

**The Conquering Christ**  
**Studies in the Revelation to St. John**  
LVPC Sunday School: Fall-Winter, 2014-2015

**Lesson Plan**

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Passage</i>
1	9/7	Orientation to Revelation	Chapter 1:1-3
2	9/14	Revelation of Jesus	Chapter 1:1-8
3	9/21	Glorious Christ	Chapter 1:9-20
4	9/28	Battlefield I	Chapter 2:1-29
5	10/5	Battlefield II	Chapter 3:1-22
6	10/12	Command Center	Chapter 4:1-5:14
7	10/19	Seven Seals	Chapter 6:1-17
8	10/26	Sealed and Saved	Chapter 7:1-17
9	11/2	Seven Trumpets I	Chapter 8:1-13
10	11/9	Seven Trumpets II	Chapter 9:1-21
11	11/16	General and Troops	Chapt. 10:1-11:19
12	11/23	Woman, Child, and Dragon	Chapter 12:1-17
13	11/30	Two Beasts	Chapter 13:1-18
14	12/7	Harvest of the Faithful	Chapter 14:1-20
15	12/14	Seven Bowls	Chapt. 15:1-16:21
16	12/21	Enemy Revealed	Chapter 17:1-18
17	12/28	Lament for Babylon	Chapter 18:1-24
18	1/4	Celebration!	Chapter 19:1-10
19	1/11	Battle	Chapter 19:11-21

20	1/18	Millennium	Chapter 20:1-6
21	1/25	Last Judgment	Chapter 20:7-15
22	2/1	New Universe	Chapter 21:1-8
23	2/8	New Jerusalem	Chapter 21:9-22:5
24	2/15	Jesus is Coming	Chapter 22:6-21
25	2/22	Conclusion	

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**Outline**

1. Revelation of Jesus
2. Stage
  - a. Warrior
  - b. Battlefield
  - c. Command Center
3. Battle Plan
  - a. Seven Seals
  - b. Israelites Sealed
  - c. Gentiles Saved
4. Call to Battle
  - a. Seven Trumpets
  - b. General
  - c. Troops
5. Combatants
  - a. Woman, Child, and Dragon
  - b. Two Beasts
  - c. Harvest of the Faithful
6. Combat!
  - a. Seven Bowls
  - b. Enemy Revealed
  - c. Victory!
  - d. Celebration
  - e. Battle
7. Present Age
  - a. Millennium
  - b. Last Judgment
8. All Things New
  - a. New Universe
  - b. New People of God
9. Jesus is Coming

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**Lesson 1**  
***Orientation to the Revelation to St. John***  
 Revelation 1:1-3

*Main Point:*

*Main Application:*

1. Read Revelation 1:1-3.
2. How we are approaching Revelation:
  - a. The big picture, an overview
  - b. My best understanding of the meaning
  - c. Historically rooted
  - d. Practically relevant
3. What we are not going to do:
  - a. Present and critique a lot of interpretations
  - b. Develop complicated outlines
  - c. Be theologically preoccupied
  - d. Explain every detail
4. What Revelation is:
  - a. A revelation, not a concealment (v. 1)
 

Some people treat this book as a concealment, not a revelation. They act as though God constructed some massive puzzle and challenges us to figure it out. Some read Revelation and find it hard to understand, so they conclude that it is either incomprehensible, or is too difficult for anyone to understand. Others write massive books with complicated explanations which you and I never would have thought of on our own. Most people miss the simple clues to understanding this book.
  - b. A picture book
 

We are not supposed to find meanings for all the details here, any more than you can find meaning in all the elements of the pictures in an art gallery. Pictures communicate by evoking thoughts and feelings that cannot be expressed in words. How can you explain in words the joy of a new mother when a baby is first laid on her belly, the distress of a father whose child was killed in an automobile crash, the delight

of a child on Christmas morning? But you can capture these experiences in pictures. Most people misunderstand Revelation because they are looking for the wrong thing. They have read Paul's letters and grasped Paul's logical explanation of the Christian faith. Then they go to Revelation and look for a logical, systematic explanation of the end – but it is not here. Instead Revelation gives us pictures of the end – pictures which show us what will happen, and also how we should react to these events.

