

Revelation: Jesus Is Coming Again Soon

A study of the book of Revelation, consisting of 35 messages. Written and preached by Pastor Russell Roberts at Calvary Baptist Church and Red Springs Baptist Church from April through December of 2021.

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1. An Introduction

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Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 1:13

The prevailing opinion is that the book of Revelation was written by the apostle John while he was exiled on the island of Patmos. It was most likely between 90-95 A.D. Although the introduction of Revelation is written as an epistle to the 7 churches of Asia, most of the remainder of the book is stylistically apocalyptic and/or prophetic. The imagery and symbolism of Revelation has led to numerous debates and interpretations, many of which are scripturally sound and reasonably plausible. The Bible is not absolutely explicit in its description of the “End Times”, thereby leaving plenty of room for various opinions on the subject.

As such, Southern Baptists are not dogmatic on their interpretation of Revelation or their understanding of the “End Times”. In fact, there are many differing perspectives on this issue within the denomination. That said, all Southern Baptists do agree on the 3 central tenets of eschatology. First, Jesus will return personally and visibly to the earth. Second, the dead will be raised. Third, Christ will judge all men in righteousness - some will receive eternal life and others everlasting punishment. Beyond this, the exact details and timing of the return, resurrection, and reckoning are open to discussion.

With this in mind, I want you to know at the outset that my interpretation of Revelation may be somewhat different than yours or other such explanations you’ve encountered in the past. Many Bible scholars much more educated than myself have commented on this fascinating book. I am simply going to present Revelation from my perspective, based upon my own personal understanding of it. I do not claim to be unquestionably certain about the specifics or to have the only possible and correct explanation. Truth be told, my opinion of Revelation has changed in the past and may do so again in the future as my knowledge of scripture increases.

I. THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE POSITION

Based upon years of studying and reading the Bible, I am a proponent of the pre-tribulation rapture position. Although it is a relatively new doctrine (which makes me somewhat skeptical), having become popular in the early 1800’s, I still believe that it most accurately reconciles all of the numerous Biblical verses and passages pertaining to the “End Times”. The modern pre-tribulation rapture position is not a new revelation, in that it does not add anything to scripture. It is simply another, albeit more recent, approach to interpreting the ancient text. Just because it’s new doesn’t necessarily mean it’s wrong, though it does invite scrutiny I suppose...

Following the pre-tribulation rapture timeline, I believe that we are currently living in (and very near the end of) the Church Age. At any moment, Jesus could return in the air for His church at an event called the Rapture. After the church is removed and the Holy Spirit is absent, a 7-year period of tribulation will begin. This time will be marked by worldwide unrest, famine, and

disease. At the midpoint of the tribulation, the Antichrist will rise to power and exercise absolute authority over the earth. He will reign throughout the later half of the tribulation, a time called The Great Tribulation, during which judgments and persecutions will increase - especially against the saints of God. At the end of the tribulation period, Jesus will return from Heaven with His church, defeat the Antichrist and his followers, bind Satan, and set up His millennial kingdom on earth.

From my perspective, what I've just outlined is the most credible and literal sequence of "End Time" events. When I read, study, and teach from Revelation, this is the lens through which I look. As we work our way through this book in the coming months, you will see that its overall structure generally aligns with the pre-tribulation rapture position. That said, I believe that much of Revelation, specifically the apocalyptic portions, are not always presented in chronological order. Having this framework in mind helps us to better understand and align its events.

II. ABOUT THE REVELATION (Revelation 1:1-3)

The word "Revelation" means to disclose or communicate divine truth. God initially gave this revelation to Jesus in order that He might share it with His servants. In other words, God wanted us to know what would take place in the last days. To this end, Jesus sent His angel to relay the message to the apostle John. Upon receiving the revelation in a vision, John then faithfully and carefully wrote down everything he'd seen so that others could read it. The book of Revelation is John's testimony. Thus, the revelation originated with God, was given to Jesus, then to His angel, next to John, and finally to us on the pages of scripture.

John stated that the contents of Revelation would "soon take place". Clearly, they had not happened by the time of his writing. Therefore, the book of Revelation unveils events that will occur in the future (at least from John's vantage point, and to a large degree our own). Also, in his introduction, John pronounces a blessing on those who read and take the prophecies of Revelation to heart. Again, he says that "the time is near". There is a repeated sense of urgency in that the realization of this vision is imminent.

III. A MESSAGE TO THE 7 CHURCHES (Revelation 1:4-8)

John addressed the opening chapters of Revelation specifically to the 7 churches of Asia. While these were distinct, local churches that existed during John's lifetime, I believe that they collectively represent the Christian church at large. His observations of and instructions to each of them have broad and far-reaching implications and applications. Such is the case in the Pauline and general epistles as well. Though addressed to a particular audience, clearly the message of Revelation is not narrowly intended for only a handful of churches, but rather is given to all believers.

In my opinion, the salutation or greeting of this book can be neatly summarized in this way: "Grace and peace to you from God - the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son." While this is not the most familiar ordering of this sequence, there is nothing inherently wrong with it as all 3

members of the Trinity are co-equal. John eloquently describes each Person of the Godhead, listing Jesus last in this case because of the extended exultation ascribed to Him.

God the Father is referred to as “Him who is, and was, and is to come”. A few verses later He is also called “the Alpha and the Omega” and “the Almighty”. These names highlight the timeless nature and unlimited power of the Father. God the Holy Spirit is enigmatically described as “the seven spirits who are before His throne.” This name speaks to the perfection and completeness of the Holy Spirit while also emphasizing His various functions (Isaiah 11:2).

Finally, God the Son is named “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” Jesus showed His love for us and saved us from the just consequence of our sins by dying on the cross as our substitute. Furthermore, He has made us into a kingdom of priests to God the Father. For doing these amazing things, John exalts the Lord declaring that He deserves all glory, praise, and dominion forever. Amen!

In the final sentence of His introductory remarks, John plainly states the main idea of Revelation. Jesus will someday return to the earth, coming in the clouds, in like fashion to His ascension (Acts 1:9-11). When He comes, everyone will see Him - including those who rejected and crucified Him - and all of His earthly enemies will mourn His arrival. This is the central and indisputable truth of the “End Times” - Jesus is coming again!

CONCLUSION

There are many possible and valid interpretations of Revelation. In this series, I am going to present my own personal perspective. That said, I cordially invite you to share your opinions and insights with me as we progress through this book. Perhaps we can sharpen one another's understanding of eschatology. While we may differ on some particulars, we can undoubtedly agree that Jesus is coming again. Regardless of how it all unfolds, the most important question is this - will you be ready when He arrives?

2. Messages to the 7 Churches (Part 1)

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You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. - Mark 12:30

As we learned last week, the book of Revelation opens with a few general statements. First, it describes the manner in which the Revelation was communicated from God to Jesus, from Jesus to His angel, from the angel to John, and finally from John to us (in written form). Second, it indicates that God purposefully wanted Jesus to share this important message with His servants. Third, there is a blessing conferred upon those who read and heed its prophecies. Fourth, it conveys a repeated sense of urgency regarding the prophecies contained therein.

After making these introductory remarks, John includes a greeting to the 7 churches of Asia. These churches collectively represent the church at large. He invokes the grace and peace of the triune God to rest upon them, and then writes a brief exultation to Jesus Christ. Before going any farther, John makes his thesis statement - the main idea of this entire book. Jesus is coming again visibly and personally to the earth.

This morning, as we continue our new sermon series through Revelation, we will begin our exploration of John's messages to the 7 churches of Asia. As we do this, let's consider how these lessons apply to Christian churches today - especially our own.

I. THE PATMOS VISION (Revelation 1:9-11)

The apostle John described himself as someone who was very familiar with persecution and suffering for the cause of Christ. In fact, he had been banished to the island of Patmos for this very reason - his public and unyielding testimony of Jesus. Patmos was a small island, just off the western coast of Asia Minor in the Aegean Sea, that served as a Roman penal colony. Prisoners were sent there to endure heavy labor as a consequence of their crime(s).

On a particular Sunday during his exile there, John came under the influence of the Holy Spirit. He heard a loud, trumpet-like voice speaking behind him. This voice instructed him to write down everything that he was about to see (in his forthcoming vision) and send it to the nearby local churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

II. THE GLORIOUS MESSENGER (Revelation 1:12-20)

John turned around to see who was speaking to him. There stood Jesus, "one like the Son of man", clothed in a long robe and wrapped around the chest in a golden sash. His hair was white like wool, His eyes ablaze like fire, and His feet glowing as burnished bronze. He spoke the word of God, described as a sharp-two edged sword, and His voice sounded like the roaring of many waters. He was standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands, and in His right hand He held 7 stars.

Upon seeing Jesus, John immediately fell at His feet. Jesus placed His hand on John and told him not to be afraid. Then the Lord identified Himself as “the first and the last”, “the living One”, He who was raised from the dead to live evermore, and He who has control over death and Hades. Jesus once again instructed John to write the things which he had seen, was seeing, and would see. Finally, Jesus explained that the 7 lampstands encircling Him represented the churches of Asia and the 7 stars in His hand were their “angels”.

The Greek word “aggelos” is translated as either angel or messenger. On most occasions it refers to a supernatural being, but it can also apply to a natural person. John the Baptist was referred to as an “aggelos” (see Mark 1:2). While there are different interpretations of the 7 “angels” in Jesus’ right hand, I believe that they most likely represent the human pastors or leaders of these churches. These men would serve as the messengers of this vision to their respective congregations. Personally, I take great comfort in the thought that I (as a pastor) am being held safely and securely in Jesus’ hand.

III. THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS (Revelation 2:1-7)

The first of these 7 messages is addressed to the pastor and congregation of the church at Ephesus. Harkening back to His earlier comments, Jesus now presents Himself as “the One who holds the 7 stars in His right hand” and “who walks among the 7 golden lampstands”. At the beginning of most of these letters, Jesus will describe Himself with an excerpt from His original introduction to John on the island of Patmos.

Jesus begins by commending the Ephesian church for several of their good deeds. He mentions 4 of them specifically. First, they are a hard-working church, busily engaged in various forms of ministry. Second, they exhibit perseverance by tirelessly enduring for the cause of Christ despite facing ongoing persecution. Third, they do not tolerate evil people or allow their fellowship to be tainted by unrepentant sinners. Fourth, they carefully guard themselves against false teachers and dismiss those who promote heresy, such as the Nicolaitans.

The Nicolaitans were one of several heretical sects that existed during the first century. Some Bible commentators have speculated that they were the followers of Nicholas, one of the first 7 deacons chosen to serve the New Testament church (see Acts 6:5). According to this theory, Nicholas eventually denied the faith, became an apostate, and brazenly embraced false doctrine. The Nicolaitans were known for eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. They practiced and taught a lifestyle of indulgence and licentiousness which grossly perverted the true meaning of grace.

Despite all of its positive attributes, Jesus rebuked the church at Ephesus for leaving its “first love”. In other words, their affection for God had grown cold. The joy and passion for Christ that they’d experienced previously was all but gone. Their worship, ministry, and service had become nothing more than religious activity. Though they were doing good deeds, they lacked the proper motivation. Apart from love, their work was largely in vain (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Jesus urged the Ephesians to remember and rekindle the warm adoration and devotion that they'd once had for the Lord. He called them to forsake their halfheartedness and apathy and to return to the intimacy of their former days. Furthermore, He warned them that they'd lose their godly influence and standing if they failed to repent.

Jesus ended his remarks (attributed also to the Holy Spirit) to the Ephesian church by extending His message to all believers. Leaving your first love, as He described it, is a danger that all Christians face. This is why we must constantly refresh and revive our relationship with Jesus. We must carefully maintain our affection and closeness with Him. Speaking from experience, nothing is more mundane and exhausting than Christianity apart from a vibrant, loving relationship with Jesus. Finally, those who overcome will be given access to the tree of life which is in "the Paradise of God" (see Revelation 22:2).

CONCLUSION

Today's message is the first of a three part overview of Jesus' comments to the 7 churches of Asia. Each of these 7 churches had its strengths and weaknesses. Over the years, theologians have characterized each of these churches in a particular way. The church at Ephesus, which we discussed this morning, is often described as "The Loveless Church". Have you ever visited or been a member of a congregation like this? I have, and it was awful! Beloved, we must always remember that our first and foremost responsibility as individual Christians and as a local church body is simply to love God completely with all that we have and with all that we are. Everything else must flow from our loving commitment to the Lord.

Next week we will continue with part 2 of this timely message as we consider Jesus' words to the churches at Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira. As you probably expect, there are more lessons to be learned from His statements. Until then, take some time each day to tell God how much you love Him.

3. Messages to the 7 Churches (Part 2)

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You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. - James 4:4

In the first sermon of this series, I described the Pre-Tribulation Rapture timeline of eschatology and explained briefly why I am a proponent of it. From my perspective, this is the framework that best supports and reconciles the various events spoken about in Revelation. According to this theological position, we are currently living in (and perhaps very near to the end of) the Church Age. The Church Age will conclude when Jesus returns for all Christians (both the living and dead) at an event called the Rapture.

I believe that the first 3 chapters of Revelation collectively represent the Church Age. Chapter 1 provides an account of events immediately leading up to John's incredible vision, while chapters 2 & 3 relate specifically to the 7 churches of Asia and generally to the Christian church at large. Some Bible commentators have suggested that these 7 churches represent 7 periods or subdivisions of the Church Age. While this theory has some general merit, it is rather ambiguous and speculative. For me, the much greater emphasis is that the 7 churches of Asia depict different types of churches that can be found at all times throughout the Church Age.

This morning we will continue with part 2 of our 3-part message on the 7 churches of Asia. Last week we introduced this portion of Revelation and talked about the church at Ephesus. As you may remember, it is widely known as "The Loveless Church". In today's sermon, we will consider 3 more of these New Testament churches.

I. THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA (Revelation 2:8-11)

The second letter is addressed to the leader and congregation of the church at Smyrna. Jesus begins by identifying Himself as "The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life". As is the case in most of these letters, Jesus' greeting to each church refers back to His original introduction to John in chapter 1.

Jesus acknowledged that the church of Smyrna was experiencing difficulties, trouble, and tribulation. They were being smeared and slandered by unbelieving and unsaved Jews. Though rich with the spiritual blessings of God, from an earthly perspective the church and its members were poor and lowly. What's more, Jesus predicted that their suffering would continue and foretold that some would even be tested by being thrown into prison. That said, He urged them to remain faithful and not to be afraid.

In His remarks, Jesus spoke pointedly of a coming tribulation that would last for "10 days". There are differing interpretations of what this prediction refers to. Some suggest that it points to a decade-long Roman persecution of the Smyrnan church that took place during the

mid-second century. During these years of intense persecution, the pastor of the church at Smyrna (an early church father named Polycarp) was martyred in approximately 156 AD. We cannot be absolutely certain about the specific meaning of the “10 days”, but this explanation is definitely possible. The greater point is that the church at Smyrna had already and would continue to suffer for the cause of Christ. It is characterized as “The Suffering Church”.

This letter closes with a promise that those who remained faithful, even unto death, would receive the crown of life (see James 1:12). Jesus advised every believer to hear and take this message to heart. He promised that everyone who perseveres and overcomes the trials of life will not be harmed by the “second death” (see Revelation 20:14).

II. THE MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM (Revelation 2:12-17)

The third letter is written to the pastor and people of the church at Pergamum. Pergamum was a beautiful, art-filled cultural center known for its worship of pagan gods. In His salutation, Jesus identified Himself as “the One who has the sharp two-edged sword”.

The city of Pergamum was originally founded by the Greeks. A large and ornate altar had been built there as a monument to their chief god Zeus. When Rome came to power, they adopted this magnificent structure as their own. The mythological and false gods of Greece, Rome, and other ancient cultures all served as competitors and rivals of the one true, living God. With this in mind, many Bible commentators believe that Jesus was referring to the altar to Zeus when He spoke about “Satan’s throne”. He also described Pergamum as the place where “Satan dwells”.

Jesus started by acknowledging that the church in Pergamum was located in a challenging city. He applauded them for remaining faithful and demonstrating courage despite their arduous circumstances and idolatrous environment, specifically mentioning their refusal to deny the faith during the days of Antipas. According to tradition, Antipas was a student of John who had become the bishop or pastor of the church at Pergamum. He was a physician as well. He was martyred by the Romans during the mid to late first century (the exact date is disputed) by being roasted to death in a brazen or copper bull.

After complimenting their faith, Jesus then listed some serious problems that greatly hindered the Pergamum church. Some of their members followed the teachings of Balaam, an Old Testament prophet who had been hired by Balak to curse Israel (see Numbers 22-24). Still others embraced the heresies of the Nicolaitans, who were also mentioned in the earlier letter to Ephesus. The church was knowingly permitting these congregants to eat foods that had been sacrificed to idols and to practice acts of sexual immorality. Jesus sternly warned them to either repent or face judgment. The excessive tolerance of the church at Pergamum has led it to become known as “The Compromising Church”.

At the end of the letter, there is a call for all believers to listen and learn from the instructions given to the Pergamum church. All Christians have to be careful about compromising the things of God with those of the world. The one who overcomes will receive 2 things - some hidden

manna and a white stone with a new name on it that is known only by the one who receives it. Though the exact meaning of these gifts is disputed, the most common interpretations are that the hidden manna represents the miraculous spiritual provision of Jesus (see John 6:48-51) and the white stone inscribed with the new name symbolizes a ticket providing privileged access into God's presence (mirroring the Roman custom of rewarding athletic victors with white stones that entitled them to participate in an award's banquet). Stated plainly, the redeemed will ultimately enjoy the Lord's eternal presence and provision.

III. THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA (Revelation 2:18-29)

The fourth letter is addressed to the pastor and congregation of the church in Thyatira. Jesus opened it by identifying Himself as "The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like burnished bronze". He then complimented the church for their love, faith, service, perseverance, and "greater works". Apparently, perhaps due to its growth, this church was doing more for the Lord presently than it had done previously.

Despite these strengths, Jesus condemned the church of Thyatira for tolerating a false prophetess that He dubbed as "Jezebel". Perhaps this was her actual name, but it is most likely a reference to the wicked Queen of Israel, the wife of King Ahab, described in the Old Testament (see 1 Kings 18 and 21). This Jezebel-like woman was leading the Christians of Thyatira astray into sinful and adulterous conduct. Jesus explained that He'd given her ample time to repent, but she'd outright refused. Therefore, He promised to throw her onto a bed of sickness and cast her unrepentant sexual partners into great tribulation. This warning should be understood both literally and metaphorically. In addition, Jesus declared that He'd kill her children with the plague so that all the churches would know undoubtedly that He is the Lord. For their sin, the church of Thyatira is often thought of as "The Adulterous Church".

Jesus urged those who had resisted Jezebel's charms and remained faithful to hold fast until He arrived. He promised to give overcomers "authority over the nations", just as He Himself had been given ruling authority by His Father. Christians will reign with Christ during the Millennium (see Revelation 20:6). Furthermore, Jesus promised to give His children "the morning star". In essence, He was promising to give Himself - "the bright and morning star" (see Revelation 22:16) - completely and eternally to His people. May all Christians hear and give special attention to this message!

CONCLUSION

The churches of Pergamum and Thyatira were both infected with the same disease - spiritual compromise. They had been infiltrated by false teachers who misled many. They permitted sinful conduct to remain in their midst unchecked. They listened to and promoted heresies and even chased after worldly lusts. Meanwhile, in nearby Smyrna, the church was suffering from intense persecution and oppression because of its refusal to compromise the truth of God.

Inevitably, most churches will take on one of these 2 characteristics. They will either stand resolutely and unapologetically for Christ while resisting immorality, which will most certainly invite suffering and tribulation, or they will prostitute themselves by compromising with the Devil and this fallen world ultimately destroying their testimony and effectiveness. Which are we?

4. Messages to the 7 Churches (Part 3)

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For I do not want you, brothers and sisters, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; - Romans 11:25

Late in his life, around the turn of the first century, the Apostle John was exiled by the Romans to the small island of Patmos. While serving his sentence there, one Sunday John received an incredible vision from God. The vision began with Jesus standing among 7 lampstands and holding 7 stars in His right hand. Jesus identified and introduced Himself, and then He dictated messages to the 7 churches of Asia.

We have already discussed the first 4 of these letters - those addressed to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyra. This morning we will briefly examine the final 3 letters. These are found in Revelation chapter 3. Turn there and let's begin.

I. THE MESSAGE TO SARDIS (Revelation 3:1-6)

The fifth message is written to the church at Sardis. Jesus described Himself as "He who has the 7 spirits of God and the 7 stars". By way of reminder, the stars are commonly identified as the pastors or leaders of the churches. The 7 spirits of God, mentioned and discussed earlier in chapter 1 verse 4, are generally believed to be the Holy Spirit (see Zechariah 4:1-7).

Unlike His other letters, Jesus had nothing positive to say about the church at Sardis. He didn't applaud them for their service or ministry. He did not commend them for their faith or perseverance. Instead, He bluntly charged that though they appeared to be alive they were, in fact, dead. Though they had a congregation who met regularly, their church was spiritually lifeless. The Holy Spirit was notably absent from their gatherings. For this reason, the church at Sardis is known as "The Dead Church".

What is a dead church? There are several descriptors that could be given, but let's highlight just a few of them. A dead church doesn't do anything, nor does it really want to do anything. Its members have little to no desire for missions or evangelism. They don't give generously through their tithes and offering. They don't want to serve, teach, or volunteer in any way. Discipleship is neglected. The preaching is powerless and uninspiring. The church makes virtually no impact on its community or neighborhood. It has forgotten why it exists. And, perhaps most notably, it isn't growing - either spiritually or physically.

Fortunately, God has the power to raise the dead. He urged the church at Sardis to wake up and to strengthen what remained, for it wasn't completely past the point of resuscitation. He advised them to remember the things they received and heard, and called them to repent and obey. If they failed to do so, however, Jesus warned that He'd come to them unexpectedly like a thief. To

those few in Sardis who had not dirtied themselves by the stains of sin, Jesus promised a “white” robe.

As is the case in each letter, Jesus extended this message to all believers. He promised that everyone who overcame would be given white garments as a token of their righteousness. Furthermore, their names would not be erased from the Book of Life (see Revelation 20:15) and He would personally confess their names before the Father and His angels (see Luke 12:8).

II. THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA (Revelation 3:7-13)

The sixth letter is addressed to the people and pastor at Philadelphia. Jesus introduced Himself as the One “who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David”. Among other things, this points to Jesus’ dominion and control over the house of David (Isaiah 22:22). It also alludes to His providential authority and ability to open and close doors in our lives.

Jesus complimented the church at Philadelphia for several things. First, He commended them for recognizing and taking advantage of the many opportunities for service that He had provided. Next, He applauded them for working in His strength, rather than their own. Then He praised them for carefully honoring and following His word. Lastly, He approved their courage and unwillingness to deny His name.

The church at Philadelphia is referred to as “The Faithful Church”. Jesus promised that these Christians would someday receive vindication, in that their adversaries (“those of the synagogue of Satan”) would ultimately bow before them and acknowledge them as beloved children of God. Jesus further promised to keep them “from the hour of testing... which is about to come upon the whole world”. His words provide strong support for a pre-tribulation rapture.

Jesus stated that He is coming quickly and told the Philadelphia believers to hold fast. He pledged to make those who overcame a “pillar in the temple of My God”, pointing to their supportive strength and permanence in His kingdom. Furthermore, Jesus promised to write on them the name of His God, His city (see Revelation 21:10-27), and His own new name. All born-again Christians will be identified as children of God, citizens of the New Jerusalem, and co-heirs with our Lord Jesus Christ.

III. THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA (Revelation 3:14-22)

The seventh message is directed to the church at Laodicea. Jesus called Himself “The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Origin of the creation of God”. This is comparable to saying “The Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end”. It highlights His eternal nature.

Jesus rebuked the church at Laodicea for being neither hot nor cold. It is thought of as “The Lukewarm Church”. He said, in essence, “You make me sick to my stomach.” Apparently, this church was wealthy, prominent, and held a high opinion of itself. In stark contrast, Jesus described it as spiritually “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”. He urged the members

to seek His riches, to clothe themselves in His righteousness, and to be cured of their spiritual blindness. Jesus reprimanded them and called them to repentance because He loved them.

Jesus described Himself as one standing outside and knocking on the door. He pleaded for anyone who heard Him to open the door and let Him in. Though this imagery is often applied to the individual heart and the receiving of salvation, in context it most directly pertains to the Laodician church. Jesus had been shut-out of their congregation! Fortunately, He had not abandoned them completely and patiently longed for reconciliation and renewed fellowship.

Jesus promised that the “one who overcomes” would be allowed to sit “with Me on My throne”, just as He Himself had been seated with His Father on His throne. Those who trust in Christ for salvation will reign with Him. May everyone hear and heed Jesus’ powerful messages to these 7 churches, spoken to us through the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

The 7 churches of Asia each had differing strengths and weaknesses. These varied characteristics have been shared by churches throughout the Church Age. The lessons we learn from them are still relevant and applicable today. Let’s take one last look:

Ephesus - “The Loveless Church” - busily engaged in ministry, but lacking in their love for Jesus

Smyrna - “The Suffering Church” - enduring intense persecution for the cause of Christ

Pergamum - “The Compromising Church” - persisting in a harsh environment, but compromising themselves to the culture

Thyatira - “The Adulterous Church” - growing and thriving, but tolerant of false teaching and empty philosophies

Sardis - “The Dead Church” - meeting regularly, but not growing, serving, giving, or making any meaningful impact for Christ

Philadelphia - “The Faithful Church” - faithfully engaged in ministry and carefully keeping His word

Laodicea - “The Lukewarm Church” - active and wealthy, but prideful, self-righteous, and self-reliant

As we move into chapter 4 next week, the setting of John’s vision makes a dramatic shift. The topic transitions away from this present Church Age and looks forward to the coming of Last Days. We will begin our discussion and examination of the Apocalypse. I can hardly wait!

5. The Heavenly Throne Room

Originally Preached on 5/9/2021

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. - 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

The first 3 chapters of Revelation take place on the earth. While imprisoned on the island of Patmos, John heard an angelic voice and turned around to see Jesus. After introducing Himself, Jesus delivered brief and distinct messages to the 7 churches of Asia. Collectively, these churches represent all Christian churches during the Church Age and highlight various characteristics of each.

