

Preachers' Gatherings 2021/22

Preaching Revelation

Part 1 Introduction

**Part 2 Sermons on the Book of
Revelation**

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START HERE: Suggestions on how to handle this material

Please do not panic! Revelation is hard going but glorious, and is not impossible for preachers and teachers. This book contains all the material for Purpose, Meaning and Application that would be needed for a preaching series on Revelation, even with minimal or zero use of any Commentaries.

Start by reading ch1 **Contents Overview** to get a broad feel for the whole Book. Then turn to Ch 7, p56, on Revelation's *Overall Structure*. As you read the four different options on Outline, decide which outline, structure and length of sermon series would best suit, and be acceptable to, your people. This could be anywhere between 7 and 28 messages for example.

Now turn to Part 2, p107, and start to select and draw out the exegetical/applicatory material needed for your first sermon. There is more than enough material! Select the biblical material relevant to your first and subsequent sermon passages as you make your way through your series of selected 7–28 sermons.

At the same time, select material in Book 1 relevant to your sermon passage from the Chapter 3 on Purpose, and Chapter 9 on Application, integrating relevant material into your sermon.

When preparing sermons that involve biblical texts and passages from Rev 6-16, take special care to give your people a healthy balance between the big, broad picture and the intense detailed material, *ie* the balance between the snapshots of the 'forest' taken from a helicopter and the details of the many text 'trees' revealed by entering the 'forest' on foot!

Draw some key thoughts from Chapter 4 on Historical Roman Imperial Setting where relevant to your particular sermon passage and probably in fairly small but significant doses *eg* Risk of compromise; State persecution.

As general background reading, have a look through Chapter 5 on Literary Challenges and also Chapter 6 on Ways of Interpreting Revelation *eg* the significance of symbols and numbers.

Keep in constant view the key applicatory themes revealed in Revelation for the Church right across the Book, as well as in Rev 2-3 itself. Examples would be:

The victory and sovereignty of God. *Our calling to keep faithful witness to Christ;*
The necessity of suffering. *The call to patient endurance and perseverance;*
The assurance of divine spiritual protection in warfare.

Because the issue of Spiritual Warfare is so central to the entire Book of Revelation, it would be good to bear *constantly* in mind Chapter 10. Our people need to be praying for us as we prepare any sermons, but especially if rooted in the texts and contexts of the Book of Revelation!

Revelation's Setting: Map and Roman Emperors



| TIME | ROMAN RULERS | NT EVENTS | TIME |
|-------|---|---|----------|
| BC 31 | Octavian defeats Mark Anthony at battle of Actium sole ruler in 27 and given title Augustus in 22 BC | | |
| AD 14 | Death of Augustus. Tiberius emperor. | Public ministry of Jesus in Galilee | c.AD 28 |
| | | Crucifixion of Jesus | c. 30 |
| | | Conversion of Paul | c. 34 |
| 37-41 | Caligula emperor | Efforts to get his statue erected in Jerusalem temple | . |
| 41-54 | Claudius emperor | Paul writes Galatians. 'Council of Jerusalem' | c. 48 |
| | | Jews expelled from Rome | c. 49 |
| | | Paul writes 1 Thess. | c. 52 |
| 54-68 | Nero emperor | Paul writes Romans | c. 56/57 |
| | | Christians blamed for fire of Rome | 64 |
| 68/69 | Galba, Otho, Vitellius emperors; end of Julio-Claudian line. | | |
| 69-79 | Vespasian emperor. | Romans destroy Jerusalem + Temple under order of Titus | 70 |
| 79-81 | Titus emperor | Arch of Titus built in Rome to celebrate defeat of Jewish revolt | |
| 81-96 | Domitian emperor | Persecution of Christians in Asia | . |
| | | Gospels of Matthew and Luke; Book of Acts | . |
| | | John reveals 'Revelation' at end of Domitian's reign, according to Irenaeus | ?95 |

Postcard Summary

In **Revelation**, John conveys God-given visions about God's sovereignty over all history, and about all creation's past, present and future time dimensions.

It is a *pastoral letter* to churches, bringing present encouragement to Christian believers.

Its message is that God is indeed working out His purposes, albeit in the midst of sadness, suffering, tragedy and what seems like Satanic victory and domination.

This book reveals the final victory of God over all the forces of evil. Believers are called to persevere, for our final reward is certain, as we worship and glorify God in and through the trials and temptations of this life and this world.

In a book full of OT allusions, John calls us to renew our commitment to God and His Word, while resisting pagan compromise.

God will protect us until He finally takes us into His new creation. We will put into practice Ephesians 6:10-17.

As we await the triumph of God and the Lamb, we know that we will reign with them and worship them *forever* in a new heaven and a new earth.



1 Contents Overview

(Chapter 6 provides interpretations to help understand John's imagery)

Chapter 1 vv1-3 God gave to Christ a revelation by an angel to John about what would soon take place. John testifies to the word of God and the testimony of Christ. The reading and hearing and obeying of this prophecy will be blessed as the time draws near

1:4-8 John addresses the seven churches in Asia. Grace and peace from the eternal God, from the 7 spirits before His throne and from Jesus Christ. Glory and power to Christ who has freed us from sin. He is coming visibly with the clouds. God is the beginning and the end.

1:9-20 John is on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and testimony of Jesus. The voice of the Spirit tells him to write to the 7 churches what he sees. John turns around and sees 7 golden lampstands and in the midst, the

figure like a 'son of man'. John describes the figure, including the sharp double-edged sword proceeding out of the mouth of the figure. John sees the figure and falls as if dead. The figure, who claims to be the First and the Last, urges the apostle not to be afraid – see 1:17-18. John is told to write down all that he has seen and will see. The 7 stars are the angels/messengers of the 7 churches and the 7 golden lampstands are the 7 churches.

2:1 – 3:22 The Seven Churches

The Church In Ephesus 2: 1-7 Addressed to the angel/messenger. The 'figure' addresses the church and commends their deeds, perseverance and willingness to test out the truth or falsity of apostles. Yet this church has abandoned its first love and needs to repent. V.5 If its lampstand might be removed, what exactly is the lampstand? See 1:20 - is it the church itself that will be removed in the event of non-repentance? The Spirit must be listened to and obeyed.

The Church in Smyrna 2:8-11 The 'figure' knows their pain but tells them not to be afraid but to persevere under the Satanic testing. Faithfulness will yield life, gifted by the 'figure'.

The Church in Pergamum 2: 12-17 You live in a demonically controlled city but have remained faithful to me. However you have some who have been enticed by the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Repentance is required and the Spirit needs to be heard. The overcomer will get the hidden manna and a white stone with a new name on it.

The Church in Thyatira 2:18-29 The Son of God commends this church but there is strong censure because of their toleration of Jezebel and of the immorality into which they have plunged because of that woman. She refuses to repent and will suffer as a result. God repays according to our deeds, having searched our hearts and minds. The overcomer will receive authority over the nations. Persevere!

The Church In Sardis 3:1-6 From Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. Reputation of being alive but your deeds indicate you are dead! Wake up, repent or I will come unexpectedly. Some have not soiled their clothes and they will wear white and their names will be acknowledged before the Father and His angels.

The Church In Philadelphia 3:7-13 The words of him who is holy and true and who controls ALL things. You have little strength but have kept my word. I will make those who claim to be Jews but are liars fall at your feet and recognise that I have loved you. Your patient endurance means that you will be kept from the universal trial that is coming. The overcomer will become a pillar in the temple of God. The speaker's new name and God's name and the name 'New Jerusalem' will be written on that overcomer.

The Church In **Laodicea** 3:14-22

The words of the Amen to a church which is lukewarm and will soon be spat out. The church claimed to be rich and not needy but was in fact destitute, blind and bankrupt. Those who God loves, He rebukes and disciplines. Therefore they must hear, be serious and repent. Anyone in the church who hears and opens the door at the knocking by Christ will enter fellowship with Christ. The overcomer will be given the right to sit with Christ on His throne, just as Christ overcame and sat down with His Father on his throne.

4:1-11 John sees an **open door in heaven** and the apostle is invited there to see what must soon happen. John is in the Spirit and someone is seated on a throne. A rainbow – v. 3 – encircled the throne and around the throne were 24 other thrones, each with an elder seated on it. Lightning came from the throne and before the throne were 7 lamps and a sea of glass. The 7 lamps were the 7 spirits of God/the sevenfold Spirit.

In the centre around the throne were 4 living creatures covered with eyes – like a lion, an ox, a creature with a face like a man, a flying eagle. Each creature had 6 wings and was covered with eyes. These creatures continually praised God – v. 8 – and whenever this happened, the 24 elders fall down before the one on the throne. They lay down their crowns before the one on the throne and give glory to their Lord and God – v.11.

5:1-14 The one on the throne held **a scroll** written on both sides and sealed with **seven seals**. An angel asks who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll? No one could open this scroll or even look inside it. The writer/author wept because no one could be found – v. 4. An elder tells him not to weep because the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has been found worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals – v. 5.

A visibly slain **Lamb** was standing in the centre of the throne encircled by the 4 living creatures and the elders. He had 7 horns and 7 eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the world – v. 6. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of the one seated on the throne – v. 7. *Then* the 4 living creatures and 24 elders fell down before the Lamb. Each had a harp and held golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sang a new song – v. 9-10 – about the worthiness and the sacrificial death of the Lamb for all peoples. The author heard thousands of angels who sang similar words, encircling the throne, the living creatures and the elders. *Then all* creatures added their praise to the Lamb – v. 13 – the 4 living creatures gave the ‘Amen’ and the elders fell down and worshipped.

6:1-17 **The Opening Of The Seals**

First Seal – The Lamb opened the 1st seal. One of the 4 living creatures calls the author to view a *white horse* whose rider went out as a conqueror – vv. 1-2.

Second Seal – A 2nd living creature draws the attention of the author to a fiery *red* horse whose rider had a sword and brought violence between men on earth – vv. 3-4.

Third Seal – The 3rd living creature shows a *black* horse whose rider held a pair of scales, weighing out various quantities of crop produce – vv. 5-6.

Fourth Seal – The Lamb opened the 4th seal and the 4th living creature shows a *pale* horse whose rider was named ‘Death’, with Hades close behind. They were given power over a quarter of the earth to cause death by many means – vv. 7-8.

Fifth Seal – The Lamb opened the 5th seal and the author saw under the altar *the souls of those who had died because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained*. Those souls cried out to God for justice but were given a white robe and told to wait a little longer until the full number of their fellow martyrs had been completed – vv. 9-11.

Sixth Seal – As the Lamb opened the 6th seal, there was a great Earthquake. Cosmic shifts of mountain locations and catastrophes as stars fall; humanity hides away in caves and among rocks. Those people would rather endure rocks falling on them than face the wrath of the Christ and His God that was being revealed – vv. 12-17. Who can stand in the face of such judgment?

7:1-8 The vision of **4 angels** standing at 4 corners of the earth, holding back the 4 winds. Another angel comes up from the east, having the seal of the living God. This angel calls out to the four angels who had received destructive power over land and sea. The message is that they must not harm land or sea until ‘we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God’ – v. 3. The number of the sealed was 144,000, *ie* 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel which are then listed thus: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin – vv. 5-8.

7:9-17 The writer sees a **Great Multitude** from all nations, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. Wearing white robes and holding palm branches, they sang praise to God and to the Lamb – v. 10. All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and 4 living creatures. The angels fell down before the throne and worshipped God – v. 12. One of the elders asked the writer about the identity and origin of those in white robes. That elder answers his own question – they are those who have come out of the great tribulation with robes made white when washed in the Lamb’s blood – v. 14. These martyrs will be eternally protected by their God and their tears will be wiped away – vv. 15-17.

8:1-5 **The Seventh Seal**

When the Lamb opened the 7th seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. The author saw the 7 angels who stand before God and they were given 7 trumpets. Another angel with a golden censer stood at the altar – v.3. He was given incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense plus the prayers of the saints went up before God from the angel's hand. The angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth. There were peals of thunder, lightning and earthquake – the classic signs of the judgment of God in Scripture.

8:6 – 9:21 The **7 angels** with the **7 trumpets** prepared to sound them.

First Angel – 8:7 The first angel sounded his trumpet and hail/fire/blood fell on the earth. Burning on earth.

Second Angel – 8:8-9 On the sound of the trumpet, a blazing mountain was thrown into the sea, causing great destruction of life.

Third Angel – 8:10-11 A blazing star fell from the sky onto a third of the rivers and on springs of water. The star is 'Wormwood'. A third of the waters turned bitter, killing many people.

Fourth Angel – 8:12 A third of the sun was struck, 1/3 of the moon and 1/3 of the stars, so that 1/3 of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light and also a third of the night. A flying eagle announces coming judgment as the other three angels prepare to sound their trumpets.

Fifth Angel – 9:1-12 The writer saw a star that had fallen from sky to earth. This star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss; when the Abyss was opened, smoke arose. Out of this smoke, powerful *locusts* came to earth. These locusts were told not to harm vegetation but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads – v. 4. The locusts tortured those people for 5 months but not to the point of death, even though those people longed for death, so severe was their suffering. Those locusts – v7-11 – had human-like faces but looked like horses ready for battle. They had human hair but had tails and stings like scorpions. Their king was the angel of the Abyss, named Abaddon in Hebrew or Apollyon in Greek – both mean 'Destroyer'. Verse 12: *'The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.'*

Sixth Angel – 9:13-21 The writer heard a voice coming from the horns/projections of the golden altar that is before God. This voice said to the 6th angel with the trumpet, 'Release the 4 angels who are bound at the great River Euphrates' – v. 14. These four angels were released and killed a third of mankind. They had been kept ready for this task. The number of mounted troops was

200,000,000 in total. The horses and riders in this vision had red, blue and yellow breastplates. Horses' heads were like lions with smoking mouths. A third of mankind was killed by the 3 plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur coming out of the horses' mouths. The power of the horses to injure was in their mouths and tails – v. 19. The rest of mankind not killed by these plagues still did not repent of their deeds of making and worshipping idols, murdering, theft and sexual immorality.

10:1-11 The Angel and the Little Scroll

The writer saw another Great Angel coming down from heaven, robed in a cloud, face like the sun, holding a little scroll, lying open in his hand. The angel had the right foot on the sea and left foot on the land. He gave a loud shout like a lion and the voices of the 7 thunders spoke but just as the writer was about to write, a voice from heaven told him to seal up the words of the 7 thunders but not to write them down – v. 4. Then the angel standing on the sea and the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by Almighty God that there would be no more delay for when the 7th angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished as told to the prophets – v. 7. The writer is then told by the voice from heaven to take the scroll from the hand of the angel – v.8 – and the angel tells the writer to eat the scroll, which will be sour in his stomach but sweet in his mouth. The writer is told to prophesy again to many peoples and nations – v. 11.

11:1-14 The Two Witnesses

The writer is given a reed like a measuring rod and told to measure the temple of God and altar and to count the worshippers there, but excluding the outer court, given to the Gentiles who will trample the holy city for 42 months – vv. 1-2. I will empower my two witnesses who will prophesy for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord. They will destroy by fire from their mouths anyone who tries to harm them. They have been empowered to stop the rain when they are prophesying, turn waters into blood and hit the earth with all manner of plagues as and when they choose – vv. 4-6. When they have finished their testimony, the Beast from the Abyss will arise and kill them, leaving their bodies in the street of the great city where their Lord was crucified, figuratively called 'Sodom' and 'Egypt'. For 3.5 days – 11:7-10 - men from across the world will refuse them burial. Indeed the world will rejoice over these bodies because these two prophets had tormented those who lived on earth. But after 3½ days, a breath of life from God raised up these prophets and they stood up! Those men were called up to heaven by a voice from there – v. 12. Just then, an earthquake hit the city and a tenth of the city collapsed. 7000 people were killed and the terrified survivors gave glory to God. v. 14 – *'The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.'*

11:15-19 **The Seventh Angel**

At the sound of this trumpet there were loud voices in heaven which said ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever’ – v. 15. The 24 elders seated on their thrones before God fell down and worshipped God with thanksgiving for the powerful reign of God Almighty, for his judgment of the dead, for his rewarding of the prophets and saints and for destroying those who destroy the earth – vv. 17-18. God’s temple in heaven is then opened and inside His temple the ark of His covenant was visible. Lightning, thunder, hail and an earthquake – v.19. These are Scriptural signs of God’s judgment.

12:1-13:1 **The Woman And The Dragon**

A sign in heaven – a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of 12 stars on her head and about to give birth. Then in v. 3 a huge red dragon with 7 heads and 10 horns and 7 crowns on his heads. The dragon stood in front of the woman – v. 4 – awaiting the birth of the child in order to devour it! The child born was a son who will rule all the nations and that child was snatched up to God and his throne. The woman fled to the desert to a place prepared for her by God.

Verse 7 onwards – war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. The deceiving dragon, also known as Satan or the devil, was hurled out of heaven onto the earth.

Verses 10-12 is the loud voice from heaven which announces this great victory of the Christ by His death and signals at the same time the defeat of Satan. This devil is full of fury for he knows that his time to deceive the world is short.

Verse 13 the dragon continued to pursue the woman but the woman received two eagle wings to fly to her divinely prepared place of protection in the desert. The dragon spewed out water like a river from its mouth to try to drown the woman. The dragon was furious at the woman and made war against her other offspring – those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. The dragon stood on the seashore.

13:1-10 **The Beast Out Of The Sea**

The writer saw **a beast like a leopard** coming out of the sea with *10 horns* and *7 heads*, with *10 crowns* on his heads and on each head a *blasphemous name*. The dragon gave the beast power and authority. The beast had a seemingly-fatal wound on one head but that wound had been healed. The whole world followed the beast,

worshipping both the beast and the dragon who had given authority to that beast – v.4. The beast was given a mouth to utter blasphemies against God and those who lived in heaven, and to exercise warfare against the saints and to have authority over all nations. All whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life will worship the beast –v. 8. The saints must therefore exercise patience and faithfulness – v.9-10.

13:11-18 The Beast Out Of The *Earth*

The writer saw another **Beast** coming out of the earth. It had **2 horns** like a lamb but spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf and made the earth and its people worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. Verse 13 – he did great signs, including fire from heaven, and managed to deceive the people on earth. He commanded them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast so it could speak and cause the deaths of all who refused to worship the image. Verse 16 – He forced all people to receive a **Mark** on the *right hand* or on the *forehead*, such that no one could buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. Verse 18: 'This requires wisdom to enable a person to 'calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number – **666**.'

14:1-5 The Lamb And The 144,000

The writer saw **the Lamb** standing on Mount Zion along with 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads. John heard the sound of rushing water and harp music from heaven. Verse 3 - they sang a new song before the throne and the four living creatures and the elders. Only the 144,000 redeemed could learn the song – they are pure and truthful disciples of the Lamb, offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb.

14:6-13 The Three Angels

vv. 6-7 John saw another angel flying in mid-air, having the eternal gospel to proclaim to all on earth 'Fear and worship God for judgment has come'.

v. 8 A second angel said that Babylon the Great, which led the nations into adultery, has fallen.

Vv. 9-12 A third angel said that if anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he will suffer divine judgment. He will be tormented in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. This will be never-ending torment. The saints must patiently endure, Stay faithful to Jesus and Obey God's commandments. These are the signs of those who conquer.

A voice from heaven calls the writer to record the blessedness of those who die in the Lord from now on. They, says the Spirit, will rest from labour because their deeds will follow them – verse 13.

14:14-2 The Harvest Of The Earth

The writer saw a white cloud and one 'like a son of man' seated on it, wearing a golden crown and holding a sharp sickle. Another angel then comes out of the temple and calls to the one on the cloud to reap because that time has come. The earth is thus harvested. Verse 17 – another angel came out of the temple in heaven with a sharp sickle. Another angel in charge of the fire comes from the altar and calls to the one with the sharp sickle to reap the grapes on earth. The angel swings the sickle and gathers the grapes from the earth's vine, throwing them into the winepress of God's wrath – vv. 18-20. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city and blood flowed out of the press for about 180 miles.

15:1-8 Seven Angels With Seven Plagues

The writer saw another great sign in heaven: 7 angels with the **7 last plagues**. This completes God's wrath. The visions continue with that of a sea of glass and fire and standing by the sea were those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and they sang the *Song* of Moses and the Lamb – v1-3a.

vv. 3b-4 Great are God's deeds and just are His ways. God's righteous and holy ways have been revealed and the nations will come to him and worship, bringing glory to God.

v. 5 The writer sees in heaven the temple opened *ie* the tabernacle of the Testimony. The 7 angels, with the 7 plagues, came out of the temple. One of the 4 living creatures gave the 7 angels 7 golden bowls full of the wrath of God. The power and glory of God caused smoke to fill the temple and no one could enter it until the 7 plagues of the 7 angels were completed.

16:1-21 The 7 Bowls of God's Wrath to be Poured Out on The Earth

16:1-2 The first angel poured out his bowl *o*pe *the land* and **sores** broke out on those with the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image.

16:3 The second angel poured out his bowl *on the sea* and it turned into the **blood** of a dead man and all living things in the sea died.

16:4-7 The third angel poured out his bowl *on the rivers* and springs of water and they became **blood**. The angel in charge of the waters proclaimed that God was just in this action because 'they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets' – v.6 – 'and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve'. The voice of the altar confirms the justice of this action.

16:8-9 The fourth angel poured out his bowl *on the sun* and the intense heat generated by this act **burned** people, but as they cursed God they did not repent and glorify God.

16:10-11 The fifth angel poured out his bowl *on the throne of the beast* and his kingdom was thrown into **darkness**. Men cursed God in their pains but refused to repent.

16:12-16 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on *the river Euphrates* which dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. **Three evil spirits** looking **like frogs** emerged from the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. They perform signs and gather the world's kings together for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. There is a challenge to be ready as the kings gather in 'Armageddon'. (Hebrew word)

16:17-21 The seventh angel poured out his bowl *into the air* and a **voice** from the throne in the temple cried out, 'It is done'. Huge earthquake, lightning and thunder. Great city split into three parts. The wrath of God fell on Babylon the Great – v. 19 – and hailstones fell from the sky onto men, causing them to curse God.

17:1-17 The Woman On The Beast

One of the 7 angels with the 7 bowls invites the writer to witness the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters. Earthly kings committed adultery with her. In v 3 the angel carries the writer away in the Spirit to a *desert*; he sees a woman on a scarlet beast covered in blasphemous names, having *7 heads* and *10 horns*. She had decorative clothing and a title on her forehead: 'Mystery - Babylon the Great - The Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth' v. 5. She was drunk with the blood of the saints who bore testimony to Jesus. The writer is astonished but the angel explains that the beast will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. Those whose names are not written in the book of life will be astonished to see this beast's arrival. Wisdom is needed here – v. 9.

The *7 heads* are 7 hills on which the woman sits. They are also 7 kings, 5 of them fallen, 1 is and the other has not yet come. The beast who was, and now is not, is an 8th king. He belongs to the 7 and is going to his destruction.

The *10 horns* are 10 kings who have not yet received a kingdom but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose – v. 13 – and will give their power and authority to the beast. However, when they war against the Lamb, they will lose, because God is Almighty, and with him will be his followers.

The angel explains that the waters and the prostitute sitting on them, seen by the writer, are peoples and nations. The beast and the 10 horns will hate the prostitute and will burn her because God has put it into their hearts to achieve his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled – v. 17. The woman is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.

18:1-24 The Fall Of Babylon

Verses 1-8 A very authoritative angel came down from heaven and announced in verses 2-3 that Babylon the Great had fallen and become a haunt of demons because the nations and the rich had gained wealth from her and committed adultery with her. Another voice from heaven calls on the people of God in verses 4-8 to come out from Babylon so they will not share in her sins and punishment. The voice says 'Pay her back...' for all her sins and indeed many plagues will invade Babylon – death, mourning and famine.

Verses 9-10 When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her see her burning, they will weep for her and mourn the speed of her demise in an hour!

Verses 11-17a The merchants of the earth will also weep and mourn over her because no-one buys their cargoes any more – animals, rich cloth materials, wood *etc.* The merchants who became rich from Babylon's trade will be terrified at her torment and realise that such great wealth has been brought to ruin in an hour!

Verses 17b-20 All who make their living from, or on, the sea will stand far off and watch Babylon burning and will weep and mourn. She has been brought to ruin in an hour. Yet there can be rejoicing – v. 20 – because God has judged her for the way Babylon treated the saints, apostles and prophets.

Verses 21-24 Then a great angel picked up a huge boulder and threw it into the sea and declares that with such violence, the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. Music, tradesmen, light, weddings will never be found again in Babylon. Her merchants were great men but by your magic spell, all the nations were led astray. The blood of prophets and saints and others has been found in her.

19:1-10 Hallelujah!!

Verses 1-3 The writer hears the sound of a multitude of shouts in heaven, declaring that salvation and glory and power belong to our God because his judgments are true and just. God has condemned the great prostitute and has avenged on her the blood of his servants. The voices shout 'Hallelujah' because of that destruction of Babylon.

Verses 4-5 The 24 elders and 4 living creatures fell down and worshipped God who was seated on the throne. A voice from the throne then is heard, appealing for further worship from all the servants of God.

Verses 6-8 Then the writer hears the sound of a great multitude like rushing waters and loud thunder, praising God for His reign and because the wedding of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready in fine clothing which stands for the righteous acts of the saints.

Verses 9-10 The angel then instructs the writer to write down the blessedness of those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. The angel added 'These are the true words of God'. The writer falls at the feet of the angel to worship him but the angel tells the writer he is a fellow-servant and that the writer must worship God – 'For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

19:11-21 The Rider On The *White* Horse

The writer sees heaven opened and a White Horse whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. He has eyes like blazing fire and many crowns on His head. Only **HE** knows the name written on Him. A robe dipped in blood, his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven followed Him and He had a sharp sword coming out of his mouth with which to strike down the nations. He treads out the winepress of God's wrath and He has a name written on His robe and thigh – King Of Kings And Lord Of Lords – v. 16.

Verses 17-18 The writer saw an angel standing in the sun calling to the mid-air birds to join the great supper of God so they could eat the flesh of all humanity.

Verses 19-21 Then the writer saw the beast and the kings of the earth plus their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. *But* the beast and false prophet were captured – the latter had deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The beast and false prophet were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came from the mouth of the rider on the horse and all the birds ate their flesh.

20:1-6 The Thousand Years

The writer saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a **great chain**. He seized the dragon/Satan/ devil and bound him for 1,000 years. He threw him into the Abyss and sealed him over to stop him deceiving the nations until the 1,000 years were ended. After that he must be set free for a short time.

The writer saw **thrones** and those with authority to judge were seated on the thrones. He saw the souls of those beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and did not have his mark on foreheads or hands. They rose and reigned with Christ for 1,000 years. The other dead rose only after the 1,000 years. This is the first resurrection and such people are blessed. The second death has no power over them and they will be priests of God and Christ and will reign with Him for 1,000 years.

20:7-10 Satan's Doom

After the 1,000 years, Satan will be released from his prison and will deceive the nations to gather huge numbers of them for battle. These numbers marched into battle against God's people and fire came from heaven to eat up the attackers. The deceiving devil was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur to join the beast and the false prophet there! They will be tormented eternally.

20:11-15 The Dead Are Judged

The writer sees a *great white throne* and Him seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence. Verse 12 – *All the dead* stood before the throne and books were opened. Another book – the book of life – was also opened. *The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books – v. 12.*

The sea and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them and each person was judged according to what he had done. Verse 14 – death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Verse 15 'If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire'.

21:1-27 The New Jerusalem

vv. 1-4 Here is the vision of a new heaven and a new earth because the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. The Holy City – the new Jerusalem – was coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride dressed for her husband. A voice from the throne said that God's dwelling was now with men and God will live with them. They will be His people. The old order has passed away and there will be no more pain. The one seated on the throne announces that He is making everything new and He wants His true words written down.

vv. 6-8 The one on the throne then said to the writer 'It is done'. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End'. The voice then offers the gift of life to the thirsty and promises this inheritance to all overcomers, but evil

people of various types will go to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.

vv. 9-14 One of the 7 angels with 7 bowls full of the 7 last plagues came and offered to show John the *Bride*, the wife of the Lamb. He carried the writer in the Spirit to a high mountain and showed him the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with God's glory like precious jewels, having high walls with 12 gates and 12 angels at the gates. The names of *Israel's 12 tribes* were written on the gates. 3 gates in each compass direction. The wall had 12 *foundations* and on them was written the names of the *12 apostles of the Lamb*.

vv. 15-21 The angel talking with the writer had a measuring rod to measure city, gates and walls. The city was laid out like a square, 1,400 miles long, wide and high. Its wall was 200 feet high/thick by men's measurement as used by the angel. Foundations were decorated with precious jewels. The 12 gates were 12 pearls, each gate was made of a single pearl. The city's great street was pure gold.

vv. 22-27 No temple was seen in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb *are its temple*. The glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp. There is no night there, so the nations will walk in it. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. No evil or evil person will enter it *but only those whose names are written in the lamb's book of life*.

22:1-6 The River Of Life

vv. 1-6 The angel showed the writer 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, giving 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations – v. 2.

There is *no more curse*. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him. His name will be on their foreheads and they will see his face. *There is no more night* – v.5 – for the Lord God will give them light. They will reign forever and ever. In v. 6 the angel confirms the truth of these words. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show His servants the forthcoming events.

22:7-21 The Coming Of Jesus ‘I am coming soon! Blessed are those who keep the words of the prophecy in this book’ v.7.

In verse 8 John confirms that *He is the one who heard and saw these things*, following which he fell down and worshipped at the feet of the angel who had shown him these things. *However*, the angel told John not to do this *because the angel also was a servant* along with John, John’s brothers the prophets, and with all who keep the words of this book. *Worship God!*

The angel then tells John *not to seal up the words of the prophecy of this book*, because the time is near. Let all continue to do what they are doing, whether good or evil.

I am coming soon – v. 12 – *and will reward everyone according to what they have done*. I am the Alpha and the Omega. Blessed are those who wash their robes that they might have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city through the gates. *Outside* are the evil and the evildoers – v. 15.

Verse 16 *I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you (plural) this testimony for the churches’. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright morning star’.*

Verse 17 The Spirit and the bride say, ‘*Come*’ and let him who hears say, ‘*come*’. Let the thirsty come and take the free gift of the water of life.

Verse 18 I warn readers *not to add anything to the words of this prophecy*. Otherwise they will incur the plagues mentioned in the book. Likewise *do not take anything away from this book* – v. 19 – otherwise God will remove from that person his share in the tree of life and in the holy city described in this book.

Verse 20 He who testifies to these things says ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ AMEN. COME LORD JESUS.

Verse 21 ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.’

2 Keys and Principles when Reading Revelation

From Zondervan Academic, 2011, reduced and summarised

Specific principles can help us faithfully read this *prophetic-apocalyptic* letter. Here are seven suggested guidelines:

1. Read Revelation with humility.

We should resist “Revelation-made-easy” approaches. Revelation is not easy! If you’re unwilling to live with any uncertainty, you’re more likely to read into Revelation things that are not there. **Beware of interpreters who appear to have all the answers to even the small questions.** “Experts” who claim absolute knowledge about every detail of Revelation should immediately raise suspicion. Have an open mind!

2. Try to discover the meaning for the original readers.

Discovering the message to the original audience is the top priority with any book of the Bible, but especially with this one. The first Christians were blessed for obeying Revelation (1:3) and the book is described as an unsealed (or open) book, even for people living in John’s day (22:10). Beware of ignoring the first century AD and jumping straight to the 21st.

Don’t start with the 21st Century AD newspapers, looking for clues to interpretation. The “newspaper” approach assumes that we must be living in the last Christian generation. It also suggests that in Revelation God wasn’t really speaking to the very first Christians. We must seek the meaning(s) for John’s readers before thinking about the meaning(s) for us. If our interpretation doesn’t make sense for the original readers, we’ve probably missed the meaning of the passage.

3. Don’t try to find a strict chronological map for future events.

Revelation doesn’t progress in a neat, linear fashion. The book is filled with prophetic, apocalyptic visions designed to make a dramatic impact on the reader, not to present a precise chronological sequence of future events.

For example, notice that the *sixth* seal (6:12–17) takes us to the end of the age. “They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!’ For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?” (NIV) But when the *seventh* seal is opened, there’s a whole new set of judgments: trumpets. The seventh trumpet (11:15–19) also takes us to the end of the age:

“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.’”

However, in Revelation 6:12–16 we’re told that “the stars in the sky fell to earth.... The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.” Yet in 7:3 the four angels are told not to “harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”

It doesn’t make sense if we try to force a strict chronological sequence on this. Instead of searching for a chronological map of future events in Revelation, try to discover the main message in each vision.

4. Take Revelation seriously, but don’t always take it literally.

Some people say we should interpret Scripture symbolically because they deny the reality of a scriptural truth or a historical event. When they say something is figurative or symbolic, they mean it isn’t real or true. However, picture language that uses symbols, images and numbers can communicate literal truth and literal events. It’s just another language vehicle, another way of communicating reality and truth. Revelation uses picture language to emphasise historical reality rather than to deny or diminish it.

Our method of interpretation should always match the literary genre the author used. For Revelation, this means we should avoid taking picture language literally. When we try to force literal interpretations on picture language, we run the risk of perverting the author’s intended meaning.

For example, what happens when we try to take literally the reference in Rev. 17:9 to the woman who sits on seven hills? To force this image into a literal mould results either in one very large woman or in seven very small hills! But when we say that the woman in 17:9 is not a literal woman, it doesn’t deny the reality or truth of Scripture. First-century Christians would naturally understand the woman to represent Rome, a city built on seven hills. The text probably also looks beyond Rome to powerful pagan empires across history which are opposed to God. We take picture language seriously, but generally not literally.

For most of the Bible, the general rule is to interpret literally except where the context clearly calls for a symbolic reading. The word “signify” in Revelation 1:1 (older translations; NIV ‘made it known’) suggests that the general rule is the reverse: interpret symbolically unless the context invites a literal reading.

5. Pay attention when John identifies an image.

John occasionally defines images for his readers or gives clues to identify them. Here are a few examples:

- In Revelation 1:17 the one “like a son of man” (1:13) is Christ
- In 5:5–6 the Lion is the Lamb
- In 12:9 the dragon is Satan

When images that John has already identified are repeated elsewhere in the book, we can probably assume they refer to the same things they did before.

Still, we have to be careful not to confuse John’s direct identification of an image (those mentioned above) with his fluid use of images. **John is not shy about using the same image to refer to different things.** For example, the seven stars refer to the angels of the seven churches in four passages (1:16, 20; 2:1; 3:1). But John also uses the image of a single star to refer to other things:

- God’s agents of judgment (8:10–12)
- Jesus (22:16)

In the same way, the image of a woman can represent different things in different passages:

- The false prophetess (2:20)
- The messianic community (Ch. 12)
- The harlot city or empire (Ch. 17)
- The bride of Christ (19:7; 21:9)

Even though John is free to use images to refer to different things, we should still take special note when he identifies an image.

6. Take seriously the Old Testament and historical contexts.

Revelation uses language at several different levels:

- **Text level:** words written on the page
- **Vision level:** the picture that the words paint
- **Referent level:** what the vision refers to in real life

One of the hardest parts of reading Revelation is knowing what the images and symbols refer to. Even when we understand what’s happening at the text and vision levels, we may not know what’s going on at the referent level. We usually know what Revelation is saying, but we’re often not sure *what* it’s talking about.

The two places to go for answers are

a) the first-century historical context, and **b)** the Old Testament.

a) Historical context of Revelation

There's evidence within the text that the early church was being persecuted:

- John himself claims to suffer alongside his audience (1:9)
- The church at Ephesus has endured hardship (2:3)
- Jesus acknowledges the suffering of the church at Smyrna (2:9–10)

We also know from other writers of the time that first-century Roman emperors often had titles similar to those which Christians gave to Jesus. Emperor Domitian wanted his subjects to address him as *dominus et deus noster* ('our lord and god') and the earliest, most basic Christian confession was 'Jesus is Lord.' When Christians refused to confess "*Caesar* is Lord" in worship of the emperor, they were considered disloyal to the state and were subject to persecution. At this time in history the pressure to bow to the emperor was becoming more widespread and systematic, and not all Christians responded with defiance.

Revelation shows us that Christians were dealing with persecution in several ways when the letter was written:

- Ephesus had forsaken her first love (2:4).
- Some in Pergamum and Thyatira followed false teachers (2:14–15, 20).
- Sardis had a reputation of being alive, but it was dead (3:1).
- The Lord was about to spit lukewarm Laodicea out of his mouth (3:16).

b) Old Testament references

In Revelation 1:7, 12-15, John draws on the following symbols from the book of Daniel to describe his vision of Jesus:

- White like wool (Daniel 7:9)
- One like a son of man, coming with the clouds (Daniel 7:13)
- Belt of the finest gold (Daniel 10:5)
- Eyes like flaming torches (Daniel 10:6)
- Arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze (Daniel 10:6)
- Like the sound of a multitude (Daniel 10:6)

In this passage, understanding Daniel helps us understand Revelation. John often uses the Old Testament language to describe what he's seen and heard. As we struggle to identify what the vision is about, we should turn to both the historical context and the Old Testament.

7. Focus on the main idea and don't get lost in the details.

With most literary genres in the Bible, we begin with the details and work toward an understanding of the whole text. With Revelation, however, we should start with the big picture and work toward an understanding of the details. As we try to identify theological principles in Revelation, we should focus on the main ideas.

Read a section of Revelation and try to capture the main idea in a short statement. For example, the main idea of Revelation 4–5 relates to the ascended and exalted Lord, who alone is worthy to execute the divine judgments. Don't let the main point of each section or vision fade. As has been said, when reading Revelation, the main thing is to make the main thing the main thing! Some scholars see *seven* main movements –

Thus, SS Smalley sees the following possible breakdown of Revelation:

Introduction (Rev 1:1-8);

Seven Oracles (1:9-3:22); Interval – Adoration in Heaven's Court (4:1-5:14);

Seven Seals (6:1-17); Interval – The Church Protected (7:1-17);

Seven Trumpets (8:1-9:21); Interval – God's Sovereignty (10:1-11:19);

Seven Signs (12:1-14:20); Interval – A New Exodus (15:1-8);

Seven Bowls (16:1-21); Interval – The Fall of Babylon (17:1-18:24);

Seven Visions (19:1-20:15) Interval – Prelude to the Final Scene (21:1);

Seven Prophecies (21:2-22:17)

Conclusion (22:18-21).

Further tips, from Fee and Stuart

John refers to his 'Revelation' as 'the words of this prophecy' (Rev 1:3). This needs to be taken seriously because John aligns himself with the OT prophets in a number of specific ways that we need to be conscious of –

1. He himself is aware that he is under the inspiration of the Spirit of God (1:10; 2:7 etc).
2. He locates himself between recent past events, on the one hand, and what is about to happen in the near future, on the other.
3. He positions all forms of earthly salvation and judgment against the background of God's final end-time judgments. Thus, the fall of Rome is not the end itself but rather to be viewed against the background of the very final events of the end.

4. He has a very strong sense of everything as being the *fulfilment* of the Old Testament. Thus, Christ is rooted in Dan 7:9; Ezek. 43:2 and climaxes in Rev 5:5-6 where Christ is 'Lion of the tribe of Judah', based on Gen. 49:9 and 'Root of David' found in Isa. 11:1. This is the OT 'slain Lamb'. Likewise, judgment against Rome in the NT is rooted in judgment against Babylon in the OT.

In a similar way we need to focus on John's heavy use in Revelation of Apocalyptic Imagery –

1. Apocalyptic imagery involves the world of fantasy *eg.* a beast with 7 heads and 10 horns.
2. John himself gives interpretation of the key images like Christ, Church, Satan, Rome and this gives us help to discern the identity of other images.
3. Some of John's images are familiar and fixed *eg.* a beast rising from the sea = an evil empire; an earthquake = divine judgment. Some images vary and are intended to trigger feelings as well as mental pictures.
4. Visions need to be seen as wholes and not to be pursued in every detail. The details contribute to the evocative nature of images, but the important thing is the *whole* vision.

From Paul Barnett

Barnett believes that four factors in particular need to be taken on board in any attempt to understand more accurately the truth of Revelation –

1. *Crack the Code* – Does John use the terms 'sea beast' and 'harlot' with reference to the Roman Government to avoid being accused of treason by the ruling authorities? Or is it just that John is presenting the transition from history into eternity and thus is forced to use strange language? Barnett thinks it could be both! Examples:

Colour white + images of throne and crown = conquest and kingly rule.

'Seven' = God and eternity but 'six' probably = Satan's false claim to divinity.

'3½ years' or 42 months = half of 7 years = a period in human history that will have an end, unlike God's eternity.

'Twelve' and multiples of 12 *eg.* '24' and '144,000' = God's redeeming of a people.

'10' is a round figure and its multiple '1000' = a great number or a very long period of time.

'Lion' = nobility; 'ox' = strength; 'eagle' = speed; 'humankind' = wisdom;

'Lamb' = helplessness. 'Horn' = power; 'eye' = knowledge;

'right hand' = authority. Thus, a symbol cannot be taken literally.

2. *Learn the Layout* – Barnett believes that ‘Revelation is perhaps the most carefully structured book in the NT’. (1989:8) It was written as a letter and was read out in turn to the seven churches. Each church heard the whole letter. There are two visions –
 - a) in Ch. 1 the vision refers to the poor state of the seven churches.
 - b) in Ch. 4 this vision covers the whole of the rest of the book re the tough journey that faces the church until the new Jerusalem descends from heaven.
 There are 4 episodes in this challenge, and each contains 7 elements, ‘seven’ suggesting ‘God-ordained’. The four stages are

Rev 6-7 = 7 seals showing *tyranny*;

Rev 8-11 = 7 trumpets showing *chaos in creation*;

Rev 12-14 = 7 signs showing *persecution*;

Rev 15-16 = 7 plagues showing *destruction of the earth*.

These episodes *are not end-on-end, straight-line projections of history in advance*. Rather do these episodes *overlap*. These episodes run as cycles throughout the historic period – Millennium – between the resurrection and return of Christ ie across the same historical span. Concurrent rather than consecutive.
3. *Centre on Christ* – Many Christians believe that Revelation is primarily futuristic but there are key points that challenge this view –
 - a) The issue of Armageddon is not as big as we might think in Revelation. It is mentioned only once in 16:16 and although kings gather for battle, no actual battle takes place, just the language of battle.
 - b) There is no actual description of the return of Christ in the Book of Revelation. In fact, the return of Jesus is not referred to in Rev 17-21.
 - c) Revelation has a *very strong stress* on the victory of Jesus *already completed*. See Rev 3:21; 5:5; 11:15; Col 2:15. The battle has been won once and for all. This is *the vital key*.
4. *Perceive the Parallelism* From Rev 12-22, John uses a style of parodying Roman society. He takes aspects of Rome and sets them negatively against the reality and truth of the gospel. For example –
 - a) Image of the godly woman, persecuted in Rev 12 and pure bride of Christ in Rev 21 is paralleled by ‘great harlot’ in Rev 17.
 - b) New Jerusalem/Holy City in Rev 21-22 parallels but hugely exceeds Babylon the Great (Rome) in Rev 18.
 - c) The ‘Lamb as though slain’ (5:6,12; 13:8) is paralleled by ‘the beast from the sea’, one of whose heads ‘*seemed* to have a mortal wound’ (13:3). That sea beast is most likely the Roman Emperor represented by the Provincial Governor.

- d) The Beast has an image/statue and those who worship this beast via his image have the mark of his name on their foreheads (13:15-17; 14:9,11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). The parallel and contrast are God's servants who worship God and His Lamb but refuse to worship the beast. They will carry the Lamb's name on their foreheads (22:3-4).
- e) The true, holy and persevering church/community/bride of Christ (14:4-5) is paralleled by the Beast's community, the great harlot, which is recognised by murder, magic, immorality and lies (21:8; 22:15).

John is very aware that God and the Lamb are sovereign and high above the arrogant claims of the Caesars, such that the latter emperors are mere demonic pretenders and false imitations of the real and ruling power source! Inscriptions claimed that the Emperor was a god and saviour who had brought in the new age. John thus sets up this parody to make fun of the Roman ideology and its false claims on the subjects of the Empire. John was thus functioning like an OT prophet who condemned the nations that surrounded Israel. John's major focus here is on the need to worship God and the Lamb, not the false Roman Emperor. Worship is the real test of where our allegiance and conviction actually lies. As Barnett writes 'Worship is the mind's conviction and the mouth's confession that reality, truth and goodness are to be found in God and the Lamb and not in any other.' (1989:14)

3 Revelation's Various Purposes

John's *Goal* in Revelation

S S Smalley argues that although Rev has a definite prophetic dimension, '...it should not be understood merely as predictive prophecy, in which the author explains what is to happen in the future alone. Revelation certainly includes visions of the next world, and of the nature of the New Jerusalem; but it is also firmly related to this age, and challenges believers about their responsibilities in the present'. (p.6 Introduction to *The Revelation to John*)

The Roman Empire had its own images that portrayed its power – statues, rituals, architecture etc. What Rev does is to present a set of different visual images which enter the world of first century AD Christians through this text and produce an alternative view – a divine view – of actual reality. Thus, for example, Rev 17 presents a vision of a woman apparently the goddess Roma but in John's reality, she is a prostitute made rich by the profits of her evil trade cf the prostitute queen, Jezebel.

The visual symbols in Rev have a crucially important literary composition. Both features are needed in order to yield *meaning*. Verbal allusions to the OT, grounded in the various OT contexts, are also crucial to our understanding of these Revelation texts. In addition, the images in Rev reflect contemporary mythological images eg the serpent or dragon, ie Satan image, has strong biblical roots – Gen 3:14-15; Isa 27:1 – *but also* connected in people's minds with pagan mythology. John in this way forms his own distinctive Christian prophecy. Thus, the images in Rev are in a real sense not timeless, but rather historically rooted and framed. They must be understood in this sense but *not taken too literally* as referring to actual or predicted events. John is *not* trying to predict a sequence of events.

The key is to seek *their theological meaning and power to change believers' worldview and attitudes*. Much of the image use is not intended to indicate literal, historical sequencing. There is a strong portrayal of *divine judgment on Rome* using a range of symbols. Rev actually is a result of *deep theological reflection*. Revelation's literary and theological riches are inseparable from each other. When we add the visions and visionary experiences of John to this mix, then we become aware that John may not always have had a specific *authorial intention in his mind at every point of his writing*. This is a challenge to our interpretation of the biblical text.

G B Caird believes, along with **C C Rowland**, that the key feature of Revelation is the *vision of heavenly truth* and that the OT prophets and OT Wisdom traditions are major influences on the writing of 'apocalyptic' in Revelation. Caird believes that John's great concerns in the Revelation are with *God's nature and will, the ultimate triumph of good over evil, and the real world breaking into the world of illusion and deceit as the transcendent interlinks with the temporal.*

John sees an upcoming battle between the Lamb and the monster, and he portrays the strength of each side. The lamb's army consists of weak and divided churches, but the monster's army is the might of imperial Rome. Ultimately *all power* belongs to God, but Rome holds great influence over the world and the church which have been deceived by the monster! See 12:9; 13:1-10; 13:14. Those who follow the monster have been deceived into thinking that Rome is wonderful and real and true. This is how Satan exercises his hold on the human mind and John knows that the only way to defy the 'realism' of this world is *to present heavenly reality!* The reality of heaven will destroy the sham 'reality' of this world, exemplified in the first century by the rise of Roman 'power'. Severe warnings are for those who fail to recognise and acknowledge this truth. The rule of Christ is not merely for the End but is a reality here and now in every age.

Thus, John mixes apocalyptic with prophecy and this is typical also of certain OT prophecy eg. Isa 1:1-2; Obad. 1:1; Neh. 1:1; Hab.. 1:1. Likewise Ezek. 1:1-3 and apocalyptic Daniel have had an influence on Revelation. John is not just a 'canonical prophet'. He also exemplifies the early Christian prophecy of the new age opened up by Christ and evidenced by oracles given in God's or Christ's name – eg. Acts 13:1-3; 1 Cor 14 cf. Mt 7:15-20.

Jurgen Roloff concludes – 'Revelation is a prophetic writing that contains numerous apocalyptic motifs and elements of style, but whose form is chiefly characterised by the purpose of epistolary communication' – p.8 in *'The Revelation of John'* 1993.

S S Smalley on p. 8 of his Commentary concludes that 'Revelation may be identified, therefore, as apocalyptic deepened by prophetic insight, and also as prophecy intensified by apocalyptic vision.... He brings heaven and eternity within the grasp of believers, on earth and in time, who may be struggling to maintain and commend their faith in Jesus'. John is challenging and encouraging the first century AD churches *and* the Church in every age.

John's Purpose in Revelation

EF Scott (*The Book of Revelation* SCM, 1939, p.174)

Scott has proposed that the fundamental aim of Revelation is pastoral, namely to strengthen the faith and courage of John's fellow-believers in Christ, to prepare them for battle with anti-Christian powers in the world and to support them in maintaining their faithful witness to Christ. This is made possible, according to Scott, by a four-fold emphasis –

- a) The centrality and permanence of the Sovereignty of God in Christ and His eternal kingdom – see Rev 1:8; 5:5-14; 12:10-12; 19:11-21:5.
- b) The Satanic nature of Roman Emperor worship. For Caesar to be granted the lordship and divinity that was God's alone, showed that 'the secret power of lawlessness is already at work' (2 Thess. 2:7). This would climax in the revealing of the final anti-Christ, yet God is sovereign (13:5).
- c) The Lord's judgments on those who submit to the pseudo-Christ rather than to God's Christ. Compare the plagues on Pharaoh and the Egyptians who stubbornly resisted the word of God through Moses. Revelation displays the kindness and sternness of God (Rom. 11:22).
- d) The conflict between the church and the oppressors of this world in the revealing of Christ and His kingdom. Certain victory for the church because Satan has been defeated by Christ's death and resurrection which anticipates the final completion and consummation of God's good purpose for this world that He created and redeemed (21:9-22:5).

GK Beale (*Revelation – a Shorter Commentary*, Eerdmans, 2015 pp. 32-34)

Beale seeks out the heart of God in giving His series of visions to John –

- a) Ultimate victory is reached by a willingness to suffer for Christ – 'The cross was actually the climax of Christ's victory over Satan; likewise believers in their ongoing suffering are confirming their victory over the dark forces. Persecuted saints are simultaneously reigning with Christ (1:6,9). In the Church Age, believers may suffer physical opposition and persecution but spiritually, they will be safe (11:1-12). The persecutors of the church will share Satan's end in judgment (11:13,18). Thus, Revelation aims to call believers to stay faithful to Christ, regardless of present pain and the temptation to turn to idolatry by compromise with this world's systems. Faithful believers will be rewarded in glory for their faithful witness. We must be encouraged by the heavenly visions of Revelation to stay faithful. We must live now by the values of the new world and new worship. It was in his worship that John received these visions.

- b) Throughout human history, God remains totally sovereign – ‘Throne’ comes 17 times in Rev 4-5 (34 times in the whole book) and indicates God’s sovereign rule. This is the victory of God *and* the Lamb and shows their authority in the visions that follow Rev 4-5 that show the struggles of believers, the seeming victory of Satan, the devil’s final destruction and the church’s final victory. These trials are sent by God to refine His people but to judge those outside His kingdom. 6:1 shows the Lamb as being in control of God’s judgments. The cross turned tragedy into triumph; likewise our earthly woes will be changed into eternal victory. We must follow Christ wherever He leads us (14:4).
- c) Biblical Prophecy is fulfilled in the New Creation – OT and NT prophecy are fulfilled in the broad concept of the New Creation ie. the new covenant, the new temple, the new Israel and the new Jerusalem. (21:1-22:5). All these have started to be fulfilled in Christ - believers as the new creation, the church as the new Israel, etc. These are then finally fulfilled and consummated in 21:1-22:5.

D. Guthrie (*NT Introduction Revised*, IVP, 1990:962-964, 977-980).

The point is made by Guthrie that Revelation was ‘designed for a specific group of people with specific needs’ (1990:962). Chapter 4 onwards is broader in nature but bears close link with Chs 1-3. John, as a genuine prophet, must pass on to the seven churches God’s verdict on each, both positive and negative. Spiritual deterioration and decline is widespread as the churches succumb to the pressure of surrounding immorality in society. However, there is much to encourage as well. Opposition between church and state has impacted the churches, yet John is able to receive visions of the judgment of those who have acted under the influence of antichrist. Coming triumph is hinted at through Revelation leading to the final overthrow of beast, Babylon (Roman Empire) and Satan. Revelation is a book of *great hope* for churches passing through great temptation. It is also a warning to those who are complacent or indifferent about the coming threats and the incessant demands for all to worship Roman Emperors. Divine justice will ultimately triumph, so Guthrie can write ‘It is important to recognise that the dominant theme is not vengeance, but rather the gracious provision of God’ (1990:964).

Guthrie helpfully lists the abiding spiritual purposes and principles of Revelation, aside from different views on the precise historical context of this set of visions –

- a) Faith is triumphant over might – The opposing forces of Rome (=Babylon) and the beast or antichrist appear to be insurmountable at the time, but God will finally reduce them all to nothing. They will be completely overthrown as Rome is reduced to ruins and antichrist and the beast are finally and irreversibly judged. The Lamb is the final victor and this truth is of great comfort to discouraged believers through the centuries, especially in periods of crisis, opposition and persecution.
- b) Judgment is absolutely inevitable. Yes, God and Christ are victorious, but the role of judgment *must not be ignored or sidelined*, as it so often has been in recent decades. The very idea of sin and evil being finally and irrevocably judged is extremely unpopular and unacceptable, especially in the contemporary postmodern mind-set. Judgment was strongly emphasised by the Lord Jesus Christ and by all the apostles.
- c) Christian truth gives us a true understanding of history. Thus, John sees the present in light of the future, as well as in relation to the past. History does move to a final consummation of all things to the glory of God Himself. If this were not the case, then life and future would be utterly depressing. Life is far more than sheer materialism or idolatrous lifestyles. So, Revelation is a book that brings ‘encouragement and exhortation’ (1990:979). At times, we will feel and seem very tiny against the enormous powers of darkness in this cosmos, but we have grounds for taking heart and courage in the midst of it all. If we are tempted to give up the faith against such forces, then the Book of Revelation contains abundant evidence as to why we *must* endure and persevere to the end!

4 Revelation's Historical Roman Imperial Setting

The Situation of John's Readers

John's readers in first century AD Asia Minor faced three key challenges in life:

1. **Jewish Hostility** – The 'synagogue of Satan' in Smyrna and Philadelphia (2:9 and 3:9) most probably was a reference to the serious problems caused for Christians there by Jewish synagogues. Jewish leaders had become suspicious and critical of the growing church as divisive and heretical. The later emperors Vespasian, Titus and Domitian were increasingly hostile to the Jews and crushed their fanaticism in Palestine by sacking Jerusalem and forcing Jews to pay tax to the temple of Jupiter in Rome. Christians were exempt from this tax and this must have annoyed Jews hugely. The Jews, however, by paying this tax did gain exemption from taking part in the rituals of Imperial Cult, which Christians were not granted. It is likely that Jews in these 'synagogues of Satan' were reporting the identities of Christians to the provincial authorities.
2. **False Teaching** – Ephesus and Pergamum churches were influenced by the 'Nicolaitans'. Pergamum was infiltrated by 'Balaam teaching' and Thyatira by 'Jezebel' influence, the latter involving sacrificial food eating and sexual immorality that did considerable damage to these churches.
3. **Caesar Worship** – Multitudes of gods were worshipped in the Greco-Roman temples for fear of people offending a jealous god and this raised huge issues for pagan converts trying to worship and serve Christ only. Magic was indulged in to try to control human futures and fortunes. Pagan religions happily engaged in temple prostitution, homosexuality and paedophilia. Caesar worship had its strongest roots in Asia Minor. In Ephesus a huge temple and statue were built for Emperor Domitian and Suetonius wrote that Domitian wanted to be called 'Lord and God' (*Domitian* 13). Antipas had already been martyred in Pergamum 'where Satan's throne is' (2:13). Believers in Christ faced one crisis after another (1:3; 2:10; 3:10; 12:12). For 200 years after John wrote 'Revelation', there was serious conflict between Church and Roman State, especially whenever Christians insisted on putting Christ *before* Caesar.

Many scholars believe that Revelation can be dated late in the first Century AD, around AD 96, after the destruction of Jerusalem and its attendant genocide. Major questions would have been asked about the whereabouts of God in a situation where the Imperial Authorities appeared to be in triumph and dominance. Some wondered why Christ's expected return in His *parousia* had been delayed even longer! (2 Peter 3:3-4) Others would have been tempted towards

some kind of compromise with Rome, to which danger the NT replied with fresh calls for perseverance and faithfulness (1 John 2:1-6, 15-17; 3:16-20; James 2:1-4; 4:13; 5:1-6). The churches addressed in Rev 2-3 show the level of syncretism with worldly values. Many were worshipping God *and* Mammon.

Adela Yarbro Collins in *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984, p. 106) goes further and argues that it was the tension between the expectations and hope arising from the gospel on the one hand, and the harsh realities of the social, political, religious setting of the late first Century AD world on the other, which triggered John's composition of this remarkable Book of Revelation! John after all was a Palestinian Jew who had been traumatised by the Roman-Jewish Wars and by the dominance of Imperial Power over the day-to-day lives of ordinary Christian folk across the Empire.