So why does God frustrate us like this, you say? Why does He tease us with pictures? Why doesn't He just tell us forthrightly what the end will be like? Why confuse us with pictures? Because that is the best way to tell the story. Remember, this is a *revelation*. God wanted to tell us about the end, and He chose the simplest, clearest, and best way to do so. If this frustrates you, the problem is with you. You have some preconceived idea of how God should communicate, and you insist on thinking you know better than He. That is not very humble is it? Part of submitting to God and His word is to submit to the form He chose to use in communicating with us. We need to stop expecting Revelation to speak in a way God never intended, and read it as He wants you to.

As a picture book Revelation has its own grammar. Pictures are made up of symbols combined in a certain way to create a whole message. In a simple landscape the symbols represent ordinary objects. A green puff with a brown stem is a symbol for a tree. But Revelation is a book about spiritual realities – things which cannot be seen with our earthly eyes. That means that God uses earthly symbols to represent spiritual realities. Here is where the difficulty comes. If this is the case, how can we know which spiritual reality is represented by a symbol? In the vision of Jesus in this chapter we see a sword coming from His mouth. What does that mean? Swords are sharp. Does it mean that Jesus speaks sharply to us? How can we know?

## 5. Interpreting Revelation.

### a. Pictures are interpreted by scripture

Here is a vitally important point. One of the most fundamental principles of biblical interpretation is that scripture must be its own interpreter. We use the Bible to interpret itself. When we encounter a puz-

zling place in the Bible, we go to a clearer passage to find help in explaining it. So although there are a few places where it might seem on the surface that all people will be saved, we know from the many places that discuss the fate of those who never believe that not all will be saved. What this means for Revelation is that it is illegitimate to make up meanings for the symbols here. Virtually everything in this book comes from earlier scripture. The right way to understand Revelation is to understand the biblical use of the symbols. So when we read in chapter six that the sun became black and the moon turned to blood we do not think this means the moon will literally become red. We know this is a standard symbol with a specific meaning, because we saw it used in Isaiah and elsewhere in the Bible. As you become familiar with the whole Bible, Revelation begins to make much more sense.

6. Why study Revelation?
  - a. Blessed are those who read and hear (v. 3)
  - b. The blessing is not contingent upon full understanding; simply reading and hearing bless people.
  
7. Application: Read chapter 1.

**Lesson 2**  
***Revelation of Jesus***  
Revelation 1:1-8

*Main Point:*

*Main Application:*

1. What do you remember of our introductory comments from last week?
  - a. This will be an overview; we're getting the big picture
  - b. It will be practically relevant
  - c. It's a revelation, not a concealment
  - d. It's a picture book
  - e. The pictures are interpreted by scripture
  - f. People are blessed by reading and hearing Revelation
2. Read Revelation 1:1-8.
3. Whose revelation is this? Where did it come from? (v. 1)
  - God, Jesus
4. What was Jesus supposed to do with this revelation? What is the second verb in verse 1?
  - “Show” it to His servants
5. How did Jesus give this revelation to His servants?
  - An angel gave it to John
6. What did John do? What is the last verb of verse 3?
  - “Saw”
  - John passed it on to us
7. These first three verses give us clues that this book will be about seeing, and before long we will find that it consists mainly of images. Remember, last week we said that Revelation is a picture book. This fundamental characteristic trips up many, if not most, interpreters. People try to read Revelation the way they read Matthew or Romans. They look for the story line, or the logical argument. They struggle mightily to find it. They try out a million ways to discover the story, or the argument, and present to us complex proposals. What they miss is that this book is a series of pic-

tures. They are united around a theme, and they are related to each other, but Revelation is more like a book of Monet's paintings than a Dickens novel.

