

**OVERCOMING
IN THE
LAST DAYS**

Reflections on the Book of Revelation

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OVERCOMING IN THE LAST DAYS

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REVELATION

INTRODUCTION

Revelation reminds us that although all the circumstances in the last days seem to point to the preponderance of evil and the rise of ungodliness and worldliness, God is transcendent and He is sitting on the throne. The Lord Jesus has won the war although the battles are still going on and the evil one is aware that his days are numbered, and he is doing his utmost to cause as much damage as possible.

The book shows Jesus as God; He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End and the final judgment is drawing near and He will be the ultimate judge (See Revelation Chapter 1).

Revelation reminds believers to endure and to persevere; not all believers and churches will be faithful in these last days and many will succumb to immorality, compromise, lukewarm responses and spiritual adultery. The tares will be shown not to be the wheat and the goats will be distinguished from the sheep. This is especially so when the evil forces will seek to be the false trinity - the devil, the antichrist and the false prophet.

Revelation gives us a glimpse of our glorious hope and future - the new Jerusalem (in the new heaven and the new earth) and the wedding of the bride with the bridegroom. There will no longer be pain, sickness, suffering or death. In the midst of pain, persecution and suffering, do not lose heart for the end is near and the end is a new and glorious beginning!

Take heart and do not abandon the straight and narrow way.

As written by one scholar, "A day will come when God's wrath

will be poured out, when sins will have to be accounted for, when the fate of every individual will depend on whether or not his or her name is “written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Carson & Moo, 2005). Equally clear, of course, is the reward that God has in store for those who “keep the word of endurance” and resolutely stand against the devil and his earthly minions, even at the cost of life itself. The Apostle John’s visions are a source of comfort for suffering and persecuted believers in all ages.

Revelation reminds us to look at the total spiritual reality and not just at the visible circumstances in our lives. It calls for faith in Him and courage in the Lord. For instance, the church of Smyrna was exhorted not to fear the persecution and the oncoming imprisonment. We are to trust Him in the midst of painful situations and even when other “believers” compromise. The Christians during the time of John not only had to endure the wrath of the Roman rulers because they will not worship the emperor but also the persecution of the other so-called “children of God” i.e. the Jews and the rulers of the synagogue who informed the Romans that Christians were not Jewish believers and therefore were not exempted from emperor worship.

Nothing will more accurately reveal whether we are genuine followers of the Lord Jesus than when we are faced with crises in our lives. It may be an illness; it may be disappointment in work and career; it may be tragedy in the lives of our family or loved ones; it may be misunderstandings and accusations from fellow-believers; it may even be spiritual attacks from the evil one or even tests from our Lord. The message from Revelation is not that we just grit our teeth and endure but that we are to reign with Christ in the midst of tribulation. Because God is on the throne, and Jesus is alive and interceding for us, and the Holy Spirit is available to empower us, and the total reality includes the definite triumph of God over evil and the glorious hope of eternal life and glory with God, we ought to, and must triumph and overcome because Jesus has overcome and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

There is no place for grumbling and complaints; there is no place for discouragement, for our hope in God and the sacrifice of Jesus for our eternal salvation demands nothing less. God has given us His all and Jesus has died for unworthy sinners like us; we have been adopted to be children of the living God and to share in all the glorious inheritance in Christ. Christ is coming again to bring us home in triumph; let us hold up our heads high as members of the family of God and beloved children of the Almighty.

We must not allow the visible circumstances to cause us to fail to see the total spiritual reality. Revelation removes the curtain to help us behold what is happening in the heavenlies and the spiritual battles taking place in the invisible realm. In our weakness, our strength is in God as we learn to fully depend on Him; in our sufferings, let us realize that God is preparing us for His eternal glory and as we die daily, God is ministering 'life' to us unto eternal life in all its fullness.

Chapter 1

REVELATION 2 & 3: LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

As we study God’s message to the churches in Revelation, it is helpful to be reminded of some exhortations from scriptures.

“This is the one I esteem,” God says, “he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word”
(Isaiah 66:2).

What is of utmost importance is to listen carefully to every word God has spoken and to listen with humility, contrition and reverential fear. What finally distinguishes the true from the false among believers is faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the Word of God and the practical obedience to it. We need to take heed to God’s warnings to the churches for ourselves too, lest the Lord spits us out of His mouth because our lives cause Him to be nauseous and dismayed.

As we study Revelation, we might be wondering, “If God is sovereign and good, why does He allow His people to suffer persecution and pain?” We need to realize that the judgment on wicked people of the world serves to be a test for His people at the same time. God intends to make good His command, “Be you holy as I am holy” and part of this difficult process is to transform us as we respond well to difficult times in our short stay on earth.

C.S. Lewis’s comments in *Mere Christianity* are very helpful in this context:

“We must not be surprised if we are in for a rough time. When a man turns to Christ and seems to be getting on pretty well (in the sense

that some of his bad habits are now corrected) he often feels that it would be natural if things went fairly smoothly. When troubles come along - illnesses, money troubles, new kinds of temptation - he is disappointed. These things he feels, might have been necessary to rouse him and make him repent in his bad old days; but why now? Because God is forcing him on, or up, to a higher level: putting him into situations where he will have to be very much braver; or more patient, or more loving, than he ever dreamed of being before. It seems to us all unnecessary: but that is because we have not yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing He means to make of us... The command 'Be ye perfect' is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command...He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though of course on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He means what He said."

John the apostle was commissioned by the Lord Jesus to write on what he had seen and heard. The first task was to write to the seven churches and to communicate God's message to each one. Although the seven churches were actual churches during John's time, the messages apply to all churches for all time. To each church, the Lord Jesus revealed that He knew the actual spiritual state of each one of them. Some were reprimanded to repent while several were commended for their faithfulness. But the promise to each one is a place in the new heaven and new earth, reigning with Him and sharing His glory, if she overcomes.

The first church addressed was the church in Ephesus. The believers in Ephesus were diligent; they persevered and endured for the name of the Lord and they did not grow weary. They had spiritual

insight and were able to test the false apostles. They did not tolerate wicked men and they rejected false teaching. We must acknowledge that from one angle, their list of achievements was rather outstanding. Yet the Lord Jesus was not pleased with them and He pointed out that they had forsaken their first love. All the toil, perseverance, spiritual insight and concern for what was doctrinally correct and the rejection of what was wicked and wrong would come to no avail if they forsook their first love. This first love probably describes the love they had for the Lord when they first believed. It was a love that was, in all likelihood, refreshing, so filled with gratitude and so much alive, filled with wonder, awe, adoration and worship of God beyond their ordinary human experience and imagination. This love inevitably overflowed to those around them and touched their lives. When all these were lost and replaced with activities, even spiritual ones, the intimate relationship with the Lord slowly diminished and in its place was just a superficial skeletal structure without the life and the real meaning of what is truly valuable before Him.