As previously stated, the Church Age will end when Jesus returns for His church at an event called the Rapture. Someday the trumpet shall sound, Jesus will descend from Heaven with a shout, all Christians - both living and dead - will rise up to meet Him in the air, and together they will all ascend back into Heaven. In an instant, "the twinkling of an eye", millions of people will vanish from the earth.

In the immediate aftermath of the Rapture, there will be a brief season of confusion and chaos on the earth. Families will be inexplicably missing loved ones, businesses will be missing workers, and churches will be largely empty. The world's economy will suffer a heavy blow. However, as is often the case following catastrophic events, a spirit of goodwill and cooperation will break out between the unsaved peoples and nations that remain. This short, unspecified span of time is the prelude to the Tribulation.

Chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation provide a picture of what happens in Heaven from the time of the Rapture until the beginning of the Tribulation. The imagery and descriptions given in these chapters is similar to those found in the Old Testament books of Isaiah and Ezekiel. As we study God's word this morning, try to imagine for yourself what John was seeing...

I. GOD ON HIS THRONE (Revelation 4:1-3)

After his lengthy encounter with Jesus discussing the 7 churches, John looked up and saw a door standing open in heaven silently beckoning. The angel who had first spoken to him (Revelation 1:10-11), whose voice sounded like a trumpet, invited him to come up and see the things which were yet to take place. Immediately, in his vision, John was transported to Heaven. His sudden relocation from earth to Heaven, accompanied by the trumpet-like voice of the angel, paints a clear picture of the Rapture.

Upon his arrival in Heaven, John began describing the incredible things that he saw. There was a throne and Someone glorious was seated upon it. The One sitting on this throne had the appearance of 2 precious jewels or stones - jasper and sardius. An emerald rainbow encircled

the throne as well. To his amazement, John was standing in a heavenly throne room, and God the Father was seated there in front of him!

Some commentators have suggested that the colors of the stones are meaningful. Jasper is clear, like a diamond, perhaps referring to God's purity and perfection. Sardius is ruby red, portraying God as our Redeemer. Interestingly, these 2 stones are the first and last on the high priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:17-20), alluding to God as "The beginning and end". As for the emerald rainbow, green is the color of life and the rainbow a symbol of God's promise to Noah. It is possible that this symbol represents God's promise to believers of eternal life.

II. OTHERS AROUND THE THRONE (Revelation 4:4-8a)

There were several others present with God in His heavenly throne room. John saw 24 smaller thrones that were spaced out around God's throne. On these thrones sat 24 elders, each in white garments and wearing a golden crown. The white garments represent righteousness and the crowns are symbolic of victory. Though these elders are never specifically identified, it stands to reason that they will be Christians who have just been raptured. Some people believe that these 24 elders are the 12 apostles and the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel. This view seems somewhat unlikely to me, seeing that the Rapture is exclusively for the Church and does not include Israel.

Flashes of lightning and peals of thunder, depicting God's almighty power, were emanating from His throne. Before the throne were 7 burning lamps of fire, which are identified as "the 7 spirits of God". John uses this figurative expression 4 times in the book of Revelation, and as we've already discussed, it most likely refers to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we see that the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit is now in Heaven rather than on earth indwelling believers - yet another indication that the Rapture has already taken place.

John also saw something like a sea of glass or crystal. Many think this refers to a large, translucent, ocean-like body of water or surface that spread out before the throne room. Finally, around the throne and in the center he saw 4 living creatures. These creatures had eyes all around, in front and behind. They each had 6 wings, like the Seraphim angels (see Isaiah 6:2). John described the first creature as a lion, the second as a calf, the third as a man, and the fourth as an eagle. There are several theories as to what these different creatures represent, and I myself remain uncertain.

III. WORSHIPING THE LORD ALMIGHTY (Revelation 4:8b-11)

In addition to all that he saw, John heard the 4 living creatures continually worshiping God. They did not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." Perhaps God's greatest characteristic is holiness. He is absolutely perfect in every way, infinitely good, all powerful, set apart, highly exalted, and unlike any other. Furthermore, He is eternal - without beginning or end - and self-existent.

As he watched, John saw the 24 elders who were seated around God cast their crowns before His throne, fall down, and begin to worship Him. They said, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." These elders recognized God's immeasurable worthiness and acknowledged Him as the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

The main point is that everyone present in the heavenly throne room was worshiping the LORD. God is completely holy and righteous, and deserving of all worship and praise. In fact, the primary purpose of mankind (and all of creation for that matter) is to love and worship Him. While critics decry God as insecure for constantly needing affirmation and strokes of affection, they don't grasp His gloriously divine nature. God alone is worthy of worship, and to Him all praise and honor is due forever.

CONCLUSION

This heavenly throne room will be the primary setting from which John witnesses the numerous events of Revelation to follow. From this lofty vantage point, he will describe things that happen both there and on the earth below. As we continue through this book, we will discover other furnishings and structures that are located in or nearby the throne room. We will also see other characters who appear there.

As we close today's service, I invite you to consider how sincere your worship for God truly is. Do you praise and honor Him wholeheartedly and continuously? Do you believe that He is worthy of such worship? Let's wrap things up by taking a few moments to exalt the LORD and glorify His wonderful name!

6. The Lamb Is Worthy

Originally Preached on 5/16/2021

You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. - 1 Peter 1:18-19

John refers to Jesus as the Lamb approximately 30 times in the book of Revelation. According to the Old Testament law, lambs (and other certain animals) were sacrificed in the tabernacle and temple to atone for sin. God justly demands the shedding of blood as the price for the remission of sin. These sacrifices had a limited effect and were repeated frequently, resulting in the deaths of thousands of animals. All of these offerings were, in fact, merely a picture of the Savior to come. It was the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ - the holy, divine Lamb of God - that paid the full debt of sin once and for all!

In today's message, Jesus will once again enter the scene. He will do something that He alone is capable of doing. Once again, let's envision the heavenly throne room where the Father sits exalted on His throne. The 4 living creatures fly about Him, the 24 elders surround Him, and the crystal sea spreads out before Him. Can you see it? Okay then, let's begin...

I. THE SCROLL WITH 7 SEALS (Revelation 5:1-4)

After describing many glorious details of the heavenly throne room, John returned his attention to God the Father (who was seated on the throne in the center). He noticed something in the Father's right hand. It was a scroll, with writing on both sides of the paper, which was sealed with 7 seals. The scroll's voluminous text highlights the extensive nature of the judgments to follow, while the seals indicate that these judgments contained therein were predetermined and preserved until the right time.

John saw a strong angel loudly declare, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?" To his dismay, no one could be found worthy of the task. None of those in Heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth were properly qualified to open the scroll or view its contents. This search to find someone fit to break the seals encompassed all 3 realms of God's creation - Heaven, Hell, and the earth.

When no created being could be found to open the scroll, John began to cry profusely. He was desperate to find out what was written inside. He was devastated at the thought that the scroll's contents would remain unknown. Was anyone worthy to open the Father's scroll?

II. THE LAMB TAKES THE SCROLL (Revelation 5:5-7)

As John wept, one of the elders seated around the throne consoled him saying, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to be able to open the scroll and its seven seals." John looked up and saw Jesus, the Lamb of God,

standing between the Father's throne, where the 4 living creatures were, and the elders' thrones which encircled it. Jesus approached God the Father and took the scroll from His hand.

Jesus is figuratively described in these verses as a slaughtered lamb with 7 horns and 7 eyes. This refers to His sacrificial and substitutionary death, through which He made atonement for man's sin. The eyes and horns point to His kingship and dominion, as well as His insight and omniscient awareness. They are also symbolic of the 7 spirits of God, which we've already identified in this series as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who had been sent out to the earth during the Church Age, was now in Heaven with the Father and the Son.

In these few verses, Jesus is called "the Lion from the tribe of Judah", "the Root of David", and the "Lamb". Hailing from the Jewish tribe of Judah, He is the majestic, powerful King over all of God's creation. He is the descendant of David, who reigns over God's people eternally. He is the Lamb who was slain to secure man's forgiveness and salvation!

III. WORSHIPING THE LAMB (Revelation 5:8-14)

When Jesus took the scroll from His Father's hand, the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures fell down before Him. Each elder held a harp and a golden bowl of incense, which symbolically contained the prayer of the saints (that is, Christians from all ages). God was on the verge of giving a final and long-awaited answer to these prayers. The creatures and elders began singing a new song declaring Jesus' exceptional worthiness to open the scroll. He offered Himself sacrificially to pay the price of redemption for all mankind, making all believers into a kingdom of priests who will someday reign with Him upon the earth.

Suddenly John saw "myriads of myriads" of angels, thousands of thousands, surrounding the throne. In the Greek a myriad is 10,000, so a "myriad of myriads" is at least 100,000,000. In other words, angels blanketed the sky as far as he could see. They joined their voices with those of the living creatures and the elders. Collectively they shouted in unison, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing."

As if this amazing heavenly chorus was not enough already, John then heard the voices of every created thing join in the praise. This included all of those in Heaven, those on the earth, those on and in the sea, and even those under the earth. It is noteworthy that even those who'd rejected Christ during their lives and had been consigned to Hell due to their unrepented sin were also recognizing and acknowledging Jesus as the Lord of all (see Philippians 2:9-11).

CONCLUSION

In last week's message on Revelation chapter 4, John drew a beautiful picture of a heavenly throne room where God the Father was seated. All of those present worshiped and ascribed the highest praise to Him. In today's message in Revelation chapter 5, Jesus enters the scene and is showered with similar worship and adoration.

This leads us to consider an important question. If the Father is worthy of all praise and adoration, how then can we rightly worship the Son also? To worship Jesus would logically take away from the praise due exclusively to the Father. If He is entitled to all of it, then none is left for Christ. Yet, the same creatures who worshiped and paid tribute to the Father did likewise to the Son. How is this reconcilable?

The answer is simple, though it defies an explanation. Both the Father and the Son, though distinct Persons, are one God. They, along with the Holy Spirit, form the Trinity. Each member of the Godhead has unique personal attributes, but all share the same nature, essence, and being. With this in mind, when worship is directed specifically toward God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit it is ascribed to all Three.

The main point is this - Jesus is God. As such, He is worthy of our praise of adoration. He alone is qualified to open the scroll of God's judgment, because He alone overcame sin and conquered death. In the words of my favorite singer and songwriter, Andrew Peterson, "Is He worthy? Is He worthy, to receive blessing and honor and glory? Is He worthy of this? He is!"

Next week, we will move into the portion of Revelation which covers the Tribulation. It begins with the breaking of the 7 seals and spans from chapters 6 through 19. I hope you'll join us. Until then, may God bless you!

7. The First 4 Seals

Originally Preached on 5/23/2021

And he [the Antichrist] will confirm a covenant [peace treaty] with the many [Israel] for one week [7 years]... - Daniel 9:27a

At the Rapture of the Church, the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit will be removed from the earth (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). It is the Holy Spirit who currently restrains or prevents the rise of the Antichrist. In His absence, conditions will be ripe for unparalleled tribulation, rampant evil, and the Antichrist's reign of terror.

The after effects of the Rapture will cause tremendous chaos and confusion upon the earth. In the wake of this worldwide catastrophe, I believe that the people of the world will come together in a spirit of compromise and goodwill. Among other things, many of these nations - including some who were formerly hostile toward her - will join together in signing a multilateral peace agreement with Israel. One of these signatories will be the Antichrist, though at this point his true identity will not be known and his power not yet consolidated.

This portion of Revelation focuses on the events taking place above, in God's throne room, where Jesus is preparing to open the scroll with 7 seals. Many Bible scholars believe that the signing of this historic peace treaty on earth will coincide precisely with the breaking of the first seal in Heaven. These 2 simultaneous occurrences will mark the official beginning of the 7-year Tribulation.

I.THE FIRST SEAL: THE ANTICHRIST (Revelation 6:1-2)

There in the heavenly throne room, as everyone eagerly watched, Jesus broke the first seal. At this moment, the Tribulation on earth began. One of the 4 living creatures, who fly around the throne continuously worshiping God, said to John, "Come!" (which translates as "Behold"). John looked up and saw a rider on white horse. The rider had a bow, but strangely no arrows. He was given a crown and then sent out to conquer the earth.

Most commentators believe that the first horseman is the spirit of the Antichrist. He rode a white horse in order to mimic Jesus, the true Conqueror, who would later return on a white horse at His second coming (Revelation 19:11). The horseman had a bow, yet no arrows, which suggests that he will be a man of peace and diplomacy - at least for a while. He was given a crown, indicating that his authority over the earth during the Tribulation will be God-given. He went to earth with the mission to conquer and subdue its people.

I believe that the spirit of the Antichrist will come and rest upon a particular world leader. He will become remarkably charismatic and charming. He will be a brilliant statesman, politician, and diplomat. His speech will be flattering and inspirational. His ability to solve problems will be unmatched. Many nations will willingly turn to him, cede their power to him, and align

themselves with his rule. During the first half of the Tribulation (3 ½ years) the Antichrist will gradually increase in power and influence, eventually exercising dominion over the entire earth.

II. THE SECOND SEAL: WAR (Revelation 6:3-4)

Jesus then broke the second seal of the scroll. Another of the living creatures said, "Come!" John saw a rider on a red horse who was given authority (by God) to take peace from the earth. He was sent specifically to make war, to stir up conflict, and to cause the nations of the world to fight against and kill one another. His purpose is symbolized by the large sword that was given to him.

Following a brief season of harmony and peace, during which the Antichrist will begin to gain prominence, many of the world's leaders will revert back to their old, aggressive nature. In their quest for power, warfare will break out between the nations and persist throughout the Tribulation. As the world's armies clash with one another, millions of people will die. Over time, the Antichrist will become increasingly militant and violent as well.

III. THE THIRD SEAL: FAMINE (Revelation 6:5-6)

Jesus then broke the third seal and another of the living creatures said, "Come!" This time John saw a rider on a black horse who was holding a pair of scales in his hand. John heard a voice coming from the center of the 4 living creatures which said, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine." Based on the location given, many commentators believe the voice is that of God. Furthermore, they identify the third horseman as famine, accompanied by inflation and economic turmoil.

It has been estimated that, during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, a single denarius could buy roughly 10 quarts of wheat or 30 quarts of barley. The prices given in these verses are highly inflated, which strongly suggests a massive food shortage. The contributors to this famine might include adverse weather conditions and natural catastrophes, ongoing warfare and destruction, and perhaps even economic manipulation and corruption. During the Tribulation, thousands will die due to starvation, malnutrition, and an inability to acquire affordable, quality food.

Even in this, however, God placed a limit on horsemen's destruction. He commanded the third rider not to damage the oil and wine, both of which were commonly used for cooking and drinking. Interestingly, these 2 commodities were poured on the wounds of the injured man in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:34). This restriction has been seen by some commentators as a sign of God's mercy, even in the midst of hardship and tribulation.

IV. THE FOURTH SEAL: DEATH (Revelation 6:7-8)

When Jesus broke the scroll's fourth seal, the last living creature also said, "Come!" John saw a rider on an ashen or pale horse. The rider was named Death, and Hades followed along with him. This last horseman seems to be a culmination of the previous 3, as the conquest of the

Antichrist, perpetual warfare, and debilitating famine would naturally lead to countless deaths. In addition, this horseman would also bring pestilence, infectious disease, and a strange and violent uprising of the animal kingdom against the inhabitants of the earth.

This rider was given authority to kill a fourth of the world's population. Currently, that number is projected to be almost 2 billion people (and growing). A death toll of this size is hard to imagine and provides insight into the staggering horrors of the coming Tribulation. To make matters worse, the overwhelming majority of these fatalities will be lost and condemned to Hell. These deaths would likely not occur all at once, but rather over the course of 7 years.

CONCLUSION

The section of Revelation that deals with the Tribulation is broadly structured in 3 stages of judgments: 7 seals, followed by 7 trumpets, and finally 7 bowls. Parenthetical details are included periodically, which provide several extended breaks in the sequence. Some commentators believe that these 21 judgments are listed in the precise order in which they will occur. I, however, do not share this opinion. I agree that John described things chronologically as he saw them in his vision, but am convinced that they were not presented to him in perfect order. I will explain my position as we move along through this series together.

From my perspective, the first 4 seals (which are symbolized by the 4 "Horsemen of the Apocalypse") describe general conditions which will persist throughout the Tribulation. During this 7-year period the Antichrist will gradually rise to power and then rule with absolute authority over much of the earth. War and violent conflict will be persistent, waged at first between the nations and eventually by the Antichrist against God and His people. Famine, disease, pestilence, economic upheaval, inflation, political corruption, predatory animals, natural disasters, darkness, and death will characterize most of the Tribulation period.

Remember, while God's judgment is being poured out upon the inhabitants of earth, Christians will be safely abiding in Heaven and praising God. They will have been raptured prior to the Tribulation. That said, if you've never accepted Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of your life, I encourage you to do so today.

8. The 5th and 6th Seals

Originally Preached on 5/30/2021

...On the day of the Lord's anger... all the earth will be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a horrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth. - Zephaniah 1:18

In last week's sermon, Jesus - the Lamb of God - began breaking the seals of the scroll that'd He'd taken from His father. When He broke the first seal, the Tribulation began and the spirit of the Antichrist was sent to conquer the earth. The second seal brought warfare and violence, the third famine and economic upheaval, and the fourth pestilence and death.

The first 4 seals are unique. They are described as 4 horsemen who have come to wreak havoc upon the earth - riding a white horse, a red horse, a black horse, and a pale horse. They are announced by the 4 living creatures around the throne. None of the other judgments in Revelation are presented this way. I believe that the destruction brought by these horsemen will begin early on during the Tribulation, and persist throughout it - becoming more and more pronounced as it wears on.

In today's message, Jesus will continue opening the scroll. We will discover what John saw when He opened the 5th and 6th seal. But before we do that, let's begin by taking a closer look at the overall breakdown of the Tribulation...

I. DIVIDING THE TRIBULATION

The Tribulation is a 7-year period during which God will judge the earth and its inhabitants. Most eschatologists divide it neatly into 3 parts - the first half of the Tribulation (3 ½ years), the midpoint of the Tribulation, and the second half of the Tribulation (3 ½ years). The second half is commonly called "The Great Tribulation" because it will be more intense than the first half (Matthew 24:21). At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus will return with His church at the Second Coming to set up His earthly kingdom.

The Antichrist will rise to power during the first half of the Tribulation. At the midpoint, he will betray the Jews by violating the Israeli peace treaty that he'd previously signed (Daniel 9:27). The Antichrist will declare himself to be God, desecrate the Temple, and end all sacrifices and offerings made to the LORD. Then, during the 3 ½ years of The Great Tribulation, he will rule dictatorially over his kingdom, severely punishing anyone who will not worship him and submit to his authority.

This general description is helpful when trying to determine the particular timing of events during the Tribulation. By carefully studying the details of each passage, many (but not all) of the scenes described in Revelation can be reasonably placed in order. I will attempt to do this as we progress through this sermon series. That said, no one knows the order for certain...

II. THE FIFTH SEAL: MARTYRS (Revelation 6:9-11)

When Jesus broke the fifth seal of the scroll, John saw the souls of those who had been killed for their testimony of God “underneath the altar”. This statement reveals that there was an altar in the heavenly throne room. When animals were sacrificed in the temple under the Old Covenant, their blood was collected and poured out at the altar’s base (Exodus 29:12). The imagery used here describes the souls of these slain martyrs resting at the foot of the altar.

It is important to note that these souls had not yet been given physical, glorified bodies. This means that they were either those who had been martyred for their faith during the Tribulation (known as the Tribulation Saints) or prior to the beginning of the Church Age (known as the Old Testament Saints). Neither of these 2 groups had yet been resurrected (Revelation 20:4, Daniel 12:1-2). Though the identity of these martyrs is uncertain, they definitely can not be Christians because Christians were raptured prior to the Tribulation and given glorified bodies at that time.

These martyred souls cried out for vindication asking God in effect, “How much longer will You allow the persecution of Your people to continue?” The martyrs wanted justice and to see God’s enemies punished. The LORD gave each of them a white robe, symbolic of the righteousness of Christ. Apparently they had some type of intermediary, spiritual body. God told them to wait a little longer, until the full number of martyrs was completed.

I believe that many people will repent and trust in Jesus during the Tribulation, especially following the Rapture. Thousands will recognize the error of their disbelief. Though the Church will be absent, God will ensure that His message continues to go out. The Tribulation Saints will be heavily persecuted and many will be killed. Though this martyrdom will become more prevalent during the Antichrist’s reign, I suspect that there will be martyrs during the first half of the Tribulation as well. Therefore, it is impossible to definitively predict the timing of this event.

III. THE SIXTH SEAL: THE DAY OF WRATH (Revelation 6:12-17)

When Jesus broke the sixth seal, several natural and cosmic phenomena took place in short order. There was a great earthquake, the sun became black, the moon became blood red, the stars fell from the sky like figs from a wind-blown tree, the sky split apart, and every mountain and island was moved from its place. Some read this literally and picture an eclipse, a meteor shower, a world-wide tremor, a tidal wave, and so forth. Others see this as a rudimentary description of a full-fledged nuclear war. Whatever it is, this judgment is extremely severe.

Everyone - from kings to peasants, from rich to poor, and from strong to weak - fled to the mountains to hide among the rocks and caves. They cried out, “Hide us from the sight of He who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” They collectively stated that the great day of God’s wrath had come. By this point, everyone knew these judgments were from God and that He was in control, yet amazingly they still refused to repent.

In my opinion, this traumatic scene pictures the Day of the Lord which takes place at the end of the Great Tribulation when Jesus returns to the earth. This phrase, “the Day of the Lord”, is used several times in both the Old Testament and New Testament. Some of these instances refer to a historic day in the past, while others point to a future occurrence. In every case, however, this expression involves God’s personal intervention, usually to bring about the utter destruction of His enemies. I personally believe that “the Day of the Lord” is best understood as a period of time (perhaps a few weeks or months) rather than just a single 24-hour day. It will include the fall of Babylon, the Battle of Armageddon, the Second Coming of Christ, and other related events at the end of the Tribulation and prior to the Millennium.

CONCLUSION

Before we wrap things up this morning, let me introduce my Tribulation Timeline that lays out the various events of Revelation in chronological order. It is my own personal representation, and is certainly open for debate and discussion. You can find this resource at the end of this book. Perhaps you will find it helpful as you seek to understand and reconcile the many different scenes being described in his vision.

9. The 144,000 and the Tribulation Saints

Originally Preached on 6/6/2021

In him [Jesus] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. - Ephesians 1:13-14

Before we begin today's sermon, let's take a moment to consider the dual setting of Revelation. We must keep in mind that the various scenes described in John's vision actually take place in 2 different locations. He is able to see both. Many of them occur in Heaven, or more specifically, in God's glorious throne room. Others, however, transpire upon the earth. In order to best understand all that is being discussed, we must keep this distinction clear in our heads.

The 4 horsemen of the apocalypse were originally dispatched from the heavenly throne room and subsequently brought their destruction to the earth. The souls of the martyrs who cried out to God were seen "under the altar" in Heaven. The catastrophic events of the Day of the LORD's wrath took place on earth. We see this back and forth throughout Revelation. Remember, when John is describing scenes in Heaven the Tribulation is still raging on earth. Likewise, when he talks about judgments occurring on earth, God is still actively orchestrating events in Heaven.

This morning we will briefly digress from our sequential discussion of the 7 seals. An entire chapter is inserted after the breaking of the 6th seal and before the breaking of the 7th seal. This chapter will be the topic of today's sermon.

I. A PAUSE IN THE DEVASTATION (Revelation 7:1-3)

After seeing the terror that befell the people of earth following the opening of the 6th seal, John looked and beheld 4 angels stationed at the 4 corners of the earth. Obviously he was using a figurative expression as the earth is round and does not have corners. These angels were holding back the winds temporarily to prevent the destruction that was forthcoming. As they did so, another angel ascended from the horizon like the rising of the sun. This angel was holding the seal of God. He called out to the other 4, instructing them not to release the harmful winds until after the LORD's servants had been sealed.

I see a connection between the scene described here and the first 4 trumpet judgments which will be revealed later in chapter 8. The first 4 trumpet judgments have a direct environmental impact on the earth, trees, and sea (or waters) - the very things that are being temporarily protected here. Thus, from my perspective, these few verses describe a brief pause in the action during which these 4 angels withhold the forthcoming trumpet judgments.

II. THE 144,000 ARE SEALED (Revelation 7:4-8)

The angel who held God's stamp then proceeded to seal 144,000 Jews. 12,000 were sealed from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. These tribes included Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Naphtali, Gad, Issachar, Asher, Zebulun, Manasseh, Joseph, and Benjamin. In this listing, the tribe of Joseph includes and represents the tribe of Ephraim. Notice that the tribe of Dan is left out (replaced by Levi), likely due to their extreme wickedness and idolatry. These 144,000 were "sealed" with God's special protection from the horrors of the Tribulation. This sealing ceremony logically occurred on the earth.

There is some confusion regarding the identity of these 144,000. Some have speculated that they are not Jews at all. The Jehovah's Witnesses go so far as to teach that only these 144,000 people will go to Heaven and reign with Christ. Opinions abound on this subject. As for me, I see no reason to identify these people symbolically. It clearly states that they are Jews selected from the 12 tribes of Israel. Therefore I, as well as most other respected commentators, accept the literal interpretation.

As for the timing of this event, it is helpful to consider the role of the Antichrist. During the first half of the Tribulation, he will honor the treaty and be at peace with Israel and the Jewish people. He will betray Israel at the midpoint and turn against her during the last half of the Tribulation. Therefore, it seems most reasonable that these 144,000 Jews would need God's protection from the Antichrist during the final 3 ½ years. I believe these redeemed Jews will be God's messengers on the earth throughout the Great Tribulation. Many others will be saved as a result of their ministry, yet they alone will possess God's protective seal.

III. THE TRIBULATION SAINTS PRAISE GOD (Revelation 7:9-17)

John then returned his attention to Heaven once again where he saw a great and numberless multitude of people from all nations, tribes, and tongues standing before Jesus and His Father's throne. They were wearing white robes, holding palm branches, and worshiping God saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." All of the angels who were present, along with the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures, fell down and began worshiping as well.