Jewish lands were confiscated and sold off to wealthy folk from outside Palestine. Public celebrations of the Emperor Cult marginalised Jew and Christian alike and they were regularly accused of treason, disloyalty and non-conformity to the dominant ideology of the Empire and the divine Caesars. The Roman authorities were very *suspicious* of astrologers, diviners and prophets who spoke of a future vision radically alternative to Rome's ideology. John may have been exiled to Patmos as punishment and deliberate isolation. He must have been depressed by the spiritual state of the churches he addressed! Indeed, in Rev 2:7,11,17,28; 3:6,13,22 the refrain is repeated – 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches'!! John had sacrificed all he had but many of the readers of his Revelation were settling into this world and working out how to serve both God *and* Mammon, as well as accommodating the gospel message to the prevailing culture! Few were able or willing to hear the Spirit.

John's Revelation was received in dire and desperate world circumstances. A world of chaos and disorder is the point at which the language of apocalyptic emerges. By 2020 the number of urban poor folk living in slum conditions is expected to reach 1.4 billion and very many of these people are Christians! David Smith writes (*Liberating the Gospel* 2016:116), 'Since John's Apocalypse aims specifically at overcoming the dissonance between what is and what, according to the gospel itself, ought to be, it is capable of speaking with great relevance and power to a world church in a globalised age'.

Those addressed by John's Revelation were strongly tempted to compromise with authorities, reduce the demands of discipleship, dilute the gospel and thereby achieve *both* social acceptance and economic success in the Empire! See 2:12-13 and the perverted splendour and claims of Pergamum. John debunks it. John and his readers are then given a vision from God's perspective in heaven. The total

imperial dominance of that world could not prevent visions of God's alternative for this cosmos. John's Revelation provides that alternative vision. This equips believers actually to resist imperial propaganda, realising that the future really does belong to the Godhead. The 'door standing open in heaven' is crucial and means that by our worship and changed lives, God's future for His cosmos will be revealed and realised in actual reality. The worship in heaven transforms the whole person – see 1:17; 5:4; 8:1; 10:9-11.

Can we on earth experience *anything* of the depth of the worship in heaven that John glimpsed in his visions?

- a) Worship in heaven is God-centred, not focused on the church's experience or individual wants and needs. Such worship of divinity equips us to resist idolatry and oppression. Worship of the true God enables resistance to worship of military/political power (the beast) and economic prosperity and comfort (Babylon).
- b) Worship in heaven is hugely creative, employing every human gift and skill. A rich blend of light, sound and colour.
- c) Such worship is profoundly counter-cultural, against the backcloth of Imperial Culture and Religion. This turns people from Caesar to God and ready to sacrifice their lives for that new relationship. The apocalypse exposes Roman brutality and persecution and underlines the futility of worshipping mere humans, whilst revealing the Christ as crucified Messiah and therefore as the true life-giver. The slain Lamb was the victim of imperial brutality and yet here in the Lamb lay true power and authority!
- d) This Revelation was for community reception and visual enactment/performance rather than to be read by individuals. It was intended to impact the mind, emotions, wills and the totality of people's lives. Not by dull monologue! Our imaginations need to be stirred, not dulled to the point of insensitivity.

The Two Scrolls

Scroll One

After the section of heavenly praise, John sees a scroll with 7 seals being handed to a 'mighty angel' who shouts out, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?' (5:1-3) This is a huge moment for it points to future history and its goal and outcome. John weeps, for no one is found worthy to break the seals. His and our worship of God does not exclude the experience of confusion, grief and brokenness. David Smith writes, "Revelation is totally realistic concerning the depths of human suffering and anguish in a broken world, and if its anticipation

of God's ultimate triumph triggers hallelujah choruses, its descriptions of present pain and distress justify honest questions, genuine doubts and the continuation of the biblical tradition of the lament" (2016:125).

John grieves that there is no one to open the seal, which means that the claims of Rome to be rulers of this world stays unchallenged. This means that the fate of the cosmos lies in the hands of the rich, privileged and powerful! The rich have bought land to grow vines for profit (6:5-6) but the poor are desperate for food!

The great news of Revelation is that *there is* someone worthy to break the 7 seals and reveal the message of the scroll. Christ has the authority to rule the nations and break the powers of darkness. He is Messiah as deliverer but not by armed victory but by His sacrificed life for people of all nations – the Lion and the Lamb. Both Paul and John were convinced that the death of this Christ pointed the way towards the final and full redemption of the entire broken cosmos.

Scroll Two

In 10:1-11 John is instructed to take this second scroll from the hand of the 'mighty angel'. John has to eat this scroll, which would initially be sweet but would turn sour. This is the reception of the gospel that would yield sweet and sour. The gospel is sweet in terms of the glory of its message, which promises another world where grace is triumphant. The bitterness is because there will be resistance to this same gospel, both from the reaction of those in power who seem to control this world and also from fellow-believers, who prefer comfortable compromise rather than radical, sacrificial discipleship. John will find strong resistance from the Christian Community to the Word of Christ. It is this glorious gospel that will bring 'the healing of the nations' (22:2). Such nations for the time being are in bondage to Rome but John sees their eventual conversion. Some believers would be afraid of the powers of darkness and might retreat into personal, private spirituality but Christ's rule is cosmic in scope. The Lamb's self-sacrifice redeemed a people for God and then the peoples' sacrifice by martyrdom will win all the peoples for God. He brings in His universal kingdom!

Babylon and New Jerusalem 21:1 – 22:6

This climactic vision is often used to bring hope at funerals for new life beyond the grave, but it must not be detached from the actual context of poverty and injustice that John's readers faced, and which triggered John's visions from God. Roman urbanisation and civilisation came at a great cost to the poor and marginalised and Revelation debunks the Roman claims to glory and success. The prediction of the Fall of Babylon/Rome in Rev 18 is the prelude to New

Jerusalem – it gives a brutal and subversive critique of the Roman Empire. Agricultural communities were being impoverished by the urban rich folk. Rome's prosperity required human brutality and massive injustice to many.

Ultimately, says John, this whole corrupt system will collapse under divine judgment (Rev 18:11,20; 19:1-8). Local rulers like Herod the Great (18:9), rich merchants (18:11) and sea captains (18:17-19) are all *devastated* by the collapse of Rome and its system of wealth for the few by oppression of the many! See 18:11,14-15,17,19.

The vision of New Jerusalem in 21:1-22:6 is directly linked to the collapse of Babylon (Rome). New Jerusalem is a solid future hope, not merely an escape into a 'disembodied, spiritual realm unrelated to human history' (D. Smith 2016:136). The cube (sign of perfection) in Rev 21:15-16 was the size of the Roman Empire and the whole of the Mediterranean and this New Jerusalem now replaces the old, earthly and corrupt Empire with the reality of the presence of our God. John in 22:1-5 reveals from God images from Genesis and Ezekiel's river of life from temple to Dead Sea with endless fruit (Ezek 47:1-12). Redeemed humanity in a recreated world. At long last, *harmony* between nature and human culture! The 'nations', once weeping over the collapsed Babylon, are now walking in God's light (21:24-26). See also Rom 16:26; 2 Cor 5:18-19. God is making all things new (21:5). The leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations, from all the damage and pain caused by the evil deeds of past, unredeemed humanity (22:2). The staggering truth is that this final redemption does not consist of God putting redeemed people into an earthly realm but by *God Himself descending into, and living among, the reconciled human family in the New Jerusalem*. The visions had started with the divine call to John to 'Come up here'. Now, finally, the order is reversed because now, God comes *down* (21:4). God and the Lamb have left their transcendent realm to become the temple of God's people in the New Jerusalem. No wonder, then, in 22:8-9, that John himself collapses at the feet of the angel and is told to worship God alone. He is utterly overwhelmed by grace and glory!

Revelation was written from the underside of a highly stratified society and it therefore challenges the appalling evil and injustice experienced by *most* of those who struggled to survive in the oppression of the Roman Empire. Revelation employs a *bifurcated* idea of time and space ie. divided into two branches. It has no clear distinction between present and future, but rather it reveals a hidden reality of which the world built by those owning human power is only a parody ie. a mockery or caricature or imitation!

Power, Magic and Imperial Cult

Over the centuries, people across this world have looked for power over their own destiny, power over their surroundings and environment, power to control their own choices and power over other peoples' lives! Revelation basically asks the question of just who is in control of this world, past, present and future? Ian Paul (*How to Read the Book of Revelation*, Grove Books, 2003:13) makes the point that across the Roman World, the goddess of magic – Hekate – was widely followed. Strangely, certain texts in Revelation were actually used in magic rituals to this goddess Hekate – namely, 'I have the key to Death and Hades' (1:19); 'I am coming quickly' (five times) and 'I am the Alpha and the Omega' (four times). In Revelation, Christ takes over these three phrases of power *for Himself* out of these magic rituals!

Even more importantly, Revelation makes reference to other power sources, namely the Emperor Worship of Roman Imperial Cult. Religion and politics were inseparable in the Roman Empire and this presented a very real problem for the church! The Emperors claimed to be the source of peace and prosperity within the Empire and as such they expected loyalty and worship from the people eg. the conflict over paying taxes in Matt 22:15f.

Rev 4 – This is the first section of the main vision of the book and shows us how access to God's presence is by His Spirit (4:2); God's authority is recognised in worship (4:2,3); our surrender is required (4:10); our meeting with God is amazing (4:3). This part of Revelation uses Ezekiel images of four living creatures and the lightning/thunder echo Mt Sinai. 24 elders in white cast their gold crowns. It is no coincidence that the emperors moved around their lands with a movable throne-room surrounded by their officials. Emperor Domitian changed the number of his officials from 12 to 24! In the OT, only priests entered God's presence but in Revelation, 'elders' surround the throne and the Emperors were always greeted on their travels by 'elders'. Simple choruses are sung in Revelation and are very similar to those used to welcome Emperors in cities. Rev 4-5 combines OT images with pagan worship images but stressing that God alone is worthy of all worship. God alone is the source of all real power in this world.

Rev 12 – This is a very strategic chapter in the book. The characters are familiar from the OT – the woman, the dragon, the child, Michael. There was a well-known story in the ancient world – "Python, son of Terra, was a huge dragon. He was accustomed to giving oracles on Mount Parnassus before the time of Apollo. He was informed by an oracle that he would be destroyed by the offspring of Leto. At that time Zeus was living with Leto. When [Zeus' wife] Hera learned of this, she decreed that Leto should give birth at a place where the sun does not

reach. When Python perceived that Leto was pregnant by Zeus, he began to pursue (her) in order to kill her. But, by order of Zeus, the North Wind (Aquilo) lifted Leto up and carried her to Poseidon; Poseidon protected her, but in order not to rescind Hera's decree, he carried her to the island of Ortygia and covered the island with waves. When Python did not find Leto, he returned to Parnassus. But Poseidon returned the island Ortygia to the upper region, and it was later called the island of Delos. There, holding on to an olive tree, Leto gave birth to Apollo and Artemis, to whom Hephaestus gave arrows as a gift. Four days after they were born, Apollo avenged his mother. He went to Parnassus and killed Python with arrows." (2003:15-16) This story is something like our soap operas. It's importance is that Roman Emperors often used stories of Apollo in their imperial propaganda. The Emperor was a new Apollo, killing the chaos monster of barbarism to bring in peace and prosperity in Roman-conquered lands! Rev 12 turns this upside down. Imperial power – the beast from the sea in Rev 13 – is actually an agent of the chaos monster, the very opponent of God and the Church, and this power of chaos has been crushed by the real and true Prince of Peace!

Compromise with the Roman Empire

(Drawn from **Smith, DW**, *Seeking a City with Foundations*, IVP, 2011)

The churches of Asia Minor in Rev 2-3 were in different stages of decline and health but the clear pattern for many believers was their ability somehow to confess Christ and yet, at the same time, to engage profitably in the economic wealth, religious ritual and political offers of the Roman Empire! Surely close parallels here with life in our 21st Century AD global consumerist societies! Our problem is also surely their problem – they were blind to their own level of compromise, idolatry and spiritual bankruptcy. Once John passes into the throne-room of heaven, he realises just how corrupt, false and dehumanising is the Empire when compared with the glory and light streaming from heaven itself. Richard Bauckham in *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, CUP, 1993, p.7 notes that the visions in Revelation are designed to *expand the hearers' world*, enabling them to see the world from heaven's perspective. Our tunnel vision is smashed open by the visions to transform our worldview and our own lifestyles.

Smith then seeks to discover just how John achieves his *purposes* in Revelation, against the backcloth of the Imperial Cult of the Roman Empire –

- a) *A New Imagination* – The Roman World was full of propaganda images and symbols. John sets out a new and alternative world of symbols from heaven that will challenge and subvert the Roman worldview and shake it to the core! Images counted a great deal in a largely non-literate world and yet

surely the poor in the Roman world would be open to feeling and doing a communal, corporate critique of their current misery and realising that they were actually getting a bad deal. The Roman Imperial authorities had captured the minds, wills and imagination of the people of the Empire, just as 21st Century folk have been persuaded and deceived by the consumerist propaganda of global giants in the markets. The Christian imagination desperately needs to be radically refurbished! John and his readers gained a new perspective as they got to grips with Revelation and were changed, re-energised and given fresh hope!

- b) *The Destiny and Calling of the Nations* – According to myth, Jupiter had promised Rome ‘empire without end, without limits on space or time’. Rome took this to mean its own right to occupy and absorb lands into their Empire. John subverts this idea by referring to Rome as a ‘harlot seated on many waters’ (17:1), the ‘waters’ meaning peoples and nations! Rome gained wealth by crushing and taking over nations and by forcefully controlling sea routes. The promise was peace and prosperity, but the reality for most people was oppression and poverty. Wealth was with a very few only! John reveals in Revelation that God’s future for the nations is massively different from the nations Rome wanted to devour! God and Christ want the nations to discover their true freedom through Christ, the Lamb of God. The eating by John of the sweet-and-sour scroll compels John to ‘prophesy about many peoples’ and this may well mean that John must speak to Jewish groups so that they in turn may speak about God’s saving purposes for Jews and others suffering under Roman domination. John’s vision is that many cultures will be respected as they come to Christ in faith. Both Jew and Gentile will come to function together as ‘a kingdom of priests’, in which God’s mercy is full and free but in which no single nation or people will arrogantly claim pre-eminence over others.
- c) *The Coming New Jerusalem* – John is very conscious that the city ideal has been fatally perverted by the ideology of Rome. Rome had followed the pattern of ancient Babylon, and Rome had corrupted all the cities that came under its control and influence. Rev 18 portrays the collapse of Rome, stressing the flaws of the local ‘kings of the earth’, the ‘merchant class’ who traded so profitably and the ‘sea captains/sailors’ who carried goods so widely. These people promoted and extended Roman power, but it was from the underside of many people’s poverty and misery that John foresaw the final destruction of Rome (18:13). It was by inhuman brutality and contempt for human life that Rome sustained its power. John offers an alternative city for those without hope and those who feared. Yet, is this a realistic alternative

city or a mere pipe dream? This city's foundations were laid in the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ outside Jerusalem. That was Christ's victory (Rev 1:17-18; 5:6-14)! This slain Lamb alone could open the seals of the scroll that unfolded human history. This New City started at Pentecost but is not yet fully consummated. It is being built by those who resist the spirit of Babylon. The divine Presence of God and the Lamb make a temple unnecessary in the New Jerusalem. The sacred/secular divide will have been obliterated.

Persecution and Pain in the Roman Empire

(Winter, BW, Exile and Execution. The Swords of Damocles for the First Christians? Hebrews and Revelation, SSEC: May 2015, pp.10-14)

For many years, Dr Bruce Winter, formerly Head of Tyndale House, Cambridge, has researched, written and published material on Imperial Rome. In this article he explains how even buying and selling by anyone could take place only in the official marketplace, and that only if the person was marked on their right hand or fore-head with the sign of the emperor. Anyone who refused to have this sign, or who refused to offer divine honours to the emperor in the imperial cult temple in any city of the Roman East on special, designated days, would be executed (Rev 13:15).

In 9 BC Paullus Fabius Maximus was appointed as Governor of Asia and was linked to Augustus by marriage. In order to honour Emperor Augustus, he proposed that Augustus' birthday should be honoured as 'the beginning of all things' for the Empire. Augustus' birthday was thus celebrated every New Year's Day and he was given the title, 'The Most Divine Caesar'. Subsequent governors in Asia increased the extent and requirements of taking part in imperial cultic veneration. The high priest of Nero, serving the imperial cult of Achaia, containing Corinth, addressed Nero as 'the Lord of all the world'. Emperor Nero had granted special Roman taxation exemption for this province and in return was to be acclaimed and 'worshipped at the existing altar dedicated to Zeus the Saviour for ever'. The officials and people gave Nero the assurance that he would be venerated as a perpetual divinity, adding 'Nero Zeus, the Liberator' and his wife would be venerated as 'the goddess, Augusta Messallina'. This decree was inscribed on a column set right beside Zeus the Saviour.

Whenever new emperors were appointed, official delegations from every part of the Empire travelled to Rome and offered to build imperial temples for the new god (emperor), whilst hoping at the same time for some kind of imperial concession or benefit or tax exemption for their own local province, in return for

their loyalty and religious allegiance to the new ruling god in Rome. It was believed that each new emperor brought in a 'Golden Age' and even greater peace and prosperity for the Empire and its peoples.

The challenge for Christian believers was enormous and constant. Life and limb were at stake for the churches, especially throughout the province of Asia Minor that was principally addressed by John's Revelation. The overall plea to the readers of, and hearers of, the Book of Revelation was *not to compromise now*, in spite of the cost, danger, misery and deep fears. The long letters written to the Hebrews and to the churches of Revelation were sent in the very real awareness that the church would pay a very high price for its bearing of 'faithful witness' to the Lord Jesus Christ, whether in life or by death. They were urged to look to their *ultimate* future, even with great joy.

5 Revelation's Literary Challenges

Regarding Symbolism, Metaphor and Numbers

Summarised from **Ian Paul** *How to Read the Book of Revelation*, Grove, 2003.

1. **The challenge of genre variation** – Even in the opening Chapter One of Revelation, there is huge genre change from verse-to-verse. Thus, v.1 Apocalypse; v.3 Benediction; v. 4 Letter; v.5 Doxology; v.7 Apocalyptic; v.8 Prophecy; v.9 Letter.
2. **The challenge of history** – There are two options re the dating of Revelation – c. AD 65 in Nero's reign or c. AD 95 in Domitian's reign. Laodicea had neither hot springs nor fresh cold water. It was lukewarm by the time it reached Laodicea, and this indicated their lack of effective works that made God sick! Significantly, in AD 61 Laodicea suffered a huge earthquake and yet it refused imperial help to rebuild the city. The letter (3:17) accuses the church of arrogant pride and self-sufficiency. Every letter ends with the challenge to listen to what the Spirit is saying and learn practical lessons from it!
3. **The challenge of biblical settings** – Revelation has deep affinities with the OT. In its 405 verses, Rev is reckoned to have 676 different allusions to the OT – Isaiah (128 occurrences), Psalms (99), Ezekiel (92), Daniel (82), Exodus (53). For example, in Rev 7 the servants of God are marked with a seal on the head and this is very similar to the marking in Ezek. 9. Both indicate those who are saved from destruction in God's judgment and both groups form an army for corporate spiritual warfare! In Rev 12, the woman in childbirth seems to represent the people of God awaiting deliverance in Isaiah 26:17 and 66:7, while the dragon is the opponent of God in Ezek. 29:3. The male child is the expected Messiah - see Psalm 2:9 and Dan 10:13. This is about Jesus' victory on the cross. In Rev 21 the vision of God's throne links with Rev Ch 4 and Ezek. 1. See also Ezek. 3, 9, and 40 for other parallels. Rev is different from Ezek. in the sense that the New Jerusalem has no temple *per se*, but has a renewed life.
4. **The challenge of the numbers and words in Revelation** – Individual numbers in Revelation *must* take account of the totality of Revelation's texts. Revelation was a pastoral letter intended to make sense to its readers, both then and now. We must start with what the author was trying to say and what his first readers would have understood from those words. We must tackle the obscure aspects of Scripture in light of the plainer texts and the overall meaning of the book ie. Jesus is the faithful witness who died and rose for us.

Christ and God are seated on the throne and are worthy of worship. Our faithfulness to God will pull us into conflict with other powers but finally God will obliterate all evil and we will see God victorious and unhindered.

Some examples of using numbers and words: Revelation presents a very highly structured and organised vision or series of visions. This contrasts hugely with the chaos of the evil powers that are variously revealed in Revelation as ‘dragon’ (x13), ‘Satan’ (x8), beast (x38), ‘Babylon’ (x6). The number 14 refers to Jesus as ‘faithful’ – perfect - ‘witness’, seven signifying completeness, times two which is the number of witnesses needed in Deut 17:6. ‘Spirit’ is linked to witness and ‘saints’ are called to witness – both words occur 14 times. The cargoes of the destroyed Babylon (ancient Rome) numbered 28 in total ie. 7 (completeness) times 4 (the whole – 4 corners, 4 winds of the world). The numbers 4,7,12,24 have particular significance in Revelation. Others are also important. Imagine a number being represented by a dot and these dots were then laid out in shapes – 5 dots by 5 dots formed a *square*, a three-sided *triangle* could have 5 dots on each side, a *rectangle* could be 6 dots long and 5 dots wide. It seems that *square* numbers are associated with God, *triangular* with God’s opponents and *rectangular* numbers with the length of conflict between these two forces. Thus, for example, a *square* 144 refers to God’s people in Rev7:4, 14:1 and 14:3, but also to New Jerusalem in 21:17. The shape of New Jerusalem was square like the shape of the Holy of Holies in the temple. The sacrificial altars of OT altars also had to be square, in contrast to those of other religions. The 6 dots on each side of a triangle of 13:18 identifies the beast who attacks the saints – hence the number 666.

The rectangular 42 months indicates the period of the trampling of the temple in 11:2 and likewise for the time of the authority of the beast in 13:5. The rectangle 1260 days seems to be the same period of time ie. 42 ‘ideal’ months of 30 days each = 1260 days total. In 11:2 it is a time for the witnesses to prophesy; in 12:6 it is the time in which the woman in the wilderness is fed by God. Both these expressions link with the ‘time, times and half a time’ ie 3.5 days/years or ‘half week of years’, mentioned by Daniel 7:25; 9:27; 12:7 as the period of the oppression of the saints. This all ties in with the period of the ‘overlap of the ages’ ie. between the kingdom breaking into the world by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the full revelation of the kingdom! In Rev 1:9, John introduces ‘kingdom’ and ‘suffering’ and then he frequently interplays ‘suffering’ and ‘victory’ throughout the rest of the Book. This indicates a real coherence.

Case Study – Rev 13:18 is the climax of the revelation that a dragon and two beasts crush and destroy God’s people and at the same time a clue to the identity of the first beast that came out of the sea in 13:1 – “Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is 666”. Essentially this does show that the 666 falls short of God’s ideal of 7! The ‘trinity’ of dragon, beast-from-land and beast-from-sea comes nowhere near God’s glory! *However*, John asks his readers to work out the name or to know the name.

Some background is needed here – ancient word, letter and number systems had no separate symbols for numbers, so letters were used to show numerical values eg. Roman system of I, V, X, L, C and M to show 1,5,10,50,100 and 1000 respectively. They made up numbers by putting these letters in order and juggling them around to make different numbers eg. viii=8; xiv=14; lvii=57. In Greek and Hebrew, every letter was given a number. This usually meant that numbers 1-10 were given to the first 10 letters of the alphabet, 20, 30 up to 100 to the next 9 letters, and 200, 300 etc. to the rest of the letters. Hebrew has 22 letters and Greek has 24. Thus any word had a value, found by adding up the value of each of the letters in the word. The name ‘Jesus’ in Greek does in fact have the number 888 and the number 8 was linked with ‘Messiah’ and ‘start of age to come’.

It is easy to calculate the number of a name but very hard to work out a name from a number. This method was generally used to show that two things could be identified by showing that their numbers are the same. Roman historian Suetonius wrote a biography about 7 emperors and quotes a common saying – “A new calculation: Nero killed his own mother”. In Greek the value of ‘Nero’ and ‘killed his own mother’ both came to 1005.

Jewish rabbis claimed that the Messiah would be called Menachem = ‘Comforter’, because in the messianic title ‘branch of David’ (Jer. 23:5), ‘branch’ in Hebrew has the value 138 – the same as the value of Menachem. This way of using numbers is *gematria* in Hebrew and *isopsephism* in Greek, the *iso* meaning ‘same’.

Rev 13:18 says that the number of the beast = the number of a man, and this number is 666. Most commentators ignore ‘beast’ but if we write *therion* (Greek for ‘beast’) in Hebrew letters, the value is 666. If we do the same with the name Caesar Neron – Nero’s name in inscriptions was some-times written with a final ‘n’ – its numerical value is 666 ie. the number of this man’s name is the same as the number of the beast. John’s readers would have known that Nero was the first systematic persecutor of the enemy of Rome, namely the

people of God. Some Bible footnotes refer to some early manuscripts that say 616, not 666. If we calculate using the Greek ‘of the beast’ (*therion*) and Caesar Nero (without the final ‘n’), then both give the value 616. In Rev 21:15 the word for ‘angel’ in Hebrew letters adds up to 144. This fits the hatred of the Empire for God and its conflict with Christians.

5. **The challenge of metaphor in revelation** – John is presenting to us an alternative ‘symbolic universe’. This is imagery and symbolism, but actually it ought to be called *metaphor*. Metaphor involves bringing two different items together eg. ‘eating like a horse’. To understand metaphor, we need some knowledge of the contexts, literature and history of the items brought together eg. God as shepherd, potter, rock. The identification is only partial. Thus Rev 12 and 13 use metaphors of the Roman Empire power of the beast from sea + beast from land + dragon, signifying “repressive violence, conflict with the true people of God, control of economic systems, and the maintenance of respect for its image” (Paul, 2003:25). Revelation thus presents a kind of caricature which stresses certain elements of reality but ignores others. Thus, Revelation easily applies to regimes in times and places other than first century AD Rome. Metaphorical language thus *makes Revelation easily transferable to other eras and locations* but still using biblical categories. *Much of the violent conflict in Revelation is a metaphor for spiritual war between God and Satan.*

However, we must be ever cautious to take very seriously the historical contexts of this first century document before seeking contemporary parallels in history or in today’s world of the 21st Century AD. Taking hermeneutical short cuts is a disaster. Revelation is teaching that we live in the ‘in-between’ era before Christ’s return. God’s rule is still only partial, and Satan’s final defeat is not yet complete. We are to exercise faithful witness in the midst of our suffering. All powers opposed to God will finally collapse under divine judgment, as the new heaven and new earth is ushered in under Christ and His eternal rule.

Barnett's view on the meaning of numbers in Revelation

The colour white, images of throne and crown. = conquest and rule (divine, human, Satanic).

Sea beast and harlot = Roman Emperor + government.

Land beast/false prophet = Roman provincial governors.

Seven = God and eternal perfection

Six = Satan's claim to divinity

*Three and a half years
(or 42 months)* = A limited period of human history,
in contrast to God's eternity)

Twelve = Leaders of the redeemed

Twenty-Four = Leaders from old and new covenants

144,000 = Redeemed from Israel

Ten = A round figure

1,000 = A great number or very long period

Lion = Nobility

Ox = Strength

Eagle = Speed

Man/Woman = Wisdom

Lamb = Helplessness

Horn = Power

Eye = Knowledge

Right Hand = Authority

6 Ways for Interpreting Revelation

The Visions

S S Smalley broadly sees *four* approaches to interpretation in Revelation –

1. **Preterist** – A first century AD contemporary-historical view. The Church was entering serious persecution in the light of Emperor worship's demands on believers. Perseverance will yield a share in Christ's victory over Satan. This has an immediate impact within the first century. Preterists say the main prophecies were fulfilled either in the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70) or the fall of Rome (AD 476). The preterist view disappeared amidst the rise of spiritualising in Alexandria and did not emerge again until the 17th century. The problem with this view is that the final overthrow of evil never happened in the first century!
2. **Historicist** – Revelation describes the movements in Christian history as they have been fulfilled up to the time of the individual interpreter. However, if this was to consist of a series of Western European historical phases, then why would God reveal this to first century AD believers! Very subjective approach.
3. **Futurist/Eschatological** – Revelation reveals what has yet to take place in the purposes of God, especially all that comes after Rev 4:1. Letters to the seven churches represent the successive ages of church history that lead up to the rapture of the church in 4:1. However, this view would not help first century AD struggling believers. Not all futurists have such a rigid view of these early chapters of Revelation. Some see 4:1 as a shift in John's view from earth to heaven and thus, the seals represent events *throughout* history.
4. **Modified Idealist/Timeless Symbolic** – Revelation is a symbolic portrayal of the timeless conflict between the forces of good and evil, God and Satan. This includes a final consummation of salvation and judgment, even though we don't have precise chronology/details on this unfolding. God and the risen Christ control this in their sovereignty. Certainly, Revelation deals in symbols, *but* on the other hand this view offers no definitive *historical* fulfilment.

Each of these approaches has value but each has weakness as well. John himself in a real sense incorporated all four approaches. The problem is that *The End* did not arrive on time! Emperor worship did pass away and Christianity became the recognised state religion. John's predictions may not have been fulfilled in specific ways in history *but* eventually there will be a *final fulfilment*. John saw the great beast as the Roman Empire but there *will come* an eschatological beast who will threaten

the Church in the last days. John of course was dealing with *the present, not just the future* and this is typical of the Hebrew mind. Thus, for example the *fall of Jerusalem becomes, in its complete fulfilment, the end of the age*.

There is a fifth approach that could be described as **Eclectic** –

An eclectic approach to reading Revelation attempts to combine the strengths of several of the other approaches:

- Revelation seems to address the first-century Christians directly, so we should read Revelation the same way that we read every other book of the Bible—by taking its historical context seriously.
- Revelation also presents timeless truths for surviving the struggle between good and evil. The visions of Revelation challenge us to forsake our complacency and stay faithful during times of persecution.
- Revelation also clearly has something to say about events still to come. Some events it describes await future fulfilment (such as the return of Christ, the great white throne judgment, and the arrival of the holy city).

G.K. Chesterton once made the point that “Though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creatures so wild as one of his own commentators”. (*Orthodoxy* New York: John Lane, 1908; repr.. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995, pp.21-22)

Amidst the morass of detail in the lengthy text of Revelation, we need to remind ourselves that this book holds many truths and encouragements for us today! It is basically a *pastoral letter*. It was ultimately intended to offer *great encouragement* to all Christian believers that Almighty God actually is working out His purposes, even in the midst of suffering, tragedy and seeming Satanic control and victory! We must not give up, deviate or compromise with the world, but rather realise that God holds the final victory over all the powers of evil. We will eventually reign in glory and worship the triumphant Lord and Lamb forever. We will be in a constant warfare, but will finally stand in God’s presence.

The nature of the book

It combines *apocalyptic, prophecy and epistle*. Apocalyptic is an intensification of prophecy, not unlike that of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. This involved forth-telling to people in the present and foretelling the future. Vital in this is the source of the Revelation, namely the throne room of God in the heavenly temple. It was the divine source of the revelation sent to the Seven Churches. This heavenly source underlines that the churches need to know that real spiritual struggles are going on *behind* apparently insignificant earthly activities. This warfare shows that

the churches are *already* involved in the heavenly dimension and that their future life will be in the new heavens and earth, opened by Christ's death and rising. Our victory over the temptation to compromise, under pressure and persecution, lies in the Spirit. The 'lamps' of the Spirit give power to the church 'lampstands' to be light and salt. This redemptive/eschatological history spans past, present and future and is directly linked to the heavenly places of this cosmos. The heavenly view of this history usually runs counter to the earthly and the latter has to adjust to hear the Word of God and be transformed and conformed to the divine way. Or else, judgment will follow. This world makes sin look normal and righteousness look odd.

The stress of Revelation is on how the Church must live in this ungodly world. This book is not mere futurology. It concerns the world's cultures in *every* age. It is also a letter with instruction on godly living. John calls all churches to use all that they possess in Christ and all they will inherit, to persevere in the faith. All of this book conveys truth and direction about what is being waged in heavenly places and how to respond to this warfare here and now in the totality of our life.

Symbolic Interpretation in Revelation

Rev 1:1 (cf Dan 2:28-29, 45) has the verb *semaino* (NIV '*made known*') actually here means to 'symbolise' or 'signify' ie. symbolic communication of revealed truth from the throne of God. This is confirmed by the use in 1:1 and elsewhere in Rev. of the verb *deiknumi* meaning to show by God by means of symbolic vision.

Many readers of Revelation take the line, 'interpret literally unless you are forced to interpret symbolically'. With Revelation it is much more accurate to take the line, 'interpret symbolically unless you are forced to interpret literally'. In short, the main means of divine revelation in Revelation is *symbolic*, rather than a literal reference to a particular person, thing or event. The exception would be Rev 2-3 on the 7 churches. These symbols *do* have literal meaning underlying the symbolic meaning and they have historical reality. This literal meaning is often about spiritual realities and sometimes about physical realities, both of which are linked to some type of historical reality.

This means that we must distinguish between the vision given to John, what that vision symbolises and to what or whom the vision may refer *eg.* the woman on the beast in Rev 17 symbolises the ungodly world system in its mix of economic, cultural and religious elements. This system's values are opposed to God's values for His people. The error we can make is to bypass the symbols and go straight for a literal interpretation ie. a literal woman on a beast. This would be so strange and unfamiliar, compared with anything that has previously happened, that it must herald a future event. This sort of vision must refer to some form of divine

judgment, past, present or future that needs to be assessed in context and by the way it is referred to. Sometimes John *does* give a clue to an element of a vision eg. the lampstands = churches in Rev 1:20. Most elements of visions however are simply impossible to interpret literally eg. the lamb, standing though slain, with 7 horns and 7 eyes (Rev 5:6).

The numbers 4,7,12, with their multiples, are common in visions. Each is best interpreted in terms of its OT background. These numbers must be interpreted symbolically eg. Rev 1:4 'the seven Spirits who are before His [God's] throne'. God is mentioned just before this and Jesus just after this. Therefore, this Book of Revelation must be from God the Father, Spirit and Jesus and this reference to Spirits must be about the Holy Spirit. Why seven? Because the fullness of the Spirit is being stressed, based on the OT idea of fullness/completeness, rooted in the seven days of creation. The 7 seals etc. show total worldwide judgment. The number 4 similarly shows fullness/universality eg. the link with Exodus in Exod. 19:16ff (lightning and thunder) comes four times in Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18 to show the universality of the final judgment. Similarly, number 12 – completeness of 12 tribes and number 10 - completeness of the 10 commandments.

Remarkably, names used of God and Christ eg. the 'Alpha and the Omega' are repeated in Revelation in patterns of 4 and 7, showing God's complete rulership over the whole earth. The name 'Christ' occurs 7 times, 'Jesus' and 'Spirit' come 14 times and 'Lamb' 28 times! The 'seven spirits' occur 4 times, connecting complete sovereignty with global control. Major stress is put on the struggle between forces of good and evil, with the final triumph of God. The Lord's Will and Control are like a massive spider's web in which Satan and his forces are trapped. Nothing in the cosmos is accidental or haphazard or chance. The Death and Resurrection of Christ gives Satan a mortal wound and put the devil in checkmate. Satan is allowed to play on but is actually already defeated! We live and minister in pain and difficulty, but God is present, faithful and He will ultimately bring us through to final victory and a share in His eternal glory!!

Why did God speak through John in symbols? Jesus spoke in a comparable way through parables, based also on the language and signs of the OT prophets. See Isaiah 6:9-10 and Matthew 13:11-14 in which Jesus used parables to awaken His spiritually-sleeping followers! Unbelievers meanwhile could not grasp parables which simply proved their hardness of heart and reinforced it! Parables and OT prophecies were the genres of divine judgment to shake up and sort out listeners, in a very similar way that John's revelatory symbols carry the same function – see 'He who has an ear, let him hear' in the 7 churches, rooted in Isa 6:9-10, Ezekiel 3:27 and Matt 13:9,11ff. John's symbols work like Jesus' parables. They open the eyes of true believers while hardening the hearts of persistent unbelievers. Many

symbols expose the Satanic power of worldly institutions and ways, with which John's churches have compromised. The plagues and other visions of Revelation harden unbelievers but call true believers to the renewal of faith. The Word of God will always polarise responses – see Rev 22:8,11. These visions are both a warning and an encouragement to believers to persevere in Christ and separate themselves from worldly ways that are actually demonic at root.

Revelation and the OT

Revelation actually has more allusions to the OT than *all* the rest of the NT added together! Thus for example, forms from Daniel 2 and 7 are found often in Rev 1,4 and 5. Parts of Ezekiel are found in Rev 4 and 5. Exodus 7-14 plague material is located in Rev 8:6-12 and 16:1-14.

Most allusions used in Revelation are linked to an OT person, place or event:

Judgment – books of judgment, Ezek 2, Daniel 7; 12; // Rev 5:1-5. Ezek. 2/Rev 10.

Tribulation – Babylon the Great, who deceives and persecutes in Daniel 4:30 // Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5-6; 18:2,24; 19:2.

Idolatrous Teaching – Balaam in Numbers 25; 31:16 // Rev 2:14.

Divine Protection – the tree of life in Gen 2:9 // Rev 2:7; 22:2,14,19.

Victorious End-Time Battle Armageddon in Zech. 12:11 // Rev 16:16.

Falling Away in Apostasy – the harlot in Ezek. 16:15 // Rev 17.

The Spirit as the Empowering for God's People in Zech. 4:1-6 // Rev 1:12-20; 11:4.

NB. John takes OT refs and universalises them beyond Israel eg. God gave Israel the title 'kingdom of priests' (Exod. 19:6) but John applies this to the Church (Rev 1:6; 5:10). Other examples in the leaves for the healing of Israel (Ez. 47:12) are now for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:2). Tyre as harlot (Ezek. 26:17 – 28:19) becomes the world system as seen in 'Babylon' (Rev 17:1-18:24). The key is that through Christ, the promise to Abraham has been extended to the nations. Those who turn to Christ become the new and true Israel. John sees the OT as prophetically pointing forward to its NT fulfilment in Christ for God's new covenant people, the continuation of true Israel. Revelation is steeped in the OT and its language in such a way that John could cope with it and deliver it. Jesus had told His followers to listen to Moses, concerning Jesus. *Only by first grasping the OT and the 1st century AD can we get a handle on Revelation's past, present and future.*

The Central Role of Rev 1:19 for Interpretation

Rev 1:19 – ‘Write, therefore, the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things’.

Those with a futurist view of Revelation believe that all the events of the visions are still in the future and will unfold in chronological order. Such folk see the *past* as the initial verses prior to 1:19, the *present* as the church issues of Rev 2-3 and the *future* as all the events prior to, and including, the return of Christ. However, there are weaknesses in this position. For example, the words ‘write the things which you have seen’ could easily include the contents of the entire book (see 1:11). Likewise, the words ‘the things which are’ could mean all the events happening during the current time of the 7 churches, meaning the entire church age. Similarly, the phrase ‘the things which shall take place after these things’ is not just the far-off future, but all events between the resurrection and the return of Christ.

Vital in all this, is the fact God had spoken 600 years earlier through the prophet Daniel. Rev 1:1; 1:19; 4:1; 22:6 are texts strongly influenced by the words spoken through Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar in the interpretation of his first dream (Dan 2:28 – ‘He has made known...what will take place in the latter days’; Dan 2:29 – ‘...what would take place after this’; and Dan 2:45 – ‘...what will take place after this’. In Rev 1:1 John’s statement is taken from Dan 2:28,29 and 45, where God shows Daniel what must take place ‘in the latter days’ or ‘after these things’. (Rev 1:1 = ‘to show....the things which must shortly [or quickly] take place’).

If we compare Rev 1:1 with Daniel in these texts, the thought is virtually the same! The difference lies in the speed of fulfilment. What for Daniel was still far off, is now imminent for John cf ‘near’ in Rev 1:3 and Mark 1:15 ie. close to its fulfilment/beginning to arrive. In Luke 20:18 (‘Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed’), Jesus equates the ‘stone’ of His ministry with the end-time rock of Daniel’s last-days kingdom. For Jesus, Daniel’s words are almost fulfilled. John takes the same meaning as Jesus. John sees kingdom-fulfilment in Rev 1:6,9 with reference to Daniel 7:14. This kingdom belongs to a ‘Son of Man’ (Rev 1:13), paralleled in Dan 7:13 and this ‘Son of Man’ is described in a heavenly vision (1:13-16), just as in Dan 7:13-14. Jesus has begun to fulfil in John’s own time the ‘Son of Man’ prophecy in Daniel 7. Thus Beale concludes that Dan 2 and Rev 1 are describing the same reality! What is prophesied in Daniel is starting to be fulfilled in Revelation. The start of God’s kingdom prophesied in Daniel has come about by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Let’s now examine the text in Rev 1:19, in light of Rev 1:1 and the texts in Daniel.

Daniel's words 'in the latter days' (Dan 2:28) and 'after this' (as in Rev 1:19), are exactly the same in meaning! 'After this' / 'after these things' in Dan 2:29 refers to something far away in the future, as does 'in the latter days'. *But in Revelation*, they allude to something that has already started to happen. Rev 1:1 replaces 'in the latter days' with 'shortly' and 1:3 adds 'near', meaning 'at hand'. The words 'after these things' in 1:19 is not a reference only to the future, but to already-unfolding events in these last days, since 'after these things' refers to the 'latter days' in Dan 2:28-29 which have been triggered by Christ's death and resurrection! Thus each phrase in Rev 1:19 *may well refer to the same reality of the entire church age*. Beale warns us not to base our view of Revelation solely on *this* interpretation of Rev 1:19.

'After these things' also occurs in Rev 4:1 where the vision section starts. The angel calls to John 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things'. This alludes to Dan 2:29. If 'these things' = 'the latter days', as is the case of Dan 2:28-29, then it refers to the events of the last days triggered by the cross and resurrection of Jesus. This follows from John's grasp in Rev 1 that the Daniel 2 and 7 prophecies have started to be fulfilled in Christ's *first coming*. Thus the Revelation visions will tell us what will unfold through the time period of these last days ie. the entire church age ie. from Christ's resurrection to His return! Revelation is thus relevant for the Church in every age. Revelation is not just about the return of Christ. If it were, then it would lack meaning for any pre-Return reader!

The final reference to Daniel occurs in Rev 22:6 where the heavenly voice says to John, "The Lord...sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place". Thus the end of Revelation repeats the opening words of Revelation. The unfolding to John started before his very eyes and has continued ever since! It is fascinating indeed that the 4 main sections of Revelation – Intro (1:1-18), Letters (1:19-3:22), Visions (4:1-22:5) and Conclusion (22:6-21) – *are all introduced by allusions to Daniel 2:28-29,45*, which themselves constitute the introduction and conclusion to Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream. No accident! The content of the Daniel 2 dream gives us a framework to interpret Revelation as a display of the '*end-time battle between good and evil and of the establishment of God's kingdom, all of which has begun with the death and resurrection of Christ and will be consummated at His final coming*'. (Beale, 2015, p. 32)

7 Revelation's Overall Structure, Outline, Direction

As seen by GK Beale, I Howard Marshall p61, Fee and Stuart p63, Paul Barnett p66

1 Outline from G.K. Beale

- 1:1-20 Prologue
- 2:1-3:22 The Letters: The Church Imperfect in The World
- 4:1-5:14 God and Christ Glorified through Christ's Resurrection
- 6:1-8:5 The Seven Seals
- 8:6-11:19 The Seven Trumpets
- 12:1-15:4 Seven Visions or "Signs"/Deeper Conflict
- 15:5-16:21 The Seven Bowls
- 17:1-19:21 Final Judgment of Babylon and The Beast
- 20:1-15 The Millennium
- 21:1-22:5 The New Creation: The Church Perfect in Glory
- 22:6-21 Epilogue

How do the visions relate to one another?

There are two broad, but different, positions –

- A) **Chronologically-Linear, Futurist Position** – Excluding the letters of Rev 2-3, by this theory the order of visions from 4:1 – 22:5 indicates the chronological order in which those vision events will unfold historically. Thus, the seals are preparatory events *before* the trumpets and bowls. The trumpets and visions of 12:1 – 14:20, plus the bowls are viewed as the contents of the 7th seal, in the sense that the 7th seal has no content of its own.
There are a number of arguments in favour of this theory –
 - i) Rev 1:19 splits the book into past (1:9-18), present (2:1 – 3:22) and future (4:1 – 22:5). 4:1 reaffirms this order.
 - ii) The progression of *numbered* visions seems to suggest a chronological order. 9:12 and 11:14 state the end of 1st and 2nd woes before the 3rd starts.
 - iii) The judgments seem to get more intense as Revelation progresses. The visions seem so bizarre that, in a literal sense, they have never been experienced before and therefore, if understood literally, they must surely be future events!
- B) **Recapitulation Position – ie. A Summary or Re-Statement of the same things over again.** In other words, the various series of judgments are *parallel*

descriptions of the same events. The pattern is identical within each series. Near the end of each series, there is a description of judgment, followed by an expression of salvation. Thus 6:12-17 and 7:9-17; 11:18a and 11:18b; 14:14-20 and 15:2-4; 16:17 – 18:24 and 19:1-10; 20:7-15 and 21:1 – 22:5. There are a number of arguments in favour of this theory –

- i) The first judgment is in 6:12-17 after breaking of 6th seal. This is so overwhelming as to sound like the final judgment, with nothing likely to come after it! This would mean that the trumpet tribulation at 8:2 must go back before the time of the final judgment in 6:12-17.
- ii) The judgment in 11:14-18, after the 7th trumpet sounds, seems really final, where the dead have been judged and God's kingdom set up. The judgment in 20:12 uses the same language as 11:18! The tribulation in 12-13 must go back *before* the last judgment in 11:14-18.
- iii) 11:14-18 show the content of the 7th trumpet as showing the last judgment, which clashes with the claim of some futurists that the 7th trumpet has no content in itself and must therefore have everything recorded in the following chapters as its content. If we see the content of the 7th trumpet as the final judgment, then futurism collapses completely!
- iv) The account of the final punishment of the lost is just as final in 14:14-20 (final harvest) and in 16:17-21 (7th bowl) as what many futurists see as the only reference to final judgment in 20:11-15!
- v) The earthquake in 6:12-17 (6th seal) seems identical to that of 16:17-21 (7th bowl). 6:14,16 the sky splits, mountains and islands disappear and there is One sitting on the throne of heaven. In 20:11, following the judgment of 20:7-10, earth and heaven flee away and disappear because of the presence of the One on the throne. This shows that 6:12-17 is the very final judgment, so that the trials that follow in the trumpet and bowl plagues must actually go back in time before that final judgment.
- vi) The same language of divine judgment through thunder etc. in Ex 19:16 is used in Rev 8:5 (conclusion of 7 seals), 11:19 (conclusion of 7 trumpets and 16:18 (conclusion of 7 bowls). Each of these Revelation texts states in context the heavenly temple or altar. Each text thus describes the last judgment so the last two recapitulate – summarise – the first.

- vii) The situation of believers and unbelievers immediately before the final judgment is very similar in description in 6:12-17 (6th seal); 9:13-11:13 (6th trumpet); and 16:12-16 (6th bowl).
- viii) The phrase 'It is done', uttered from the throne of heaven in 16:17 and 21:6, seems on both occasions to refer to the fulfilment of the same final judgment.
- ix) Repetition of 'gather together for war' in 16:14-16; 19:19; 20:8 indicates the *same* final battle being described three times over.
- x) Fall of Babylon in 14:8; 16:19; texts in chs.17-19 must be describing the same thing ie. recapitulated descriptions of judgment.
- xi) The trumpets and bowls are both patterned after the Exodus plagues, involving the same plagues, in a similar order.
- xii) Each very similar series of judgments ends with the same reality of final punishment and reward. Thus in every series of judgments, we could say that God is seeking to get across the same realities with increasing force, as Revelation reaches its climax.

Conclusion Beale favours recapitulation as best explaining the structure of Revelation. The book is a series of *parallel visions* where God reveals the same truths in different ways. The seals do speak of four horses while trumpets and bowls speak of Exodus plagues but in different order. John is relating what he saw in a string of visions, in the order in which he saw them, *but* 'the order in which he saw things is not necessarily the historical chronological order in which those things will happen' (Beale, 2015:24). John is recording the same events in different visions but in some places, he is not recording them in precisely the same order or telling different visions to express the same reality eg. horses rather than plagues, the latter occurring right across history. Thus, some details do vary from one vision to another. When John says 'after these things', he means that one vision follows another in its chronological revelation, *but this does not necessarily mean that the history within the visions comes after the history recorded in the previous vision.*

Thus, John is dealing here with parallel visions that encompass a spread of history from Pentecost until the Lord's final return. **This is a vital key to the book.**

How do the letters relate to the visions?

There is a real link because a number of themes in the seven letters actually do reappear in the visions themselves –

1. *Israel* – False Israel in 2:9 and 3:9. Church as true Israel in 7:4-8.
2. *Suffering and Persecution* – a) Smyrna. Christians persecuted (2:10) and some were slain for their faith (6:11). b) Philadelphia. Christians will get God's help in trial (3:10) and will have God's name written on them (3:12). Believers will be protected and have the divine names written on them (7:3; 14:1). These Christians will be pillars in God's temple (3:12) and these sealed believers will serve God in His temple (7:15). c) Pergamum. Antipas is seen as God's witness (2:13), as are the Christians in 6:9 and the two witnesses in 11:3-13.
3. *Demonic figures* – Satan has his throne in Pergamum (2:13) and Balaam is a false prophet there (2:14). Satan later is present as the dragon (12:9) who is ejected from heaven and tries to rule on earth. He is attended by a second beast – a false prophet (13:13-17; 16:13; 19:20). Jezebel is at Thyatira in 2:20-23 and is used as a model for the harlot in Rev 17.
4. *Promises to Christians* – Clean clothes for Christians, plus eating with Christ, at Laodicea (3:18,20). Clean garments for Christians on Christ's return plus entry to supper of the Lamb (19:8-9). Christ – the 'faithful and true witness' (3:14) stands behind door of Laodicean Christians; the One who is 'called Faithful and True' stands inside the open door to heaven (19:11).
5. *Additional Themes* – 'Overcoming' (2:7,11 and 12:11; 15:2; 17:14). 'Idolatry' (2:14,20 and 9:20-21; 13:4,12-15). 'Jesus judges by the sword out of His mouth' (2:16 and 19:15).

The State of God's Church

The *letters* in Revelation deal with the present state of the church (imperfect condition);

the *closing section* of Revelation presents the glorified church in heaven (perfect condition).

The connection between the two is the outworking of *promise and fulfilment*.

NOW

False apostles (2:2)

False Jews (2:9; 3:9)

Christians live where Satan's throne is (2:13)

Some in the church are dead (3:1)

The church is an earthly lampstand (1:20; 2:5)

The church contains idolaters (2:14-15, 20-23)

Christians are persecuted (2:8-10, 13)

LATER

True apostles (21:14)

Tribes of true Israel (21:12)

Christians live where God's throne is (22:1)

All in the perfected church are alive (21:27).

God and the Lamb are the lamps (21:23-24; 22:5)

The perfected church has no idolatry or lying (21:8)

Christians reign in victory (21:6-7)

PROMISE

They will eat of the tree of life (2:7)

They will be a pillar in the temple (3:12)

They will be part of the heavenly Jerusalem (3:12)

They will have the name of their God (3:12)

Their names will be written in the book of life (3:5)

They will be clothed in white (3:5)

They will have a white stone and receive the morning star (2:17, 28)

They will rule the nations (2:26-27) Christ on His throne (3:21).

They will be saved from the second death (2:11)

FULFILMENT

The tree of life bears fruit in heaven for Christians (22:2)

God and the Lamb are the temple in heaven where Christians live (21:22)

They are part of the heavenly Jerusalem (21:23-27)

The name of God is on their foreheads (22:4)

Their names are written in the book of life (21:27)

They are the bride adorned for her husband (21:2)

They are part of the city founded on precious stones (21:11, 18-21), whose light is God and the Lamb (21:23; 22:5) and that lives with Jesus, the bright morning star (22:16).

They reign for evermore (22:5) and sit with

They are saved from the second death (21:7-8)

G K Beale's Conclusion

Revelation, plus all NT Letters, is fundamentally a *pastoral book for Christian believers*. Grace is there in Rev 1:4 and in Rev 22:21. Revelation does deal with pastoral issues that confront the churches and the need to live for Christ. Perseverance in faithfulness to Christ will bring an eternal reward. The content of this book is universally relevant in all ages – perseverance, idolatry, courage in witness, moral purity, doctrinal soundness. If Revelation were only about the future, it would have much less relevance for today. The visions deal with issues that have *always* been pertinent to the church. True, there are parts of Revelation that do deal with the future and with Christ's return in His new heaven/earth.

2 Outline from I. Howard Marshall

Overall Sweep of Revelation

A Tribute to the late Prof I. Howard Marshall, based on his work in *A Concise NT Theology*, IVP, 2008.

“God knows what his enemies are capable of doing, and he will act in such a way as to ensure their final defeat. The author's purpose is to prepare and encourage a group of congregations that on the whole are spiritually ill-equipped to face a future in which faith will be tried to the limit”. (2008:211)

Rev 1 – Prologue and Opening Greeting – The main thrust here is that readers, facing an uncertain future, will be encouraged by the picture of God and Christ's superior power and will gain assurance of the authority of John's revelations.

Rev 2-3 – Seven Congregations – The readers are being opposed by various religious groups and by the state Emperor Worship. These congregations in the main are not in good shape to face a tough future and Christ is calling these believers and churches to repentance, yes, repentance, while there is still time! They are called to ‘conquer’ ie. to stand firm in their battle against temptation and persecution. Their reward will be the tree of life, freedom from second death, the crown of life and a share in Christ's authority etc.

Rev 4-5 – The scene in heaven – There is conflict in heaven and earth involving good and evil. Only one person is qualified to open the scroll – the slain Lamb of God is his qualification. We have been redeemed to become kings and priests for God.

Rev 6 – A series of judgments – 4 seals are broken and 4 riders cause chaos in the world. These are limited judgments to warn people and offer repentance – see

Rev 6:16; 9:20-21; 16:9. The 5th seal shows some martyrs who cry to God for His judgment to fall but that must await the completion of all the martyrs. There seems to be no evidence of repentance. More visions are parallel versions of the future from a variety of aspects.

Rev 7-10 – *Sealing, prayer and further judgments* – During an interlude, God puts a seal of identity and belonging on His people to protect them from future judgments. A huge, future crowd is seen to encourage those still on earth to hang in and persevere! The 144,000 number is symbolical and is the same as the huge crowd before and after death. The final seal is opened but is not the final end but introduces trumpet judgments. These are partial judgments and thus warnings to repent – see 9:20-21.

Rev 11 – *The two witnesses* - Rev 10:6-7 declares no more delay in God's plans. The vision of two witnesses who are protected until their testimony is complete. They are slain by God's enemy from the abyss and then taken to heaven. During the persecution and judgment, the church is called to bear faithful witness. The 7th trumpet sounds re God's final victory – a vision of the end-time event itself!

Rev 12-14 – *The woman and child; the dragon; angelic messages* – The end is not yet recounted and now is another parallel account in Rev 12 in which is an image of a woman who bears a child who is Christ. Opposition comes from a dragon but the child is taken up to God for protection. The dragon is defeated and cast down to earth where it assaults the woman and her offspring. She personifies Israel – both the OT godly and the NT followers of Jesus. Because the accuser of the church is cast out of heaven, he can no longer accuse them there, but the dragon has accusers on earth who instigate an authoritative regime that attacks and overcomes Christ's followers. Those who don't follow Christ instead worship the anti-Christian beast. The believers will face hard times so the 144,000 are revealed in vision again – now in heaven – to encourage the struggling believers. Angelic messages show that there is still opportunity for people to hear the gospel and repent but when the seven last plagues come, it is clear that people did not repent (Rev 16:9,11). More warnings of eternal judgment follow and then a vision of people being gathered for judgment by Christ.

Rev 15-18 – *Seven final plagues; Babylon and its fate* - These are not the final judgment but they *are* more severe than previous plagues. Surviving people make war against God in a final 'fling' before the last judgment on Babylon ie. Rome, Jerusalem and the whole ungodly world.

Rev 19-20 – *The Victory of God* – Rev 19 is a celebration of God's victory over the evil systems of this world and rejoices in the church's great banquet as the bride

of the Lamb. No final battle is described as such, but the victory of God over all His enemies is total and complete at the final judgment. Rev 20 shows how the dragon, Satan, is imprisoned to stop him deceiving the nations for 1000 years, though actually they all died in Rev 19! Meanwhile the martyrs come to life and rule with Christ. Satan is then set free to deceive the nations, followed by another battle and judgment, including that of the dead who are now raised to face God's judgment. Marshall more or less rules out a literal 1000 years because that doesn't explain where the nations come from and because a temporary kingdom of Christ doesn't seem to have much point. Marshall offers a possible solution – that John is taking us back to the start ie. to the binding of Satan by Christ's death and resurrection which would mean that the millennium is the present age and then a final flurry of evil that leads to its final defeat. Thus, the battle of Rev 19 and the elimination of evil in Rev 20:9-10 are actually the same event! Another explanation might be that the millennium is a proleptic (advanced or anticipatory) image for the new earth that will be described similarly in Rev 21-22! Marshall concludes regarding the Millennium, 'No solution is free from problems' (2008:216).

Marshall says little about 'recapitulation' in Revelation ie. repetition of visions in different forms and for different reasons that have already been revealed, but Beale treats 'recapitulation' in detail. However, Beale feels that the imagery of plagues, floods, thunder, lightning etc. is essentially figurative rather than visible and literal. Is he right in this view? Could John be revealing here, to a degree at least, actual 21st Century AD, and/or previous, natural disasters. This is not to deny of course the truth, reality and eternal validity of John's 'Revelation'. Both Marshall and Beale are united in their view of the truth and authenticity of the biblical records.