We need to be mindful to continue to nurture an intimate relationship with the Lord in His Word, in a daily walk with Him, in continually being sensitive to His Holy Spirit and finding joy and pleasure in Him alone. Only then can our deeds bear true spiritual fruit and endure to eternal life.

The church in Smyrna was exhorted to be faithful in suffering, even to the point of death. And suffering and martyrdom will feature much in the battle against the evil one and his forces in the lives of the churches.

The church in Pergamum and the church in Thyatira, in spite of some commendable areas, had compromised in terms of allowing false teachers and false teaching to infiltrate the churches. Allusions to the Old Testament referred to the teaching of Balaam in Pergamum and the influence of Jezebel in Thyatira, with indications of sexual immorality

and idolatry affecting the churches to different degrees. The call to repentance was clear in both situations with the warnings of impending judgments.

The church cannot afford to compromise in their loyalty and faithfulness to God. Wrong teachings and influences from individuals, even those who claim spiritual authority and exude charisma, should not be tolerated if God's people desire to persevere in the right direction and on the narrow road to life and eternal glory with God.

The letters to the churches in Sardis and Laodicea carry very sober warnings to God's people and are definitely relevant to us and the churches today.

To have a name or reputation that we are alive as believers and yet are spiritually dead is dead serious. The church in Sardis was relatively free from persecutions and spiritual opposition but what is frightening is that it had been infiltrated by the values of the 'world' and had imbibed the ways of the world without being very conscious of it. Outwardly, it looked like a thriving church, going through all the proper Christian and church activities but inwardly, it was dead spiritually. God's warning to her was to be vigilant (watchful) and to wake up before it was too late. She needed to remember what she was and to repent. Self-confidence, worldly desires and unawareness of the reality of what is happening may be worse than actual failures.

As for Laodicea, she thought she was rich but she was actually poor spiritually. Noted as a city famous for medical healing of the eye, she was in fact spiritually blind; famous for her black sheep wool for garments, she was actually naked spiritually and her 'undrinkable' water mirrored her nauseous spiritual condition before the Lord God. The Lord threatened to spit her out of His mouth! It is a dangerous situation to be in: to be indifferent, to be half-baked believers, without true convictions and commitment to the Lord. There is no such thing as

a half-hearted Christian; either we are all out for the Lord Jesus or we are not! Complacency and self-deception are serious issues for the believer! Again, C.S. Lewis's writings in *Mere Christianity* are helpful for us to ponder:

“There must be a real giving up of the self...Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death to your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in”.

As for the church in Philadelphia, she had little strength; yet she did not deny the Lord Jesus but remained faithful. She kept the command of God to endure patiently. We see the importance of obedience to God and patient endurance in the midst of opposition despite having little strength. It is not so much the resources and abilities the people of God have to depend upon, but it is the patient and complete reliance and dependence on God that really matters in spiritual ministry and spiritual warfare. God can use what little we have if we surrender it to Him for His use and He can provide the enabling and the opportunities for us to be truly fruitful in His service.

Chapter 2

REVELATION 4 & 5

Revelation 4 and 5 bring us to behold the glory, the transcendence, the wisdom and awesomeness of God. We see God sitting on the throne, in control and ruling over all, surrounded by angelic beings, unapproachable by any without going through the sea of glass, the seven lamps, the 24 elders, the 4 living creatures and being 'greeted' by continuous thunder and lightning which struck terror in the hearts of the Israelites when they beheld God's revelation on Mt Sinai. The throne was surrounded by a kaleidoscope of colors, reminiscent of precious jewels with a beautiful rainbow (reminding us of the rainbow after the flood in Noah's time) and there was continuous worship and praise from those surrounding the throne and myriads and myriads of angels. This is our God, our Creator, sovereign and majestic, yet merciful and loving! We must not lose sight of this reality as we go through the pains and sufferings as pilgrims in this fallen world. We cannot diminish His glory by refusing to worship Him; in fact, our good is to love Him, and to love Him, we must know Him and if we know Him, we shall fall on our faces and knees in worship. For indeed He alone is worthy of all worship, glory and honor!

Then we see the slain Lamb of God; our Creator has become our Redeemer. The Son of God has become man, for us and our salvation, and has died on the cross to save us from eternal judgment. The saving death of Christ quenches God's wrath against us by obliterating our sins from the sight of God and shielding us from the nightmare of retributive justice by becoming our representative substitute, in obedience to the Father's will, and receiving the wages of our sin in our place. Redeeming love and retributive justice joined hands so that God can show Himself to be the 'just' and the 'justifier of those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3: 26). He tasted on Calvary Gods' wrath, which

was to be our due. The subsequent chapters of Revelation will manifest the fearful and terrible wrath, which will be unleashed on a rebellious world. Jesus' sacrifice guaranteed and assured the glory, holiness and true happiness of the redeemed! It is no wonder that He alone was worthy to receive the scroll from the Father's right hand and to remove the seals. It is no wonder that those around the throne and myriads of angels accorded Him the same praise and worship as that received by the One sitting on the throne. May the truth in Revelation 4 and 5 bring us to our knees in worship and adoration. May it encourage us to persevere in faith and gratitude to the One who has loved us even when we were sinners and enemies of the Cross.

Chapter 3

REVELATION 6 to 18: AN OVERVIEW

We now come to Revelation 6 to 18 and here we are treading on ground that requires us not to be so dogmatic that we are not open to other forms of interpretation. What is important is that the fundamental meaning and theology is preserved in the interpretation of significant areas, whilst we can be more open in the minor issues i.e. issues which do not make a serious compromise to our faith and fidelity to God and the scriptures. This is particularly so as Revelation is apocalyptic in a major way and many symbols are in the writing. What is helpful is to note the many Old Testament allusions and the prophetic nature of this letter (epistle). God desires us to know the things which will take place and those who read and hear the words of this book are blessed.

We see the opening of the seven seals, the first interlude, the blowing of the seven trumpets, the second interlude, the revelation of the false trinity (Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet), the third interlude, the seven plagues with the pouring out of the bowls of wrath and a further interlude.

The scroll basically reveals God's salvation plan, His judgment of, and wrath against all that is evil. Some have looked at the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath as looking at similar events from different angles, culminating with final judgment in the seventh seal, seventh trumpet or seventh bowl. We need to note the increasing intensity of the judgment as we move from seal to trumpet to bowl. In Revelation 6:8, when the fourth seal was broken, authority was given to the ashen horse and its rider over a fourth of the earth to kill with the sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth. In Revelation 9:18, after the sixth trumpet,

a third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the sulfur which proceeded out of their mouths. At the end of Revelation 16, after the pouring of the seventh bowl, “every island fled away and the mountains were not found. And huge hailstones about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe” (Revelation 16:20-21). The judgment was complete and total.

Despite the judgment and wrath of God, mankind did not repent of the works of their hands and continued to blaspheme God.