After a brief back and forth, one of the 24 elders told John that this multitude of people had come out of the "great tribulation". They had been washed in the blood of the Lamb and made righteous, symbolized by the white robes they wore. They had become servants in God's heavenly temple. This verse indicates that there was a heavenly temple (or tabernacle) in John's vision, perhaps beside or adjacent to the throne room. Furthermore, these people would no longer have to endure human suffering, but rather would enjoy God's favor and blessing.

There seems to be some continuity between this passage and the aforementioned description of the 144,000 sealed Jews. Perhaps this great multitude of people were saved through the evangelistic efforts of the 144,000 during The Great Tribulation. They, however, did not enjoy God's physical protection from the Antichrist or other such persecutions. When they were killed their souls went on to Heaven.

I believe that these Tribulation Saints are the same group (though increasing in number) as the martyrs first mentioned back in chapter 6. They are still clothed in the white robes that were originally given to them. The notable difference is that these saints are no longer crying out for justice at the base of the altar. Instead, they are now standing before God's throne and worshipping Him. This seems to indicate a growing satisfaction on their part, perhaps because they know that God's vengeance upon His adversaries is imminent. To me, their behavior places this scene closer to the end of the Great Tribulation.

CONCLUSION

Let me close today by trying to tie all of this information together as I understand it. During the first half of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will not yet have fully consolidated his power. He will still be at peace with Israel. However, the nations at large will face ever intensifying warfare, famine, and so forth. There will be people during these years who are martyred for their faith in God, perhaps by these other world leaders. The souls of these Tribulation martyrs will cry out in Heaven for justice.

When the Antichrist finally reaches his full strength and fiercely turns against the Jews, God will place His special protection over 144,000 of them to serve as His witnesses during The Great Tribulation. As a result of their ministry, many people from all nations and ethnicities will be saved. Most of them will be killed also, and will join their fellow Tribulation Saints in Heaven. However, as the tribulation nears its end these pleading saints will break out in worship, anticipating the nearness of God's judgment upon His enemies.

Next week we will resume our discussion of the Lamb and the scroll and discover what happens when Jesus breaks the 7th seal. We will also introduce a new series of judgments and begin exploring them. In the meantime, remember that God always preserves a remnant of His people. Even in the worst of times, He ensures that His word remains and goes forth to those who would receive it.

10. The 7th Seal and the 1st & 2nd Trumpets

Originally Preached on 6/13/2021

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. - 1 John 5:14-15

Good morning. In today's sermon we will wrap up our discussion of the seal judgments and begin our exploration of the trumpet judgments. As I've previously stated, John's vision of the tribulation is generally structured around 3 series of judgments - 7 seals, followed by 7 trumpets, and finally 7 bowls. By following this general outline, we can easily track our progress as we study through the book of Revelation.

I. THE 7TH SEAL: ANSWERED PRAYERS (Revelation 8:1-5)

John watched as Jesus, the Lamb of God who was slain to ransom mankind, broke the 7th and final seal of the scroll. When He did so, a silence fell upon the heavenly throne room that persisted for half an hour. The angels, the 4 living creatures, the 24 elders, and all the others present became silent and still. Even their praise and worship ceased. Their prolonged silence spoke to the significance of the moment. Something monumental was about to happen, which commanded their undivided attention and reverence.

There are various opinions among scholars as to the reason for their silence. Personally, I think that these were the final moments before the Second Coming of Christ. Everyone in Heaven was awestruck and grew completely quiet, all filled with wonder and anticipation as Jesus prepared to return to the earth. This was it! Jesus was coming again!

After the long silence John saw an angel come and stand at the altar, before the throne of God. The angel carried a golden censer and was given "much incense" above and beyond that which he already had. This great quantity of incense represented the collective prayers of all the saints. These included the prayers of the Church (represented by the 24 elders) first introduced back in Revelation 5:8 as well as those of the Tribulation Saints mentioned in Revelation 6:9-11. The scent of the burning incense rose from the altar, depicting their prayers rising to the LORD.

Then, in obedience to God's command, the angel filled the censer with hot coals from the altar and hurled it toward the earth, initiating peals of thunder, loud rumbling noises, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. These signs are quite similar to those associated with the 6th seal, which we've already identified as "The Day of the LORD". As previously stated, I believe this scene is associated with Jesus' Second Coming. Having heard the prayers of the saints for many generations longingly crying out "Come, Lord Jesus" (see Revelation 22:17,20), God finally, in accordance with His perfect and providential timing, grants their request.

Therefore, I place the timing of the 7th seal at the very end of the Great Tribulation. It includes the return of Jesus, the defeat and final condemnation of the Antichrist, and the binding of Satan. All of these things, together, provide complete and eternal vindication for the saints.

When I read the description of the 7th seal, I can't help but think of Proverbs 25:21-22 and Romans 12:17-21. These verses say, in a nutshell, that being kind to your enemies heaps fiery coals upon their heads. In like fashion, we as believers are commanded to pray for our enemies and for those who persecute us knowing that one day, should they refuse to repent, the same burning coals that gave rise to the incense of our prayers will be poured out upon them in judgment.

II. THE 1ST TRUMPET: SCORCHED EARTH (Revelation 8:6-7)

John saw 7 angels (some say these are the archangels) standing before God and each was given a trumpet. They prepared to blow them. Like the seals, each of these trumpets would bring about a new judgment upon the earth. Having completely opened the scroll, Jesus now watched as the remaining events were about to unfold.

When the 1st trumpet was sounded, John saw "hail and fire mixed with blood" hurled to the earth. Some have interpreted this figuratively as a military invasion or massive missile attack. Others read it more literally as a terrible hailstorm or destructive meteor shower. This judgment is quite similar to the 7th plague of Egypt during the days of Moses, during which the LORD sent thunder, hail, and fire to rain down upon Pharaoh and his kingdom (Exodus 9:23-25).

As a result of the hail, fire, and intense heat, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth was scorched and $\frac{1}{3}$ of its trees and grass were consumed. We can reasonably assume that this destruction included other types of plant life and vegetation, such as crops and produce. Imagine the economic and agricultural ramifications of such an event. Farmers would lose a substantial portion of their harvests, ranchers would be unable to feed many of their animals, drought and heat would dominate, and the food supply would be greatly diminished. The famine that began earlier with the 3rd seal (the black horseman) would be amplified significantly.

Here is another consideration. Though hard to quantify specifically, a loss of trees on this scale would undoubtedly be detrimental to the world's oxygen supply. Trees remove harmful carbon dioxide from the air and produce breathable oxygen. If $\frac{1}{3}$ of them were suddenly destroyed, the air quality would certainly diminish, making it more difficult for humans and animals to breathe.

III. THE 2nd TRUMPET: BLOODY SEAS (Revelation 8:8-9)

Then, when the 2nd angel blew his trumpet, something like "a great mountain burning with fire was hurled into the sea". Notice that John said "like", meaning that in this instance he was definitely making a comparison and wasn't absolutely literal. Some have equated this "mountain" symbolically to an earthly kingdom or heresy within the church. Others have suggested that it refers to a massive volcano which erupts and spills its lava into the seas.

Although the exact manner of this judgment was indescribable, its results were perfectly visible. $\frac{1}{3}$ of the seas were turned to blood, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the marine creatures in them died, and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the ships were destroyed. There is a resemblance between this disaster and the 1st plague of Egypt (Exodus 7:17-18), when God turned the Nile River into blood. However, this time the destruction came on a much larger scale.

Again, take a moment to consider how such an event would impact the world's economy and affairs. Shipping fleets would be crippled and international trade between nations would be greatly limited. Imports and exports would decline, leading to increased economic isolation and hardship. Food supplies would become even more scarce without salt-water fish and other sea creatures. What's more, the contaminated waters might contribute to widespread sickness, disease, pollution, and other problems. This would intensify the pestilence brought earlier by the pale horseman (4th seal).

CONCLUSION

In closing, let's take a moment to recall a passage from last week's message. We read that there were 4 angels stationed at the 4 corners of the earth who temporarily held back the winds while the 144,000 Messianic Jews were being sealed. These angels had been given authority to destroy the earth, trees, and sea (Revelation 7:1-3). Notice that the objects of their looming destruction perfectly match those affected by the 1st and 2nd trumpets. So, after the 144,000 were sealed, these winds were unleashed.

With this in mind, I believe that these 2 initial trumpet judgments will likely occur early on during the Great Tribulation, soon after the 144,000 are sealed (at the midpoint). They are part of the accelerating disasters which will unfold during the final 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ years before Christ's return. The Great Tribulation will be a time of unprecedented persecution and catastrophe, not just against God's children but also against the entire world.

Next week we will take a look at the 3rd and 4th trumpet judgments. We will also preview the 3 "woes", which are synonymous with the 5th, 6th, and 7th trumpets. I hope you'll join us then, and bring a friend...

11. The 3rd & 4th Trumpets

Originally Preached on 6/20/2021

...for He [the Lord] says, "At a favorable time I listened to you, and on a day of salvation I helped you." Behold, now is "a favorable time," behold, now is "a day of salvation". - 2 Corinthians 6:2

Last Sunday we began our discussion of the 7 trumpet judgments. As you may recall, John saw 7 angels standing before the throne of God, each holding a golden trumpet. They began sounding their horns 1 at a time. When the first trumpet blared, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth and its vegetation (trees, grasses, etc) was burned up. When the second blasted, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the seas were turned into blood. This morning we will learn what happened when the 3rd and 4th trumpets were blown.

These first 4 trumpets are also known as the " $\frac{1}{3}$ Judgments". I believe that they will occur in rapid succession during the early part of the Great Tribulation. The misery brought about by these drastic judgments make the tribulation of these days "great".

I. THE 3RD TRUMPET: BITTER WATERS (Revelation 8:10-11)

John then heard the sound of the 3rd angel blowing his trumpet. He looked and saw a great star, burning like a torch, falling from heaven to the earth. Some commentators have suggested that this star might have been a comet or asteroid. When it struck the ground, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the world's rivers and springs were affected. It is reasonable to assume that this would also include lakes, ponds, streams, and other inland bodies of water. Thus, the 2nd trumpet (which we discussed last week) impacted the salt-water while the 3rd trumpet dealt with fresh water.

The name of this star was "Wormwood". Wormwood is an herbal plant, well known for its bitterness. It is toxic and unsettling to the stomach, and in large enough amounts can be fatal. The Greek variation of this word means undrinkable. The term wormwood is used 9 times in the Bible, mostly in the Old Testament. It is typically used as a metaphor to describe the bitter consequences of sin and judgment (Proverbs 5:4, Jeremiah 9:15, etc). Therefore, the most literal and obvious explanation of why this star was named Wormwood is because it made the waters bitter and non-potable.

Imagine the repercussions of such a judgment. If $\frac{1}{3}$ of the world's fresh water supply was suddenly lost, there would be an immediate and lasting shortage of drinkable water. This would be in addition to the reduced food supply already caused by the previous trumpets. It is estimated that people can only live about 3 days without water. Therefore, those without access to clean water would have no choice but to drink the bitter and polluted water (just as some people are forced to do even today). This would lead to widespread sickness and disease. As a result, Scripture states that "many people died".

II. THE 4TH TRUMPET: INCREASED DARKNESS (Revelation 8:12)

When the 4th angel sounded, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the sun, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the moon, and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the stars were struck. Unlike the first 3 trumpets which were precipitated by fiery hail, a burning mountain, and a blazing star respectively, this time John did not mention any type of object falling to the earth. He simply saw these celestial bodies change so that they would be darkened. Some experts argue that this judgment only affects the intensity of the light that shines. Others, based upon a closer reading of this verse, think it pertains to the duration of time that the light shines.

Jesus may have been referring to this trumpet judgment when He told the disciples that the days of the Great Tribulation would be “cut short” (Matthew 24:22, Mark 13:20). Seeing that the Bible clearly and repeatedly states that the Great Tribulation will last exactly 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ years, or 1,260 days, it would be inconsistent and contradictory to believe that the number of these days could be decreased. Therefore, perhaps Jesus was referring to an actual shortening of the length of each individual day. How could that happen?

A handful of interpreters have proposed that following this trumpet the length of each day will be trimmed by $\frac{1}{3}$ from 24 hours to 16 hours. If the amount of time that daylight shines is reduced by a third, and the nighttime is affected “in the same way” (ie, also reduced by a third) then maybe the 24 hour day would be shortened by 8 hours. Though I believe that with God anything is possible, this interpretation seems highly unlikely to me. Scientifically speaking, it would require the earth to rotate much faster on its axis which would cause all sorts of catastrophic problems. So what other alternative could explain the days being “cut short”?

Let’s consider how people use the word “day” to mean different things. Sometimes it refers to a full day consisting of 24 hours. Other times it means just the daytime, which is approximately 12 hours depending on one’s location and/or the season of the year. This is what we mean by saying, “The days are shorter in the Winter.” When Jesus said that the days would be shortened, He may have been explaining that the duration of daylight each day would be decreased. Since the night would suffer “in the same way”, the duration of nighttime light would also decline. The result would be a 24 hour day that included $\frac{1}{3}$ daytime, $\frac{1}{3}$ nighttime, and $\frac{1}{3}$ utter darkness - no light at all from either the sun, moon, or stars.

However one interprets this verse and/or reconciles it with Jesus’ earlier statement in the gospels, the results will be bad. The ripple effects of having less light will be numerous and far-reaching. Its impact on plant life, the ocean tides, man’s emotional well-being, and countless other things will be extremely detrimental.

III. INTRODUCING THE 3 “WOES” (Revelation 8:13)

John then looked and heard an eagle flying in midheaven (which is the sky). Seeing that this “eagle” was able to speak, many commentators believe it was actually an angel. Some have even identified it as the 4th living creature - an angelic being with the face of an eagle who continuously flies around the throne praising God (Revelation 4:7). Or, seeing that God used a donkey to talk to Balaam during the exodus, perhaps this was an actual eagle that God miraculously allowed to speak...

This eagle said, "Woe, woe, woe to those who live on the earth". His warning was given in anticipation of the remaining 3 trumpet blasts. They would be even more daunting. For this reason, the final 3 trumpet judgments (the 5th, 6th, and 7th) are often called "the 3 woes". We will begin exploring them next week.

CONCLUSION

In closing, there is another interesting interpretation that seeks to tie the first 4 trumpet blasts together. Some see them collectively as a figurative description of a large-scale nuclear war. The various objects that John saw streaming down from the heavens could be nuclear missiles. The intense heat and mass destruction caused to the earth, trees, and waters could be the result of the nuclear blasts and their subsequent fall-out. The darkening of the skies could be attributed to radiation, dust, debris, and other pollutants filling the atmosphere. If so, this war would rage during the first part of the Great Tribulation, effectively ruining $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth, and would represent a significant escalation to the more conventional conflicts of the early tribulation period brought about by the 2nd (red) horseman.

Despite the incredible devastation brought about by these first 4 trumpet blasts, we can still see evidence of God's longsuffering and mercy. Notice that the destruction, while certainly horrible, is limited to a fractional degree of $\frac{1}{3}$. It is not yet complete. God is still showing restraint. For those people who survive these judgments, there is still time for redemption and hope for salvation. That said, their window of opportunity is quickly closing...

12. The 5th Trumpet

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And they [a legion of demons] were begging Him [Jesus] not to command them to go away into the abyss. - Luke 8:31

Good morning. Over the past 2 weeks we have discussed the first 4 trumpet judgments, also known in eschatology as the “ $\frac{1}{3}$ Judgments”. For the next few weeks we will talk about the final 3 trumpet judgments, which are sometimes called the “3 Woes”. Today’s message will focus exclusively on the 5th trumpet, as detailed in Revelation 9:1-12.

Before we begin, let me state that one of the primary reasons why God sends judgment upon His people is so that they will turn from their sin in repentance. The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel emphasized this truth repeatedly as he explained why God allowed the Babylonians to conquer Jerusalem. He wrote at least 50 times in his book that this judgment occurred so that they would “know that I am the LORD”. The same is true in Revelation. The wrath of God shown in the last days is intended, at least in part, to wake people up and cause them to turn from their sinful ways, recognize, and trust in Him.

I. THE PIT OF TARTARUS (2 Peter 2:4, Jude 1:6)

Before we delve into the 5th Trumpet of Revelation, let’s take a moment to backtrack just a bit. Only a few generations after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, as the population of mankind was quickly multiplying upon the earth, something strange and terrible happened. Scripture says that some of the “sons of God” were attracted to “the daughters of mankind”, took them as wives, and bore children with them. These kids grew up to be mighty men of renown, and became known as the Nephilim (Genesis 6:1-4).

The Bible does not give us many details surrounding this unfortunate incident. It appears that an untold number of angels sinned against God (and therefore fell from grace) by marrying and subsequently having sexual relationships with human women. Their offspring developed into a mixed race of powerful and demonic humans that existed during ancient times. Many scholars propose that the giants of the Old Testament, the most famous being Goliath, were the last remaining descendants of the Nephilim.

Because they had abandoned God’s established order through their sinful commingling with women, the LORD harshly punished these fallen angels - that is to say, these demons - by casting them into a special Hell reserved solely for them. There are 3 different Hells referred to in Scripture. “Tartarus” is the hell where these fallen angels were and are currently confined, “Hades” is the hell where unrepentant sinners who have died are currently confined, and “Gehenna” is the final and only enduring Hell into which all of God’s enemies will someday be cast - including the occupants of both Tartarus and Hades (Revelation 19:20, 20:13-15). Tartarus, the hell of these fallen angels, is described in Scripture as “a pit of darkness” and some believe it to be the lowest part of Hades.

Having laid out this background information, let's now return our attention to John's vision of the Revelation.

II. THE ABYSS IS OPENED (Revelation 9:1-6)

While standing in the heavenly throne, John heard the 5th trumpet sound. He saw a star that had fallen to the earth. This "star" had been given a key to the shaft of the abyss. Obviously, this star was an angel or, perhaps, a demon who had been given authority by God to open this ghastly pit. When he did so, dark smoke like that from a blazing furnace ascended out of the shaft darkening both the sky and the sun. Following the smoke, hoards of destructive locusts came pouring out of the pit and spread out like scorpions upon the earth.

Although these "locusts" were very powerful, they were subject to God's authority and had particular limitations placed on them. They were told not to harm any of the plants on the earth. They were not allowed to kill anyone, but were permitted to torment the earth for 5 months. They could only afflict people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. Therefore, everyone was fair game except for the 144,000 believing Jews who had been sealed earlier and were under God's special protection. These locusts inflicted pain like that of a scorpion's sting. During these days, people longed to die in order to escape the extreme suffering being caused by their stings.

III. A HOARD OF DEMONS (Revelation 9:7-11)

John described these "locusts" as horses prepared for battle. They wore something like golden crowns on their heads and had human faces. Their hair was like that of women and their teeth like those of a lion. They had breastplates like those made of iron and tails like scorpions which were used to sting people. The sound of their wings was like that of many chariots and horses rushing into battle. Clearly, John was using figurative language in this passage to describe what he was seeing. These locusts were not merely insects, but rather had the characteristics and features of something else. There are many different theories about the identity of these locusts. Some have suggested that they are technologically advanced military helicopters. I and many others believe them to be the fallen angels of Tartarus.

This hoard of demons has a king over them known as "the angel of the abyss". This angel is named Abaddon in Hebrew or Appolyon in Greek. His name means, "Destroyer". Some scholars equate this angel with Satan himself. Others suggest that Abaddon is a high-ranking demonic official who leads the demonic forces of Tartarus, mimicking the role of Michael the archangel who leads the armies of God (Revelation 12:7). Abaddon is mentioned 6 other times in the Bible - in the Old Testament books of Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. In these instances it refers to the dwelling place of Abaddon, which would be Tartarus.

During the tyrannical reign of the Antichrist, I believe that the pit of Tartarus will be opened. The fallen angels that intermarried with human women centuries ago will be released. They will come

forth from the abyss to terrorize the inhabitants of the earth, subject to the limits imposed upon them by God.

CONCLUSION

The Bible clearly states that these locusts will not harm those who have been sealed, which seems to suggest the 144,000 Jews. However, it does not specifically state who they will harm. Though they have the prerogative to torment everyone else, perhaps they will serve in conjunction with the Antichrist to persecute only those who will not take the “mark of the beast” (Revelation 13:16-18). Or, it could be that God will use them to afflict all of the “unsealed” people of earth, including those who’ve aligned themselves with the Antichrist. If so, this might anger and provoke the Antichrist to wage war against God directly. The precise target of their wrath is uncertain...

Whatever the case, I believe that the 5th Trumpet judgment will occur sometime around or just after the middle part of the Great Tribulation. As the day of the Lord's return approaches, the judgments leveled against the earth and its people become increasingly severe. Yet, as horrible as this is, it is only “the first woe” (Revelation 9:12). There are still 2 more yet to come...

13. The 6th Trumpet

Originally Preached on 7/5/2021

However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. - 2 Kings 17:14

I hope you have been blessed by our examination of Revelation this far. This morning's message is the 13th installment of this fascinating series. Looking ahead at my list of upcoming sermons, I suspect we are approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way through this study. That said, let's resume our discussion of the 7 trumpet judgments by taking a close look at the 6th trumpet.

I. THE 4 ANGELS (Revelation 9:13-16)

When the 6th angel sounded his trumpet, John heard a voice coming from among the 4 horns of the golden altar which was before God's throne. Based upon previous descriptions, this altar appears to be used for burning incense rather than for offering sacrifices. The voice instructed the angel with the trumpet to release 4 other angels who were "bound at the river Euphrates". Most commentators agree that this was most likely God speaking.

The Euphrates River runs from modern-day Turkey southwest through Syria and Iraq eventually emptying into the Persian Gulf. It is the longest river in the Middle East at 1,740 miles long. The Euphrates River is referred to several times in the Bible and plays an important natural role in the region. The Euphrates serves as the far eastern border of the land given by God to His chosen people Israel (Genesis 15:18).

After the command was given, these 4 angels were released. Because Scripture states they had been "bound", many believe they were fallen angels or demons. They had been prepared in advance specifically for this moment. Their purpose was to kill $\frac{1}{3}$ of mankind, again strongly suggesting that they were evil fallen angels. This harkens back to the first 4 trumpets, each of which also involved $\frac{1}{3}$ of something.

These 4 fallen angels were associated with a massive army of 200,000,000 horsemen. Perhaps they were commanders of the differing divisions or branches of this great army. For perspective, China currently has the largest military in the world at approximately 2.5 million soldiers. The army described in this passage is 80 times larger than that!

II. THE DEMONIC ARMY (Revelation 9:17-19)

John carefully described the horses and riders which he saw. The riders wore breastplates which were the color of fire, of hyacinth (sapphire), and of brimstone (sulphur). The horses had heads like lions and from their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. As instructed, they proceed to kill $\frac{1}{3}$ of mankind. These horses also had power to do harm with their tails, which were serpent-like and had heads. Obviously, as was the case with the 5th trumpet and the

aforementioned “locusts”, John was using figurative language in his description of these horses and their riders.

Earlier during the tribulation, the 4th horseman of the apocalypse (the 4th seal) was authorized to kill $\frac{1}{4}$ of mankind. Now this immense army led by these 4 fallen angels is sent out to kill $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth’s remaining population. Consider this example... If there were 100 people and $\frac{1}{4}$ of them died (25), only 75 would be left. Then, if $\frac{1}{3}$ of these remaining 75 people died as well (25), only 50 would be left. Thus, the original population would be reduced by 50%. The number of people living at the beginning of the Tribulation will be cut in half by these 2 judgments alone, not to mention all of the other unquantified fatalities associated with the many other judgments. This is a staggering number of casualties.

There are many interpreters who believe this army of 200,000,000 consists of modern soldiers, equipment, and advanced mechanisms of human warfare. However, when one considers the immense size of this army in relation to the diminished population and devastated condition of the earth at the time, it would seem plausible that these horses and riders were not human at all. The description John gave of these horsemen and their horses was somewhat similar to that given about the demonic locusts earlier in the chapter. That said, perhaps this sizable force was made up by millions of destructive and murderous demons.

Let me suggest a possibility that ties the 5th and 6th trumpets together. Perhaps the same horde of demons that was released from the pit of Tartarus to torment the people of earth for 5 terrifying months following the blast of the 5th trumpet was now being permitted to kill $\frac{1}{3}$ of the world’s population as an organized demonic army following the 6th trumpet. Or perhaps those demons were joined by others, both human and/or demonic, to make up this huge and formidable army. No one knows for certain...

III. THE UNREPENTANT RESPONSE (Revelation 9:20-21)

John saw millions being killed by this large and aggressive army. Yet, even in the face of this incredible tragedy, those who survived continued to resist God. They did not repent of their wickedness, their false worship, and/or their idolatry. Instead, they kept committing murder, practicing witchcraft, engaging in acts of sexual immorality, and perpetrating theft.

When the difficulties and challenges of this life come, many people who believe in God’s existence become bitter and miserable. They get mired down in the pits of depression, sorrow, and anger. Many blame God for their circumstances and turn themselves away from Him. Oftentimes, their misguided and erroneous response leads them down the rocky road of rebellion and waywardness. In stubborn resistance, they refuse to repent of their sinful attitudes and actions. Instead, they become increasingly hostile toward and entrenched against the LORD. Some folks even stop believing in Him altogether (which indicates that they never truly had a saving faith).

Nonbelievers are so blinded by their sin that they are completely unable to see God's handiwork all around them. They can not recognize God's judgment or discipline when it comes, and are unable to perceive or understand His redemptive purposes for sending or allowing it. In accordance with their secular worldview, they don't acknowledge the LORD's existence at all and, therefore, regard the happenings of life as natural processes or random events. Those who share this perspective see no need for repentance.

Following the judgment of the 6th trumpet, and the great loss of life that it brings, most of the survivors will fall into one of these categories, doggedly refusing to repent. Either knowingly or unknowingly, they will persist in their sinful behaviors and ways. Like immature children (and some adults), they will continue to practice the very same things that brought judgment upon them to begin with.

CONCLUSION

Let me close with a familiar point that I've made many times before. Though this may disturb some of you, the fact is that God's greatest concern for each of us is not our physical well being, but rather our spiritual well being. While He certainly cares about our physical lives, and instructs us to protect and value them, and even pray about them, God sees things from a much higher perspective. This world is not our home. In fact, in relation to eternity our time here is a brief, passing moment. Therefore, the condition of our temporal, earthly circumstances pales in comparison to that of our eternal destiny (Romans 8:18). Knowing this, God readily allows the difficult trials and tests of this life as a means to spur us and others on toward repentance, so that we might come to know and forever enjoy the riches and blessings of the life to come. Our eternity is, quite literally, infinitely more important than this present life...

