represents God's ordained plan, especially as it pertains to the space between Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> comings. "To open that scroll by breaking the seals, means not merely to reveal but to carry out God's plan" (Hendriksen). Why does John weep out loud? Because

When the scroll is opened and the seals are broken, then the universe is governed in the interest of the church. Then, *God's glorious, redemptive purpose is being realized*...Hence if the scroll is not opened, then no protection for God's children in the hours of bitter trial; no judgments upon a persecuting world; no ultimate triumph for believers; no new heaven and earth; no future inheritance! (Hendriksen)

The scroll, then, contains the world's destiny, foreordained by the gracious purpose of God...Until the scroll is opened, God's purposes remain not merely unknown but unaccomplished...Especially in persecution God's people had longed for that day to bring an end to their sufferings, but also to vindicate their faith. For there is a limit to the capacity of faith to survive in the face of hostile fact; unless in the end right obviously triumphs over wrong, faith in a just God is utter illusion. God must 'vindicate his chosen who cry out to him day and night' (Lk 18.7)." (Caird)

### **The Lamb**

"Seven horns" indicate the full and unlimited power of the Lamb. It is because of the Lamb that the seven Spirits who were before the throne (4.4) are now "sent out into all the earth" (5:6). Christ taught his disciples that when he went to the Father, he would send the Spirit (Jn 15.26; 16.7). When the Spirit was poured out on Pentecost and the disciples were speaking in all the various languages of those gathered in Jerusalem for the feast, Peter declared that the exalted Christ had "poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (Acts 2.33).

While John declares that Christ is all-powerful, "he redefines omnipotence. Omnipotence is not to be understood as the power of unlimited coercion, but as the power of infinite persuasion, the invincible power of self-negating, self-sacrificing love." (Caird) This brings to mind Paul's great statement in 2 Corinthians 5.14, "For the love of Christ controls us." As Paul wrote, "I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal 2.20). It is his love that drew us to him and his love that binds us to him.

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor *because of the suffering of death*, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.  
Hebrews 2.9

Our Lamb-King rules all. He is who we worship; he is who we admire and follow. This one, the Lamb, is our Lord. His life is in us and so we live out his sacrificial life in this world as he commanded us (Jn 13.34-35) and as the apostles command us (Eph 5.1-2; 1 Jn 3.16-18). As Jesus said, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mk 10.43-45). Living out a cruciform life was the passion of Paul: *that I might know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death* (Phil 3.10). Christ's resurrection life in us means that we are empowered to give our lives away for others, as he gave his life for us.



## Revelation 6.1-11 – The First Five Seals

Revelation 5 presents the enthronement of Christ. These OT texts provide background:

*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

Daniel 7.13-14

*The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."*

Psalm 110.1

The latter is *the* Messianic passage to which the NT refers again and again. Jesus quizzes the Pharisees about it (Mk 12.35-37), Peter refers to it in the first sermon after Pentecost (Act 2.33ff), and being seated at the right hand is a constant refrain drawn from Psalm 110

*God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins*

Acts 5.31

*But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."*

Acts 7.55-56

*Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

Romans 8.34

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

Colossians 3.1

*...according to the working of his great might<sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,<sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.<sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet...*

Ephesians 1.19-22

*After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

Hebrews 1.3b

*But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.*

Hebrews 10.12-13

*Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

1 Peter 3.21-22

Remember that the scroll contains God's plan for the unfolding of his kingdom to its final consummation. As the Lamb breaks the seals, he is initiating the plan of God. The Lord Jesus is the Administrator of God's decrees, bringing about his Father's will at the right hand of power. *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet* (1 Cor 15.25).

As he breaks a seal we do not hear anything read, we *see* it immediately unfold. The content of the scroll is enacted before John's (and our) eyes. The four horsemen represent the judgments of God that fall upon this world. One background is Ezekiel:

*"For thus says the Lord God: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast!*

Ezekiel 14.21 (see vv. 15-21)

In the wilderness before Israel had entered the promised land, these are the very judgments with which God had threatened Israel (Lev 16.18-28; cp. Dt 32.23-25). This direct allusion shows that as God judged Israel, his covenant people, now he is judging the whole world for it has broken covenant with God. And as those tribulations upon Israel were meant to judge the wicked and apostate, they also were meant to bring repentance to His people. Here these tribulations have the same purpose.

Another background is Zechariah 1.8-15 with the different colored horses sent to patrol the earth, and especially the four chariots in Zechariah 6.1-8, one led by red horses, one by black horses, one by white horses and one by dappled horses. They were also sent to patrol the earth - sent to the "four winds" (6.5). The horses in Revelation are not simply patrolling the earth; they are bringing forth God's judgments upon the earth.