The four horsemen, as a result of the opening of the first four seals, were summoned by each of the four creatures who stood before the throne. The judgment of war, civil disorder, famine, bloodshed and death originated from the throne of God. God allows the sin, corruption and evil of men to cause them to destroy one another. It reveals the desperately wicked hearts of men who refuse to repent before a holy and righteous God and this wickedness will ultimately destroy itself, without God’s intervention in mercy and grace. God is able to work through evil to bring about good. Even king Nebuchadnezzar was called the servant of God and king Cyrus was addressed as God’s anointed. The prophet Habakkuk could not understand why God could use the wicked Chaldeans to punish His people Israel. The sovereignty of God extends over wicked nations and even over evil to bring about good and no evil power can withstand the might and will of God.

In the blowing of the trumpets, notice that God was responding to the prayers of His people (Revelation 8:3-5) and the judgment was unleashed by God Himself in the forms of hail and fire, mixed with blood, a mountain with fire hurled into the sea, a great star falling on a third of the rivers and springs of water and the release of demonic forces to torture the wicked and rebellious. Let us be comforted that God does

listen to the prayers of His people and He will act in His own wisdom and timing. God even uses evil forces to fulfill His own will and judgment. These evil forces are limited in their power and subject to the power and sovereignty of God.

The seven plagues and the bowls of wrath were effected on those who bore the mark of the beast, namely, those who were unrepentant and were stubbornly against God in rebellion and disobedience. They were the ones who 'worship' the false trinity and submitted to the will of Satan, antichrist and the false prophet and they persistently rejected God and blasphemed Him. These chapters in Revelation manifest the battle between good and evil, and between the triune God and the false trinity. Contrast the people of God possessing the seals of God, and the followers of the beast possessing the mark of the beast. Take note of the allusion to the plagues in Egypt before the exodus and the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh.

Satan and his forces use persecution and violence against God's people; he also employs deception and deceit to cause the people of the world to go astray. Notice the repeated calls for God's people to endure and to persevere. Revelation 12:11 revealed: "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death".

Because of the blood of the Lamb, Satan can no longer accuse them because the Lord Jesus has died in their place and redeemed them. The Lord Jesus is their advocate and He intercedes for them from the right hand of God the Father.

The word of their testimony means the preaching and sharing of the gospel and the preaching of God's word, accompanied by lives that are transformed and manifest the holiness and character of God. It emphasizes the importance of preaching the gospel and the truth in the Word of God to correct deception and to combat deceit; it also

demonstrates the need for the messengers of the gospel to reflect the truth and reality of the message in their lives. It does not just mean the sharing of the gospel by our mouths but also the demonstration of the gospel by our lives.

Finally, their willingness to be loyal to God even to the point of death is a great testimony to the reality of the true and living God and His plan of salvation. Non-believers and even many so-called believers often feel that life on earth is the key to happiness. To them, death takes away the joy of life. The earth is the only realm of existence for them and death to them is the ultimate tragedy. For true believers, death is not the end but the beginning of eternal joy with God. Take note that the martyrs were seen underneath the altar and they were very much alive in the heavenly realm and they cried out to God for His justice and for the lives of the brethren who were still on earth. Indeed, “death” has lost its victory and its sting because death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15: 55-56). Hence we can understand what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote, “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”.

Throughout the history of the church, in the midst of severe persecution and suffering, the church grows. Even non-believers exclaimed that Christians know how to die. The Romans were taken aback by Christians singing as they were brought into the lions’ den and onto burning stakes. The blood of martyrs lays the foundation of the church. Even in the great plague, when unbelievers abandoned their families and fled for their lives, Christians stayed back to nurse the sick and the dying. Many also died in the process but their testimony of love and courage turned many to Christ and the gospel. The Lord Jesus told the church in Smyrna to be courageous and faithful and not to be afraid but to hold fast to His name. This is also the calling to us today. God is interested in the salvation of the world. It will not be effected by physical warfare but by the preaching of the gospel in the word and life of His people and by the testimony of true disciples who will not deny

the Master but remain loyal and true even to the point of death.

The Lord Jesus is our example and pattern: He effected the greatest victory over the evil one and death at the cross, followed by His resurrection and ascension. He desires His salvation plan for the world to be worked out through His people who follow in His path of denying the self, taking up a cross and following Him with the gospel of truth in word and in life. God's warning, judgment and wrath may turn some back to Him in repentance but the majority will turn back because of the preaching of the gospel, the transformation of lives of believers and their impactful testimony to the world that Jesus is indeed the way, the truth and the life and there is no other God except the triune God revealed to us through the God-man, Jesus Christ. For there is one God and one mediator between God and man and that is none other than the true man and second Adam, Jesus Christ.

May the Lord minister to us as we meditate upon these truths.

Chapter 4

REVELATION 6 to 11: A CLOSER LOOK

In Chapter 6, we see the opening of the seals and the events accompanying the opening of each seal. What was revealed was not the content of the scroll, which would be seen subsequently. It is important to note that the seven seals, the seven trumpets and seven bowls of wrath may not be strictly sequential but they overlap in some instances. The seventh seal, the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl of wrath, however, each refers to the final judgment. What was manifested in the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls may actually be taking place already to some degrees after the first advent of the Lord Jesus and His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.

With regard to the first 4 seals and their opening, the Lord Jesus Himself declared: “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains” (Matthew 24:6-8).

In Matthew 24:9, the Lord pointed out “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me”. This is reflected in Revelation chapter 7 where God showed to John the heavenly perspective - those who were martyred for Christ standing before the throne of God praising and worshipping God. Prior to that, we noted the sealing of the people of God on their foreheads, signifying God’s protection for His people in the midst of the tribulations. God's protection does not mean freedom from pain and death but rather that God, in sealing His people with the Holy Spirit, would grant them grace and empowering through His Spirit to

triumph in the midst of the difficult situations and to be kept safe until they enter into the presence of God.

The various interludes in Revelation often show us the heavenly perspective and what has taken place or is taking place in the heavenlies. It is a reminder that total reality includes the physical and spiritual realms and we must not mistake what is seen as the only reality that is unraveling.

As we focus on Revelation 8-11, we notice chapter 8 beginning with another heavenly perspective. The prayers of all the saints were regarded as incense with smoke and aroma before God and here we are reminded of the cries of the martyrs in Revelation 6:10: "They cried out in a loud voice, 'How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?'" In response to the prayers of the saints, God's angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar and hurled it on the earth. The thunder, rumbling and flashes of lightning and an earthquake indicate that the response was from the throne of God Himself. Thus begins the sounding to the seven trumpets.

The blowing of the trumpets has several connotations in scriptures. It may indicate a call to war. For example, the conquest of Jericho was preceded by the blowing of trumpets (Joshua 6). It may be blown as a warning of impending disaster and judgment (Ezekiel 33: 3). The apostle Paul pointed out the blowing of the trumpet in association with the second coming of the Lord Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The trumpet was also blown to call the people to repent (Isaiah 58:1).