14. The Angel and the Little Scroll

Originally Preached on 7/11/2021

And He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. - Ezekiel 3:3

Earlier in this series, we came across some parenthetical information between the breaking of the 6th and 7th seals. John described a brief pause in the first series of judgments to allow for the sealing of 144,000 Jews and also told of a celebratory praise chorus being offered to God by the Tribulation Saints. Following this same pattern, we now encounter several verses inserted between the sounding of the 6th and 7th trumpets. This week and next, we will carefully examine the details and content found in this brief interlude.

This morning we will focus exclusively on chapter 10. In some ways, it is uniquely different from all of the other chapters in Revelation. As we study it today, I will try to explain how. Now that I've piqued your interest, let's get started...

I. THE 7 THUNDERS (Revelation 10:1-4)

From his heavenly vantage point, John saw a "strong" angel coming down from heaven. While there are many angels mentioned in this apocalyptic vision, only 3 are described as strong angels (Revelation 5:2, 10:1, and 18:21). This angel was clothed with a cloud, had a rainbow on his head, his face shone like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. He had a little scroll in his hand that was opened. Based on this description, a few commentators believe this "angel" to be Jesus carrying the scroll which He opened earlier. However, Jesus is never referred to as an angel anywhere else in scripture - in fact, He is clearly distinguished from and exalted above angels (Hebrews 1). The more widely accepted view is that this extravagant angel was likely an archangel and the little scroll was not the same document as the 7-sealed scroll from before.

This mighty angel stood with his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. He cried out with a loud voice, which boomed like the roaring of a lion. His speech was like 7 peals of thunder speaking. John began to write down what each of these 7 rumbles of thunder said, but a voice from heaven stopped him. The voice, presumably from God, told him to "Seal up the things" spoken by the 7 thunders and "do not write them". They contained additional revelation specifically and exclusively for John, which was not to be shared with others.

The portion of Revelation that pertains to the 7-year tribulation includes and unfolds around 3 sets of 7 judgments - the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. However, there is a 4th and unknown group of 7 - these 7 mysterious thunders. What did these thunders say? Did they unleash more judgments? There are some things that God intentionally keeps hidden from us, and we just have to trust that He has a good reason to keep them secret (Deuteronomy 29:29). These "thunders" are a prime example.

II. THE ANGEL'S OATH (Revelation 10:5-7)

The angel who stood on the sea and the land raised his right hand to Heaven. He swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens (the sky), the earth (the land), and the sea and all the living things in each of them. The angel's stance with one of his feet on the sea, the other on the land, and his hand held up in the air is a picture of the comprehensive nature of His oath. He swore by God - the Eternal Creator - that there would be no more delay, perhaps speaking of the remaining judgments contained in his little scroll. When the 7th angel sounded his trumpet, the mystery of God would be finished just as it was announced by the prophets.

The Old Testament hero Daniel was deported from Judah as a child and spent most of his life serving the kings of Babylon and Persia. He is well known for surviving a night in the lion's den. Many people do not realize that Daniel had visions and wrote several amazing prophecies, including one that is very similar to this portion of John's revelation. Daniel described seeing "a man dressed in linen" (presumably an angel) swearing to God that after the destruction of His holy people "all of these events will be completed" (Daniel 12:7). Most commentators ascribe Daniel's vision to the last days, and like John, he was also told to seal it up and keep it secret.

III. THE BITTERSWEET SCROLL (Revelation 10:8-11)

John again heard the voice from heaven, which is widely considered to be the voice of God. He told John to, "Go, take the scroll which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." Following the LORD's directive, John went to the angel and asked for the little scroll. This exchange suggests that John was temporarily transported - at least in his vision - from the heavenly throne room back down to the earth where the angel stood.

The angel told John to take the scroll and eat it. He said that it would taste as "sweet as honey" in his mouth, but would make his stomach "bitter". So John took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. Sure enough, it was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his belly. Once again, we find a similar episode in the Old Testament ministry of Ezekiel. He was also given a scroll to eat. Most Bible scholars interpret these scenes metaphorically. The gift of prophecy and having an important message from God to share is a sweet privilege, however the contents of that message - in this case, looming judgment for unrepentant sin - can be bitter and unsettling.

After eating the little scroll, "they" spoke to John. This most likely was both the voice of God and the strong angel. Together the 2 of them gave John a final admonition. He was commanded to continue prophesying "concerning many peoples, nations, languages, and kings." In other words, this short personal encounter in his prophetic vision was over and it was time for him to continue writing about the upcoming judgments of the last days.

CONCLUSION

The scenes described in today's sermon are unique from other parts of John's vision in a few different ways. Let me close this morning by pointing out a few of these distinctions:

First, while most of Revelation seeks to reveal or disclose mysteries about the end times, this particular chapter highlights certain information that is to be kept secret. Only John is privy to the revelation given by the 7 thunders. The rest of us will simply have to wait and wonder what they might have told him...

Second, those who share a futuristic interpretation of Revelation see it as a vision of coming events - a preview of the last days. However, the events of this chapter don't necessarily pertain to the future or the tribulation at all. Rather, they seem to be for John's benefit only. It is though the narrator - who has been telling the story - suddenly and briefly becomes the main character. To me, it is reminiscent of those scenes in the movie *The Princess Bride* where the story itself pauses to show a conversation between the grandson and his grandfather who is reading the book.

Finally, why did John mention this episode in Revelation if he was restricted from revealing the rest of what he heard and saw? Perhaps it was to show God's concern for him as an individual. I can't help but think that John was, by this point, troubled by the extensive judgments he'd already witnessed - and there were more to come. Perhaps he needed some reassurance to press on. In this chapter, God - along with His strong angel - personally gave John a word of encouragement to keep watching, listening, and prophesying.

15. The 2 Witnesses

Originally Preached on 7/18/2021

“You are My witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, only I, am the Lord, and there is no savior besides Me.” - Isaiah 43:10-11

In last week’s message on Revelation chapter 10, the LORD spoke to John personally and encouraged him to continue prophesying. Perhaps this apocalyptic vision of sweeping horrors and terrifying judgments was beginning to get to him. I can see how he might be hesitant to keep watching and writing. If it were me, I might have closed my eyes and cried, “Make it stop! I don’t want to see anymore!” Nevertheless, God lovingly urged John to go on prophesying and, thankfully, he did.

This morning we will discuss another scene that John saw between the 6th and 7th trumpet judgments. The one involves 2 witnesses. Open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 11 and let’s get started...

I. THEIR LOCATION & TIMING (Revelation 11:1-3)

John wrote that he was given a measuring rod, similar to a staff, or what we might think of today as a yardstick. He was told to go and measure the temple of God and its altar, and to count the number of people worshiping there. However, he was ordered not to measure the courtyard around the temple, as it had been given to the Gentiles who would “trample the Holy City for 42 months”. In other words, John was instructed to go and measure an earthly temple in Jerusalem where people were freely and actively worshiping and offering sacrifices to God.

In order for this to actually happen, many eschatologists argue that the Jewish Temple will have to be rebuilt and in use prior to the tribulation. After all, how can John be expected to measure a building and count the number of people there if it doesn’t physically exist? Furthermore, the fact that John saw people worshiping God there seems to place these events in the first half of the tribulation period, prior to the Antichrist’s desecration of the temple and the cessation of such worship.

The voice (which seemingly belonged to God) then said, “I will grant authority to my 2 witnesses and they will prophesy for 1,260 days.” I propose that the LORD will raise up 2 witnesses who will minister in or near the Jewish temple in Jerusalem during the first 3 ½ years (or 1,260 days) of the tribulation. After their departure, during the second half of the tribulation, known as “The Great Tribulation” (which is also 3 ½ years or 42 months), both Jerusalem and its temple will be profaned by the Antichrist and his pagan followers. Worship to God will be outlawed and believers severely punished.

II. THEIR POWER & MINISTRY (Revelation 11:4-6)

The 2 witnesses were described as “olive trees” and “lampstands” that stood before the LORD of the earth. This imagery is comparable to that of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah who saw a vision of 2 olive trees that continuously provided oil to a lampstand (Zechariah 4). In his vision, God was revealing that the work of rebuilding the temple would be supernaturally sustained and accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the hands of Zerubbabel and Joshua. In Revelation, God is revealing His intention to protect and empower these 2 witnesses to complete their service.

The 2 witnesses were adequately equipped to confront their adversaries. They were not to go on the offensive, but were given permission to defend themselves against those who sought to do them harm. They had the ability to devour their enemies with fire that flowed from their mouths. In addition, they had the power to withhold the rain from falling, to turn waters into blood, and to strike the earth with a plague as often as desired. These powers were very similar to those given to Moses and Elijah, prominent Jewish prophets.

Though the Bible does not clearly state the purpose of these 2 witnesses, I think we can make a few reasonable assumptions. First, they will be present to proclaim the message of God in the absence of the Church. Following the Rapture, Christians will no longer be on the earth. God will send these 2 witnesses to declare His name during the first half of the tribulation. As a result, many will be saved. Second, seeing their close resemblance to Moses and Elijah, many formerly unbelieving Jews will give them credibility, hear their message, and accept it. I believe that the 144,000 Messianic Jews (who evangelize afterwards during “The Great Tribulation”) will come to faith as a direct result of the ministry of these 2 witnesses.

III. THEIR DEATH & RESURRECTION (Revelation 11:7-13)

At the end of their testimony, John saw “the beast that comes up out of the abyss” overcome and kill the 2 witnesses. Their bodies were left lying in the streets of Jerusalem and many people from different nations, tribes, and tongues saw them. The evil and wicked people who hated God and His witnesses gleefully celebrated their deaths.

Then, after 3 ½ days, God brought the 2 witnesses back to life. They stood to their feet and fear overcame all who were watching. Then a loud voice from heaven (probably God’s) said, “Come up here!” and they ascended in a cloud as their enemies watched. Immediately there was a great earthquake, a tenth of Jerusalem collapsed due to the shaking, and 7,000 people were killed. Those who survived were terrified and gave glory to God.

As stated earlier, I believe these 2 witnesses will appear on the same day that the tribulation begins. They will serve faithfully during the rise of the Antichrist, while he and his forces are still at peace with Israel. However, after 3 ½ years pass, at the midpoint of the Tribulation, when the Antichrist comes to power, he will betray God’s people. His evil partner, the False Prophet (Revelation 16:11-18), will subsequently kill the 2 witnesses and seek to take their place.

Following my timeline, the death, resurrection, and ascension of the 2 witnesses occurs in the middle of the tribulation, accompanied by a catastrophic earthquake in Jerusalem.

CONCLUSION

Before we conclude, notice that John ends this section of Revelation by saying, “the second woe has passed” (Revelation 11:14). This refers back to the 6th trumpet judgment, which is the second woe. It does not pertain to passages about “the angel and the little scroll” or “the 2 witnesses”, both of which were inserted in the trumpet sequence. The statement marks the end of this parenthetical break. From here, John returns to and concludes his discussion of the 7 trumpets, as we will see in next week’s message.

The main idea for today is this... though he may try to distort it, pervert it, dilute it, and/or distract us from hearing it, Satan simply cannot prevent God from heralding the message of Jesus and His salvation to the world. Throughout history God has chosen representatives to carry this life-saving message, such as Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church. Even during the horrible tribulation of the last days, the gospel of God’s kingdom will be preached starting with the 2 witnesses and ending with the 140,000 Jews. People will be saved because the word of God will not be chained (2 Timothy 2:9).

16. The 7th Trumpet

Originally Preached on 7/25/2021

Now after John was taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." - Mark 1:14-15

Thank you for joining us this morning as we continue our study through the Revelation of Jesus Christ. This is the first time I've ever seriously and meticulously examined this book, chapter by chapter and verse by verse. To be honest, up to this point I've been somewhat intimidated by it and felt unqualified to teach it. As we work our way through it together, my prayer is that God will enable me to present Revelation correctly, clearly, and rationally. How would you say that I'm doing so far?

I. VOICES IN HEAVEN (Revelation 11:15)

Starting back in chapter 10, John's vision temporarily transported him to the earth where he took the little scroll from the mighty angel's hand and ate it (10:8-11) and then measured the Jewish temple in Jerusalem (11:1). Now, as he returns his attention to the series of trumpet judgments, John again finds himself in the heavenly throne room of God. He watched as the 7th and final angel standing in line before the throne of God blew their trumpet.

When the trumpet sounded, John heard loud voices in heaven saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." Scripture does not specifically identify who was speaking. That said, it could be the 4 living creatures, or some angels and/or archangels, or perhaps even the Tribulation saints. I personally do not believe it was raptured Christians (the Church), as they are represented by the 24 elders who speak next.

According to their statement, by this point the worldly kingdom had given way to the kingdom of God. Jesus, the King of kings, had begun His never-ending reign. This seemingly refers to the Millennial reign of Christ, which I believe will precede the eternal state. With this in mind, a significant number of Bible experts place these events after the Great Tribulation ends.

The timing of 7th Trumpet provides strong evidence that these individual scenes are not always written in chronological order. While most of them are, some - like this one - clearly aren't. The fall of the world system and the beginning of Christ's reign over the kingdom of God clearly occur at the end of the tribulation. If the events of John's vision were written in precise chronological order, this would take place in the final chapters of Revelation, not in the middle! As stated earlier, I believe that John recorded the things he saw in the order that they were presented to him, which is not necessarily the same order in which they will occur.

II. THE 24 ELDERS SPEAK (Revelation 11:16-18)

After the unidentified voices finished, John then heard the 24 elders speak. Many noted Bible commentators believe that these elders represent redeemed Christians. They fell on their faces before God, worshiping Him and saying, "We give You thanks, Lord God, the Almighty, the One who is and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."

Their statement contains several important parts. First, they expressed thanks to God because He had demonstrated His great power and had begun to reign. Second, they stated that the nations were enraged and that God's wrath came. Putting these 2 ideas together, we see that the nations of the world railed against God, He poured out His judgment upon them with great power during the tribulation, and then set up His kingdom after defeating them. This statement basically echoes that of the unidentified "loud voices" in verse 15.

The words of the 24 elders also provide insight into certain events that take place after the tribulation ends. They said that the time had come for the dead to be judged, for the LORD's servants to be rewarded, and for God to destroy those who destroyed the earth. I personally believe that all 3 of these things will take place between the Second Coming of Christ and the beginning of His Millennial reign on earth. We will discuss each of these events in much more detail later in this series.

III. THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE (Revelation 11:19)

Having heard the loud voices in heaven followed by those of the 24 elders, John then saw the temple in heaven being opened. He was able to see the "ark of His covenant", suggesting that even the veil shielding the Holy of Holies was removed. All of the contents of the heavenly temple were exposed. As he watched, there were peals of lighting and rumbles of thunder, along with an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

The Bible repeatedly speaks of a temple in heaven, where the LORD dwells (Psalm 11:4). God instructed Moses to construct the earthly tabernacle after the model of or in the pattern of the heavenly temple (Exodus 25:9,40; Hebrews 8:5). After His death on the cross, Jesus entered this temple as our great High Priest once and for all time to obtain redemption for believers (Hebrews 9:11-12). Some scholars suggest that the temple of God in heaven refers to all of heaven (the LORD's dwelling place), while others argue that it is a specific building or sanctuary in heaven - one not made by human hands. I do not have a strong opinion on this either way.

Like most of Revelation, there are various interpretations surrounding the meaning of this passage. I tend to think that it refers to the return of Christ. The earthquake, lightning, thunder, and hail are reminiscent of other passages that describe the Second Coming. Perhaps the heavenly temple is "opened" to show that Jesus has come out of it. If so, we can combine this portion of the vision with the voices cited in the preceding verses to conclude that at the

sounding of the 7th trumpet Jesus will leave the heavenly temple, return to earth, and begin His reign there.

CONCLUSION

With the sounding of the 7th blast, the trumpet judgments come to an end. Remember, the final 3 trumpets are sometimes called the “3 woes”. Woe to the earth, for a horde of demonic locusts will come to terrorize people for 5 months (5th Trumpet). Woe to the earth, for an army of 200,000,000 will rise up and kill $\frac{1}{4}$ of the population (6th Trumpet). Woe to the earth, for God's kingdom is coming, sinners will be judged, and His enemies will be utterly and completely destroyed (7th Trumpet).

Following the 7 trumpets, there is a final series of 7 bowl judgments. However, these are not mentioned until chapter 15. For the next few weeks, as we work our way through chapters 12-14, we will discuss several scenes from John's vision that are not connected to any prescribed series of judgments. That said, they will provide us with greater details and a further understanding of end time events.

In closing, the Lord is coming again. He will establish His Kingdom. Jesus will reign eternally. His enemies will be defeated, sinners will be judged, and the righteous will be rewarded. It is going to happen. So, are you ready?

17. The Woman, Child, Dragon, and Angel

Originally Preached on 8/1/2021

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies. - John 8:44

We have completed our discussion of the 7 seals and the 7 trumpets of the tribulation. In a few weeks, we will begin dealing with the 7 bowls. In the meantime, however, we will consider a few intervening chapters that provide details about major end time characters and events. Chapters 12 and 13 vividly describe the 3 persons of the unholy trinity - namely Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet - who seek to mimic and misrepresent the true, holy Trinity - God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We will highlight each of these 3 unholy charlatans during the next few weeks, starting this morning with Satan...

I. SATAN FAILS TO DEFEAT JESUS (Revelation 12:1-5)

John saw another great sign appear in heaven. He beheld a woman “clothed with the sun”, having “the moon under her feet”, and wearing a “crown of 12 stars on her head”. Most reputable scholars identify this “woman” as Old Testament Israel. The description given here is similar to that of Joseph's second boyhood dream in which he described his father as the sun, his mother as the moon, and his brothers as stars (Genesis 37:9-11). Jacob's sons were the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel.

John then saw a great red dragon “having 7 heads and 10 horns”, and on each of the heads was a crown. This “dragon” is clearly identified as the Devil (v9). Most commentators interpret these heads, crowns, and horns as various kings, kingdoms, and leaders under Satanic control. We will see a similar description given to the “beasts” of Revelation 13:1 and Revelation 17:3. John stated that this dragon swept away $\frac{1}{3}$ of the stars. This statement mostly likely refers to the original rebellion and fall of Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12-15), during which it is believed that $\frac{1}{3}$ of God's angels joined the failed insurrection against Him and consequently became demons.

John explained that the “woman” was pregnant, had gone into labor, and was crying out in pain because she was on the verge of giving birth. The evil dragon stood before her, intending to devour her newborn Child as soon as it was delivered. She gave birth to a Son who would “rule the nations with a rod of iron” and, before the dragon could consume it, the Child was “caught up to God and His throne”. This Child is generally believed to be Jesus Christ. He was born of the Jews (Israel), overcame the Devil's attempts to destroy him, and ascended into heaven where He sits at God' right hand.

II. SATAN IS THROWN DOWN TO EARTH (Revelation 12:7-12)

Next, John stated that a war broke out in heaven between the forces of God, led by the archangel Michael, and the forces of Satan. The Devil and his armies were defeated, expelled from heaven, and cast down to the earth. It is widely held that this “war” is totally different from the initial rebellion of Satan mentioned earlier. The original fall of Lucifer occurred in ages past, probably even before the creation of man, while this conflict will presumably take place in the future. To be specific, I think this particular war in heaven will begin during the first half of the Tribulation and end at the midpoint.

John then heard a loud voice in heaven praising God and proclaiming His kingdom because the accuser of the righteous had been thrown down to the earth. Obviously, this outcast “accuser” was Satan. The armies of God had overcome him by the blood of the Lamb (Jesus Christ), their testimony (or faith), and their unyielding courage. Those in heaven were told to rejoice, seeing that the Devil and his demons had been expelled from their presence. However, those on the earth were warned to be extremely wary because the Devil had come down to them and was hell-bent, knowing that his remaining time was short.

It is important to note that, currently, Satan has access to the throne room of Heaven. As we see in the case of Job, he is permitted to come before God and make accusations against His children. While he and his demons are typically thought of as roaming about the earth, actively seeking to turn the hearts of mankind against God, clearly Satan still has permission to appear in Heaven. Following this war, however, he and his fallen angels will be thrown out of God's presence and not permitted to return. As we will see in chapter 13, upon the dragon's expulsion from heaven the Antichrist will come into power and the Great Tribulation will begin.

III. SATAN PERSECUTES GOD'S FOLLOWERS (Revelation 12:6, 13-17)

John said that when the dragon realized he had been cast out of heaven, he began to furiously persecute the woman who had given birth to the Child. In other words, the Devil set out to oppress and terrorize Israel and the Jewish people. To his dismay, 2 wings of a great eagle were given to the woman and she flew away into the wilderness where she was protected from the dragon and nourished for 3 ½ years (a time, times, and half a time). This was foreshadowed back in verse 6 when she fled into the wilderness for 1,260 days (3 ½ years). Though he desperately sought to harm her by hurling waters from his mouth in hopes of sweeping her away in the flood, the earth came to her aid and swallowed the waters.

This figurative language describes the Devil's unsuccessful attempts to destroy Israel during the Great Tribulation. I believe that it refers specifically to the 144,000 Messianic Jews (ie, true Israel) who will be sealed by God and protected from Satan and the Antichrist. Some have even speculated that the LORD will use the United States, as alluded to by the “eagle's wings”, as a protector of Israel. I don't particularly share this interpretation, but it is interesting to think about I suppose...

Once the dragon recognized that he was unable to destroy the woman, and having already failed to devour her Child (Jesus), he then turned his anger toward her other children. These

“other” children included all of those who kept the commandments of God and held to the testimony of Jesus. In other words, in his growing frustration and desperation the Devil began to pour out his wrath upon all believers (other than the 144,000) - whether Jew or Gentile. He persecuted anyone who would not submit to his rule, through the evil hands of the Antichrist.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I believe that Revelation 12 provides a thorough and graphic description of Satan's progressive collapse. He was originally created by God as a beautiful, blameless angel (Isaiah 28:13-15). Over time, however, he became envious and prideful. Wanting to be God himself, Satan led an unsuccessful rebellion against the LORD Almighty. Though soundly defeated, he and the fallen angels who joined him were still permitted to commune with and exercise limited influence over the affairs of mankind. God created human beings with free will, and therefore tolerated the continued presence of Satan on earth consistent with His divine purposes.

The dragon's greatest attempt to thwart God came when he sought to destroy Jesus. Working through the crazed King Herod, the Devil sought to murder Jesus as a baby. When that failed, he tried to taint Jesus' ministry and render it ineffective by tempting Him to sin (especially in the wilderness). When those efforts also proved unsuccessful, he spurred the Jews and Romans to crucify Christ. Even that didn't work, as Jesus triumphantly rose from the grave!

In the last days Satan will stage another futile uprising against God. This time he and his angels will be completely banished from Heaven and cast down to the earth. There they will rage against Israel and God's children during the Great Tribulation. Ultimately, with time running out, the Devil will rally all of his forces together in a collective assault against God at the Battle of Armageddon... more on that later.

Here is the bottom line - Satan is a loser. He was unable to overthrow God the Father in ages past or defeat Jesus the Son at Calvary, and he will never derail the LORD's plan for Israel and/or His redeemed people. Though he has created chaos and inflicted extensive damage on humanity, Satan's eternal fate is sealed and his doom is certain. Those who follow him will share in his downfall and humiliation.

18. The Beast from the Sea

Originally Preached on 8/8/2021

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. - 2 John 7

Last week, starting with chapter 12, we began a brief study of the 3 evil characters who make up the unholy Trinity. In the last days, they will set themselves up to mimic God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We started off by discussing the dragon, who is clearly identified in Scripture as Satan (Revelation 12:9), the evil leader and “Father” of this unsavory group. Today, we will examine the second person of the satanic trio - the beast from the sea. This beast is almost universally recognized as the Antichrist, in contrast to Jesus. We read about him in the first 10 verses of chapter 13. Let’s get started...

I. THE RISE OF THE BEAST (Revelation 13:1-3a)

John described a scene in which the dragon stood on the seashore, presumably beckoning someone. Then he saw a beast rising up out of the sea. The beast had 7 heads and 10 horns, with a crown on each horn. One of the heads bore the marks of a fatal wound that had been miraculously healed. The beast resembled a leopard, with bear’s feet, and having the mouth of a lion. The dragon imparted his strength, authority, and throne to the beast.

John’s description of the beast from the sea is similar to his earlier description of the dragon (Revelation 12:3). Both creatures had 7 heads and 10 horns. This speaks to their common nature. There are various interpretations as to the meaning of these heads and horns. Speaking of the heads, one of the more prominent views is that they represent pagan kingdoms that have oppressed and persecuted God’s children Israel throughout history. To be specific, the 7 heads are thought by many to represent Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and Turkey (or the Ottomans). Apart from a few periods of Israeli independence, these 7 empires and their related predecessors have sequentially dominated the Jews since their selection as God’s chosen people during the time of the patriarchs up until the present day.

As for the horns, they represent 10 future kings or kingdoms that will give their authority to the beast during the last days (Revelation 17:12-13). Some have speculated that the beast will be the leader of the European Union, a revived or resurrected Roman Empire of sorts, symbolized by the head with the fatal wound that had been healed. Following this theory, the EU will be divided into 10 regions or kingdoms that will each submit themselves to his cruel lordship.

John’s vision of the beast from the sea seems to incorporate all of the elements described centuries before in Daniel’s prophetic vision. Daniel saw 4 beasts coming up from the sea (Daniel 7:4-8). The first appeared to be a lion (believed to represent Babylon), the second was like a bear (believed to represent Medo-Persia), the third looked like a leopard (believed to represent Greece), and the fourth had 10 horns (believed to be Rome). Collectively, these 4 beasts also had 7 heads. Coincidence?

Whatever your opinion concerning the proper meaning of the beast's heads and horns, notice that he rises to authority upon the calling and empowering of the dragon. Let me put it plainly, as I understand it. After losing the war in heaven during the first half of the tribulation and being thrown down to the earth at its midpoint, a furious and desperate Satan will harken to and initiate the totalitarian rule of the Antichrist.