Rev 21-22 – *The New Jerusalem* – John describes this reality where God dwells with His people. The Presence of God is eternal. Rev 22:14-15 seems to indicate that sinful people are still present outside this city, signifying what it means to be cut off from the Living God for all eternity.

3 Outline from Fee and Stuart

Fee and Stuart believe that Revelation was triggered by the early Christians' refusal to take part in the Imperial Cult, especially when the Emperor was addressed as 'lord' and 'saviour'. The church was heading for a major clash with the state which would accelerate for a church that was inadequately prepared. Revelation is thus a warning and an encouragement amidst the warfare, but with the promise of God's judgment and ultimate victory over all powers of darkness. God will finally restore in Rev 21-22 what had been lost or distorted at the start. Asia Minor was especially strong in the state's demands for emperor worship and the martyrdom

of Antipas (2:13) and John's exile to Patmos (1:9) were merely the start of big trouble ahead for the church – see 1:9; 2:10; 3:10; 6:9-11; 7:14; 12:11,17. John sees this clash as a part of the greater cosmic warfare between God and Satan (12:1-9) in which God is finally victorious. 'The church is called to 'triumph over [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...not lov[ing] their lives so much as to shrink from death' (12:11). God has already disarmed and defeated the dragon by the death and resurrection of Christ, and God will judge the state and systems for their church persecution.

Fee and Stuart claim that Revelation deals with these issues in various ways. Thus, Rev 1:12-20 presents a vision of the Risen Christ who holds the keys to all that follows. Then Rev 2-3 deal with churches in their varying strengths and weaknesses. Rev 4-5 contain a vision of the ruling Creator God and Redeeming Lamb who hold all wisdom, glory and power and who ultimately will command the submission of heaven and earth. Then the scroll that contains God's justice and righteous judgments finds the only person worthy to break its seals – the 'Messiah', the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah' and the 'Root of David' (5:5). This 'Lion' is actually a Lamb, *the Slain Lamb of God* who has redeemed people from every nation. This seal-breaking (Rev 6) set the drama in motion for all that follows – conquest, war, famine, death in the first four seals, followed by martyrdoms in seal 5 and then the response of divine judgment in seal 6. Christ does play a role in the final battle (19:11-21) but everywhere else He appears as the slain Lamb, which is how His followers are expected to function and triumph (12:11).

Rev 7 has two interlude visions that involve the 'sealing' of God's people from coming judgments, though they appear here in battle formation and eventually redeemed. Then, the 7th seal is opened, and this unfolds the vision of the 7 trumpets of Rev 8-9. These 'judgments' echo the Egyptian plagues but do not result in repentance (9:20-21). The interlude visions between 6th and 7th trumpets (10:1-11:14) call the church to prophesy and to bear witness to Christ, even in the face of death. At the same time, these visions announce the certain doom of the Empire but also the certain reign of God and His Lamb (11:15-19)

Rev 12-22 account for and describe the final doom of the Empire. In particular, Rev 12-14 deal with the reasons for the suffering and judgment. Rev 15-16 treat the doom of Rome in the vision of the 7 bowls, which echo the trumpet plagues but now there is no opportunity to repent. This leads to the story of the two cities represented by two women – the prostitute is Rome and the other 'city' is the bride of the Lamb. Rome represents hatred of God and His people and this city is judged in Rev 17-18. Then, Rev 19-20 portrays God's final salvation and judgment, while the final glory of the bride as city of God, the New Jerusalem, comes down from heaven in Rev 21-22.

Fee and Stuart suggest the following **outline** of the Book of Revelation –

1:1-8 *Prologue.*

1:9-3:22 *The historical setting of the seven churches.* Christ as giver of the revelation (1:9-11); Christ as Lord of the Church (1:12-16); Christ as Lord of history (1:17-20). Christ addresses the Seven Churches in Rev 2-3.

4:1-5:14 *A Vision of the Heavenly Throne.* Check out Ezek. 1 and Isaiah 6:1-3 for OT background of Rev 4, and Gen 49:8-12 and Isa 11:1-11 for Rev 5 background.

6:1-8:5 *The Opening of the Seven Seals.* This triggers 3 visions – seals, trumpets, bowls – all of which have the same structure, namely a series of 4, a series of 2, an interlude of 2 visions and a 7th seal that marks the unveiling of the 7 angels with trumpets in Rev 8:1-5.

8:6-9:21 *The Judgments of the Seven Trumpets.* This series of 4 (8:6-13) picks up the picture of God's wrath from the 6th seal, but now as trumpets ie. warning judgments. These are partial judgments in a series of two woes, the third being held back until Rev 18. Even though only partial judgments, they do not lead to repentance (9:20-21).

10:1-11:19 *The Two Interlude Visions.* Back to John and the church. A vision that belongs to God and not to Satan, and a vision about the prophetic role of the church in witness whatever the cost. The 7th trumpet intervenes to depict the future end as if it's already happened in the present!

12:1-14:20 *Conflict between the Church and Evil Powers.* 12:1-17 has two visions: Christ has *already* defeated the dragon who attacks the church, but the church responds in witness. We overcome by Christ's death and our witness. 13:1-18 depicts the beasts out of the Sea and the Earth, attacking the church because of its resistance to Emperor Worship. Rome seemed invincible and tried to isolate Christians economically. 14:1-20 shows the results of the holy war – vindication for the future of God's people and the judgment of Rome.

15:1-16:21 *The Seven Bowls: God's Judgment of 'Babylon'.* Third and final set of God's judgments against Rome. 15:1-8 has the Prelude with John back in heaven; 16:1-21 has Babylon judged.

17:1-22:21 *The Original Tale of Two Cities.* The fall of Rome in the 'desert' (17:3) and the founding of the New Jerusalem on a mountain top (21:10). In 17:1-19:10, God judges the harlot for her economic oppression of the poor. God's people are

called to flee from her. Those who fostered her are in mourning over her fall. Rome is ultimately doomed because she killed the martyrs (18:24). In 19:11-20:15, the Last Battle is recorded as Christ defeats the beast, the prophet and Satan himself into the lake of fire. In 21:1-22:11, the City of God, the New Jerusalem comes down to earth and Eden is restored. See Ezek. 40:1-43:12; 47:1-12. The city *is the temple*. God is Present with His Church for all eternity.

4 Outline from Paul Barnett

1:1-20 – John writes in 1:1-8, having received news of Asia from a human messenger, followed by his reflection on this and then two visions from God in 1:9-20 and 4:1, which he then writes down so the couriers can take this to the seven churches. John presents the Word of God, which is the testimony of, or witness to, Christ. It is fundamentally about the *past*. John hears in 1:9-11 a voice that directs him to write down what he saw. He is brother, fellow-sharer in the suffering, kingdom and patient endurance. John is giving a prophetic, historical interpretation of the evil forces that are affecting unbelievers and believers. John sees Christ like a son of man, having died and risen, amidst his churches in 1:12-20. Chapters 2-3 (past); Chapters 4-5 (present); Chapters 6-22 (future).

2:1-3:22 – *The Seven Churches in Asia* – Christians, but not Jews, were required to worship the Roman Emperor as a *living deity* and their loyalty was tested by the reciting of a prayer to the gods, plus their giving of wine and incense to the emperor's statue plus their cursing of Christ. All these churches are called to overcome and remain faithful in witness by refusing to compromise with Rome! The protected Jews often betrayed the names of disobedient Christians to Rome. Over all these churches, Christ, by His death and rising, has gained His eternal victory and is seated in triumph with His Father on His throne. He calls these and all churches to repent of lack of love, false teaching and all immorality. To those who overcome all opposition, God promises the fruit of the tree of life, escape from second death (=hell) and share of rule with Him over the nations.

4-5 – *Heaven Opened* – John receives a majestic vision by the Spirit of the glories of heaven before the church's challenging earthly journey is revealed in Chapters 6-20, through its *tyranny, chaos, persecution and destruction*. In 4:2-6, God is always faithful and covenant-keeping. 24 victorious elders on thrones – 12 OT tribes and 12 NT disciples/apostles. Early symbols of real judgment from God. A picture of God's final judgment and final peace in His cosmos. In 4:6-8 are the four living creatures who alone know that God Himself controls all history and that He is thrice *holy*. In 4:9-11, the 24 elders respond in worship to this declaration of divine holiness of this Creator God. In 5:1-4 the *scroll of destiny* appears, and no one is found worthy to reveal and trigger God's plans for history. In 5:5-7, the *Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah*, is the only one worthy to break the 7 seals of the scroll.

The great battle of God is not future; it is already past, complete and is the eternal victory that was won, not by a Lion, but by a slain Lamb. It is Christ, Lamb of God, who holds all power and control in the cosmos. In 5:7-14, Christ is shown to have the authority to open the scroll because only He died as Redeemer to buy people from the nations for God. Praise follows.

6-7 – Tyranny – The sequence of *Tyranny*, *Chaos*, *Persecution* and *Destruction* are not historically consecutive, but rather concurrent. These aspects are separated by John, examined in turn by him in Revelation, but in actual historical time, they are not chronological. Therefore, we cannot try to conjecture/speculate just what specific events/people are being pinpointed. They are all happening at the same time to varying degrees and all four are mixed up together. Each of the four is divided into 7 parts. Each main part ends with a heavenly interlude after part 6. In 6:1-8 the four horsemen come on scene – white horse invades other lands and occupies them, initially Roman authorities invading Galilee and Judaea (AD 66). Human greed yet divine comfort too. God gave these situations and is in control of the tragedy and pain, limiting the extent of the damage. In 6:9-11, after the Rome fire of AD 64, Christians could no longer escape the demand to worship Roman emperor and gods. 6:9 is probably the martyrs under and after Nero. See 8:3 and 20:4. The martyrs cry for divine justice but must await their full number. In 6:12-17, the 6th seal opens God's great judgment on the tyrant persecutors who have caused misery and martyrdom. In 7:1-8 there is an interlude indicating peace and protection for the sufferers. 144,000 is symbolic for faithful OT people. In 7:9-17 – the second part of the interlude – John sees the throne, God and Lamb, with multitudes who declare that salvation belongs to our God and Christ. They have suffered hugely, yet still believe that salvation is found only in God! They are eternally safe in Christ and this truth will be repeated in later chapters.

8-11 – Chaos –

- a) 8:1-5 *Seventh seal: silence in heaven* – This is the bridge into the 7 angels with 7 trumpets, which starts after the silence and the ascent of the saints' prayers. Depicts the darkness of earthly life, yet with hope.
- b) 8:6-12 *First four trumpets: cosmic chaos* – A world of decay and destruction. Apocalyptic images of bombardment by natural forces and disasters. God is judging those who reject Him and fail to repent, but the final end is not yet here. Trumpets 5, 6 and 7 are judgments of humanity.
- c) 9:1-11 *Trumpet five: torture of humankind* – Spiritual torture from Satan who accuses God's people but also torments his own followers eg. the possessed man in Mark 5:1-20. See also 1 John 5:19. The first woe (9:12) for humanity is Satanic torture; first 4 trumpets signal natural disasters; fifth trumpet gives satanically-inspired supernatural disasters.

- d) 9:13-21 *Trumpet six: killing of humankind* – Again, our prayers trigger God’s judgments on the earth (8:3-5; 9:13). Prayer seems weak to us but powerful to God and He responds to it by speaking. The armies of Satan arrive and four evil angels drive the killing spree but God looks for true repentance. Humanity cannot build heaven on earth. That finally comes down from heaven, but not yet. The disasters will not bring the change; that needs the prophetic Word of God to warn of coming, eternal wrath.
- e) 10:1-11 *Interlude: call to prophesy* – A mighty angel holds a little scroll and announces no further delay for at the 7th Trumpet, the mystery of God will be revealed (9:6-7). God’s NT people know this mystery, but *will they declare it in a world full of tyranny, martyrdom and chaos?* Will the prophets have the courage to speak the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus in a world of suffering and persecution? Jesus then calls John to take the scroll (10:8) and prophesy. John eats the scroll ie. he digested the Word of God for all peoples and nations. Prophecy is the gospel for all.
- f) 11:1-14 *Interlude: deaths of the two prophets/witnesses* – Two prophets die while witnessing and it seems to be in Jerusalem – temple and Gentile outer court. The worshippers here are protected and preserved for the New Jerusalem. The earthly city was crushed by Rome and has no more use for God. The great cities and prophets are wherever churches preach. Like the OT prophets Elijah and Moses, prophets will be protected by God during their time of prophesying. This might be linked to powerful prayer. Their resurrection may refer to their raising as martyrs by Jesus’ raising.
- g) 11:15-19 *Seventh trumpet* – God’s great mystery will now be revealed in the midst of the chaos of the cosmos. Praise in heaven for the Lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed – Christ’s sacrificial and redemptive death (5:5-6). This is the bitter/sweet gospel that took the life of the witnesses. The reign of God is already here by the slain Lamb who died and rose. This is what intensely angers the nations and causes them to persecute.

12-14 Persecution – These chapters are absolutely crucial within Revelation, root-ed in the suffering of Rev 2-3 and pointing to the judgment of the persecutors in Rev 18-20. From Jesus’ birth to the persecution in Rev 2-3, the story focuses on the birth of Christ, the efforts of evil Herod to destroy Him and Jesus’ escape to heaven. The Jews then try to chase the Jerusalem church to the wilder-ness. The persecution spreads from Judaea into proconsular Asia. Alongside this theme is a second one – the message of the prophetic word, the gospel, the testimony of Jesus, the male child, the Lamb, redemption, ascension, ruler of nations, eternal gospel, persecution of Lamb and His people, judgment of all who reject Christ.

John shows his readers that the oppression of the church comes from Satan, that the Devil's time is short and that the suffering church is called to patient agony.

- a) 12:1-6 *The woman, the male child and the dragon* – In the first part of Rev 12, the woman seems to be 'Mary' but in the second part, the fleeing Jerusalem Church in AD 70. The common factor is that this 'woman' suffers! The language suggests the victorious Bride of Christ. Jesus and His people will rule the nations. King Herod is likely symbolised by the 'dragon' in his seeking to remove the baby Jesus' life. The huge, red dragon = the devil = Satan (Rev 12:3,9; cf. Gen 3:1-19). His 7 heads and 10 horns = his pretentious claims to divine wisdom and power. The dragon deceives people to believe that divine power is found in human rulers and false gods and emperors like Domitian. The warfare of the Asian churches had its roots in King Herod and Genesis 3.
- b) 12:7-12 *The dragon is cast down to earth* – Satan is highly determined! He pursues the child to heaven and attacks the gates, but is repulsed for Christ is in control, based on His great victory by death as the slain Lamb. Satan had been cast down to earth by Christ's death (John 12:31-32), but the demonic anger on earth will mean ongoing persecution for believers. Christ overcame Satan on the cross and we now have power to overcome.
- c) 12:13-17 *The flight of the woman* – The woman escaped the pursuit of the dragon. This may be a reference to the flight of 'mother church' ie. Church of Jerusalem, during the AD 60s Jewish-Roman war. The dragon is angry and finds other churches to accuse and persecute in his determination to destroy the woman's offspring. The beast is an incarnation of the dragon.
- d) 13:1-10 *The beast out of the sea* – The beast is a reference to Roman Imperial power and perhaps a particular human expression of that authority and power. John uses coded terms to avoid charges of treason! The sea-beast also has 7 heads and 10 horns – a pretence of deity! This beast seemed to have had a fatal wound but the *truly-wounded* is Christ. Rome was the beast and was given power by the dragon to rule nations. Domitian spoke many words of blasphemy and arrogance. Satan operates war against God, Christ and Christians. John is highly realistic about the church's persecution, pain and suffering. Patient endurance and faithfulness is called for and for some it will mean a martyr's death 13:10.
- e) 13:11-18 *The beast out of the earth* – This second beast is most likely the symbol for the High Priest of proconsular Asia. Like a lamb, he had just two horns. This beast – the High Priest of Asia – had the task of forcing the local people to worship the emperor and keep the people fully committed to Rome. Magical powers were used to get a statue of Domitian in Ephesus to

speak (13:15)! Details are unclear but only Christians who took part in Emperor Worship were given a token or pass to buy or sell. The number 6 means incomplete or insufficient; 7 is divine and eternal. 666 might be the evil trinity of dragon, sea beast and land beast – a parody or fake of the real Trinity. Christians *had to offer to Caesar* civil obedience, cooperation and regular taxes. All rulers in all epochs who demand this allegiance and worship become anti-Christ ie. substitute Christ. Satan expresses his wrath against Christ by warring against believers. Satan himself is supernatural but he uses human instruments that are neither divine nor eternal.

- f) 14:1-5 *The Lamb and the 144,000* – John now looks away from earth to the New Jerusalem. He sees the Lamb with the 144,000 who are gathered as the redeemed Jews and Gentiles. They sing praises to God and the Lamb. These are the ones who have been redeemed and freed from sin, especially their idolatry; they have not defiled themselves with sacral prostitution and other sexual immorality; they are disciples of Christ who are willing to die; they are people of truth including being honest re their faith in Christ.
- g) 14:6-11 *The interlude: first part: three angels* – Frequent references to the gospel of Christ are found here, directed to the followers of the (sea) beast and to Rome (Babylon). First angel brings the eternal gospel to a people ripe for divine judgment – see also 14:14-20. They must abandon idolatry, turn to God and give glory/worship to their true Creator God. The ‘gospel’ of the worship of Emperor Augustus had already been around for about a century. Second angel states the ‘gospel’ of the fall of Babylon (Rome) and its resultant condemnation. Rome will be replaced by the New Jerusalem. Third angel declares that worshippers of the beast and its image are under God’s judgment. John had thus stated that the Lamb had been slain for their sins, that He now ruled the nations, and that there was doom for those who served the dragon, not God and the Lamb. Two sides of gospel!
- h) 14:12-13 *The interlude: second part: faithfulness* – Patient endurance is vital – 1:9; 2:2,3,19; 3:10; 13:10. Christian = one who has submitted to the eternal gospel. The great sacrifice for us is our readiness to die for Him!⁴
- i) 14:14-20 *The reaper and the reaping* – The time of judgment came with the death and resurrection of the Lamb. The final harvest is the ultimate goal of God’s salvation. God the Father calls Christ the reaper, seated on the cloud, to reap. Christ does this and another angel gathers in the harvest. Another angel gathers the grapes from the altar – recall 6:10; 8:3-5 where the saints’ prayers were gathered and judgment was triggered. All who have not been forgiven and freed by God will be swept into the winepress. Yes, figurative; but yes also, very real indeed. Satan is looking for those who worship him via emperor worship. God alone is our goal.

15-16 *Destruction* – The last of the numbered sequences now shows the destruction of this present physical world. This is necessary prior to the coming of the new heavens and the new earth.

- a) 15:1-8 *Prelude to the end* – These are the seven last plagues. The sea of glass and fire is the sign of divine judgment, but God's faithful people are safe and secure. Satan had used Imperial Cult, the worship of images/statues of emperors and his own real identity as 666, a man pretending to be God but unmasked. That is the world culture forcing Christians to bow the knee before it. The challenge to Christians, both then and now, is to 'overcome' ie. remain loyal to Jesus despite the cost and the pain of such obedience. That is the meaning of *real triumph*. The song is that of Moses – the leader of God's people under the Old Covenant – and of Christ – the leader of God's people under the New. The unrepentant however remain in hard resistance against the Godhead (16:9,10). One of the four living creatures in the heavenly temple gave to seven angels seven bowls filled with God's wrath (15:7). These are the seven last plagues cf. 15:1.
- b) 16:1-12 *The first six plagues* – Like Rev 8, the first four scenes impact the physical environment on earth – earth, sea, rivers, sun. Scenes 5-6 affect humankind. These final plagues find strong parallels in Gen 1 and Exodus 7-11. Plague 1 – Poured out on those who worship and belong to the beast (16:2). Plagues 2 and 3 – Sea and rivers that turn to 'blood' (16:3-4). This is divine justice (16:5-7), for the people of the persecuting beast had shed the blood of saints and prophets! Plague 4 – The sun was given power to burn people (16:8-9). Plague 5 – Darkness comes onto all rule and government that is against God and tries to replace Him (16:10). This fails to produce repentance, but the time has not yet come for the nations to worship God (cf 15:4). Plague 6 – River Euphrates dries up (16:12), opening the way for invaders from the East, including the fear of a resurrected Emperor Nero thought to be coming to recapture Rome!
- c) 16:13-16 *Interlude: the evil spirits and Armageddon* – Three evil spirits come from the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (=the beast from the earth) and do apparently genuine miracles. The various kings are deceived to gather for battle, convinced they will win! Humankind is destroyed here by *Apollyon*, the destroyer, in this plague 6. John gives comfort in 16:15 that Christians have nothing to fear in all this.
- d) 16:17-21 *Plague seven: the destruction of the air* – God declares His work of judgment 'is done' (perfect Tense), as Christ said that His work of redemption 'it is finished' (John 19:30 – perfect tense – valid always). We *must preach the Word of the gospel while there is still time for repentance*! Nations come and go. Why?...

“Earthly rulers are corrupted by power and deify the power by which they are corrupted” (1989:131). They fail to accept that Christ has conquered and that He will reign forever and ever.

17-20 *The End of Evil* – People believe that a new world will only be achieved by overcoming greed, ignorance and poverty. Christians see evil in humans as the key demonic issue to be dealt with. Evil will not be removed by revolution or by evolution. Rev 17-20 present the divine solution, namely by the defeat of the three enemies of God and the Church – the dragon, beast and false prophet. This great battle has already been won by God who will now finally dispose of evil. 17:1 – 19:8 treats Fall of Babylon, while 19:11-21 capture of beast + false prophet.

- a) Rev 17 *The woman and the beast* – The woman is the prostitute ie. Rome and its extensive empire. This is the first supra-evil power to be defeated (17:1,3,15,18). Rome seduces rulers to trade with her, regardless of her own poor and needy. She demands total obedience to Roman emperor and cult. The kings here are probably proconsular governors who served for only one year. Emperor and governors derive their authority from the Dragon (13:2,7; 17:13-14). Barnett thinks as follows – ‘five fallen’ = Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, Nero; ‘one who is’ = Vespasian (AD 69-79); ‘the other is not yet come but must stay a little while’ = Titus (Emperor AD 79-81); ‘beast who was and now is not’ = 8th king Domitian (AD 81-96); ‘belongs to the 7 and is going to destruction’ = as Nero ‘re-incarnate’. John shows Nero/Domitian as a parody of Christ Himself.
- b) Rev 18 *The fall of Babylon* – The ‘woman’ was brought down, not by external enemies but by her closest contacts, namely the emperor and local governors. Rome had accrued huge wealth (18:11-13), had corrupted her traders (18:3,9) and had persecuted the saints (18:20,24). Rome is thus ripe for divine judgment. John describes this in great detail. Rome reached its height in the AD 90s and had five good emperors, Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius across AD 96-180. God’s judgment falls on any society that claims the place of God and oppresses Christian believers who worship the creator and refuse to worship as God either the state or its ruler.
- c) Rev 19:1-8 *Hallelujah!* – A repeated pattern is that the crowds in heaven shout the gospel message which includes the truth that God is judging individuals, societies and individuals that take over the place of God. The crowds then respond to this gospel with ‘Hallelujah!’ Those who oppose the name and people of God will be judged. The bride replaces the harlot!

- d) Rev 19:9-10 *The spirit of prophecy* – God’s words of promise to us outweigh our fears. John is warned to worship God alone, not an angel. The testimony of Jesus is the essence or spirit of prophecy (19:10).
- e) Rev 19:11-21 *Capture of the beast and false prophet* – The final battle! Christ’s armies of heaven versus armies of beast and kings of the earth. John sees Christ at the opened heaven – victor, ruler, judge, executioner. Victorious by His death. The only sword in His mouth is the Word of God! His people share this victory of righteousness. Now a bride; now an army! He exercises His rule by the gospel *we proclaim!* There is no battle. Beast – emperor – and false prophet – cultic high priest – are taken and thrown into the fiery lake (19:20). God took His huge power and began to reign in the death and resurrection of Jesus (11:16). No battle; just a Word of God spoken! That’s the key to Christ’s work of creation, redemption, new life.
- f) Rev 20:1-6 *The 1000 years* – Many have believed in a literal view of the 1000 years ie. Christ returns to earth to throw the beast and false prophet into the fiery lake and to put the dragon into prison for 1000 years. After those thousand years of peace, Satan is freed for a brief time of chaos before Christ finally returns to wind up history. This view is classic *pre-millennialism* or dispensationalism and holds the position that Christ will rule over the earth for 1000 years. However, Rev 20:1-6 is the only biblical reference to the thousand years. *Post-millennialism* holds that the thousand years is a period of growing development for the gospel, general improvement of life on earth and large numbers of conversions to Christ, who will return to earth at the end of this long period of time. *A-millennialism* means that the non-literal thousand years is the period between Christ’s resurrection (first resurrection when those who have died by faithful witness will be raised and will reign with Christ – Rev 12:11; 20:4,6) and Christ’s return (second death when Satan is thrown into the lake of fire). During this era, Christ is already reigning with His victorious, resurrected saints in glory, so that when He returns to earth, He will give us the new heavens and new earth. Satan is bound in the sense that he cannot stop sinners coming to Christ during the ‘1000 year’ Gospel Age. The devil is restricted by the faithful witness of Christians. When Christ finally returns – after the Gospel Age - all remaining Christians will be raised and judged. Barnett remains convinced that it is ‘by the redemptive death of Jesus and the ongoing preaching of the cross, that the Devil is defeated and bound’ (1989:148).
- g) Rev 20:7-10 *The final overthrow of the dragon* – Gog is an evil prince from the land of Magog and this evil union, under the briefly-freed devil, then launches a final deception and short attack on the people of God (cf.

16:14,16; 19:19). This is surely just one event. The dragon, beast and false prophet are thus finally defeated at the same time.

- h) Rev 20:11-15 *The Second Death* – Deceased Christians are not dead but alive and reigning with Christ during the ‘thousand years’ between the resurrection and return of Christ. After the thousand years, the dead come to life. Sea, death and Hades yield up the dead who then stand before God. They are judged by what they have done in life (20:12,13). If a person is not found in the Book of Life ie. does not belong to Christ, then the lake of fire will be their end (13:8;17:8; 20:15). Symbolic words but deep reality!

21-22 New Jerusalem –

- a) 21:1-4 *New heaven and a new earth* – The eclipse of this present cosmos has already been noted in Rev 6:12-14; 8:7-12; 16:2-9. Evil has been defeated so here is the time for a new cosmos (Isaiah 65:17-19). John sees New Jerusalem coming down from heaven as a gift from God – the bride of Christ made up of the faithful, enduring souls who by death have been raised with Christ in the first resurrection and have reigned with Him for ‘1000 years’. The community of the Lamb replaces the community of the beast; New Jerusalem replaces Babylon; the Bride of the Lamb replaces the great harlot. In 21:1 John saw; now in 21:3 he hears. God is now with His people – Lev 26:12-13; Ezek. 37:27-28. God is now our temple! This church has been loyal to Jesus, not Caesar and pain/death/suffering is now over, as God comforts His own people.
- b) 21:5-8 *The Gospel Challenge* – God promises to make everything new, to issue trustworthy and true words and to fulfil all that He promises. God says ‘it is done’. He will give fresh life to the weary in the battles against beast and false prophet. He will give the inheritance of the New Jerusalem to all who overcome the opposing forces. He will never desert them. Meanwhile the Second Death will be for lapsed Christians – cowardly, unbelieving, polluted – and for those who only ever belonged to the community of beast and false prophet – murderers, sexually immoral, magic practitioners, idolaters and all liars. Christians must *continue!*
- c) 21:9-21 *Size and splendour of New Jerusalem* – An angel with a bowl of the seven last plagues shows John the bride, the wife of the Lamb – the persecuted church on earth, now secure in the presence of God and Lamb. The angel showed John not the woman, but the New Jerusalem. This city shines with God’s infinite glory, in contrast to Caesar’s faded poverty; this city is huge – London to Athens cubed; this city is built on God’s redemptive acts, number twelve being the sign of saving completeness. Only those obedient to God will be in this city. Old is gone; new is here.

- d) 21:22-22:5 *Worship in the Holy City* – Revelation starts and ends with worship! John repeatedly calls on Christians not to worship the Emperor, state or imperial cult but to worship God and Christ alone and not to be deceived by Satan into worship of humans and into consumption of material wealth. Worship is always to involve the totality of our beings. There is no temple in this new City of God and yet its presence is stated in Rev 3:12; 7:15; 11:19! *Answer:* God and Christ *are the new Temple*. John wrote in his Gospel, in 2:19-21 and 4:23-24, that this temple was Jesus' body. God and the Lamb will give the only light needed in the City of God! There will be those from Gentile nations in this City – Gen. 22:18; Gal 3:8. The City will never be dark and will never be closed. The impure, deceitful, adherents of imperial worship, members of the alternative city, the unrepentant, will not gain admission to the New Jerusalem. Only those with their names in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter! Worship is rooted in the river of the water of life (22:1-2). cf Ezek. 47:1-12; Zech. 14:8. This river flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. Kingship and worship are to be universal, rooted in the temple of the City of God. The images of Paradise in the Garden of Eden and of the fruit-bearing tree of life from Gen. 2 appear here, signifying endless life and healing for the City's people, the end of all pain and suffering of humanity and the absence of the curse (22:3). 'Tree of life' also has reference to the cross of Christ. The life of the City is briefly described in 22:3b-5 and includes servants worship-ping God, seeing His face and reigning eternally in the City of God.
- e) 22:6-21 *The words of this prophecy* – Revelation opened with 1:3,11 'words of the prophecy...written...in a book'. This recurs in 22:7,9,10,18, 19. The words of Revelation are highly important – see 22:6,7,9,10,18-19. John's vital response in all this was *Worship!!* – see 22:8-9. Jesus says three times 'I am coming soon' (22:7,10-12, 20). Will John's readers respond by steadfastly staying in the community of Christ or will they slide away under the influence and life-style of the dragon, beast and false prophet (22:15). There are only two final destinies. Spirit and Church cry 'Come' to their Lord. They ask the readers/ hearers of the message 'Come'. Jesus' response to them is, 'I am coming soon'. The readers respond 'Amen, come Lord Jesus'. The great end-time battle lies in the past, not in the future. Christ has conquered guilt and death by His dying and rising. God's Kingdom is thus present reality by a slain Lamb!!

8 Overview of Revelation 6-16: that ‘Tricky Middle’!

The initial impact of Revelation on its first hearers was one of presenting a total picture. Thus, the repetitions, delays and changes of key make up the totality of the effect, such that the proportions of the whole are actually more important than the individual scenes. Thus, for example, the visions of destruction are bracketed by the umbrella vision of God the Creator and Redeemer in Rev 4-5 who makes all things new in Rev 21-22. This new creation is God’s work, but it is strongly linked to the faithfulness and involvement of God’s people here and now, especially seen by Christ’s message to the churches in Rev 1-3 and 22:6-21. The broad sweep of Revelation is vital to grasp, so we need to be cautious of overkill and anxiety, as we try to handle all the tiny details of the biblical text. The original hearers of Revelation would not have had the luxury of time to reflect on all the details. The impact was visual, pictorial, musical rather than cognitive! Having said that, we do need to pay attention to detail, with its huge richness of cross-references, allusions and symbols. Images and their meanings tend frequently to merge and mix, challenging our 21st Century AD differences of mindsets and thinking, when compared with those of the ancient world.. The earthly story and reality of Revelation can only be truly grasped by our insight into what is happening continually in the heavenly realm, as revealed by John’s revelation. GB Caird captured something of this in his reference to Rev 4 and its implications for the key theme of Faithful Witness –

“John knows that to ordinary mortals the presence of God becomes real not through direct vision, even in the mind’s eye, but through the impact of those to whom God is the supreme reality. So he allows his readers to look on the Eternal Light through the mirror of the worshipping host of heaven”. GB Caird (1966:63)

The seven seals – 6:1 – 8:1

The first unsealing, by itself, suggests that God’s gospel cause is progressing well, but then we hit war, famine, plague and death, though achieving only partial, not total, destruction. The souls of the martyrs ask how much longer before they are avenged. Only in the 6th unsealing do we see what they are looking for. The 7th would surely give the finale of the New Age, but there is a delay while God’s servants are sealed against supernatural attack and the unsealing seems to lead into a further 7-fold series of disasters. As in the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia, Rev 6-7 encourage patient endurance from Christians in the face of apparent triumph of God’s enemies. Rev 6 does show the effect of Christ’s victory and dominance, while Rev 7 gives assurance of protection, of belonging to God and of final glory.

Thus, Rev 4-7 is all about assurance, namely that God's people need to know they possess an unassailable status and ultimate security as God's people! The dangers/pains we face are pre-ordained, part of the out-working of Christ's victory in which we share! As John Sweet says, "carnage and chaos are within the divine plan and lead through into the fulfilment of humanity's destiny in final union with God

The seven trumpets – 8:2 – 11:19/14:20

The Seals section relates to the 'beginning of birth-pangs' (Matt 24:8), dealing with the themes of assurance and endurance from 2nd and 6th letters of Rev 2-3. The Trumpets section climaxes in Satan's expulsion from heaven and his setting up the kingdom of the beast on earth (Rev 13) – the 'third woe' (12:12) that follows the 7th trumpet blast (11:14f). This probably relates to the 'desolating sacrilege', the consequent 'tribulation' and the 'false Christs and false prophets' (Matt 24:15-24) of the Lord's Apocalypse; and the themes of the third letter, to Pergamum, are evident: the throne of Satan (13:1-8), Balak and Balaam, false king and false prophet (13:1ff; 13:11ff) and the danger of compromise with idolatry (13:14-18).

There is a long process to this climax in the first six trumpet blasts. They announce the self-destruction of idolatry. They function like the Egyptian plagues and result in hardening of hearts (9:20f). As in the Seals, the last three, known as the three woes (8:13; 9:12; 11:14) differ in weight from the first four and the 6th is followed by an interlude (10:1-11:13). This picks up the theme of the scroll, now open, from Rev 5 and produces the work of the two witnesses – witness is the key positive theme of the 3rd letter (2:13), taken up in the 7th (3:14). The penitence in which it finishes (11:13) is in contrast to the hardening effect of the demonic plagues.

In the OT, Pharaoh's hardening after the death of the first-born led to a deliverance like a new birth at the Red Sea, but Israel's wilderness travel was under threat from golden calf worship and seductions of Balaam and Balak. Likewise, the death warned by the 6th trumpet is followed in Rev 12 by a new exodus, that is then threatened in Rev 13 by the worship of the beast and the seductions of the false prophet.

Finally, just as in Rev 7 we are given anticipatory views beyond the great tribulation, so, after the final woe, which corresponds to it, Rev 14 celebrates the triumph of the Lamb and His disciples, the fate of the beast's city and worshippers, and the final coming of the Son of Man (cf Matt 24:27).

Rev 8-9

The journey is not yet over. As Seal 7 is opened, there is half an hour of silence in heaven, followed by the heavenly incense procedure, plus 7 angels blowing trumpets. Like the unsealings, the trumpets bring disasters for earth. The seals were *natural but the trumpet blasts are supernatural, modelled on Egypt's ten plagues, leading to the Exodus*. Trumpets 1-4 form a group and their symbolism suggests disasters, earth scorching and water poisoning, that indicate the backfiring/ payback of human arrogance and idolatry upon themselves and their world. Trumpets 5-7 each has the scream 'Woe!' from the flying eagle.

Woes 1 and 2 at Trumpet blasts 5 and 6 raise the level of supernatural horror by demonic locusts and horse cavalry from Euphrates – considered to be a dangerous place for OT Jews and for the eastern areas of Roman Empire – but even though people refuse to repent of idolatry and immorality, nevertheless, the end is delayed!

Rev 10-11

A Closer Look at the Interlude – Putting 10-11 under the Microscope!

The 6th Trumpet brings us to the end of a cul-de-sac or blockage! As in Egypt, Pharaoh's heart is still hardened and a breakthrough is necessary. But, before the 'exodus' of Rev 12, comes an interlude – stretching from 10:1 to 11:13 between Trumpet 6 and Trumpet 7 – that is tied in with the 2nd woe by 11:14. The section starting 11:14 *continues from* 9:21. The second woe is past (9:13-21); the third woe is coming. The repentance of Rev 11:13 must therefore balance the hardness of 9:20f. The theme appears to be the *Gospel* (Rev 10) and the *Church's Witness to that Gospel* (Rev 11), over against the visitations of God's wrath on idolatry. The parallel delay between the 6th and 7th unsealings, when the servants of God were sealed (Rev 7:3ff), strongly suggests that the *Bearing of Witness* is what these servants were sealed for! Rev 8 and 9 have told us what they were sealed against. Witness and idolatry are the key themes of the letter to the Pergamum church. Rev 10 now gives us vital direction through the rest of the Book of Revelation! How?

John is told to prophesy about the ongoing witness of believers that will trigger *suffering* for them, and about the future of those who react against their witness. The vision concerns the relationship between the godly and the ungodly across the Church Age that climaxes in the final judgment. At that point, John completes the Trumpet Vision with the final judgment, ie Rev 10-11 connects the two halves of Revelation. This interlude does not intervene *chronologically* between Trumpets 6 and 7 but provides an extra interpretation of the same part of the Church Age that is covered by Trumpets 1-6. In Rev 7 Christian believers are sealed against the spiritual harm of the six Trumpet judgments. The ungodly are judged through the Trumpets 1-6 era *because* they have persecuted Christians. God has done this

judging *because* He is answering Christian prayers for vindication and for righteous justice in their suffering, *see* 6:9-11; 8:3-5; 9:13-21. The texts 10:6b-7 and 11:14 show that God will not be slow to wind up history (11:11-13,18), once the sum total of Christian pain and suffering has reached its appointed limits (6:10;11:7a) and once the level of utter refusal to repent has reached its maximum. Ultimately God's witnessing community is finally and fully vindicated. God's true and faithful church is raised, restored and renewed. The final judgment of the ungodly is recorded in 6:12; 11:13; 16:18.

There are surely real and huge challenges in this teaching for us today in the 21st century - a) the need for readiness to suffer in our own lives, as faithful witnesses to Christ. b) the need to depend absolutely on God's Spirit in our own ministries of teaching, preaching and living out this Gospel of Christ. The two surely cannot be separated. Suffering demands and produces complete dependence on Christ. GK Beale wrote that "As we wage spiritual warfare in the wilderness, so God will finally judge the ungodly."

Before the 7th trumpet blast and the 3rd Woe (Rev 11:12), there are a number of symbolic scenes. In Rev 10:1ff, an angel descends from heaven and gives a scroll to John to eat (like Ezekiel). He is then to prophesy (like Jeremiah) about many nations and peoples. The scroll, like the gospel itself, is sweet in the mouth, but when it is preached out and lived out, it will have painful consequences in a spiritually and physically hostile and ungrateful world. This image of the scroll is absorbed into the Two Witnesses in Rev 11 who prophesy for 3½ years (like Daniel's time of violence and suffering for God's people in Israel before their final vindication). A prelude to this activity is an acted parable when John is told to measure the temple and its worshippers. This probably refers to the spiritual protection for the people of God in its witness-bearing, in the face of 'outer court' rejection and defeat. The Two Witnesses are a torment to the earth-dwellers and are eventually killed by the beast who rises from the abyss. Dead bodies lie in many cities but like Christ's body, they are raised up and ascend to heaven. An earthquake shatters the city and survivors give glory to God. The angel blows the 7th trumpet and hymns rejoice in God's/Christ's reign, signifying also the destruction of the earth-destroyers.

By now, we can see the strength of Beale's, and other scholars' argument, that "Again the order of visions is chronological in John's descriptions but that is not to say that their actualisation in the order of events is historically chronological."

Let's continue and complete our closer look at the interlude portion, this time focusing around the somewhat controversial third woe towards the end of Rev 11. It is recorded in 10:7 that when the 7th Trumpet was sounded, God's plan for

history's completion is complete. Rev 11:1-13 throws light on the mysterious and sobering truth that Christian people are sealed to offer faithful witness to the gospel, but that such divine sealing does not guarantee protection against pain, grief or suffering! A number of scholars hold the view that 11:15-19 is probably the third woe, based on the claim of 8:13 that the last three woes are the same respectively as the last three trumpets. Rev 11:15-19 treats in song the final judgment but also the coming to earth of the eternal kingdom of God and His Christ.

Thus Rev 11:15 heralds the third vision of woe, which is the 7th trumpet – the Kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our God and His Christ. All the enemies of the Kingdom have been defeated, so God takes back His rule, in place of the Satanic rule He has permitted in His cosmos. The world systems that persecuted the church have been overturned and replaced. *This is systematically and progressively revealed through Revelation Chapters 17-22.* It fulfils Daniel 7 and shows the final judgment and rule by Christ and the saints. Rev 11:16-17 has the 24 elders celebrating God's completion of His Kingdom (11:18). Very interestingly and significantly, Rev 11:17 no longer includes the term "who is to come", because for John, this reality is still future but for the heavenly worshippers, it has already been fulfilled. The rule of God and final judgment *are the content of this 7th trumpet!* In fact, 11:18 is actually a step *before* the events of 11:15-17. Evil nations – both leaders and people – are set against God/Christ/Church and have been destroying 'the earth' ie God's people and God's land. God thus judges dead unbelievers. This parallels the judgment of Babylon (Rev 6:9-11; 18:24-19:5).

Again we are seeing with Beale how "The visions of Revelation describe the same set of events from different perspectives, rather than presenting a chronological listing of events" (2015:238). God has vindicated His persecuted people by judging their persecutors and Rev 11:3; 19:10; 22:12 give a snapshot into the same victorious Church. In Rev 11:19 God's temple in heaven is opened and there is thunder, lightning etc. ie signs of final judgment (Rev 4:5; 8:5; 16:18). Rev 11:19 involves judgment and reward at the Last Day. Our final reward will be the revelation of God's glory, as He takes up eternal reign over ourselves, His Church and His creation.

Rev 12-13

But the end is not yet! The 3rd Woe has still got to come and it is introduced by the heavenly sign of the pregnant woman, with the dragon waiting to devour the Christ-child. But the Christ who will rule the earth is caught up to God's throne in His exaltation. The woman flees into the wilderness for 3½ years or 42 months. The woman is an amalgam of *Eve*, mother of all living, *Israel*, Mother of Messiah /Christ, *Mary*, mother of Jesus, *Church*, mother of Christians. This refers to the

birth and death of Jesus which triggered the events leading to the 'third Woe'. Revelation has elements of past, present and future time dimensions.

Now there is war in heaven. Michael and his angels drive out the dragon and his angels, and the dragon of Gen. 3 (Satan or the Devil) is thrown down to earth. There is rejoicing in heaven where his accusations have been quietened by Christ's shed blood, but Woe to the earth – the third Woe, the descent of the devil who calls out from the sea (abyss) a beast which mirrors his attributes as the Son mirrors the Father's, and which parodies the Son's death and resurrection as the devil parodies God. This is the Antichrist who is opposed to Christ and claims to be Christ, as Satan claims to be God. This beast is a composite of the 4 beasts in Daniel 7 that represents world empires and is to make war on the woman's seed or offspring, fulfilling God's word in Gen 3:15.

Another beast (the 3rd person of the Satanic trinity that counterfeits the powers of the Holy Spirit) taught the whole world to accept the first beast's claims. All who refuse to worship its image or be branded with its mark are destroyed. This second beast may represent the imperial priesthood which promoted the Imperial Cult in Asia. The first beast is identified by the number of its name, 666, likely to have been Emperor Nero as personification of the Roman Empire as blasphemous and totalitarian in power, yet claiming divinity and wiping out all opposition. The world saw this Roman empire as its greatest blessing, but it is actually the third Woe, the final disaster.

The triumph of the Gospel – 14:1-20

The first two woes are in Rev 10:1 – 11:13. Rev 13 treated the unholy alliance of Church and World. Rev 14 looks back over the Trumpets section and looks forward to the Bowls section. In contrast to Rev 13, John sees in 14:1-5 the true Lamb and His followers. This is reflected on earth in a shift from the focus of the Pergamum letter to that of the Thyatira letter. In Rev 14:6-13, after the third woe – *the great deception* – comes *the true gospel*. The gospel perspective introduces the final plague of Rev 15:3f in the text of Rev 14:13-20. After the picture of 'sacrilege' and 'tribulation' comes the picture of Christ on a cloud, collecting the vindication of the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:11-13) and outlining the centre-piece of the final section, which is 19:11-21.

The Trumpet Series is completed by more symbolic scenes – the Lamb with his 144,000, with *His* name, not the beast's, on their forehead, stands on Mount Zion; in mid-heaven, another angel, who screamed 'Woe', now declares an eternal gospel; other angels declare the fall of Babylon, the symbol of arrogance and hate to God's people, and declare also the eternal pain of beast-worshippers; One like

a son of man appears and triggers the harvesting of the earth and the trampling in the wine of God's wrath.

Again, this seems like the end, but no, another series of disasters is going to come (the Bowls). Thus, the Trumpet Section of Rev 8-14 reveals a sort of counterbalance – human idolatry and arrogance lead to disasters that simply harden people in their idolatry and lead on to eternal suffering. Christian witness to God brings humanity temporal suffering, but leads to repentance! God's Son and his saints defeat Satan in heaven: Satan's beasts defeat the Son and his saints on earth. Christians are called to take sides and decide between earthly and heavenly salvation (13:9f, 14:12f): the call of God on our lives is to *patient endurance and faithful witness all the days of our earthly life*.

The seven bowls/plagues – 15:1 – 16:21/22:5

The final section – *the Bowls* – covers much of the same ground, but is not simply a more specific recapitulation. There is a new focus - the final End of Satan's work, now viewed as embodied in the harlot, Babylon, and the final triumph of God's work, embodied in the *Bride*, New Jerusalem – themes already mentioned in the 4th and 7th letters. The Lord's Apocalypse is still in view – the coming of the Son of Man, the victorious, conquering Bridegroom, is the very centre of the picture (19:11ff.).

Rev 15-16 Now, another series of angels carry bowls full of the final plagues of God's wrath and pour out another series of disasters, echoing Egypt's plagues. They seem like the Trumpet plagues that harden people in their blasphemy, but actually these bowl plagues are aimed specifically against the beast's worshippers, its throne and its city, Babylon, which is finally made to drain the cup of God's wrath. Her nature as a city and its destruction are laid out in the extensive details of Rev 17 – 18.

This final section is dominated by the 'seven last plagues'. Their key target is the beast's city (16:19-19:5) but a bowl-angel reveals to John the judgment of the harlot (17:1ff) and the descent of the Bride (21:9ff). In-between is the coming of the Bridegroom or Son of man (19:11ff), the culmination of John's revelations. *His main concern is the Church*. He presents the 'gathering of the elect' as the adorning of the Bride (19:8; 21:9ff) and *prefaces that coming with the opposite theme of the collapsing of the Harlot* (17-18). Rev 14 has hinted that the elect, by the mysteries of first fruits (14:4) and wine press (14:20) eventually include the nations seduced by the harlot. This Book of Revelation is surely a challenge to the church to think *locally* eg our own church; *nationally* eg UK; *globally* eg empires and continents; but also *cosmically*, of the interaction between earth and heaven.

16:1-9 *The First Four Bowls Of Wrath* These are closely modeled on the first four Trumpet plagues (Rev 8:7-12). These bowls are set into action from the temple and they fall on earth, sea, rivers and sun. They constitute the punishment of idolatry, stated symbolically in 8:8-11, but stated directly in 16:2. They are actually more than a recapitulation –

a) The Trumpets issued warning by hitting a third of the earth: here the effect is total!

b) The evil that recoils on the idolatrous is centred on the murder of God's spokespersons that their idolatry involves (Rev 16:5-7).

c) The Trumpets section dealt with the great 'sacrilege' and 'tribulation' in the Lord's Apocalypse – the beast killed those saints who refused to worship its image and take its mark (Rev 13:15-17). The Bowls section deals with the vindication of the Son of Man and His chosen people, which involves the punishment of the beast's followers (the first four bowls), and the destruction of its kingdom and city (the last three bowls).

Rev 17-18 – One of the 7 bowl-angels reveals 'Babylon' to John as the *great harlot, a parody of the glorious woman of Rev 12, and sitting on the 7-headed beast, that represent the series of 7 Emperors*. She bears a cup to infect earth-dwellers with the wine of her adultery and she herself is drunk on the blood of the Christian martyrs killed by Nero in AD 65. The beast turns on the harlot in the person of one of the seven, most likely Nero who was thought by many folk to ascend from the abyss ie return from the dead with armies from the east to punish Rome which had turned against him.

Rev 18 recounts Rome's (the harlot's) destruction, drawn from Ezekiel's lament over Tyre. (City of Jezebel, the harlot, in Rev 2:18-29 Thyatira letter).

Thus, the section Rev 13-18 seems to be a hatred statement against Roman Empire and Roman Emperors, but it also contains strong warnings to Christians to wake up the churches that are sliding into conformity with the world, *at the expense of their witness to that world* (13:9f,18; 14:12f; 16:15; 17:9; 18:4). The churches need to see the true nature and destiny of this world underneath its apparent power and attractiveness. The churches need to realise the dangers and deadliness of cowardliness, comfort, complacency and compromise with this world and its values. Witness to the truth has real and lasting value, in spite of its apparent stupidity and folly.

Conclusion

Rev 2:26-28 is very important indeed – those who conquer and keep Christ's works until the end, will receive from Him 'power over the nations' and they will rule them with a rod of iron even as Christ received power from His Father. This is a promise of authority of rule in the present order, not by compromise with the

nations, but by faithful witness and sometimes by death (see 11:3-13), reproducing Christ's life and authority. Note that in the Pergamum letter and the 'Trumpets' section, the witness is primarily verbal; here it is moral – fornication is named before idolatry and the 'conqueror' is the one who keeps Christ's works to the end. In the Bowls section, the Bride – the City of Light that draws in the nations – is clothed with the righteous deeds of the saints (19:8). John's concern with Christian behaviour is deeply evangelistic! The 'rod of iron' may well be an expression of God's grace through the witness of Christ and His church – shepherd's crook to the responders but iron bar to the rejecters.

According to Bauckham, the seals and scrolls have massive significance that has been missed by many commentators. The 7 judgments that attend the seal openings and the 7 trumpet blasts that are attached to the opening of the 7th final seal are *not* the content of the scroll. The opened scroll (Rev 5) now reappears in 10:2,8-10. There is a major interpretative interlude that lasts from Rev 10:1 to 11:13. We have to wait for this crucial interlude to discover the real secret of God's purpose for His Church in relation to God's kingdom on earth. Thus, the actual key revelation from heaven does not appear until Rev 10. Everything before this is preparatory, but not the actual revelation that God is wanting to give in Rev 10-11. All judgments up till the 6th trumpet are limited warning judgments designed to bring humanity to repentance, but just before the interlude, 9:20-21 records the failure of people to repent. *Judgments alone do not secure repentance and faith.* The scroll eaten by John is sweet in the mouth but bitter in his stomach. In Rev 5:7 Christ the Lamb takes the scroll from God's Hand and opens it in 6:1-12; 8:1. It is then taken from heaven to earth by an angel (10:1-2) who gives it to John to eat. See also Rev 1:1. The judgments affecting a quarter of the earth in Rev 6 and a third of the earth in Rev 8 and 9 are not extended to a half of the earth. The 7th trumpet now announces only the *final judgment* consisting of the 7 bowls in 15:1. They are total, not limited, judgments. The 7 thunders will not happen and remain sealed (10:4). God reveals His secret plan of the content of the scroll to achieve what judgments alone have failed to achieve!

The two inclusions of a *delay* by John in Rev 7:1-17 and 10:1 – 11:13 are each linked to the victorious Lamb in Rev 5. HOW? The vision of the Lamb's followers in 7:4-14 is deliberately paralleled to that of the victorious Lamb in 5:5-14. Secondly the 'mighty angel' of 5:2 is compared with 'another mighty angel' in 10:1. The open scroll he holds in 10:2 must link with the sealed scroll in 5:2. John's eating of the scroll in Rev 10:8-10 connects with Ezek. 3:1-2 and also with Rev 5:1. *Bauckham believes that these two scrolls are actually one and the same scroll.* If Bauckham is correct, then this is of massive significance for our interpretation of the text. Rev 11:1-13 is vital and central concerning the church's witness to the

nations intervening before the final judgment, the 7th trumpet, with which God's Kingdom finally comes in 11:15-19. Rev 12-15 deals with the Church's victorious warfare with the evil powers, which then extends into the final judgment/results in Rev 15-22. The scroll opened by the Lamb by opening the 7 seals (6:1,3,5,7,9,12; 8:1) is brought down from heaven by the angel for John to eat, so he can reveal its contents as prophecy (10:11). He does this initially in 11:1-13, but more fully in Rev 12 onwards.

These three chapters – Rev 10,11,12 – tell us for the first time the mystery of God which is no less than the very heart of the gospel, namely, the life, death, resurrection, ascension and rule of Christ, together with the mandate for our faithful, verbal and visible witness to these truths of the gospel and to the truth and righteousness of Christ, regardless of personal cost to ourselves. This is surely the key Revelation message and application from God Himself for His entire global Church today. The theme of Revelation's hearers and readers as *conquerors* is absolutely vital. God's plan for the Rev 2-3 churches – and indeed for all churches – is *to enable the readers to take part in the spiritual warfare that will ultimately set up God's universal kingdom, against all hostile human and supernatural opposition.*

Finally, the 6th seal reveals that the whole church's evangelism will trigger the suffering that we all must absorb in spiritual warfare, as Christ's rule clashes with forces like nationalism, racism, arrogance, lust and violence in this hostile world. Rev 6:12 shows how God takes His Hands off the cosmos, which implodes and collapses. God finally allows the world to control the cosmos and the result is utter chaos and disintegration. 6:17, according to Darrell Johnson, actually means that *"The final end is not God hurling meteors or thunder but simply handing the cosmos over to humanity."* Only those with the seal of God's Spirit will be able to stand finally and fully, right through to the End – see Rev 7.

PS. If we are to ask ourselves the question, *When will all this come to pass?*, we surely need to recall and ponder the teachings of Mark's Gospel Chapter 13, confirmed in a number of places in Revelation and indeed in other portions of the New Testament. For example, Jesus Himself does not know the timing of His Return – only the Father knows; the gospel must be preached to all nations; many false prophets will appear to confuse and deceive people; the full number of martyrs must be completed; the final number of hardened unbelievers will need to be reached; Christ's final Return will be sudden and unexpected, requiring all of our constant alertness and our readiness. This keeps us on our 'spiritual toes' and will test the reality of those three precious commodities – our patience, our perseverance and our faithfulness – as we await the full and final consummation of the Kingdom in the new heaven and new earth.

9 Applying Revelation in Today's World

Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 1993, pp. 144-164,
Summarised

‘Revelation’ as Christian Prophecy

Revelation is the only work of Christian prophecy to enter the canon. It sees itself as the culmination of the entire biblical prophetic tradition, in continuity with the OT. The ‘Shepherd of Hermas’ is also early Christian prophecy but ignored the OT almost completely and failed to enter the canon. John is strongly focussed on the OT in an age in which God’s eschatological purpose has started its fulfilment. He draws heavily on the OT to show how those threads are to be fulfilled. John sees the unity of OT prophecy in its hope for the coming of the divine universal kingdom on earth. That hope is rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the resultant transformation of the people of God into a people made up of all nations. John reads the OT in light of Jesus and His church but conversely, he interprets Jesus and His church by means of OT prophecy. This leads him to be convinced that this universal kingdom *will come* through Jesus.

His fresh prophetic revelation is that the church is called to take part in Jesus’ victory over evil *through faithful witness to the truth, whatever the cost*. Truth will defeat lies and the nations will thus be won to worship of the one true God. Jesus will thus fulfil God’s promises and usher in the prophesied universal kingdom of God. The vision of the future drawn from the prophetic tradition thus gets new life. Small struggling groups of Christians will take on the might of the Roman Empire and will win the nations to God by their faithful witness to his truth. More than any other biblical book, Revelation gathers up the whole biblical tradition as it points to the eschatological future! Revelation reveals the future, roots it in the Christ-event and prepares us to live out this eschatological future.

In spite of all this, Revelation had some problems of acceptance into the canon in the early church and in the 16th Century, as well as in more recent times. The acid test over the centuries is the use of Scripture as Scripture in terms of its ability to convey the Word of God to the church in various contexts. Revelation has consistently inspired the Church’s vision of God. It has been used by martyrs and visionaries to save the church from mediocrity and has been a means of critiquing both church and state. Some critics of Revelation however criticise the idea of Revelation’s continuity with the OT. Bultmann called it ‘weakly Christianised Judaism’. This was part of a 19th and early 20th century tendency from some scholars to dent the Jewish origins of Christianity. In it’s becoming a universal religion, Christianity did develop its continuity with the Jewish religious tradition. The prophecy in Revelation is based on the continuity between the two testaments.

Biblical prophecy is much more than prediction.

The prophetic sense of Revelation has three major and intertwined elements –

1. **Discernment** – This involves discernment of the contemporary situation by prophetic insight into God's nature and purpose. Revelation is concerned with exposing truth both in the church and in the world and stressing how things look from God's heavenly vantage point. Thus the deceitfulness of Roman power is revealed to the churches as they are called to be witnesses to the truth of God.
2. **Prediction** – Present *and* future – 1:19; cf. 4:1; 1:1. This is basically the coming of God's Kingdom in relation to, and conditioned by, the contemporary situation.
3. **Response** – This is required from the readers and listeners in terms of a needed response to the predicted divine future and what God's coming kingdom means here and now for the contemporary world. God thus gives human freedom to be a part – or not – of God's Kingdom purposes. Thus Nineveh was spared *because* that city repented.