In the context of Revelation 8 and 9, it is probable that the blowing of the trumpets may be a call to repentance for unbelievers and a warning of impending judgment and disaster. For God's people, it is a call to spiritual warfare and a looking forward to the second advent of the Lord Jesus.

The blowing of the first 4 trumpets brought about fire burning up one third of the earth, the trees and the grass; the turning of one third of the sea into blood with one third of the sea creatures dying and one third of the ships destroyed. It also affected one third of drinking water, the sun, the moon, the stars and one third of the day was without light. The use of one third was to indicate that it was still a partial judgment and the warning was given to the people of the world to repent before it is too late to do so.

Notice the allusions to the Old Testament in comparing the judgments to those on Egypt and Pharaoh in Exodus. There was hail in Egypt, the river Nile was turned into blood and there was a period of darkness in the whole land. The exodus in Egypt began after the slaying of the firstborn among the Egyptians but Israel was spared when their homes were 'covered' with the blood of the lamb. The Lamb of God has already been slain and the eschatological exodus for God's people has begun with God leading them to the 'promised land', the new heaven and new earth. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart showed how deserving the judgments and the plagues were, and in Revelation, God's judgments are truly in order as the people hardened their hearts and refused to repent. The fifth and sixth trumpets being blown brought about demonic forces causing 'torture' and plagues on the unbelievers and yet they refused to repent and acknowledge God. The blowing of the seventh trumpet brought about the final judgment. There no longer remains any room for repentance and the final judgment is irreversible.

Chapter 10 revealed John given a scroll by God through a mighty angel to eat. It will turn his stomach sour, but in his mouth, it will be sweet. The scroll is probably the same scroll seen in the beginning of Revelation and after the seals were opened, John was given the content of the scroll to eat and commissioned to prophesy to many peoples, nations, languages and kings. The prophecy and preaching is directed to the whole world. An allusion to a similar incident is noted in Ezekiel Chapter 3 when Ezekiel was also given a scroll to eat, causing a similar

reaction and he was commissioned to preach to Israel. For Ezekiel, the warning and justice of God towards Israel was sweet but it was bitter or sour when Israel refused to repent and had to undergo the awful judgment of God. For John, the justice of God and His judgment of evil was sweet but the fact that God's people had to undergo persecution and even martyrdom in order to rescue the world for God's kingdom was bitter or sour.

God's salvation plan for the rest of the world now becomes apparent. It will not be brought about by judgment alone but it will be effected by the church preaching the gospel and the word of God with power through the Holy Spirit to the world with an attitude of suffering and sacrificial love, even to the point of death.

In chapter 11 of Revelation, the two witnesses represent the universal church (note the reference to the lamp stands) and the olive trees (with allusion to the book of Zechariah) declared "Not by might nor by power but by the Spirit of God". God's church will testify with power likened to the prophets Elijah and Moses, and the gospel and His word would go out effectively. Although the evil forces may seek to destroy the church and her testimony, she will rise again from her 'death' each time to defy the intention of the enemy. Truly, the blood of the martyrs is the 'seed' and foundation of the church. Even in the book of Acts, persecution only served to spread the gospel, 'turning the world upside down'.

1260 days or three and a half years, to the Jews, clearly reminded them of the duration of guerrilla warfare carried out by Judas the Hammer or Judas Maccabeus against Antiochus IV Epiphanies from the Seleucid Syrian empire who intended to paganize Judah. Victory was finally secured after three and a half years of battle and the temple was rededicated. This period speaks to Israel of a period of intense suffering and resistance which ultimately will end with victory. This is also the confidence the universal church of God has. God promised

ultimate victory in the midst of suffering and loving ministry to the world. Notice verse 13: at the end, one tenth of the city's inhabitants died but nine tenths of the people were terrified and they gave glory to the God of heaven, signifying repentance and positive response to God. Suffering and sacrificial love on the part of the Church with faithful and powerful effective preaching of God's word and the gospel, accompanied by godliness, would win the day. The city represents the world and not just a city or nation.

God has a mission for His church: to carry on the work of the Lord Jesus, with the same spirit of denying the self, carrying the cross and reaching out to a lost world. It is God's intention and desire to save the world through the sacrifice of the Son and through the witness of His people.

Chapter 5

REVELATION 12

In Revelation 12, once again, we are given the heavenly perspective. We see a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and was about to give birth. Another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. The dragon was waiting to devour the child the moment it was born. A male child was born and he was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert (wilderness) to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1260 days. What followed was war in heaven and the dragon and his angels lost their place in heaven. The dragon was hurled down to the earth with his angels. At that point, a loud voice in heaven declared the establishment of the salvation, power and kingdom of God and the authority of Christ. The dragon was filled with fury, knowing his time is short, and he sought to harm the woman and made war against the rest of her offspring.

The woman was thought to represent Mary by some but the context does not support this. The male child is the Messiah Jesus Christ. In one sentence is described His life on earth, His ministry and ascension to the throne of God. There He waits until all His enemies are vanquished and brought to His footstool. The woman, we are told, represents the messianic community and the Messiah came forth from her. The other offspring are those who obey God's command and hold to the testimony of Jesus and this points to the Church of God (from the Old Testament and the New Testament), all those justified by faith in Jesus.

The point of time the dragon was hurled down to earth seems to

be the point of time he was defeated at the cross when the Messiah died for the sins of man. No longer can Satan be the accuser of the brethren before God, for the sins of believers have been forgiven and dealt with at the cross. It is also at this point that the salvation and the kingdom of God was established and the authority of Jesus demonstrated and further manifested by His victory over death and His ascension to the right hand of God. In this sense, we can rightly say that the war is over. However, as we can see, the dragon was full of fury and he went on to battle against the messianic community and the offspring of the woman. The battles rage on and although God brought the woman to the desert place for protection, the persecution of believers and the relentless fury of the enemy continue unabated until the final judgment and the consummation of God's kingdom at the end.

What is clear is that spiritual warfare is real and Satan is real. Believers must be conscious of this; otherwise, they may fall prey to the designs of the evil one and his angels. The enemy not only uses persecution and violence to cause damage to God's people; he also is a master of deception and can dress as an angel of light. The distortion of truth and scriptures by him may not be recognized as his 'attacks' and the people of God can be led astray and rendered as no longer a threat to his kingdom. The devil is not afraid of activities, even so-called spiritual ones, carried out in the flesh; he is only concerned with those done with the power of the Holy Spirit and in dependence on God. The apostle Paul reminded us that our battle is not only against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual powers, namely the evil one and his followers (Ephesians 6:12).