II. THE REIGN OF THE BEAST (Revelation 13:3b-6)

John saw that the whole world was amazed by, worshiped, and followed the dragon and the beast from the sea. They revered the beast as being greater and stronger than any other. Inspired by his father Satan, the beast was filled with arrogance and pride and spoke blasphemies against God and his children. The beast was given dictatorial authority to rule over the earth for 42 months or 3 ½ years.

The initial commissioning of the Antichrist took place back in Revelation 6:1-2. When Jesus broke the first seal, the rider on the white horse came to earth. This rider, whom I believe to be the Antichrist, was a charismatic, diplomatic world leader who was committed to peace with Israel. Throughout the first half of the tribulation, he gradually became more and more popular and influential. Then, at the midpoint of the tribulation, filled with the Spirit of Satan, the Antichrist morphed into the hideous beast, seized absolute power, and turned against God. He reigned during the Great Tribulation.

I see incredible parallels between this story and that of Judas Iscariot. Jesus called Judas Iscariot to be an apostle, just as God dispatched the rider on the white horse to earth. Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, just as God knew that this rider would soon become the Antichrist. Judas walked with Jesus as His close companion for roughly 3 ½ years, the same amount of time that the Antichrist held friendly relations with Israel. Then Satan filled and darkened Judas' heart, leading him to betray Christ (John 13:2,27). In the same way, Satan possessed the Antichrist and he became the beast who betrayed and persecuted Israel and the followers of God.

III. THE RAGE OF THE BEAST (Revelation 13:7-10)

The beast made war with the saints of God and overcame them. Though his rage was most fiercely directed specifically toward the Jews, he held power over all of the people and nations of earth. His evil intentions mirrored those of the dragon. All who were unsaved worshiped him, while only those whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life resisted. They suffered greatly because they refused to submit to the beast.

John urged his readers to listen and understand. This season of adversity (ie, the coming Great Tribulation and the Antichrist's reign of terror) has been preordained by God. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise. Those who suffer through it must remember that God will punish evildoers by the same measure that they persecute others. Though many will be taken captive

and/or killed by the dragon and the beast from the sea during the end times, ultimately they too will suffer a similar fate. Knowing this, believers should be encouraged to persevere even through extreme hardship.

CONCLUSION

The beast from the sea is the Antichrist. His authority and power come from the dragon (that is, Satan) who exalts him to a place of prominence. The beast will rule over the earth for 42 months, during the Great Tribulation. He will make war with the saints of God and kill many of them, excluding the 144,000 who are under the LORD's divine protection. However, in the end he (and the dragon) will face God's justice.

Next week we will study the final member of the unholy trinity - the beast from the earth. Our message will cover the remainder of chapter 13. If you have time this week, read and reflect upon these verses in advance. Then you'll be even more prepared.

Until next Sunday, may God's grace and favor be upon you and your family.

19. The Beast from the Earth

Originally Preached on 8/15/2021

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. - Matthew 7:15

Good morning. Thank you for joining us for worship today. This morning's sermon is the 19th message of the "Revelation" series. We are currently just over halfway through our study of this incredible book. Based upon my series outline, we should complete this sermon series a week or 2 before Christmas. So settle back and get comfortable, we still have a lot of ground to cover...

This week's topic is the beast from the earth, the close companion and sinister partner of the beast from the sea. More specifically, they are the Antichrist (who we discussed in the opening verses of chapter 13 last Sunday) and the False Prophet (who we will discuss this morning in the closing verses of chapter 13). The False Prophet is the 3rd person of the unholy trinity, and therefore is to be contrasted with the Holy Spirit.

I. THE MISSION OF THE BEAST (Revelation 13:11-12)

John saw the dragon, Satan, being cast out of heaven and thrown down to the earth. Then he saw the dragon standing on the seashore as a beast rose out of the sea, widely regarded to be the Antichrist. Finally John saw a second beast, this time rising from the earth as if coming up from underground. This beast had 2 horns, like a lamb, but spoke like a dragon. In other words, it appeared to be harmless and gentle, but in reality it was evil and destructive. Looks can be deceiving! There are various interpretations as to the meaning of these horns, and I don't particularly favor any of them.

More importantly, the second beast exercised the authority of the first beast "in his presence". The language suggests that the second beast, widely regarded as the False Prophet, was almost always present with the first beast, serving as his chief advisor and trusted associate. The False Prophet derived his authority from the Antichrist, who in turn received his from the Devil. The beast from the earth had a singular purpose - to make all the peoples of earth submit to and worship the beast from the sea.

The beast from the earth, also known as the False Prophet, is the wicked version of the Holy Spirit. Both have a similar mission. While the Holy Spirit does many things, His primary purpose is to point people to Christ and bear witness of Him (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit does not speak of Himself, but rather gives all accolades and praise to Jesus (John 16:13-14). In the same way, the False Prophet will glorify the Antichrist and compel the nations to worship him.

II. THE METHOD OF THE BEAST (Revelation 13:13-15)

The beast from the earth was able to perform many great and miraculous signs before the people, such as calling fire down from heaven (which Elijah once did in the Old Testament). These signs deceived thousands of unwitting people into following the Antichrist. The False Prophet used deception as his primary tool for leading the world astray. He even convinced the people to construct an image of the first beast (who appeared to have been resurrected from the dead), perhaps like a statue or monument.

The False Prophet had the power to animate the image of the first beast so that it could speak and even kill those who refused to worship it. In other words, this image was unlike dead idols made of wood or stone. It appeared to be alive and had some sort of power and influence. Some commentators speculate that this could be some type of enhanced hologram. Also, many are of the opinion that this image is the “abomination of desolation” which will be set-up in the Temple during the last days (see Matthew 24:15).

When I think of how the Antichrist’s partner-in-crime, the False Prophet, will mislead the people into constructing and worshiping an idol, and can’t help but remember how Moses’ brother and companion Aaron did something very similar. While the stories are not exactly the same, there are clear parallels. Aaron led the children of Israel to worship a golden calf rather than God (see Exodus 32:1-6), while someday the False Prophet will encourage people to worship the image of the Antichrist.

III. THE MARK OF THE BEAST (Revelation 13:16-18)

Finally, John stated that the second beast caused all of the inhabitants of earth to receive a mark on either their right hands or foreheads. No one was exempt from taking the mark. This mandate included “the small and the great, the rich and the poor, and the free and the slaves”. The mark was an indicator of submission and allegiance to the first beast, the Antichrist.

In addition to the mark, people were compelled to bear the name and/or number of the beast from the sea. The number is said to be 666. In the Bible, 6 is the number of man, as people were fashioned on the 6th day of creation. Furthermore, 7 is considered to be the number for perfection. 6 falls short of 7, just as man falls short of perfection. Some experts have suggested that 666 is the numeric form or code of the Antichrist’s actual name and have put forward several possibilities. Some suggest the 666 reveals the corruption of all 3 members of the unholy trinity.

As you might imagine, there has been much debate over the years concerning both the “mark” and the “number” of the beast. What are they exactly? The truth is, no one knows for certain. However, Scripture plainly states that no one will be able to buy or sell anything unless they bear either the mark, name, and/or number of the first beast. These emblems are inseparably tied to commerce and the ability to exchange goods and services. In other words, those who refuse to submit to the Antichrist will be unable to purchase the things they need to survive, such as food and water. Furthermore, they will be unable to earn an income by selling the products and/or services they produce.

While such a scenario used to seem like absurd science fiction, increasingly it has become a viable possibility. With the rise of digital currency, the great decline of bartering and cash transactions, and the advent of credit/debit cards we have entered into a new age of commerce. Most modern sales and purchases are made without any actual, physical money. It's all just numbers on a computer screen. Therefore, whoever controls the computers also controls the money and can, if they so choose, regulate which exchanges are acceptable and which are not. The ability to exercise absolute control over and to monitor all monetary transactions worldwide is no longer a novel idea. Advances in technology have made the mark of the beast possible.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the beast from the earth is known as the False Prophet. He is the 3rd person of the unholy Trinity that will set itself up during the end times. His ministry will coincide with the Antichrist, taking place during the Great Tribulation. While the Antichrist will be more concerned with civil and political leadership, the False Prophet will have charge over religious things. Together they will be like the king-high priest duos of the Old Testament.

The beast from the earth will compel people to worship the Antichrist. He will perform miraculous signs that will deceive the masses and lead thousands astray. He will force people to take the "mark of the beast" which is a sign of allegiance and fealty to the Antichrist.

Satan, the Antichrist, and the False prophet will contend with God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They will wreak havoc on the earth and cause much pain and destruction. But their days of deception will be numbered, and ultimately the Truth will prevail...

20. Mt. Zion, 3 Angels, and the Spirit

Originally Preached on 8/22/2021

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. - Philippians 1:21

Over the past few weeks, we have studied the 3 characters of the unholy Trinity. Satan is the dragon, the Antichrist is the beast from the sea, and the False Prophet is the beast from the earth. In chapter 14, which we will begin today, there are 4 new and distinct scenes. We will discuss the first 3 of these this morning and save the last 1 for next Sunday. Let's get started...

I. THE SCENE ON MT. ZION (Revelation 14:1-5)

John looked and saw the Lamb, Jesus Christ, standing on Mt. Zion. He was surrounded by the 144,000 saints who had His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. John heard a voice from heaven which sounded like "many waters", "loud thunder", and "harpists playing on their harps". A heavenly choir, presumably made up of the angelic harpists and other singers, sang a new song before the throne of God. The 144,000 saints who were gathered below on Mt. Zion joined them in singing. Of all those living on the earth, only they were able to learn this song.

These 144,000 were described as having been "purchased from the earth". They had not defiled themselves with women and were celibate. They followed the Lamb wherever He went and were a sort of "first fruits" to God. They were honest and blameless before Him. Like the 120 or so Jewish believers who watched as Jesus ascended into heaven following His first coming, these 144,000 righteous Jews were there to witness His glorious return (Acts 1:9-10).

This scene almost certainly describes the second coming of Christ (Zechariah 8:3), which will occur at the end of The Great Tribulation. The 144,000 saints are, undoubtedly, the very same Messianic Jews who were sealed by God and under His divine protection during the reign of the Antichrist. The marks on their foreheads can be directly contrasted with the mark of the beast, which we discussed last week. In the last days, they will assemble to welcome and greet Jesus upon His return, and will join with the angels in Heaven singing praise to His wonderful name.

II. THE FLIGHTS OF 3 ANGELS (Revelation 14:6-11)

John then saw an angel flying in midheaven bearing the "eternal gospel". This message was to be preached to the entire earth - people of every language, nation, and tribe. It was a call to fear, worship, and give glory to God - the Creator of the heavens, earth, and everything in them. It was a call to repentance, faith, and salvation. This gospel message also included an urgent warning that the time of the LORD's judgment had come.

John then saw a second angel following behind the first. This angel proclaimed that "Babylon the great" had fallen. This angel described Babylon as, "she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." There is great debate among experts

regarding the identity of “Babylon”. We will discuss this issue in much greater depth later in this series when we get to chapters 17 and 18.

Finally, John saw a third angel following the other 2. This angel loudly declared a stern warning that if anyone worshiped the beast or took his mark, they would face the full strength of God’s anger and wrath. To be specific, they would face the eternal torment of fire and brimstone without any rest or relief in the presence of the Lamb and His holy angels. In other words, Jesus would see and approve of their everlasting condemnation.

These 3 angels were seen flying in midheaven, which is typically understood as the earth’s lower atmosphere or “sky”. It seems to me that the first angel, who came proclaiming the gospel, would have done so at the very beginning of the 7-year tribulation as a cry to those who would have to endure it. The second angel, who stated that Babylon had already fallen, would seem to arrive at the very end of the tribulation after Babylon had collapsed. The third angel, who gave a warning about the impending mark of the beast, would seem to appear at the midpoint of the tribulation, just prior to the wicked rule of the Antichrist.

If my suggestions are correct, these 3 angels are clearly presented out of chronological order. They appear at the beginning, end, and then middle of the tribulation. To me this is yet another example showing that John recorded his vision in the order that it was revealed to him - not necessarily in its proper chronological sequence. Broadly speaking, the events of Revelation will unfold in the order they are written, but there are numerous examples of flashbacks and foreshadowing found in the text.

III. THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Revelation 14:12-13)

John exhorted believers to persevere, remain obedient, and keep their faith in Jesus even when confronted with terrible persecution from the Antichrist. His words here echo those he’d penned earlier when originally describing the beast from the sea (Revelation 13:10). Sometimes we need to be encouraged repeatedly, especially in the face of such dire circumstances.

John then heard a voice from Heaven telling him to write. Scripture indicates that this was the Spirit speaking, i.e. the Holy Spirit. Remember that the Holy Spirit was removed from the earth along with all believers at the rapture of the Church and was seen in the heavenly throne room pictured as a 7 lamps of fire (Revelation 4:5). The Spirit dictated, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on... so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.” It would seem logical to make this statement at either the beginning of the tribulation or at the midpoint, just before The Great Tribulation. It would not make much sense to say this at the end, when or even after Jesus comes again.

Nevertheless, the summation of these verses is that believers should persevere even unto the point of death if necessary, knowing that it is a blessed thing to die in the Lord. Those who have been born again have the assurance of an eternal rest and the certainty that their good deeds

will be rewarded (James 1:12). This is the encouragement of God, as spoken by the Holy Spirit. We can face death courageously, because our hope is in Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION

The various scenes described in Revelation 14 seem to be, at least in my studied opinion, somewhat scattered in time across the 7-year tribulation period. To me this is the most disorderly, or shall I say non-sequentially presented, chapter in the entire book. For clarity's sake, let's review and reemphasize my proposed timeline for the first half of chapter 14.

- Jesus will stand on Mt. Zion and be welcomed by the 144,000 saints at the Second Coming - the end of the tribulation.
- The 1st angel will herald the gospel message to all of those left behind after the rapture who will have to go through the tribulation - the beginning of the tribulation.
- The 2nd angel will proclaim that Babylon the great has fallen - the end of the tribulation.
- The 3rd angel will warn the inhabitants of earth of the consequences that will befall those who take the mark of the beast - the middle of the tribulation.
- The Holy Spirit will inform all believers and/or would-be believers that it is a blessed thing to die in the Lord - the beginning or middle of the tribulation.

Next week we will cover the closing verses of Revelation 14. You'll not want to miss this message. Until then, remain strong, be faithful, and keep believing knowing that "He who endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13)."

21. The Harvest

Originally Preached on 8/29/2021

Seeing the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." - Matthew 9:36-38

Good morning. Last week we talked about the first half of Revelation 14, which included scenes of the Lamb and the 144,000 on Mt. Zion, the flights of 3 angels, and the voice of the Holy Spirit. Today we will finish this chapter with a message titled "The Harvest". As people who live and work in an agricultural area, I think we'll be able to easily identify with and appreciate the symbolism presented in this passage.

I. THE HARVEST OF THE EARTH (Revelation 14:14-16)

John looked and saw someone "like a son of man" sitting on a white cloud. He wore a golden crown on His head and held a sharp sickle in His hand. An angel came out of the heavenly temple and said to Him, "Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe." Hearing this, the one who was sitting on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and it was reaped.

The harvest depicted in these verses was of the "earth", generally thought of as a grain harvest. There are some who believe that the one sitting on the cloud was an angel, but the large majority (myself included) identify him as Jesus Christ, who often referred to Himself as "the Son of Man". Angels are not human and would therefore not be described as being like a son of man, but Jesus is both fully human and fully God at the same time. Furthermore, it is more consistent with other related passages to view this harvester as the Lord, Jesus Christ. Let me explain...

During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke of this future harvest in a parable known as the "Wheat and the Tares" (Matthew 13:24-30). In the parable, He told of a farmer who sowed a field with good wheat. However, his adversary came along and sowed bad seeds in the same field so that when the wheat began to sprout there were weeds growing up with it. Not wanting to potentially damage his harvest, the farmer allowed both the wheat and the tares to grow together. He intended to separate them one from another later, at harvest time.

Jesus went on to explain this parable to His disciples (Matthew 13:36-43). He explained that the Son of Man was the one who had sowed the field with good seeds. The enemy who sowed bad seeds was the devil. The field was the earth, the wheat was the children of God, and the tares (or weeds) were lost unbelievers. The workers who helped to reap the field and separate the good grain from the bad were angels. Jesus explained that this story depicted a future judgment that would occur at the end of the age, during which the unrighteous would be gathered up and cast into a fiery furnace while the righteous would shine like the sun in the Father's kingdom.

I believe, as do many other Bible scholars, that the harvest of the earth which John described in Revelation is the literal fulfillment of Jesus' parable. Jesus will someday divide the wheat from the tares, so as to reward the righteous and punish the wicked. Until then, however, we are all living in this world together.

II. THE HARVEST OF THE VINE (Revelation 14:17-20)

John saw another angel coming out of the heavenly temple, also holding a sharp sickle. Then yet another angel with the power of fire came out from the heavenly altar and cried out to the first one, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe." Having received permission, the angel with the sickle swung it over the earth, gathered the clusters from the vine, and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. There they were trampled outside of the city and great quantities of blood poured out, forming a pool measuring roughly 4 to 5 feet deep and almost 200 miles long.

The harvest described in these verses was "from the vine". In Biblical times, grapes were gathered and pressed, and their juice was collected and used for making wine. What John saw had been spoken of by the prophet Joel in the Old Testament (Joel 3:12-14). Again, it referred to a great end time judgment. In this harvest, the ripened grapes represented the wicked who would be thrown into the winepress of God's wrath to be crushed. The resulting blood that flowed has been determined to be either that of the wicked themselves or of the saints who they martyred.

Some interpreters understand this harvest of the vine to be completely distinct from the grain harvest mentioned in the previous verses insisting that they are totally separate events. However, I (and many others) tend to think they describe the same event in 2 different ways. The first depiction emphasizes that Jesus is the chief harvester, with the angels following His direction. The second stresses and graphically describes the horrifying fate of the unsaved. Let me repeat: I believe that there will only be 1 grand harvest, and propose that this pair of scenes (of grain and of grapes) are both representations of the same occurrence.

From this passage we get the phrase, "the grapes of wrath". This is the title of a classic American novel by John Steinbeck that tells the story of a small-time farm family struggling to survive during the Dust Bowl era. The "grapes of wrath" are also mentioned in the lyrics of the popular patriotic anthem called "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". In these verses we also read of "the grim reaper", although pop culture's image of this character is vastly different than the angel described here in Scripture.

III. PARALLEL PASSAGES IN THE GOSPELS

I equate the harvest of Revelation 14 with a couple of other passages found in the gospels. Not only did Jesus tell a parable about wheat and tares (which we discussed earlier), but also about a dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50). In this story, fishermen cast their net and caught all kinds of fish.

After dragging it ashore, they separated their catch by putting the good fish into containers and throwing the bad fish away.

Jesus also spoke of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). He foretold that one day the Son of Man will return and gather the nations together. At this time He will separate them, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. The righteous sheep will be placed on His right, and will inherit the kingdom of God that has been prepared just for them. However, the unrighteous goats will be placed on his left, and will go away into eternal punishment.

All of these passages, the grain harvest of Revelation 14, the grape harvest of Revelation 14, the parable of the wheat and tares, the parable of the dragnet, and the prophecy of the sheep and goats all describe the same thing in various ways. During the last days, Jesus will come and judge the world. He will separate everyone - the living and the dead - into 2 categories. There will be no middle ground. Those who have been born again will receive eternal life while those who remain unrepentant sinners will face eternal condemnation.

CONCLUSION

According to my understanding of the Bible, there will be 3 major judgments that take place during the last days. First, all Christians who accept Jesus prior to the Rapture will be rewarded at the Bema Seat Judgment. This is reserved only for the New Testament Church and will take place during tribulation. Second, all nonbelievers will be judged based on their works and condemned eternally to the lake of fire at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15). This will occur after the Millennium ends. In between these 2 events, a third judgment will occur. There will be a great separation of the righteous and the unrighteous at "the Harvest". This will take place during a brief window of time after the tribulation ends and before the Millennium begins. All of the redeemed will live on into the Millennium with Jesus while the unsaved will be cast into Hades for 1,000 years to await their eternal fate.

22. The Victors' Song & Smoke-Filled Temple

Originally Preached on 9/5/2021

Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the entire mountain quaked violently. - Exodus 19:18

Good morning. In today's sermon we are going to discuss the events described in Revelation 15. This chapter has fewest verses in the entire book - only 8. Therefore, we will easily be able to cover the entire chapter in a single message. The events we're about to consider take place in the heavenly throne room and temple. They serve as an introduction to the 7 bowls of wrath, the final series of God's tribulation judgments, which will be poured out upon the earth.

I. A SONG OF TRIUMPH (Revelation 15:2-4)

John looked and saw something "like a sea of glass mixed with fire". Standing on this sea were all of those who had been victorious over the beast, his image, his number, and his name. They were holding and playing harps while singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

There are various opinions about the make-up of this "sea of glass". Though we can't be certain, it seems to be some vast, brilliant, and translucent plane or surface upon which people could stand. Perhaps it is the floor of Heaven, through which events on the earth can be seen. John originally mentioned it back in Revelation 4, when he gave his overall description of the heavenly throne room.

There is a striking similarity between the details given here and those from Revelation 14:2-3. John had previously described a heavenly choir playing harps and singing a new song in heaven as the Lamb of God set foot on Mt. Zion. He saw the 144,000 believing Jews singing along with those in heaven as they welcomed Jesus' return to the earth. Could it be that the group singing in heaven was the Tribulation Saints who had overcome the Antichrist? Might this "new song" be that of Moses and the Lamb? Perhaps these 2 passages speak of the same event, one from an earthly and the other from a heavenly perspective. It's possible...

Moses wrote 3 full-length songs that are recorded in Scripture. The first was sung after the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 15:1-21). The second anticipated Israel's future apostasy and declared the Lord's faithfulness (Deuteronomy 32:1-43). The third was a melodious prayer included with the songs of David, Solomon, and others (Psalm 90:1-17). The song of Moses and the Lamb, which John recorded in this passage, is a condensed chorus that combines many elements found in these 3 longer songs.

II. 7 ANGELS PREPARE (Revelation 15:1,5-7)

Next, John described seeing the heavenly temple being opened and 7 angels coming out of it. These angels were dressed in clean, bright linen and wore golden sashes on their chests. One of the four living creatures gave each of these angels a golden bowl, full of the wrath of God.

These 7 bowls were synonymously referred to as the 7 plagues, and were to be God's final series of judgments upon the earth.

The language used in these verses seems to place this scene near the end of the Great Tribulation. As we will see starting next week, when we move into chapter 16, the severity of these 7 plagues almost certainly necessitates that they occur not long before the Second Coming of Christ. They are absolutely devastating and serve as the culmination of God's furious wrath. Following these judgments, the earth will be in almost total ruin...

III. SMOKE FILLS THE TEMPLE (Revelation 15:8)

After watching the 7 angels come out of it to receive their golden bowls, John saw the heavenly temple being filled with the smoke of God's glory and power. No one was allowed to enter the temple until the 7 plagues of the 7 angels were complete. In other words, the temple was off limits to everyone throughout the entire outpouring of the bowl judgments (possibly a period of several months).

In Old Testament times, after King Solomon had completed building it, God's shekinah glory filled the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 7:1-3). As a result, the priests were temporarily unable to enter it. Isaiah envisioned a similar occurrence when he saw the temple being filled with smoke (Isaiah 6:4) prior to his calling. The smoke represents the presence of God. Some readers have suggested that the smoke also served, in part, to prevent anyone from entering the heavenly temple to possibly intercede for mercy on behalf of the Antichrist or his kingdom.

CONCLUSION

As we have stated before, the largest portion of Revelation covers the 7-year tribulation period (chapters 6-19) which includes 3 series of 7 judgments - the 7 seals, the 7 trumpets, and the 7 bowls or plagues. The Bible also mentions 7 undisclosed "thunders" (Revelation 10:3-4) which may or may not refer to yet another set of judgments. Sticking with the 3 that we are certain of, there are 2 prevailing views about their timing. Some believe that they will occur in chronological order (one set after the other) while others believe they will occur simultaneously (in layered fashion). Personally, I think both of these theories have some merit. In my opinion, they will be "chronologically layered".

The seals describe events that begin during the first part of the tribulation and persist throughout. For the most part, they are somewhat broad in nature and gradually become more severe over time. They are not exclusively attributed to the Devil or the Antichrist, but rather characterize the general condition of the earth during the last days.

The trumpets describe events that occur during the early and middle years of the Great Tribulation, when the Antichrist's power and dominion are at their peak. They are much more

specific, but are still limited in scope and extent. These judgments will be inflicted directly by the hand of God and/or through the wicked devices of the Antichrist.

The bowls describe events that occur during the final year or perhaps even months of the Great Tribulation, as the Antichrist's kingdom and "Babylon the Great" begin to crumble. They are all-encompassing and merciless. These horrible judgments will fall upon all of the earth, with emphasis on the Antichrist and his hapless followers.

The Tribulation Saints, who have overcome the beast (Antichrist), will sing the victors' song. The heavenly temple will be filled with smoke while God's final judgments are poured out on the earth. Next week we will begin discussing the bowl judgments. Get ready. It's going to be brutal...

23. The First 5 Bowls (Plagues)

Originally Preached on 9/12/2021

Solomon also made all the furniture that was in the house of the Lord: the golden altar and the golden table on which was set the bread of the Presence; and the lampstands of pure gold, five on the right side and five on the left, in front of the inner sanctuary; and the flowers, the lamps, and the tongs, of gold; also the cups, the shears, the bowls, the ladles, and the firepans, of pure gold; - 1 Kings 7:48-50a

This morning we will begin our exploration of Revelation 16, which details the 7 bowls or plagues. This is the final series of judgments against the earth. Following these judgments the Great Tribulation will come to an end, and Jesus will return to set up His kingdom. Today we will consider the first 5 bowls, depicted vividly in verses 1-11.

Before we begin, remember the scene described in the previous chapter. John saw 7 angels come out of the heavenly temple. 1 of the 4 living creatures gave each of them a golden bowl full of the wrath of God. Then the temple was filled with smoke and no one was allowed to enter...

I. THE 1ST BOWL (Revelation 16:1-2)

John heard a loud voice coming from the temple instructing the angels to go and pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath. Upon hearing this directive, the 1st angel obediently went and poured out his bowl on the earth. When he did so, a painful and harmful sore afflicted those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.