God's Kingdom must come and eschatological renewal must happen but God allows freedom in outworking of this plan that all nations will worship the true God. However, there is the threat of divine judgment on this world over its final unwillingness to accept God's rule.

Revelation is not a strict chronological history either of the whole of church history from 1st Century to present day ('historicist' tradition) *or* of the final few years before the *parousia* ('futurist' tradition). What is certainly predicted is that from the first century AD to the final *parousia*, there will be a *conflict* between the church and the beast in which the church will persevere in its witness to the truth of God. The dark powers will seek to undermine divine truth and church witness; *but* even in martyrdom, the church will hold to the life-changing power of God's truth for the nations. This 3½ years of final demonic activity before the End (12:12) will see huge demonic attack on the church. Christ will then come and assemble the redeemed, silencing all opposition to His rule! Symbolic language is used by John to show this happening. The church *must persevere in its witness* and John's images indicate the nature and meaning of this battle, *not its chronology*! John provides the *heavenly perspective* that is needed to sustain the Church in its costly witness. In the first two centuries, the Church *DID* become a sizeable minority and persecution tended to be local and occasional, but in the third century, much more serious persecution developed as the Church was increasingly seen as a threat to imperial ideology and power.

Martyrdom increased in frequency and John's Revelation gave the Church its vision to persevere whatever the cost – see early martyrdom allusions to Rev.14:4 and 1:5; 3:14 in 5.1.10 and 5.2.3 respectively in Letter to the Churches of Lyons and Vienne (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.1-5.4.3). Even in the Christianised Empire, the beast appears in a Christian disguise – not surprising since the beast and Babylon were already active in the Seven Churches of Revelation. The newly 'Christian' Empire was clearly not the eschatological kingdom and it remains true that the beast rules the nations (13:7-8) and the nations have drunk Babylon's wine (14:8; 18:3, cf. 23-34; cf. 17:18). John's prophecy was thus amazingly fulfilled but not by the final arrival of the kingdom. *Biblical prophecy* addressed contemporary situations *and at the same time* pointed those people, plus later readers, and ourselves to the future purposes of God. *We must see revelation initially in its first century context but not exclude its ongoing relevance beyond.*

How is biblical prophecy of ongoing relevance?

1. God's purposes in history were seen as *consistent*. Thus, His acts of salvation and judgment in the past, like the Exodus, could be seen as models and reinterpreted signs for what God planned for the future. Thus, John was able to echo the OT prophecies of the doom of Babylon and Tyre in past centuries by applying them to his own prophecy of the fall of Babylon in a different era. He viewed Rome as successor to Tyre in its economic empire and as successor to Babylon in its political oppression. Rome was more evil than these two and thus merited even heavier judgment from God. We are *NOT* saying that when Jeremiah referred to Babylon, he really meant Rome but we *ARE* saying that prophetic oracles, like those of John, validly go beyond their original reference and context.
2. Prophetic promise often exceeded fulfilment. Thus, the restoration of Israel after the exile in Babylon did not completely match the terms in which the great exilic prophets had foreseen it. Their prophecies were vindicated but also continued to produce hope that a much greater salvation would accrue when God would finally be worshipped by Israel and all nations! This has inspired *apocalyptic eschatology* such that for example, the exilic prophets' visions of a rebuilt Jerusalem and Temple are far exceeded in the vision of the New Jerusalem in John's Revelation. Thus Isaiah could see the coming judgment of Israel though Assyria but this points for him to the even greater peace and justice of the Christ event. These 'partial' fulfilments of prophecy in the midst of uncertain and ambiguous history were not seen as failures or falsities, but rather as precursors and triggers of hope for the final coming of the eschatological kingdom itself at the End of the Age.

Revelation as Re-envisioner of Biblical Prophecy

There is a sense in which Revelation climaxes all biblical prophecy and as such it is able to draw together elements of biblical prophecy that had already well surpassed their own original contexts and as such were energising and encouraging the further and future hopes of God's people. Thus Revelation is relevant to its original contexts of composition *and yet* it also transcends those contexts and points to future fulfilment, using universal and eschatological language. Thus the church is drawn from every nation (5:9) and is a multitude (7:9), going out in witness to all nations (14:6) and experiencing struggle with the beast along with the whole world (3:10). The beast has universal authority and attracts the worship of all the world (13:7-8). The second beast controls all economic life (13:12-17) but more so than it could really and actually achieve in the first century. The dragon, beast and false prophet gather the kings of the whole world for Armageddon (16:14-16). Babylon deceives all nations (14:8;18:3,23) and is guilty of all blood shed on earth (18:24). All this must be deliberate hyperbole, going beyond historical reality or possibility. John and his readers face an imminent future, but John's universal kingdom vision is superimposed on top of that.

John is not prophesying a completely anti-Christian and universal state centuries later than the Roman Empire, but uses a kind of 'as though' description – not an actual literal or measurable – reality which takes the form of hyperbole in order to portray the issues that are at stake in the ongoing conflict between church and Empire. In other words, the beast as Roman Empire *never actually held universal power* but it is what the beast represents in multitudes of historical situations that challenges the control of God's world until that final eschatological kingdom arrives. Thus, the street of the great city where witnesses to the truth lie dead, victims of the beast, can be located in any city in any century where martyrs have died for their witness. These hyperbolic symbols thus stretch right to the *parousia*. For example, the focus is on the issues at stake, sometimes bypassing mere historical details, so that Babylon is built on 7 hills (17:9) and trades in recognisable goods in first century Rome (18:11-13), but their total is small enough to make re-application of the image quite feasible in other contexts in time and space! *Any society that prioritises its own economic prosperity at the expense of others must come under Babylon's condemnation.*

These are examples of the pattern established by John's Revelation –

Prediction → Fulfilment → Eschatological Excess Through Hyperbole.
Imminence And Delay

Problem: John's prophecy expects what will happen *soon* (1:1: cf. 1:3; 22:10: 'the time is near'). The *parousia* is expected soon (22:7,12,20; cf. 2:16; 3:11). The NT as a whole has a strong eschatological expectation. *However*, there is also a sense of eschatological *delay* in Revelation. Thus, the martyrs cry "How Long?" but are told to wait a little while longer (6:10-11). The End is constantly approached but not actually reached. Warning judgments move towards final judgment but with interludes. Thus the interludes between 6th and 7th seal-openings and between 6th and 7th trumpet-blasts both symbolise and explain the delay. In chapters 10-11 we are told there will be no more delay for the sake of further warning judgments (10:3-6) and that there is to be a 3½-year delay (11:3) for the sake of the church's prophetic witness to the world.

The logic of imminence is that God's kingdom must come. Evil is rampant, the righteous suffer, so the question arises 'How much longer?' Surely a righteous God *must* sort this out soon. *However*, the logic of delay lies in the grace and patience of God. God will actually *use* His Church's suffering and martyrdom *in order to establish his kingdom*.

The 3½ years is symbolic – 2:10; 17:12. It is 'a little while' – see 6:11; 12:12; 17:10 – which ties in with Ps 37:10; Isa 26:20; Heb 10:37. This gives confidence to the Church that there is a time limit to its pain and the kingdom *will* come. The tension is theological, not merely chronological. We pray for the kingdom to come and long for the nations to be converted but we do so in the tension between imminence and delay. The theological 'problem' over this would not have been an issue for the early church, whereas it has been an issue for the chronologically-oriented modern mind!

Imminence helps John to see the ultimate coming of the kingdom alongside what that will mean in the way of action by the contemporary Church to hasten that very kingdom. The End of history has a unique relationship to all of history. Bauckham – 'It is the point at which the truth of all history comes to light. It is the divine judgment on the value and meaning of all history' (p. 159). This helps the believer to see all moments of life in relation to that final coming of the kingdom. Thus, the *meaning of the present and the eschatological kingdom cannot be divided up*.

Contemporary Relevance of Revelation's Theology

John delivered his Revelation prophecy against two backgrounds –

- a) He speaks to the situation of the Johannine Community with its internal doctrinal and ethical problems, as well as its external pressures.

b) He speaks with a cosmic dimension in which the eternal Spirit speaks in time to churches and throughout time to us as well. The message is universal and timeless (1:1-2).

1. **Revelation works on the human imagination** to re-orientate it from the ways in which the mind has been moulded by images and ideals of the dominant culture. That culture determines the ways in which we view, and respond to, this world. Revelation exposes the ideology of the powerful as working to maintain that powerful ideology. Revelation shows an alternative perception of the world that enables people to resist the dominant ideology. This ideology involved a transcendence that goes beyond worldly power, structures and ideals. We must take account of Revelation's context and make sure we take account of our contemporary context, but Revelation does produce a re-imagining so the Church can be truly counter-cultural in any context.
2. **Revelation is hugely concerned with God's truth.** Thus the differing imaginative ways to view this world does *not* relegate truth down to the level of individual preference. Revelation does not put images in place of truth but rather it seeks images that conform to truth. The church's witness to the world *IS* a witness to the *truth* of the one, true God and His glorious grace and righteousness. In the Roman Empire, the church faced a totalitarian sole truth ideology. Today in the 21st Century it faces 'a relativistic despair of the possibility of truth and, even more, a consumerist neglect of the relevance of truth. The church's witness will be of value only if it knows truth worth dying for'. (p. 160)
3. **Revelation's alternative vision of the world, oriented to the truth, is a highly theocentric one.** This vision can confront oppression, injustice and inhumanity. This counteracts an idolatrous orientation to this world. It resists the deification of political power in the beast and economic prosperity in Babylon. The reality presented by Revelation is that God in Christ has given all power in earth and heaven to the Lamb who has been victorious over Satan and his angels (5:12; 12:7-12). *AND YET* it seems that this power is powerless and the Church faces unbelief and persecution; death and destruction, whilst at the same time struggling with its own weakness of belief and conduct in a context of political oppression. John has two answers – a) this distress will not continue indefinitely because God's victorious power will eventually prevail and the Church will be delivered (12:12; 20:1-15). b) all power is derived, whether from God with good human uses OR from Satan with evil human uses (1:8; 13:2). The Church must use the power it is granted appropriately with love and justice (19: 1-16).

4. **Revelation confronts the dominant ideology.** It bases this on a transcendent God (heaven) and an alternative future (New Creation and New Jerusalem). This opens the world to the coming of God's kingdom and to the transformation of individual and community that the Spirit can bring as the church submits to Christ *continually*.
5. **Revelation has a perspective from above, from its eschatological future and from below,** the latter meaning from the viewpoint of the victims of history. Revelation stands solid for God and his kingdom against the idolatry of the powerful. Revelation is a kind of liberation theology that addresses the powerful as well as the oppressed. There is a universal call for repentance AND faith (2:5; 3:10-11; 9:21; 22:14-15 et al). Christ is enthroned within the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem (22:1) but also stands at the door of the Church on earth (3:20).
6. **Revelation does not encourage the church to hide from the world and await the fulfilment of its millennial dreams!** Revelation looks for the coming of God's kingdom in the whole world and for active Christian involvement in this coming. The church develops universal aspects of the biblical prophetic tradition. It witnesses to the true God and His righteousness *against* the political and economic idolatry of Rome. Thus, it takes the position that 'true worship of the true God is inseparable from justice and truth in all aspects of life' (p. 161). This *does not mean pietistic retreat from the public world*. SS Smalley writes '...the Church and its members cannot escape from the responsibilities of the present, into a purely 'spiritual' realm of the future' (p17). Worship resists this world's idolatry and it is this worship to which the whole world is ultimately destined.
7. **Revelation points to God's universal kingdom and thus it stresses future eschatology.** Some say that most NT eschatology is realised, but Revelation actually stresses the eschatological victory of Christ as already realised and that victory's creation of a new people of God under God's rule as already existing. The future element of Revelation lies in it's awareness that its goal and purpose has not yet been fully completed. The powers that dominate this world are still defying God and His righteousness. The church does not exist for itself but rather to take part in the coming universal kingdom. Christ's victory was decisive but has not reached its goal until *all evil has been wiped out and all nations gathered into Christ's kingdom*. This is a Jewish apocalyptic perspective on the Christ salvation-event but it is needed *as a counter to the kind of realised eschatology that spiritualises the kingdom of God and forgets that the world is still unredeemed!* Future eschatology is thus vital for the church to hold onto but at the same time, Revelation takes seriously the past, present and future tenses. Christ is active now as well as later.

8. **Revelation has a prophetic critique of church as well as world!** Power and prosperity have an idolatry that involves a false religion, but true religion can also falsify itself as it compromises with idolatry and betrays God's truth. Revelation does address churches that had problems of disunity, division and disintegration. The Church triumphant will be united and healed. The members of the New Jerusalem will reign together forever (22:1-5). Eventually God's people will exist eternally in covenant community with Christ (21:2-26). Ultimately God's sovereignty and the perfection of his people will be achieved. The unity of the Church can begin to become a reality here and now. The truth of God is known in true worship of God. The church must resist idolatry by faithful witness to the truth and it can only do this by continually purifying its own view of truth through a vision of God's Holy Person on a throne shared by the sovereign Creator and the slaughtered Lamb.
9. **The church takes part in the divine bringing in of the kingdom through verbal witness and life.** This change of society will not be through power and influence. It will come through the church's witness to the world. This involves obedience to God's commandments ie. embodying his kingdom in life. That participation, however, does not depend on power and influence. The crux of Christian witness is *consistent loyalty to god's kingdom*. 'In this powerless witness the power of truth to defeat lies comes into its own' (p. 163). Legitimate power and witness are not to be ignored but they also present temptation to us and the priority must be faithful witness.
10. **In revelation's universal perspective, the doctrines of creation, redemption and eschatology are very closely linked together.** John's cosmology in Revelation has a *double polarity* and the drama in the book is enacted on two levels at the same time – the *heavenly* and the *earthly*. This means that John values the creation *AND* the next world, thus combining the physical and the spiritual. The *old order becomes the new* in the New Creation in which God lives in close covenant with his people (21:1-7). The link between earth and heaven is retained and Christ is at work in both. This has two consequences – a) John seems to invite his readers to celebrate life and enjoy God's new creation, despite the fallen consequences of this good creation. John affirms the new creation by using messianic banquet imagery (3:20; 7:16-17; 19:9; 22:17 et al.). b) If this world is good and to be enjoyed, then it must be respected. The Church must take a lead in preserving and conserving nature, thus protecting it against those who would ravage it.

God has created all reality and in faithfulness to His creation, God takes action in Christ to redeem and renew His whole creation. He is the Alpha and Omega of creation and his work in new creation is as universal as the scope of

creation. As Creator he claims his universal kingdom and can renew his creation, taking it beyond evil and nothingness into the glory of His presence. Salvation in Christ is at the heart of God, the Creator's purpose for His whole creation. This is central to the whole outlook, content and goal of the Book of Revelation.

11. **Revelation's vision is theocentric**, and all its vision of the world derives from its understanding of God. This comes through serious theological reflection. Revelation has the most developed Trinitarian theology in the NT, except perhaps for John's Gospel. It upholds the glory of the transcendent God, but not the transcendence of a superior lord who dominates his creation, and whilst it withholds the glory of God from a world where evil still holds sway, it recognises God's presence in this world in the form of the slaughtered Lamb and the seven Spirits who inspire the church's witness. It places the Lamb on the throne and the seven spirits before the throne, thus giving centre stage to sacrificial love and witness to truth in the coming of God's kingdom in the world. At the same time, the openness of creation to divine transcendence makes certain the coming of this kingdom. The beast by tyranny enslaves humanity but God's rule does not contradict human freedom. People participate in God's rule. Divine transcendence makes it possible to have the eschatological destiny of creation as *existence in immediate relation to God. His immanent presence is its glory and its eternal life. Revelation will help to renew the doctrine of God, so desperately needed today.*
12. **Revelation calls on the church worldwide to hold a balanced Christology.** Christ's person is balanced between the earthly and the exalted, the human and the divine. This is why Christ can be the Saviour of the world (1:4-7) and why Christ holds together in his person and work the ability to address problems of belief and behaviour in the church. Poor Christology will cause church tensions and will push churches towards idolatrous compromise with pagan culture (2:14-15). John's plea for balance was not heeded and the result at times was disintegration of the community. Doctrinal and practical errors and weaknesses will inevitably follow weak Christology. Church unity and engagement in World Mission also depend on sound & balanced Christology.
13. **Revelation is a message of huge hope because of the resurrection of Christ**, leading to new creation and ultimately to the new heaven and the new earth. John assures the churches that if they endure faithfully, they will survive external threats and internal conflicts. This is what apparently happened because in the early 2nd Century, Ignatius reports that the churches of Asia, including Ephesus, were flourishing. But *hope* goes beyond that – it gives hope of resurrection to every believer and the promise of final victory in Christ

over evil and death. *God will always dwell with his people* (21:3). The message of divine judgment which is salvific is addressed to ALL churches and societies. The nations will walk by the light of the glory of God and of the Lamb (21:24). This does not mean that everyone will receive God's gift of new life. In order to enter the New Jerusalem, it is necessary to keep the covenant and be holy (7:9-14; 22:11-15). John shows that the Father and Son and Church are ONE and that the Christ by his Spirit enables right conduct to proceed from saving faith. This new life is open to all who hear, understand and receive this good news. (21:2-4) *such hope brings great encouragement to the church in all ages.* Revelation reminds us that life is stronger than death and that hope cannot be conquered by despair. *Ultimately, the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our lord and of his messiah and he will reign for ever and ever* (11:15).

Some final thoughts on 'application' from other writers

Starting with the Montanist Movement of the second Century AD, there have been many groups that have espoused a variety of views on the impending reversal of the social order in favour of the poor, marginalised and oppressed. Others, like Joachim of Fiore (1145-1202), believed that there would eventually be a new age of the Spirit in this present Gospel Age. Christopher Columbus was convinced that his own expeditions could bring in the Joachim new heaven and new earth. Some were convinced that the discovery of the New World would open up a new 'promised land', including gospel endeavours that would bring fresh divine light, prior to Christ's return. This did also promote the modern missionary movement. America did indeed lead the world but in a much secularised way – another form of imperial rule. Alongside this, came Fundamentalist apocalyptic speculation entering into the American mainstream.

However, Western modernity has also yielded huge ecological and nuclear threats. Has our misreading of Revelation's original context and purpose led to an apocalyptic, fantasy mind-set and expectation with potentially bizarre and dangerous results? Revelation can never justify the imperial goals of nations but can be a vantage point for critical enquiry into our own selves and our churches, our Western arrogance, our imperialism, our power-seeking, our domination over large tracts of this cosmos.

What does 'Revelation' say to us in 2020?

1. In the midst of the Roman Empire in the first century AD, Revelation gives a renewed vision of the gospel of Christ and the impact that God insists such a gospel demands in this world here and now. Jesus' Person and Work was a huge threat to all who exercised religious and political power. That threat

simply had to be eliminated by the execution of the Christ. John stresses that this world's only true Lord is Jesus Christ Himself, not the Caesars. By Christ, God is reconciling, justifying and putting right both the human and non-human creation. This message carries the power to set free a humanity held in bondage by sin, Satan and death. That new humanity will then worship its true God forever and ever! This gospel is therefore not just about the rescue of individual souls from their spiritual struggles and distress. Christ's gospel is cosmic in size and scope.

2. The growth of the Roman Empire in ancient times is paralleled by the growth and spread of Western capitalism, culture and colonialism across the global South. Some in the non-Western world have benefitted economically but the masses have been driven into deeper poverty, frustration and disillusionment. Just as the Roman Empire falsely claimed to be a utopia to which there was no alternative, so also Global Consumerism in the 21st Century AD claims to be a panacea which neither needs nor has any viable alternative way of life. The world now has two types of traveller – those in the West who move as 'tourists' in search of new experiences and those in the Global South who seek a new life in the West out of sheer desperation, poverty and escape from their misery. By contrast, John of Patmos, under divine inspiration and revelation, very definitely *does* offer a viable, real and true alternative future vision! So much is offered by the Global South that might bring the West back to its biblical roots eg's. the concepts of sharing, family, fellowship, community that we have largely lost!

3. The apparent advances of modernity towards universal comfort, security and prosperity – at least for some – seem to have created societies of widening social divisions, anxiety, depression, ethical uncertainty and spiritual emptiness. Christopher Lasch described American culture in the late 1990's in a devastating but penetrating way (*The Culture of Narcissism*) - "...overwhelmed by an annihilating boredom, like animals whose instincts have withered in captivity. Narcissism had ceased being a pathological condition of some individuals within the society and had become instead a defining feature of an entire culture" (1991:11). The 'solid' society of modernism has become the 'fluid' society of postmodernism, with its accompanying uncertainty, weak relationships, need for continual flexibility, insecurity, privatisation of troubles, loneliness, impotence, short-term relationships, fear of long-term commitments. No longer a society of producers but now of consumers. Life revolves around individual wants, desires and frustrated longings. And yet, both the Roman Empire and the Current 21st C. Globalisation claims of 'utopia' have left folk today asking, 'Is this sort of life all there is?'

4. Christianity had its roots among the margins of the urban and rural poor in the first century AD but over 2000 years expanded alongside colonialism right across the globe. This was the root of global capitalism. Christianity and the West became inseparable in peoples' minds. Western nations exploited Global South economic wealth under colonialism, alongside much genuine and sacrificial missionary work. Today this fusion of religion and culture is still the cause of much division between Christianity and Islam and there is a desperate need to liberate the true gospel to do its transforming work among the nations. Indeed the current expansion of the Global South Church is enormous. The centre of spiritual gravity has shifted from Europe/North America into the Global South. The Church from the underside and marginalised parts of the Global South is now raising its voice and we in the West have much to learn from hearing it.
5. Though globalisation has now replaced colonialism, the truth is that little has changed for the poor, deprived and underprivileged. The political control exercised by colonialism tended to be limited to particular countries – exploiters and exploited. Today, under globalisation and free markets, the control is increasingly universal and involves the control of human minds and desires by hidden forces in a globalised networking system. There are greater, invisible forces at work in the world than political forces, whether those of the Roman Empire or of Colonialism.
6. In a lecture in 1985, the missiologist Andrew Walls claimed that the scope of the Christ event is “beyond the most comprehensive description of the saving act, as experienced by any one of us, by any part of the redeemed creation. For it extends to the depths of the demonic kingdom and proclaims God's victory at every level of it. By the same token, the proclamation of the gospel, the witness of the church to the cross and the resurrection extends to the various reaches of that kingdom”. This gospel of Christ needs to be taught and lived out in a way that brings healing and hope to those who are marginalised and those who are comfortable. Our biggest problem is our enslavement to the powers of evil that rule today. Contemporary church worship in the West suggests that Christ's life, death and resurrection were aimed to meet individuals' needs for satisfaction, fulfilment, comfort and reassurance! Global environmental danger and human suffering seldom get a mention. Are such song lyrics the result of believers trying to serve God *and* Mammon in this world?
7. There are many shoots of promise globally, wherever there is a renewed focus on Word and Spirit, alongside a call to conversion, Christian community and costly, sacrificial, radical discipleship. These shoots are sprouting in Europe

and North America, as well as in the Global South. They hold great promise for a universal Church that celebrates, and can handle, difference, as it grows into the united Body of Christ that is the Church of God universal.

8. Revelation surely speaks to the Western Church in particular in 2020 in its weaknesses – a) *Comfort* by ‘drip-feeding’ in so many of the aspects of its life of seeking security in the things of this world. b) *Compromise* with this world – does the church really long for God alone or does it love the Mammon of this world? c) *Cowardice* – yes, Revelation portrays a very real and demanding Spiritual Warfare and yet, we are either not aware of it or don’t really believe it or don’t want to be enlisted as soldiers in it. d) *Communication* and relation-ships within and outwith our churches surely need a radical overhaul and deepening. e) Compassion for the spiritually lost and for each other in the church needs to grow and to develop much deeper roots. f) *Care* for the church and for the world needs to be pastoral, spiritual and practical in nature, as we focus more seriously on works, as well as on grace. Let’s get a more balanced understanding of the full teaching embodied by the Apostle Paul *in the whole of* Ephesians 2:1-10.

Postscript

Some final thoughts from **Rev Dr David Smith** from *Liberating the Gospel: Translating the Message of Jesus in a Globalized World*, Darton Longman and Todd, 2016, Ch.4

1. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 raised huge questions for Jews and Christians concerning the sovereignty of God in a world that seemed utterly dominated by Roman Imperial power. It triggered a strong temptation to accommodate and absorb what the world and the empire had on offer for a more peaceful and comfortable life! An alternative community was vital, based on self-sacrificial love and sharing resources. Christians were caught in the tension between the excitement and expectations of the gospel and the reality and brutality of late first century AD life in the Roman Empire. John was struggling as a prisoner (Rev 1:9), overwhelmed by sheer Roman power and yet feeling deeply for the hugely challenged believers who would read his letter to them. Smith stresses the intense pain of John who had ‘sacrificed his freedom and given everything for the sake of Christ, [while] many of those to whom he writes are settling down in the world, devising ways to serve both God and Mammon, and accommodating the message of the gospel to the dominant culture’ (2016:114). Smith then suggests that only a minority of John’s readers were even capable of really hearing what the Spirit was saying to

them! (2:7,11,17,28; 3:6,13,22). The crisis was so serious that even a new kind of language was needed – the apocalyptic appeal at ‘overcoming the dissonance between what is and what, according to the gospel itself, ought to be’. That huge ‘distance’ is still with us today in the worlds of 2020!

2. John writes down his visions in subversive language, claiming that Roman power and splendour is actually Satanic. After the divine verdict on some churches in Rev 2-3, John sees the open door in heaven and views the earth’s society and churches in an entirely new and changed way, by which hope and vision are re-kindled and imperial propaganda is resisted by John’s readers! A fresh vision of Christ is vital and that vision must transform the *whole believer and community of believers* – a) Worship in heaven is deeply theocentric and that should teach us the sheer absurdity of idolatry. It challenges our own conformist and compromised faith. b) Worship of heaven is richly creative. On earth it must employ every human gift, touching and affecting the whole of life. c) Imperial Cult focused on the worship of powerful human beings, while John’s symbols aimed to persuade readers into a counter-cultural and counter-religious, genuine worship of God and His Christ. d) Worship must be communal and can be dramatically performed in the oral and public way intended in its first century AD contexts of communication.
3. In Rev 5:3, the sealed nature of the scroll – containing God’s revelation of the course and outcome of human history - and the apparent absence of anyone able to open that scroll, meant that the Roman claim to be in charge of this world would remain completely unchallenged. This would be great news for the rich and privileged, but catastrophic for the poor, marginalised and oppressed of this world. Thank God that Christ was able to use His authority to open the scroll, rule the nations by His death and rising, and overturn totally the powers of evil darkness. Then, according to a second scroll in 10:1-11, the gospel is shown to be bitter-sweet. Sweet by the glory of its message of a new and better world, but bitter because its opponents will resist it incessantly, while those who embrace it will still face the real temptation to refuse its costly demands, preferring a life of comfort and worldly security instead! In short, there will be resistance to the Word of Christ *within the Christian community*!
4. Rev 21:1-22:6 deals with the great climax of the New Jerusalem and contains much comfort to those crying, suffering and grieving *and yet*, the danger lies in missing the actual, contextual causes of such pain in the first century AD, namely the poverty, idolatry and injustice of the dark underside of Rome and other Roman Asia cities that inflicted such deep pain and despair on the majority of their inhabitants. So-called Roman civilisation came at enormous

social, economic and human cost. Rural economies were decimated by the imperial core, local fishing enterprise was wiped out as Rome expanded its grasp and control of the entire Mediterranean area. Rome's prosperity and luxury is condemned for its absence of human compassion and its exploitation of the poor – see Rev 18, especially 18:13. The gap between rich and poor became a largely unrecognised disgrace – until God judged! The vision of the New Jerusalem in 21:1-22:6 *must be read in the light of the judgment and collapse of Babylon (Rome)*. Heaven in John's visions is not a place of escape into some kind of disembodied, spiritual existence detached from human history, but is indeed a new heaven and a new earth of true and great magnificence, giving the new world real joy, life and peace in the *Presence of the Living God and Christ*. It will be a place of deep healing of past wounds in which the nations of the world will be represented because of God's redemptive grace. God will dwell with His redeemed people for all eternity (21:3). He descended into this new world to live with His people, as He once descended to us in Christ, incarnate in a fallen world. The old order of the world has been utterly swallowed up in the new order of life. No wonder then that John was totally overwhelmed by all this revelation and fell, as if poleaxed at the feet of the angel who had opened up this great glory of grace. One of the marvels of all this is that the New Jerusalem is not Marx's 'opium of the people' or 'pie in the sky when we die', but rather is it written from the underside of a brutally biased social system that massively favoured the rich and influential. Revelation is a huge protest against rank sin, evil and injustice that ruined the vast majority of lives within the Roman Empire. Revelation offers hope for the here-and-now! The rule of God in history can now be expressed because of the death and resurrection of Christ in the midst of a fallen and corrupted world. Final fulfilment and consummation of God's Kingdom is, however, still future.

5. Smith wisely points out that the life of Jesus belongs to the core of the gospel and needs our serious attention, rather than being thought of as a mere prelude to the death and resurrection of Jesus, crucial as they both are. 'The gospel is not just about the 'spiritual distress of individual souls' (2016:151). The gospel is cosmic in scale and consequences and this emerges clearly from the visions of Revelation. There are indeed clear parallels between the Greco-Roman empire and the modern global capitalism and consumerist obsessions of the early 21st Century AD. One of their many common underpinnings is the unshakable conviction that there is no chance of any alternative world order! As with Rome's huge economic benefits for a very small majority of elite, so also the impact of globalisation has benefited the few and ruined the lives of multitudes of the displaced poor and marginalised (Rev 18). One irony in all of this is that the rich and comfortable today are now starting to struggle

to find purpose, meaning and ‘happiness’ in life! We are living in a postmodern world of ‘material wealth, blighted by widening social divisions, ethical uncertainty and spiritual emptiness’ (2016:166). Mental anxiety and depression are escalating. C. Lasch wrote in his critique of American society in late 20th Century AD ‘Narcissism had ceased being a pathological condition of some individuals within the society and had become instead a defining feature of an entire culture’. The Romans claimed to have brought ‘peace and security’ in a frightening world; ‘The claim that ‘the political and economic triumph of the free market on a global scale represents the ultimate goal of millennia of human questioning, searching and striving seems no less empty and fraudulent’ than the Roman boast (2016:168). Smith notes that religious freedom is now increasingly restricted to private and domestic life, thus keeping the public square utterly secular and protected from the threat of Christian critique. All prophecies of a message of nations coming under God’s impending judgment are thus being efficiently silenced and blocked out! In the midst of this, it is becoming clearer that economics and ecology are nothing like as firmly under humanity’s control than we once imagined! Also, the centre of Christian, spiritual gravity has shifted from the rich West to the poorer global South.

6. *The Liberating of the gospel of Christ in the Cosmos* – Smith concludes that ‘we confront the challenge of an ideology (global empires and their rule/influences) which claims validity everywhere on earth and promises a secular salvation to the entire human family, on condition that they submit to its political, economic and social demands and accept its vision of the purpose of human existence.’ (2016:181). Globalisation now operates everywhere but is rooted nowhere. That makes its values hard to challenge and resist. It is borne along by powers that operate above and beyond the traditional visible and political authorities. Paul’s principalities and powers at work are fundamental to John’s visions in Revelation. God chose weakness and humility in Jesus’ death and resurrection and in His global mission, God chooses to work especially in the margins and poverty of societies. Smith also argues that ‘The gospel must be articulated and lived out in a way that brings healing and hope to those whose comfortable lives conceal a hidden despair’ (2016:186). This must be done against the backcloth of huge opposition from the dominant society that is ultimately rooted in dark, spiritual, supernatural powers. Many in the churches today have actually adopted and embraced the religion of Mammon. Nearly a hundred years ago, RH Tawney wrote ‘Compromise is as impossible between the Church of Christ and the idolatry of wealth, which is the practical religion of capitalist societies, as it was between the Church and the State idolatry of the Roman Empire’. (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: An Historical Study*,

London: John Murray, 2nd Ed., 1936, p. 286). The problem is now a century further advanced than when Tawney penned these words. Since that time, this evil has developed into a ‘double-headed monster’, namely that many Christians simply don’t see that an addiction to Mammon is actually idolatry and that this natural world of ours cannot any longer sustain ever-expanding human desire for ‘stuff’. Such spiritual blindness demands the teaching, preaching and living out of a full-orbed biblical gospel. This crucial focus will need to be combined with a wide acceptance that our gospel is multi-national, multi-coloured and multi-ethnic and demands far deeper cross-cultural understanding, teachability and unity in action. Cultural differences need to be accepted and respected across the global churches, always on the foundation of the authority and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures that we embrace and hold in common by the goodness and grace of God and Christ.

10 Revelation’s Strong Focus on the Reality of Spiritual Warfare

The late Prof. Dr. I. Howard Marshall believed that John held a ‘three-level’ view of the universe –

- a) God dwells in heaven with his worshipping servants. God determines what takes place on earth.
- b) Earth is the platform on which conflict is happening between Jesus’ followers and the ‘world’. Demonic powers of evil can descend from heaven or be thrown down from heaven, into the realm of earth.
- c) Under the earth is the abyss that is a realm of captivity and punishment for the evil powers and their ‘followers’ who exist there.

Marshall’s thinking starts with the Sovereignty and Power of God and thus with the massive *hope* of the redeemed people of God. The church is called to be and to do faithful witness and will be persecuted as a direct result of that witness. Many will reject this witness but Revelation calls on unbelievers to repent. The church will suffer opposition and persecution but God is victorious and is in control. John brings heavenly visions to reassure the church that God *will* judge the world – as well as believers – and to comfort His people with the promise of their destination of New Jerusalem with Christ. The church must worship God not the rulers of this world. Christ is central with God in Revelation. The Spirit seems to be taking up the role of God’s angels as communicators of divine messages eg. to the seven churches. All three members of the Trinity are vital to the message of Revelation.

The main evil force in the cosmos, according to Revelation, is the dragon/devil/Satan who initiates activity against God. Satan is involved in conflict with Michael but gets defeated and thrown down to earth, so that he can no longer accuse the people of God before God Himself, but is free to persecute the church of God on earth. Satan has two wild animals for allies – satanically inspired to impersonate the power of Christ and the role of the prophets. These two beasts rule over the earth by supernatural agents. Their power however is restricted by the Lord God – see Rev 6:2,4,8,11. The way of life of this world order produced by these beasts is described and condemned in Rev 18. That chapter paints a picture of a world that follows Babylon (Rome), having grown wealthy by trade but also by its godlessness, violence and persecution of the church. It is the church that follows the Lamb whilst those unbelievers follow the life offered by satanic powers. The latter are called to repent but the former are also warned not to slide into apostasy. Believers are called to ‘overcome’ and ‘persevere’ ie. resist temptation and persecution. John requires Christian disciples not only to believe but to be faithful by refusing the temptation towards unbelief – see Rev 1:5; 2:10,13; 3:14; 17:14; 19:11. They must also discern the false prophets of evil – see Rev 2:2,20. The world is open to evil influences which take over the world but death and destruction are the world’s final end. By contrast, for believers, heaven and earth seem to merge in a new creation.

The apocalyptic nature of Revelation is most clearly expressed in its portrayal of the church clashing with the demonically-triggered forces of the world. These worldwide and cosmic powers are concentrated in hating and persecuting the church. There is no purely human hope that the church will survive the suffering and martyrdom that are constantly on the horizon. A major crux of Revelation is to assure believers that God will sustain them, reward them and take them to glory, as long as they remain faithful in avoiding apostasy to the tempting offers of demonic powers. God *will* judge and punish and totally destroy the opposing powers that threaten the church. He will vindicate his people by His victory. God is more powerful than the church’s oppressors. Believers ultimately do not need to fear being overwhelmed or threatened by their evil oppressors!

Revelation joins forces with other NT books, like 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 Cor 15, 2 Peter, Jude and the three Synoptic Gospels, in speaking of the future attacks on the church from demonic and human powers. False prophets and messiahs will appear but the church must persevere in preaching truth and gospel. Christ will come to gather His Church. He will separate people on the basis of their attitude to Christ and the Church of Christ.

Revelation reveals what is going on in heaven concurrently with what is happening on earth. The two are parallel and inseparable. Its primary focus is on the whole concept of the devil and his allies working in an evil trinity that is opposed to God and God's people. Revelation prepares God's people for persecution, possible martyrdom and the glory of the New Heaven and New Earth. John stresses that God is in ultimate control.

The church is to function like an army fighting a battle and determined to win that battle but at the same time determined to avoid all contact with sin. The ultimate reward will be eternal bliss for the true church in the continual presence of God and the Lamb.

Revelation is unusual in some respects from the rest of the NT, yet similar in its key theological themes. Its overriding concern is to show its readers that God is victorious over the evil forces gathered against believers, He judges evildoers, He calls us to persevere, assures us of His protection and encourages us re. God's final triumph over evil forces that guarantees eternal peace and salvation. God is indeed the all-powerful judge of the world, vastly superior to the devil and his agents of evil. The framework for the entire action in Revelation is fixed by the dualism and conflict between God and Satan.

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Strongly recommended in Bold Type

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- (An Overview of **Revelation** is available online from The Bible Project, both as a movie and as an A4 printable sheet.)

Part 2

SERMONS ON THE BOOK OF 'REVELATION'

Significant source: *Revelation* GK Beale and D Campbell, Eerdmans, 2015.

1. God and Christ at the Centre of the Cosmos 1:1-20

Big idea: This 'Revelation' enabled John to witness to God's Work in Christ and enabled believers to grasp God's view of history and respond in obedience.

Outline: The Revelation – the Word of God and the testimony of Christ -
1:1-3

The Revealer – the cosmic Christ who continually rules - 1:4-16

The Result – the loss of our slavery to fear - 1:17-20

1:1-3 Exegetical detail: The Revelation *by/from/about* Jesus Christ. Revelation = Apocalypse = Heightened/Intensified form of Prophecy. To show God's servants the things that are soon to happen. Rooted in Daniel 2:28-30, 45-47, the verb 'revealed' comes 5 times, meaning 'show', 'communicate', 'signify'. Daniel says this kingdom of God will come 'in the latter days', but the Apostle John says it will be 'quickly' or 'soon', even having started to happen already! References to imminent eschatological era (v.3b), Christ's present kingship over world's kings (v.5), beginning form of kingdom (v. 6,9), 'Son of Man' (v.13) and vision (vv. 13-15) all point, not only to final, future fulfilment, but also to what is going on in the here and now of life.

In the process of 'Revelation' – God, to Christ, to His angel, to John, to God's universal bond-servants in 1:1 – John is the link. He conveys the words of all three re. the totality of fulfilment of OT prophecies about the kingdom in Jesus Christ. Verse 2 basically concerns the revelatory word of God *ie* what God has done through Jesus Christ.

1:3 clearly is a call for obedient living rather than intellectual speculation about the future. The sequence is *read, hear, obey, blessing*. Why? Because the kingdom of God is 'about to arrive'/'is now arriving'. John sees the kingdom as inaugurated by Jesus' death and resurrection and it will continue throughout the church age.

1:1-3 Application: Life change begins here and now in God's kingdom. Great attention needs to be paid to the complete revelation of God's Word and Will, and the OT must never be ignored or downgraded. Response to prophecy must focus on the church's life in the present.

1:4-8 Exegetical Detail: In verse 4, John presents grace greetings from the eternal Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity's redemptive work has sealed our salvation and given us a new status in the eyes of God. John addresses seven churches, referring to the fullness/completion of the universal church, the seven stars (angels of the seven churches), the seven lampstands (the seven churches), the seven spirits. Each church and each vision in the Revelation receives the whole message of the Revelation. John's prophecy is for the whole Church in every place and age. Grace will be needed to persevere under tribulation but the believers will need God's peace as well! The very fact that God is past, present and future gives us huge confidence that He knows all things, controls all things and works His purposes out with complete confidence and compassion for us. It is only by the presence, anointing and power of the Holy Spirit that we are equipped to do the work of God and be the people of God.

John expands this point in verse 5 in which Christ is declared to be ruler over earthly kings (Ps 89:19-29). That includes Christ's power over all Satanic forces. He is first-born from the dead (Ps 89:27), inaugurating the new creation by His own resurrection from the dead. This again shows that the events portrayed by these visions are present and ongoing, not just future expectations! John's spirit erupts into a volley of praise here!

The staggering truth emerges in verse 6 that God has actually made us into Christ's kingdom and into priests to serve Christ's God and Father. We too have been resurrected to rule with Him by His exaltation! We are kings *with Christ*, sharing His priestly office, identifying with Him in His death and rising again! (Exodus 19:6). Part of our witness to Christ as priests is by our faithful perseverance in suffering and persecution and by our refusal to compromise. The Church is here and now called to reflect the light of God's presence into this desperately needy and broken world.

The Church only knows grace and peace because of Christ's kingship and the Father's glory and sovereignty throughout the history of the cosmos. (1:7-8) This is the end of John's greeting but is still deeply Christocentric in content. It is rooted in Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 12:10. The former records the enthronement of Christ at the Father's right Hand, over the nations. The latter involves the end-time victory of Israel over the nations and Israel's repentance before God for

their killing of the Christ. It also refers to their mourning for a firstborn son based on Ps 89:5. John extends the mourning from Israel to *all* peoples... and every eye will see Him!

Thus, repentant Gentiles are seen as part of true Israel which fulfils Zechariah's prophecy at Christ's Second Coming. 1:13 'Son of Man' has present reference. Christ guides all history in both judgment and blessing. Daniel saw Christ coming to receive an end-time kingdom, *but* John sees this kingdom as having been received at the resurrection. Thus, Christ constantly 'comes' to His churches through history as Saviour and Judge (see 2:5, 16; 3:3). Christ will come again finally but He is also 'coming' throughout the church age! This is confirmed in verse 8, where Christ declares Himself as Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. These polar opposites include everything in-between, so God is actively present throughout history and is in control of all that happens *now*. That explains why the phrase 'who is' comes first in order of sequence! John's confidence about God's future consummation of history is possible *solely* on the grounds of God's total omnipotence in the here and now.

1:4-8 Application Our understanding of God's Church needs to be more truly universal rather than merely local ('seven' signifies 'whole', 'complete'). God's building of His universal church is utterly rooted in Christ's Death, but also in His Resurrection and gift of His Holy Spirit. The truth that Jesus is 'continually coming' to His Church should change the way we live as His kings and priests.

1:9-20 Exegetical Detail *Christ has conquered death and that is why we can be confident in Him as universal judge, as great high priest and as ruler of His Church.*

The centrality of Christ in His cosmos now continues to be revealed in 1:9-20.

Verse 9 reveals the 'shocking' truth that these three words have just one Greek article in common – tribulation, kingdom, perseverance – that *is* ministry. Reigning in the present with Jesus absolutely requires faithful endurance through tribulation. Identifying with Christ will produce trials and the way we reign is to follow the example of Christ – no compromise of witness (2:9-11; 3:8-10); ruling over powers of evil (6:8-11); defeating our own sin (2-3). Endurance and overcoming are inseparable in the Christian life. Tribulation has started already eg Patmos Exile for John. The world will frequently reject the Word of God and the testimony of our lives. This will bring under judgment both the world and those who compromise with the world. This is hinted **at** when John is called to write down in a book what he is seeing, thus reflecting the OT prophets of judgment like Jer. 36:2; Isa 30:8; Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; Exod. 17:14.

The vision in 1:9-20 extends the themes of suffering, kingdom and priesthood, but also introduces the theme of Christ as judge. Christ commands John to write down this vision in full. The message is plain – the churches – all of them – must reign as priestly kings by faithfully witnessing to ‘the testimony of Jesus’ in the midst of suffering. If we fail in this, we will be judged by Christ. If we are faithful under persecution, we will ultimately be victorious, as Christ overcame death. This core message has very strong OT allusions at its very roots and foundations.

The seven golden lampstands of verse 12 are the universal church must draw its power from the seven lamps that represent the Holy Spirit. Christ’s death and resurrection are the foundation stones for the new temple that God will build by His Spirit out of all nations! Christ as ‘Son of man’ (Dan 7:13-14 and 10:5-6) and as heavenly priest, will superintend and enable the building of this church. This building *will* reveal Christ as judge, for He knows the spiritual and moral state of His churches and will deal in blessing or judgment. The image of Christ (1:16) holding the seven stars, the angels of the churches in verse 20, shows that His authority does indeed extend into the heavenly realms! With the sword from His mouth, Christ will judge disobedience in church (2:16) and in the world (19:15).

In **1:17-20**, John’s response to the vision is like Daniel’s in Dan 8:16-19 and 10:7-12. He collapses in fear; is strengthened by a heavenly being and receives further revelation. We are intended to take confidence that God/Christ alone is in control of all human history and he is working out His purposes in it all. The fact of *His* resurrection in v. 18 should strengthen our own prophetic witness today. John is called in v. 19 to write all the details of his visions down – they cover all the history from Jesus’ own death/resurrection to His Second Coming. The heavenly beings – angels – are a reminder that the church does already have a certain heavenly existence and identity, even amidst its earthly tribulations.

1:9-20 Application: The mystery of 1:20 is that Christ’s rule coexists with the suffering of His churches. Christ as Creator *had* to suffer death! We are called to suffer *and yet* remain faithful. He will judge our faithfulness and our witness.

2. To the Church in Ephesus

2:1-7

Big Idea: Christ praises the church in Ephesus for her orthodoxy and perseverance in the faith but warns of the need for deeper love in the fellowship.

Outline: Commendation for the Church in Ephesus

- a) Their determination and dedication – 2:2a,3
- b) Their discernment of falsity – 2:2b
- c) Their detachment from worldliness – 2:6
 - Condemnation for failure to love each other – 2:4-5
 - Challenge and Comfort – 2:7

Exegetical detail: One way to approach the Book of Revelation is to think of it in terms of ‘triplets’ because Rev 1 introduces us to the three persons of the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But who actually is this God? We are told a number of times in Rev that He is the *Holy One* – distinct, perfect, separate – there’s another ‘triplet’!

It is on the basis of His holiness that the four living creatures worship him in 4:8. Rev shows us that it is because He is holy that He can initiate, sustain and complete a plan to redeem and renew His cosmos, His creation and His Church. That’s basically what Rev is all about and God shows us His attributes in at least three ways – His *power*, His *eternal nature* and His *compassion*. How does He do that?

Power – The 24 elders in 4:10-11 fall down before the throne of God in utter adoration. Why? Because He created all things. He holds the 7 stars and 7 lampstands.

Eternal Nature – The Lord God Almighty ‘is and was and is to come’, echoed in 1:8,18; 4:9-10 and onwards through Rev.

Compassion – When John fell at the feet of the Living One, totally overwhelmed, the words of the Lord to John were stunning – ‘Do not be afraid’. Why? Because of His power and eternal nature 1:18, He can show us His love. Christ is revealed as moving among the lampstands – the churches. He lives in a vital relationship with His churches – caring, encouraging, rebuking, judging, uplifting, loving.

The holiness of God requires a sacrifice for sin. His separateness in sovereignty has combined with His compassion in His plan to redeem His creation and His church. The whole of Scripture unravels that mystery. In His holiness, God is complete, the number 7 indicating completeness and these 7 letters are for all the universal church, such that the whole of Revelation was and is for *every* church.

Rev is thus about the manifestation and outworking of God's holiness in a very unholy, incomplete and broken world. God wants to reveal His holiness in and through His Church by means of the thoughts, words and actions of His people in the nitty gritty of the suffering, opposition and persecution facing the Church in every age. That's what Rev is all about and especially chapters 2-3.

In Rev 2:1-7 the Living God repeats a statement of His holiness right at the outset in 2:1. This verse highlights God's power, eternal nature and compassion, before showing *how* His holiness must be lived out in Ephesus and in the whole Church. Ephesus was a tough place to live as a Christian - in a city dominated by the Cult of Diana and by the pressure and persecution of the Imperial Cult which raised the challenge of conflicting loyalties – Church or Cult? Christ or Caesar? In the midst of all this, Christ is *continually* – Present Tense Greek verbs here – examining His churches and through John, He delivers an oracle both of warnings and of encouragements, initially to these 7 churches of Asia Minor, but actually to all churches in all ages in all places.

These oracles are addressed to the 'angel' or messenger of each particular church. This could refer to a church's guardian angel, *or* the ruling leadership *or* its prevailing spirit. Christ is holding these 7 angels (stars) in His right hand and walks constantly among these 7 churches (lampstands), and by extension, among *all* His churches. Now, how should that make us feel?

Challenged – Heiley says the angel is 'the inward state or prevailing spirit of the church itself'. Christ is inspecting, examining and scrutinising all His churches.

Comforted – because Christ controls, owns and is present with His churches. He is now victorious over all the powers of darkness. *We are secure in him.*

So, how will God act in holiness in the Ephesian Church? How will the church reflect God's holiness to the glory of God? How does the Ephesian Church emerge from the scrutiny of Christ? Is it a positive report or a negative one?

Three areas are commended:

1. *Their determination and dedication vv. 2a, 3.* Christ praises this church, in His oracle through John, for its faithfulness, endurance and perseverance. This would involve their character, lifestyle and patient response to hostile opposition. So far, so good is the commendable behaviour of the Ephesian Church. This means living with opposition and Christ says in effect, '*Do not give up*'.
2. *Their discernment of falsity v. 2b.* They had reacted patiently to persecution and aggression, yet at the same time had taken the initiative in rooting out and dealing with that which was false, fake, sham. John declares that 'evil people' had been in the church and had claimed that they were authoritative apostles

but were not! The church discerned them, tested them and dealt with them. What a challenge for us today! So how do we identify false apostles? Do they wear long black or highly coloured robes? Do they have horns growing out of their heads? Jesus said 'Look for fruit in their lives (Mt 7:20). The Didache (very early church teaching manual) had a test for apostles – 'they must have the behaviour of the Lord'. Paul said true apostles must show the works of an apostle – 2 Cor 12:11ff. The Ephesians applied tests and found some self-appointed apostles to be self-deceived and deceivers. They were actually liars because they failed to 'walk the talk'.

This is a huge challenge and even more so in a postmodern world and culture in which the call to 'tolerate', 'include', 'accept' is stronger than the call to 'test', 'evaluate', 'discern' and 'expose'. God calls us to be wise, not naïve; discerning, not blind; courageous, not cowardly. God appoints *us* to sort out the issue of falsity in the church. The Ephesians were acting responsibly in rooting out falsity in their church. Toleration and inclusion tend to dampen the urgency for evangelism today and some scholars suspect that this may also have been the case in first century Ephesus.

3. *Their detachment from worldly norms and values v. 6.* This is where the mysterious Nicolaitans enter the picture! The Ephesians are commended by Christ for hating the works/deeds of the Nicolaitans. This heretical sect had compromised with pagan society and whilst claiming to be spiritually liberated, they were deeply involved in idolatry and immorality. This probably links into Numbers 25:1-2. Balaam was seen as causing Israel's adultery with Moabite women which then drew Israel into pagan cult and sacrifice. In Rev this refers to the serious danger of embracing or accommodating to the values and practices of the Imperial Cult and very probably the strong pull of the Diana Cult. Christ warns us against a mind-set and lifestyle and ways of 'doing Church' that are more controlled by 'Caesar', culture and cult than by the eternal Christ.

However, there remained one catastrophically weak area of their life:

Their dismal and disastrous failure to love each other deeply vv. 4-5. It *may* be that the church had become too concerned with doctrinal threats. It *may* be that they had lost their desire to 'do' works because of an over-emphasis on being saved by grace, thus sinking into comfortable complacency. It *may* be that the presence of false apostles had produced an atmosphere of fear and suspicion in the church and that love had been strangled, diluted or dissolved. Whatever the cause, love for God was cool and the church was being damaged as a result. This is surely a potentially neglected area of church life – the 'love of God' can make us feel this is sloppy and sentimental; it's the ABC of the Gospel and

we've surely moved on from that (!!); it's oriented towards 'works' and as evangelicals we sometimes have negative views of works!

Christ takes this lack of love in the church very seriously indeed and calls for repentance in thought, word and action. Without love, the church fails to demonstrate its supernatural nature. If 'love' is not the goal and is not shown, especially by church leaders, then another spirit will rule – that of disunity, conflict and fear. Without deep love, the church ceases to be the church and its lampstand will be removed, unless it is sorted out! If a church no longer practices love, emitting light and warmth, then it loses the right to exist and Christ threatens to wipe it out of existence, for such a church has lost the right to exist in this cold and dark world.

Such judgment is present and ongoing – this text is not only about a final and future judgment. The later letters of Ignatius show that the Ephesian Church heeded this warning. Yet the warning remains for us – It is God Himself in Christ who will snuff out any church if it fails to repent and restore attitudes and actions that show *His* love to this dying world.

2:1-7 Application: How can we deepen our love? By giving each other, and the lost, more of our 'precious' time and our real presence with one another. 'Love' is a 4-letter word spelt 'T I M E'.

Two final words on **2:7**

Challenge – to the Ephesians (and to us) – Are you listening? Are you actually hearing what I'm saying? Are you acting on what I'm saying? This is the challenge to live out the holiness of God in an unholy world.

Comfort – Christ says that if we're truly hearing and truly acting and truly persevering, then we *will* be numbered among the conquerors. We will eat from the tree of life. We will enjoy eternal intimacy with Christ in the paradise of God where all will be finally restored in the heavenly Jerusalem.

3. To the Church in Smyrna

2:8-11

Big Idea: Christ praises the church in Smyrna for her endurance of tribulation and calls for ongoing faithfulness under persecution, as the road to eternal life and kingship in glory.

Outline:

A Reminder of God's Complete Sovereignty – 2:8

God knows – their suffering, poverty and warfare – 2:9

God knows – their imminent pain and prison – 2:10

God wants – their fearlessness and faithfulness – 2:10

A Reminder of the strength of the Spirit and the outcome of overcoming – 2:11

2:8-11 Exegetical detail: **2:8** This is a vital introduction that links back to the reality of 1:17-18, namely Christ's complete control over time and eternity and over all that happens in His world. How necessary to know this in the frightening future that threatened the believers in Smyrna.

2:9 Great comfort to know that the Lord God controls even the severe socio-economic and political constraints facing the church in Smyrna. It is quite likely that Jews, resenting the growth of the believing churches, exploited their own relative safety under the Roman Empire by reminding the Roman authorities that Christians no longer merited special treatment or protection as a 'Jewish sect' (Acts 13:45,50;14:2-7,19). The city of Smyrna, moreover, had shown particular loyalty to Rome and its Imperial Cult! Satan was seen as 'false accuser' and some Jews were aligning themselves with the powers of darkness in stirring up trouble for faithful Christians – see the 'blasphemy' references in Rev 13:1, 5-6; 17:3-6.

2:10 Suffering, imprisonment and possible death await some of these believers. They are not to fear this, for their lives are in the Hands of the God of all history. Christ was persecuted here on earth – even to the extent of crucifixion – and yet He '*overcame*' and did so by His resurrection to eternal life and rule. Jesus also overcame Satan (1:1, 18; 12:1-12). Even Satan's evil efforts to test God's people will work towards the fulfilment of Christ's Sovereign plan for history! God's purpose is for the strengthening of His people. God indeed has overruling purposes! The 'first and the last' derives from God's self-description in Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12 and the first two of these includes God's commands to Israel '*Do not fear*' which He now repeats to the Smyrneans. The latter are now the true Israel, successors to the faithful of God even way back in Isaiah's time!

Their time of tribulation will be brief – 10 days – as it was for Daniel and his three friends who refused to be involved in idolatry (Dan 1:2; 1:12-15; 5:3-4). This may not necessarily be a literal 10 days but may well be linked with the common factor of avoidance of pagan/Imperial cultic images, sacrifices and meal-sharing.

If they are faithful in this testing, the crown of life will be theirs. They may have to experience ‘defeat’ under Rome’s ‘crown’/authority, but they will actually gain life and will inherit a heavenly crown. This means a share in the rule of Christ who alone holds the keys to life and death. ‘*Overcoming*’ here means our real but ironic victory. This promise of 2:10 finds expansion in 20:4-6 where martyred believers are granted life and rule with Christ, being protected from the second death. Yes, Satan is allowed the power to imprison God’s people and to put them through death, but Satan is *already defeated* and does not therefore have the power to impose a second death on them. All power over death was won by Christ in, by and through His resurrection (1:18b). That’s why He had the power to bind Satan *and at the same time* protect His very own people from the ultimate harmful effects of the realm of death.

2:11 This text - ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death’ – appears in variant form in each of the letters to the seven churches. The condition for inheriting the promise of salvation is that we ‘overcome’ or ‘conquer’. This is finally repeated in 21:7 – ‘..he who overcomes shall inherit these things’, namely the enjoyment of God’s covenant promise and presence among His people (21:3).

2:8 – 11 Application: In all of this, we rest in the Sovereignty of God. Are we to accept that ultimately God Himself is the originator of tribulation and Satan is God’s agent under the Hand of God?

If that is the case, what does God achieve by the suffering of His people?

4. To the Church in Pergamum

2:12-17

For many decades of the 20th Century, a true story circulated among the members of OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship) International in East Asia. The OMF Director had met with a road accident from which he was admitted to hospital in Bangkok, Thailand, with a broken leg. During the course of the day he hosted three concerned visitors –

- a) One missionary said to him ‘Look. You’ve been far too busy of late. God knows you need a break, with time to relax and take some time out.
- b) Another fellow-worker arrived and suggested – ‘Listen, you are involved in a very strategic ministry. This accident is clearly an attack of Satan aimed to damage and limit your work for the Lord. We must positively resist Satan.
- c) Later in the afternoon, once contacted, his wife walked into the hospital. Concerned, yes, but mainly exasperated! ‘Why on earth didn’t you look more carefully before crossing a busy Bangkok street in the morning rush hour period?’ A realistic and down-to-earth response!