In the meantime, the woman was brought to the desert, to a safe place to be taken care of for 1260 days. We have looked at what 1260 days represent in the previous sharing. We will recall God taking care of Israel in the desert, providing for her, caring for her. Yet we know that Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness, grumbling, complaining and testing God and seeking to go back to Egypt (a type

of the world). The 'desert' is a place of testing for God's people: God will care for them but they need to go on by faith and confidence in the Lord and not give in to self-preservation, disobedience, idolatry and outright rebellion against God, always seeking to go back to the world and into bondage prepared for them by the prince of this world, Satan himself. Many Israelites died in the desert without reaching the promised land. This is certainly a warning for us to triumph in the desert by faith and in loyalty to God who will definitely bring us into the 'promised land' - the new heaven and the new earth. The God who brought Israel out of Egypt in the exodus is the same God who will bring us out of this fallen world in the eschatological exodus through the blood of the Lamb into the promised land where there will be no more tears, no more sorrow, no more death but only eternal joy, worship of God and wondrous fellowship with all those who overcome (remember the letters to the seven churches).

We would recall the Lord Jesus, when He was on earth, led into the desert to be tempted by the evil one. The first Adam failed God and sinned in the garden of Eden. Israel, for the most part, failed God in the desert in her rebellion and disobedience. The second Adam, Jesus, triumphed in the desert when He confronted the temptations of the evil one with the Word of God and His submission and obedience to the heavenly Father. He demonstrated how man should live and obey God. Angels appeared to minister to Him. The Lord God takes care of His people in the desert. The desert is also a place where temptations abound and it serves as a testing ground for the people of God. We must remember the example of our Lord Jesus in meeting temptations in the desert and overcoming them. We must also remember that Jesus Christ was truly God and truly man when He was on earth. He encountered all that human beings encountered on earth, including going through difficulties and pain in meeting temptations, enduring misunderstanding from various ones as well as physical trials.

Some may conclude that He probably used His divine power to

overcome all the difficulties and trials but this would not explain Him as fully man. In fact, Jesus as the God-man chose not to exercise His divine power and attributes in order to live within the limitations of being truly human. He opted to experience the world through the limitations He took upon Himself in order to be truly man even though His divine attributes were still present in Him but not voluntarily exercised by Him. As such, He experienced time and space events within the confines of a normal human being, and in such a context, He became the perfect example of how a man should live before God.

In the meantime, there is a mission to accomplish as seen in Revelation 12:11 - we need to overcome on the ground of the blood of the Lamb, to preach the gospel and God's word faithfully and being ready even to sacrifice to the point of death. The messenger must look like the message in order to bring the rest of the world into God's kingdom.

Chapter 6

REVELATION 13 & 14

Chapter 13 introduces two beasts: one coming out from the sea and one coming out of the earth.

The sea has been associated with chaos and ‘evil’ (cf. Isaiah 57:20). When reference is made subsequently to the new heaven and the new earth, the sea is no longer present there (Revelation 21:1). Notice that the first beast has its power source from the dragon, the evil one, and it is an “incarnation” of Satan as he wages war against God and His people. In the time of the apostle John, this beast can be identified with the imperial power of Rome and her emperor, with her military might. This was the antichrist in that context. But John was not just focusing on the antichrist during his time and the Roman empire but he wrote of the beast having authority over every tribe, people, language and nation and all inhabitants of the earth and this beast will make his final appearance not just on a national scale but on a world-wide stage before the second coming of our Lord Jesus. In 1 John 4:3, John wrote, “This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” The apostle Paul, in 2 Thessalonians referred to the antichrist, “Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come, until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

This beast had a fatal wound and yet he recovered. In Revelation 17:8, it was written, “The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction”. This antichrist keeps appearing at various points of the history of the world.

When various ones thought that he was gone, he reappeared again. And he will make his final grand appearance before the second coming of our Lord, only to be destroyed forever. Antichrist may refer to a political, military or civil power with its head, an individual or individuals, given authority by the evil one to war against God and His people. But realize that it is God Himself who allows the evil one to have such power for a limited period of time (1260 days, 42 months or three and a half years) according to His own wisdom and sovereignty (Revelation 13:7). During this time, the calling is for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

The antichrist will blaspheme God and slander His name and he will be given power to war against the saints and to conquer them. From the world's perspective, the antichrist is the conqueror but from the heavenly perspective, it is the people of God, including the martyrs, who conquer as they would not allow the deception and lies of the evil one to distort or reject the truth of the gospel and the words of God, even to the point of death (Revelation 12:11). It is a battle between good and evil, between the evil one and God, between truth and falsehood and those who stand by the truth with the enabling of God's Spirit are the real conquerors (remember again the letters to the seven churches who were exhorted to overcome).

The second beast came out of the earth. The earth is supposedly stable and is not a context of chaos. It seems to indicate that this beast has a relatively benign origin; perhaps he comes out from the midst of the people, even the so-called people of God. He also appears as a lamb, seemingly unthreatening, but he speaks like a dragon, revealing his evil origin. This beast represents the false prophet, the false religious institutions and set-ups, appearing as relatively harmless but capable of causing serious damage and injury to God's people. He was given power to act on behalf of the first beast and certainly his origin and authority was from Satan himself. In the battle between truth and deceit, the false prophet is a dangerous foe, for he comes "dressed as

an angel of light”. He can quote the scriptures according to his own interpretation and he can put the people of God in a precarious situation by leading them onto the wrong and perilous path by claiming to represent God. Notice that he was given power to do ‘miracles’, even causing fire to come down from heaven in full view of men and he deceived the people of the world and ordered them and compelled them to worship the first beast (Revelation 13:12). All who complied were given the mark of the beast on their forehead; without this mark, no one could buy or sell. This would mean economic hardship for God’s people on a world-wide scale and perhaps even starvation and severe deprivation.

We should remember the temptation scene of the Lord Jesus when He was on earth. After forty days and forty nights of fasting in the desert, he was hungry. The devil tempted Him to change the stones into bread. Jesus replied, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). The Lord Jesus as the perfect man on earth demonstrated what it means to put God and His Word above His own physical needs. He is our perfect example when such a temptation comes our way. In the same temptation scene, Satan, the prince of the world offered the world to Jesus if He would bow down to him and worship him. Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’”. The people of God will face such a temptation when the antichrist and the false prophet exerted their influence on the world. It is either “worship the true God or worship Satan and his henchmen”. The Lord Jesus as the perfect man made it clear to us what our choice should be.

We need to be aware that signs and wonders demonstrated by those who claim to represent God might have their origin from the evil one. We should not be naive to think that all signs and miracles must be from God as the devil and his angels can masquerade as the servants of God.

Notice the parody; there is the false imitation of the Holy Trinity. The evil one, the antichrist and the false prophet will try to put themselves forward as the true trinity but the number of the beast is 666, short of the perfect and complete number 777 with reference to the holy triune God.