The Bible does not give us any additional details about this agonizing sore. We don't know where it appeared on the body or how long it remained. However, it is important to notice that this judgment was directed specifically at the Antichrist's followers. Up to this point, the devastations of the tribulation generally affected the entire earth and all of its inhabitants. Meanwhile, the heavy persecutions of the beast narrowly targeted Israel and the Tribulation Saints (believers). For the first time, God's anger was pointed exclusively toward His enemies. This 1st bowl marked the beginning of the end for Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet.

II. THE 2ND BOWL (Revelation 16:3)

John then saw the 2nd angel pour his bowl into the sea. It turned to blood "like that of a dead man". Every living thing in the sea died. This atrocity can be compared to the 2nd trumpet judgment (Revelation 8:8-9) that took place sometime earlier during the Great Tribulation which caused $\frac{1}{3}$ of the sea to be turned to blood and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the creatures in it to die. Now, as a result of this bowl, the destruction of the sea was complete - 100%.

It is hard to imagine the many effects that this would have. In an instant, there would be no more ocean creatures to eat and or use for producing other products. Shipping and marine trade would come to a complete and abrupt end, upending the world's already floundering economy.

Travel would be altered and restricted. Contamination and pollution from putrid, bloody oceans would cause worldwide sickness and death. The impact would be unimaginable...

III. THE 3RD BOWL (Revelation 16:4-7)

Next, the 3rd angel poured his bowl out on the earth and all of the fresh-water rivers and springs (and therefore lakes, streams, etc) were also turned to blood. John heard “the angel of the waters” praising God for avenging the blood of slain prophets and saints by giving those who’d martyred them blood to drink. “They deserve it”, the angel said. A voice from the heavenly altar agreed and affirmed the righteousness of God’s judgments.

This is comparable to the blast of the 3rd trumpet (Revelation 8:10-11), after which $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth’s fresh-water was made bitter and undrinkable. Following this bowl judgment, all of the water was tainted. The remaining $\frac{2}{3}$, which had been potable during much of the Great Tribulation, was also ruined. Now there was virtually no fresh-water to drink or to nourish plants or crops. If any supplies of fresh-water remained, they were extremely scarce and of the utmost value as life cannot exist long without drinkable water.

IV. THE 4TH BOWL (Revelation 16:8-9)

The 4th angel poured his bowl out on the sun and it was given power “to scorch people with fire”. Due to the severe heat, the masses were badly scorched and began to blaspheme God’s name. Though suffering from extreme sunburn, they still stubbornly refused to repent or give God glory. This is somewhat similar to the 1st trumpet judgment (Revelation 8:7), during which $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth’s plantlife and trees were burned up.

Some modern environmentalists suggest that such a catastrophe could occur due to the deterioration of the ozone layer which shields the earth from the sun’s intense heat. Global warming is a popular and sometimes controversial topic. Is it natural or man-made, or perhaps a combination of both? Can we do anything to significantly change it? While these questions are the subject of much debate, the Bible reveals clearly that in the last days temperatures will rise, famine and drought will increase, and people will suffer in the blistering rays of the hot sun.

V. THE 5TH BOWL (Revelation 16:10-11)

John watched as the 5th angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast. The kingdom of the Antichrist was “darkened” and he and his royal court were plagued with painful sores. They gnawed their tongues in agony and blasphemed the name of God, foolishly refusing to repent of their evil deeds.

The 5th bowl was, in some respects, a continuation and extension of the judgments begun by the 1st bowl. While the 1st bowl afflicted only the worshipers of the beast, the 5th bowl actually took aim at the beast and his attendants. The heavy persecution that the Antichrist had been

wielding against the children of God was now being turned against him. As they say, "What goes around comes around." His dominance was waning and his kingdom began to crumble...

CONCLUSION

The bowl judgments will take place during the final months of the Great Tribulation, setting the stage for Christ's glorious return. Though their effects will certainly impact the entire world, their primary target will be the Antichrist and his followers. Let's take a moment to highlight and emphasize this point.

The 1st bowl was exclusively aimed at those who took the mark of the beast or worshiped his image. The 3rd bowl was primarily against those who martyred God's people and were deserving of God's wrath. The 4th bowl hit those who blasphemed God's name and refused to repent. The 5th bowl was precisely pointed at the Antichrist and his sinister kingdom.

Up to this point, the beast had imposed his tyrannical dictates and torments upon the people of God. He and his wicked cohorts had imposed severe persecutions against Israel and the Tribulation Saints throughout most of the Great Tribulation. But as his power began to slip and God's judgment began to fall upon him, the Antichrist became increasingly crazed and desperate. What could he... what would he do to resist?

24. The 6th and 7th Bowls

Originally Preached on 9/19/2021

Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. - Isaiah 13:6

Last Sunday we began a 2-part discussion of the 7 bowls or plagues. These are God's final judgments upon the earth. While they will impact the entire world, their primary target will be the beast, his kingdom, and his followers. As we learned in the first message, bowls 1-5 will severely cripple the Antichrist and weaken his authoritarian rule.

This morning we will cover bowls 6 & 7. With his monarchy quickly unraveling, the desperate and unhinged Antichrist will turn his attention away from merely persecuting the people of God. Instead, he will endeavor to fight with God directly in an attempt to save his throne. Inspired by Satan, who has a long and documented history of losing to the LORD, the beast will muster every resource at his disposal and will rally all of his forces together for this great and epic battle.

I. THE 6TH BOWL (Revelation 16:12)

John saw the 6th angel pour out his bowl on the Euphrates River, which at this point would have already been turned to blood. When he did so, its "waters" dried up making passage over the river quite easy, especially for large numbers of people. Thus, the way was prepared for the kings of the east and their armies.

Earlier in Revelation, at the blast of the 6th trumpet, John described the release of 4 angels who were bound at the Euphrates River (Revelation 9:13-19). The river was not dried up at this time. Apparently, these angels led an army of 200,000,000 soldiers or "horsemen". These troops had strange features and lethal abilities that enabled them to kill $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth's population during the years of the Great Tribulation. As stated earlier in this series, I believe that this huge army was that of the Antichrist, that these 4 angels were his generals or commanders, and that the millions of soldiers were militant demons (although some humans may have joined as well).

II. THE KINGS GATHER (Revelation 16:13-16)

John then saw 3 unclean spirits, like frogs, coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. He depicted them as frogs because they were unclean and loathsome. This powerful trio of demonic spirits went out to the kings of the entire world, intent on convincing them to join the Antichrist in a massive and direct assault against God. As a result of their manipulative persuasion, several kings agreed and dispatched their armies to Israel. Some of them crossed the dried up Euphrates riverbed as they came. This massive alliance of human soldiers gathered together with the evil and demonic forces of the Antichrist at a place called Armageddon. There they all prepared to wage war with God.

The word Armageddon appears only once in the Bible. In Hebrew, it means "Mount Megiddo". Because the Scriptures never mention a mountain by this name, most commentators believe it refers to the rolling hills surrounding the plain of Megiddo some 60 miles north of Jerusalem. This valley was the site of several historic battles including Barak's victory over the Canaanites and Gideon's victory of the Midianites during the era of the judges. It is also where King Saul and his sons were slain by the Philistines and King Josiah was killed by the Egyptians.

John inserts a quotation in this passage that should not be overlooked. It is taken from Matthew 24:43 and Luke 12:39. Jesus told his disciples, "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and people will not see his shame." A thief does not typically give an advanced warning of when he plans to break into your house, but Jesus has given us notice of His return and has instructed us to be ready for it. Those who are caught unaware will be put to shame.

The 6th Bowl essentially sets up the Battle of Armageddon. It provides an unobstructed path for those kings of the earth who've aligned themselves with the Antichrist to assemble together at Armageddon. It removes any obstacles and puts the necessary pieces in place. The 6th bowl should not be thought of as the Battle of Armageddon, but rather a precursor that makes the battle possible. Obviously, the timing of these events is very near to, likely in the final days of, the Great Tribulation.

III. THE 7TH BOWL (Revelation 16:17-21)

Finally, John watched as the 7th angel poured out his bowl upon the air. He heard a voice from the throne coming out of the temple that said, "It is done!". There was lightning, thunder, and a great earthquake more powerful than any other that had ever come before it. The great city, likely Jerusalem, was split into 3 parts and many other cities around the world collapsed. God poured his wrath upon Babylon, and even the mountains and islands were shaken and displaced. In addition to this mighty earthquake, huge hailstones fell from the sky weighing about 80-100 lbs each. The embittered people blasphemed the name of God.

Earlier in the tribulation there was another smaller earthquake that hit Jerusalem (Revelation 11:13). In my opinion, it took place at the midpoint of the tribulation following the resurrection of the 2 witnesses. A tenth of the city fell and 7,000 people were killed. Though it was devastating, the massive earthquake associated with the 7th bowl will be much worse and will have a more far-reaching, global impact.

The fact that the voice came from the throne, yet also out of the temple suggests a close proximity between the 2 (or perhaps even a oneness). Surely this was the voice of God. His words, "It is done!" were the same as Jesus' cry from the cross, "It is finished!" This was a shout of victory, indicating that the mission had been accomplished. Thus, I believe that these things will take place immediately after the Battle of Armageddon, when Satan and the Antichrist have already been defeated.

There are several notable parallels between the 7th bowl judgment and the 6th and 7th seal judgments. At the breaking of the 6th seal there was a great earthquake, the sky was split apart, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Furthermore, stars fell from the sky like hail and people hid themselves in caves. At the breaking of the 7th seal fire from God's altar was hurled upon the earth (similar to a hailstorm), there was lightning and thunder, and a great earthquake. Personally, I believe that all 3 of these judgments refer to the same occurrence - the Day of the Lord. This will take place immediately before Jesus' return to the earth.

CONCLUSION

Some words have multiple meanings. For example, sometimes "Passover" refers specifically to the night that the death angel passed over the Hebrew children. Other times it refers to the annual 24-hour day held in commemoration of that night. On occasion it even refers to the entire week-long Jewish festival, which also included the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of First Fruits.

In the same way, sometimes the phrase "the Day of the Lord" refers to a single calendar day while other times it refers to a season of several days or even weeks. After much build up and anticipation, I think that the tribulation will come to an abrupt end with an outbreak of several cosmic signs and natural disasters, the Battle of Armageddon (which will be the culmination of Babylon's fall - more on this later), and the Second Coming of Christ all occurring on the same 24-day. Afterwards there will be an extended period of mourning over Babylon followed by the Harvest or Sheep-Goat Judgment. These things will occur in the days/weeks following Jesus' return, yet are typically thought of as integral parts of "the Day of the Lord".

The upcoming chapters delve more deeply into the mystery of Babylon, her impending doom, and the grief that will be shown for her. There are many varied interpretations on this topic. Anyway, we'll get into it starting next Sunday. God bless you.

25. The Mystery of Babylon the Great (Part 1)

Originally Preached on 9/26/2021

Now He was questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, and He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." - Luke 17:20-21

Over the next few weeks, in chapters 17 and 18, we will dig deeper into the topic of "Babylon". John has already mentioned Babylon twice in his vision (Revelation 14:8 and 16:19), though he hasn't elaborated on it in detail. When he described the flights of the 3 angels, he wrote that the 2nd angel shouted, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." Later, as he talked about the 7th bowl judgment, he said, "Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath."

We learn from these 2 statements that "Babylon the great" misled the nations of the world and enticed them to act immorally. As a result, Babylon was judged by God, experienced His terrible wrath, and subsequently fell or collapsed. But the question remains, "Who or what is Babylon the great?"

I. THE TROUBLING SCENE (Revelation 17:1-3,7)

John was approached by 1 of the 7 angels who had just finished pouring out the bowls of God's wrath. The angel invited him to come see "...the judgment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters". This prostitute was described as one "...with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of sexual immorality, and those who live on the earth became drunk with the wine of her sexual immorality."

The angel carried John away in the Spirit into a wilderness. Therefore, in his vision, the scene shifted temporarily away from his heavenly vantage point in the throne room to a mysterious wilderness. There, he saw a woman riding atop a scarlet beast. The beast was covered with blasphemous names, had 7 heads, and 10 horns. Overcome with curiosity, John was assured by the angel that the mystery of both the woman and the beast would be revealed.

In part 1 of this message, this morning, we will focus on identifying and further investigating this hideous beast. Next week we will deal with the strange woman who was seen sitting upon the beast. By first familiarizing ourselves with this beast, we'll then be in a better position to discuss and understand who its harlotrous rider might be.

II. THE IDENTITY OF THE BEAST (Revelation 17:8)

As previously stated, the beast was full of blasphemous names, had 7 heads, and 10 horns. This description matches that given of both the dragon and of the beast from the sea found

earlier in Revelation (12:3 and 13:1). They are of the same corrupt nature, mimicking the holy oneness of God the Father and Christ the Son. Therefore, this beast would seemingly represent either Satan, the Antichrist, or maybe both.

The angel who was speaking with John said, "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction." It is important to remember that the bowl judgments ended with the defeat of Babylon and the coming of Christ. Therefore, following the sequencing of the Revelation narrative, Satan and the Antichrist would have recently been defeated. In other words, their kingdom was, but currently is not.

This beast would soon come out of the pit before going to destruction. This statement foreshadows the fate of the Devil, who (as we will discuss in the coming weeks) would be bound during the Millennium, released at its end, and then ultimately defeated and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:1-3,7-10). The unsaved people living on the earth at the end of the Millennium would be in awe and wonder when the beast (Satan) reappeared after having been imprisoned for 1,000 years.

III. THE HEADS OF THE BEAST (Revelation 17:9-11)

The angel told John that the beast's 7 heads were 7 mountains upon which the woman sits. While some interpret this metaphor literally, the text plainly states that these mountains were kings - not natural land features or hills. Mountains are often used symbolically in the Bible to refer to kingdoms (such as in Daniel 2:35). Therefore, a more credible and widely accepted interpretation of this passage is that the 7 heads depict the 7 kingdoms that have ruled over and oppressed Israel throughout her history - namely Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and Turkey (or the Ottomans). Let me explain...

Referring to these 7 kings and kingdoms, the angel told John that 5 had already fallen, that 1 is, and that another is yet to come. Remember that John lived and wrote during the 1st century, while the Romans were in power. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece (5) had already fallen or relinquished control over Israel, the Romans currently held it, and the Ottomans would take over centuries later.

The angel then stated that the beast himself was an 8th kingdom, yet also 1 of the 7. To clarify, the beast was a revived version of 1 of the previous kingdoms that would reassert itself in the last days to dominate Israel for a second time. This was depicted earlier by the single head of the beast that had been fatally wounded but was miraculously healed (Revelation 13:3). Most commentators agree that this resurrected kingdom will be Rome. A revived and refashioned Roman Empire led by the Antichrist, perhaps manifested in the form of the European Union, will reign over and oppress Israel during the Great Tribulation.

IV. THE HORNS OF THE BEAST (Revelation 17:12-14)

Finally, the angel explained to John that the 10 horns of the beast were 10 future kings. These distant kingdoms were not in existence during John's lifetime, but rather would arise during the last days. They would receive authority and power for a brief time and give it to the beast. Together with the beast, they would wage war against and subsequently be overcome by the Lamb and His faithful followers.

Some eschatologists suggest that the revived Roman Empire of the last days (possibly the EU) will consist of 10 divisions or nations, ruled by 10 kings all under the headship of the Antichrist. If so, these 10 monarchs will likely be European. This is in contrast to the aforementioned "kings of the east" who will also agree to fight alongside the Antichrist during the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:12-16). They will presumably be Asian. Collectively, the "10 kings" and "the kings of the east" combined illustrate most, if not all, of the world's leaders.

CONCLUSION

When we meld all of these characteristics together, the beast of Revelation 17 most aptly represents an evil and Satanic kingdom, led by the Antichrist, that will come to power in the last days, made up of and supported by a confederation of several earthly kings. This coming kingdom will revel in persecuting Israel and opposing God Almighty. The beast symbolizes both this kingdom and its demented king. It will be a dark, secular, corrupt, and sinful realm filled with lies, lust, promiscuity, violence, greed, idolatry, and all other forms of vile immorality.

In closing, remember that the scarlet beast is only half of the mystery. Join us next week for part 2 of this message, as we seek to identify the prostitute riding on top of the beast. Only then will we truly be able to comprehend the meaning of "Babylon the great".

26. The Mystery of Babylon the Great (Part 2)

Originally Preached on 10/3/2021

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife inclined to infidelity, and children of infidelity; for the land commits flagrant infidelity, abandoning the Lord." - Hosea 1:2

Good morning. Today's message is part 2 of the sermon we started last Sunday. We are looking at Revelation 17 and talking about John's description of "Babylon the great". As you recall, John was talking with 1 of the 7 angels that had just finished pouring out the bowls of God's wrath. This angel carried him away "in the Spirit" into a wilderness where he saw a woman riding on a scarlet beast.

In part 1 of this sermon, we specifically discussed and sought to identify this terrifying beast. Based upon the characteristics given, especially the creature's heads and horns, I strongly believe (as do many other respected commentators) that this beast represents the Satanic kingdom of the Antichrist, which will be a revived and modern form of the old Roman Empire. As such it will be a civil, political, and governmental structure.

In part 2 of this message we will consider the mysterious woman that was seated on the beast. Who is she and what does she represent? Again, various suggestions have been made as to the identity of this woman. Today I'll share my perspective...

I. THE WOMAN'S SIN (Revelation 17:1-3,7)

Though we already studied these verses last week and I touched on them again in the introduction of today's message, let's take a moment to consider a few particular details about this woman. The angel described her as "a great prostitute who sits on many waters". She seduced the kings of the world into committing acts of sexual immorality with her. She also caused those who live on the earth to become drunk with the wine of her sexual immorality.

The Bible deals with prostitution in much the same way as it does adultery. When a married or betrothed person had sex with someone other than their spouse, they were said to be "prostituting themselves" or "playing the prostitute". In other words, there is a scriptural equivalent between the traditional prostitute (who engaged in sexual activity in exchange for money, favors, or religious purposes) and the adulterer (who cheated on and thereby sinned against their husband or wife). Both are depicted as prostitutes.

To me, the difference is quite subtle. I would describe a prostitute (in the Bible) as a person who intentionally allured or enticed someone other than their spouse into having sex with them. They purposefully sought out and initiated the relationship. Thus, a "prostitute" might be a single person using their body as a means of making a living or a married person looking to have an illicit affair. The latter describes Old Testament Israel who, spiritually speaking, violated her

covenant relationship with God by chasing after idols, false gods, and other worldly things (Jeremiah 3:1-10).

II. A DESCRIPTION OF THE WOMAN (Revelation 17:4-6)

The prostitute riding on the beast was clothed “in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls.” These were the colors worn by royalty and the upper-class of society. Interestingly, they are also quite similar to those worn by the high priest (Exodus 28). In addition, she held “a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her sexual immorality.” Though herself shameful and debased, she associated with (and allowed herself to be used by) the affluent and wealthy elites of the earth.

On her forehead was written, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” This can be compared with the aforementioned worshippers on the beast, who took his mark on their foreheads (or right hands). It can be directly contrasted with the 144,000 Messianic Jews who were sealed with the mark of God on their foreheads and thereby received His divine protection. Based on this verse, the great prostitute John saw is commonly called “The Whore of Babylon”.

This woman was “drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.” In other words, the harlot was responsible for martyring the saints of God - both His prophets and people. This could apply to the Old Testament. Furthermore, she persecuted and killed those who bore witness to Jesus Christ - ie, the early disciples and born-again Christians. This could apply to the New Testament. In short, she was a murderer of God’s children (Matthew 23:37).

III. OTHER IMPORTANT CLUES (Revelation 17:15-17)

The angel said to John, “The waters which you saw where the prostitute sits are peoples and multitudes, and nations and languages.” In other words, she had misled most of the world - from the greatest to the smallest - making them commit acts of lewd and sinful immorality. Throngs of people and nations had been seduced by her ruinous charms.

The Antichrist and the 10 kings who submitted themselves to his authority (pictured by the horns which we discussed last week) fiercely hated the prostitute. They sought to make her “desolate and naked” by destroying and devouring her. Ironically, the very beast that the prostitute rode upon despised her and wished her dead. This animosity toward her was consistent with God’s purposes, and He used the beast to discipline the harlot.

Finally, the angel plainly said that the prostitute was “the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” Twice already in the book of Revelation John used this phrase. When discussing the execution of the 2 witnesses, he wrote that the Antichrist would leave their bodies lying in the streets of “the great city... where their Lord was crucified” (Revelation 11:8). Later, when describing the 7th bowl, he stated that “The great city was split into three parts” (Revelation

16:19) by a tremendous earthquake. In both of these previous instances, the great city obviously referred to Jerusalem. Could the prostitute be Jerusalem?

CONCLUSION

There are 2 leading theories as to the identity of "The Whore of Babylon". Some argue that she is Rome, or perhaps the church of Rome. Though there is some support for this view, I find it ultimately unconvincing. Many who take this position are simply hesitant to identify the prostitute as Jerusalem because they don't want to be labeled as anti-semitic. But the beast itself already represents Rome, thereby making this hypothesis rather redundant.

Remember, the beast hates the prostitute and seeks to kill her. How could Rome hate Rome and why would it seek to destroy itself? To me, the evidence clearly supports the alternative theory - that the prostitute is, in fact, Jerusalem. After all, the Bible repeatedly describes Israel as a prostitute practicing open infidelity toward God (and the Bible isn't anti-semitic, is it?). Jerusalem figuratively "reigns" because it is the most prominent religious center in the world, influencing and impacting the lives of millions.

It is important to clearly differentiate between "True Israel" and "Apostate Israel". True Israel consists of those who share in the saving faith of Abraham, especially those Jews who trust in God and believe that Jesus is the messiah. These righteous believers are depicted by the pure and faithful mother who fled away into the wilderness to be protected by God during the Great Tribulation (Revelation 12:1-2,5-6). "Apostate Israel" is made up of those Jews that have unfaithfully violated God and His covenant, and have rejected and crucified His beloved Son Jesus Christ. These are portrayed by the great harlot.

In closing, though narrowly exemplified as Jerusalem and Apostate Israel, broadly speaking the "The Whore of Babylon" represents all religions and empty philosophies that compromise themselves with the world, glorify earthly things, and worship other false gods. Finally, the woman and the beast together illustrate the entire corrupt and carnal world system - both secular and spiritual - that stands at enmity against God. This was foreshadowed by the collusion of the Jews (the religious authorities) and the Romans (the civil authorities) who conspired in Jesus' crucifixion. In the end, the whole sinful world order - Babylon - will fall.

27. The Fall of Babylon

Originally Preached on 10/10/2021

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. - 1 John 2:15

In chapter 17 John described seeing a great harlot riding on a scarlet beast. The literary style of the text clearly indicated that these 2 characters were symbolic. Upon careful study, I proposed that together they portrayed the entire world system - its culture, politics, economics, religion, and so forth. The beast depicted the secular and Satanic kingdom of the Antichrist, which would be likened to the revived Roman Empire. The prostitute represented a vile and bankrupt human religion that denied faith in Jesus and instead gloried earthly things, narrowly exemplified by the image of Jerusalem and apostate Israel.

To a lesser degree, the prostitute and the beast might also illustrate the uneasy relationship between the Jews and Gentiles, who - though they hated one another - were jointly culpable for the crucifixion of Christ. In the end times they will stand together again, hand in hand as a singular "Babylon", to oppose the forces of God Almighty. In spite of their unholy alliance, they will be resoundingly defeated.

I. THE ANGEL'S DECLARATION (Revelation 18:1-3)

John looked and saw another angel coming down from heaven having so much glory that it illuminated the earth. The angel called out mightily, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" He went on to say that the once great Babylon had now become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of unclean spirits, full of unclean and hateful birds. In addition to and because of Babylon's demise, all of the nations and kings of the earth had also fallen and its once wealthy merchants had lost all of their fortunes.

The message spoken by this angel is almost identical to that of the second angel seen back in Revelation 14:8. Perhaps they are the same, and this scene is simply repeated twice in John's vision... who knows? Babylon had recently been the greatest power on the earth, admired by all others. But after her fall, she had become a miserable and wretched place where the demons and unclean spirits resided. Her excessive pride and arrogance were no more, as she had been justly humbled and judged by God. Oh how the mighty had fallen!

All of the nations on the earth had colluded with evil Babylon and compromised themselves with her, seeking to satisfy their carnal desires and lusts. As a result, they too had fallen. The world's political structure and powers had crumbled. The economies and financial systems had completely collapsed. Money had become worthless as the entire world order had eroded. God's judgment against His enemies was devastating and complete.

It would seem that this angel spoke after Satan, Antichrist, and the False prophet had been defeated. Their demise began with the bowl judgments and culminated at the Battle of

Armageddon, just before the return of Christ. Therefore, I place this angel's declaration at the end of the Great Tribulation.

II. THE VOICE'S WARNING (Revelation 18:4-8)

John heard another voice saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive any of her plagues". The voice stated that Babylon's sins were numerous and that God was fully aware of them all. It then urged Him to take retribution against Babylon in double-portion for the wickedness that she had committed. The voice asked God to inflict torment and mourning on Babylon because she had glorified herself, lived in luxurious excess, and boasted of her power and greatness. Finally, the voice declared that God would surely send plagues upon Babylon, including mourning and famine, and burn her with fire because of her rampant immorality.

Though the speaker in this passage is never expressly identified, it would appear to be another angel. In this portion of his quotation, the presumed angel expressed 3 distinct ideas. First, he warned any true believers to flee from the false pretenses and corrupt powers of Babylon before it was too late. Second, he urged the LORD to begin pouring out His judgment upon Babylon. Third, he promised that, though it may not have started yet, God's judgment of Babylon would certainly come.

It would seem that this voice spoke prior to the fall of Babylon. After all, it would be unreasonable to urge God's children to flee from Babylon if she had already fallen. Likewise, why would this angel plea with the LORD to execute His judgment upon the world if He'd already done so? Thus, the placement of this voice in John's narrative is (in my opinion) yet another glaring indication that parts of Revelation are not written in chronological order. I would place this angel's message with that of the third angel mentioned in Revelation 14:9-12, arguing that both spoke at the midpoint of the tribulation, just prior to the Antichrist's reign and the rise of Babylon.

III. THE MEASURE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

Notice that the angel asked God exact vengeance upon Babylon in proportion to the evil that she had committed. In fact, he wanted God to pay her back in double-measure for her sins. The angel's words highlight an important Biblical concept, that of proportional judgment.