Last we explained that pictures are composed of symbols. A brown pole with a green puff on it is a symbol for a tree. Likewise the word pictures in Revelation consist of symbols, and interpreting Revelation is a matter of understanding the symbols. Too many people just make up meanings, but the true meaning comes from other scriptures.

Learning any language takes time, and this is true of the language of symbols. If I were to attempt to learn Chinese, it would be silly of me to argue with my teacher. After all, he is the one who knows Chinese. He may not be correct in everything he says, but I have to begin by trusting him to get it right most of the time. Similarly, I will not be right about everything as we discuss Revelation, but I ask you to give me a fair hearing. If you do, I think you will find yourself becoming much more comfortable with symbol language.

8. We're still in the first three verses, and we find here an indication of when the events described in this book will take place. What does it say? (vv. 1, 3)
  - “Soon” (v. 1); “Time is near” (v. 3)
9. The Bible is the word of God, so it is always accurate. When it speaks of a certain time period, that is important. It's not enough that the Bible contain some noble truths or inspirational wisdom. The Bible claims to be true in all its particulars. And if we can't trust the Bible in all parts, then we can't be sure that any of it is trustworthy. If we are going to trust God to be true about sin and salvation, we have to trust Him to be true about when historical events happen.
10. Revelation is about historical events, so it is essential to know what time period it is referring to. This is so important, the matter is addressed again at the end of the book. Let's read a couple of verses there.
11. Read Revelation 22:6, 7, 10, 12, and 20.
12. Look at all those time references! So you can see how important it is that

we grasp that this book points to a particular time period.

13. Revelation is a book about events that are about to happen soon. It shouldn't be necessary to state this because the book is self-evidently a letter to seven first century churches about their situation. But Jesus removes all doubt by using the word "soon" in verse one to mark the time of this prophecy. This word (Greek: *ταχος*) is used elsewhere to refer to events that were coming up immediately. (Acts 12:7; 22:14; 25:4; 1 Timothy 3:14) Then to emphasize the point, he says in verse three that "the time is near". This word (Greek: *εγγυς*) is used all over the New Testament and means something which is just about to happen. (Matthew 3:2; 10:7; 26:18; Mark 1:15; 13:28-29; Luke 7:12; 15:1; 19:11; John 2:13; 11:18; Ephesians 2:13, 17; Philippians 4:5) Then at the end of the book, this point is hammered home again. OK, so what does "soon" mean? We are not given a specific year and day, but by looking at the other uses of this word it is certain that it must refer to something in the lifetimes of those receiving the message.

Now I must admit that most scholars disagree with me on this point. I am not alone, but neither am I in the majority. Even my New Testament professor, Dr. Vern Poythress, whom I greatly admire, thinks Revelation predicts events yet to come. How can this be? There are several strands of thought that contribute to thinking Revelation speaks of the end of time. One is a dismal lack of understanding first century history. If you do not know what happened in the first century, you will not be able to recognize the events predicted here. Another problem is confusing several different first century periods of persecution. Revelation predicts a great persecution of the church. Was it the persecution under Nero in the 60s? Or Domitian in the 80s and 90s? Or some other emperor? Or is it some future persecution? Now you can see that the date of the book is of critical importance. If it was written late in the first century, as most scholars believe, either it is not a prediction of first century persecution, or it is not true prophecy. Christians who take the Bible as the word of God, who does not lie, will not accept Revelation as history masquerading as prophecy. Once you agree it was written late in the first century, you must take it as a prediction of events beyond the early church.

This means that the date of writing is critically important. Why do most scholars think it was written late in the first century? Because that is what

virtually every other scholar says. But when you investigate the source of this thought, it all goes back to one man, a bishop named Irenaeus, who lived in the second century and grew up in Asia Minor. Now you would think that someone who lived that close to the time and place of Revelation would know when it was written. I also would be inclined to believe him. The problem is that Irenaeus' statement was ambiguous, and he was wrong about other important dates. Irenaeus was a godly leader in the church, but he appears to have trouble with dates – like many of us!