Chapter 14 revealed the redeemed of the Lord in its complete number, 144,000; none is missing. Note that they were before the throne of God singing a new song that no one could learn except those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. They were described as faithful to God, and they followed the Lamb in His example and pattern of obedience to the Father and they were purchased as an offering and sacrifice to God. As the Israelites sang the song of Moses after the exodus, God's people will sing a new song in the eschatological exodus of God's people. No lie was found in their mouth, signifying their stand for the truth of God in the gospel and scriptures as opposed to the lie presented by the evil one and his accomplices. Here we realize the great need for God's people to know well the totality of the Bible, God's revelation and truth, if we do not wish to be deceived and led astray by subtle emphasis on only part of the truth with manipulations and deceit in the background. It is also a call for the church of God to defend the complete truth of God revealed through the written Word and taught by the Holy Spirit of God. It must be noted that false teaching creeps in rather subtly and inconspicuously and it may begin with just a slight distortion of the truth. The people of God must be vigilant to defend the truth and to propagate the truth.

The rest of the chapter sounded out the warnings and pointed out two outcomes: those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark on their forehead will drink of the wine of God's wrath and their end will be tormenting with burning sulfur in the eternal fire of hell but those who worship God and are faithful to Him will be the bride of Christ collectively and the new Jerusalem. The stakes are high: it is heaven or hell; it is sharing the joy and life of God or eternal

damnation and separation from His presence. God will harvest the chosen ones in his 'reaping' but the unrepentant and persistently rebellious will be gathered and thrown into the great winepress of God's wrath, trampled and destroyed. "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Chapter 7

REVELATION 15 & 16

Revelation 15 brings us back to another heavenly scene. This time we see seven angels preparing to release the seven last plagues and this will lead on to the completion of God's wrath and final judgment.

The scene changes and the focus is now on those who overcame the false trinity in the tribulation, standing besides the sea of glass before the throne of God with harps in their hands, singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, praising God and worshiping Him, declaring His marvellous deeds, true ways and righteous acts. God's impending judgment on those who worshiped the beasts and Satan demonstrates His glory and holiness and causes the nations and His people to worship and glorify Him. This judgment will be seen subsequently in the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath inflicting the seven last plagues.

Notice the parallels depicted: Israel singing the song of Moses by the Red Sea after Pharaoh and his army were drowned in the sea; and the martyrs killed by the antichrist singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb by the sea of glass before the throne of God. Israel was rescued from slavery in Egypt in the exodus to worship God in the desert; God's people are rescued from the slavery of sin and the evil one in the great eschatological exodus to stand before Him to worship Him and to find glory in Him. Egypt was undoubtedly one of the greatest, if not the greatest, nations at the time of the exodus and she boasted a mighty army, and the charioteers in the army were feared by the surrounding nations. However, Pharaoh and his charioteers were drowned in the Red Sea. No king or kingdom can stand before the King of kings and Lord of lords in arrogance and not suffer the consequences. And so it shall be for the devil and his henchmen.

Although they wielded great power and authority in subduing nations under them and persecuting and marginalizing God's people, they shall crumble before the almighty God. No one can touch and hurt God's people without suffering the consequences of God's wrath and judgment.

Here before the throne of God, God's people declared that God's judgment is just, true and righteous! Indeed, God's judgment is right retribution for sin and injustice, and His judgment is the true expression of His holiness and justice, for a holy and just God must deal with the injustice and sins committed before Him. God's wrath and judgment are truly in line and consistent with His holiness. Those who mistakenly declare that a loving God will not punish the evil and wicked people of the world and send them to hell forget that God is not just a God of love; He is also a holy God and a just God and will not leave sins unpunished. In subsequent chapters, we will see God sending the antichrist and the false prophet into the burning lake of sulfur and those who persistently bear the mark of the beast and refuse to repent will follow them into the same place where they will be tormented forever and ever. The great dragon, the devil, will follow suit ultimately. We shall examine this in more details in the following chapters.

Chapter 15 ends with a vision of the temple, the tabernacle of the testimony (with further allusion to the Old Testament) opened and the seven angels given the seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God by one of the four living creatures, indicating that the instruction came direct from the One who sits on the throne. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power and no one could enter the temple. We are reminded of the temple filled with the glory of God after king Solomon dedicated the temple and the cloud covering the Tent of Meeting with the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle such that Moses could not enter the tent. This is the manifestation of the glory and holiness of God and His mighty presence, for our God is the same yesterday, today and forever. Woe to those who

await the unleashing of His wrath, for there is no escape from this great and majestic Lord and God.

Chapter 16 recorded the pouring out of the bowls filled with the wrath of God on the earth. Notice that the plagues which followed were targeting those who worship the false trinity and bore the mark of the beast. This time there is no holding back and the judgments were total and complete. What was affected was not one fourth or one third; it was affecting the whole of the sea, the rivers and the springs of water and the people bearing the mark of the beast were infected with painful sores, scorched by the sun and plunged into total darkness. Again, we hear the refrain of God's people, declaring that God is just and true in His judgments and the recipients truly deserve the punishment.

Notice that the people being judged refused to repent and give glory to God; instead they cursed the God of heaven and continued to blaspheme Him. Such is the depth of the wickedness and deceitfulness of the hearts of these people! The pouring out of the sixth bowl prepared the scene and the way for the battle on the great day of God almighty. Satan and his evil angels gathered the kings of the whole world to battle against God and His army at Armageddon.

At this point, we hear the declaration: "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed". No doubt, this is the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ who warned His people to be ready and alert for His second coming. Let us not be found 'naked' like the believers in the church of Laodicea when He comes.

"God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished

with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.” (2 Thessalonians 1: 6-10)

We may be wondering why the triune God seeks to be marvelled at and He delights in the praise and worship of His people. Some may irreverently question whether God is a megalomaniac and egoistic, always seeking to be praised and glorified. This is very far from the truth. God Himself is fully sufficient in Himself. He does not require our praise and He is perfectly satisfied and contented in Himself without the need for companionship or external input due to loneliness. By no means! God created us such that we find our true happiness and pleasure in praising Him and worshiping Him and those who have come to acknowledge Him and love Him would find it a constant joy to glorify Him, to worship Him and to praise Him, for that is our greatest good and that gives us the greatest pleasure.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!” What followed was a great earthquake, with flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder, reminding us of the description of what came forth from the throne of God in Revelation 4. It is the final judgment and how terrifying it will be for those at the receiving end! The subsequent chapters of Revelation will describe in more detail the judgment meted out by the almighty.

Chapter 8

REVELATION 17 to 19:10

Revelation 17 focuses on the great prostitute, given the title “Babylon the great” and one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls carried John in the Spirit to behold this woman to explain what she represented and the punishment she will undergo.

The first thing we notice is the inseparable relationship between this woman and the beast, the antichrist; she was described as sitting on a scarlet beast. The prostitute has achieved her glory and power because she was made great by the antichrist and was completely dependent on the latter. Notice that the woman was also seated on many waters, depicting her relationship to the nations of the earth and the kings of the earth. The great prostitute seduces the nations and kings to commit spiritual adultery and she persecutes the people of God with the support of the antichrist who appears in history in a succession of godless kingdoms at different periods in the history of the world. This woman has formed an adulterous connection in every stage of her history with the then existing world power. As such, Babylon represents not just one nation at one point in history but she is the symbol and embodiment of the corrupt and evil human civilization with all its pomp, wealth and luxury, organized in opposition to God and His people. She convinced the nations that they can live without God and that safety, security and prosperity will surely be theirs if they follow her in her luxury, self-indulgence and wealth.