Jesus taught us as Christians not to judge one another. True, we should boldly stand against sin and strive to live above reproach by not participating in acts of willful disobedience, but at the same time we should not condemn those who behave unrighteously. Experience has taught me that this can be a difficult balancing act at times... hating sin, yet simultaneously loving sinners. Still, this God's perspective towards us and it should be our perspective towards others.

When we do wrongly judge others, the Bible says that we will ourselves receive judgment by the same measure (Matthew 7:2). In other words, the more harshly we condemn others for their sins, the greater our judgment will be. On the other hand, the more gracious and forgiving we

are, the lighter our judgment will be. It is somewhat unclear how this will play out, seeing as all born-again believers will receive eternal life, but perhaps these degrees of judgment will affect our rewards in Heaven or our proximity to the throne of God. Nevertheless, Scripture repeatedly teaches that we will be judged proportionally. Following this principle, the angel in today's text implored God to judge Babylon according to the measure of her sin.

CONCLUSION

Satan is the god of Babylon. The Antichrist is the king of Babylon. The False Prophet is the priest of Babylon. The people who reject God and worship the beast are the citizens of Babylon. Idolatry and materialism characterize the religion of Babylon. Pride and arrogance describe the attitude of Babylon. Immorality and corruption exemplify the behavior of Babylon. In short, this world is Babylon... and it will someday fall before the mighty hand of God.

But as Christians, we are not of this world. Our citizenship is not here in Babylon, but above in Heaven. We are pilgrims and strangers on the earth, waiting to go to our eternal home. While we are here, however, may we echo the warning given by the angel. Let us also urge people to flee from the kingdom of darkness - to come out of her through faith in Jesus Christ - while there is still time. Judgment is coming soon.

28. Grief Over Babylon

Originally Preached on 10/17/2021

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it is better for him if a heavy millstone is hung around his neck and he is thrown into the sea. - Mark 9:42

This morning we will wrap-up our discussion of Babylon. Though he'd mentioned "Babylon the great" a couple of times earlier in Revelation, John did not elaborate on it or explain it in detail until chapters 17 & 18. He began his emphasis on Babylon by depicting her as a prostitute riding on a scarlet beast. John urged God's people to come out of her before it was too late. He also talked about the calamitous fall of Babylon. In the passage we will look at today, John will describe various reactions to the demise of Babylon.

Just as a reminder... I am of the opinion that the prostitute - called "the mother of all prostitutes" - represents Jerusalem, or apostate Israel, who has grossly and continuously been unfaithful to God throughout history. Her daughters, by extension, are all of the other worldly and adulterous religions that chase after other "lovers". The beast pictures the Satanic kingdom of the Antichrist - a revived manifestation of the Roman Empire - which is the culmination of earthly political power and strength. When considered together, Babylon is the entire order or system of corrupt man - both spiritual and secular. God will judge it all.

I believe that Babylon will crumble over a period of time as the bowl judgments are being poured out, finally collapsing completely following the crushing defeat of the Antichrist and his allies at the Battle of Armageddon. The enemies of God who remain on the earth will react to the fall of Babylon in the days that follow, after the Great Tribulation has come to an end.

I. WOE OF THE KINGS (Revelation 18:9-10)

The surviving kings of the earth mourned and wept over the symbolic ruins of Babylon. They had formerly committed sinful and immoral acts with her and lived lavishly at her side, but not anymore. They sorrowfully watched the smoke rise as she burned. Still, they observed from a distance fearing that they might suffer the same fate. They cried, "Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come."

Rather than repenting in the wake of God's judgment upon Babylon, the remaining world leaders and political powers lamented her fall. Remarkably, they still refused to give reverence to the LORD. Instead of turning to Him they groaned and wailed, "Woe!" They were deeply saddened to see the sinful city and all that she stood for destroyed. They obviously loved the darkness more than the light (John 3:19).

II. WOE OF THE MERCHANTS (Revelation 18:11-17a)

The merchants of the earth also mourned and wept over fallen Babylon. The economy was in complete disarray and no one bought their products. The once vibrant market for precious

metals and gems, expensive fabrics, quality building materials, fine spices and oils, grain and livestock, and even the slave labor had dissolved. These merchants had previously become rich selling such material things to satisfy the extravagant indulgences of Babylon, but not anymore. Their wealth was gone in an instant, worthless in the wake of Babylon's grave misfortune and utter degradation.

These merchants, who represent the wealthy elites, the businessmen, and the upper class, also mourned and wept over Babylon. Like their political cohorts, they too grieved from a distance concerned that God's judgment might likewise fall on them. They cried, "Woe, woe!" as they recalled how the extravagant and beautiful city had suddenly been laid to waste. Their sorrow was not only for Babylon, but also selfishly for themselves...

III. WOE OF THE MARINERS (Revelation 18:17b-19)

Even the mariners mourned and wept for Babylon. The ship captains, sailors, passengers, and all who earned a living by the sea (even fishermen) were heartbroken. Like the others, they observed the smoke of Babylon's burning from a distance. They threw dust on their heads and cried, "Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich from her prosperity, for in one hour she has been laid waste!"

These mariners were the working class, the common people, who also made a living by serving the demands of Babylon. How would they survive now? Who would pay them for their products and services? Everything they had worked for and saved was lost. How would they be able to start over again?

The kings, the merchants, and the mariners collectively represent the full gamut of society. Their 3-fold "woe" symbolizes the perfection and fullness of God's judgment. Literally everyone sobbed because Babylon had fallen - both the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, the famous and the obscure, and so on.... Those who are of the world will naturally mourn when she finally faces her long-overdue judgment..

IV. JOY OF THE HEAVENS (Revelation 18:20-24)

While the world bemoaned the fall of Babylon and the collapse of sinful man, those in Heaven were told to rejoice. The saints, the apostles, and the prophets were called to joyfully celebrate because God's judgment had come. They had long been praying for God's vengeance against their enemies. Earlier in Revelation the martyrs (6:9-11), the Tribulation saints (8:3-5), and a voice from Heaven (16:4-8) each pleaded with God to bring judgment upon His adversaries.

Then John saw a strong angel pick up a large stone, like a millstone, and cast it into the sea. As the stone sunk into the watery depths, the angel compared it to Babylon. The kingdom of man, led at the end by the Antichrist, would likewise be violently thrown down and disappear forever. There would be no more joyful music, crafting, or milling. Young couples would no longer be

given in marriage. Her lamps would be extinguished and darkness would persist. The wealth and power of her merchants would be eternally lost.

Babylon would fall because she had deceived the nations and led them astray by her witchcraft. She had belittled, persecuted and murdered the saints and prophets of God. She had perpetrated violence against all of the inhabitants of earth. Influenced by corruption and a Satanic worldview, she enticed all of mankind to sin and harshly punished those who resisted.

CONCLUSION

You can tell a lot about someone by the way they react to things. Some people are more heartbroken by the deaths of criminals, murders, liars, thieves, and cheaters than they are their victims. They grieve over the unrighteous and the wicked because they themselves are of the same kind - unrighteous and wicked.

When God judges the world, and the way of man is brought down, there will be 2 distinct reactions. Sinners who oppose and hate God will mourn and weep to see Babylon in shambles, but the children of God will rejoice because His divine justice has finally prevailed. Which of these responses will you have?

29. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Originally Preached 10/24/2021

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who held a wedding feast for his son." - Matthew 22:1-2

Hello again! It's time to continue our series through the book of Revelation. This morning's message is the 29th sermon in this in-depth study. We are quickly approaching the finish line, as there are 35 messages in all - just 6 more after today.

Revelation 19 is the last chapter that deals with the tribulation. We have been talking about the tribulation, especially the latter half called "The Great Tribulation", since way back in chapter 6. Once we finish this chapter, we will move on to end-time events that will take place after the tribulation ends.

I. THE FOURFOLD HALLELUJAH (Revelation 19:1-6)

John heard something like a loud voice coming from a great multitude in Heaven saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation, glory, and power belong to our God." The multitude praised the LORD for judging the prostitute who had corrupted the whole earth with her immorality, and for avenging the saints. The multitude cried out a second time, "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises forever and ever." Their words expressed the severity of God's judgment.

Then the 24 elders and 4 living creatures fell down before God's heavenly throne and worshiped Him, agreeing with and affirming the multitude by shouting, "Amen. Hallelujah!" Finally, a voice like a great multitude, the sound of many waters, and mighty peals of thunder said, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns." They celebrated the long awaited reign and rule of Christ over the earth.

Hallelujah in Hebrew means "Praise the LORD!" Everyone in Heaven celebrated the fall of Babylon and her long-overdue judgment. They glorified and worshiped God, just as they'd been instructed to do (Revelation 18:20), rejoicing that the Satanic rule of the Antichrist had finally ended and that Christ had victoriously returned to reign righteously over the earth.

II. THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB (Revelation 19:7-9)

The multitudes continued, "Let's rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has prepared herself." She, the bride, was clothed in fine linen that was bright and clean. These fine linens were the righteous acts of the saints. Then "he", presumably the angel who communicated the vision to John (Revelation 1:1), instructed him to write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb." He also said, "These are the true words of God."

Scripture definitively identifies both the bride and the groom referred to in this passage. The angel directly stated that the groom was the Lamb, which is undoubtedly Jesus Christ (John 1:29). John calls Jesus the Lamb frequently throughout Revelation. The bride is the New Testament Church, for whom Jesus died (Ephesians 5:25-27). Thus, the marriage ceremony being described in these verses marked the official union of Jesus and His Church.

The Church, though imperfect in her humanity, was washed, cleansed, and sanctified by Christ so that she might be clothed in white, beautiful, and unblemished wedding garments. Her righteousness had been imputed to her by Jesus Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). The angel also indicated that guests would be present, and that they were blessed to be invited to the wedding feast. The whole scene being described seemed so wonderfully splendid that the angel felt it necessary to reassure John that he was telling the truth.

III. THE JEWISH WEDDING CEREMONY

In Biblical times, the Jewish wedding ceremony consisted of 3 major parts or components. It began when the groom formally chose his bride-to-be. Arrangements were made between the fathers of both parties and a dowry was paid by the groom for the bride. Afterwards a betrothal period began, during which the bride and groom remained separated in their parents homes for approximately a full year while the groom prepared a house for the new couple to live in after their marriage. Though physically apart, the betrothed bride and groom were to remain chaste and wholly faithful to one another.

When the year had passed, the groom and his friends went in a grand procession to retrieve his bride. She was notified in advance of his coming so that she might prepare herself accordingly. When he arrived, usually during the night, she and her attendants left with him and his party and returned to his father's house. The bride and groom then spent the night together in the bridal chamber and officially consummated their marriage.

The next day a grand feast began to celebrate the newlywed couple. This feast would sometimes last for 7 days or more. It was a time of great joy for everyone, complete with festive music, delicious food, and the best wine. Guests would be invited, often the entire town, and the streets would be full of laughter and jubilation.

Now let's make the comparison... Jesus chose the Church to be His bride and gave his life as payment for her (on the cross). He then returned to His Father's house in heaven where He is currently preparing a place for her during the betrothal period (the Church Age). At the right time He will return for her, and take her with Him back to Heaven (the Rapture). After their union, there will be a great marriage banquet complete with many guests (the Old Testament and Tribulation Saints). I believe that the wedding feast of the Lamb will take place in Heaven during the 7-year tribulation, as the Great Tribulation rages below upon the earth.

IV. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP (Revelation 19:10)

John was so overwhelmed by the words of the angel and his glorious description of the marriage supper that he fell at his feet in order to worship him. The angel quickly intervened to stop him and stated that he was merely a fellow servant like John and others who believed in Christ. The angel said, "Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The prophetic vision that John was having was the Revelation of Jesus Christ, not of any angel.

God alone is worthy of all worship and praise. We can ascribe praise and glory to the Father by worshiping Jesus Christ, the Son. He is the object of our worship. We as Christians should be careful not to worship anyone or anything else, and not to accept worship ourselves.

CONCLUSION

After weeks of focusing on judgment, persecution, and torment during the years of tribulation on the earth, the tone of Revelation has now begun to shift. The saints of God are now celebrating the victory of Christ and the fall of Babylon. John sees a joyful and cheerful ceremony taking place in Heaven - the marriage of the Lamb - and a great wedding feast commemorating the joyful union.

The events of the last days will affect people in vastly different ways. Those who do not know God will be judged and condemned because they have rejected the Groom, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. However, those who have believed in Him will not perish, but have eternal life...

30. Christ's Return and the Battle of Armageddon

Originally Preached on 11/7/2021

But with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the humble of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. - Isaiah 11:4

In today's message we will cover 2 topics, as noted by the sermon's title. We will talk about the return of Christ and the Battle of Armageddon. Both of these events will occur in short order on earth at the end of the Great Tribulation. Let's get right into it...

I. JESUS' SECOND COMING (Revelation 19:11-16)

John saw the heavens open and Someone sitting on a white horse. He was called Faithful and True, and came to judge and wage war in righteousness. This Rider wore many crowns on His head, had flaming eyes like fire, and had a name written on Him that only He knew. His robe was dipped in blood, and He was called the Word of God. From His mouth came a sharp sword, with which He would strike down the nations and then rule over them. He would execute the wrath of God Almighty, and on His robe and thigh were written, "King of kings, and Lord of lords". Along with Him came the armies of heaven, dressed in fine, clean white linens, also riding upon white horses.

The titles attributed to this unidentified Rider make it clear that He is Jesus. He is given 4 names in this passage. The first is "Faithful and True", adjectives which Jesus used to describe Himself in His message to the church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:14). The second is an unknown name, which is somewhat reminiscent of the new names that believers will receive in heaven (Revelation 2:17; 3:12). The third is the "Word of God" (John 1:1 & 14). The fourth is "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15). Jesus is coming again, as a Warrior-King, to defeat God's enemies once and for all and to set up His eternal kingdom.

Compare these verses to the coming of the Antichrist, who was dispatched to the earth at the beginning of the Tribulation with the breaking of the first seal (Revelation 6:1-2). In an effort to mimic Jesus, the Antichrist also came riding on a white horse intending to conquer and reign. However, he only had one crown (not many) that was given to him, and carried a bow (without arrows?) rather than a sharp sword. No names were attributed to him, unlike those given to Jesus. The Antichrist was a fake Messiah - a counterfeit, but Jesus is the real deal!

When Jesus returns on His gallant white steed, He will be leading the armies of God. Notice that they will also be riding horses and will be dressed in fine, clean, white linens. Such attire seems strangely inappropriate for battle, and more fitting for a wedding. In fact, these garments seem identical with those worn by the bride of Christ during the marriage of the Lamb mentioned earlier in this chapter (Revelation 19:7-8). This suggests that the armies of God will consist of the Church, all born-again Christians who were raptured and subsequently dwelt with Christ in

Heaven during the tribulation on earth. This would seemingly place Christ's return after His wedding celebration.

II. ANTICIPATING THE BATTLE (Revelation 19:17-19)

John saw an angel standing in the sun, crying out loudly to all the birds of the sky, "Come, assemble for the great feast of God." The angel stated that, following the impending battle, there would be vast amounts of carnage for these scavengers to feed upon. The flesh of slain kings, commanders, mighty men, horses, riders, and all people great or small and free or slave would be scattered across the battlefield.

John saw the Antichrist, also called the beast, along with the kings of the earth and their many armies all assembled together in the valley of Megiddo. They had gathered to wage war with Jesus and His heavenly cavalry. They had begun rallying their forces sometime earlier, with the outpouring of the 6th bowl (Revelation 16:16). Now they had reached full strength, and believed themselves to be adequately prepared for the conflict ahead.

As I prepared this message, I couldn't help but wonder if the enemies of God who were congregating in the valley could also hear the angel's disturbing prediction. His words were quite intimidating, similar to those of a prize fighter trying to psych out their opponent before the actual fight. If so, were they emboldened by it or terrified by it? Surely Satan knows that he is a defeated enemy... but is he so full of pride that he can't admit it?

III. THE ADVERSARY'S DEFEAT (Revelation 19:20-21)

Much has been made about the Battle of Armageddon. It has been portrayed as an epic and grand struggle between the forces of good and evil during the Last Days. Some imagine a hard-fought, prolonged conflict between fierce and mighty champions. While this description may sound compelling and exciting, in truth the Battle will be a one-sided rout. It will be over before it begins, like a boxer who knocks out His opponent on the very first punch. Jesus will defeat His enemies from the air with just a spoken word.

First, at Christ's command, the Antichrist and the False Prophet will be suddenly seized. Remember that the False Prophet was the Antichrist's right-hand man, the one who had performed great signs and deceived the masses into taking the mark of the beast and worshiping his image. These 2 wicked characters will immediately be cast alive into the lake of fire, called Gehenna, where they will spend the rest of eternity in burning hell. This will leave the stunned enemies of God without their highest leaders.

Dazed by this quick and unexpected blow, the kings of the earth and their armed forces will also be swiftly cut down and killed. From atop His horse, Jesus will simply speak the word and the sword from His mouth will slaughter all of His enemies. Then, just as predicted, the birds will feast on their lifeless flesh. I've heard it said that you shouldn't talk smack if you can't back it up. Well, Jesus will have no problem living up to the angel in the sun's pre-battle hype.

CONCLUSION

Though it often appears in this world that wickedness and corruption have the upper hand, in truth God is overwhelmingly more powerful than all of the forces of darkness combined. Good will resoundingly triumph over evil - it won't even be close - and Jesus will vanquish all of His enemies. In fact, they will begrudgingly come and bow before Him to acknowledge Him as Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). Christ will reign in righteousness over the earth forever.

In my opinion, Jesus will not physically set foot on the earth until after the Battle of Armageddon is complete. Once His enemies have been defeated, Jesus will then descend from the sky to the Mount of Olives (also called Mount Zion), where He will be welcomed by the 144,000 Messianic Jews (Revelation 14:1). This will mark His official arrival, the end of the Great Tribulation, and the completion of His Second Coming.

Next week we will consider a few things that will occur following Babylon's fall and Christ's return, between the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the Millennium. Don't miss it!

31. The Pre-Millennium

Originally Preached on 11/14/2021

And from the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who is patient and attains to the 1,335 days! - Daniel 12:11-12

As we've already noted in this series, the Great Tribulation will last exactly 3 ½ years or 1,260 days (360 x 3.5). However, in his prophecy regarding the end times, Daniel foresees a period of 1,290 days and pronounces a blessing on those who attain "to the 1,335 days". What accounts for this numeric difference?

The most credible explanation that I've discovered proposes that following the defeat of the Antichrist and fall of Babylon, when Jesus returns to the earth, there will be a period of 75 days prior to the beginning of His millennial reign. I have dubbed this gap as "The Pre-Millennium". This brief interlude is divided into 2 parts - the first lasting 30 days and the second 45. In other words, after the 1,260 days of the Great Tribulation, there will be an initial window of 30 days bringing the sum to 1,290, and then another span of 45 days making the total 1,335 days.

Several important things will happen during the Pre-Millennium. First, the surviving enemies of God will spend time grieving over the collapse of Babylon (Revelation 18:9-10). Second, Jerusalem and the earth at-large to be restored from the devastations of the tribulation. Third, Christ will organize and set-up His millennial kingdom. In my view, all 3 of these things will occur during the initial 30-day phase.

In today's sermon, we will read about and discuss several other occurrences that will take place during the Pre-Millennium.

I. SATAN BOUND (Revelation 20:1-3)

John saw an angel coming down from Heaven holding a great chain and the key of the abyss. He seized the dragon, which is the Devil, and bound him (presumably with the chain). The angel threw Satan into the abyss, shut it, and sealed it (figuratively locking it with the key) so that he could no longer deceive the nations. The dragon would remain confined in the abyss for 1,000 years, after which he'd be released for a brief time.

The binding of Satan will effectively remove the external presence of evil from the earth for 1,000 years. Remember that the Antichrist and False prophet have already been cast into the lake of fire, never to escape, and thousands of wicked and unbelieving soldiers have been killed (Revelation 19:20-21). Though the text does not expressly say it, I believe that common sense and reason tells us that the demons who had been previously unleashed upon the earth (during 5th and 6th Trumpets) and all other fallen angels will also be bound and cast into the abyss. Thus, all of God's enemies will be vanquished for a season.

This is the 7th appearance of the word “abyss” in Revelation. I personally believe that in each of these instances it refers to Tartarus - the current hell of and for demons. While unrepentant and unsaved humans are condemned to Hades, Satan and his fallen angels will be confined separately in Tartarus (some already are). I will not dwell on this doctrine today, as I have covered it in depth in previous messages. It seems most likely to me that “the binding of Satan” will occur during the first 30 days of the Pre-Millennium, perhaps almost immediately after Christ’s return.

II. THE NATIONS JUDGED (Revelation 20:4a)

John saw thrones, and judgement was given to those who sat upon them. The only “thrones” in Revelation, other than God’s of course, are those belonging to the 24 elders (Revelation 4:4, 11:16). We have already explained these 24 elders represent the Church - that is, the Christians of the Church Age who were raptured prior to the tribulation’s onset and who returned with Jesus at His second coming. We will reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:11-13). Thus, the common interpretation is that John witnessed Christians judging the surviving inhabitants of the earth - both friend and foe. This would fulfill the New Testament teaching that believers will judge the world (1 Corinthians 6:2).

This would be the “Harvest” judgment which we covered several weeks ago (Revelation 14:14-20). It is more commonly thought of as “The Sheep and Goat Judgement” (Matthew 25:31-46), though both refer to the same event. In short, Christians (who have already been given glorified bodies) will assist Jesus in separating the remaining people on earth (who still have bodies of flesh). The unrighteous will be banished to Hades, or hell, while the righteous will live on into the Millennium. I believe that this judgment will be held during the second, 45-day portion of the Pre-Millennium.

III. THE FIRST RESURRECTION (Revelation 20:4b-6)

John saw the souls of those who had remained faithful to God during the tribulation and had been martyred for refusing to worship the beast or take his mark “come to life”. This undoubtedly refers to the Tribulation saints - believers who came to a saving faith in Christ during the 7 years of tribulation. Their disembodied souls had been present in Heaven, crying out to God for justice, but now they too would be resurrected - given glorified bodies. Along with the Church-Age Christians, these Tribulation Saints would reign bodily with Christ on the earth for 1,000 years.

Though not expressly mentioned here, it seems most-appropriate to accept that the resurrection of the Old Testament saints will take place at this time also. The prophets testified of a coming resurrection for faithful Israel, to include all Jewish believers who lived and died on earth before Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection (Daniel 12:1-2, Isaiah 26:19, Hosea 13:14). This would include people like Abraham, Noah, Moses, Deborah, David, and others (Hebrews 11).

The most established opinion is that “the first resurrection” will include both the Tribulation Saints and the Old Testament Saints. These believers will be blessed, have power over death, and (along with their Church-Age brethren) become priests of God and Christ. Following this resurrection, all of God’s children from every age who have ever physically died will have eternal, glorified bodies in which to reign with Christ on earth for 1,000 years. I think that this resurrection will occur during the second phase of the Pre-Millennium.

CONCLUSION

In closing, after the Tribulation ends and Christ returns, there will be a short period of time leading up to the beginning of His earthly reign. During this time, several important things will happen. Let’s review:

- Jerusalem and the whole earth will be restored (to its pre-tribulation condition) in preparation for Christ’s millennial kingdom.
- Satan and all of his demons will be bound in Tartarus, or the abyss.
- The surviving inhabitants of earth will be judged. The unrighteous will be condemned to Hades. The righteous will live on into the Millennium.
- The souls of the Tribulation Saints and Old Testament saints will be resurrected (given glorified bodies).

After the 75-day Pre-Millennium comes to an end, Jesus’ 1000-year reign on earth will officially begin. At its outset, only believers will be present. In fact, most will have already received their glorified bodies - the Church, the Tribulation Saints, and the Old Testament Saints. Some, however - namely the righteous who actually survived the horrors of the tribulation - will still have fleshly bodies. Blessed is he who attains to the 1,335 days!

Next week we will discuss the Millennium, the release of Satan, and the events that immediately follow. Until then, may God bless you richly.

32. The Millennium & Great White Throne

Originally Preached on 11/21/2021

Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let's go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; so that He may teach us about His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go out from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, and will mediate for many peoples; and they will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not lift up a sword against nation, and never again will they learn war. - Isaiah 2:2-4

In today's message we will discuss the Millennium - the 1,000-year reign of Christ. There are 3 major Christian views pertaining to it. Amillennialism is the belief that we are living in the Millennium right now, between the first and second coming of Christ, and that "1,000 years" figuratively refers to a long, unspecified period of time during which Jesus reigns from heaven. Postmillennialism proposes that the evangelistic efforts of the Church will someday succeed and most of the world will be saved. This will usher in a Golden Age of Christianity on the earth (ie, the Millennium), after which Jesus will return.

The third interpretation is called Premillennialism. I hold this view, as do many others, because I believe it to have the most Biblical support. Premillennialism has gained popularity in recent centuries due to the sweeping moral decay of humanity. Premillennialists maintain that Jesus will return prior to the Millennium, set up His kingdom, and then reign over the earth (from the earth) for 1,000 years. After the Millennium, there will be a final judgement followed by the eternal state. My understanding of Revelation is based on this theological perspective...

After the Great Tribulation comes to an end and Christ returns to the earth, there will be a brief period of preparation prior to the beginning of the Millennium. During this time Satan (and his demons) will be bound and cast into the abyss and the souls of all remaining unrighteous people will be judged and condemned to Hades. The righteous survivors of the tribulation will live on into the Millennium in their fleshly bodies alongside the Church-Age Christians, Old Testament Saints, and Tribulation Saints who will collectively reign with Christ in their glorified bodies.

I. THE MILLENNIUM (Revelation 20:7a)

Jesus will establish His kingdom and reign over the earth for 1,000 years. I think that this period of time should be interpreted literally, as it is repeated verbatim 6 times in verses 2-7. During His 1000-year reign (called the Millennium), Jesus will rule from Jerusalem where He will be seated on the throne of David (Luke 1:32-33). The nations of the earth will submit themselves to Him and to His righteous theocracy. Glorified Christians will serve as governors and nobles under His divine headship.

The Bible does not answer all of the questions we might have about the Millennium. Generally speaking, it will be a time of peace, comfort, and tranquility. The earth will be repaired and the environment refreshed following the tribulation. The believers who survived the tribulation will be fruitful and repopulate the earth (as did Noah's family after Flood). The people of earth will be joyful, obedient, holy, and filled with the knowledge of God. There will be a lack of violence and bitterness. Those still with natural bodies will live long and happy lives.