Who was involved in this road accident? We need to be aware of the reality of spiritual warfare, but we must beware of giving too much credit to Satan – he is *not* God. This passage in Rev 2:12-17 contains some of the strongest language in the NT and as Christ addresses this church, He is clearly aware that Satan is both present and active in the Pergamum Church and City. Within a single verse 13, we are told by Christ that ‘Satan lives there’ and that ‘Satan has his throne there’! Why such a strong emphasis on Satan in this particular letter? Two reasons –

- a) Pergamum stood on a rocky hill 1000 feet above its surrounding valley and was the capital city of Asia Minor. It was the first city in Asia Minor to build a temple dedicated to Emperor Worship and ordered by the Roman Emperor for the worship of a living ruler! From the start, Satan was going to be the real and prime enemy of the Christian believers. A huge altar to Zeus was erected, along with many other altars to varied divinities. Pergamum also functioned as a centre for the worship of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. This temple attracted followers from right across Asia Minor, the cult being symbolised by a serpent, emblem of ‘Satan’ for Christian believers. Pergamum thus was a strong centre for the exercise of demonic power, authority and influence in society, culture, politics and the church. The consequences of this for the church in particular were immense – believers had to offer incense to images of emperors and affirm the Lordship of the ruling Emperor! So Pergamum was a focus for Greco-Roman culture and religion, in which Christians faced enormous problems, pressures and persecution.

- b) There is however a second reason why John was led by the Spirit of Christ to reveal the Satanic context of this city. Whether it was Satan or God or self or one, two or all, who was at work in the circumstances of the OMF Director in Bangkok, the one thing we can say with certainty is that the area of special interest to Satan is the whole issue of divine truth. Satan will do anything within his limited power to pervert, dilute, confuse or deflect the impact of divine truth on human minds, hearts and wills!

As the Book of Revelation develops, Satan (the dragon) gives the political system (the beast) the power to persecute the church, which was certainly happening in Pergamum. There *are* clues in Rev 2:12-17 which should alert us to the matters of truth and doctrine. The Roman proconsul had the 'right of the sword' and this authority was handed to Augustus in 29 BC. This sword was symbolic of divine authority, power and judgment, but it was also symbolic of the discerning and authoritative power of divine truth. Satan has always been urgently concerned to oppose that truth. When Satan is active in a situation, we can be sure that he will engineer an assault on truth and doctrine. Sure enough, the two criticisms that the Spirit of God directs at this Pergamum Church *both involve teaching*.

Let's trace both God's Commendation and Condemnation in Pergamum.

2:13 is very positive. Pergamum was a tough place to be a Christian –

- i) Difficult on a Physical Level – Antipas was recognised as the first Asian martyr. According to tradition, he was put inside a very large bronze kettle and heated up on a fire. Followers of Antipas as martyrs included Christian stone-cutters who refused to carve images of the healing god Asclepius.
- ii) Difficult on a Social Level – Refusal to adopt the lifestyles offered by Greco-Roman religion could mean loss of job, trade, social standing and political privileges.

Within this challenging situation, the believers at Pergamum are *commended* by Christ through John's letter. Three encouragements –

- a) God recognises the pressure of life in Satan's stronghold – 'I know where you live'. God knows and understands and acts in the situations He brings us into – nothing happens by accident under His sovereign control!
- b) 2:13 The church had been faithful to the name, to the Person of Christ – His full divinity and full humanity.
- c) 2:13 The church had been faithful to the work of Christ – to the faith of Christ. They understood His atoning death, had been transformed by it and were committed to Christ's Mission in the world – they were confident of these things. If so, then what was the problem? They were grasping the

essentials of the faith and they had kept the faith in the most difficult of days. Some had been martyred by the Roman authorities. Surely this was enough. What more did you expect of them, Lord? Clearly there *was* a problem – a problem of such severity that God demands *repentance* – of such a degree that without it, He will intervene quickly and directly. *Something* is desperately wrong here – but what?

The Core Problem

In the OT, Balaam had encouraged Balak to entice Israel to sin by engaging in idolatry and immorality (Num 25:1-3; 31:16). ‘Balaam’ came to be used by those who earned money by pushing believers towards ungodly practices – Deut. 23:4; Neh. 13:2; 2 Peter 2 :15; Jude 11. Idolatry and its associated immorality pulled believers towards compromise involving loss of money from trade. In the Pergamum Church, *some* were following the error of Balaam and the current and similar heretical sect – the Nicolaitans – who saw no problem with eating sacrificial food and practising associated sexual immorality. Some at Pergamum had presumably attended, and perhaps participated in, cultic festivals. Some perhaps justified it by arguing, as in 1 Cor 8, that an idol had no real existence; some may have said ‘surely we must be involved in Greco-Roman culture so as really to understand and identify with it’ – an ancient form of the more modern argument ‘you need to be in it, in order to win it!’ So, some in the Pergamum Church were involved in idolatry and immorality which they justified by holding to the false doctrine of Balaam. However, we have not yet uncovered the foundation of what had gone wrong at Pergamum. The root of the problem was *not* wrong conduct – that was the symptom of the illness – but rather wrong creed understanding. What was that wrong creed? We need now to go deeper and we need to return once more to Balaam.

In Numbers 22-24, Balak king of Moab sent for the prophet Balaam and wanted him to curse the nation that he, Balak, feared, namely Israel. A fee was offered to Balaam. God appeared to Balaam and warned him not to go but Balak offered great rewards, so Balaam set off but met an angel on his way. The angel warned him not to go on. Balaam eventually offered to go back but now the angel tells him to go forward. Then on three mountain tops, instead of words of cursing, Balaam speaks amazing words of blessing on Israel. Balak is very angry and sends Balaam home. So what? What is the root of the problem? Then in Numbers 25, we suddenly read that the daughters of Moab succeed in tempting the people of Israel to join them in their idolatrous feasts and sexual immorality. Balak had wanted to *destroy* Israel but God blessed Israel and yet suddenly we find Israel joining herself to Moab in idolatrous worship.

Then in Numbers 31, Moses sets the blame for this state of affairs on Balaam's teaching. When Balaam had failed to curse Israel, he had apparently gone home and began to encourage social relations between Moab and the Midianites on the one hand, and Israel on the other. After all, therefore, according to the prophecy he had been compelled to utter, Moab would not be able to harm Israel. The oracles had proclaimed the mighty strength and blessedness of Israel as the covenant-elected people of God. Balaam's doctrine appears to have been that Israel, as God's Covenant people, cannot be harmed by its relationships with its neighbours. So certain and guaranteed was its covenant with God that Israel was *absolutely bound and certain* to be blessed, regardless of its relations with Moab and the lifestyle it might adopt there. Some Corinthians in the first century AD believed that their idolatry and immorality were not a problem, for precisely the same reasons of their rock-solid covenant relationship with God and the Apostle Paul spells out in 1 Cor. 10 that this is a disastrous doctrine. They thought they were safe, impregnable and utterly secure in their divine covenant!

Some in the Pergamum Church, it seems, still held to this doctrine. They were convinced that this 'truth' gave them license and liberty to indulge in the sins of the city of Pergamum. This doctrine of *antinomianism* says that you are so safe in the name and faith of Christ that conduct doesn't really count or matter. In other words, you can share the lifestyle of Pergamum *and* enjoy the blessings of the covenant. Some in Pergamum had actually swallowed and practised that perversion of truth. There are of course variant forms of this deception in the contemporary church today! Numbers 31:8 records that during a battle between Israel and the Midianites, commanded by the Lord through Moses, Balaam was killed by the sword for his evil-doing. Interestingly, in Rev 2:16 Christ threatens to come against those indulging in this sort of sin 'with the sword of my mouth'. The sword of Christ's mouth is a reference to His authority over church and demons. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the dangers of idolatry and immorality by his reference to Israel of old in the wilderness where 23000 fell in a day for their failure to judge idolatry (1 Cor. 10:7-11). In Rev 2:16, the Pergamum Church needs to heed the warning, by hearing of their own sin of toleration and failure to exercise discipline.

The root problem issue at Pergamum was not absence of truth but rather a wrong understanding and Application of truth by some. One of the hardest balances to achieve in the Christian life is surely the challenge of 'living in the world' but not becoming 'of the world'. The teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans basically said 'Accommodate yourselves to the religious and social requirements of your surrounding non-Christian society'. That was virtually impossible in any case in the ancient world – as is also the case in the contemporary non-Western world – for religion and society were inseparable in practice. When the church enters into

such partnership with the world, then that is when it comes under the influence and control of Satan and his demonic forces. At the same time it is true that believers must engage *with the world*. That dilemma was compounded and intensified by some in Pergamum who felt they were so safe in God's Hands and as God's people that they could not be harmed by the pagan involvement/lifestyle they adopted. In short, they said 'We can do what we like now that we've been freed and forgiven by Christ'. The reality was, and still is, that we dare not do as we like – unless we want to risk disaster. The result in Pergamum was over-tolerance, over-accommodation, compromise and the flooding of worldliness into the very church itself!

This problem had, and still has, two levels –

- a) At one level, some say in effect 'as long as we uphold truth and orthodoxy, then it doesn't really matter too much how we live, how we treat our family members, how we conduct our business affairs, how we spend our time and money'.
- b) At a second level, comes the false sense of security that because we are 'in Christ', then we can live as the world lives and adopt worldly standards. Increasingly across the Western world, all religious positions are gaining acceptance as holding equal validity. Toleration, inclusivism, inter-faith services, gender and identity confusion, materialism are widespread.

2:16 In the church at Pergamum, many had shown true love for Christ and his gospel by their martyrdom but some also had a faulty concept of the meaning of 'love'. Real love involves the upholding of truth and living that truth out regardless of the cost. The church in Pergamum tolerated those who held false practice of doctrine and turned a blind eye to those who compromised with the world. The Pergamum Church *was* largely orthodox but had slipped into thinking that as long as a person's creed was orthodox, then that person's behaviour was not really so important. One lesson for us all, in all of this, must surely be the point that as Satan is the Master of Deception and clouds people's understanding of the gospel message, so also He has a great interest in Theology and Hermeneutics in order to trip up, confuse and deflect us in the very areas in which we ought to be proficient! Another lesson is surely that the church must not tolerate those who lower the standard of the demands of truth. Christ will come to the whole church - He holds the church responsible for exercising discipline against compromising Christians. The act of discipline is actually the act of love. Why love? Because, if we tolerate compromise within the church, the offending members will feel they are in a position of great safety, not realising that they are in extreme danger, for if the church fails to discipline, then Christ will act decisively (2:16).

2:17 Christ never issues a challenge to a church without His promise and provision of the necessary resources, so in verse 17 Christ sets out the equipment for the task. He gives encouragement alongside the challenge for all who are willing to resist the temptation to compromise with worldliness –

- c) Some Hidden Manna – Supernatural food for the people of Israel was supplied by God for the journey from Egypt to Canaan. There was a tradition that a pot of manna was placed in the Ark as a memorial to future generations and would be brought out again when the Messiah came. Those who resist pagan sacrificial banquets will receive sustenance from God Himself, namely the fullness of Christ and fellowship with Christ. Our hope lies in the unseen but powerful Word of God.
- d) A White Stone – Various interpretations of this. Probably *tessera* ie. a token of admission to a banquet. In effect an invitation to the marriage supper, given for the righteousness of believers in resisting compromise with idolatry and immorality.
- e) A New Name – This name was likely to have intended the victor's own name ie. the personal assurance of God's approval of the church's faithfulness in trial and of the fact that those believers had entered the one feast that really mattered, namely the Marriage Feast of the Lamb of God. Some say it was God's name, indicating His character and power – a promise of the power and sufficiency of God that is available to us in Christ (see also Rev 2:13; 3:12; 21:2). The Lord Jesus Christ is thus basically saying to the Pergamum believers – 'Why do you chase after the glitter of this fading world? If you have the Spirit of Christ, the Father in heaven, the Word of Christ and the personal assurance of Christ, then you possess already all that you will ever need, both for time and eternity. Christ is our satisfaction and our sufficiency at all times and in all circumstances that we will encounter.

5. To the Church in Thyatira

2:18-29

Big Idea: Commendation for works that witness to Christ, but condemnation for toleration, compromise and idolatry. The chance to overcome in order finally to rule with Christ!

Outline: *A Reminder* – the nature of the Christ – each letter begins with an awesome reminder of the source of the ‘words’. 2:18

A Point of *Praise* – past record of the church’s works. 2:19

A Point of *Pleading* – the church ‘tolerates’ the prophetess Jezebel, who teaches falsely and towards sexual immorality and idolatry. Christ has given Jezebel the time and chance to repent but she refused, so now she will be cast into a position of suffering and weakness. 2:20-23a.

A Point to *Ponder* – God knows us inside out and will repay us according to our deeds. 2:23b-c.

Points for our Practice persevere in the faith 2:24-25
overcome by doing His will and works 2:26a
receive authority over the nations 2:26b-29

Exegetical detail 2:18 The citizens of Thyatira had two deities that they worship as sons of Zeus and this may well be why Christ points to Himself as the ‘Son’ who holds authority to judge (Ps 2:7-9; Dan 10:6,16; Rev 19:12).

2:19 Initial point is that of faithful witness in spite of persecution. See this theme elsewhere in Rev 1:15; 2:13; 3: 8-10,14; 13:7-10; 14:12; 17:12.

2:20-23 Jezebel (verse 20) was being ‘tolerated’ and was leading some into sexual immorality and eating sacrificial idol food. This immorality was probably physical and spiritual – intercourse with other gods. In the OT Jezebel had led Ahab and Israel to adopt Baal worship. Continued membership of trade societies or guilds required members to engage in idolatrous practices. Here in the contemporary 21st Century AD, a strong parallel exists in that ‘toleration’ is a very highly prized postmodern virtue! Toleration can so easily slide into compromise by Christian people. Notice that the judgment on Jezebel anticipates that on the harlot, Babylon, in Rev 18. Many of the trades mentioned in Rev 18 were also present in Thyatira and commerce could so easily lead to compromise. In a real sense the visions *do* portray reality in society, and indeed church, today. We must never forget that Christ does judge in the midst of the sin He finds in His world (1 Cor 5:2,5). Christians can and do die by their disobedience and some who claim to be Christian turn out finally not to be so. Very sobering! It seems that church leaders had really thought that Jezebel was a true believer. God will deal with false teachers for He sees right into our hearts and minds.

2:24-29 Jezebel and her followers may have used the expression ‘the deep things of God’ but the reality is that they were involved in idolatrous worship that actually dragged them into the ‘deep things of Satan’ and did spiritual harm to them as a result. As Christians, we must beware of those who claim to bring new revelations or deep, hidden truths that have never previously been known at all. In v 25 Christ appeals to those who have not been deceived, simply to persevere, holding fast to faith and trust until Christ comes. Their reward for faithfully believing and witnessing will indeed be very great, namely a share in Christ’s rule and authority over the nations! The ‘morning star’ is Christ Himself (2:28-29). The indication seems to be that Christ is here revealing Himself as the true ruler of this world who replaces *all* human claimants to this cosmic throne. These ‘overcomers’ have started to overcome before getting their eternal reward. The overcoming is thus happening in this life, not the next life. Christ had overcome by living faithfully on earth as a Lamb, to the point of being slain. (5:5-6). Paul views our overcoming as a parallel to this, as sheep to be slaughtered (Rom 8:36-37).

The beast overcomes believers by causing them suffering (11:7; 13:7) but believers in turn overcome the beast by remaining faithful in suffering (5:5-6; 12:11; 15:2). This does not just mean overcoming by death; it is also ‘keeping my deeds’ (2:26) ie right across a life of obedience and faithfulness. We do this primarily by avoiding idolatry or compromise of any sort whatsoever.

2:18-29 Application: False teaching had found a way to penetrate this church at Thyatira and this raises big questions for us within the church. We surely need to ask the question of whose responsibility it is to guard against this happening in the 21st Century – Ministers? Elders? Members? Has compromise so subtly weakened our resistance that we struggle even to recognise false teaching when it is sitting under our very noses but largely undetected? Clearly we are not called to detach ourselves completely from the world but have we moved too close to the dangers of conformity to, and compromise with, worldly influences that, if given the opportunity, could destroy a church effectively?

How easy it is to focus so much on the love and grace of God in Christ that we begin to lose sight of the infinite holiness of the Lord God Almighty and of His capacity at times to step in at any stage of the church age and exercise strong judgment even against His own believers and churches. Some countries in the world experience the direct persecution of the church to the point of death. Perhaps other lands need to find other ways of showing the ‘overcoming’ that Revelation so often mentions. For example, overcoming by not submitting to the temptations that arise from possible personal gain, pride, sexual temptation, theological deviation of financial offers that will give us some benefit.....or so we are tempted to think!

6. To the Church in Sardis

3:1-6

Big Idea: The Word of Christ brings rebuke to this church in Sardis for its lack of fruit-bearing witness and its readiness to compromise. Great reputation; poor reality. There is some hope though that a few are overcoming as they seek to walk faithfully with Christ and Christ will eternally be faithful to such believers.

Outline: A Word from The Christ who holds and controls both Spirit and Messengers. 3:1a

A Call to wake up and work in witness! 3:1b-2.

A Call to remember and repent....or face judgment. 3:3.

A Call to Flee compromise. 3:4a.

A Counting of Worthiness to Walk with Christ for ever. 3:4b-6.

3:1-6 Exegetical detail

3:1a Not unlike the church in Ephesus, this Sardis congregation has somehow lost its power to reach outwards in witness. The church had declined along with the fame of the city and its spiritual life had drained away almost to extinction.

3:1b-2 Lethargy and apathy had crept into this church and there was a desperate need for it to wake up and realise its responsibility to witness to the surrounding pagan culture. There had been genuine life in the past but the church had drifted into living on their *name* only! (2:17) A renewed spiritual life is possible because Christ holds out two great hopes to this church – a) Seven spirits ie the power of the Holy Spirit and b) Seven stars ie angelic support. In short, Christ graciously has the means available to revive this flagging church into faithful obedience! This is the only church out of the seven in Rev 2-3 that is on the verge of dying out. The Sardian Christians may well have feared persecution if they were too lively or threatening in their gospel witness to a deeply pagan society. If that is indeed the case, then fear of witness leading to a tendency to compromise must count as a temptation for any gospel-bearing church throughout global history.

3:3 Their works have not been acceptable to God. Three -fold plan – a) Present – Therefore, remember. Remember what? Maybe remember that however great and glorious the free grace of God truly is, we must never forget that God's goal of grace is a renewed life for the church that is proved by our works (Eph 2:10). b) Past – Recall what you have received and heard. c) Present – Keep it and repent. The conditional sense of this indicates not Christ's final return but rather a judgment in time on the local churches that fail to wake up! This will be linked to the final coming but the timing Christ's coming in these letters is uncertain and indeed ambiguous. What we can say is that Christ treats this as very urgent.

3:4a The soiling of garments most likely refers to engagement in pagan practices at religious festivals involving the use of images, sacrifices and communal meals. It may well also include the sexual immorality that was an integral part of such pagan religion. The few, faithful folk who had not soiled their garments will walk with Christ in white because they have proved worthy. Why so? Because they have received a reward for their perseverance in and through suffering (see also Rev 7:14 on those who have come through the tribulation with white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb). Also in 6:9-11, those martyred for the word of God will be given 'white robes'. The focus again is on the cost of discipleship borne through faithful witness to the gospel and word of the Lord.

3:5 Yet again, a life of faithful witness is rewarded with white garments that signify purity made possible by the One who wore white – 3:18; 6:11; 7:13-14; 19:8. The picture in 3:4 seems to be that the faithful are *already* wearing these white garments. In 3:18 believers are asked to buy white garments and 16:15 notes that there is the keeping of garments so as not to be naked. There is a remarkable triple promise re white garments –a) 3:4 is the initial promise. b) Christ promises not to wipe out the names of the faithful believers from the book of life in 3:5. Repeated again in 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27. These names have been there in the book of life 'since the foundation of the world'! Stunning truth. The OT concept of 'name' indicated the character of the person and Christ was checking out that character in its totality. The church may initially have had a good 'name' but time can bring weariness and lethargy...and compromise! This is a warning that the decline and destruction of some churches is not impossible. c) The third breathtaking promise from Christ in 3:5 is that He, the Lord of Glory, will confess the overcomer's name 'before My Father and before His angels'. In other words, if we confess Christ's name before potential persecutors, then in turn, we will have *our* names confessed by Christ. See also Matt 10:32 and Luke 12:8 if this truth is almost too mind-boggling to take on board! This includes all true believers, not just those martyred for word and faith.

3:6 Christ desperately wants to save this church from impending death and pleads for listening ears. Even then in Rev 16:15 in the bowl visions, the Sardis church is already under attack and that church – and others no doubt – need to hear, receive and respond to this warning there and then. *The dragon, the beast and the false prophet* had already engaged combat. What a timely warning to all churches across the entire global church in every age. Witness or be judged now.

3:1-6 Application: There does seem to have been a real problem with the churches of Thyatira, Pergamum and Sardis regarding their levels of idolatrous compromise over pagan culture and religion. The amazing truth is that Christ loves His Church. He gave Himself for her in life, death and resurrection. He is

ready even now to supply the supernatural power that was needed to save and equip His church. This is surely a warning message from Christ for all churches at all times to be alert for the early warning signs of potential or actual decay, decline, deterioration or death in our spiritual and practical life and ministry. What a challenge. As individuals and churches, our 'name' does indicate our identity in Christ, as well as our Christlike character. Our 21st Century AD pagan world has a desperate, but largely unrecognised, need to see Christ in the pages of His inspired Word, but not only there. Many will never see more or less of Christ than they see *in our lives*. In a real sense, the keys to the Kingdom of God have been placed in our own hands and God will hold us responsible for that.

7. To the Church in Philadelphia

3:7-13

Big Idea: Christ praises this church for her continuing faithful witness. Christ will continue to equip and empower this church and encourages the members to persevere so they will inherit eternal fellowship and identity with Christ.

Outline: A Word from the Christ who is holy and true and who holds the key of David that opens and closes doors. 3:7.

A Word of praise for their faithful keeping of the Word. 3:8.

A Word of promise that Christ will show to rebellious and trouble-making Jews His own love for His Church. 3:9-10.

A Word for patient holding-on to faith, with the assurance of an eternal crown and a new identity in the new Jerusalem. 3:11-13.

3:7-13: Exegetical detail 3:7 The reference to 'holy' and 'true' occurs also in 6:10 as an attribute of God and suggests that this designates here in 3:7 the divine Sonship of the Christ. It links also with Isa 22:22. Jesus takes the role of Yahweh, the true Messiah, and his followers as the true Israel. This also links with the idea of Jesus rejected by the Jews as a false messianic pretender. The keys in 1:18 were those of death and hell and Christ's authority over salvation and judgment, but here in 3:7 it is the key of David that decides who enters the kingdom (Isa 22:22). Eliakim holds this key and he is seen as a type of Christ who parallels the very well-known Isa 9:6. As Eliakim ruled over Israel, Christ rules over the church and decides entry to it.

3:8-9 The Philadelphian Church was undergoing severe persecution by the wealthy, local Jewish community who made claim to belong to true Israel but are described in verse 9 as being ‘the synagogue of Satan’. Christ comforts the believers here that He and He alone has the key that gives entry to God’s kingdom – the key of the house of David. Though weak and persecuted, these believers are given Christ’s power to remain in His Kingdom. The open door is the chance to preach the gospel and witness for Christ. They have kept the Word of God and have not denied the name of Christ. The church has witnessed to Christ and now Christ will work in such a way that these Jews will fall in repentance at the feet of the church – an allusion to Jews turning to the new and true Israel in Isa 45:14; 49:23 and 60:14. The ‘Gentiles’ in Isaiah are now actually ethnic unbelieving Jews who are being brought by Christ to worship the one, true, living God. The remarkable yet ironic truth is that Christ is the One causing the unbelieving Jewish community to acknowledge that it is the Gentile church that makes up His beloved people. Jesus has power in salvation and judgment ut is exercising that power through His followers (Matt 16:18).

3:10 Christ made His church (vv. 7-8a) and sustains His church (vv. 8b-9), but is also now ready and powerful to give protection to that church during the impending tribulation because they have already been faithful under duress. The phrase ‘the whole world’, referring to the great and final tribulation, is probably not to be taken literally here. It would more likely be localised to Asia Minor or maybe a little more generally across the Roman Empire. Christ is probably saying here that the physical suffering will be very real but that He will preserve them spiritually in the midst of it.

Thus it seems that 3:10 refers not to a physical rapture prior to the start of a ‘Great Tribulation’, but rather to Christ’s protection for believers as they pass through the end-time tribulation that began in the first century and would gain momentum as the final end drew nearer. Likely allusion to Dan 12:1,10 in which ‘that hour’ is ‘that day of tribulation’ when ‘many are tested and sanctified and sinners sin’. Rev 3:10 may well be the purifying and strengthening of believers *but also* a divine punishment. See Rev 7:14 in allusion to Dan 12:1 and 12:10. Shown also by Jezebel’s suffering in Rev 2:22 cf 7:14. Thus the end-time tribulation started during the church age even in the first century. This testing ‘of those who dwell on the earth’ means unsaved unbelievers. The latter will be further hardened against God by the trials, but believers will be spiritually strengthened in faith and kept spiritually safe. See Rev 7:14-17.

3:11-13 The challenge of verse 11 is to persevere in the midst of trial. The promise to come quickly probably means that Christ will come very soon by the power of the Spirit to the Philadelphians in their specific context. Christ will strengthen them *in the trial*. From verse 12, Christ gives four aspects of a promise to all who overcome – writing on him ‘the name of my God, the name of the city of my God and My new name’ all mean our eternal union with God and fellowship with His presence. Fourthly, Christ makes the overcomer ‘a pillar in the temple of My God’, not just opening the door of the temple. Those who genuinely draw fellowship from Christ, however, will always attract persecution. See also Rev 21:25 and 21:2 for this amazing progression of Christ’s promises to the Philadelphians and indeed to all believers. This opening of the doors by Christ into the heavenly Jerusalem, has already begun here on earth for the faithful. No one can shut this door (3:8) and the passage will be fully consummated when people enter through the gates of the new Jerusalem (21:25). We will participate in the new Jerusalem that will descend from heaven (21:2,10). Once again in 3:13 the readers are called to hear what the Spirit says – they need discernment as they prepare for that coming tribulation so that they don’t deny Christ’s name, but receive their final reward. They and we *must* focus on eternity, reward and heavenly-mindedness as we face trials and temptations.

3:7-13: Application: One of the most amazing truths of this section is surely the extent of God’s saving work among the Jewish people of Philadelphia, such that they will recognise the church as the ‘true’ synagogue. This theme of the church as actually fulfilling the promises of Israel, develops as the Book of Revelation unfolds. God uses trials to mature and strengthen the faith of believers and to keep us safe spiritually, while at the same time operating in judgment on those who are hardened unbelievers. This Philadelphian congregation was small and weak *and yet* God singles out this church for a special manifestation of His care, interest and help. God had indeed not forgotten them in their apparent insignificance. He cared and intervened!

8. To the Church in Laodicea

3:14-22

Big idea: Christ brings condemnation for the church at Laodicea because of its weak witness and shocking spiritual condition. He pleads with the church to persevere by functioning as truly faithful witnesses and by renewing their fellowship with Christ so they will be equipped to reign with Him.

Outline: Christ speaks words to this church as the faithful and true witness. He functions as the ultimate ‘Completer/Finisher’ of His Creation! ‘Creation’ here refers primarily to Christ’s work, rooted in His death and resurrection, of beginning His great work of new creation and a new heavens and a new earth. 3:14

Christ condemns their lukewarm attitudes and deeds. 3:15-16

Christ exposes their enormous spiritual blindness to their own state. 3:17

Christ counsels them to seek His willing help. 3:18

Christ disciplines them out of love to bring them to repentance. 3:19

Christ invites them to share fellowship with Him and to share with them as overcomers even His own eternal throne. 3:20-22

3:1-14 Exegetical detail: 3:14 This point is rooted in Rev 1:5; Col 1:18; Isa 65:16-17. It is based on His resurrection and His beginning work of new creation and a new heavens and a new earth. ‘Amen’ is a Hebrew equivalent of ‘faithful and true’. This Laodicean church is desperately lacking in precisely this area of faithful witness and the absence of Holy Spirit power for their role as firstborn of this new creation initiated by Christ’s own resurrection. The tragedy is the absence even of any hint of commendation for this spiritually dead church of Laodicea.

3:15-16 Out of this cluster of three nearby towns – Hierapolis, Colossae and Laodicea – Hierapolis had hot waters with medicinal qualities while Colossae had healthy cold water. However, Laodicea lacked any good water source and its supplies had to be piped in from outside, resulting in dirty, lukewarm water, fit only to be spat out! The wider ancient world also believed that lukewarm water was unhealthy. Likewise, the Laodicean lack of faith and witness was negatively affecting the region and its compromise with idolatry was a key factor in this. Their faith and witness ought to have been challenging local pagan culture.

3:17 The Laodiceans, says Christ, have prospered materially by linking up with the corrupt and godless world economic system that surrounded them and was based on idolatry and immorality (see Rev 6:15; 13:16; 18:3,15,19; Isa 2:10-21; 13:16). Poverty is not endorsed in Scripture but wealth needs very careful handling or we will be consumed and destroyed by it! Christ’s condemnation here is rooted in Hosea 1-2; 2:5,7,8,11; 12:7-8. The Laodicean self-assessment was that they were rich but the reality lay in Christ’s verdict – spiritual bankruptcy! Their wealth lay in its banking system, famous eye treatment and textile trade – all founded on idolatrous economics. Disastrous results accrued.

3:18 To resolve this catastrophe, they must buy ‘refined gold’ = purity and ‘white garments’ to cover over their nakedness. This charge of nakedness is connected with idolatrous practice eg Isa 47:3; Ezek. 16:36; 23:29; Nah 3:5. To overcome their blindness – lack of spiritual insight – ironically they must buy eye ointment! Remarkably, the gold, white garments and eye-salve all point to the same thing in 1:12-16, namely *Christ Himself*. The Laodiceans simply needed a renewed relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself – nothing more, nothing less!

3:19-20 Amazingly, Christ has not lost hope for these Laodicean believers! This really is utterly stunning. He actually invites them to renew fellowship with them and the verbs ‘stand’ and ‘knock’ indicate present, continuous action. Most likely based on Song of Solomon 5:2 – a picture of Christ as husband wanting a renewed relationship with His bride, the church - is the assurance that all believers who have cooled off, drifted or got tangled with this world are invited back to renew their fellowship with Christ.

3:21-22 Any loss of worldly ‘gain’ is simply nothing, compared with the priceless riches of a share in their reigning with Christ in His eternal kingdom. This comes frighteningly close to home in the 21st Century AD. GK Beale puts it this way – *‘We must adjust our priorities to place the kingdom first and be willing to give up what we cannot keep to gain what we cannot lose – our share in the kingdom of God. This reward of kingdom reign has actually already begun (cf. Rev. 1:5-6,9)’*. (2015:93).

3:14-22 Application: Israel of old must have been relieved to escape the slavery and struggles of their Egyptian bondage but greater wealth brings greater temptation to the people of God. So often, more wants more, and the gaining of wealth can dilute/drag us away from deep spiritual worship to, and pure living for, the Lord God Himself. The wealth and idolatry of Laodicea clearly damaged the life of the church there. We may not consider ourselves to be very wealthy, yet we will be relatively more wealthy than Christian believers in many other nations of this world. We need seriously today to assess how wisely we are using our time and our money in particular as we embrace church life and ministry in the 21st Century.

It is surely all too easy slowly to slide into ‘lukewarmness’ without even being aware of it. As one preacher recently suggested – ‘The greatest danger facing Western Christians is drip-fed comfort’. Maybe it is true that our root problem is actually not ‘materialism’ *per se* but rather the self-sufficiency and independence that we feel materialism will buy us. The Laodiceans were wrapped up in concern about their appearance, their health, their finances, their clothing. When we feel self-sufficient, we lose sight of Christ as our security and fail to realise our *total* dependence on Him. We can easily feel spiritually healthy when in reality we are actually far from healthy. We cease to feed fully on Christ...and thus fail. We need to recognise sin, repent, listen to the Word and be renewed.

9. God's Throne in Heaven

4:1-11

Big Idea: The Glory and Majesty of God who reigns His Cosmos, as Sovereign, Redeemer and Judge from Creation to New Creation and for all eternity.

Outline: 'And there before me...' John's vision of Rev 4-5 follows the 'overcoming promise' for sitting on the throne previously revealed in 3:21.

An Open Door in Heaven. 4:1

A Throne in Heaven. 4:2-3 and 4:5-6a

Twenty Four Other Thrones in Heaven. 4:4

Four Living Creatures in Heaven. 4:6b-8

Corporate, united worship in Heaven. 4:9-11

4:1-11 Exegetical notes: Introduction – Christ has already 'overcome' (5:5) and His overcoming sits in 3:21 alongside its fruit, namely the overcoming exhorted to the seven churches of Rev 2-3. Christ's reign was inaugurated by His death and resurrection as He Himself 'overcame'. That is now the pattern for our own overcoming and ruling. Rev 5:5-6 shows how Christ gained His present and continuing kingship by His death and resurrection through suffering. Our present reign as believers is shown by our white clothing (3:5,18; 4:4), seated on thrones (3:21; 4:4), crowns (2:19; 3:11; 4:4) and the 'open door' image (3:8, 20; 4:1). Christ rules by His 'seven spirits' ie. the Holy Spirit. Believers persevere now because they already know they have part of their ultimate inheritance here and now. Believers know that God and Christ are sovereign in their plan for our suffering and that eventually we will be vindicated against our persecutors.

John may well have been aware of Daniel's very similar vision of the Ancient of Days and Son of man (Dan 7:9-14). Some examples –

The prophet 'looks' (Dan 7:9; Rev 4:1). He sees a throne in heaven with God sitting on it (Dan 7:9; Rev 4:2). God's appearance is described (Dan 7:9; Rev 4:3).

Other examples are in Dan 7:9-10 cf Rev 4:5. Dan 7:10 cf Rev 5:11. Dan 7:10 cf Rev 5:1-5. Dan 7:13-14 cf Rev 5:5-13. Dan 7:14 cf Rev 5:9. Dan 7:15 cf Rev 5:4. Dan 7:16 cf Rev 5:5. Dan 7:18,22,27 cf Rev 5:10. Dan 7:27 cf Rev 5:13-14.

See also Ezekiel similarities – Ezek. 1:5 cf Rev 4:6. Ezek. 1:22 cf Rev 4:6. Ezek. 1:26-28 cf Rev 4:1-5.

Rev 4-5 show the scene of a throne room in a heavenly temple. See certain links – Isa 6:1-4 cf Rev 4:8. Rev 11:19 and 15:5ff develop the picture in Rev 4 of a 'sanctuary' or 'temple'. Much similarity between these texts. 'Seven lamps' in 4:5 like those in the temple. Golden altar of incense in 8:3; 9:13; 16:7 cf 6:9-10.

Rev 4-5 is patterned after Dan 7. A temple depiction would be strengthened if Dan 7:9-14 is seen as a vision of a *temple* throne room in heaven.¹⁶⁸

4:1 'After these things' does not necessarily mean that 4:1ff events come chronologically *after* Rev 1-3 events. Rev 4-5 is simply a new vision. John is simply obeying Christ's call to proclaim Christ's message. 4:1 'what must take place after...' refers to Dan 2:28ff in which Daniel prophesies latter-day coming of God's kingdom which John sees as starting to be fulfilled in Christ and concerning the events between Christ's first and second coming. The visions of 4:1-22:5 are introduced by 4:1 but *all the events* starting to unfold are events that stretch throughout the church age, past, present and future. John is now in the timeless, spiritual presence of God and His court in heaven!

4:2-3 John is caught up in the Spirit to the heavenly realm in a way not unlike that of Ezekiel's experience – or Isaiah's. John, like the OT prophets, is being called *as a prophet* by his being brought into the secret heavenly council of Christ. He is then to go back to the Christ's people and inform them of God's secret purpose and of what role they will exercise in the carrying out of this. For the moment though, John is in the timeless sphere where truth and reality are clear. It would be difficult to use 4:1-2 to uphold a view of later physical rapture. The 'divine throne' occurs 17 times in Rev 4-5 and 21 more times in Rev 6-22. The intention is to stress God's sovereign rule over the whole of human history. An awesome thought, for our willingness to be ruled by this king is the basis for our own judgment! God works everything for our good and His glory – awesome also! In Rev 6-16, all judgments come from His Throne – huge encouragement to all believers who are suffering, are being persecuted or are tempted to give up. The three named stones in 4:3 signify the sovereign majesty and glory of God and the rainbow, His mercy and glory. Points also to new creation (21:10-11, 18-23).

4:4-5 Twenty-four thrones for 24 elders. Significant number that could be David's 24 orders of priests (1 Chron. 24:3-19), 24 Levitical gatekeepers (1 Chron. 26:17-19) and 24 Levitical worship leaders (1 Chron. 25:6-31), thus representing the church in worship. Rev 21:12-14 could also make it 12 patriarchs plus 12 apostles, meaning the church as universal priesthood of believers. These elders are different from the redeemed saints for they are separate from the crowd of the saved in 7:9-17. Thus, these 24 elders are probably angelic beings representing the whole church (see 22:9) ie. heavenly representatives of God's elect people, like the 4 living creatures are probably heavenly reps of all animate life in general creation. The church is thus represented in heaven by very powerful heavenly beings who attend the throne of God. and present believers' prayers (5:8 and 8:3), as well as interpreting visions to people (5:5; 7:13 cf 10:4,8; 19:9; 22:8). In a real sense, the church on earth *already* is heavenly! God will judge the persecutors of His church

and he indicates this in lightning and thunder. 5:6 develops the 'seven temple lamps of fire' theme as the Spirit's work.

4:6-8a 'Sea of glass like crystal' could be the heavenly version of the Red Sea (place of dragon in Ezek. 32:2) ie obstacle to freedom and source of evil and the beast. In the new Jerusalem, there is no longer any sea! (21:1) The four living creatures seem to be a high order of angelic being. Many eyes = God's agents with divine omniscience who inaugurate and continue judgments on humanity. Symbolic descriptions but real and an uplift to those undergoing persecution.

4:8b The hymns of vv. 8b-11 interpret the preceding vision of vv. 2-8a. The key issue is that God is holy (v. 8b) and is sovereign over creation (v. 8b,11b) which shows His 'worthiness' (v.11a) to be worshipped, praised and glorified (vv.9-11). Thus God is to be glorified since He is holy and sovereign. All of creation was supposed to recognise this! This is being done by the 24 elders in heaven but also by the true church on earth. Isa 6 is pulled into Rev 4:8-9 and closely ties to Daniel 7 and Ezek. 1. Past, present and future shows God's infinity and sovereignty over history. This gives the church on earth courage and strength to stand firm during the testings of our faith.

4:9-11 The living creatures declares God's power in the heavenly court of the temple throne room but this divine authority is enforced on earth and gives huge encouragement to suffering believers (4:9). Such praise in heaven triggers even more worship from the elders for the eternal God (4:10). This is in massive contrast to evil, earthly kings who abuse power in their persecution of God's people and are judged for it (11:30-35; 12:7). Those who compromise are called to avoid worship of pagan gods or kings who falsely attributes that belong only to the One true God. Christians are now crushed but the tables will be turned. 4:11 shows that the title 'our Lord and our God' was being given to Emperor Domitian when John received this amazing vision. Our God *is* worthy of glory, honour and power *because* He is Creator of everything. He created by His Will and God's power is revealed through creation, shown by the praise of His created beings. God keeps and preserves the created order; He indeed created all things right at the beginning. The former and first statement shows readers that all that happens to us in history is a part of God's created purposes. In spite of appearances, God still sits on His Throne and is in control. Therefore even our pain and suffering has a redemptive reason and is worked by Him according to His own good will and purpose. Our calling is to trust Him in all circumstances. The next chapter, Rev 5, will show *how* He achieves His plan and it is through Christ's death and resurrection and continuing control over everything. He does this by the Spirit He gifts to His believing church on earth. The climax of the chapter is *the giving of glory to God* which is the chief activity in heaven and must be

reflected on earth as well. We are to constantly realise that His main goal in history is to magnify the greatness and glory of Christ's name, not to magnify ourselves, our egos or our reputations!

4:1-11 Application: The whole of this cosmos finds its focus and centre in the Throne of God and most of the NT occurrences of the expression are to be found in the Book of Revelation. All angelic and human creatures are subject to His authority and every judgment in the following chapters of Revelation emanate from this Throne. The church needs a strong theology of divine sovereignty that will offer both encouragement and comfort, especially during times of suffering and persecution. That perspective will also give us biblical balance when we are seeking to discern the relative roles of God and Satan in Scripture and life. The visions do use symbolism but the depiction is of real beings with real powers and purposes. Spiritual warfare is very real and our theology is lopsided without it. Our earthly worship ought to be a reflection of what is going on now in heaven, empowered by the Holy Spirit and directed to magnify the glory of our Lord God.

10 The Scroll and The Lamb

5:1-14

Big idea: The glory of God and the Lamb, founded on their sovereignty over all creation by, in and through the death and resurrection of the Christ. Judgment and redemption have started and will finally be consummated and completed.

Outline:

Then I saw.....a scroll sealed with seven seals but none worthy to open it. 5:1-4

Then I heard.....an elder says there *was* someone worthy to open it. 5:5

Then I saw..... a Lamb who had been slain and who took the scroll. 5:6-10

Then I looked and heard.....the voice of many angels. 5:11-12

Then I heard.....every creature singing 'glory to God and to the Lamb. 5:13-14

5:1-14 Exegetical detail:

5:1-4 In Rev 5:1, heavenly worship continues unabated and the One seated on the throne holds in His right hand a book/scroll sealed up with seven seals. The scroll represents the *judgment of God*. An allusion to Ezek 2:9b-10. The sealed scroll idea seems to be a combination of Dan. 12:4,9 with Isa 29:11. The structure of Rev 4:1-5:1 is the same as that of Dan.7:9ff and Ezek. 1-2. Rev 2:2-14 follows the outline of Dan 7. *Judgment* is the key motif of the following visions as they unfold. In **5:2** we find a strong angel asking a strong question. This closely parallels the angel in Dan.4:13-14, 23 who is a divine spokesman for a heavenly council

announcing a judgment followed by restoration re Nebuchadnezzar. The angel in Rev 5 is also from a heavenly council with a divine decree of judgment and redemption re the cosmos! The common element of both decrees is that Only God Himself, and God alone, has the power, authority and worthiness to be completely sovereign over history and to carry out His cosmic plan. Daniel was ordered by the angel to seal up the book recording these divine judgments till the 'end of time' (Dan 12:4) or the 'end time' (Dan 12:9). John believes these 'latter days' have been started by the resurrection of Christ which has unsealed Daniel's book. John here is witnessing the actual fulfilment of Daniel's 500-year-old prophetic vision! Rev deals with visions and events of the past and present of the church age, as well as with the eschatological future itself.

Thus, Revelation contains God's plan of judgment and redemption triggered by Christ's death and resurrection, but still to be finally completed. The angel is simply asking *who* in creation has the authority over this plan. The question is actually answered in the two stunning hymns of 5:9-10 and 5:12. One way to see this is as the book/scroll being in effect a will or testament that contains an inheritance waiting to be received. Adam had lost the promise to reign over the earth, but Christ, as last Adam, would inherit that promise. Humanity steeped in sin stands under the very judgment written into the scroll. Humanity could never in a million years open that scroll! But Christ is declared worthy because He suffered the final judgment as a voluntary, innocent sacrificial victim in place of, and on behalf of, His people. He represented them and thus redeemed them (5:9). A great mystery - for Christ is both priest *and* sacrifice! He is Lord *and* temple both at the same time (cf Rev 21:22). The scroll thus contains God's divine plan for judgment and redemption that is unravelled in visions through Rev 6-22, particularly from cross to new creation. This covers huge areas such as Christ's sovereign rule over history; the rule of Christ and His people through the church age and the new cosmos; Christ's protection and sustaining of His people who are on trial in their suffering; His immediate as well as final judgments on a world that hates and persecutes the Christian Church. Even in the midst of the chaos and confusion of this world with its suffering and evil, God is still in control and working out His plan for His Church and Cosmos and that plan is unassailable and totally safe! Christ has opened the seals, the plan is forceful and final and the purposes of history are even now being forwarded under His lead!! These are truths of immense power, reassurance and comfort for believers now.

Scholars have debated whether the 'book' was a 'scroll' or a 'codex' (the forerunner of a modern book). Futurists say it was a scroll so that all seals would need to be broken before the full picture could be seen. They see the sets of judgments working out in chronological sequence rather than in tandem. Others see it as a codex, each seal could enclose a segment of the book, with the contents

revealed segment by segment as the seals are broken. Thus, the seven seals would together unfold the whole course of history starting with Pentecost and stretching till Christ's return. However, this text may refer to a Roman Will that needed witnessed (sealed) by seven witnesses and sometimes a summary of contents was written on the outside of the document. Only on the death of the testator could the will be unsealed for the execution of the will. A trustworthy executor had to be found! Rev 5:5 may well show a vision of the inaugurated fulfilment of OT prophecy. The prophecy in Daniel had said the book was sealed up till the end time but in Rev it is shown that by Christ's death and resurrection, Daniel's prophecies have started to be fulfilled, so that now the seals are broken.

In **verse 3** no one was found worthy to open the book by breaking the seals for all are sinners and therefore under the judgment of God! This is devastating news for the weeping John, for if the book's seals cannot be broken, then surely God's glorious plan for redemption and judgment would not be capable of execution!

5:5 Great news though is now announced – the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:8-12) and the Root of David (Isa 11:1-10) – has indeed overcome and can therefore open the book. Both these OT titles are about a prophecy of a Messiah who would defeat his enemies and judge them. Christ's overcoming of the enemy puts Him in such control that He can indeed execute redemption and judgment. On the basis of His own overcoming, Christ demands our daily overcoming by that same divine grace.

5:6-10 Verse 6 is an absolutely pivotal text in the whole of biblical revelation. John sees a Lamb 'as slain', not 'as if slain', standing literally in the centre of the inner court area around the throne. 'Slain' alludes to the Passover lamb and to the lamb led to the slaughter (Isa 53:7), both indicating Christ's sacrifice that achieves redemption and victory for the people of God. This victim was prophesied as 'sinless' (Isa 53:9), hence 'worthy' (Rev 5:9). The slain lamb was indeed a conqueror fatally injured in defeating an enemy. Its 'seven horns' are the fullness of its power (Deut. 33:17; Ps 89:17; Dan 7:21). The Lamb ridicules the prophesied, but merely apparent, victory of the beast! The slain lamb is now on the divine throne and His death not only redeems humans but also conquers the power of the enemy. His enthronement concerns His resurrection and ascension to heaven. The key idea is that *Christ, as a Lion, overcame by being slaughtered as a Lamb* – This of course totally defies all human logic, as does the apparent oxymoron idea of the 'crucified Messiah'. Not only that, but this overwhelming truth and reality also dismisses and demolishes all human pride and arrogance that we have the power to decide or determine our own destiny independently of the Lamb. The 'weakness' and 'foolishness' of the Cross defies all our striving for wisdom or power to work out our own futures without Him. The Lamb was slain,

the Lamb redeems people and the Lamb confirms them as a 'kingdom and priests'. All this explains why He is 'worthy' and He 'overcomes'. The centrality of the Cross lies at the root of the Lion/Lamb imagery for John.

The twin verb phrase 'standing as slain' contains two Greek perfect participles showing an ongoing condition. The Lamb continues as 'slain', indicating the ongoing victorious effect of His death as redemptive. Christ's death and the consequent suffering of the church are continually being turned into victory. Christ's overcoming started with His death and resurrection and patterns our own overcoming. 'Lamb' occurs 27 times in Rev 4-22! Strength comes through weakness. Our victory will only come by our living out the cross in suffering. (7:14; 14:4). Christ as innocent victim was our representative penal substitute for our sin. Christ suffered the defeat of death. He was simultaneously overcoming as He formed a kingdom of redeemed followers set free from Satan.

In Zech. 4:2,6,10 '7 lamps' and '7 eyes' mean God's full and powerful Spirit – omniscient and powerful to track His people wherever they are on the earth. After Christ's death and resurrection, these spirits are now agents in His plan.

In **verse 7**, the Lamb takes up the book/scroll, sits by the Father and reigns.

Verses 8, 9 and 10 reveal some of the results of the Lamb's received authority. The immediate response is one of heavenly worship cf 4:9-11, confirming the divinity of Christ. The text actually states that each elder has a harp and it is the elders who exercise the priestly duty of presenting before God the prayers of the believers (see also 6:10 and 8:4). These prayers concern God's judgment on those who do evil and God's care for the righteous ones. The church on earth may still be in great pain but an angelic ministry in heaven is being exercised on their behalf! (8:9).

Verses 9b-10 reveal a 'new song'. Christ is worthy to take the book/scroll and break the seals *because of* His redemptive work – see the link with creation in 4:11; the link with the hymns of 5:12,13 cf 4:11; the link with the 'new creation' in 21:1-2, 5; the likely link with new creation in 4:3. This whole section underlines the worthiness, authority and divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lamb *overcame through death* and this is the foundation of His worthiness to receive sovereign authority. The hymns of 5:9-14 interpret the vision of 5:1-8 and confirm that by Christ's death, He overcame and bought/created a kingdom of priests. Note the huge irony of divine victory *through death*! This should bring us great comfort in our present sufferings. This redemption is global and not determined at all by race or racial origin. Every group will be represented. The marvel and miracle is that God has made them 'a kingdom and priests' (5:10a). See Dan. 7:22,27, though this is actually the fulfilment of a much older promise in Exod. 19:6, though the new

truth is that this kingdom is being drawn ‘from every tribe and tongue and people and nation’ (5:9), not just the nation Israel! God’s people have been delivered not from Egypt but from Satan’s rule, and not to enter the old Promised Land but into one that extends to the whole coming new earth. As Beale puts it (2015:117) ‘The slain Lamb of the Israelite cult has become the end-time king of the cosmos’. Thus, Christ is sovereign over His whole creation and His believing church will reign over a kingdom, rooted in Dan 7. ‘Reign’ could be present or future tense here but likely present as the kingdom of the new creation has broken into this fallen world by Christ’s death and rising. This rule is real but limited and will be completed in the final new creation.

5:11-12 Here is further praise and worship in heaven, confirming that His receiving of the scroll meant that His death – and resurrection – had made Christ worthy ‘to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and glory and honour and blessing’. Millions of angelic beings were, and are, rejoicing over this.

5:13-14 Yet again, this hymn underlines the point already made in 5:11-12, namely the interpretation that the dead but resurrected Lamb’s receiving of the book/scroll demonstrates and proves that His death and resurrection made Him *worthy to receive praise and glory*. Here the earthly worshippers join forces with the heavenly host to give glory to God and to the Lamb. Christ, in other words, is viewed as being in the same position as God Himself, jointly to be glorified. That glory is rooted utterly in their sovereignty over the entire cosmos. One day even God’s fiercest enemies will bow the knee before Him. Thus Rev 5:9-12 indicates the ‘already’ and 5:13 the ‘not yet’. All creation is called on earth to submit to Christ and God or face the Godhead in judgment. In verse 14 the living creatures and elders again renew their worship. Interestingly, the same sequence and order are maintained in Rev 5:9-14 as in Daniel 7:13-27.

5:1-14 Application:

This message of the vision of Rev 5 comes from the very presence of God and insists that He only has power over history. We are called to suffering obedience in the midst of injustice, hardship and even death and yet to an awareness that God is still sovereign in all this. We live in the strange enigma of living as ‘slain’ people of faith, at the same time as exercising a degree of kingdom authority. We are called here and now to assess the quality of our worship in the church on earth and the degree of its witness to this unbelieving world. It does seem that John presents Rev 4-5 to show the fulfilment of the Dan 7 prophecy of the reign of the ‘Son of man’ and the church, inaugurated by Christ’s death and rising and His receiving of authority. Rev 4-5 show that God’s sovereignty in creation also make Him sovereign over judgment and redemption by the Lamb. The Spirit energises this trajectory that will lead ultimately to New Jerusalem in Rev 21-22.

11 Opening of The Six Seals

6:1 – 7:8

Big idea: Seals 1-4: Christ is using evil heavenly forces to bring trials on humanity during the church age either for the purpose of purification or of punishment. Seal 5: Persecuted and martyred believers must wait for God's justice to be seen once the sum total of designated suffering has been completed. Seal 6: God's justice will be shown in final judgment on this unbelieving world. Angels are at work preventing an explosion of evil on earth until believers are given protection against the loss of their faith in the midst of all that threatens it.

Outline: Six Seals. see Exegetical Notes below

Introduction: All authority has been given by the Father to His Christ and He now rules over His kingdoms – 1:5; 2:26-27; 5:1-14. The seals show us that although the world seems to be in chaos and confusion, Christ is fully in control. Christ brings about trials with both the purposes of redemption and judgment. All trials and persecutions of the church are in Christ's Hands. The persecution unleashed by the opening of the seals hit the seven churches of Rev 2-3 but is still ongoing till Christ's return. Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and receiving of authority at God's right Hand triggered the persecution and believers are called to persevere in and through these trials. The first four seals may well have released simultaneous and immediate persecutions in the 1C AD. The events of Rev 6:1-8 take place *before* the final judgment. Parallels and influences can also be traced in Zech. 6:1-8 and Ezekiel 14:12-23. Faithful believers will be purified but any in the church who compromise by idolatry and become disloyal to Christ will suffer judgment by the same tribulations.

6:1 – 7:8 Exegetical notes: Seal 1 6:1-2 First Living Creature – white horse and rider – bow – crown – conquest.

The 'voice of thunder' comes from God's throne (4:5). This triggers the arrival of the white horse and rider. Some say the rider is Christ because of the links with 'white' (19:11-16 and the word is used 14 times in Rev to show purity). However, other factors suggest that the rider is actually satanic. The parallel horses in Zechariah are all considered evil. Satan can also imitate the appearance of Christ (Rev 12-13). Also 'false Christs' and 'false prophets' is stated in the first of the woes prior to Jesus' return in Mk 13:5-6, Matt 24:4-5 and Luke 21:8. Thus the first rider is most likely satanic, trying to deceive, defeat, persecute and oppress believers. Yet this rider received a crown and was sent by Christ! Satan aims to destroy the church and world but God's plan uses Satan's evil plan on a higher level to purify the church and judge the evil. God is always in control!

Seal 2 6:2-3 Second Living Creature – red horse and rider of war – large sword. This involves literal war but also spiritual warfare. In the section 6:3-8, Satan will try to conquer believers through the means of suffering designed to make them lose faith. God also ironically uses such trials to punish unbelievers. The first rider had opened up the effort of Satan to control the world, but here Satan stirs trouble between nations on earth. The gospel brings peace but Satan attacks its progress and that creates strife. We must bear witness, for God desires that. This may well involve persecution for us, even to the point of pain and death.

Seal 3 6:5-6 Third Living Creature – black horse – rider with a pair of scales. The Third Living Creature commissions this rider to carry out the orders of this broken seal, namely to bring famine. Hence the scales, for during famine, food was rationed out by weight. Another voice is then heard and that is probably the voice of Christ ‘in the midst of the throne and of the four living beings’ in 5:6. These commend to riders are thus issuing directly from the throne room of heaven. The famine is a serious one but not totally disastrous. Prices have certainly risen. Christians as a persecuted minority would be given limited access to food supplies because they would stand firm when it came to paying unfair prices or offering bribes in exchange for food.

Seal 4 6:7-8 Fourth Living Creature – pale horse – rider named ‘Death’ – Hades just behind – power to destroy.

‘Death’ and ‘Hades’ are satanic forces, yet under the control of God’s throne-room. Probably disease and pestilence is intended here. Greek OT ‘death’ (*thanatos*) = Hebrew word for ‘plague’. Hades was the abode of the dead. Ultimately, Death and Hades ‘were thrown into the lake of fire’ (Rev 20:14), along with the beast and false prophet (19:20) and the dragon (Rev 20:10). Death and Hades are under God’s final control. These four judgments are parallel to one another and broad in form, location and time-setting. They cover literal famine, plague and warfare, but also spiritual famine, plague and warfare as well. These four judgments cannot be restricted to a specific historical background. The amazing truth is that by His death and resurrection, Christ has made satanic forces His agents to carry out His plans to sanctify believers and judge unbelievers. Our apparent defeat is our spiritual victory in Christ as long as we don’t compromise our faith in pain or persecution. Christ uses the evil purposes of evil forces to achieve a far higher and greater spiritual good – the judgment of the ungodly but also the sanctifying of the saints! Christ has started to fulfil Daniel’s prophecy of the Son of man being exalted over and above evil powers. Maybe in the Western world we have a particular struggle to see and really grasp God’s sovereign control of evil forces because we view things from *this* world.

Seal 5 6:9-11 I saw souls slain for the Word of God, seeking to be avenged – white robe given to each – the need for patience in awaiting all martyrs-to-be.