Babylon has extended her influence over the whole world and appeared at different epochs in history together with the spirit of the antichrist; she will also manifest her influence greatly when the antichrist makes his final grand entrance in the tribulation prior to the second coming of our Lord Jesus. The apostle John was referring to the

eschatological Babylon who is the personification of wickedness and represents the final manifestation of the total history of godless nations. She indulges herself in wanton luxury and glories in materialism to the extent that she proudly exalts herself over the true living God and sheds the blood of God's people in partnership with the false trinity. The image of Babylon signifies the satanic tendency of humanity to develop idolatrous empires that challenge the dominion of the One sitting on the heavenly throne.

The end of Revelation 17 reveals that Babylon will somehow be ruined and destroyed by the beast and the kings who were her former allies. The satanic empire and evil is ultimately a self-destructive entity; evil will ultimately destroy itself, even without divine intervention.

Revelation 18 announces the fall of Babylon by an angel coming down from heaven with great authority. We see the description of this city as a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit. There is no doubt that her excessive luxuries, crass materialism and spiritual idolatries are closely tied up with demonic and satanic influence from the antichrist, the false prophet and the evil one.

Next comes another voice from heaven exhorting God's people to come out of her and not share in her sins. It is interesting that the call is not so much in combating Babylon but to come out of her and to flee from her influence and sin. We are reminded by what the apostle John wrote in 1 John Chapter 2:

“Do not love the world or anything in this world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever”

(1 John 2:15-17).

Certainly, the love of the world is not compatible with the love of the Father; in fact they cannot coexist. The desires of the world are in fact the desires championed by Babylon and they belong to all that are contrary to godly desires. They have their root and source from the prince of the world, Satan himself. They promote fleshly pursuits, self-exaltation and pride, selfish gratifications, the love of mammon and rebellion against the living God. The people of God must not have anything to do with these and they must come out from among them and be separate.

We need to be aware that the evil one can offer the world to us if we will only worship him. It is sad but undeniable that believers have succumbed to his offer time and again and it may not even be the whole world but just a part of it. We allow friendship with the world to contaminate us and we allow this to take place even in spiritual activities. Let us not be presumptuous and think that we will not fall into this trap and compromise. Scriptures recorded for us that Demas, a co-worker of Apostle Paul, a man of some spiritual stature in all likelihood, deserted Paul because he loved the world (2 Timothy 4:10). The attractions of the world and the pull of the world can be very strong. Sins can be enjoyable and pleasurable; we see Babylon dressed in purple and scarlet and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. The seductions can be very intense; only those who learn to love God and holiness can overcome her overtures. It implies the need to nurture intimacy with God and His Word and a constant vigilance in all that we do or think. We must be saturated with the Word of God and be equipped with the whole armour of God lest we become casualties.

When Babylon is destroyed, all those who shared her luxury and committed spiritual adultery with her will mourn and weep, for they will no longer be able to enjoy the evil gains from the great city - it is all over! But those in heaven will rejoice over her destruction and ruin for she truly deserves the judgment and wrath of God.

Chapter 19 of Revelation sounded out the “Hallelujah!” from heaven, from the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, praising God, rejoicing in Him and giving Him all the glory. It is the vindication of God’s justice and righteousness. The final “Hallelujah” heralds the coming of the wedding of the Lamb and the readiness of His bride, the Church. This eschatological event marks the perfect union between Christ and the Church, a consummation of God’s plan and desire from all ages. The apostle John was so overwhelmed that he fell at the angel’s feet to worship him but he was promptly told not to do so. The angel is a servant of God; John must only worship God! And so must we!

Chapter 9

REVELATION 19:11 to 20:15

Here the focus is on the defeat of the antichrist and the false prophet, the temporary binding of Satan, the introduction of the “millennium”, and the final judgment before the great white throne of God.

Verse 11 opens with the glorious appearance from heaven of the Lord Jesus on a white horse with the armies of heaven following Him, dressed in fine white linen and also riding on white horses. Notice the various descriptions of the Lord Jesus and His name with allusions to the Old Testament and the gospels. He is called Faithful and True; He makes war in justice and truth; His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns and His name is the Word of God. On His robe and on His thigh is written: ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’. His robe is dripped with blood; out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations and He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

See the parallel descriptions in the following passages:

“He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist”

(Isaiah 11:4b-5).

“I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me, I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come”

(Isaiah 63:3-4).

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”

(John 1:1).

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”

(John 1:14).

“For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account”

(Hebrews 4:12-13).

The Lord Jesus appeared as a warrior and a judge, to make war against the two beasts and the kings of the earth and to execute judgment. He came as the King of kings and the Lord of lords (with many crowns on His head), accompanied by the armies of heaven. Nothing is hidden from His eyes, described like blazing fire. Judgment will be effected by the sharp sword from His mouth that will strike down the nations, the sword depicting the Word of God. God created the world out of nothing by His Word and He will slay and judge by His Word. He speaks and it comes to pass. He will rule with an iron scepter (see Psalm 2) and He is trustworthy and true as contrasted to the devil who is deceitful and the father of lies. In all likelihood, the blood on His robe is the blood of the wicked spattered on His garments as He trod the winepress in His vengeance and judgment on those who are evil and wicked.

The two beasts and the kings of the earth gathered to make war

on the Lord and His army but they were immediately defeated. The antichrist and the false prophet were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus. Jesus appeared earlier as the slain lamb but now He came as a conquering king, warrior and judge to administer justice and to dispense the wrath of the Lamb. Let us not be too overfamiliar with the Lord Jesus lest we forget that He is God Almighty, the great Sovereign who reigns in majesty and holiness. The One who is our savior and our elder brother in God's family is also our God and king!

Chapter 20 sees the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil, seized by an angel and bound for a thousand years in the Abyss. After the thousand years were ended, he was set free for a short time. During the thousand years, it was recorded that the martyrs came to life and reigned with Christ. After his release, Satan will go out and deceive the nations to gather them for battle against God's people and His city. However, they were destroyed by the fire that came down from heaven. The devil, who deceived the nations, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur where the antichrist and the false prophet had been thrown and they will be tormented day and night, forever and ever. Here we are introduced to the subject of the millennium (the thousand years) and for centuries, believers cannot quite agree about what this represents and what the passage seeks to communicate.

The three major schools of thought are premillennialism, amillennialism and postmillennialism. In summary, premillennialism teaches that there will be a future, literal, earthly millennial kingdom, and that it will begin when Christ returns. Amillennialism teaches that the millennium represents the current church age, not a literal one thousand years. Postmillennialism teaches that Christ will return after the millennial kingdom concludes.