The best evidence points to Revelation being written between A.D. 60 and 70 before the first great persecution under Roman emperor Nero. That means that it is about events leading up to the catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

One brief additional note. Many people explain this first century reference in Revelation by pointing to 2 Peter 3:8. "...with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Their thinking is that "soon" to God may take thousands of years. This is true as far as it goes. But a thousand years for *us* is still exactly a thousand years – and God sent this message to us. If He wishes to communicate with us, He will do it in terms that make sense to human beings. This sort of cryptic meaning only works if you assume that God is trying to make things difficult for us. Furthermore, the verse quoted is taken out of context. Peter used this comparison simply to illustrate God's patience. It has nothing to do with how God measures time.

14. Let's look at verses four and five. What literary form is used here?
  - Epistle
15. As we mentioned earlier, the book of Revelation is actually a letter to seven churches. These were real churches, and in a couple of weeks we'll learn more about them. Verses 4 and 5 follow the standard for of a first century letter: identify the author, identify the recipients, and wish them a blessing.
16. Who besides John and his audience is also described in verse 4?
  - God
17. Why is God described as "who is and who was and who is to come"?

- This is the New Testament version of God’s covenant name which He revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:15. There God declared that His name was “I am what I am”, typically pronounced Yahweh. This immediately sets God apart from any human being or any creation of human hand or mind. God spans time, is beyond time. God’s reality is the most basic fact, and any attempt to replace Him with a man-made god, or the emperor, is entirely foolish.

18. Why are there seven spirits before the throne?

19. How is Jesus described in verse 5?

- Verse five introduces Jesus as the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the earth.
- These three attributes of Jesus provide three of the dominant themes of the book. Revelation is about judgment, and Jesus is the court’s chief and most reliable witness. Revelation is about life and death. Jesus has power over both, for He experienced both. Revelation is about rule, and Jesus is the supreme ruler. There are other kings, some of whom pretend to the supreme throne. They will fall before Jesus. Revelation will show Jesus as the faithful witness, the giver of life and death, and the king who rules all other kings.

20. The end of verse 5 and verse 6 describes God’s people, and it mentions three features of us. What are they?

- Loved by Jesus, freed from sin, made a kingdom and priests

21. There is much that can be said about these things, but here are a few thoughts. First, we are loved by Jesus. This is a mystery. Why would He who is, and who was, and who is to come love mere creatures like us? There is no rational explanation, but it is true. Because of His love for us, God has set us free from sin by His own death. This is a multiple mystery. How could the eternal one die? And how could His death set us free from death? This is awesome, but also true. Finally, He has made us a kingdom and priests to God the Father. This hints that we also shall reign as kings (that comes later), but now we are priests. Only those specially called and made holy are able to serve as priests. What a mystery that all believers are called and sanctified to serve God this way!

22. Verse 7 echoes an earlier scripture. What is it?

– The Olivet Discourse; Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21

23. What is the Olivet Discourse? What is it about?

24. Verse seven recapitulates Jesus' prophecy of the end which is recorded in the gospels. This tells us that Revelation and the Olivet Discourse predict the same events. It also underlines that those who put Jesus to death will live to see these events come to pass. This reinforces our view that Revelation is about first century events.

25. What do we learn about God from His name Alpha and Omega?

– The eternal nature of God. God is the Alpha, the beginning. Everything has its origin in Him, and nothing exists without His initiative. God is the Omega, the end. He brings everything to completion and brings history to its conclusion. God is the Almighty. His power is supreme.

**Lesson 3**  
***Glorious Christ***  
Revelation 1:9-20

*Main Point:*

*Main Application:*

1. What sort of book is Revelation?
  - Picture book, letter
2. How can we know what the pictures mean?
  - Earlier use in scripture
3. When did its events take place?
  - 1<sup>st</sup> century
4. When was it written?
  - A.D. 60s
5. Today we're going to plunge right in and see the first picture that Jesus showed the apostle John.
6. Read Revelation 1:9-20.
7. How does John describe himself?
8. Why does he describe himself this way? Why not mention that he is an apostle?
9. Where was John when he received this vision?
10. Why was he on Patmos?
11. Who did John see? What was this vision?
  - Jesus (v. 18)
12. Why was Jesus' voice like a trumpet?
13. Where was Jesus standing?