During the Millennium many of God's promises and covenants will be fulfilled. The Lord predicted that Israel would someday be redeemed and restored - that they would come to know their Messiah (Zechariah 12:10). He also swore to give the Promised Land to Abraham's descendants eternally. Furthermore, He foretold of a righteous King that would rule over them forever (Luke 1:33, Isaiah 9:7). God has not forgotten any of these covenant promises, and He will keep His word by honoring these things during the Millennium.

II. THE RELEASE OF SATAN (Revelation 20:7b-10)

After the 1,000 years are complete, Satan will be released from the abyss where he'd been imprisoned. He will come out and deceive the nations of the earth, referred to here as Gog and Magog. He will gather them together for war, and they will be as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They will march to the plains of Israel and surround the camp of the saints and Jerusalem. Suddenly, fire will fall from Heaven and devour them all. The Devil will be thrown into the lake of fire, to join both the Antichrist and False Prophet who are already there.

Although the Millennium will begin with only righteous people, apparently over time the numbers of nonbelievers will gradually increase. The yet-to-be-glorified people still have bodies of flesh, which are naturally tainted with sinful and carnal desires. Though Satan himself will not be manifestly present, still thousands will stubbornly turn away from God and reject Jesus as their rightful King. When the Devil is finally released, these adversaries will join with him in a short-lived and failed rebellion against God.

Magog was the grandson of Noah (Genesis 10:2, 1 Chronicles 1:5). Historians believe that his descendants settled to the far north of Israel. Many respected eschatologists equate them with modern-day Russia. Gog is their king or prince (Ezekiel 38:2). The original battle of Gog and Magog, prophesied by Ezekiel (in chapters 38 & 39), will likely take place immediately before or sometime during the first half of the tribulation. However, this reference to Gog and Magog seems to be metaphorical, as this uprising obviously involves more than just 1 nation. Nevertheless, some commentators have dubbed the final rebellion of Satan as "The 2nd Battle of Gog and Magog".

Just like the Battle of Armageddon, Satan's revolt at the end of the Millennium will be a brief and one-sided affair. God will quickly and resoundingly destroy both him and his allies. This will be Satan's final defeat. I tend to believe that all demons and fallen angels will be thrown into the lake of fire at this time, too.

III. THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT (Revelation 20:11-15)

John saw a great white throne and Someone awesome seated upon it - all of creation fled before Him. All of the dead stood before the throne, including those of the sea, Death, and Hades. Then 2 sets of books were opened - the Book of Life and the books of human deeds. All of the dead, both great and small, were judged according to their deeds. The realms of Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire as well as everyone whose name was not written in the Book of Life.

Though His name is not definitively stated, most experts agree that Jesus was seated on the throne (Matthew 25:31). This was likely His millennial throne, upon which he had ruled for the past 1,000 years. All who were spiritually "dead" - that is, the wicked and lost - were resurrected (John 5:29) and brought before Him to be judged. This includes every person who was ever confined in Hades, dating all the way back to the death of the first unrepentant sinner (after the fall of Adam and Eve). Because none of their names were written in the Book of Life, Jesus proceeded to judge the unrighteous based solely upon their deeds. Scripture teaches that human deeds are woefully insufficient for the attaining of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). As such, all of them were condemned and cast into the lake of fire.

Following The Great White Throne Judgment, the current realm of Hades will no longer exist. It along with everyone who has ever been held there will be thrown into the lake of fire, or Gehena, which is the final and eternal Hell. The Antichrist, False Prophet, Satan, and all of the demons will be imprisoned there also. Tartarus or the abyss will be no more. All of God's enemies will be removed, destined to suffer in fiery hell for all of eternity.

CONCLUSION

When the Millennium ends, the righteous who still have bodies of flesh will be glorified in an instant, similar to Christians living at the time of the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:52). Believers who die during the Millennium (if possible) will also be resurrected and glorified. Though these issues are not specifically discussed, they would seem to be necessary. Thus, following the Millennium every person - without exception - will have been physically resurrected and fitted for eternity. In addition, everyone will have been judged to either life or death.

Someone asked me recently, "Why would God release Satan at the end of the Millennium?" It's a good question. My response would be, "Why does God allow Satan to terrorize people today? Why not bind and banish him now?" There are some things that we simply do not understand about the mind of God, yet we must trust in His reasoning. God is in control, and we can always rest in His sovereignty and strength. This is something we should all be thankful for!

33. The New Heaven and Earth

Originally Preached on 11/28/2021

Just as it is written: "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the human heart, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." - 1 Corinthians 2:9

Good morning. We are nearing the end of this year's sermon series through Revelation. There are only 2 chapters remaining in the both, and both deal with "the eternal state". Following the Millennial reign of Christ, the final demise of Satan, and the Great White Throne Judgment, God's children will enter into eternity where they will enjoy the riches of His blessings forever.

Chapters 21 and 22 provide us with a few select details about the believer's eternal home. There is a lot of repetition in these chapters, as many of the same themes are repeated over and over again. Therefore, in an effort to be more clear and less redundant, I am going to present parts of them together.

I. THE NEW CREATION (Revelation 21:1a,5a; 22:3a)

John saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and earth passed away. He heard One sitting on the throne say, "Behold, I am making all things new". What's more, there was no longer any curse in this glorious new creation.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (the earth, its atmosphere, and outer space). In its original state, this was the perfect and ideal environment for humanity. However, when man sinned and fell, all of nature and the environment was cursed as well (Genesis 3:17-19). Since that time, it has suffered countless natural disasters and has been corrupted and ravished by sinful men. Nature itself groans for the final redemption and revealing of mankind, so that it too may be restored to its original condition (Romans 8:19-22).

During the Millennium, the devastating effects of the Great Tribulation will be repaired and the earth itself will be clean, fruitful, and well cared for. That said, it will still remain under the curse. The New Heavens and Earth will come after the Millennium ends, when the curse against it is finally lifted and God makes everything new.

The current heaven and earth will pass away (Matthew 24:35), and its tainted elements will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10). While some advocate that the earth will be completely destroyed with fire and replaced with a brand new creation, I tend to agree with those who believe that it will be purified by fire and restored. Thus, the redeemed and glorified people of God will spend eternity in and on the renewed heaven and earth - just as God originally intended.

II. THE SOURCES OF LIFE (Revelation 21:1c,6; 22:1a,2)

John stated that there was no longer any sea in the new heavens and earth. However, he did see both a spring and a river flowing with the crystal clear water of life. In addition to these, he

saw the tree of life growing up on both sides of the river, bearing 12 kinds of fruit, yielding it monthly, with leaves that had power to heal the nations.

There will be no sea on the new earth. In ancient times, the sea was often regarded as a tumultuous and foreboding place. Terrible monsters were believed to live there. Great tragedies often took place there. Perhaps the absence of the sea metaphorically pictures the removal of all fear, worry, and unrest in the new creation.

Jesus spoke of “the living water”, explaining that those who trust in Him live eternally (John 4:10-13). This life-giving water will be freely available in the new heavens and earth. As for the tree of life, it was a major component of God’s original creation (Genesis 2:9) and its fruit provided Adam and Eve with perpetual nourishment and physical life (Genesis 3:22). This fruit will one day be accessible again. These features were present on the earth in the beginning, and will be present again in the end. These life-giving sources will sustain and enrich our physical lives throughout eternity.

III. THE PRESENCE OF GOD (Revelation 21:3; 22:1b,3b-4)

John heard a loud voice coming from the throne declaring that God would now make His home among His people and dwell with them. He saw the throne of God and the Lamb situated on the newly restored earth. John also stated that the righteous people who will live there would serve Him and be able to see His face.

In the beginning, God was manifestly present with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8). Sadly, after the Fall of Man, people were no longer allowed to see God’s face due to their unholiness (Exodus 33:20). They were separated from Him. But in the new and final creation, God’s manifest presence will return to the earth once again and the redeemed will behold Him. God Almighty will sit on His throne, with Jesus at His right hand, and together they will reign in righteousness forever.

During the Millennium, Jesus will rule over the earth from Jerusalem while His Father remains above in the present heaven. But at the beginning of the eternal state God the Father will descend also, leaving the present heaven unoccupied and obsolete. This marks a notable difference between the Millennium and the eternal state.

Though the Holy Spirit is not mentioned, surely He too will dwell on the earth during the eternal state. Perhaps He will return with Christ and the saints at the second coming, or perhaps He’ll come with God the Father after the Millennium ends. Whenever He comes, the final result will be that God - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - will manifestly abide with redeemed mankind for all of eternity.

IV. THE QUALITY OF LIFE (Revelation 21:4,5b,7-8; 22:6)

John stated that throughout eternity there will be no more death, no more mourning or sorrow, no more weeping or tears, and no more pain for those who overcome sin by placing their faith in Jesus Christ. They will inherit these wonderful blessings, and God will be their God and they will be His people. On the contrary, those sinners who reject Christ will suffer all of these things in the lake of fire forever (the second death).

Finally, John is assured twice (once by God and a second time by the angel that has accompanied him throughout Revelation) that all of the words that have been given to him are "faithful and true". This description was also given of Jesus (Revelation 19:11). In other words, what he has seen and recorded provides a trustworthy and accurate account of the last days. This vision was given to be shared with believers, so that they will know the events that will soon take place.

CONCLUSION

A few years ago we did a sermon series called "Heaven and Hell". In that series, we learned that there are 3 heavens and 3 hells mentioned in the Bible. The hells are Hades, Tartarus, and Gehena. Hades is the current hell for people, where the souls of the unsaved are held. Tartarus is the current hell for demons, where some are currently confined, and it is sometimes referred to in Scripture as the abyss. Gehena is the final and eternal hell, also called the lake of fire. Last week we learned that Hades and Tartarus will be cast into Gehena at the beginning of the eternal state.

The 3 heavens are Abraham's Bosom (also called Paradise), Heaven, and the New Heaven and New Earth. Throughout the Old Testament, the souls of deceased saints dwelt in Abraham's Bosom - the first heaven. Following His resurrection, Jesus escorted these souls to the current Heaven where believers (Christians) now go when they die. This heaven is commonly thought of as being above the clouds, where Jesus sits at God's right hand. It is the heaven described in most of Revelation. In the last days, Jesus and the occupants of the second heaven will return to the earth. Following the Millennium, creation will be made new. The Father will then join the Son. This New Heaven and New Earth will be the third and final heaven - the eternal abode for God and His children (and the angels).

Next week we will read a few more details about the new heavens and earth. Make plans to join us then. God bless you!

34. The New Jerusalem

Originally Preached on 12/5/2021

For he [Abraham] was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. - Hebrews 11:10

In last week's message, we began talking about the New Heaven and Earth. Following the Millennium, God will lift His curse on creation and make it new. The earth and sky will be restored to their original perfection and splendor, just as they were created in the beginning. The springs and rivers will flow with the water of life and the tree of life will again produce its fruit. God the Father will dwell there, along with the Son and the Holy Spirit. The righteous will see Him face-to-face and serve Him forever with joy and gladness. There will be no more death, mourning, tears, or pain.

In today's message, we will discuss one of the New Heaven and Earth's most prominent and glorious features. The great and historic city of Jerusalem will be remade and will become the leading city on earth for all of eternity. God will be enthroned there, and Christ will reign over His kingdom without end.

I. THE CITY AND ITS WALL (Revelation 21:2,9-11,15-18,21b)

John wrote that one of the angels who had poured out the 7 bowls of God's wrath (Revelation 16) spoke to him. The angel invited him to come and see "the bride, the wife of the Lamb". John was carried away by the Spirit to a high mountaintop, where he saw the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down from heaven full of glory, brilliant as crystal-clear jasper, and prepared as a bride for her husband.

The Bible clearly teaches that the New Testament Church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27). In fact, earlier in his vision John already saw and described the Marriage Supper of the Lamb which celebrated the union between Jesus and raptured Christians (Revelation 19:7-9). So why then is the New Jerusalem now spoken of as His bride? To answer this question, we must recognize that the Church is a people, while the New Jerusalem is a place. Oftentimes, a group of people and the place where they reside are referred to synonymously. For example, "Atlanta celebrated all night after winning the World Series." Following this literary principle, many commentators propose that the New Jerusalem is metaphorically called the "bride of the Lamb" because it will serve as the eternal home of the Christian Church.

Many theologians teach that true Israel should be viewed as the wife of God the Father. After all, she was and is His chosen nation and people. As such, spiritually speaking of course, Israel (which is sometimes referred to narrowly as Jerusalem) is the mother of Jesus Christ the Son and, by extension, His bride the Church (Galatians 4:26). Thus, when the Persons of God are considered distinctly, the Father is married to Israel (and both will descend to earth after the Millennium) and the Son is married to the Church (and both will return before the Millennium). When considered in unison, "the bride of the Lamb" is also the wife of the Father - they are a

single and united people made up of believing Jews and Gentiles, just as Jesus and the Father are one God (John 10:30)

John then watched as the angel used a gold measuring rod to measure the dimensions of the city and its outer wall. The city was laid out as a square, or most literally a cube, measuring 12,000 stadia in length, width, and height. This equates to approximately 1,400 miles in each direction. For perspective, this is about the distance from Dallas to Los Angeles. In other words, the New Jerusalem will be a huge and spacious city! Its wall was 144 cubits high, which is roughly 216 feet. The wall was made of jasper and the city and its streets of pure gold, like transparent glass.

II. ITS GATES AND FOUNDATIONS (Revelation 21:12-14,19-21a)

John described the great, high wall of the city as having 12 gates. There was an angel stationed at each gate and the names of the 12 tribes of Israel were written on the gates. There were 3 gates on each side of the city's wall, on the north, south, east, and west. This is somewhat reminiscent of the camping arrangement of the 12 tribes during the exodus (Numbers 2). These city gates were made of pearl, with each divinely fashioned from a large single pearl.

The wall of the city sat on 12 foundation stones. Each of these was a precious stone - namely jasper, sapphire, chalcedony (onyx or agate), emerald, sardonyx, sardius (ruby), chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst. Inscribed on each of the foundation stones were the names of the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ.

There is some overlap between the stones mentioned here, and those which were displayed upon the breastplate of the high priest as prescribed by the Law of Moses (Exodus 28:17-20). The stones on the breastplate represented the 12 tribes of Israel, while these foundation stones bear the names of the 12 apostles. Clearly, the gates and the foundations together indicate that this holy city, the New Jerusalem, will be occupied by the redeemed of all generations - including Old and New Testament believers, both Jew and Gentile alike.

III. OTHER DETAILS (Revelation 21:22-27; 22:5)

John did not see any temple in the city, because God Almighty and the Lamb were Themselves the temple. Neither did the city have a sun or moon to shine over it, as the glory of the Father and Son illuminated it. Because there will never be darkness or night there, the gates of the city will always remain open. The kings will bring the glory and honor of their nations into it. However, nothing unclean or abominable will ever enter into the city, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The Jewish temple was built to be the place where God's glory would dwell among sinful men, but during the eternal state such a structure will be unnecessary. God will already be fully and manifestly present, as He was in the Garden of Eden. The brilliance of His shekinah glory will

light up the new heaven and earth, in perhaps a similar way that it did from days 1 through 3 of creation (Genesis 1:1-13), before the sun and moon existed.

The gates of New Jerusalem will always be open, which speaks to the never ending access that believers will have to the presence of God. Obviously only the righteous and pure will enter, because the wicked and sinful will not be there (having already been cast into the lake of fire). While thousands of glorified people will live in this grand city, those outside its walls will freely come and go to see, learn, and converse with the LORD.

CONCLUSION

In closing, the preeminent city of the New Heaven and Earth will be the New Jerusalem. It will be the magnificent and beautiful city from which God - both Father and Son - will reign over redeemed humanity and creation forever. The righteous citizens of God's eternal kingdom will have unrestricted and unlimited access to the city, as its gates will never close...

Like Abraham centuries ago, I long to see the New Jerusalem. It is the ultimate "destination city". I want to walk through the pearly gates, stroll down the streets of gold, bask in the warm light that emanates directly from God Almighty, drink from the spring of living water, and eat fruit from the tree of life. I want to see God face-to-face, bow before King Jesus seated on His throne, fellowship with believers from every generation, and together serve the LORD joyfully - without any pain, sorrow, or death - forevermore.

This is my hope, my desire, my confidence... is it yours?

35. A Final Message

Originally Preached on 12/12/2021

In My Father's house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you also will be. - John 14:2-3

After several months of study, this morning we will finish our study through Revelation. I have presented the messages in this series from a futuristic perspective, believing that most of the events described in the book have yet to come. Let's briefly review:

Chapter 1: John on the island of Patmos as the vision begins
 Chapters 2-3: A Representative Picture of the Church Age
 Chapters 4-5: The Rapture and Prelude to the Tribulation
 Chapters 6-19: The Tribulation & Second Coming (with emphasis on the Great Tribulation)
 Chapter 20: The Prelude to the Millennium and the Millennium
 Chapters 21-22: The New Creation and Eternal State

In this final sermon, as the Revelation comes to an end, the Lord Jesus begins to speak. He delivers a final message to John and to all who would read this book. His words make a fitting conclusion, not just for Revelation, but for the Bible as a whole.

I. THE PROPHECY (Revelation 22:7b, 10, 18-19)

The message of Revelation is prophetic. Its primary purpose isn't to provide instructions for moral, godly living. Nor does it seek to teach or explain deep theological doctrines or truths. Rather, it simply lays out a vivid presentation of future events so that its readers might have a confident expectation of things to come.

God revealed this vision to John with the intention that it be openly and freely shared with others. It was not to be kept secret or hidden. Furthermore, the Revelation was not to be edited from its original form - either added to or taken away from. God warned that those who alter the message would suffer from the plagues described in the book and lose their part from the tree of life in the New Jerusalem. However, those who faithfully "keep", or place their trust in, the prophecies of Revelation as it is written will be blessed.

In these verses we see (1) the call to share this message, (2) the urgency of the Lord's soon return, and (3) the promise of blessing to those who keep it. These 3 themes are also found in the opening verses of this book (Revelation 1:1-3).

II. THE ANGEL (Revelation 22:8-9, 16)

Jesus sent an angel to communicate the message of Revelation to John. This angel was present with and regularly spoke to John throughout his apocalyptic vision. Earlier in the book,

John started to worship this angel but was quickly cut short (Revelation 19:10). Perhaps he was so enamored by what he saw that he had a momentary lapse of judgment.

In this last chapter, John falls down a second time to worship this angel. By this point Jesus Himself is speaking, which may have led John to mistake the angel for Christ. Like before, the angel quickly stopped him and stated that he, too, was simply a fellow servant of God. He exhorted John to worship God only. Jesus alone is worthy of worship - He is the son of David and the bright morning star.

III. THE PEOPLE (Revelation 22:11, 14-15)

Jesus, not the aforementioned angel, delivers the final message of Revelation. He describes 2 distinct groups of people - those who still do wrong and are still filthy and those who still practice righteousness and are still holy. The operative word is "still". Jesus states that if, after hearing the warnings of Revelation, people continue to wallow in their sin and depravity then so be it. Such wretchedness is their free choice, though it is certainly not God's desire.

On the other hand, those who "wash their robes" and are cleansed of sin through their faith in Jesus will have access to the tree of life and free entry into the gates of New Jerusalem. Meanwhile, all manners of sinners - including sorcerers, the sexually immoral, murders, idolaters, and habitual liars - will be kept outside, condemned eternally to the lake of fire.

IV. THE PROMISE (Revelation 22:7a, 12-13, 20a)

In His final discourse, Jesus repeats the words, "I am coming quickly" 3 times. Obviously, this is the main point of emphasis. Jesus is coming again, and His return will be soon. When He comes, He will bring His reward with Him and give to each one as their work deserves. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, and He will be with His people in the end as He was in the beginning.

God's timing is not the same as ours. In fact, God exists outside of time, as He was the One who created and initiated it. To Him, one day is like 1,000 years and 1,000 years like one day (2 Peter 3:8). Therefore, our understanding of "soon" differs from His and we cannot know for certain how far off His return will be. That said, we can be sure that Jesus is coming again, and seeing that His return could occur at any moment, we must always be ready and on watch.

V. THE ANTICIPATION (Revelation 22:17, 20b-21)

We are currently living in the Church Age, which began centuries ago at Pentecost (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit currently indwells believers on the earth and they are called Christians. But, as we have discussed previously in this series, when Jesus returns in the air at the Rapture the Church will be caught up to Heaven. In addition, the presence of the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn from the earth (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7).

Knowing that at any moment we could be taken into Heaven to be with Jesus, our attitude about His second coming should be that of eager expectation. We as the bride of Christ, together with the Holy Spirit within, cry out in anticipation, "Come!" as we long for Christ's return. In fact, all who hear the saving message of the gospel, who thirst and desire the living water, should embrace this same attitude of anticipation.

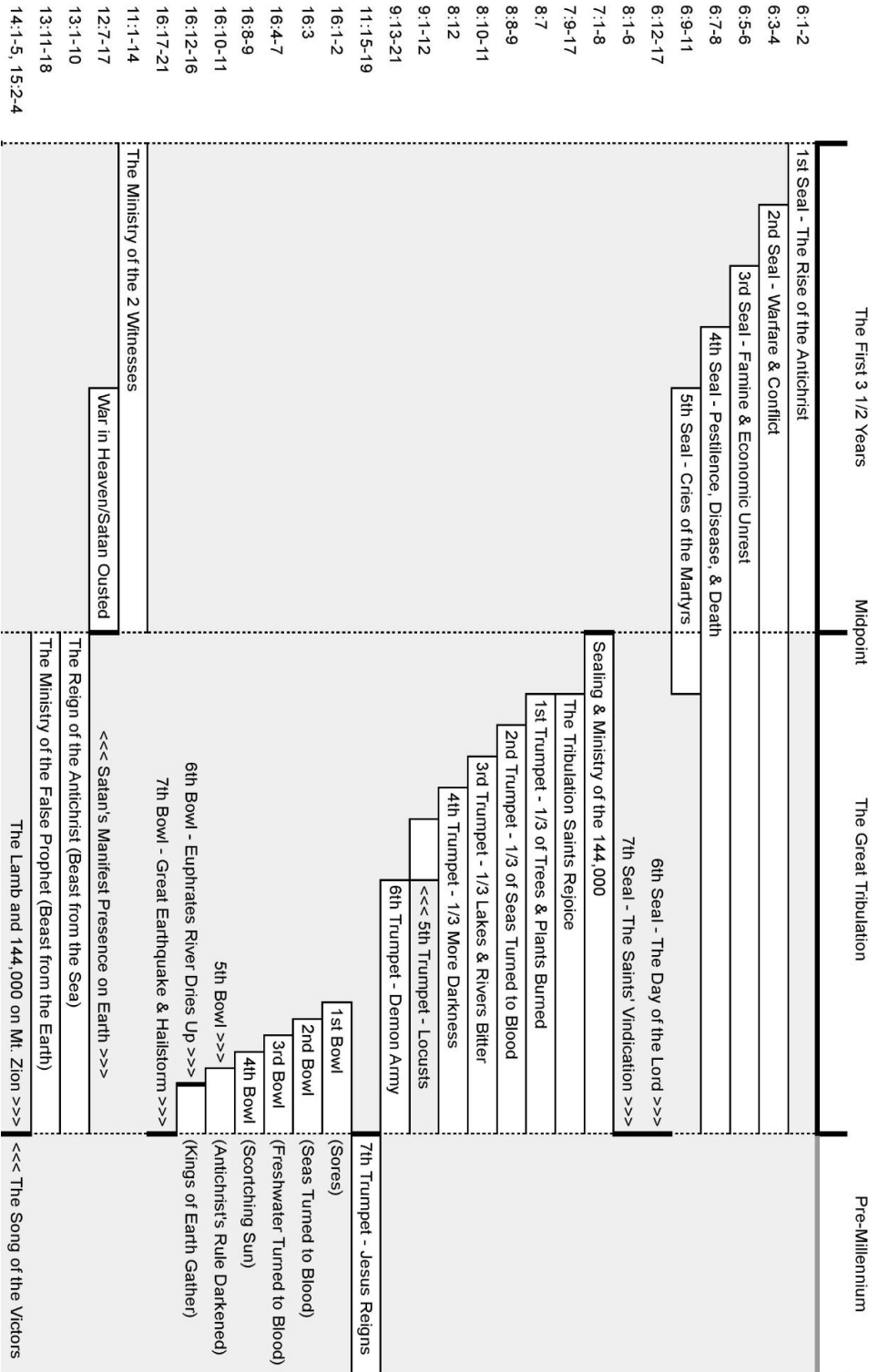
After seeing the magnificent vision of Revelation, with all its glory and wonder, John expressed his final plea. It is our plea also. "Come, Lord Jesus." We want to see You and be with You. Would You come and call us to Yourself today? And as we wait, may your grace be upon us all.

CONCLUSION

As I have stated several times over the past few months, there are several Biblically sound interpretations of Revelation. My interpretation may differ from yours, and that's fine. We are not dogmatic or rigid in our beliefs about the End Times. That said, I want to conclude this series by quoting the Baptist Faith & Message 2000, which is the denominational statement of faith for Southern Baptists. It expresses central truths, upon which we all agree...

"God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord."

The Tribulation Timeline: A Chronological Presentation of Revelation 6-20



14:6-7	<<< 1st Angel - With the Gospel			
14:8, 18:1-3		2nd Angel - Babylon Has Fallen >>>		<<< Glorious Angel
14:9-12, 18:4-8	3rd Angel - Warning About the Mark >>>	<<< Cry for Judgment Against God's Enemies		
14:13	<<< The Holy Spirit's Blessing			
14:14-20		Smoke Fills Temple >>>		The "Harvest"
15:1, 5-8				
17:1-18	The Harlotry of the Prostitute with the Beast	The Persecution of the Prostitute by the Beast		
18:9-24		Mourning Babylon >>>		
19:7-10		Marriage Supper		
19:11-21, 1-6		The Return of Christ & Battle of Armageddon >>>		<<< The Fourfold Hallelujah
20:1-6				Satan Bound, 1st Resurrect

10:1-11 *Revelation disclosed only to John and a personal calling and message*
12:1-6 *Background information to support verses 7-17*