#### *Reference to the saints*

However, though these are judgments for the whole world, these seem to include at least some reference to the suffering of God's people. In the fifth seal we see the souls of those who were *slain*. This word is used four times in Revelation describing the Lamb who was slain (5.6, 9, 12; 13.8) and twice describing the saints who are slain (here and 18.24).

Therefore, "that men should slay one another" in 6.4 (same word) may carry a special emphasis of the slaying of God's people. This also helps explain why, after the four horsemen, the fifth vision abruptly moves to "the souls of those who were slain" almost as to pick up from the slaying of v. 4.

It seems that the persecution of Christians is at least understood as a vital part of what is happening in the first four seals. Some (like Beale and Hendriksen) think it's uppermost. Support for this idea comes from the synoptic gospels (Mt, Mk, Lk) where Jesus speaks of the general suffering of mankind and in the midst of it talks of the persecution of His people. (Mk 13.7-9, 24-25; Mt 24.6-8, 29; Lk 21.9-12, 25-26 with Rv 6.2-17).

One can see how comforting this would be for those who are suffering. The "slain" under the altar represent all of God's people throughout history in all that they suffer as they bear witness to the word of God.

### *Unity*

Because of the unity of the four horsemen, it is likely that the seals are not temporal indicators but that the disasters are simultaneous. The saints (6.9-11) seem to have suffered under all four trials symbolized by the seals. Yet there is a logical order, since conquest brings about famine, pestilence and the rise of wild beasts in a devastated land. We must remember again that these are pictures that don't give all the details and instances, but they are broad strokes giving overall pictures. So, this is a summary picture of humanity against humanity in all its forms and with all the suffering that attends it.

### *Is this new?*

A question arises. John weeps because there is no one to open the seals of the scroll. Then the Lamb steps forth to take the scroll. There is the greatest anticipation. What is the content of the scroll? But the four horsemen represent destructions as old as humanity. *This* is the amazing revelation? *This* comforts the church that is necessarily caught up in these destructions?

First it is the revelation that Christ is the one who rules all things including the destructions of the earth. All that we see around us is in some way fulfilling the purpose of his reign "until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor 15.25).

Second, the fifth seal is often depicted as an interlude. Martin Kiddle (1940) urges us not to focus on the four horsemen or the final judgment at the end of chapter 6, but the fifth seal (vv. 9-11) often called just "an interlude." But "it is much too important to be thus designated as though I were of minor significance, inasmuch as it gives meaning to the vision as a whole."

This is the message to the church, that no matter what the church faces and suffers in this world, the church is safe in Christ (along with ch 7) and that their prayers play a vital role in the accomplishment of God's purposes on earth (here and in 8.1-5). "They are told in Revelation that on the stage of history, "the messianic people, the church must play the leading part." Here is not only their safety, but their significance and glory.

### *The First Seal*

The crown indicates authority, the bow, that he is a conquering warrior. The white horse indicates the victory of those who conquer. And the total focus is conquering. The purpose is to conquer. What an apt summary of the history of the world. If we began listing all the nations and tribes and peoples that have launched attacks to conquer others, it would turn into a book. Our comfort as believers is that the crown "was given to him." God is sovereign; Christ is sovereign.

This and all the judgments are precursors of final judgment. Though we will offer compassion and help in the midst of a suffering world, still we recognize that we live in a world under judgment. This is "pre-wrath" we might say, because there is yet "the wrath to come" (1 Thess 1.10). Believers are not spared as the vision of the souls slain indicates. However, believe that all things are under his sovereign hand and that while he carries out his purposes of judgment, he also sustains his people to bear witness to Christ by word and deed, bring glory to his name and by faith conquer by remaining faithful.

### *The Second Seal*

Some interpret this as the civil war, but I side with those who include every kind of violence and bloodshed, The horse is red; the rider bears a sword. Peace is removed from the earth. This is “permitted” by God. This is a terrible aspect of God’s judgment on the earth: people hurting, harming, attacking, fighting, shooting, stabbing, killing one another. The word for killing particularly means “to slaughter” or “to butcher.” Such is the world’s history, leading finally to the terrible, final, forever judgment and death (6.12-17). This is the arena in which the church lives out its faith (see again the letters to the seven churches, chapters 2-3).

### *The Third Seal*

The voice comes from the throne. This indicates its divine origin. This rider is famine, represented by the black horse and the scales for measuring food. “The balance indicates a time of scarcity when the basic commodities of life are measured out at greatly inflated prices” (Mounce). Pictured is a situation in which wheat and barley cost anywhere from 6 to 12 times the normal cost. Famine accompanies the violence depicted in the first two trumpets, even as we presently see in Gaza. At this point a limited famine is indicated. The drought that ruins the grain does not affect the deeper roots of the olives and grapes.