This suffering is specifically the result of persecution, as seen from the perspective of those glorified in martyrdom. All four riders thus far have been inflicting suffering through persecution and from the heavenly perspective, this ironically advances the kingdom and was already operative in John's own day. These martyrs may actually be both literal and also those who have endured any sort of persecution for their faith. 'Underneath the altar' = In God's presence. All true believers *will experience* some degree of suffering for their faithfulness to Christ. The heavenly altar is the one on which the sacrifice of Christ was made and this is where the glorified saints are found, having persevered in persecution and in temptations to compromise. Sacrificial suffering and apparent defeat will become final victory (v.9). In v. 10 the saints are not crying for revenge but for a revealing of God's justice. – see Rev 6:12-17;16:7;19:2; Zech 1:12; 6:1-8. In Rev 6:11 a white robe confirms their purity and faithfulness, tested by tribulation. They are vindicated, whether killed literally or metaphorically. Shortness or length of time is relative to God Himself. Final justice and vindication are huge incentives for those who are still struggling on earth under persecuting regimes.

Three vital lessons surely face us in this text – Firstly, have we really taken on board that suffering actually is required of us in Christian life and ministry. Secondly, the huge challenge within, and right in the midst of, suffering is to be able to witness to the world in such key areas as dealing with the temptation towards bitterness, resentment, revenge, retaliation and lack of forgiveness, concerning those who have wronged, criticised or persecuted us. Thirdly, we have a great need to exercise patient endurance and perseverance in a world that demands instant gratification, spiritual results and church growth.

Seal 6 6:12-17 Great earthquake – changes in the earth – the wrath of the Lamb.

The believers' plea for justice in 6:9-11 is finally and conclusively answered in 6:12-17 – the last judgment that follows the completion of the full number of suffering saints and the final end of all persecution of the Christian Church. The Great Earthquake recurs in 16:18, also about the Final Judgment and the removed islands recur in 16:20. Many OT texts also refer to these earth-shattering events eg. Isa 24:1-6, 34:4, 50:3; Ezek 32:6-8; Joel 2:31, 3:15-16; Hab 3:6-11. The kings, great men and idolaters hide from the judgment that has fallen on them because of their idolatry and persecution. They followed and showed support for the beast Rev 19:18-19. The poor are also judged in Rev 13:15-16. All this does not seem to suggest trials in a final period of tribulation before the final judgment but rather a literal or figurative last judgment.

6:16 portrays these earthly rulers as fleeing God, related back originally to Adam and Eve running from God. The end of sin-soaked history will come as it started but with salvation for God's people. The great day of wrath of God and the Lamb against sin has finally arrived and these named groups of people are full of terror. See Rev 16:14;19:17;18. These groups are destroyed by Christ's final judgment. The earth-dwellers have followed *in idolatry* the things of this world – material wealth, false religion, injustice, immorality. They have made these their gods and are comfortably at home in this world, refusing to bow the knee to God! They truly do worship the creation rather than the Creator – Romans 1:21-25; Rev 9:20. The key elements of earth, sun, moon, stars, heaven and 'every mountain and island' have become the idols and refuge of unbelievers. Sin has made these elements impermanent and they must now finally be destroyed. All earthly comforts will be ripped away. The meek Lamb of the Cross and the God of a beautiful creation will now become the mighty, powerful judges of unbelievers. OT allusions underline the power of the Lamb – Isa 2:10,19,21; Joel 2:11. Christ's resurrection gave Him power to rule 'the kings of the earth' (Rev 1:5-6) but now He judges many of them (Rev 6:15; 16:12;17:12-18; 19:18-21). He is also the compassionate Redeemer of His people. The 'kings of the earth' being judged in the last judgment of 6:15 are those being finally judged in 19:18-21 rather than those redeemed in 21:24.

Idolatry ultimately means finding our security without God and our own independence from God! It is shown in our attachment to created things, not to God Himself. Satan deceives sometimes in very subtle ways. Devotion to families in Scripture is commended but can become idolatrous; holidays can bring healthy refreshment but can also become obsessive, self-directed and addictive; concern for the environment is very important but can become idolatrous if it diverts us from devotion to the Creator Himself and joy over the New Jerusalem.

144,000 sealed – from all 12 tribes of Israel – church as true Israel.

7:1 John actually experienced this vision after the one in Rev 6 but what it reveals comes before what Rev 6 reveals chronologically. The angels standing at the four corners holding back the four winds of the earth refers to angelic protection from the evil spirits unleashed in 6:1-8 – temporary protection for believers so that the latter are not harmed by the unleashing of the seals.

7:2-3 This is not a new series of events in the final tribulation but rather an interlude within the tribulations that span the church age. The four angels are temporarily preventing the four horsemen from unleashing trials on the godly whilst they are 'sealed on the forehead' with protection against harm. Meanwhile the ungodly are sealed with the mark of the beast which confirms their exclusion

from God's kingdom. The sealing signifies identity, authentication and ownership for true believers who will be equipped to persevere right to the very final Day! Notice the Exod. 28:17-21 twelve stones text on membership of the true covenant of God cf Rev 21:19-20 new Jerusalem. The sealed are those who belong to the slain Lamb and who know the power and enabling of the Holy Spirit of God. The sealed 144,000 have been purchased by the Lamb and belong to Him – see Rev 5:9b; 7:3-8 and 14:1-4. The 144,000 are most likely to be, *not* a small remnant of ethnic Israelites but God's redeemed, global remnant from across the church age. The seal enables us to remain faithful and uncompromising *and* protected from the final day of judgment. Those without the seal and with the 'mark of the beast' have no protection and face God's eternal wrath – 2:7,10-11; 3:5; 11:11; 14:9-11; 20:4,6; 21:6,27; 22:12,14,17. Our spiritual protection is the key point in all this.

7:4-8 The 144,000 are the church of all ages from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. This number is global but is founded on the 12 tribes x 12 apostles = 144. It is appropriate that this starts with Judah and the Christ – see Gen 49:10. Judah opens the door through the Messiah for all nations to believe. The original calling out of the 12 tribes in Numbers was to call out a remnant army to fight for God!

6:1 – 7:8 Application:

Assurance of salvation requires us to be 'sealed with the Spirit' and carries certain marks with it – belief that the Lamb has bought us with His own blood; our longing to keep and obey God's Word; ongoing sense of sin leading to repentance and renewal of life with Christ; desire to witness to Christ in the midst of suffering, persecution and the temptation to compromise with idolatry.

'Bond-servants' follow Christ and long to please their Messiah/Master in living. Our obedience to Him should be out of deep desire, not merely a dull duty! If not, then idolatry will be lurking close by. We are called to fight and conquer in Spiritual Warfare in the same way that Christ fought – *by persevering in the midst of suffering, by resisting temptation, by refusing to compromise with idolatry and by realising that before we can do that, we must spot Satan's more subtle idols.*

12 Multitude in white robes. Opening of 7th Seal 7:9 – 8:5

Big idea: God and the Lamb are protecting the multitudes of the redeemed through a sanctifying tribulation, but God answers their plea in 6:10 for vindication through the final judgment on an unbelieving world.

Outline:

7:9-12 John saw a great multitude before the throne and the Lamb, wearing white robes, proclaiming that salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb.

7:13-17 The identity of the multitude in white robes – comfort for the ‘overcomers’ of the tribulation.

8:1-5 Seal 7 - Silence in heaven. Seven angels with seven trumpets before God. Another angel offers incense, with prayers of all the saints, on the altar before the throne. Fire was hurled from altar to the earth.

Exegetical detail and application: 7:9-12 This vast number has lived through the era of the church age and right across the globe. This is in fulfilment of Isaiah’s and Ezekiel’s restoration prophecies concerning Israel and Daniel’s tribulation prophecy. John either sees that which is interpreted by what he immediately hears or vice versa. E.g. in Rev 5 John hears about a Lion (5:5) and then grasps its meaning by seeing the Lamb who appears to him (5:6). In Rev 7 John hears the number of those sealed from the 12 tribes, then grasps its meaning by seeing the huge crowd before him. All these links are issues that come before the final judgment and reward. The concept of ‘standing’ often relates to Christ’s and our resurrection existence. Chapter 7 is not a *new series* of future events during a final tribulation period that follows the series in Rev 6. Rev 7 is an interlude or bracket that explains the vision of Rev 6 in greater detail. Thus the events of 7:1-8 immediately *precede* those of 6:1-8 and 7:9-17 puts its focus on the time *after the final judgment* that has been shown in its early phase in 6:12-17. Thus in Rev 7 God and the Lamb are glorified in 7:9-12 because of the redemptive rest they have given to God’s people (7:15-17). This reward is because of the perseverance of these folk through the great tribulation (7:14) of the 4 winds (7:1-3) by God’s seal (7:3-8).

This was the next vision John saw but not necessarily events in immediate chronological sequence after 7:1-8! In fact it shows events *after* the depiction of the final judgment in 6:12-17! This group is the same end-time, already-glorified group as that in 5:9. This imagery originally referred to Israel in Egypt and her subsequent descendants in the Promised Land, now used by John to refer to peoples from all nations who have persevered, overcome and had their faith kept

by the power of God throughout their period of great tribulation in the ‘deserts’! They now enjoy an eschatological Feast of Tabernacles. They have resisted evil – 12:10-11; 19:1-2. God’s power and sovereignty have preserved their faith. Purity through testing because of the seal God has granted them. This world has persecuted them but is now judged by God. Only He has the sovereign attributes

To redeem a people for Himself, for which He is eternally thanked and glorified.

7:13-17 This phrase ‘*the* great tribulation’ occurs here and in Daniel 12:1, plus Matt 24:21. This is not just another general tribulation but *the* latter-day one, prophesied by Daniel and featuring persecution of God’s people because of their faithfulness to God – Dan 11:30-39,44; 12:10. Some will fall away, as in 5 of the 7 churches. This trial involves the danger of compromising faith in the multi-religious context of the Greco-Roman world. Pressure from the ungodly socio-economic-political world and from other religions are the sort of pressures that are tied into idolatrous practices, acts and attitudes. Such pressures are a daily challenge for Christians in the contemporary Global South of Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as their more hidden/subtle/sophisticated counterparts in the Western World. John and Jesus see this as tribulation that stretches right across the entire church age. Indeed 21 of 23 uses of ‘tribulation’ in Paul refer to a present reality. It began with Jesus’ own sufferings and is now shared by the church – see Rev 1:9. In 7:13-14 these followers of Jesus have received white robes, having been faithful in pain but persevered in both faith, maturity and witness to Christ. The true Israel is now purified white. These believers have been made clean from sin by the death of Christ which they continue to believe in and have been purified by suffering. It is Christ’s blood, so this picture is not primarily about a group of martyrs but about all the redeemed.

7:15 The believers’ perseverance in Christ and their resulting purity (vv. 13-14) are the basis for their entrance into God’s and the Lamb’s presence (vv. 15-17). Their hatred of sin, perseverance in the faith and endurance in persecution without compromise qualifies them for the glory of God in their eternal rest. We and all true believers are thus made a new priesthood in service to God and Christ (see Lev. 8:30). We and all believers, not just martyrs, have become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, in fulfilment of the promise of Exod. 19:6. God’s tabernacle will be over all His people (Ezek. 37:26-28). This text shows that God’s work in this will show the nations that Christ is now the Lord, not just for the old Israel but much wider than this – to the global church, the continuation of true Israel, in the presence of God and His Lamb, the Christ.

7:16-17 The redeemed multitudes in God’s presence are fulfilling the prophesied restoration of Israel – see Isa. 49:10 – no hunger, thirst, etc. We partially enjoy

this provision in the present life, gifted by Christ who sits in the centre of the throne. He is the divine Shepherd who feeds and leads his people. This God will also wipe away all tears that mortality and death had introduced – see Isa. 25:8; Rev 21:4. The OT hope of Israel's restoration had thus been fulfilled by Christ for His bride, the global church. There is close identity with David here (Ezek. 37:24-28) – the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David. The Lamb is inextricably linked to His people. As Christ died and was raised so His flock follow this same pattern – dead, buried and raised 'with Christ'. Christ leads His church on earth by the Spirit but in the future, He will lead them in person! This passage follows the sealing and the final judgment and stresses that as conquering and overcoming believers, we will complete our witness and enter eternal glory – see Rev 21:3-4,6; 22:3. Unless the church recognises that it is living through tribulation past, present and future, then there is surely a serious danger that it will fail to identify the areas of its corporate life that are currently under threat of compromise, syncretism and toleration – yet without our even noticing it!

Seal 7 8:1-5 – Christ the Lamb opens the Seventh Seal, resulting in half an hour of silence in heaven! The OT links silence with divine judgment. Thus, for example, Zeph. 1:7-18; Zech. 2:13-3:2; Hab. 2:20-3:15 have God in His temple in heaven ready to exercise judgment over the earth and God orders silence on earth at the point of judgment. Whilst the first five seals cover the whole period of the church age, the last two seals involve the final, most awesome judgment. (See 11:18; 14:14-20; 16:17-21; 18:9-24; 19:19-21; 20:11-15). This seventh seal judgment is in response to the *prayers of the believers in 6:10*. In Rev, 'hour' often refers to suddenness of judgment (3:3; 11:13; 14:7; 18:10) and 'half' means 'times' of crisis and judgment in Dan 7:25; 9:27; 12:7. 'Half an hour' is probably not exact time but rather the suddenness and unexpectedness of a judgment.

Suddenly, it seems, the seven trumpet angels appear in 8:2,6. These seven angels might well be equated with the seven guarding angels of the seven churches in Rev 2-3. Rev 8:3-5 functions to continue and conclude the depiction of final judgment started in 6:12-17 (Sixth Seal) and 8:1. The prayers in 8:3,4 link with Rev 6 for the pleas for justice cannot be fully answered until the end of history when the full number of persecuted and martyred is completed. God gives large amounts of incense to the angel in 8:3 and its burning and smoking is strongly connected with the whole theme of a pleasing sacrifice. God has received and accepted the prayers and pleas of the persecuted, but now-deceased, saints of God. It also shows that this depiction must be of the last great judgment and therefore that Revelation should not be viewed as a 'logical', futuristic, consecutive or chronological series. John returns several times to final judgment in 4:5; 8:5; 11:19, and 16:18-21 but that final judgment *is in God's answer to the prayers of the*

saints! Various noises! It is God's final judgment against all who do not possess God's seal of protection.

Such a concept of an unseen or unexpected judgment at the close of history is likely to be a hard one to take on board for people in a western society – or even church – who have been raised on the drip-feed of material comfort and security. These texts of Revelation would certainly raise such questions as – Where is God? Would God ever punish evil? Will God ever take the side of persecuted believers and give them final justice? Are our prayers really for God's glory and from hearts ready for sacrifice or are they inward-looking and self-motivated?

At the end of Seal Seven – the final judgment – God is seen as having always been just and righteous. Christ has shown how OT prophecy is being fulfilled in judgment and redemption. He has been fulfilling Seals 1-5 but Seals 6 and 7 have not yet been triggered in history because they concern the last and final judgment. Likewise, the first six trumpets are woes that signal final judgment day. The trumpet judgments are introduced in 8:2 and this indicates that 8:3-5 function as conclusion to the seals *and* introduction to trumpets. The whole trumpet series is a divine response to the believers' prayer in 6:9-11. Seals 1-4 focus mainly on the testing trials of Christians; the trumpet woes focus mainly on the trials that punish godless persecutors during the same period of the entire church age. Exodus plagues follow the same pattern – the same plagues that hit the Egyptians were used to protect the Israelites. Trumpet 7 is parallel with Seals 6 and 7. Trumpets 1-4 affect sources of human life; trumpets 5-7 strike humans.

Pastoral Interlude – A Sermon on Revelation 7

The Book of Revelation is a classic example of Apocalyptic literature in which God promises that He is intervening in human history. 'Apocalyptic' means revealed from heaven by heavenly beings like angels, often in symbolic visions, and it is a form of enhanced and dramatic prophetic writing that has particular reference to the final phases of history. In this Book of Revelation, God will bring suffering and evil to an end. Apocalyptic deals with pairs of forces – Two unequal powers (God and Satan); two ages (evil present and righteous future); two worlds (present visible universe and perfect heavenly eternity). It is God who is moving all things all of the time to work out His plans for the cosmos. John is given glimpses into God's eternal purposes, so in a real sense this is indeed prophetic revelation. John writes about the first and second Comings of the Lamb – the Christ – and he shows how, between these two Comings, all the forces that oppose righteousness will be destroyed. He thus encourages the church as it enters persecution and that's exactly what he is doing here in Rev 7 in

the interlude/pause/space between the sixth and seventh seals. 'Who can stand?' was the cry of those facing the wrath and judgment of the Lamb in 6:17. Chapter 7 answers! God answers through two visions given to John –

1. **7:1-8** What on earth is happening here? Four angels are holding back the destroying winds which are God's agents of destruction. The angels are carrying out the will of God until God's servants have been 'sealed'. Ezekiel 9 speaks of God telling a man to place an X on the forehead of all who are deeply troubled about the sins of Jerusalem, in order to protect them from God's coming judgment on Jerusalem. Those whom God owns, God seals. He doesn't seal them *from* tribulation, but He does seal them from His coming wrath. This sealing before the trumpet judgments is a picture of God's sealing of true believers through the church age *from* the coming destruction on the earth and *for* their place of spiritual safety in the heavenly kingdom. This number 144,000 is the symbol of completeness and refers to *all believers* entering the traumatic last stages of human history throughout the church age, between Christ's Resurrection and Return. This sealing ensures that the true church will enter the heavenly kingdom and ensures their faithfulness and spiritual survival in the coming persecutions. How will all of this help us face a wet Monday morning in January with our regrets about the past, concerns about the present and fears for the future? It helps enormously because it screams out something about the *Character of God*. This is the grace of God and the power of God and the overwhelming compassion of God.
2. **7:9-17** Sealed into safety from the coming tribulation but also sealed into their, and our, place in the Coming Kingdom. That was John's first vision and now, here in 7:9-17, the vision of the vast crowds looks forward in time to the church in the presence of God, having endured faithfully and realised her reward. I am reminded of a story told by Rev Martin Goldsmith, a Missions Lecturer at All Nations Christian College near London. He had once been teaching at an Approved School for boys in very tough circumstances and backgrounds. One lad had come to a living faith in Christ and Martin decide to take him to a very large Christian Worship Rally. Before the meeting had even begun, Martin noticed tears streaming down the lad's cheeks. Asked if he was feeling unwell, the young convert replied, 'I thought I was the only one who believed. I had no idea the church was this *vast!*' 'After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count.....'.

If you felt a bit uncertain about the character of God displayed in the first vision, test it out now in this vision of the faithful in every age, some having been martyred, coming through suffering and trial and now standing before their living God.

So, where is *grace* in all this?

Grace is here abundantly. The grace of God is in the very vision itself. God gave this vision to John to grant the people of God a glimpse into the eternal joy that awaits those who are passing through the agonies of this godless, hostile and persecuting world. The redeemed by grace will wear white robes – symbol of the victory of faith and the righteousness of Christ. How do we know it's by grace? Because the glorified, redeemed saints say so in 7:9-10 – 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb'. Our salvation rests on the Sovereign Will of God and Christ's work of redemption.

So, where is the *power* in all this?

The vision then reveals the angels responding to the praise of the crowds by affirming in 7:11-12 that all these attributes belong to God and that God rules the cosmos in power. Each quality has a definite article – unusual in Greek – to highlight and heighten each quality. It is by the planning and power and authority of God that the Lamb died, was raised and now rules from heaven. He rules in power over history, people and events, working all things to that day when the redeemed will be with their God. Robes are possible only by the power and righteousness of the Lamb.

So, where is the *compassion* in all this?

The elder in 7:13-17 piles up the evidence for the Lamb's deep compassion –

- a) God has provided clothing for His otherwise naked and guilty people through the shed blood of His only Son.
- b) God has spread His tent of His Presence over us, giving protection and shelter – 7:15.
- c) God will utterly and totally satisfy His people eternally, giving shelter from eternal dangers – 7:16.
- d) God will shepherd us. The Lamb leads us into the very presence of God and thereby into complete spiritual wholeness.
- e) God will remove the tears of the tribulation of this world.

Grace, power and compassion – the Trinity that God uses to encourage His people to persevere in all circumstances, because the final outcome will be glorious beyond our imagination. God knows precisely just when and how to lift His people up and He does that here in Revelation 7.

13 Trumpet Judgments 1-6

8:6 – 9:21

Big idea: The first Six Trumpets – God uses angels to carry out judgments on the persecuting world.

Outline:

- 8:6-13 The first four trumpets – God takes away earthly security from the ungodly because of their persecution and idolatry. Introduction to the fifth and sixth trumpets.
- 9:1-12 The Fifth Trumpet – demons reinforce and harden the spiritual plight of unbelievers.
- 9:13-21 The Sixth Trumpet – demons judge hardened unbelievers and seal their final punishment, either by lifelong deception till death or by continuing failure to repent.

8:6 – 9:21 Exegetical detail and Application

8:6-13 Trumpets 1-5 are modelled after five of the Exodus plagues –**i)** cf hail and fire, Exod. 9:22-25. **ii)** and **iii)** cf plague on the Nile, Exod. 7:20-25. **iv)** cf plague of darkness Exod. 10:21-23. **v)** cf plague of locusts, Exod. 10:12-15. Just like the Egyptian plagues, the Rev. plagues punish hardness of heart, idolatry (linked to specific gods) and persecution of God's people. God's plan and purpose was to harden Pharaoh's heart against releasing Israel and to demonstrate His power to do plague signs. God's omnipotence was being shown. His glory and authority were seen. God has the final power to open, close, release, harden ie *to judge*.

These plagues in Rev are mainly God's judgment of unbelievers across the whole church age. Some will repent and God will temporarily delay judgment to take care of the truly repentant – 8:7-9:21. Hardness of heart in unbelievers is shown by ongoing idolatry and persecution of believers. The Rev. trumpets also follow the pattern of the seven judgment warning trumpets at Jericho in Joshua 6. The 7th trumpets at Jericho and in Rev. signalled the ultimate final judgment, against unbelievers in the case of Rev. The saints are engaged in 'holy war' but prayer for divine justice against their persecutors and persistent sacrificial suffering are their weapons. In and through all of this, God exercises total Kingship and Leadership.

The seven trumpet angels featured in 8:2 and after a short interruption, they now reappear in **8:6**. These trumpets *do not follow the 7th seal chronologically*, even though they do so in the order of visions in the text. The trumpets actually cover the same time sequence as the seals. The difference lies in the *divine purpose* – the focus

of the first five seals was on trials faced by believers; the first six trumpets describes judgments to be endured by unbelievers.

The fire is figurative symbol – see Rev 1:14; 2:18; 4:5; 10:1; 19:12 – for God’s holy judgment. It affects areas of food supply (Rev 8:7) ie judgment of a significant part of the earth by famine – strong parallels in Ezekiel. In the second trumpet (8:8-9), ‘the mountain’ probably reflects the OT use to mean evil nations under divine judgment e.g. Babylon sinks in Jer. 51:25 cf Rev 18:21. Symbolic of marine creature death and human economic loss. In 8:10-11 the third trumpet seems to be the continuation of famine impact. The falling burning star represents an angel bringing more judgment on sinners. Israel’s religious leaders had ‘polluted’ Israel with idolatry and they now had to bear the bitterness of suffering – see Isa. 14:12-15; Jer. 9:15 and 23:15. Wormwood is a bitter herb that infects water – see also Deut. 29:17-18; Prov. 5:4; Amos 5:6-7.

8:12 concerns the fourth trumpet that portrays partial darkness ie a smaller judgment than the final judgment of 6:12-13 when God finally judges idolaters and persecutors. Rev 8:12 links with Exodus 10:21-29 – the plague of darkness will show idolaters the stupidity of their ways and will likely lead to depression, fear, anxiety and a sense of loss of hope. Again these are figurative, symbolic ways to portray real historical judgments that stretch right across the church age, starting with the resurrection and ascension of Christ to His heavenly throne of total divine power and authority. Similar background references can be located in Joel 2:1-10; Jer. 15:9; Amos 8:9; Eccl. 12:6-7; Job 3:3-10; Zeph. 1:15-16. These first four trumpets underline the spiritual separation from God of hardened unbelievers in this fallen and fading world. This includes those within the church who are ‘married’ to the idolatrous cultures of this world and actually drawing their life parasitically from such idol cultures. This is a severe warning shot across the bows of those in and outside the church who may mistakenly be convinced of their being owned by Christ! Meanwhile, based on the links between Rev 7:7 and Ezek. 9:46, plus those between Rev 8:3-5 and Ezek. 10:1-7, the reality is that true believers have their faith protected by their God-given sealing.

The tribulations of 8:6-12 are expressed in a number of parts of the world at various times throughout the church age but they are partial and selective in nature. See Rev 10:11 for the evidence of this judgment of the ungodly in every nation and the wide effects the trumpet judgments are having. John is told in 10:11 to prophesy against these people and these are the same people he prophesies against in Rev 8:7-9:21.

The first four trumpet judgments are parallel to the first four bowl judgments and both are because of idolatry, though the bowl judgments also add the reason that the saints are being persecuted (16:5-7). These first four trumpets use the Greek

word 'like' or similar words, which suggests that there is a lack of precise description of visions. The Greek word *semaino* ('communicate by symbols') also confirms that the language of these visions is figurative rather than literal in intention. The ungodly put their trust in this unstable and uncertain world and God is showing them through these visions and deficiencies in the world's resources just how foolish and short-sighted this attitude to the cosmos actually is and how certain the judgment of the ungodly has been, is and will be. God's work of creation is being undone bit by bit by His judgment. None of these events throughout the church age is by accident. God does have a purpose in all things, either to refine the trust of believers, drawing them closer to Himself, or to awaken the slumbering, nominal believers or to deal in grace with repentant unbelievers or to harden the hearts of those who consistently refuse to repent and turn to the Living God.

8:13 introduces the fifth and sixth trumpets with the common theme of spiritual darkness and the horrors of being entrenched in that darkness. The trials of Trumpets 5-7 are indeed dire and are aimed directly at the ungodly who failed to respond to Trumpets 1-4, where the environment was judged and the ungodly were stripped of their worldly comforts and props. Trumpets 5-7 are referred to as 'woes' and God specifically brings demons into the activity of divine, spiritual judgment. Eagles were often the warning signs for judgment – Hos. 8:1; Jer. 4:13.

9:1-12 *The Fifth Trumpet*. In verse 1 the star that had fallen from heaven is very likely a fallen angel who had been given by Christ to the Abyss where Satan dwells. This fallen angel is tasked to punish sinful humanity and at the same time also to be judged. Suffering believers must never forget that God ultimately holds the key to Death and Hell and God Himself controls all that happens in His cosmos. This gives us hope and promise. Verse 2 signals more judgment of the demons, signified by the smoke and darkness, extending to the human realm in wider and wider circles egs 12:7-12; 13:3-8; 16:10 and 17:8. Darkness = spiritual blindness and deception of those who give their ultimate allegiance to Satan. It is God Himself who sends the locusts from the Abyss and across the earth itself. Verse 4 shows how only God's believers have His seal of ownership and are kept spiritually safe even in the midst of the severest of trials vv. 5-6.

These verses indicate temporary periods of God-directed spiritual and psychological suffering on the ungodly. They most probably extend beyond the believing community but also to those in the visible community of new Israel who have still failed actually to trust in Christ. The locusts make the ungodly aware that their persecution of believers is pointless. The ungodly will long for death yet at the same time be terrified of it! They will despair and yet will continue to be deceived by demons who will influence them towards a deeper

hardening against God. Believers will realise that Christ is always with them and that a loving and sovereign God is always working for their good and for His eternal glory. The godly persevere to testify to Christ and His Word, even to death (12:11). Note the use of 'like' in 9:7 – the imprecise language of a vision, but portraying spiritual rather than physical famine. These locusts are like demonic horses and they are inflicting ferocious spiritual damage. Cf Joel 2:4-7. OT imagery is vital as our first port of call for Revelation interpretation. Judgment on idolaters by 'horses' and 'scorpions' that 'sting'. These demonic beings (9:11) are controlled by the angel 'Apollyon'. This could be Satan or another 'higher' demon. Trumpet 6 completes the process. The visions are chronological in sequence but not in historical order of actual happening. Important also is God's overall authority in using Satanic power to judge. It reflects the *seriousness of human sin*.

9:13-21 *The Sixth Trumpet*. The cry from the four horns of the golden altar may be Christ's or an angel's. This verse 13 is a reminder of the cry for justice from the glorified saints below that same altar. 'Four horns' refers to the completeness of divine power from His presence. Euphrates is an approximate area and God seems to be releasing evil angels bound up by Him in verse 14. This sixth trumpet and sixth bowl describe the same event. The Satanic forces will be unleashed but those already sealed by God will be safe from demonic damage. God decides the timing in all this! The size of the demonic army in verse 16 is of vast multitudes and it seems here that, although this is not yet the final judgment, the death inflicted here can include physical *and* spiritual death. The power of the horses is in their mouths ie. suggests demonic deception *normally leading to idolatry*. For example, false teachers who claim that certain types of idolatry are quite acceptable for Christian believers – see 2:6,14-15,20-21. Demons intensify the doctrinal and moral deception and delusion of the ungodly in 9:17-19. False teaching abounds throughout the church age.

Verses 20-21 focus on the failure to repent. The plagues warned people rather than having a redeeming influence. The ungodly who were not killed by the plagues continued in hardness of heart, locked into demon worship, demon deception and immoral lifestyles that enslaved them. The impossibly unrepentant are finally judged at the 7th trumpet in 11:18. Opposition from 'unsealed people' to faithful witness will continue to the end of history but that should not discourage true believers who press on. The ungodly failed to repent of the 'work of their hands' ie idols are used by dark forces to keep people in spiritual darkness so that they cannot spiritually see, hear or walk. They lack the spiritual awareness, sensitivity and understanding that would lead them to true repentance to the Lord. Idolatry leads to a multitude of sins – murders, witchcraft, sexual immorality, spiritual fornication and robbery – see Jer. 7:5-11; Hosea 3:1-4:2; Rom. 1:18-32; Rev. 2:14, 20-23. Even some in the true community of faith will

need to be challenged in areas of compromise and complacency. The danger amidst the exotic, flowery symbolism of much of Revelation is that we will ourselves be deceived into missing the harsh truth and reality of ongoing sin, even within the very churches that we would consider orthodox! The Word of God must be faithfully taught and practiced in our churches as the only sure antidote to false teaching. Idolatry can certainly extend to career, family obsession, leisure, holiday travel, promotion, material greed, self-absorption, pornography, money, safety in this world, comfort, material possessions and worldly security. The underlying and powerful danger here is that we can very easily become anaesthetised, blind, insensitive, unaware to what actually counts as ‘idolatry’. Satan and his dark forces can work very subtly, quietly and unobtrusively, as well as more boldly and spectacularly. He loves Biblical/Theological deception!

14 A Great Angel and a Little Scroll

10:1-11

Big idea: Paradox: John prophesies judgment that makes him rejoice *and* lament.

Outline, Structure, Exegetical Detail and Application:

We have seen that there was an interpretative interlude/parenthesis between Seal 6 and Seal 7. Likewise, this happens again with an interlude that stretches from 10:1 to 11:13. The bulk of the content of this interlude lies in 11:1-13 but it is introduced by 10:1-11. This is a new vision and John is told to prophesy again a) about the ongoing witness of believers that will trigger suffering for them and b) about the future of those who react against their witness. The vision is about the relationship between the godly and the ungodly across the church age that climaxes in the final judgment. At that point John completes the trumpet vision with the final judgment. In other words, Rev 10-11 connect the two halves of the Book of Revelation. The interlude does not intervene chronologically between Trumpets 6 and 7 but gives an extra interpretation of the same part of the church age that is dealt with by the first six trumpets. In Rev 7 we saw how believers are sealed against the spiritual harm of the 6 trumpet judgments. Likewise, in 11:1-13 we see that we are sealed to offer a faithful witness to the gospel. These are surely staggering truths – the ungodly are judged through the first six trumpets era *because* they have persecuted Christians. God has done this *because* He is answering believers’ prayers for vindication and for punishment of their persecutors – see 6:9-11; 8:3-5; 9:13-21. The text 10:6b-7 and 11:14 explain that God will not be slow to wind up history (11:11-13, 18), once the number of suffering Christians has reached its set limit (6:10; 11:7a) and once the level of absolute refusal to repent has reached its highest point.

10:1-4 *Then, a mighty angel with a little scroll.* There is a likely link between this angel and the one in 5:2. The one in 10:1 is ‘clothed in a cloud’ and that language in the OT is for God alone. See also Rev 1:7; 14:14; Dan 7:13. It could therefore be a reference to God or Christ Himself. The rainbow reference is also used in reference to God Himself (Rev 1:13ff; 4:3; 10:2, 8-10; Ezek. 1-3). Pillar of fire is also seen in Exod. 13:20-22; 14:24. Great OT connections again. The key thought is that, as in the wilderness of old, God’s Presence is present with the new Israel, protecting and pastoring the faithful witnesses to Christ – see Rev 11:3-12; 12:6, 13-17. Christ is compared with a lion in 5:5 and an angel in 10:3.

Rev 10:2 has Christ holding the small scroll/book which John eats and subsequently prophesies from. He speaks against ‘many peoples, nations, tongues and kings’, a judgment formula also used in 11:9; 13:7-8; 14:6ff.; 17:15. The little book thus includes at least use of the contents of Rev 11-16. Another commission to prophesy will be coming in 17:1-3 and therefore the little book may stretch right into Rev 17-22 as well. This book may be the one to be opened by the Lamb in Rev 5 as there are certain very definite similarities surrounding both books – both are opened, held by Christ, are drawn from Ezekiel, are linked to a ‘strong angel’, are linked to the Daniel 12 end-time prophecy and are global in scope. The Rev 5 scroll involved the judgment/redemption plan of God inaugurated by Christ’s death and resurrection when Christ took authority to fulfil this plan, though it would involve the suffering of the saints as a necessary prelude to their final ‘overcoming’. The little scroll in Rev 10 most probably has a very similar meaning to the Rev 5 scroll. In 10:2 the planting of Christ’s feet on land and on sea signifies His control and sovereignty over the entire cosmos, including the dragon (13:1) and the beast (13:11).

Verses 3-4 continue the point that it is most likely the Christ who roars like a lion, followed by seven peals of thunder, which would be the voice of a heavenly being or the living creature or indeed Christ/God Himself. These voices are proclaiming the sovereignty and authority of the Christ which releases the revelation of the seven thunders. It may refer to some judgment actually prior to the final judgment, for we have not yet had the sound of the 7th Trumpet that introduces the final judgment. The seven peals of thunder probably indicate another seven series of judgments not to be revealed *but parallel to the series of seven seals, trumpets and bowls*. Same events but a variety of perspectives on those events. The judgments are happening because the ungodly are suffering for their rejection of the message of the witnesses and for their persecution of such believers (see 11:1-13). In Daniel 12, Daniel himself did not grasp the fullness of the fulfilment of his prophetic message. John did grasp the meaning of his message but in verse 4b he is told not to reveal it to his readers, perhaps because the sealing suggested that fulfilment was still in the far future.

10:5-7 *Then, the mystery of God will be completed at the seventh trumpet call.* Strong links here with Dan. 12:7; Deut. 32:32-45 and 40-43. These texts help to confirm that the seven thunders are another series of imminent judgments that are parallel with the seals and trumpets and that the first six woes of each series are inaugurated. Christ orders the sealing of the seven thunders in Rev 10, in the same way that the Father told Moses that His judgments were sealed. Verse 6 confirms the total sovereignty of God over *all created things*. This rule of Christ extends through the church age and into eternity. Verse 7 explains that the prophecy in Daniel 11:29-12:13 was about the end-time suffering of God's people, God's judgment and destruction of the enemy, the setting up of the kingdom and the reign of the godly. The divine plan will be consummated and completed in the final judgment at the close of history. The timing in Dan 12:7 'a time, times, and half a time' for these prophetic events refers to Rev 12:4-6, meaning the completion of God's plan that started at Christ's ascension and ended in His Return. This is the period of *the church's suffering* which will end when time and history end. The angel had told Daniel that the prophecy's meaning was sealed till the end time when it would be revealed. In contrast to that, Rev 10 stresses just when and how the prophecy will be completed, and Rev 11 adds more detail to this. When the 7th angel blows his trumpet, the prophecy of Dan. 11:29-12:13 will be fulfilled and history (Dan 12:13) will finally end.

There is a clear parallel between 10:6b-7 and 6:11 that indicates that the mystery in Chapter 10 revolves around God's decision that the godly must suffer and that that anguish will trigger judgment of their persecutors. In 6:10-11 shows only a little time left before the full number of martyrs is reached and in 10:6b, it is announced that time is up! The events triggered by the seventh trumpet thus mark the end of the saints' suffering and the answer to their prayers (6:10). The word 'preached' in 10:7 means that God told the OT prophets about this forthcoming gospel of Christ rooted in the death, resurrection and exaltation of the Lord of the Universe in this glorious gospel of salvation and judgment. This is by way of fulfilment of the prophecies of 'mystery' in Dan. 2:28-45; 12:4,8-9. Daniel did not fully understand 'his own latter day prophecies' but now in the latter days, John is told that the latter days have now started, triggered by the 'mysterious' way of Christ's death and resurrection. The prophecy of God's crushing of the evil kingdom is now strangely and ironically being fulfilled by this evil kingdom's *apparent* physical victory over Christ and His followers. Jesus' death in Rev 5:9-10 had, as it were begun the victory by faithfully witnessing and by resisting compromise and by paying the penalty of His people's sins and by opening the door to resurrection. Rev 10 says that *we will follow in His footsteps*. We will be faithful witnesses who resist compromise; we will die but rise, gaining a crown of victory (2:10-11). Rev 11:1-13 shows how the persecution and defeat

and struggles and suffering of the God's witnessing church are the way that actually leads to the church's resurrection and its enemies' defeat. We will rule with Christ ironically from the weakness of the cross.

10:8-10 *Then, John is told by the heavenly voice to take and eat the scroll.*

There is similarity between 5:7-8, where Jesus opens the scroll to signify His own authority in judgment and redemption, and 10:8-10, where John shares in and identifies with Jesus' authority to judge and redeem. Chapter 11 expands this to the two witnesses and indeed to all Christians ie. we all share in this ministry of prophecy and suffering as we 'follow the Lamb wherever He goes' (14:4). John is recommissioned as prophet and symbolised by the eating of the scroll cf. Ezek. 1:10; 2:8-3:3; 4:1-2. The sweetness in the mouth – its life-giving glorious words –, followed by bitterness in the stomach is because of the people's rebellious response. Eating the scroll shows John's total identification with the message cf. Ezek. 2:10; 3:10 and the enormous challenge to ministers of the Word today! The scroll's purpose is to present judgment but face rejection of grace by hardened people (10:9-10). This joy *and* bitterness of prophetic ministry is shared also by Jeremiah 15:15-18. John is issuing warnings to the visible church – the new Israel – against unbelief and compromise with this idolatrous world, in addition to warning the unbelievers.

John can stand firm as a prophet of salvation and judgment because he knows that God's righteousness is seen when He punishes sin, that Christian suffering is vindicated when sin is dealt with and that judgment requires us to hold faithfully to God's Word. In all this, God is glorified. That is the great encouragement for all today who preach and teach.

It may well be the case that just as Christ is fulfilling the cosmic purposes of the Rev 5 scroll/book, believers are seeking to live in union with Christ by fulfilling the purposes of the smaller scroll of Rev 10 ie. following in His footsteps, enjoying the sweetness of His grace and yet experiencing that grace in the midst of the bitterness of the pain and suffering that accompanies our prophetic life and ministry in proclaiming His Word. The bitterness certainly includes our agony as we watch a dying world rejecting the gospel that by grace we have come to love and cherish so much. This is painful beyond words and will stretch out throughout the entire church age until He returns and shows us His power and glory. The call and challenge that we face is to *persevere* in this pain until we receive the recompense of the glory of heaven (6:9-11) and recognition at the final termination of history (11:11-13,18) for our faithful witness. In all this focus on the marvels of redemptive reward, however, the fact remains that the scrolls give heavy orientation towards God's judgment.

10:11 *Then, John is told to prophesy again about many nations.*

The word ‘then’ here carries the tone of ‘therefore’...., ‘and so’.....The message is one of judgment against many ungodly peoples, nations, languages and kings. This is a further recommissioning to proclaim this message of judgment. His commissioning is now for the third time – 1:10-20 led to the prophecies of chapters 2-3, while 4:1-2 led to the prophecies of chapters 4-9. This recommissioning in 10:11 leads to the prophecy of 11:1-13 which probably extends to chapters 11-16 or even to chapter 22. John also uses the targeted peoples and groups of 10:11 elsewhere in 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; cf. 17:15.

This verb ‘prophesy’ has future reference but also reveals God’s perspective on the present and on what He is wanting in the here and now. In short, forth-telling as well as foretelling and directed not only to ungodly nations, but also against compromising elements of the visible church – the new Israel – who resist repentance and who veer frequently into the worship of Mammon and the ‘fellowship’ of this world’s values. The antidote to these temptations surely lies in the very focus of Revelation itself, including 10:1-6, namely, the divinity of Christ and the OT association of the divine angel with Yahweh and with Christ Himself. This Book is not about eschatological fancies and speculations but rather about the glory of God and of His Christ. It is this Christ who receives from God the scroll of Chapter 5 and it is this Christ who gives to John and thus to the church the scroll of Chapter 10. Christ has received from the Father all authority, but Christ does delegate authority to His church to announce the gospel message, with its accompanying message of judgment. That message is bittersweet and will bring in its train rejection and the suffering of the church. There is much mystery in all this, ultimately in the mystery of the cross of Christ. One of the deepest mysteries is the continuation of evil, pain and suffering in this life and world. The evil seems to be victorious, but Revelation teaches that it is possible to deal with this apparent paradox and not to be afraid of it or embarrassed by it. Suffering is a key point of contact that we have in common with seekers.

15 Two Witnesses and the Seventh Trumpet 11:1-19

Big idea: God sustains His people in their faithful witness – which seems to fail – but the oppressors of God’s witness are indeed judged.

Outline, Exegetical Detail and Application:

A) 11:1-2 *The angel of Chapter 10 continues to speak to John.* The section 11:1-13 indicates that the church is sealed so that it can give faithful witness to gospel truth and that will provide a foundation for the final judgment. That in itself shows the *massive responsibility* that is ours. These verses carry a message of judgment on all who reject the faithful, persevering witness of Christians and who are intent on persecuting these suffering believers for such witness. This judgment actually is the answer to the pleas of the godly in 6:9-11 and 8:3-5 for justice against their oppressors and the events revealed in 11:1-13 happen in the same time period as the first six trumpets. In fact they were implied in the trumpets but shown more overtly in 11:1-13. In 11:1-2 John has to act out a parable of measuring the temple of God, altar and number of worshippers. The outer court area is to be excluded from the measuring because that area has been given over to the Gentiles ‘who will trample it’.

These verses 1-2 have invited a number of differing interpretations from biblical scholars and commentators. ‘Measuring’ is a key theme in Ezekiel, with 30 appearances as a verb and 30 as a noun, meaning the sure and certain safety and protection of the temple cf Rev 3:12; 21:12-14,15-17,24-26,27; 22:2. Thus, metaphorical symbolism for God’s assured Presence in the midst of a purified and multi-national redeemed church. God will protect and uphold the faith of His redeemed. OT prophecies like Ezek. 40-48 must be seen through the lens of Christ and His Cross and Resurrection. Christ suffered and our lives will be patterned with His in the form of the necessary suffering, and apparent failure/defeat of the church. Through all of this, though, God’s Presence stays with His people and gives protection against all idolatrous deflection and damage.

11:1 shines its spotlight on the entire covenant community in the spiritual temple where God’s presence dwells. The prophecy of Ezekiel has thus begun to be fulfilled spiritually but will eventually be consummated physically and spiritually in the new creation, the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1-22:5). Everywhere else in Revelation, ‘temple’ does not mean literal or historical. It means either the heavenly temple in the present eg 7:15; 11:19; 14:15,17; 15:5-6,8; 16:1,17, or God’s presence as temple in the future new age eg 3:12; 21:22. God’s people on earth are referred to as the ‘temple of God’ (John 2:19-22) and they are at the same time members of God’s temple in heaven. The ‘altar’ refers to the priestly sacrificial

role of believers in their faithful witness to their Lord Christ. The outer court of the temple refers here to the life of the church in the midst of the world system to which the church is always in danger of idolatry, compromise and syncretism. The mention of 42 months seems to be 3.5 years of tribulation prophesied by Daniel 7:25; 12:7,11-12. The number 42 was the period of judgment exercised by Elijah and the wilderness period of Israel – 42 encampments in Num. 33:5-49. Believers will be kept safe under God's sanctuary from the assaults of the devil. The 3.5 year period may well refer also to Christ's ministry, culminating in His death and resurrection that unleashed the era of faithful witness, Satanic opposition, persecution, suffering and martyrdom until Christ returns. The Outer Court is part of the temple that is the earthly expression of God's temple. As believers we are members and representatives of heavenly Jerusalem but while on earth we will be persecuted and trampled. Amazingly this church age of persecution is also the same 3.5 years of persecution of the woman (early church) by dragon and beast.

B) 11:3-6 *God sets up His Tabernacle Presence to ensure the effective witness of His end-time community.* We will suffer as prophets of Word and Life but will be given authority to stand firm against our Enemy. The Two Witnesses are the whole church in their faithful prophetic witness to Christ (two 'lampstands' of 11:4 ie. churches; beast attacks the two witnesses in 11:7 but this links to the *one* covenant community of Daniel 7:21). This 'two witnesses' refers to common use of two witnesses in the NT but also refers to the two 'lampstands' (churches) that stood firm in Rev 2-3. The 'sackcloth' shows strong mourning because of judgment. 11:5-6 actually reveal that judgment is triggered/inaugurated through the witnesses themselves! The witnesses are on the earth and yet at the same time 'they stand before the Lord of the earth. In other words, the witnesses operate on the earth, yet simultaneously and spiritually in God's presence and heavenly courtroom. God is very close by His servants and especially in their ministry of witness to Christ's gospel. The lampstand is the new Israel that is part of God's spiritual temple on earth and is empowered by the Spirit of God to maintain effective witness.

The two olive trees are rooted in Joshua, high priest and Zerubbabel, king in Zech. 4:12-14. God gave the 'oil' of His Spirit to anoint these men to lead the completion of the temple against opposition. Likewise, God is using His Two Witnesses to build the heavenly temple in Revelation. The two witnesses in Rev are actually one, namely the universal church that God is using to build His eternal temple against the ongoing Satanic opposition. Verses 5-6 describe powers given to the witnesses but the focus is really on the degree of the spiritual protection that the witnesses have in Christ. 'Fire' is not literal but symbolic of our

pronouncing of non-consummative, non-final judgment on the world's sin. This is linked to Deut. 19:15-19 and the idea that two witnesses are needed to establish sin which must then be punished in the same way that sin was first inflicted on the victim. This is directly related to the OT witness/judgment role of Moses/Elijah – see Mark 9:4-7. All witnesses suffer; some die. All witness inflicts spiritual punishment by their very perseverance in witness during persecution. Patterned after Elijah in 1 Kings 17-18 and Moses in Exod. 7:17-25, the whole prophetic and witnessing community of the church is actually afflicting the idolaters and compromisers who are persecuting the church!

C) 11:7-13 *The end of history and the completion of the church's witness to Christ, a witness that appears to have failed.* Verse 7a 'when they have finished their testimony' shows that vv. 7b-13 is going to happen at the end of history. The church's witness to Christ will be over and will seem defeated (Matt 24:9-22), but the 'measuring' of v. 7 actually guarantees the success of that mission! The glorified godly pleaded justice and retribution for the persecution against them (6:9-11) and when the full number of saints to be killed is up at the completion of witness, then their apparent defeat (11:7-10) will signal the world's actual final defeat (11:11-13). The beast has been constantly active especially through antagonistic worldly authorities but at the end that beast will show himself more obviously see Rev 11:7; 17:8; 20:7. In verse 8, the church will seem small, defeated and despised. At the very end the church will be small and silent but with a remnant of faithful witnesses. The 'dead bodies' will be scattered in many godless parts of this world and the church will seem to have failed in its witness (v.9). The worldly systems like the Roman Empire will appear victorious but actually the Antichrist's victory is of short duration only! In verse 10 the idolaters are those who loved and used the resources of this world for their own pleasures. They trusted in this world, not in God. The worldlings celebrate the 'death' of the church because they had hated the gospel that had troubled them.

Verse 11 signifies God raising the persecuted to spiritual life at the end of the age by the power of His Spirit. God's faithful witnessing community is finally and fully vindicated. See Ezek. 36-37. God's true and faithful church is raised, restored and renewed – the new creation ultimately in the new heaven and new earth, reigning with her God and Lord for all eternity. Those seeing this act of God's Spirit were stunned, overwhelmed and deeply afraid. 11:12 and its 'Come up here' is closely parallel to the 4:11 text. GK Beale is sure this refers *not* to a physical rapture immediately before the final judgment, the sound of the 7th trumpet and the end of history, with no tribulation or millennium to follow. Beale believes it is more parallel to Ezekiel's repeated *spiritual* raptures in Ezek. 1:28-2:2; 3:12-14, 23-24; 11:1-5; 43:5. See also Rev 1:9-11; 17:1-3; 21:9-10. Thus, a spiritual transport

into an unseen dimension, not physical. The church's 'rise' to heaven in a cloud is thus mainly her vindication and acceptance by God. The persecutors realise with horror the divine seal on the witnesses' prophetic approval as God's speakers and they are terrified! This is immediately followed by the final judgment of the ungodly in 6:12; 11:13; 16:18 – the 'great earthquake'. This great fear is probably a recognition of God's awful reality rather than a real turning to Him. The survivors were likely the ungodly suffering judgment, rather than sudden mass conversion just prior to the very final judgment stage in 11:19. The great challenge for us today is surely the need for readiness to suffer in our own lives, as faithful witnesses to Christ, as well as the need to depend *utterly on God's Spirit* in our own ministries of teaching, preaching and living out the gospel of Christ. The two are of course inseparable – suffering demands and produces total dependence on Him. As we wage spiritual warfare in the wilderness, so God will finally judge the ungodly.

D) 11:14-19 *God's Consummation of judgment, history and His kingdom.*

The theological interlude of 10:1-11:13 is now over! **11:14** thus continues from 9:21. The second woe is past (9:13-21); the third woe is coming quickly. Again, the order of visions is chronological in John's descriptions but that is not to say that their actualisation in the order of events is historically chronological. The content of the third vision of woe is controversial. 10:7 had told that when the 7th trumpet was sounded, God's plan for the completion of history is complete. 11:15-19 is probably the third woe, because 8:13 said that the last three woes are the same respectively as the last three trumpets. 11:15-19 deals in song with the final judgment but also with the appearance on earth of the consummated kingdom of God that is for all eternity.

11:15 The third vision of woe is the 7th trumpet. 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ'. All the enemies of the kingdom have been defeated so God takes back the rule of this kingdom that previously He had permitted Satan to have. The world systems that persecuted the church have now been defeated and replaced! This fulfils Dan 7 and shows the final judgment and rule by Christ and the saints, the persecution of whom has now finally ended.

11:16-17 is the celebration of the 24 elders for the fact that God has completed His Kingdom (v. 18) for all His enemies have been finally defeated and judged. The phrase 'the one who is and who was and who is to come' in 1:4,8; 4:8 is modified in 11:17 by omitting 'who is to come'! The reality is still future for John but from the perspective of the heavenly worshippers it has been fulfilled as God

takes up His power and reigns. The rule of God and final judgment *are* the content of this 7th trumpet.

11:18 is actually a step *before* the events of 11:15-17. The evil and sinful nations are set against God and Christ and the church. These oppressors had been persecuting and destroying ‘the earth’, meaning God’s people. God thus judges dead unbelievers. This parallels the judgment of Babylon (Rev 6:9-11; 18:24-19:5) and shows once more how ‘*The visions of Revelation describe the same set of events from different perspectives, rather than presenting a chronological listing of events.*’ (Beale 2015:238) God has vindicated His persecuted people by judging their oppressors. Rev 11:3; 19:10; 22:12; Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:16-21 are one and the same entity ie the whole church which is rewarded by deliverance, reign with Christ and the joy of being counted, by witness and testimony, a prophet of God! Indescribable privilege! In **11:19**, God’s temple in heaven is opened. Lightning, sounds, thunder, earthquake and hail are classic Revelation signs of the final judgment (4:5; 8:5; 16:18). See esp. Exod. 15:13-18 - the nations are enraged when God leads His people into ‘His holy habitation’. This closely parallels God’s final leading of His people to glory.

Ark and trumpets take us back to Jericho, declaring God’s judgment and victory. The Ark represents in 11:19 the setting up of the end-time temple, indicating the divine Presence in the midst of God’s people – symbolic of judgment and reward at the Last Day. The cross is God’s means of forgiveness and justice. Our final reward is surely the revelation of God’s glory, as He takes up eternal reign over ourselves and creation.

16 The Woman and The Dragon

12:1-17

Big idea: Christ is victorious over all the powers of darkness and God is therefore powerful to protect His messianic community against evil.

Introduction: 8:3-5 and 11:19 share in common the language of judgment at key sections of the apocalypse. *12:1 to 15:4 is a major section that falls into seven parts, each introduced by phrases like ‘and I saw’ or ‘behold’ – 12:1-17; 13:1-10; 13:11-18; 14:1-5; 14:6-13; 14:14-20; 15:2-4.*

Other parts of Revelation are also divided into sevens – seals, trumpets, bowls. 12:1-15:4 continues previous themes but also reveals the profound conflict between church and world, especially the pressure to compromise from inside and outside the church. Seals show the evil being unleashed against all people under the orders of Christ. Trumpets show God’s judgment on hardened human beings. There is spiritual protection in all this for God’s people through all these woes. God’s grace shines out! Chapters 12-22 basically tell the same story as the introductory Chapters 1-11 but in more detail. The devil is mentioned in 2:13; 6:8; 9:11 but is shown in the second half to be instigator of trials and persecutions, and the releaser of the beast and false prophet. John introduces in order the rise of the devil, the beast, the false prophet and the harlot Babylon and then he reverses this order to show their fall in Chs 12-20. This shows that *the devil* is active from first to last in his hatred of God and Church. The devil is restricted in his activity – 12:6,14; 13:5. Satan is furious in attacking believers because he has already been crushed by Christ’s rising and this should encourage us to persevere in faith and faithful witness. If we compromise with this world, we are actually compromising with Satan. Rev 12 tells the story of the church’s destiny in the church age, the story of the protection of the true church in trials, rooted in His power over Satan by His death and resurrection. Rev 12 calls us to persevere in faithful witness in spite of ongoing persecution from the world and Satan.

Outline, Exegetical Detail and Application:

A) 12:1-6 *God protects Christ and church against all Satanic damage.*

Following the temple scene in 11:19, John sees a sign: a woman in heaven ‘clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars’. Verses 2-6 reveal that this is the community of faith, pre-and post-Christ. See Gen. 37:9; Song of Sol. 6:10; Isa. 60:19-20; 62:3,5 for OT roots. The woman (church) reflected God’s glory. The true Israel both old and new is indestructible on earth because her final identity is in the glory of the indestructible heaven! The

crown indicates our share in Christ's kingship and our reward for resisting all efforts to wreck our faith through persecution, deception and multiple temptations to compromise (2:10; 3:11; 4:4,10; cf. 14:14). Verse 2 stresses that this woman, the church of God, is in painful labour, referring to the OT era in which the woman is being persecuted in an attempt to destroy Christ and His church even before it is 'born' on earth! The text at this point concerns the faithful Jewish community of true believers prior to the first birth of Christ, not His 'resurrection birth'.

The ultimate root of this vision lies in Gen. 3:14-16, namely that after Eve's pain in childbirth her seed would bruise the serpent's head cf the harlot of Rev 17 who represents the unbelieving community. The woman will give birth to the One who will take back that which was lost in the Garden – see Isa. 7:10-14; 26:17 - 27:1; 51:2-11; 66:7-10 for related prophecies, including the destruction of the dragon.

The red dragon appears in the heaven in **12:3**. He has 7 heads, 10 horns and 7 diadems, symbols in the OT of evil kingdoms that persecute the people of God, by oppressing Israel eg God defeats Pharaoh as sea dragon at the exodus (Ps. 74:13-14; 89:10; Isa. 30:7; 51:9). At the end of history God will finally defeat the evil, Egyptian dragon (Isa. 27:1). The dragon certainly includes the evil kingdom of first century AD Rome, but the dragon actually stands for the devil himself who is the force behind all persecuting of God's people – see Rev. 12:9; 20:2. The numbers 7 and 10 symbolise completeness of evil, falsity, deception and parody, while the colour 'red' symbolises the shedding of the blood of the faithful witnesses. **12:4** and the dragon's sweeping away of stars fulfils Dan. 8:10 and 12:3 which may well refer to the persecution of the saints of Israel in pre-Christian times but is now revealed to John with respect to an assault on the faithful covenant community. The dragon desperately and repeatedly tried to destroy Christ Himself, following the Saviour's birth and it seemed that the dragon had won at the Cross of Calvary – until the rising!