Premillennialism has two distinct groups; dispensational

premillennialism and historic premillennialism. The former believe that the promises made to Israel have not been abolished or fulfilled by the Church, which is a distinct body having promises and a destiny different from Israel's. They believe that Christ, at the end of the age, will return for His Church in the event termed the rapture and usher in a seven-year period of tribulation on the earth. After this, Christ will return to the earth in the Second coming to establish the kingdom on the earth for a thousand years, during which time the promises to Israel will be fulfilled.

The historic premillennialism group does not subscribe to a rapture of the Church before the tribulation. They believe that the Church will fail in her mission, lose influence and become corrupted as worldwide evil increases toward the end of the Church age. The Church will pass through a future, worldwide, unprecedented time of travail. This era is known as the Great Tribulation. Christ will return at the end of the Great Tribulation to rapture the Church, resurrect deceased saints, and conduct the judgment of the righteous in the "twinkling of an eye." Christ will then descend to the earth with His glorified saints, fight the battle of Armageddon, bind Satan, and establish a worldwide political kingdom, which will be personally administered by Him for 1,000 years from Jerusalem. At the end of the millennial reign, Satan will be loosed and he will gather the nations in rebellion against the kingdom but will be destroyed by God in a fiery judgment.

Postmillennialism advocates believe that the kingdom of Christ will gradually expand in time and on earth. This will be accomplished with Christ's power as King but without His physical presence on earth. They believe that the Great Commission will succeed in the age of the Church and includes the virtual Christianization of the nations. The extended period of spiritual prosperity may endure for millennia, after which history will be drawn to a close by the personal, visible bodily return of Christ.

Amillennialists interpret the millennium mentioned in Revelation 20 as describing the present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven. They understand the binding of Satan as being in effect during the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ. They further hold that the kingdom of God is now present in the world as the victorious Christ is ruling His people by His Word and Spirit, though they also look forward to a future, glorious, and perfect kingdom on the new earth in the life to come. They expect the bringing of the gospel to all nations and the conversion of the fullness of Israel to be completed before Christ's return. They also expect an intensified form of tribulation and apostasy as well as the appearance of a personal antichrist before the Second coming of Christ.

The divisions that exist within the Christian community are understandable, given that the subject matter and the literary genre of future prophecy are very difficult. Here especially, we cannot afford to be dogmatic. We must hold to the central things Apostle John had made clear: the victory of the Lamb of God, the call to victory through faith and endurance and that the one who wins the victory is the creator God who defeats death itself, the devil and his henchmen, and opens the way to the glories of the new heaven and the new earth for His redeemed.

Chapter 20 closes with the judgment at the great white throne of God. All the dead, great and small, are judged before God sitting on the throne. They are judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. Another book is opened which is the book of life. If anyone's name is not found written in the book of life, he is thrown into the lake of fire. Death and Hades were also thrown into the lake of fire. There will be no more death; Hades, *sheol* in Hebrew, denoting the abode of the dead or a temporary place for the wicked to await judgment, is no longer required. There are only two destinations eternally: one is the new heaven and the new earth for those recorded in the book of life and the other is the fiery lake of fire (hell or Gehenna) for those whose names were not found written in the book of life.

The Lord Jesus spoke much more than anyone else on the subject of hell and the reality of eternal judgment. We see it recorded in Matthew 13:41-42, 18:8-9. So terrifying is the prospect of hell that it is better to be maimed or blind in this life than to be thrown into hell subsequently. Hell is described as a fiery furnace burning in an eternal fire that goes on and on forever, and the fire is not quenched and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth that last for eternity (Matthew 9:48).

Decisions in this life have eternal consequences. Those in this life who reject God and Jesus Christ, despite His continual mercy extended to them, will be rejected by Him forever. Final judgment is sure; let us not reject God's offer of forgiveness in His Son, the slain Lamb of God.

Chapter 10

REVELATION 21 & 22

Chapter 21 begins with Apostle John being shown a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth has passed away. Then he is shown the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. A loud voice from the throne declares, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, there will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

There will be a whole new creation, a renewal and a re-creation of this world. This current world is like a glorious ruin. We can see some of the splendour and the beauty with which God made the world; we also see the ruin – we see it in the disasters, the famines, the earthquakes, the wars, the diseases and we know it in the pain, the disappointments, the frustration and the hurt. Romans 8 tells us:

“The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies”

(Romans 8:23-24).

The apostle Peter wrote:

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness”

(2 Peter 3:10-13).

The apostle John sees the fulfilment of God’s promise to make everything new – a new people of God in a new heaven and earth with a new order of things.

There is a pause with the reminder that this is only for those who overcome; it is not for the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - theirs will be the fiery lake of burning sulfur which is the second death.

Then John is brought by one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls to behold the bride of the lamb, the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. The city actually pictures God’s perfected people, those who were born again and redeemed. The city is not the place where believers will live; the city is the people of God themselves. The redeemed people of God constitute the New Jerusalem; they collectively become the bride of Christ. It is Christ who purifies them; He saves them from the penalty of sin in dying for them; He also rescues them from the power and presence of

sin in His renewal of them. That renewal is going on as they live by the Spirit and grow in holiness. Subsequently, on the day He returns and institutes the new heaven and the new earth, the work of renewal is completed. They will be perfected in their godliness. What is wrecking the world now is not just the curse on the physical world but also the on-going sin in the lives of God's people and the people of the world.

However, the New Jerusalem shines like precious jewels; there is nothing dirty or shameful about it. It is perfected in beauty and glory and that is what God is going to do with His people. They, the redeemed, will be perfected by God so that they are like a pure bride, beautifully dressed for Christ and without blemish, with a heart that is so purified to love the bridegroom such that all other loves will be stripped away.

Notice in verse 16 that the city is the same dimension in length and breadth and height. It is a perfect cube. There is one other structure in the Bible that is a perfect cube; it is the Holy of Holies. This is where God's glory is, in the temple of God. There is no temple in the new creation; the Lord God almighty and the Lamb are its temple. In this new city, there is no darkness, there are no shadows, there is complete safety and security because God is there in all His fullness. The glory of the Lord God fills the temple; His glory, His presence shines through in every part of the city of God. Here in this new creation, God will wipe away every tear; He will make right what was wrong; there will be no more pain, no more death, no more sorrow.

In chapter 22, the same angel showed John the river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. There will be no longer any curse and no more night. God will give them light and they will reign forever and ever. The river of God brings life where there was death. Life is flowing out from God, renewing His creation

and bringing healing to the nations. It is a picture of a community; a people from every tribe and tongue and nation united together as God meant us to be. God has always desired that His people will live together in a loving community just as He lives in loving community within the three persons (trinity) of the Godhead.

In the closing of the chapter, we hear, “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” These are the words of the Lord Jesus. Again, it is repeated in verse 12, “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

Blessed indeed are those who have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Let the people hear and take note. Let the churches hear and listen! He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

And again, we read, “He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Let us be ‘awake’ and be vigilant. “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.” Come, Lord Jesus.

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