### *The Fourth Seal*

This horse is the yellowish-green of a dead body (Greek, *chloros*, from which we get ‘chlorine’). *Death* and *Hades* are the horrible results of sin (“in the day you eat of it, you shall surely die” Gen 2.17; “the wages of sin is death” Rm 3.23) and finally will be cast in the lake of fire to indicate the final removal of sin and all its consequences (Rev 20.14). Here it carries out its work using the same categories as we’ve already seen above from Ezekiel 14.21.

### *The Lamb is the Lord of History*

Think of the implications that it is the *Lamb* that is opening the seals! Think how he conquered all the evil done against him (Jews, Pilate, soldiers, mobs, his own followers) by enduring that evil, continuing faithfully to suffer that evil, and as a result bringing about the greatest good, the redemption and reign of His people (5.9-10). How about now *He* be given the reins of history, to bring ultimate good out of all the evil that mankind does? How about all things being subjected to Him and how about He rules until all His enemies are a footstool for His feet? How does that work for you?

But also, the stress on the slain Lamb bringing forth these judgments shows that part of his saving work involves judgment. It must be so. His death, resurrection and reign bring about the final overthrow of all his and the church’s enemies. As we have seen, that is the *goal* of his reign. That is why Kiddle wrote “by virtue of redeeming His people...a train of cosmic destruction was released, ending only when all evildoers on earth are destroyed...from the Death on the Cross flow whelming tides of divine Wrath.”

This is the flavor of Paul’s announcement to the Greeks in Athens, *The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead* (Acts 17.30-31).

Here it is the reigning Lamb who brings upon the earth the temporal judgments that plague humankind's history. And as the final judgment and closing of history is poured out with the sixth seal (6.12-17), the horsemen represent the general judgments inflicted on mankind as a result of sin. As Paul proclaimed in his gospel, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..." (Rom 1.18). These judgments are previews of final judgment - warnings of final judgment.

Christ carries out his redemptive purpose to gather all his sheep (John 10) in the midst of his judgment of the world. His people will be gathered, grown, kept and made noble in holiness and faithfulness, even as this world continues to suffer under the judgments of God.

### *The Fifth Seal*

The white robes indicate "victory, purity, and bliss" (Caird).

"...those who "overcome" in chs. 2 and 3 are all those who remain faithful to Christ in the face of various kinds of suffering and temptations to sin and compromise, not only those who die for their faith. All genuine believers will experience suffering of one sort or another as a result of their faithfulness to Christ. As Jesus put it, "Whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it" (Mark 8:35). Whether or not they are literally put to death for their faith, they have so committed themselves to the word of God and to the testimony of Christ that they have come to be identified generally with the suffering destiny of the slain Lamb, a metaphor that becomes the identity of all Christians. (Beale)

The altar is the heavenly altar and has features of both the bronze altar where animals were sacrificed and the altar of incense right before the veil which represents the prayers of the saints. This latter altar is in the forefront as we see the prayers of the saints in heaven (here and 8.3-4 e.g.). But the former altar at whose base animals' blood was poured, may be partly pictured because their souls under the altar may reference their blood being shed as a kind of sacrifice of worship and allegiance to God.

They do not cry for personal vengeance but for God's righteous justice ("holy and true").

"Those who dwell on the earth" are unbelievers throughout the earth (3.10; 8.13; 11.10; 13.8, 14; 17.8).

"until the number..."

"He has already warned the churches that they face an imminent call to become Conquerors, people in whose martyr death Christ wins again the victory of the cross. He has told them that only by the victory of the Cross has Christ won the right to open the scroll of God's purpose, both to disclose it and to put it into operation. It is not surprising then that the content of the scroll should include the story of continued martyrdom by which the final victory is to be won" (Caird)

The assurance that God will unquestionably punish the evil world becomes a motivation for Christians to persevere in their witness through suffering on earth, knowing that they are key players in helping establish the kingdom in the same ironic fashion as their Lord (e.g., see on 1:6, 9; 5:5-10). That is, through faithful endurance in trial they begin already to reign with Christ (see, e.g., 1:9). (Beale)

## Revelation 6.12 – 17

### The Final Judgment

#### *Review*

The Four Horsemen (6.1-8) are not released at the end of time. *All* the time between Christ's exaltation and reign (5.9-10, 12) and the final judgment (6.12-17) is one of suffering and tribulation. "...rampant evil will be abroad, bringing suffering to the world in general and to the church in particular, through the entire period from the time of John's vision to the time of Jesus's (sic) return...Seals 1 to 5 portray different aspects of the whole history; Seal 6 describes the day which will end it" (Wilcock). This is the purposeful context in which His people are called to live out their faith in Christ.