12:5 remarkably condenses Christ's entire existence into a kind of 'single moment'. At the point of His apparently catastrophic death, the Christ is suddenly raised to life and ascends for His eternal reign! Rev. 2:26-28; 19:15 confirm that Ps 2:7-9 prophetically fulfils the final defeat of the dragon through the resurrection and ascension of Christ. 12:6 complements 12:5 by revealing that the woman – the messianic church in the post-resurrection era – is now on the earth. The woman fled into the wilderness, yet this is an allusion to Israel's flight from Egypt into the wilderness and into the spiritual protection and nourishment of her amazing God. The Lord God will do this for His people at the end of history in a final exodus/restoration. The wilderness still contains dangers, threats and temptations for that 3.5 years. The harlot lives there and tempts, deceives and persecutes. It is a hostile world, yet God protects – Deut. 8:15-16. The 3.5 years reflects wilder-

ness wanderings but also the entire church age of persecution. The prepared place is the temple/sanctuary cover of protection. Most of all, it is the place of the Presence and Spirit and Protection of God. That is the only way we can persevere and overcome and avoid compromise. We *will* undergo tribulation in this world but our covenant relationship with God is spiritually guarded and fed by our God. Thus 12:6 immediately follows 12:5 in time, and without a time gap or a revival of ethnic Israel. Likewise, the relation between 12:10 to 12:11-17 and the relation of 1:5 and 1:6; 1:12-20 and chs. 2-3; 5:5-14 and 6:1-11; 7:10-11 and 7:13-14. These focus on Christ's work and its immediate results in church life. Life and ministry for us is a complex and continuous interweaving of pain and blessing.

B) 12:7-12 *Christ's death and resurrection lead to the victory of Christ – and His Church – over Satan, and the establishment of Christ's Kingdom.*

12:1-6 recorded earthly events of warfare while **12:7-12** gives the heavenly counterpart. In Dan.10:13,21; 12:1, Michael is the great angel appointed to represent God's people. Michael and the Son of Man fought together for Israel against the demonic rulers over Persia and Greece (Dan. 10:20-21). In Revelation, John sees Michael as fighting in heaven on the basis of Christ's earthly victory. Christ's death and resurrection on earth plus the start of His rule triggers *in heaven* the immediate defeat of the devil and his hosts by Michael and his angels. Michael is representative of true Israel and on the basis of Christ's victory he will guide and guard Christ's people through the final tribulation. What stunning assurance! Dan.7:21 states that the horn is 'making war' with the saints and being too powerful for them. This refers in Rev 11:7 and 13:7 to the attacks of the beast against the godly. Here is a parody or reversal, because in 12:7 it is the dragon – Satan – who is defeated.

12:8 The defeat of the devil and his hosts immediately causes their expulsion from heaven, paralleled in Dan. 2:35 with its destruction of hostile world kingdoms in the latter days under the impact of God's kingdom. Jesus saw this prophecy starting its fulfilment in Lk. 20:17-18. Christ as the stone of Dan. 2 and 7. Opposition to God's kingdom and people is decisively disarmed, but the final consummation will be when Dan. 2:35 is fulfilled in Rev 20:11. Just as the dragon threw stars to earth in 12:4, so he himself, along with his angels, was thrown down to earth. Dragon=devil=Satan ie 'slanderer' and 'adversary' (12:9). Satan slanders God by doubting His motives in giving His command in Gen 3:5 and then deceives Adam and Eve by suggesting their disobedience will have a good result in Gen 3:4-5. The rest of Rev 12 to the end of the book show how Satan's capacity to act like this has been hugely reduced by Christ's death and resurrection. Satan lost his temporary right to accuse, as he fell away.

12:10-12 is a hymn from heaven that often interprets or summarises a vision, as in 12:7-9, namely what Michael does is a heavenly reflection of what Christ does on earth, especially the establishment – but not yet the final consummation- of His Kingdom, following His death and resurrection. ‘The resurrection is the turning point of all human history’ (Beale 2015:255). Satan had been responsible for deceiving humanity into sin. Because of Satan’s unjust accusations and because of Christ’s anticipated redemptive death for His people, the OT godly were protected by God from the damning danger of these accusations. Christ bought a people by His own shed blood (Rev. 5:6-9) from throughout the world (Rom 8:1, 33-34, 38). The decisive and legal defeat of Satan happens as the kingdom is inaugurated on earth; the final destruction of Satan will happen when Christ returns to set up His completed kingdom (Rev. 19:20-21; 20:10-15). **12:11** shows us that the victories of Michael (heaven) and Christ (earth) are the foundation on which we suffering believers are victorious over Satan throughout all human history! Our suffering as Christians is a sign, not of Satan’s victory, but of ours! We have overcome the devil by our identification with Christ’s resurrection. We are called to be faithful witnesses in our suffering at whatever level, even to the point of death itself. *The saints in heaven command all heavenly beings* to rejoice in 12:12 because Christ’s kingdom has been established, the devil has lost his place in heaven as our accuser and the saints can overcome his accusations.

Meanwhile however *on earth*, the devil’s anger is focused on believers – see vv. 13-17. He is angry at losing his place in heaven but also because he knows he now has limited time on earth to wreak havoc in the churches and among their Christian believers. The shortness of time is a key part of God’s purpose that believers should perform *good works* but Satan’s purpose is the very opposite, namely that he and his helpers and his deceived followers should do maximum damage whilst he persecutes them. The 12:12 time slot is the same as the ‘thousand years’ of 20:3. Thus, the dead saints in heaven – 6:9-11 – reign victoriously there – 20:4-6 – until the rest of their brothers and sisters suffer, die and join them in their heavenly reign. During this time the devil is locked in the abyss where he cannot harm the souls of sealed saints, though he can harm their bodies by persecution.

Thus, although the devil is at work against the church, he cannot ultimately deflect her spiritual, heavenly destiny. Physical suffering? Yes. Ultimate victory? Yes. We have all the resources we need to endure in this battle until we enter final glory. The battle in the invisible world was won by Christ’s resurrection and this very event released the power of God’s kingdom in the visible world.

These verses give a remarkable insight into the unseen world (Eph. 6:12). The danger is that believers will either downplay the centrality of spiritual warfare or

become so obsessed with it as to enter fear of demons and see evil beings behind every bush! We need a healthy biblical balance regarding God's total sovereignty over all that happens in His cosmos.

C) 12:13-17 *Rooted and anchored in Christ's victory over Satan, God protects His Church against the devil's damage, deflection and devices.*

12:13-14 continues the story at 12:6 where the woman (church community) had fled into the wilderness and at 12:12 where Satan had been thrown to earth in huge rage about his loss of office in heaven due to his failure to stop Christ's birth and ultimate enthronement. The woman (church) who gave birth to the child is absolutely hated by Satan, who will now and always chase and persecute that woman (the church). 12:14 picks up and extends 12:6 in a remarkable way. Exod. 19:4, Deut. 32:10-12 and Isa. 40:27-31 have God carrying 'old' Israel as an eagle in the physical wilderness; here in Rev.12:14 God gives spiritual protection to new Israel. The Presence of Christ is our manna as our nourishment. God will sustain us, assure us, encourage us in our suffering of persecution in our wilderness wanderings in this world, keeping us faithful in our testimony to Christ. This is the whole church age of 3.5 years ie. the same as in 11:2-3 and 13:5 and the 1260 days of 12:6.

12:15-17 Satan's persecution of the church is portrayed as the serpent sending a river of water from his mouth in an attempt to drown and destroy the church completely. He does this by deception from within the church and by persecution from outside the church. He uses his agents to bring deception through false teachers, compromisers and demons to deceive and deflect the church (2:14-16, 20-22; 3:15-17; Rom 16:17-20; 2 Cor 11:3-4, 13-15; 1 Tim 4:1; 5:15; 2 Tim 2:23-26). See the damage done to churches in Rev 2-3 by the stated presence of Satan. 12:16 portrays the swallowing of the flood by the earth has strong Exodus allusions and Israel's wilderness experience, such as the flood swallowing Pharaoh and his armies in Exod. 15:12. Another example is in Num. 16:31-32 and both cases involve God's opening the earth to swallow all who oppose the establishment and welfare of His people. These and other references (Ps 74:13-14; Isa 51:9-10; Ezek. 29:3; 32:2-3) show God's determination to preserve and deliver His people, defeating the serpent. God in 12:16 is taking His people through this world's wilderness to a place of protection. Satan in 12:17 is furious because he is failing to destroy the church of God, so he redoubles his efforts.

The interpretation of **12:17** is not easy but Beale believes as follows –

The suffering church in 12:6,13-16 is viewed from the eternal, heavenly perspective and her offspring in 12:17 are the multitudes of suffering individual believers, as viewed from an historical/earthly angle. The woman is identified in 12:1 as being in heaven wearing heavenly clothing and *the same woman* is shown in 12:6, 13-16 as suffering on earth. She is seen from heaven, even in her earthly sufferings, but in verse 17, this same suffering is portrayed from an earthly perspective as the suffering of individual believers. This is a two-way view of the church –

- a) as a corporate, ‘ideal’ body, from God’s perspective, and
- b) a community of individuals as we experience it on earth see Ezek. 16; Isa. 49:14-26; 50:1; 51:1-3,16; Hos. 4:4-5.

If this approach is correct, then it represents a contrast between the whole heavenly and the whole earthly church. Thus, 12:13-17 conveys the truth that the one heavenly church being persecuted on earth cannot be destroyed (God’s perspective) because it is heavenly and ultimately untouchable spiritually, but the many individuals who make up this church can suffer physically on earth (our perspective) but cannot be destroyed spiritually. Re Rev11, this would mean that the woman equals those in the spiritually protected inner court and her offspring are in the outer court that is vulnerable to physical harm. In short, in our spiritual warfare on earth, we must constantly view it from God’s perspective. All believers are related to this heaven woman.

The church keeps God’s commandments and holds to the testimony of Jesus. This can mean both the ‘testimony from Jesus’ given to the church and ‘the testimony to Jesus’ given by the church. The stress may be on Jesus’ testimony to God which the church is to demonstrate ie. God’s care for the church enables that church to be faithful to God and Christ. Whenever this happens, Satan is rebutted and pushed back. 12:17 partially fulfils Gen 3:15 – the bruising of the serpent’s head. Whenever we resist persecution, compromise and deception, the devil continues to be defeated. Gen 3:15 does also show that our persecution is fixed by God.

17 Hold the Faith: Discern and Resist Satan's Tactics 13:1-18

Big idea: Satan uses falsity and deception in his aim to destroy the kingdom and church of God. We are called to discern his methods at ground level and resist him on every level in order to overcome.

Outline, Exegetical Detail and Application:

A) 13:1b – 10 *The Beast Coming out of the Sea – given authority and power from the dragon to curse God and to persecute God's people.*

Chapter 13 continues the theme of Satan's persecution of the church and is parallel in time sequence with 12:13-17. Satan has been defeated but still has power to oppress the godly and he uses political and economic earthly powers to achieve his purposes of damage infliction. The antichrist figure of Rev 13 seems to have been a corporate spirit since the first century AD, spreading false teaching and persecution and taking a mixed form of personal *and* evil spirit, but ultimately taking personal form as the prime leader of opposition to the church in the final days. In 13:1 (12:18), the dragon dredges up his servants to perpetrate evil plans. This is Part Two of a major vision section that opened up at 12:1. The first beast is like a leopard, bear and lion, rooted in Dan. 7:2-7. This beast is symbol of the OT evil kingdoms that persecute God's people. The 7 heads and 10 horns show the completeness of oppressive and universal effects. The dragon locates himself by the sea, hurling floods after the church (12:15). The beast arises from the sea and serves the dragon, while the harlot 'sits on many waters' (17:1). Sea = 'The dwelling place of evil, centred on unregenerate humanity. The 'diadems' and 'blasphemous names' show the beast's false claims to divine sovereignty and kingship. Verse 2 extends the thought from Daniel's focus of the four empires – especially Rome – to a larger number of empires beyond the first century AD that will oppress the people of God (17:10-11) right through to the end of history. The beast can work through unbelieving Jews, corrupt churches and subhuman political governments and organisations.

13:3-4 John observes that there is a fatal wound on one of the beast's heads. The word 'wound' indicates a plague of divine origin – 11 other occurrences in Revelation. This wound was inflicted by Christ at His resurrection and fulfils Gen. 3:15 as well as Isa. 27:1. The effects of the beast's defeat are continued by the faithfulness of Christian disciples (Rev 12:11,17; Rom 16:17-20). The healing of the wound is only temporary because Satan's activity has been restricted since Christ's death and resurrection. The beast is a Satanic counterfeit of Christ Himself! Dragon and beast try to conceal the fact that they are already decisively defeated. Many commentators believe the beast was mainly the Emperor Nero,

who committed suicide but would rise again, yet it was God or Christ who dealt the fatal blow to the beast. In reality, the beast's 'career' is presented as a parody of Christ's, Christ's leading to the glory of His kingdom, the beast's ending in his utter destruction! And yet, the world followed Satan, failing to see his utter inferiority to the false gods and idols of this world!

13:5-8 This section expands the limited permission, power and authority granted to the beast to proudly blaspheme God and to deceive God's people for a limited time and to gather to himself a limited 'discipleship'. The beast considers himself, and claims to be, equal to God, deceiving and persecuting God's suffering people throughout the church age (13:6). This includes deceased saints who worship in heaven. Our allegiance to our heavenly citizenship means that we must be ready to sacrifice and disobey our earthly citizenship. Verse 7 fulfils Dan 7:22-27 in the ongoing persecution of the church by the world, continuing ever since the death and resurrection of Jesus. All the beast's efforts are ultimately an ironic parody of Christ's final triumph. Those persecuted now will ultimately conquer and will rule for ever with Christ. Rev 13 has a universal application that is valid right across history. All unbelievers will continue to worship the beast ie all whose names are *not* written in the book of life from the world's foundation. That book is the book of Christ, the Lamb who was slain – see the link with Daniel 7:10 and 12:1. Christ has sovereignty over who has life and who does not. True believers have the assurance that they will spiritually survive Satanic assaults because of the safety granted by the Lamb's book of life. This guarantees the salvation of those for whose sins the Lamb died and rose. The journey though is hard! The beast is thus a demonic counterpart to Christ. This beast had authority from the dragon; he was slain but had an apparent resurrection; he rules on earth via human governments. Yet it is all a parody of the One who draws His power, authority and influence from His heavenly Father.

13:9-10 The events of 13:1-8 stretch across the church age, including the seven churches. John appeals to all churches with a repeated challenge 'If anyone has an ear, let him hear'. Those who have no ears will be further hardened but this message is strongly aimed to disturb genuine believers who are trapped in the compromising complacency of most people. How many of those folk worship in our churches in the early 21st Century AD? Many fail today to detect the Satanic trap of pagan ways, institutions, values and lifestyles to which they are tempted to accommodate. Verse 10 can be traced back to Jer. 15:2 and 43:11, with reference to God's people being sent into 'captivity' and suffering by the 'sword'. Israel was being punished for their unbelief and sin. Here John conveys the message that God's people must suffer and be refined in faith—see also Ezek. 14:12-23. We are to respond to pain and persecution by perseverance and faith. Indeed, in

Revelation, every use of ‘faith’ and ‘faithful’ means the faith of Christ or saints under persecution – 1:5; 2:10,13,19; 3:14; 14:12; 17:14. The ‘Perseverance of the Saints’ is not a mere theological truth and doctrine but needs actually to be lived out in the crucible of testing, hardship and persecution, if God is to be glorified by this purifying.

B) 13:11 – 17 *The Beast Coming out of the Earth – given the power of the first Beast to deceive the world and drive it into idolatry.*

13:11-17 actually involve the same situation as 13:1-8 but from the viewpoint of the second beast who is the ally of the state. A rising beast that is linked to Dan. 7:17 and this second beast is a parody of the resurrected messianic Lamb of 5:6 and it has two horns that link it with Dan 8:3. Both beasts speak with the devil’s authority – ‘as a dragon’ – and this second beast is later called ‘the false prophet’ – 16:13; 19:20; 20:10 – who leads people to worship the state/Satan. The first beast speaks loudly and aggressively against God, but the second beast more subtly makes that voice sound plausible, working towards deception *within the covenant community* and compromise with the culture’s idolatry. 13:12-13 extend the image of counterfeit imitation, firstly of Moses’ signs (Exod. 4:17,30; 10:2) and secondly of Elijah’s fire (1 Kings 18:38-39; 2 Kings 1:10-14). Fire = speaking God’s Word to convict and judge sinners, but the second beast is a false teacher and false prophet (Matt. 24:24). This false teaching is based on false identity, false resurrection and false authority! The second beast is thus a counterfeit/fake/parody of the true church.

13:14-15 The two falsely prophetic beasts *pretend to be divine in nature*. True prophets receive their inspiration and commission as they stand before God’s presence. False prophets act in the presence of the beast and their followers become certain of the beast’s authority. Thus, deception pushes these followers to acknowledge the divinity of Caesar in Asia Minor for example. Satan is highly active in deceiving – see Dan 8:25; 11:32 and 13:3,12. Verse 15 confirms that the second beast deals in counterfeit and is able to persuade people that false prophets are actually delivering divine truth! Idolatry does not merely involve idols but encompasses *any substitute for the truth of God in any age*. (Beale, 2015:281). Saints must resist evil and persevere – see link to Dan 3:2-7 and the required worship of Nebuchadnezzar’s image. This may well link up with the huge statue to Emperor Domitian set up for the Imperial Cult in Ephesus and demanding the allegiance of Christians, on pain of persecution or even death for any hint of disobedience. Surely, one of the greatest threats faced by the church today is the slow, subtle, hidden and gradual assault on biblical truth and its corrosive effects, especially in postmodern, Western church and society.

13:16-17 The mark here is figurative and refers to the state's methods of tracking people's level of submission to required idol worship. The emperor's seal on business deals was the mark that marked out those who agreed and cooperated with Imperial religious requirements in the first century AD and beyond. This marking acts in Revelation as the parody and opposite of the 'seal' for true believers in 7:3-8; 14:1; 22:4. These are invisible, spiritual identity markers. 'Image' may also mean character, whether Christ or beast, and the *name* certainly indicates the character of the one who leads our lives. The beast has names written on his followers, showing their belief, and loyalty, in his authority and kingship. The 'head' shows their ideological/theological adherence and the 'hand' proves their practical living out of that theological position. The second beast is very similar to the first but the second beast in John's time had a real relationship to political, religious and economic institutions, all of which had equally real links into emperor worship. Society and cults were inseparable in the Jewish and Greco-Roman ancient world, thus presenting *huge pressures* on Christians to conform and compromise.

13:18 The Number 666. Most theories about '666' revolve around 'gematria' *ie* the ancient way of having each letter stand for a number. However, there are endless possibilities for this *eg* Nero, and no clear or conclusive evidence. Also, so much language and numbering in Revelation is used metaphorically. All numbers used in Revelation reflect some spiritual reality. Even the word 'number' in Revelation is used figuratively to mean an uncountable multitude. The number 7 shows completeness, whereas 6 involves judgment *e.g.* 6th seal, 6th trumpet. If the 144,000 in 14:1 signifies completeness, then 666 is most likely the contrasting incompleteness of the beast and his followers. The triple 6 stresses the completeness of its incompleteness! The beast is pretending to be prophetic and divine but that is actually a falseness and parody of '777'. The whole point of 13:11-17 is that believers are given wisdom and understanding to discern and withstand Satanic falsity. Many believers today seem to be hugely unaware even of the existence and reality of spiritual warfare. 13:18 does in fact parallel 13:9 re our need to be alert and aware. The phrase 'man's number' in 13:18 means that the beast is the ultimate representative of the fallen and unregenerate humanity that is estranged from God and unable to reach God in any meaningful or salvific way. Humanity was created on the sixth day to reach completeness. 666 thus underline the fact that the beast and followers fail to attain to the intended glory of God. The wisdom called for in 13:18 includes the need for believers to shun compromise with any god or person or state institution that is tainted and stained by idolatrous culture and fallen humanity. This is closely tied to Dan. 11:33; 12:10; Rev. 17:9. We are not called to solve mathematical conundrums, but rather to exercise spiritual insight and wisdom to be aware that Satan and the spirit of the antichrist is working constantly in the world and in the church. Our calling is to discern,

persevere and live as faithful witnesses, resisting the world, the flesh and the devil and especially refusing to engage with idolatrous compromise in whatever form it happens to take.

Application The key issue is not the identification of a particular individual in history but rather our growth in maturity so we can recognise the ways in which our enemy, as a demonic parody of the divine Trinity, opposes and enters the church to wreak internal havoc throughout the church age between Christ's Resurrection and His Return. The pattern of Rev 13 is that an agent appears, is granted power and that exercise of power produces results on earth and in heaven cf. Dan 7:3-6. Rev 13 expands the way in which Christ's authorisation contrasts with that of the beasts. The key is this – the dragon, sea-beast and land-beast make up a trinity that contrasts with Father, Son and Spirit. The whole thing is irony and parody. The Satanic beasts seem to win in their deceptive falsifying of truth but actually they never shed themselves of their evil and never attain to divine character. Ultimately it is God who sends these beasts of deception to test and purify our lives and faith.

18 Visions of Future, Final Judgment

14:1 – 15:4

Big idea: The Glory of God is revealed by the Trinity, through the final Rewarding of believers and the final Punishment of Satan and followers.

Outline, exegesis and application:

A) 14:1-5 *We have the presence of God and Christ to guarantee our relationship with the Lamb, our redemption, our righteousness and our perseverance.*

A massive contrast between the horror of the beasts in 13:18 and the glory of the Lamb in **14:1**. Here is the fourth subsection of the major visionary section of 12:1 – 15:4. Zion has a heavy usage in the OT and here Mount Zion refers to the eternal city that God will rule at the end of time for His faithful remnant in Christ. This includes saints taken from the earth at the End and also the deceased saints. We have the name of Christ and His Father written on our foreheads, meaning the protective presence of our God with us. Christ's presence here proves that He is the only valid occupant of the throne of the universe in the temple of God. The 144,000 are with Christ and are the ones sealed in 7:4 – saints of every age and era cf. 13:16-17. This is the 12 tribes x 12 apostles x 1000 for the complete number of God's true people in all history, as contrasted with the incomplete. The divine name and seal are evidence that we are empowered to persevere through trials and faithful witness as members of the community of the redeemed.

14:2-3 reveal the saints in worship for the victory over sin and Satan. We have found final victory and divine refuge in Mount Zion. This is a vision of the ideal church in all ages but also the full and final redeemed church at the end. The worship is deafening for it arises from vast numbers of redeemed – all who by grace know the 'new name' and who have been given the right and gift to sing.

Verse 4a confirms the need for Christian 'warriors' to be self-sacrificing and ready to follow the Lamb wherever He leads them. 'Chaste' here most likely means unstained by flirting and compromising with this idolatrous world and that should be true of all believers, not just a few or a remnant.

Verse 4b underlines that those who are genuinely redeemed will identify with Christ and not with this idolatrous world. These people were bought at huge price by God and the Lamb and their lives are thus to be offered as a sacrifice to that God and the Lamb. This involves being offered 'as first fruits', referring to the sum total of believers throughout the church age who finally receive their redemption. This is the same group as in Rev 7. The surrender as first fruits means *ownership by God*. These first fruits have been separated from this idolatrous world and set apart for God alone. Verse 5 speaks not just of telling the truth but of the church's integrity in witnessing to Christ under pressure and in persecution,

rather than compromising our faith by believing the lies of the beast and false prophet. In Christ our Lord and Saviour was a spirit of sacrifice and holiness. Those who follow Him must exhibit those very same traits in their day-to-day living. Yes, there is painful persecution but there is divine protection as we persevere. In the midst of the pain we are called, like the redeemed in 14:1-5, to offer praise and gratitude to the Lord. We turn away from this world's values and follow Christ unconditionally – 'wherever He goes'. That degree of intimacy means we will develop a godly character and it is that character which should be utterly visible to a world that will certainly be watching just how believers tick... and why?

B) 14:6-13 *We have an eternal reward for our faithful perseverance, as God judges the world order and nations whose allegiance is to Satan.*

The First Angel – 14:6-7 – The unbelieving world is warned of judgment in this fifth visionary subsection of the major section 12:1-15:4. The focus of 14:1-5 was on the redeemed but 14:6-11 moves to the unredeemed. The focus of this mention of 'eternal gospel' is on the judicial, punitive aspect, rather than on the gracious offer of new life in Christ. It is a warning message to the lost. Indeed, the reference to 'nation, tribe, tongue and people' concerns the saved in 5:9;7:9; but it refers to the lost in 10:11; 13:7; 17:15 cf Matt 24:14. Verse 7 continues the theme of judgment and the fall of an ungodly world system led by Satan. The suffering of the godly – God's mystery – will be succeeded by defeat and judgment for the church's persecutors. Believers can take encouragement here. Humanity is required to respond to this gospel in fear for God and glory to Him, which is only feasible for true Christians. The rest have to be coerced by force – see Nebuchadnezzar's response but also his judgment in Daniel 4. The timing of the Rev 14:7 judgment seems to indicate the period prior to the final end-phase. The call is to abandon the idolatrous worship of creation and turn to the Creator.

The Second Angel – 14:8 – The gospel warning is even stronger here, for Babylon has infected this world and made it seemingly impenetrable to the gospel. This refers to Nebuchadnezzar and as Israel was in bondage under Babylon, so believers were in slavery to the idolatrous Roman Empire and other world Babylon orders and systems. The nations have fallen under the powerful temptation of 'Babylon' to seek material security in this world. We are intoxicated. We are blind to Babylon's own insecurity. We are unaware or unconcerned at the coming judgment of God. This is frightening indeed.

The Third Angel – 14:9 – The tone of warning is even heavier here, as present tenses show the continuing worship and following of the beast, despite warning.

Consequences of beast worship – 14:10-11 – The nations have drunk deeply of Babylon’s religious/economic systems. Therefore, they must now drink deeply of the painful, punishing and permanent wrath of God (9:17-18; 11:5; 16:8-9; 20:10). The pain is mainly spiritual and psychological in Christ’s presence. The texts 14:10-11; 19:20; 20:10 indicate that the ungodly are thrown into the same ‘lake of fire’ as their Satanic leaders. Smoke speaks of an enduring memorial to the removal of sin but this is accompanied by ‘a real, ongoing, eternal, conscious torment’ (Beale, 2015:305). Eternal restlessness will be theirs.

14:12-13 – True believers are called to persevere in suffering out of loyalty to Christ. They will be rewarded and will avoid the tragedy of following the beast. Faith enables us to accept the suffering that comes by not compromising (13:10) and faith gives us wisdom to help us to avoid the beast’s deception. If we were to come under divine judgment, it would be worse than suffering by persecution. We are to keep the Word of God and will receive an eternal reward of rest. The reward will depend on the good works and faithful works sustained under trial. It is our ongoing works that will mark us out as the faithful witnesses of Christ. The gospel is a gospel of divine righteousness (Rom 1:16-17) *but also* a gospel of the wrath of God from heaven (Rom 1:18-32). We need to warn our people of the serious dangers of the cotton wool of comfort, our love of money and material possessions (Matt 6:24). The reality of judgment motivates us to persevere, but we don’t rejoice in our ‘revenge’, rather in the vindication of God and His gospel.

C) 14:14-20 *We have final deliverance from the reality of hell and God’s awful judgment reserved for unbelievers at the final end of history.*

Here starts the sixth of the seven judgment visions of 12:1-15:4 and like the sixth seal, it concerns judgment at the end of history. Strong warning to professing Christians had been announced in 14:6-13; here in this subsection, the judgment is carried out. The ‘Son of Man’ is the divine Christ and He it is who executes judgment as King of the Cosmos. In 14:6-20 seven heavenly beings are mentioned, indicating completeness, but the ‘Son of Man’ is *not* described as an ‘angel’. This is rooted in Dan 7. In **14:15-16** God gives Christ the ‘go-ahead’ to judge – see Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7. Angels in Revelation never *initiate* messages; they *convey* them from the throne room. God alone knows the right time to judge, once humanity’s sins have reached their full extent – see Gen. 15:16; Dan 8:23-26; 1 Thess. 2:16.

14:17-20a – It might be the case that the presence of Christ in 14:14-16 is one harvest of the saved and redeemed, whereas the brutal reaping of 14:17-20a is a second harvest of the severe judgment of the lost – see Matt 3:12; 13:24-30. However, both halves of 14:14-20 seem to involve judgment, so it might be that both are about judgment in order to emphasise the sheer seriousness of sin. What

is certain is that 14:17-20 is a judgment of the ungodly and is paralleled in 8:3-5. In 'Revelation', 23 out of 24 uses of 'fire' concern judgment! The winepress/wrath of God imagery has been developing since 14:10. The treading image is most probably the punishment of unbelievers outside the eschatological city of the righteous. Verse 20a is linked to Joel 3:13 and Isa 63:2-3 concerning the judgment of unbelieving nations. Rev 20:8-9; 21:8,27, 22:15 also show the judgment of persecutors as happening *outside* the city, away from the protected and saved community of true believers in Christ who have been redeemed by God. The *same set of events* of God's judgment of the wicked from all of history is described in four Revelation texts – 14:9-11; 19:20; 20:11-15; 21:8. The images of battle, horses and the spreading of blood shows the horrendous severity of Christ's final judgment of the ungodly on His Return to execute this destruction. 300 kilometres would be the about length of Palestine but may be symbolic of the total, worldwide judgment ie 1600 as the squares of 4 and 10 which are symbols for completeness elsewhere in 'Revelation'.

One thing emerging clearly when we try to assess Rev 14 is that there is no strict chronology in the major themes of the events – see Beale 2015:313:

- 14:1-5 the beginning of eternal bliss
- 14:6-7 a warning to repent
- 14:8 the judgment at the end of history
- 14:9-11 the eternal consequences of judgment
- 14:12-13 exhortation to persevere in the present
- 14: 14-20 judgment at the end of history.

D) 15:1-4 *We glorify God and the Lamb for their work in redemption and judgment.*

Here is the seventh vision since 12:1 and it is suddenly interrupted by a mention of the seven bowl angels who promptly disappear until 5:5. This is a transition section that closes one part and introduces the next. 15:2-4 resume the idea of the last judgment that was announced in 14:6-11 and carried out in 14:14-20 with a praise song for divine justice. The stress is on the victory of the godly over the ungodly, plus the judgment of the persecutors. This expands 14:1-5. Themes intertwine here – judgment, perseverance, reward – and parallel the structure of 8:1-7ff. The series of 7 heavenly visions in Rev 12-14 is now concluding and one sevenfold series is now introducing the next sevenfold series of bowl plagues which are based on the Exodus plagues and the Song of Moses and which will occupy our attention in 15:5-16:21. The word 'last' most likely means the sequential order in which John saw the visions rather than the actual chronological order

of the events shown in the visions. Thus in 'Revelation' itself, John saw the seals, then the trumpets, then the seven visions in Rev 12-14 and then the additional scenes in subsequent chapters. 15:5 begins 'and after these things', adding strength to this argument. The scene of the Last Judgment appears several times – 6:12-17; 8:1; 14:8-11; 16:17-21; 19:19-21 – which strongly suggests that each passage enhances our grasp of the same final judgment, rather than being chronological and historical in actual sequence. The bowls finally complete the divine wrath. Various theories of chronology are held by scholars but they actually make very little difference to the overall meaning.

15:2-4 is the 7th and final sub-section of the major section that started at 12:1. OT sea = place of evil and the mix of glass and fire is where the Lamb has judged and destroyed the beast. The new heaven and new earth has no sea at all. The saints celebrate their victory but only because the Lamb has been victorious for them. The victorious saints are those who have refused to compromise their faith in the middle of a world of pressure and persecution aimed to bring them down. They celebrate with harp and song. They won victory through their vigorous, faithful testimony against which the beast and his workers had used deception. The singing fulfils in an enhanced way the victory of the Red Sea and reflects the truth that these new covenant believers have been *raised* to these new heights. The Lamb's redemption and resurrection in the new song and new age also challenges the apostate Christian believers to look at their lives and flee to God. In the new exodus, God continues to be revealed as being in sovereign control of His people's history. Not only is God sovereign in power over all nations but also in His moral justice, for those trusting in Christ have the huge penalty of their sin paid for and covered by Christ's blood (1:5-6; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11). Those who reject God's provision are forced to pay themselves the punishment for their sin. The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of God and His Christ.

It is because of these works of the Godhead in 15:3b that all people ought to fear and to glorify the Lord God of cosmos and cross. God in His attributes is utterly set apart from His creation and therefore God is worshipped *because* He is holy. (Jer 10:1-16). This is followed by a further reason – God is holy *so that* all nations will worship Him (Ps 86:9-10). People from all nations will worship God – 5:9; 7:9; 13:7; 14:8 – but *not all people*. God is simply incomparable in His universe. God is to be feared *because* He is holy and *because* His righteous acts have been revealed. God ultimately *must judge the unbelieving nations* because He has revealed His power, righteousness and holiness in the Exodus and now in the new Exodus. Remarkably, in the very place of our suffering and apparent defeat, we are actually vindicated and delivered by the very Lamb who we praise for His great grace.

19 The Seven Bowls of Judgment

15:5 – 16:21

Big idea: God punishes the ungodly in the period between Christ's First and Second Comings and then finally at the Last Day.

Outline, Exegesis and Application:

A) 15:5-8 *'I looked'.....'the heavenly temple was opened' – the renewed introduction to the Seven Bowl Judgments.*

The introduction to the bowls of wrath in 15:1 is interrupted in verses 2-4 and picked up again in 15:5. 'After these things I looked' opens a new vision in a new series of visions. The temple is the heavenly equivalent of the tabernacle of testimony ie the 10 Commandments which Moses placed in the ark of the tabernacle in Exodus. This showed the will and mercy of God *but now* the tabernacle witnesses to judgment, not mercy. The key point here is that God will send judgments against those who refuse His *testimony* in Jesus Christ. The opened temple indicates that God has appeared to carry out final judgment cf 11:1-2, 3, 5-6, 7, 19. In 15:2 the seven angels come out of the temple with the seven plagues. God has His people and prophets on earth giving testimony that has a heavenly origin but is at the same time being used of God in judgment. Lev 26, in which God judges Israel for her idolatry, is strongly linked to the bowl judgments which are also very much centred on idolatry in the church age. The bowl judgments describe the crucial results achieved and triggered by Christ's defeat of the beast at the point of His death and resurrection, results that will culminate ultimately at the final judgment on the beast and all of his followers. These bowl punishments in 15:7 – see 5:8 and 8:3-5 - are God's answer to the saints' prayers for vindication. The reality of these bowl punishments as coming from God Himself is reinforced in 15:8 with its close link to Isa 6:1,4 and Ezek. 10:2-4. No earthly or heavenly being is able to stand in God's presence or reverse His will when He carries out His judgments for sin, persecution, idolatry and compromise. The stunning fact in all this is that as we *offer prayer for justice* and that prayer rises to God, there may well be long periods of suffering, patience, delay, persecution that we have to endure *but God does not forget*. He does answer and we must persevere with faith and divine wisdom. We need to seek God's patience and perspective and we must not give up – see Luke 18:1.

Rev 16 explains the contents of each of the seven woes of the seven bowl judgments. There are some differences between the trumpet and bowl judgments but the former are very figurative, whereas the latter are more specific. Both trumpets and bowls present the plagues in the same order and are both modelled on the Exodus plagues and both most likely are actually presenting the same series of events – see Beale, 2015:326-7. The bowl judgments do not come chronologically

after the judgments of Rev 6-14. Rather, the bowls go back in time and give greater detail and explanation of the woes that stretch across the age and that climax in the final judgment. The trumpets deal mainly with unbelieving humanity. The bowls deal with the hardness of heart, idolatry, refusal to repent and persecution of the saints displayed by them. The bowls also deal with the saints' pleas for justice – see 6:9-11 cf 16:5-7. The seven woes do not refer only to seven incidents but to the completeness and serious nature of all God's actual judgments and punishments of the wicked.

B) 16:1-11 *'I heard...a loud voice from the temple' – God will use the first five bowls to strip away earthly security, as punishment for the ungodly's idolatry and their persecution of the godly.*

Notice the reversed sequence of the rise and fall of God and the Lamb's foes – Rev 12 Rise of the Dragon; Rev 13:1-10 Rise of Beast; Rev 13:11-18 Rise of False Prophet or Second Beast; 14:8 Babylon's deceiving of the nations. *REVERSAL* –

Rev 16:17-21 and Rev 17-18 Demise of Babylon; Rev 19:17-20 Demise of Beast and False Prophet; Rev 20:10 Demise of the Dragon.

This again underlines the lack of chronology in Revelation. The language indicates that these four foes are eliminated *simultaneously* (16:14; 19:19; 20:8). In 16:1 God speaks and orders the seven angels to execute the figurative but actual outpouring of His wrath against covenant disobedience and the persecution of His people – see Isaiah 66:6; Ezekiel 14:19; Jeremiah 10:25.

Bowl One – God gives suffering to those idolaters wedded to this world's system. Based on the literal boils of Egypt's plague. The sufferers will receive a penal mark that may be a spiritual/psychological pain like that of the 5th Trumpet.

Bowl Two – God punishes the economic aspect of the world system. Very similar to the Second Trumpet in Rev 8:8-9 cf Exod. 7:17-21, but the bowls have wider, more universal effects. This may well refer to famine conditions tied into world trade. Not necessarily the literal death of sea life but certainly the death of economies leading to widespread suffering. 'Sea' = 'evil', in the Book of Revelation and indicates Satanic control of idolatrous world economic systems.

Bowl Three – In 16:4-7 God judges economically those who persecute believers. Similar to the third trumpet but more universal in extent. Rivers and springs in 16:4 turn to figurative blood ie suffering and death. Again, damage to commerce is in mind and this paves the way into Rev 18 and the collapse of 'Babylon'. Here in 16:6 the suffering will involve the godly and the ungodly. The ungodly have persecuted the godly and will be judged because of this but the godly will suffer. In 16:5-6 the angel in charge of the waters declares God's sovereign right and power to execute

judgment in the trials that are leading up to the final judgment. God is judging here so as to vindicate His own Name and His people's name in answer to their pleas in Rev 6, by punishing their persecutors. This fitting of the punishment to the crime is confirmed by the conjunction 'for' in 16:6 cf. Isa 49:25. The persecutors are actually worthy to receive suffering as a penalty. Indeed God is absolutely justified in His work of redemption and judgment.

Bowl Four – In 16:8-9 *God inflicts judgment on the wicked for their idolatry*. The outpouring of this bowl onto the sun is not literal but the phrase 'was given' shows God's absolute control over His judgments. Here God judges those who have changed God's moral laws by their blasphemy and idolatry. Wasting by famine and scorching by heat are again most probably figurative but the issue does seem to be economic oppression of believers that has caused them to suffer at the hands of their persecutors - see Isa 49:10; Rev 7:16. Those judged will lash out with curses and attacks on the attributes and character of the God who judges them – see Rev 13:1,5,6; 17:3. Those suffering these judgments become ever harder in heart and in their absolute refusal to repent of all their deeds.

Bowl Five – In 16:10-11 *God judges hardened idolaters by showing them their true level of estrangement from Him*. This bowl assaults and darkens the very heart of the beast's ability to rule. Based on the darkness of Exod. 10:21-29 because of Pharaoh's link with the sun god Ra, his rejection of God and his oppression and idolatry based on Egypt's religion. Here God is attacking Roman Imperial Cult and Roman Empire/Government powerful rule which oppresses Christians and encourages idolatry in all its forms. The darkness most likely expresses the intense spiritual separation, fear and horror of being away from the true God. See Isa 8:21-22 and Jer. 13 for the direct background here, as well as Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30. Rooted in idolatry. Verse 11 shows how this pain and anguish simply hardens hearts even more. The only ones who will repent are those who have been sealed by God (7:1-4 and 14:1-2). The rest continue to serve the beast by their immorality, murder and magic – see the parallel in 9:20-21. The lesson seems to be that, as with Pharaoh of old, repeated pain and suffering simply inoculate the ungodly against the mercy and grace of God and they stubbornly resist every chance to repent at all. How easy it is to become enticed and enslaved into money and materialism of a world economic system that God is actually destroying. He is removing the physical security of this world system to leave Himself as our only valid safety. We need to beware of bitterness against God, which so easily can turn into blame of God for our sufferings, which can then become blasphemy against His character and against His absolute trustworthiness in all the events of our lives.

C) 16:12-21 *'I saw'.... God will use the sixth and seventh bowls to execute His final judgment of the evil world system.*

Bowl Six – In the section 16:12-16, *God assembles godless powers to punish them finally and totally at the end of history.*

This judgment on the River Euphrates by its drying up is patterned after God's judgment of Babylon and Israel's restoration which was itself patterned after the drying up of the Red Sea at the exodus. Cyrus was God's appointed means to judge Babylon and deliver Israel from captivity by a king from the east. In the OT God is always the One who dries up water, whether in redemption or judgment. John, in **16:12**, universalizes divine judgment. The 'many waters' of 17:1 are interpreted figuratively as 'peoples and multitudes....and nations and tongues' in 17:15. The drying up of the Euphrates pictures the multitudes of Babylon's religious followers across the world turn disloyal to it. The 'kings from the East' is also universalized into many kings, the point being that the 'kings' or forces are demonically driven to defeat Babylon, but God is the One actually in control and He will establish His everlasting kingdom and the reign of His godly saints. God in heaven originates the judgment in heaven, an angelic being starts it and the work involves earthly agents. The three great opponents of the church react, namely the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. The latter deceives people into worshipping the first beast. False prophets in the NT work within the covenant community of Israel or within the church. The second beast's sphere of activity is both outside and inside the church. Out of the mouths of God's three chief opponents come three evil, unclean spirits like frogs that are spiritually deceptive, with the ability to deceive followers about idol worship and the ability to lead them into immorality. The frogs seemed harmless and yet they 'destroyed' the Egyptians (Ps 78:45). They now give the appearance of being wise counsellors but actually are spiritually corrupt. The frogs are able to carry out signs that are ultimately under God's sovereign hand, as in the Exodus plagues. The frog plague is thus reapplied symbolically into a new setting in the Book of Revelation and is spiritualised.

16:14 extends and explains the reference to the demonic nature of these frogs. The Egyptian frog plague was partly a polemic against the goddess Heqt who was goddess of resurrection, symbolised by a frog. The three evil enemies of God were trying to persuade people that the beast had been resurrected. These demons behind false gods and idols were performing signs (13:13; 19:20). They were deceiving the kings of the whole world ie the political authorities of the ungodly world systems. Their demonic plan was to gather together kings and powers ready to fight against Christ at His coming (19:19; 20:8) at the end of history. This is rooted in OT prophecy – Zech. 12-14; Ezek. 38:2-9; 39:1-8) and all of this was still

under the great umbrella of God's sovereignty. These powers encourage idolatry and falsity. Rev 11:7; 16:14; 19:19; 20:7-10 all refer to the same final assault of Satanic forces against the saints of God. The nations are deceived into thinking they are about to wipe out the church but actually they are being gathered together by God to be finally and fully judged – see 19:11-21.

Meanwhile in **16:15** Christian believers are urged to expect, and be prepared for, the return of Christ. It will be sudden and unexpected. Believers are called to hold firm in faith and loyalty when the beast tries to annihilate the entire Christian community of faith. Christians must not compromise with the idolatry of beast worship. Nakedness is a sign of spiritual adultery with idolatrous worship. Believers must 'keep their clothes on' if they want to feast with the Lamb, for in the end dragon and beast will be destroyed by God and Christ in 17:14; 19:14-21; 20:7-10. Rev 16:16 may link with nearby Mount Carmel and Elijah's victory over the forces of evil Baal, symbol of the church in Rev 11:3-7.

Bowl Seven In the portion 16:17-21, God punishes this ungodly world system in His final judgment. This final judgment referred to in 16:17-18 follows the battle of Armageddon and falls on the unbelieving realm ruled by dragon and beast. Christ at Calvary said 'It is finished' to complete redemption; now He cries out 'It is finished' to signal the end of God's wrath. The elements of **16:18** indicate the last judgment and are rooted in Exodus 19:16, 18-19; Dan 12:1-2; Matt 24:7. Fashioned after ancient Babylon the Great (Dan 4:30), in Rev 16:19 the massive earthquake triggered the fall of all the world's cities because they are all part of 'Babylon's world centres of culture, politics and economics (Rev 14:8,10). The details of the Fall of the Babylon world system is amplified and detailed in Rev 17:1-19:10, including the further disintegration of the cosmos in 6:14, 16:20 and 18:14,21,22. In 16:21, the plague of hail is based on Exod. 9:13-35 and it falls on the unfaithful, just as fire fell on the persecuting nations in Rev 20:9. This is now the final stage judgment on the end-time enemies of God – see Ezek. 38:19-22; Rev 19:19 and 20:8. As the huge hailstones fell, people cursed God, just as people tried to hide from the carrying out of the final judgment in 6:15-17. So, context is vital in hermeneutics and John's vision takes the historical fall of Babylon, then relates it backward to Pharaoh's defeat at Red Sea, and then uses this forward as a type for the fall of the Babylonian world systems. We simply cannot pinpoint specific people, places and events. The final battle and judgment is universal and is shown in 16:17-21, 6th and 7th seals, 7th trumpet and 14:14-20. The same events are described further in Rev 17-19. The battle is global and is between Satan and Christ's Church. The NT is full of the reality of spiritual warfare and our churches *must be equipped with such knowledge and engagement for this war.*

20 The Woman Seated on the Beast

17:1-18

Big idea: The impact and influence of this world's economic, religious and political order and system, but its certain judgment, downfall and collapse.

Outline, exegesis and application:

A) 17:1-3a *An Angel announces to John the certain judgment of the Woman.*

This extensive portion of Scripture stretches from 17:1 to 19:20, initially foretold in 14:8, and elaborating the 6th and 7th bowls that deal with Babylon's judgment. 19:11-21 details the final battle by which Christ defeats the forces of evil. Rev 17 is basic to our grasp of the woman's relationship to the beast as power source. Babylon – rooted in Jer. 51:13 – is compared to a harlot who pulls people away from Christ by her seductive charms of deception and distraction. In **verse 2**, the allegiance of kings and nations to immorality intensely involves their part in the religious and idolatrous requirements of the ungodly earthly order or system. No doubt this included physical as well as spiritual immorality and adultery. Their goal was material/physical pleasure, wealth and security offered by *this world that is actually highly insecure if only they realized it!* See also Rev 18:3, 9-19; Isa 23:8, 17-18; Ezek. 26-28. Economic systems, in league with the state, governments and religious cults offer enticing rewards for playing in idolatry. In **verse 3a**, John like Ezekiel is taken up 'in the spirit' to prophesy judgment. Similarly, Isa 21:9 shows the 'desert' as protection for God's people but at the same time a place of fear, sin, evil spirits, persecution of saints and judgment from God. Water/sea is a metaphor for evil and deception. John himself is spiritually protected in the desert from falling into temptation and seduction, but he is aware that the risk and danger is very real! Those who assault God's people will themselves be assaulted by the judgment of God but meanwhile there will always be strong temptation to compromise our faith for socio-economic gain.

B) 17:3b-7 *The Angel takes John into a desert 'in the spirit' to show him this Woman and the fearful attraction this Woman offers for compromise by idolatrous association.*

It is clear that the woman has close links with the beast who is a deceiver and a persecutor of the church. The woman is seated on the scarlet beast with its blasphemous names, seven heads and ten horns, indicating the fullness/completeness of evil power/nations that persecute the church – see also Rev 13:1; Dan 7:3-7, 20, 24. The red beast/dragon – 12:3 – spill the red blood of believers and the blasphemous names refer to the beast's false claims of universal sovereignty. The woman is not exactly the same as the beast but works alongside of it to represent the godless world in its cooperation with the state in economics, culture

and society in order to persecute believers – see 17:6; 18:24; 19:2. Beast and woman also work together in an unholy alliance to deceive the ungodly everywhere – see 14:8; 17:2, 8. In **verse 4**, the woman wears blood red clothing and is linked to a prosperous trading system rooted in demonic idolatry. Worship of Caesar and homage to patron gods of trade guilds was widespread. Christians were expected to join in this idolatry, thereby compromising faith. They were thus forced to ask ‘Where is my ultimate security? World or Christ? In **verse 5**, a name on the forehead shows the person’s character and relationship with either God (7:3; 14:1) or Satan (13:16; 14:9). Based on the fall of proud Nebuchadnezzar in ancient Babylon (Dan 4), John’s vision now reveals the mystery of the end-time fall of spiritual Babylon because of pride and evil. ‘Mystery’ refers to the start of God’s kingdom through the suffering of His Christ and His people. Similarly, and also ironically, God will fulfil His prophecy re Babylon’s destruction when that kingdom of world economic and religious systems starts to turn against itself and self-destruct, even before Christ returns to destroy it completely. Babylon is thus a ‘demonically -directed economic and spiritual reality present throughout the church age. The woman in Rev 12 gave birth to the church, while the harlot of Rev 17 attempts to destroy the church’ (Beale, 2015:360). **Verse 6** reveals that those who refuse to follow the practices of Babylon will be persecuted or even killed. True disciples of Christ are witnesses of/to Christ and as such will be targeted for persecution by this world. This was already happening in John’s time – all forms of Christian suffering; expulsion from trades; exile (1:9); imprisonment (2:10); death (2:10, 13). John responds to this vision in fear and confusion, as did Daniel in his vision of Dan 4:19. The frightening and confusing thing for John may well have been that the bride/city of Christ in 18:16; 19:8 was similarly dressed to the woman on the beast. The angel warns John in 13:3; 17:7,8 not to be deceived by appearances. This is actually a severe warning, for in Rev 2:20-24 the church is warned that although some may teach that it is fine to have some level of worship of other gods for economic/ social/cultural gain, actually it is not fine at all in reality. Jezebel and her disciples are actually Babylon *inside the church* and finally will be judged along with persecutors *outside the church*! This is a divine warning not to be deceived, tempted and captivated by the apparent attractiveness of this evil and dangerous woman/ worldly system of entrapment. We must beware of the intoxicating effect of this world’s offers of peace, prosperity and security – it is a false offer that leads us only into compromise, judgment and spiritual danger.

C) 17:8-14 *The Angel explains to John the mystery of this evil Woman and exposes how Christ will finally judge the demonic deception coming from the State(s).*

This is a parody of Rev 1:4 'him who is, and who was, and who is to come'. What was applied to God is now reversed and applied to the beast. 'Is not' = 'death', as a result of the victory of the death and resurrection of Christ. Whereas the beast goes to his destruction, Christ begins His eternal reign. This parody and reversal ridicules the beast's futile efforts to crush the true Godhead and their forces. The beast had demonic roots and powers (9:1-2, 11; cf 20:1-3, 7). The beast may seem to be winning for a short time but thereafter he will be consigned to defeat. This fate of the beast is paralleled by the same events of Satan's demise in 20:1-10.

After defeating the godly, the beast and allies will attack the Lamb but be defeated by Him and all those who were formerly defeated by the beast will accompany the Lamb to defeat the beast permanently. In the church age, the beast's persecution of the saints will make it seem that he was 'healed' from his death wound and his persecution will intensify against the whole church but the beast's efforts to imitate Christ will finally and utterly be exposed. God's wisdom! Many will be deceived by the beast and will follow him in worship (13:3) but at His return, Christ will finally expose and crush Satan's forces. Those whose names are written in the book of life will be eternally protected, even from the foundation of the world, and secure in the Lamb's victory, but the focus here is on unbelievers whose names are not in that book and who have no such security.

Verse 9 stresses that in the end-time tribulation, God's people will need wisdom, insight and understanding to avoid being deceived by an evil king who rates himself higher than God Himself (Dan 11:33; 12:10; Rev 13:18). God's people across the church age will need to recognise and be aware of the evil state forces at work under Satan to deceive people into compromising with the state's idolatrous and ungodly demands. Some within the church will be so deceived. These seven 'heads'/'hills' have often been seen as the seven hills of Rome and thus as the Roman Empire but **verse 10** seems to confirm that the hills are actually symbolic of 'kings' of 'kingdoms'. The woman sits on the seven 'kings' ie on the beast himself. Seven is not literal but figurative for the 'fullness' of evil, falsity and persecuting power of states and organisations right across the ages. In verse 10, 'fallen' probably means 'died' and there is again a three-fold parody of God Himself, applied to the beast and indicating the beast's work through historical kings. The key point is that only one more king's rule has to be endured before the end of the age, though that 'distance' is still indeterminate in length!

Verse 11 identifies the beast as one of the seven 'heads' but also as an eighth 'head' ie the ruler intended is very close to the beast himself. The eighth may be a reference to Christ's dying on the 6th day of the week, resting on the 7th and raised on the 8th. Thus, the beast as 8th king may be a parody/mimicry of his effort to match Christ's resurrection. Christ's death and rising absolutely guarantees the final destruction of the beast. The ten horns of verse 12 are based on Dan 7:7-8,

20, 24 but probably do not refer to literal kings. They are the ‘kings of the earth’ (16:14, 16; 17:2, 18; 18:3, 9; 19:19). This is likely a reference to the fullness of power that will arise in the future and which is the exact opposite of the ‘called and chosen and faithful’ of 17:14. They are the forces that will fight against the Lamb and God in the final end-times, but they will also oppose the harlot cf Ezek. 16 and 23. These ‘kings’ will receive authority from the sovereign God and they will ally with the beast to defeat end-time Babylon and oppose the Christ. This patterns God’s causing of Nebuchadnezzar to become like a beast, but only for a while (Dan 4:17a). The beast is shown in Dan 7:21 and Rev 11:7; 13:7a as defeating the saints but this is all within the bounds of divine sovereignty for soon the situation is reversed and the same language is now used to confirm that the Lamb is defeating the beast and his allied forces of evil. The beast will be punished by his own sin – the OT ‘eye for an eye’ principle. Dan 4:37 shows how Nebuchadnezzar was entitled similarly to the ‘Lord of lords and King of kings’ in the Old Greek version, but now the equivalent is the king of latter-day Babylon *ie* Rome. God is sovereign and judges in both contexts, for only the Christ is the true owner of that divine title and He proves all other claims false. The saints fight and overcome, along with the Lamb, for they are vindicated as persecuted believers – see Dan 7:21; Rev 6:9-11; 12:11; 13:10, 15-17. In this sense, the true church will judge the wicked in the end-time.

True wisdom and understanding of all this ‘Revelation’ and acts of God only comes by careful study of, and obedience to, the Word of God (see Rev 17:9). The meaning of the visions needs to be sought primarily in the Scriptures rather than in our own thoughts about only current events or people. Whilst we need to know and engage with the world around us, we must focus our attention and search for divine truth first and foremost on the Scriptures, not on this world.

D) 17:15-18 *The Angel reveals to John the final fate of the Woman in God’s sovereign purposes – God will cause ungodly states to turn against their economic-religious systems, to remove their security and finally to destroy them for good.*

Universality occurs both in Daniel (3:4, 7; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14) and in Revelation (7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). The reference in these texts is to the peoples under Babylon’s domination, the ‘waters’ being those around Babylon. Those waters led to Babylon’s economic prosperity but now they represent the masses of fallen humanity that sustain Babylon’s economic trade and security (Rev 17:15). In **verse 16** the harlot/prostitute who sits on these ‘waters’ faces attack by the 10 horns and beast, before that evil coalition assaults the Lamb. This picture of the harlot’s destruction is taken from God’s judgment of another harlot, namely apostate Jerusalem in Ezek. 23:25-29, 47. God also judges the harlot, faithless Israel, in Ezek16:37-41. What Babylon did to Israel in the OT era is now turned

around and now applies to the Babylonian world system in the NT era. The ‘kings of the earth’ turn against Babylon and destroy her. These ‘kings’ are the world system’s political force which turns against the economic-religious force. The ‘kings’ were deceived by the beast to do his will and then regretted the loss of their security. Satan can lead people to destroy even things that are precious to them. The Babylonian harlot is clearly also patterned after Jezebel, the spirit of idolatry still highly active in the church (2:20-24) but her destruction, paralleling 2 Kings 9:36, comes from the word of the Lord Himself. The apostate church has cooperated with the immorality of the idolatrous world system and will be judged. There are many links between the OT Jezebel and the Babylonian harlot and the false prophetess who gives false teaching to the church, whilst claiming to be Christian, whilst upholding worldly ideas with a thin, Christian veneer. The focus is on the evil religious-economic system of the Roman world system, but the *apostate church and unbelieving Israel* are part of this and will also be judged. Jezebel teaches falsely in the churches and offers this world’s evil ideologies.

Verse 17 reveals that the beast and his forces will defeat Babylon but the final and ultimate author of all these events is the Lord God Himself as He fulfils His own Word and Will. The kingdom of evil is actually, but unknowingly, fighting against itself, thereby imploding, self-destructing and destroying its own system. Finally, God will cause Satan to be divided and to attack Himself into final defeat. There will be civil war among evil nations which will then unite against Christ when he comes. The evil kingdom’s destruction of its own economic-religious world system is ironic and not predicted in the OT. In verse 18, the woman has control of the universal and evil world economic-religious systems of the entire cosmos. She has indeed deceived all the nations throughout the church age in the battle between the two women of this age – the Bride of Christ and the Babylonian Harlot. (see the contrasting texts – Rev 21:9 cf 17:1; 17:1 cf 21:9-10; 17:4 and 18:16 cf 21:2, 9-23; 17:15 cf 12:1. Also each is seen in a desert and called a city – 12:14 and 21:2; 17:3 and 17:18. Deception can be overt or covert; obvious or subtle. False teaching/ideology is no surprise among the pagan nations or in deceased or ungodly religious systems like those of unfaithful Israel, *but it is a shock when we encounter it within the professing and confessing church of Christ*. Satan still masquerades as an angel of light and is highly active inside the church, as well as outside. The Babylonian world system needs to be discerned and dealt with as it enters and corrodes the life of the church of God.

21 The Fall of Babylon.... Hallelujah!

18:1 – 19:10

Big idea: Faithful believers who refuse to compromise with this idolatrous world will rejoice about God's judgment of it because this reveals their faith's integrity, as well as God's glory and justice. The result will be God's final rule and complete union with His Church.