As Paul's team encouraged the churches, "it is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14.22) and as Peter wrote, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Pt 4.12). As he wrote earlier, these trials come "so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 1.7). *Revelation 6 and 7 provides a picture of this precious faith.*

We are comforted because the Lamb Himself is in ultimate control of these forces. He releases the seals. Only He has authority to do so. Only He has authority to rule history because he is the one who died for His people and made them a kingdom and priest to God (Rev 5.9-10). When Paul described Christ's humbling of himself to die as a servant in Phil 2.5-8, he then writes, "*Therefore* God has highly exalted him..." We too can be encouraged that however terrible the woes and suffering of this world, the reins of history have been given over to the One who in humility died for His people. We can say then that the cross rules the world, for Christ reigns to bring about the full effects of the cross both in salvation and judgment (see also John 3.16-21):

**2 Corinthians 2:14-16** But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. <sup>15</sup> For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup> to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

**John 3:35-36** The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. <sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

**Hebrews 2.3a** How shall we escape if we neglect such a salvation?

**John 5:22** For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

**John 12:48** The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

**Romans 2:16** on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

**2 Corinthians 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

## THE 6<sup>th</sup> SEAL

The Symbolism – get the overall picture! “What we have here is a symbolic picture of the terror of the judgment-day...What a picture of dread and despair, of confusion and consternation for the wicked” (Hendriksen). The earthquake “indicates that God is coming, and that the very foundations of the creation respond to his presence (cf. Rev 8.5; 11.19; 16.18; Mark 13.8; Exo 19.18; Isa 29.6; Mt 27.54).” (Poythress) This language of the tearing down of creation is found in many OT texts that describe God’s judgment (Isa 13.10-13; 24:1-6, 19-23; **34.4**; Jer 4.23-28; Eze 32.6-8; Joel 2.10, 30-31; 3.15-16; Amos 8.8-9; Hab 3.6-11).

Several of these passages refer to one nation defeating another. This makes the language of de-creation clearly figurative. The sun and moon were given to rule the day and the night (2x in Gn 1.16-18), and so the destruction of earthly power is symbolized by the destruction of sun and moon. It cannot be taken literally (compare Joel 2.30-31 which is fulfilled at Pentecost according to Peter in Acts 2 and likely indicates the coming destruction of Jerusalem as does Mt 24.29 and Mk 13.25).

This is the overturning of man in his pride against God. (Notice here the mention foremost of kings, great ones, generals, the rich and powerful.) The number 6 is the sign of man. NIV probably has the right translation of Rev 13.18: “This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.” So here in chapter 6 in the *sixth* seal affects *six* objects of creation and falls upon *six* categories of mankind (the last category is one group, the lower class, made up of slave and free). So this section underscores man in his self-professed power and glory. You can summarize this section as “God Meets Rebellious Man.” This is God’s holy war in which He defeats sinners.

And where is mighty man? Hiding among the rocks and caves. (Isa 2.6-22 is an amazing parallel where it is said three times that the prideful and haughty seek shelter in caves and holes from God’s glory in the day of judgment). In Hosea 10.8 we read, “...they shall say to the mountains, ‘Cover us’, and to the hills, ‘Fall on us’.” As Swete wrote, “What sinners dread most is not death, but the revealed Presence of God.” This is taken directly from Hos 10. The parallels (11.18; 16.14; 19.7-8) show that this must be regarded as the final day of judgment.

These OT passages upon which 6.12-17 is based have to do with judgment on idolatry (see Isaiah 2 for instance) and later, God’s similar judgments fall on those who are allies of the beast (19.7-8), have his mark (13.16) and worship him (13.15). The rest of Revelation uses “ones who dwell on the earth” exclusively of idol worshippers (8.13; 11.10; 13.8, 12, 14; 14.6-9; 17.2, 8). These “are at home in the present world order, men of earthbound vision, trusting in earthly security and unable to look beyond the things that are seen and temporal” (Caird). As Beale writes, “The unbelievers’ idol-refuge, the earth, must be removed because it has been made impermanent by the pollution of their sin...creation itself (sun, moon, stars, trees, animals, etc.) has become an idol that must be removed...these earthly securities will be ripped away so that they will appear spiritually naked before God’s judgment seat on the last day.”

So, how should this affect us?

## **Give thanks for your salvation!**

**Ephesians 2:3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

**Romans 9:22-24** What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, <sup>23</sup> in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory-- <sup>24</sup> even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

**1 Thessalonians 1:9-10** For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

**1 Thessalonians 5:9-10** For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

**Romans 5:9-10** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

## **Don't avenge yourself**

**Romans 12:17-20** Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

## **Avoid a lifestyle that will bring His wrath upon you**

**Romans 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. **Romans 2:5** But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

**Galatians 5:19-21** Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**Ephesians 5:5-8** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (cp Col 3.5-7)

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-7** <sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, <sup>5</sup> not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. <sup>7</sup> For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

**Hebrews 13:4** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.