Outline, Exegetical Notes and Application:

1. 18:1-3 *The Fall of Babylon – the vision continues from 14:8; 16:14-21; 17:3 but the events recorded in Rev 18 are not set out in a strict chronological order.*

The phrase 'after these things' comes in 4:1; 7:1,9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1 and refers to the order of the visions, *not* to the order of events described in the visions. The angel is announcing judgment and is warning God's true church to be separate from the world and be restored to God Himself. Wherever 'glory' in Revelation is ascribed to a heavenly figure, it is always to God or Christ; here in 18:1 to Christ. Babylon fell in history, but a much larger 'Babylon' will fall. Past tense is used, as if that final fall has already happened. In verse 2 the fall of Babylon is rooted in the fall of historical Babylon and Edom in Isa 13:21 and 34:11,14. Babylon was desolate after its judgment and foreshadows the future state of universal Babylon after its judgment. Universal Babylon had been driven by demons and in its destruction, it lies in ruins occupied by various demons and unclean spirits. Verse 3 reveals that Babylon must fall because it enticed nations into idolatry. Rulers and kings accepted Babylon's religious and idolatrous demands in return for economic security. This is rooted in the example of Tyre's judgment in Ezek. 26-28.

Merchants who cooperated with Babylon gained great wealth but those who were faithful in refusing idolatry in Babylon had their economic security removed from them. Those who became intoxicated into idolatry are numbed to any sense that Babylon herself was utterly insecure and would be judged. Behind the seductive attraction of luxury, wealth and comfort lie insecurity and demons!

2. 18:4-8 *God's People must refuse cooperation with the Babylonian world order in case they share its final judgment, punishment and demise for all eternity.*

The call from some heavenly voice here is for the people of God to have nothing to do with the compromising idolatrous system of Babylon, for Babylon is going to be judged cf Jer. 51:45; Isa 52:11. This is a call to persevere in the true faith – it is *not* a call to withdraw from the world or from the economic life of the world. Their witness must continue but they must not be 'of the world'. Spiritual

Babylon parallels the old earthly Babylon and its multiple sins must be punished (v.5). God will give the equivalent in judgment as the end-time Babylonian system 'gave' in its idolatrous sin (v.6). Self-glorification is actually sinful, since glory belongs to God alone. Pride and self-sufficiency will ultimately lead to judgment. The church must not trust in economic security cf Rev 3:17. Earthly confidence is a false delusion and will ultimately implode and collapse. In v.8, political and economic arrogance will lead to destruction, and spiritual Babylon will likewise collapse when the beast and his agents turn against the economic-religious system and finally destroy it. God uses Enemy powers as His agents to judge and destroy the Babylonian System, as He did to physical Babylon of old. If we compromise with this world to share its wealth and benefits, we will also share in its judgment. Are we hearing the many teachings of Jesus about Money?

3. 18:9-19 *Supporters of Satanic Systems mourn its judgment because it includes themselves!*

Verses 9-11 and 15-19 show the grief of those who have gained by their involvement in the idolatrous economic system. They will despair at their economic loss caused by the judgment and collapse of that very system. This is rooted in the parallel judgment of Tyre (Ezekiel 26-28) which is prophetic of the judgment of the last great economic system. Kings (vv. 9-10), merchants (vv. 11-17a) and mariners (vv. 17b-19) all lament, and these groups are also paralleled in the destruction of Tyre account in Ezekiel.

Lament of Kings – 18:9-10. Economic, yet idolatrous, wealth accrued from allegiance to Caesar and to the patron gods of the trade guilds. Kings here most likely refers to all earthly rulers. They are shocked at the sudden collapse of the economic wealth of Babylon and they may fear their own judgment because of their close ties to the idolatrous network of religion and money in Babylon. The judgment, linked into Daniel's prophecy, is based on refusal to accept God's sovereignty and on causing economic collapse, as well as harming the saints. The mourning here indicates a godless reaction to the loss of Babylon and its wealth.

Lament of Merchants – 18:11-17a. The collapse of Babylon means that no one now buys the goods that were sold by the merchants to the Babylonian economic system. This is huge loss for them! These goods are symbolic of the harlot's clothes in 17:4 and 18:16. This focus is a warning to the churches about the idolatrous temptation of economic compromise. Babylon had sought satisfaction from worldly wealth rather than desiring God's glory. The end-time City and Glory of God will replace the false glitter and glory of earthly wealth (18:14). The repeated themes from 18:9-11 underline the severity of the message from the heavenly messenger. Wealth is personified here in the person of rich clothing. The harlot reflects the pagan economic system, but that also includes unfaithful Israel

and even compromising Christians. Apostate religion has merged with the ungodly world. The harlot's clothing symbolically is compared with the high priest's garment and with the bride of Christ! The lament here is actually self-centred for the merchants are starting to sense their own impending judgment!

Lament of Mariners – 18:17b-19. The collapse of Babylon meant the end of the mariners' sea trade and wealth. The floods of tears therefore did not represent genuine repentance but rather sadness and sorrow at their own demise! Cf Ezek. 27:28-33. 'Babylon, the strong city' was a reference to its economic wealth. The sheer horror is linked to the suddenness of the desolation of Rome, yet the sense of despair is basically self-centred at the mariners' own loss. Those involved in seafaring will lose money, employment and security. This will be crushing indeed and comes about by the loss incurred due to Babylon's judgment from heaven. Yet, all these groups of kings and traders failed to repent or to recognise the righteousness of God and of His judgment. Focus of materialism drives us inwards into ourselves, blinds us to the needs of others and makes us numb/unaware to impending judgment, so we cannot even recognise its arrival. The loss to these groups will not only be material but more alarmingly, spiritual as they face the inevitability of divine judgment. We must guard against Babylon.

4. 18:20-24 *God's People rejoice at the fall of Babylon because it justifies their faith and God's justice.*

The section starts with a link back to Jer. 51:48 concerning the reaction of God's allies to Babylon's destruction. In the context of Revelation, this refers to the cosmos shouting for joy over the demise of Babylon – the Satanic system -described in vv. 9-19. Rev 18:24 links to Jer. 51:49 to show that one of the reasons for the judgment was the persecution of God's people – both those in heaven and those on earth. All the people of God – but especially the suffering servants of Rev 6:9-11 who cry for vengeance - are called to rejoice over this! God has been showing, is now showing, and will in the future demonstrate, His absolute justice in the cosmos that He alone owns, upholds and controls. The point is not to focus on delight at Babylon's suffering but rather on the success of God's justice which shows the integrity of our faith and God's just character. We are not to seek revenge but to rejoice that God has honoured His just name and vindicated the rightness and validity of the Church's faith throughout the ages.

The destruction of ancient Babylon is depicted in Rev 18:21-23 as a parable of an angel throwing a huge stone into the sea., based on Jer. 51:63. Likewise the end of Tyre is paralleled in Ezek. 26:12 and 21. The shift to a millstone in Rev 18:21 might be a warning to those in the church who try to deceive the spiritually weak cf Matt 18:6. The aim of Rev 18:21b-23 is to reveal that the persecutor will be

judged and punished by the means of her own sin ie. Babylon's economic system forced Christians out of trade guilds if they refused to worship the guild deities and into poverty. Therefore, God will remove Babylon's loyal tradespeople, thereby destroying Babylon's economic base cf Jer. 25:10 and Ezek. 26:13. All who persecute the church and try to wipe her out will be most severely dealt with.

The angel gives three reasons for the destruction of Babylon in 18:23b-24:

- a) The 'great men' in Isa 23:1-18 were wealthy traders in Tyre who failed to live responsibly and focused instead on their own glory and the display of their wealth, regardless of the effect on the needy. Tyre was destroyed because of this. Ezek. 28:2 shows how Tyre had come to consider itself divine, not merely human! Humanity was made to glorify God and self-glorification requires judgment and forced humbling. To put people at the centre, instead of God, is sinful idolatry.
- b) All the nations were deceived into idolatry by Babylon's 'sorcery' ie. the closely connected sorcery, immorality and idolatry. – see Rev 9:20-21. Often in Revelation, *porneia*=*immorality*=*idolatry*. Much overlap here!
- c) In earthly Babylon, there had been violence and death (Jer. 51:49). Babylon and Nineveh of old were both sinful world empires that are models for the elimination of the final evil world system. Spiritual Babylon is not a particular nation at a specific time but rather all forms of evil government in the church age. In John's own day this was the Roman Empire. The slain refers probably to all kinds of persecution incl. martyrs. The godless world thought the godly were being judged in their suffering. They were wrong! God showed His justice for sin simply had to be judged. The godly and the godless have totally different worldviews on who God is and on the honour due by them to this God. God is at the centre of life.

5. 19:1-6 *News of Babylon's coming fall is also the basis for our glorifying the kingship of God*

The 7th trumpet proclaimed in Rev 11:15-19 the reward to the godly and the destruction of their enemies and these themes are picked up again in Rev 19, especially in vv. 5-6. Rev 19:1-6 continues 18:20-24 and John hears the whole company of the saints praising God in heaven at the end of history for His salvation, glory and power and for His judgment of Babylon and His salvation of His own people. This links to Rev 11:18 and 19:2, both of which depend on Jer. 51:25. Rev 19:2 literally means that God has avenged the blood of His servants shed by Babylon. The following verse 19:3 stresses the absolute finality of Babylon's judgment. Judgment on Edom in Isa 34:10 is also a type of the final fall of the world system. Beale (2015:400) says '..those wishing to be saved must leave

Babylon or suffer her fate'. The 24 elders and 4 living creatures now join the worship for the end-time Church of God has been victoriously delivered. Rev 19:6 could refer to the voice of God or of Christ or of a heavenly being. We as believers are all bond-servants, being those who fear the Lord God Almighty. An even noisier crowd then raises praise to God in verse 6. These are the heavenly saints at the end of time fulfilling the prophecies of Isa. 52:7 and Zech.14:9. The Lord God has always ruled but His reign in a sense starts once he has judged Babylon at the end of time. we need to remember to praise God for His cosmic achievements, glory and Person, as well as His individual blessings to each of us!

6. 19:7-10 *God's people glorify God's kingship because it shows their final union with Christ and the ultimate victory, justice and righteousness of their great God.*

This is the concluding section of the major portion from 18:1 but is also a transition to the section 19:11-21. The praise is rooted in Ps 118:22-24 and Matt 5:12, the issue being God's vindication of Christ and His followers. The oppression of Babylon was used by God to refine the faith of the saints ready for their entry to the heavenly city! So often difficult people and situations are placed before us in order for God to sanctify us and form Christ within us, ready for glory! Whatever the level of suffering we face, there awaits us in heaven a reward of God's intimate presence. The church is called on to prepare herself for this entry. Thus, fine linen are the righteous acts ie. holding to the testimony of Jesus in word and deed – see 1:2,9; 6:9;11:7;12:11,17;20:4. Thus a changed life is the proper response to God's grace in the gospel. The white clothes will be a gift from God to those who have persevered in a purified faith. The saints are wearing clothing that symbolises their vindication against their oppressors, even as they inherit their righteous standing before God. The works are very important. The saints now enter into the fullness of their grace-based relationship with God. It is His work in righteousness, but we respond by our works. God vindicates us as we persevere in the midst of persecution and as we maintain 'righteous acts' on earth. The church is responsible to make herself ready, but God will provide His Spirit to make this possible (19:8). The picture shifts a little from the Church as 'bride' to the Church as the ones invited to the marriage supper. God is the one who initiates the close communion with Himself. In verse 10 our calling is to revere God's Word but not the messenger who brings them. John is himself in danger of falling into the sin of idolatry. The angel is a fellow-servant of John and the brethren! Both angels in heaven and believers on earth have prophetic roles and both centre their testimony on Christ Himself.

22 Christ finally judges the Last Enemy Forces 19:11-21

Big idea: God in Christ will show His complete sovereignty and faithfulness to His promises by judging Babylon's previous co-workers, so as to vindicate His people.

Outline, Exegetical Notes and Application:

Three visions of judgment from heaven:

19:11-16 Christ and His armies are ready for battle.

19:17-18 Imminent destruction of the enemy is announced.

19:19-21 Defeat of the beast, the false prophet and their followers.

Completing the large section 17:1-19:6 or 8, Christ's final defeat of all ungodly forces at the end of history is prophetically portrayed. The demolition of Babylon in 17:1-19:6 or 8 did not destroy *all forces of evil* and indeed 17:12-18 indicates that God actually used the beast and his forces to crush Babylon. Therefore, there still remained the beast, false prophet and forces to be finally destroyed. Only then would the victory be complete. Such victory would confirm, complete and validate the 'testimony of Jesus' as vindicating those who gave this testimony, showing them to have been right all along and showing that this testimony actually is true. The weapon of judgment is *Christ's word of truth* which is the foundation and guarantee of the Lamb's Supper, the saints' vindication and the truth that His Word actually is fulfilled in practice. This of course is hidden from unbelievers until Christ is finally and fully revealed at the end of history.

A. 19:11-16. Here is another vision of heaven opened – see 4:1; 11:19; 15:5. White garments are for those pure believers who have persevered through persecution. They have been vindicated as people of truth. Christ, the rider, will be faithful and true in His judgment and in His vindicating of His people. He will give a legal battle and judgment for His people. Christ in 19:12 has eyes that are a 'flame of fire', showing Him to be divine judge, as in 1:16 and 2:12. That suggests that Christ is also judging unbelievers and 'apostate Christians' who claim to be in the church circle. The only others who wear diadems are the dragon (12:3) and the beast (13:1)! Such diadems represent false claims to sovereign universal authority. Christ's diadems are multiple in number and truly eternal. Believers also wear crowns, like Christ Himself – see Rev 2:26-28; 3:21.

In verse 12b, Christ has a new name that no one knows except Himself. The root of this lies in Isa 62:1-5 and involves a new name re Israel's new 'married' relationship with God – bride/bridegroom. Christ gives His saints a new name that He shares with them – the new Jerusalem (Rev 2:17; 3:12). The name is not

yet known, except to Christ, because the prophecy of Isa 62 and 65 has not yet been fully consummated. The name 'Yahweh' was written on a gold plate on the high priest's forehead. If Christ's name is written on the forehead of believers (14:1; Ch 22), then God's name is probably written on Christ's diadems. No-one yet knows the name because Christ's identity has not yet been fully revealed ... until He returns as Judge. True believers can know and understand the name here and now, but it is veiled in meaning and significance to the unbelievers. Unbelievers will only see the significance of His name and character at the point at which they are judged by Him! At the same time, Christ will vindicate the faith of His true followers. Verse 13 has Christ as divine warrior with a robe dipped in blood as He judges the nations (Isa 63:1-3). He seeks justice and redemption for His people. As well as 'faithful and true', Christ the rider is identified as the 'Word of God' for he judges by means of God's Word. Elsewhere in Revelation (1:2,9; 6:9 and 20:4) the Word of God is seen most fully in the life, acts and teachings of Christ.

The immediate context here is that Christ judges finally on His remaining enemies, fulfilling OT and NT prophecy. In verse 14 the heavenly armies follow Christ, the rider, to carry out final judgment and this judgment is most likely done by the saints, rather than by angelic forces! (17:14). Only saints wear white garments and they judge because it is *their testimony that functions as the legal evidence that condemns their persecutors* cf Matt 12:41-42; Rom 2:27. Their white robes also give them a priestly function. Verse 15 shows how Christ fulfils OT prophecy in His judge's role, namely, the sharp sword (Isa 49:2); He uses the sword to smite the nations (Isa 11:4); rules the nations with a rod of iron/word of accusation (Ps 2:9); 'treads the winepress of God's fierce wrath' (Isa 63:2-6), meaning the complete destruction of the lost. Sobering and humbling! Another title is added to explain the unknown name of v. 12 and this title appears on Christ's robe and thigh – 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' (Dan 4:37). Just as God showed His sovereignty to Nebuchadnezzar, just so Christ will deal with latter-day Babylon. This underlines Christ's divinity. Christ as Judge offers a very different picture of Him than that painted in the Gospels! *Then – the weak baby of Bethlehem; the weak victim on the cross; the one who called us to serve Him in weakness. Finally – executing judgment, accompanied by His saints and ruling utterly over all!*

B. 19:17-18. The first angel in 18:1 had proclaimed the fall of Babylon and this second angel declares the fall of the beast and false prophet. The invitation to the birds is actually a parody of the invitation to the Lamb's Supper in v.9. This is rooted in Ezek 39:17-20 and the birds – metaphorical – are invited to eat the flesh of the destruction following Christ's prophesied defeat of the beast, the false prophet and their armies. The Ezekiel reference is to God's defeat of Gog and Magog as enemies of Israel, the point being that God will save Israel and judge

His enemies. Likewise in 19:19-21 Christ will show His name by saving His own people whilst judging their persecutors. God in all this is *very* concerned to uphold His name, not primarily our names and our interests. He alone must be seen as the God of Righteousness. Our calling is to be faithfully and consistently identifying with His name.

C. 19:19-21. In terms of time sequence, v.19-20 probably come before vv. 17-18. Verses 19-21 are a vision of the actual judgment itself but verses 17-18 show the aftermath of the warfare. The language of vv. 19-21 is essentially the same as that of 16:14 and 20:8 re the opening of the final battle of all history. Satan and his agents are behind this warfare but the passive voice indicates that God is in overall control. Again, this is rooted in the Gog and Magog issue in Ezek. 38:2-9; 39:1-8. God is in overall control – Ezek. 38:4; 39:2. See also Zech. 14:2,7,8. Notice that the phrase '*the war*' occurs in Rev 11:7; 16:14; 19:19; 20:8, and refers in each text to the last great battle between the Lamb and the forces of evil that are seeking to destroy the entire church of God.

In **verse 20**, the judgment is two-stage.

First, the beast and false prophet are judged. They are thrown into the lake of fire – not literally – and then their followers are executed in v.21. This throwing whilst still alive may suggest that they were not totally wiped out but rather punished eternally – see Rev 14:10-11; 20:10; Dan 7:10-11;12:2. *Reason for their Judgment* – In 13:3,7-8 the beast had made claims to divinity and the false prophet had deceived people into believing those claims!

Secondly, the armies following the beast and false prophet were killed by Christ's sword ie His Word, that accuses people of their evil deeds and announces a verdict of death as judgment. The 'sword' link goes back to Isa 11:4; 49:2 and the power of Christ's Word to execute judgment seems to be validated by the legal court case, where the ungodly are accused of evil deeds – see Rev 20:11-12,15; Matt. 25:41. Christ's Word is sufficient and powerful to condemn. The message is clear – history will end with a final war, as the devil and his forces unleash their last fury against God and His people. The devil will constantly attack the church and the battle involves us here and now. We are called to be aware of this and to be ready for battle. If we opt out of warfare, we will suffer loss, for Satan will never relent in his warfare. Our chief weapon is that of prayer, by which God will finally be victorious and by which our persevering life, faith and prayer will be vindicated.

23 Millennium, Activity of Satan, Final Judgment 20:1-15

Big idea: God's Millennium – Thousand Year Reign – starts in the Church Age as He restricts Satan's power to deceive and as dead believers find final vindication in their heavenly reign. This Millennium ends with a renewal of Satanic power against the Church and with God's final judgment of all people.

20:1-15 Outline, Exegetical Detail and Application:

20:1-6 God limits Satan's power to deceive people and to destroy the church of God during the church age. Meanwhile the souls of deceased believers are raised to heaven to reign with Christ.

20:7-10 God will release Satan for his further deception of the nations and for his efforts to destroy the church.

20:11-15 God will finally judge the world at the close of history. All people will then be raised and judged re. their works. The guilty will enter eternal punishment.

Rev 20 is closely tied to the previous and major section of 17:1-19:21 which treated the fall of Babylon at the end of history (declared in Rev 17) plus the explanation of Babylon's fall (18:1-19:10) plus Christ's judgment of demonic world powers at the close of history (19:11-21). *Beale argues that 20:1-6 is set in the church age* which in time precedes the account of final judgment in Rev 17-19. However, Rev 20:7-15 repeats the description of final judgment in 16:14-21 and 19:11-21. Our interpretation of Rev 20 must surely depend on – **a)** its immediate context; **b)** its links to other nearby parallels in Rev; and **c)** its parallels elsewhere in the OT and NT texts.

Views of The Millennium

Premillennialism = A millennium *after* the Second Coming of Christ.

Postmillennialism = A millennium toward the end of the church age, with Christ coming right at the end of that millennium.

Amillennialism or 'Inaugurated Millennialism' = The millennium began at Christ's resurrection and will end just before His final coming.

Our primary hermeneutic for Revelation must be mostly symbolic in nature. Detailed and thorough exegesis must be applied throughout all biblical texts. The *visionary level* of hermeneutic (what John actually saw) and the *symbolic level* (what the elements of the vision mean biblically over and beyond any definite historical reference) *must not be mixed up with the historical level* (the specific historical identifying of resurrected folk and other objects seen in the vision). We must beware of

ignoring the visionary and symbolic levels and jumping straight into an immediate connection with the possible physical/historical level.

Example: In Rev 1:12,20 John sees (vision) seven golden lampstands (visionary level). These lampstands are counted as seven churches (historical level) but they are not physical lampstands! The symbolic level of this vision is that the churches are portrayed as 'lampstands'. The symbolic meaning is that the lampstands were in the old temple and gave light. The Church is the new temple and gives out the light of God's revelation! The events of the millennium in 20:1-6 are *prior in time* to the final battle of 19:11-21, thus showing that the millennium itself should be identified with the church age. Other textual support for this –

- a) *Greek word kai*= 'and'. Premillennial position sees 20:1-6 as following 19:11-21 in historical sequence *ie* millennium follows battle and throwing of false prophet into lake of fire. However, the word *kai* in Rev rarely indicates historical sequence, but rather, simply a new vision in the text. The phrase 'and I saw' in 20:1 does not introduce events taking place *after* those of 19:1-21, but rather temporally parallel events.
- b) Rev 16:12-16,19:17-21 and 20:8-10 refer to the same battle in Ezekiel 38-39. Rev 19:19 and 20:8 are repeated prophetic narratives of the same future battle mentioned in 16:14. This is the same battle as 11:7 that has reference to the close of time. The battles presented in Rev 19 and 20 may well be one and the same battle, both accounts just universalizing Ezekiel's enemy.
- c) Ezekiel 39 gives a concise summary of the battle in Ezekiel 38. This is a commonly found and followed model/pattern in prophetic literature and strengthens the argument that John also uses recapitulation in Rev 19:17-21 and 20:7-10.
- d) Rev 16:12-16; 19:19-20; and 20:8 use the same language of 'gathering together' of forces for the war. They also share in common the idea that these gathered forces have been deceived into taking part. This seems to confirm that Satan's deceiving the nations in 20:8 is the same as that in 16:12-16 and 19:19-20. There is deception of all who are enemies of Christ. The war of Armageddon in Rev 16 is followed by the demolition of the cosmos in 16:17-21 and likewise the final battle of 20:7-10 is followed by a vision of the dissolving of the cosmos.
- e) If Rev 20:1-3 follows 19:17-21 chronologically, then there is a problem because there is no point in guarding the nations against deception by Satan in 20:1-3 after they have just been deceived by Satan (16:13-16; cf 19:19-20) and

destroyed by Christ at His return (19:11-21; cf 16:15a,19). The ‘nations’ are consistently distinguished from the redeemed in the ‘Book of Revelation’.

- f) The limiting of the deception of 20:3 links back to the events of 12:9, not 19:20. The title for Satan in 20:2 – ‘the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan’ is borrowed from 12:9. Thus the limiting of Satan’s deception by his being thrown into the abyss in 20:3 connects with the same events as his ejection out of heaven and down to earth in 12:8-9. This strongly supports the events of 20:1-3 as taking place at the same time as those of Rev 12 *ie* across the church age.

A) 20:1-6 This vision goes backwards in time before the final judgment description in 19:11-21 and covers the period between Christ’s resurrection and return. ‘Key’ = ‘keys of death and of Hades’ = ‘Key of David’, possessed by Christ from His resurrection. All these dark, spiritual realms are under the authority of God and His Christ. The binding and unlocking of Satan’s activity is located in 9:2-3 and 20:2-3 and Beale believes that the binding of Satan in the church age does not put an absolute block on his freedom to act. He is convinced that the events of 20:1-6 come before the final judgment of 19:11-21 and therefore the binding and millennium are Christ’s authority to restrict the devil during the church age – see also Rev 12; Rev 20; Matt 12:29; Mark 3:27; Lk 10:18-19; John 12:31; Col 2:15. Christ has defeated death (1:18) and Satan’s control over death has therefore been altered. Satan is still active but must function under Christ’s authority. Satan can no longer deceive the nations re God’s plan of salvation (20:3). ‘Sealing’ = ‘with authority over’, not the total arrest of activity. In 9:1-2 Satan has power to deceive unbelievers but in 20:1-3 he has only limited power to deceive believers. This binding will be loosened at the end of this present church age. In the church age – the 3.5 years of 11:3 – Satan cannot deceive the elect re salvation, nor can he deceive the pagan peoples, until God’s time, into gathering for a final attack on the church. The latter happens in the very short time before the end of the millennium and the final judgment (3.5 days of 11:9). All this is under God’s sovereign Hand. In the church age, the church will suffer physically, but is spiritually safe. The church holds the keys to ‘death and Hades’, but in the very short end-time, the beast (11:7) and Satan (20:3,7), will be released from the abyss to gather the nations to persecute the global church. The beast leads this final attack and deception (see also 16:12-16 and 19:19-21). During the church age, Satan operates in the dark, spiritual area of the abyss that is alongside, and in the middle of, the earthly sphere.

Satan’s tactic has always been that of deception – in the Garden, he persuaded Adam and Eve that God was a liar and this stopped humanity from subduing the earth for God; Christ has come to make this global mission possible for the

covenant community; in the OT Satan deceived most of Israel so that they failed to be a saving light to pagan nations; Satan then used foreign powers to destroy Israel; disciples of Christ are now called to preach the gospel to the world and will be able to do this until that very short time at the end of all things. See all of this in Rev 12:2-5; Matt 28:19; Matt 24:14.

Verses 4-6 reveal the victory of the Church of God! Yes, throughout the church age, attacked by Satan, yet granted a crown of eternal glory for its faithful witness to Christ (2 Tim 2:11-12). Rev 12:7-11 and 20:1-6 has visions that move from heaven to earth – Satan ejected; Christ and His people enthroned! These two passages most likely show the same events. Both texts show the huge loss of Satanic power by Christ's dying and especially His rising. It is by the *resurrection of Christ* that believers now have power to rule spiritually over Satan and at the same time, Satan is stripped of His right and power to accuse believers of being unsaved!! Satan's fury intensifies in the abyss for he knows how little time is left! The spotlight on the abyss in 20:1-3 now moves to heaven and the results of the binding of Satan in 20:4-6. The time period is the same, but the 1000 years is not literal or chronological. The whole Book of Revelation is mainly figurative, especially re numbers egs 5:11; 7:4-9; 9:16; 14:1; 21:16. The saints have come to life by Christ's dying and rising and now these deceased saints rule with Him in heaven's court (Dan 7:9-11,22). Dead saints reign now with Christ in heaven, as vindication for their faithful witness under persecution and as answer to their prayers for vindication (6:10). There will be full vindication when Christ finally returns. These saints are those who died under persecution but were faithful to Christ and His Word. Some were beheaded, some suffering generally under oppression, but all are reigning and all these saints still await their final resurrection bodies for completion in glory. All deceased saints whose names are in the book of life, will overcome the second death ie the judgment of God on the lost. All saints will be priests and reign with Christ. These gifts to the saints are all the results of Satan's binding.

Verses 5-6 These verses explain the resurrection life of priesthood and kingship that has been mentioned in 20:4. The saints have resurrection existence and therefore the second death has no power at all over them. The rest of the dead who failed to come to life are eternally lost. The eternal reign of the saints (22:5) is the continuation of their millennial reign. Their combined priesthood and kingship is rooted in Exod. 19:6, Isaiah 61:6 and Zech. 6:13.

Futurist views see the millennium as starting with Christ's return and views coming to life of the righteous during the mill. (v.4) and of the ungodly at the close of the mill. (v.5a) as two literal physical resurrections. Historic Amillennialism views the first resurrection as spiritual and the second as physical.

Some Factors That Favour A-millennialism –

- a) The word *anastasis* ‘resurrection’ occurs only once here in Rev 20:5-6. The ‘first resurrection’ and ‘second death’ references here appear nowhere else in the Bible. The main meaning of *ζωο* in Rev is spiritual life, but it can be used to mean ‘physical’ and the two can appear together, within the same immediate context, as is claimed in the a-millennial view.
- b) The differences between first/second and old/new in Rev is not so much concerned with temporal succession (as in Premillennialism), but rather with qualitative difference ie ‘transient’ versus ‘lasting’.
- c) In 6:9-11 dead saints appear as living souls without bodies, but awaiting physical resurrection. Other texts like Lk 20:36,38; Phil 1:21,23; 2 Cor 5:8 suggest that souls of the righteous at death rose to heaven as a spiritual resurrection, to await a resurrection body on Christ’s return ie they had a spiritual intermediate existence on death.
- d) Ezek. 37:10 is uniquely parallel in the OT to the verb form in Rev 20:4. ‘They came to life’ in Ezekiel is symbolic or spiritual in nature, being made universal in Rev and applied to the church re spiritual rising.
- e) Rev 15 has the 7 plagues or bowl judgments ending God’s wrath. 16:12-16 has Armageddon at the 6th bowl and the 7th bowl ends history. This is picked up by 19:17-21 which clearly ends divine wrath against unbelievers. This rules out a later judgment in 20:7-10 which is probably repeating 16:17-21 and 19:17-21.
- f) Scripture is adamant that there is only one final physical resurrection.
- g) Premill^{ism}. has glorified, resurrected, new bodies mixed with corruptible.
- h) 1000 in Rev portrays ‘completeness’ e.g. of the duration of church age.

B) 20:7-10 In verse 7-15, John stresses the final judgment of the second death for Satan and all his allies. The prediction of 20:3 is now reaffirmed in that Satan will be released from his prison/abyss after his significant limitation of activity in deceiving the nations from joining together to destroy the church totally. See Ezekiel 38-39; Rev 11:7; 16:14 and 19:19. *God* will gather these forces for this very final battle. This battle is the same one in each of those texts. **In verse 8**, the opposition of the northern nations of ‘Gog and Magog’ in Ezekiel is universalised into global opposition to the global church. These are people, not demons. These enormous forces of people cannot be identified with any named, contemporary country like Russia. **Verse 9** continues the Ezekiel connection in Ezek. 38 where the massed armies of opposition surround the people of God. This is the worldwide church of God and the new city, Jerusalem, occupied by the new and

true Israelites of God. The people of v.9 are the persecuted people of God who have been under the ‘desert’ of God’s protection. Now they are attacked by the nations, but the latter are destroyed in this, the final judgment of God’s enemies. Verse 10 confirms that it was the devil who deceived the nations to assault the godly. These verses 7-10 are most likely a repeated summary or recapitulation of 19:17-21 which casts doubt on the idea that Satan was thrown into the lake of fire much later than were the beast and false prophet. Context and verb grammar suggest that all three were thrown into the ‘lake’ at the same time. Eternal, conscious punishment for all of them, including all unbelievers (14:10-11). ‘Torment’ in Rev. always means ‘conscious’. The ‘lake’ is not literal but is very real indeed. This is *final* judgment and takes place at the destruction and re-creation of the cosmos – the ‘second death’. First death is physical and lasts till the destruction of the present cosmos. Unbelievers who die are held in ‘death and Hades’ until their final judgment into the ‘lake’. Deceased believers are kept by God in His presence until Christ returns. ‘Second death’ cannot start until all have died physically. Casting of beast and false prophet into the lake in 19:20 cannot occur before the millennium period. Second death leading to lake of fire does not occur until great white throne in vv. 11-15. At that judgment *after the mill.* death and Hades yield their dead for judgment and throwing into the lake. Thus, the last battle and lake of 19:17-21 are the same events as 20:7-10 and the mill. is thus *before that battle ie. the church age.*

C) 20:11-15 Verse 11 concerns the holiness of God who judges to punish sin but also to vindicate His persecuted church. It is both God and Christ who judge and this is rooted in Dan 7:9 and Ezek. 1:26-28. The whole corrupt, evil, world system disappears, and the new heaven and new earth appears. This final judgment also is seen in 6:14 and 16:20. Verse 12 assumes that the final resurrection of the godly and godless has now happened cf Dan 7:10 and 12:1-2. Thus Rev 20:11-15 extends 11:18. Figurative, but real and true, books! The sea is probably the place of evil forces and God compels the powers to yield up their captives for judgment – v.13. Unbelievers are in the lake of fire, so the powers of ‘death and Hades’ are now also finished and end up in the lake itself also – v.14. This verse is probably dealing with the final punishment of Satan’s demonic forces. *Not* annihilation, but mainly eternal spiritual suffering. Humans suffer spiritually but also physically because they have resurrected bodies which never die. The second death lasts for ever and means eternal separation from God’s presence. Verse 15 reinforce the truth the God’s holiness and justice compel Him to exercise judgment, but a believer’s identification with Christ in His death and resurrection guarantee that person inclusion in the Book of eternal redemption. Such people are free from God’s judgment because Christ, our righteousness, has already suffered our judgment in His body and in our place.

24 New Creation and God's Church perfected in Glory

21:1 – 22:5

Big idea: The new heaven and the new earth. The new Jerusalem from God & the completion and glory of the redeemed Church of Christ, living in the eternal presence of God. The unfaithful will be excluded from that divine presence.

Outline, Exegetical detail and Application:

21:1-8 In the new creation, God's faithful saints will dwell in God's communion and community, but the godless will not be included in that salvation blessing.

21:9-14 The sight of New Jerusalem and the Presence of God which completes and guarantees the redeemed Church of Christ.

21:15-17 The measurements of New Jerusalem and the permanence of God's Church there.

21:18-21 The materials of New Jerusalem cause and sustain the security and reflected glory of God in His Church there.

21:22-27 The inner nature of New Jerusalem, in which the divine Presence triggers praise from the redeemed but reveals the complete absence of the ungodly.

21:1-5 Tree, river, light and God's true people. The curse has gone and God's Presence ensures the eternal reign of His servants as priests and kings.

a) 21:1-8 The vision of 21:1 follows from that in 20:11 and opens up a new creation after the dissolution of the cosmos. 21:9-22:5 chiefly summarises 21:1-8. Rev 1-3 focus on the weak and largely failed state of those churches whilst 21:9-22:5 stress the eternal, perfected state of the church. The key aim is to press believers to persevere in pain in order to be part of that eternal church in glory. In 21:1 the first heaven and first earth have gone. The term 'new' refers more to quality than to time but we can also note that the new cosmos is recognisable, but renewed, with the old. Likewise, our new resurrection bodies will be identifiable. Thus, new creation is linked to Christ's resurrection and ours. John stresses the roles of the saints in this new creation of glorified Christian people. This is rooted in Isa 65:16-18 and 66:22 which are being fulfilled gradually across the church age, in the conversion of the godless into the godly. The 'sea' will be no more in this consummated new creation and its role as origin of global evil, place of death and realm of idolatrous trade will no longer exist. Isa 65:16-19; 51:10-11 and their record of weeping in captivity will be fulfilled. No tears!

Rev 21:2 reflects Isa 52:1b; 62:1-5 and records the coming of the bride ready for her husband. The 'bride' is metaphor for 'saints'. God is gradually preparing His people for New Jerusalem – see also 2 Cor 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27. The church is thus the continuation of true Israel. The focus of Rev 21:3 is therefore on the presence and intimate union of God with His people – see also Rev 19:7-8; Ezek. 37:27. Originally for Israel but now fulfilled for 'every tribe and tongue...' who share in true Israel's redemption only as they trust in Christ Jesus who died but now lives. Now, in Christ, and for all eternity, Jew and Gentile can tabernacle under God. In Rev 21:4, further fulfilment of OT prophecy is revealed in Isa. 25:8; 35:10; 51:11 which show the cessation of suffering in the new creation, once the old order has passed away. All things have been made new and suffering is now in the past.

This theme of renewal is continued in Rev 21:5-8 when God now speaks, drawing on Isa 43:19, 65:16 and 66:22, speaking of the future renewal of church, heavens and earth. The divine titles here express the control that God exercises over the whole of history (21:6). Eternal life has its source in God and the Lamb for those who rest in Christ's atoning death and rising. Verse 7 picks up again the theme of the new creation as being those who are 'overcomers' and this encourages believers to persevere in hardship so as to inherit divine blessings.

These pairs of fulfilled promises of God for 'overcomers' can be traced as follows – Rev **2:7** and 22:2; **3:12** and 21:22ff; **3:12** and 21:2,10; **3:12** and 22:4; **3:5** and 21:2,9ff cf 19:7-8; **2:17,28** and 21:11,18-21,23; 22:5,16; **2:26-27**; **3:21** and 22:5; **2:11** and 21:7-8. These promises climax their fulfilment in 21:7 'I will be his God and he will be My son' – see 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:26; Ps 2:8-9. Because believers are in Christ, they will inherit what Christ inherits. On the other hand, the ungodly will be judged by their exclusion from God's Presence. This includes those who have claimed Christian faith but have crumbled under persecution; unbelievers; the cowardly who have given up in the warfare; the abominable, murderers, immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, liars; persecutors of Christians; professing believers who fail to live out their faith in Christ. (See also Titus 1:16; Rev 21:27 and 22:15). These people will enter the 'fiery lake of burning sulphur' – second death (14:10-11; 19:20; 20:10) - which suggests figuratively not only separation from God but also extra suffering. Such people experience perfected and eternal punishment as judgment – the second death. 21:4 They will not dwell in the boundaries of the new cosmos. They will be completely outside those borders. It is wrong for believers to imagine that in glory they will float on clouds or on stars. New creation means basic physical change of the old creation and its renewal. Likewise is the body that will be raised and changed. We will be changed. The church will be bride ie a *very intimate relationship with God*. We seek intimacy with God in a world that is so often shallow, pleasure-seeking, unreal. We begin

surely with a deep love for Scripture. God's will is that we earnestly desire Him, seek Him and love Him. He is faithful and will reward us.

b) 21:9-14 Recapitulation starts in vv. 9-10, for these are virtually the same expressions as in v. 2. John is shown the bride, 'wife of the Lamb.....holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, from God'. 'Bride' and 'city' are then extended in 21:11-22:5. John is hearing and then seeing. 21:9-10 is very close wordage to 17:1,3 in the introduction to Babylon, as harlot and bride are compared. Harlot's clothing in 17:4 = godless, economic forces and state that are persecuting believers into compromise. The Bride's symbolic clothing = her faithful works and consequent vindication. Her temple stones = her redemption by God. Harlot = worldly culture that opposes God. Bride = redeemed community in the new order of a literal new cosmos. Similar to Ezek. 3:12,14; 11:1; 40:2; 43:5, John is taken away in the Spirit. The coming Jerusalem is seen to be on a high mountain. Both John and Ezekiel in their visions point to a final reality.

The whole issue of God's presence is opened up again in 21:11 and is developed to 22:5. That glorious presence of God in city and temple will actually be in the redeemed and renewed people of God. This glory of God is rooted in Isa 58:8 and 60:1-2,19. Isa 65:17-19 is in Rev 21:1-2,4; Isa 54:11-12 is in Rev 21:19; Isa 60:19-20 is in Rev 21:23. God's glory is His presence and deep communion with His church. John describes God's glory as bright and shining precious stones. The New Jerusalem is portrayed in vv. 12-13 as having a great and high wall, with 12 gates, 12 angels and 12 names of the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel. The wall = the safe and strong fellowship of the church with her God – see 21:27 and 22:14-15, as well as Isa 26:1-2. Ezek 40-43 and 48:31-34 prophesy these 12 gates of the new Jerusalem, with one angel at each gate in the Revelation account, suggesting the angels of the churches and the 24 elders = true Israel/true people of God. Four groups of three gates at 4 points of the compass. Each of the 12 gates has one name of the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel written on it. Then, in v. 14, the wall has 12 foundation stones and on them, the 12 names of Christ's apostles. Remarkable is the sum of 12 tribes and 12 apostles ie 24 appears in Rev 4:3-4 ie the 24 elders may well be the angelic beings that represent the total of God's people in both covenants. The whole covenant community = the spiritual temple in which God's presence dwells – 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph. 2:21-22. Thus Christ and His apostles are the foundation of the new temple = church = new Israel. City and temple have become the presence of God and Christ with their people. Back in 11:1-2, temple, altar, outer court and holy city are all actually the Christian community. Likewise church = Israelite names/prophecies. Our lives are supposed to reflect God's glory in the here and now, as well as later.

c) 21:15-17 This extends vv. 1-8 and is rooted in Ezek. 40:3-5, as the angel measures the city with his rod of gold. This act signifies the security, safety and protection from evil influences, of God's redeemed, inside the 'walls' of new Jerusalem. In the consummated city there is now total protection for all of the redeemed, physically and spiritually. Verse 15 informs us that the city is a cube, with equal sides of 1500 miles each. God's presence in the temple will spread across the whole city with its sanctifying power. 12000 stadia = 1500 miles = the idea of the completeness of God's people – 12x1000. This huge size is about the same size as the first century AD Hellenistic World ie the Jewish and Gentile redeemed of all nations? Old Babylon and new Jerusalem were being contrasted! In v.17 the wall is 144 cubits – another non-literal reference to all of God's people. John adds that these measures are literal human but their meaning is spiritual. God's people will suffer here and now, but be totally safe in that City.

d) 21:18-21 The City = God's fully protected people, in fellowship with God, who is eternally present with His people. The City is made of pure gold, plus precious stones like jasper, which reflect God's glory and are the solid wall of His protection and holiness. The 12 jewels are rooted in the high priest's breastpiece of judgment – Exod. 28:17-20; 39:8-14. Each stone bore the name of one of the tribes. Thus the tribes and apostles are foundational to end-time Israel ie church. The breastpiece = small version of the 'Holy of Holies'. Each gate was a pearl – see Isa 54 = the guarantee of the safety of God's people in God's presence. The jewels reflect God's glory and the worthiness of His people to be in the City. See also Ezek. 28 and the King of Tyre prophecy. New Jerusalem is a restoration of God's original creation. These stones are linked with perfect righteousness that is the hallmark of God's new creation. Sin and evil have no place in new creation. In v 21, each gate is a figurative pearl and the street is pure gold, reflecting God's glory. The previous street in Rev 11:8 was where believers were slain but now they are glorified in the new creation – what a massive transformation indeed!

e) 21:22-27 in v. 22, the New Jerusalem has no physical temple for God and Christ are its temple – see Jer. 3:16-17; Isa 65:17-25. Christ referred to His own resurrection as the temple rebuilding (John 2:19-22; Mark 14:58; 15:29). The temple of God frequently refers to the true people of God. 'Temple of God' in Revelation refers to the end-time *heavenly* temple. Verse 23 makes the claim that the city has no need for sunlight or moonlight. God's glory alone is perfectly adequate (Isa 60:19)! Christ is the lamp/light of its people, thus showing the deity of the Lamb (Ezek. 43:2,5). Rev 21:24-26 can be seen as fulfilments of Isa 60:3,5,11). Isa 66:12 speaks of the nations' glory as flowing into Israel. Formerly rebellious nations will be redeemed and bend their knee in true worship and obedience and be united with redeemed Israel – see Isa 49:17-18. There will be no more evil, darkness, death or curse in the new creation. No night at all. Nations

and kings includes those who once persecuted the church but who repented and turned to God, entering the city. Some, however, would never enter the city (Rev 22:18-19). For the redeemed, though, the gates were never closed yet this is metaphorical language. Idolatry and unfaithfulness will never 'enter'. Some of these were in the church and may even have made profession but failed to match this by an appropriate lifestyle. They were false believers and 'liars'. In this, John is issuing strong warning to all outside the church and to some inside it. Life in the presence of God demands holiness, growth and maturity in Christ.

f) 22:1-5 This passage concludes the whole of Rev 21. John sees 'a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from God's and the Lamb's throne'. This stretches right back to the Garden of Eden and is rooted in Gen 2:10; Zech. 14:8; Ezek. 47:1-9; Joel 3:18. The water of life celebrates eternal life rooted in God and Christ in the new creation. The water comes from the temple which actually *is* God and Christ and the 'water' of this fellowship with the Godhead purifies. The fruit-bearing issue of verse 2b is based on Gen 2:9-10 but also on Ezek. 47:12. The one tree of life in the first creation has become expanded in the glory of Paradise in the second, new creation and a number of trees are now spoken of in the singular sense of the one original tree of life. The waters of the river come from God and therefore bring healing, the presence of God and deep fellowship with Him. The leaves of the tree function for the healing of the nations, ie for all people who have believed the gospel. Rev 5:9 explains the 'healing' of the nations – Christ died for the believing nations to forgive their sins and to remove their need to suffer eternally for those sins. This healing is once only in the sense that there is no sin/suffering to be healed in new Jerusalem. The monthly fruit-bearing – twelve meaning 'complete' - is a figurative symbol for the fullness of God's salvation and the fullness of the number of the redeemed people of God.

The paradisaical city-temple in Rev 21-22 covers the whole of the new earth – see Isa 54:2-3; Rev 21:27 and 22:15 stress the absence of sin in the whole new creation; John sees the new heaven and new earth in 21:1 and then in 21:2 and 21:9-22:5 he identifies just a paradisaical city-temple. These two realms are probably one and the same entire new creation. The OT temple, especially the Holy of Holies, was the localized point of God's presence on earth which pointed to the end-time presence of God across the entire new creation. Scripture traces a connection between the Garden of Eden, the sequence of temples and their spreading in Christ to the entire new creation. In v 3, Zechariah 14:2-15 speaks of a curse of death for sin and the nations would then attack Jerusalem to purify her of evil dwellers, but finally Jerusalem will live in safety, while the attackers will suffer the curse and be permanently excluded from the new city-temple. Christ the Lamb has opened up the gate to the sanctuary closed by the Fall. The removal of the curse means the elimination of physical *and* spiritual sickness. God and

Christ are united in the Godhead on the one throne and in their presence, their servants worship and serve in a safe and secure new creation.

Verses 4-5 show how the entire new creation is saturated with God's Presence and Spirit and the glorified church sees God's face and serves as priests to Him. The unique OT privilege of the high priest to enter God's presence has now been extended to all redeemed believers in the new creation. The focus on God's name being on our forehead underlines the truth that every redeemed believer is secure in the new creation and in the eternal city. The 'overcomer' will be a pillar in God's temple. The name written on believers concerns God's character and their demonstration of that character in their lives. The statement in 21:5 that there will no longer be night underlines the whole point of this extended vision, namely that the saints will never be separated from God and will be free from all the sufferings that they endured in the old world. The redeemed will no longer need light from lamp or sun, for God Himself will be their light and their glory. This fulfils the prophetic promise of Isa 60:19-20 and the thought of Num. 6:25-27. This is figurative language to assure the church of God's continuously accessible presence in the new creation. The divine name on Aaron's forehead

has now become the experience of all believers as God's priests in eternity. Cf. Exod. 33:20! God's people will reign eternally as kings and serve Him as priests. Adam and Eve had failed to grasp the truth of God's Word – cf Gen 2:16-17 with Eve's quoting of it in Gen 3:2-3. We must guard against defilement in our lives.

Summary of 21:1 – 22:5

In Revelation, earthly Babylon and eternal Jerusalem are set in sharp contrast –

17:4 cf 21:21. 21:2,9 cf 17:1-2;18:9. 17:16,18 cf 21:24. 18:11-17 cf 21:24-26. 17:4-5; 18:2-3 cf 21:8,27. 17:6;18:24 cf 22:1-2. 18:4 cf 22:14. 18:5, Gen 11:1-9 cf 21:2. 16:17-19 cf 21:6-7; 17:5 cf 22:4. 17:8 cf 21:27. 18:7 cf 21:11,23.18:2 cf 21:3,22. Evil powers constantly try to imitate good ones. Thus, *false apostles* (2:2); *false synagogue* (2:9;3:9); *false prophet* (16:13;19:20;20:10). 3-fold name of beast (17:8,10-11) and 3-fold name for God (1:4,8). Note the warning of 21:8. The churches are being warned of compromise with the harlot, so they can live holy lives now! The great OT promise is of *new creation*, including new covenant, new temple, new Israel, new Jerusalem. Assurance of eternal perfection helps the church to persevere in the pain and temptation of the old creation. We are to *stay faithful* now and seek God's glory in our lives in anticipation of the final glory. We are called to worship and glorify God for His work of salvation and judgment. We are in full fellowship with God and Christ, only as we reflect *their glory*.

Big idea: A call for holy obedience in the church in order to receive God's salvation. Promises of blessing and warnings of judgment, related to future events. Five exhortations for holiness in light of the second coming of Christ.

Headings, Exegesis and Application:

22:6-7 *First Exhortation* – Verse 6 is both a conclusion of the whole book and an introduction to the epilogue. John hears the voice of Jesus or a representative angel confirming the faithfulness and truth of the words about the new creation, fulfilled from Isa 65:16 and Dan 2:45. Thus Rev 1:1,19; 4:1; 22:6 testify to the setting up of God's Kingdom globally and to the judgment of evil systems. This word 'quickly'/'shortly' suggests that these acts have been inaugurated. God inspires by His Spirit the spirits of the prophets. This Revelation *is from God*. It comes from God to Jesus to an angel to John and then to believers. John thus had a prophetic office. We do not experience these visions in exactly the same way that John did, but we do still experience them through John's record of visions. Christ will come finally but *has come across the church age* e.g. in Rev 1-3. God's goal is to give His people salvation blessings – 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:14.

22:8-10 *Second Exhortation* – John confirms himself in verse 8 as a prophetic witness of this revelation to the covenant community, made legal by his 'seeing and hearing'. John brings the promise of blessing and warning of judgment. His turning to the angel in worship in verse 9, however, prompts an immediate response from the angel not to offer him worship but rather to direct his worship to the one, true, living God. In the next verse 10, if the revelation is sealed up, then its contents will be concealed from the church who cannot therefore respond in worship. By contrast, Dan 12:4,9,13;8:26 has a 'sealing' of his prophecy that prevented their understanding or fulfilment till the end. Daniel's prophecy can now be grasped – unsealed – because those prophecies have started to be fulfilled, as the end-times have begun. OT prophecy has now been inaugurated in its fulfilment in Christ's death, resurrection, rule over history and the church's suffering. Christ also unsealed Rev 5:1-2 in a similar sort of way. In Rev 22:10 the prophecy must not be sealed 'because the time is close/near'.

22:11-12 *Third Exhortation* – Here the angel appeals to the conclusion of Daniel's prophecy in Dan 12:10 cf Rev 22:11. Both texts make two statements about the end of the unrighteous and two about the end of the righteous and assert that both groups will stay in their present state! The Daniel prophecy seems to be a statement of actual fact, whereas the Rev one appears to be a command. How could an angel command the ungodly to stay in their sin? Some say that people

could repent; others say that v 11a means the wicked should no longer be told to obey God; some say John saw the end as close and therefore not enough time to change. The reality is that in the OT, in Jesus' ministry and in Rev 2-3, people could *hear the divine words, but resist and be hardened even further*. The ungodly could thus become even more resistant, whilst some backsliding believers might still turn and repent! God can and does still work out His gospel of judgment and redemption in people's lives. The unrepentant are thus urged not to understand, as punishment for their apostasy/idol worship. God still addresses His lazy and apathetic church, with His Word and some 'outsiders' will repent but some within the church will slide into hardened apathy and be lost. Dan 12:9-10 will see some false members of the covenant community not grasping the fulfilment of prophecy noted in Rev 22:10 and therefore continuing to disobey. The godly however will discern what is going on. They will obey God. The shift from Dan 12:10's prediction to Revelation's commands reveals that the fulfilment of Daniel is now already starting in John's era and that authentic saints should see this and respond. This can surely be theologically hard to accept and even distressing news for unbelievers but confirms the 'book of life'.

Verse 12 makes the additional point that the imminent Second Coming of Christ is a further strong incentive for people to make a rapid response to the Word, Will and Gospel of Christ, as the 'day of opportunity' gets shorter and shorter. The focus here is on Christ's final coming and most likely on its suddenness and unexpected occurrence. After Christ's death, resurrection and Pentecost, the next key event is the final coming of Christ, whatever the actual timing of it. So it is 'soon' and the key points in the NT must surely be its unknown and unexpected nature, together with the need for the church to be alert and ready for Christ. V. 12b is a reference to Isa 40:9-10; 62:11 concerning salvation, but in Rev 22:12b the stress is on works of righteous and unrighteous for which believers are either blessed or judged. This does *not mean* that a person is justified by their good works because those works outside of Christ cannot save, since they would need to be perfect to be acceptable to God – see Rev 5:9-10; 7:14. Christ's death on our behalf is what makes us worthy before God. Beale (2015:517) however states "On the other hand, 'works' are considered a necessary condition for salvation at the final judgment. But how? Works are a sign demonstrating that a person has *already met* the ultimate, causal, necessary condition for salvation, which is redemptive justification from sin by Christ's death and resurrection (cf. also Eph. 2:6-10)". The crux in all this is that the saints of God must live holy lives in readiness for Christ's Coming. The ungodly however will likely harden further.

22:13-17 *Fourth Exhortation* – **Verse 13** stresses that the deity of Christ is being spotlighted here as the Alpha and Omega, first and last, beginning and end – see also Rev 1:8,17; 2:8; 21:6. Christ is present and active at the start, middle and end of human history, as well as in eternity. The great truths of 22:13 are a massive incentive for the godly to persevere to the end and finish their lives well.

Likewise, **verse 14** pushes the saints to keep going in trials and tribulations. Only the death of Christ yields a *righteousness that is from God alone and from no other source*. The righteous acts of the saints – Rev 19:7-8 – means the saints’ justified status before God *and* their resulting righteous deeds. Their reward is blessing in the form of the receiving of the right to the tree of life and entry to the city by the gates. This develops Isa 60 and 62:9-10, plus Gen 3 in 21:24-22:3 where some nations enter the city to worship God. This right is only for the righteous, redeemed community.

Verse 15, with 21:8,27, indicate those unbelievers to be excluded from the city. The sobering truth is that the excluded liars will include the false-Christians who claim to believe but their sin denies their claim to be Christian. These are folk who want to be in the church but also firmly in the economy of a godless world. Such people are excluded by unholy lifestyle or false doctrine. ‘Dogs’ means those people who are obsessed with worldly security. The OT use of ‘dogs’ indicates a focus on economic gain and is used in Deut. 23:17-18 to mean male, cult prostitutes involved in idolatry. That ‘dogs’ refers to false apostates is clear from Phil 3:2-3,18-19 and 2 Peter 2:1-3,13-14,16,20-22. Such folk cannot be part of the new creation and city. They belong in the lake of fire for eternity.

Verse 16 links back to Rev 1:1-2 but here the angel testifies to the entire book. There is divided opinion re the identity of the ‘you’, as in ‘for the churches’. Which churches? The text may well refer to the angel’s testimony ‘to you the churches’ as being a link back to Rev 1:4ff and intending the 7 churches. Jesus identifies himself as the ‘root and offspring of David’, the ‘bright morning star’, based on Num 24:17 and Isa 11:1,10 and fulfilling His messianic victory now being consummated by Jesus. This teaches that Christ began a new redemptive day that He will complete on His final coming.

In **verse 17**, the Spirit is the Holy Spirit and the bride is the true, redeemed people of God. The Spirit’s message can only penetrate the ears of those who are willing and able to hear. The stress now moves from the corporate church onto individual believers. The church and the hearers call on Christ to return. Then the thirsty people are called upon to take the free water of life by believing. However, the three commands of ‘come’ and the command of ‘drink’ (Isa 55:1) may also be

seen as directed to individuals. This is a call to unbelievers *and* to those in the church needing to *persevere*. The crux of v.14-17 lies in the two *rewards* offered and promised in verses 14 and 17.

22:18-20 *Fifth Exhortation* – These verses are warnings given to ‘old Israel’ in Deut. 4:1-2 and 29:19-20 in the context of idolatry. It refers to those who embrace the falsity that idolatry can be practised alongside worship of our God. The basic sin here is that idolatry underlies the act of adding to or taking away from the words of revelation. See evidence for this in Rev 2-3. This is also the fundamental mistake of today’s churches. This has to be overcome *in the church*. The warning of judgment is ironic – eye for an eye – but very real and serious. The focus is not on the truly redeemed losing salvation but rather on the false, double-minded claimants of faith within the church who will be denied the final reward – see Rev 13:8; 17:8; 21:8,27; 22:15. Thus 1:3a and 22:18a are severe warnings of judgment to professing believers inside the visible church. These words are from the very Godhead in heaven – see Rev 2-3; 19:9; 21:5; 22:6. Regarding 22:20, 22:16,18 state that the angel and John have testified to the vision in the revealing and recording of it. The Spirit is the third witness – see Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 19:10; 22:17a. Jesus now makes Himself the fourth witness who testifies. These are all in a real sense legal witnesses to the entire vision that make the readers accountable to Christ’s coming as Lord and Judge! Jesus’ comings – 1:7; 2:5; 3:3,11; 22:7,12 – reveal truth and demand our trust.

22:21 *Conclusion to 22:6-20 and the whole book* - John wants God’s grace for his readers to grasp and obey the whole letter. Revelation deals with the problems of the 7 churches by presenting their present and future available resources in Christ. These are a mix of OT prophecy and fulfilment at their various stages, some already, some not yet. Faithful endurance by persevering obedience will yield eternal reward. This points even more fundamentally to the worship and glory of God. *We must bear faithful witness to Christ in words and works*. Satan still seeks to attack the church by false believers and idolatry within the church. God or mammon? Christ or self? His character in our lives or worldly ambition?

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'Preaching **Revelation**'

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