- In the midst of the golden lampstands
14. What was He like?
    - Son of man
  15. What does this mean?
    - Reference to Jesus' self-reference, and to Daniel 7
  16. Let's read Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
  17. Who is described here?
  18. What are the similarities between Daniel's vision and John's?
  19. What is the overall visual effect of this vision?
  20. Why the robe and gold sash?
  21. What might fiery eyes signify? What could Jesus do with such eyes?
  22. Why would his feet be like bronze? What could Jesus do with bronze feet?
  23. Why would His voice sound like the roar of many waters?
  24. Why is a sword coming from Jesus' mouth?
  25. This picture is the culmination of all previous visions of God. As on Mt. Sinai when God met Israel and gave her the law, here God announces His presence with the sound of a trumpet.

Jesus is identified as the Son of Man – the name He most often used for Himself while on earth. He has the robe and sash of a priest. His hair takes us back to the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7:9. Snow and wool show the glory of the heavenly King. In Isaiah 1:18 they are used to indicate purity. "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." Jesus is the glorious King, utterly pure.

His eyes penetrate every barrier and see everything in the universe. This x-ray vision enables Jesus to render perfect judgment on all men everywhere.

His gleaming feet are the feet of a warrior. Isaiah 63:1 describes the Servant of God as a soldier on the march. “Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? ‘It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.’” These are the feet of a warrior who can march anywhere on earth. Nothing can bar His path.

Jesus is master of the stars. He made them, of course, and controls them. Job says He seals them up so they may not shine (9:7). Psalm 147:4 says, “He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.”

Jesus is armed for battle with a sharp sword. But why is it coming out of his mouth? Ephesians tells us that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. And Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” We shall have more to say later about God’s word as a powerful weapon.

Finally, Jesus’ face is shining as brightly as the sun at noon.

What is the meaning of this vision? Each element tells us something about Jesus, but the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. John got the message instantly. This is one terrifying dude! This is God equipped for battle, and no one can stand in His way. Just to see Him is to flee in terror. This is Jesus the Terminator. He comes to kill, and He is invincible.

26. Was John afraid of Jesus?
27. What did Jesus do to John?
28. What does this tell us about Jesus?
29. Do you think John was less terrified after Jesus touched him?

30. What did Jesus say that might have comforted John?
31. In verse 20 Jesus tells us what the stars and lampstands represent. What are they?
32. Who are the angels of the churches?
33. The Greek word *αγγελος* means “messenger,” nothing more. It can mean a spirit messenger or a human messenger. In this context, it seems to indicate the pastors of these churches. The pastors are the ones who are the messengers of the gospel for their people.
34. What does Jesus do with the stars?
35. What does this mean?
36. Where is Jesus in relation to the lampstands?
37. What does this mean?
38. Jesus is clothed in power and glory. He walks among the lampstands as a sentry on patrol. He upholds the pastors of the churches, and He guards the churches against their enemies.

Is this who you think Jesus is? Many people do not. Their Jesus is the baby in the manger, or the gentle shepherd, or the patient teacher. Their Jesus is not a terrifying warrior on patrol. But this is the Jesus that we need. As we will see, the church has vicious and deadly enemies. On our own, we are cannon fodder for Satan’s army. We are dead unless Jesus guards and protects us.

The problem is that this Jesus is dangerous, as John experienced. A Jesus powerful enough to protect you is also powerful enough to hurt you.

Do you trust Jesus? Are you convinced that Jesus will use His awesome power to protect you, or are you afraid that He will use His power to hurt you?

Jesus gives us in this passage the reason why we can trust Him. He is the one who died and lives forevermore – and He died to save us from our sins. We can be sure that the One who died to save us will never hurt us. We can trust Jesus to protect from all our enemies.

**Lesson 4**  
***Battlefield I***  
Revelation 2:1-29

*Main Point:*

*Main Application:*

1. What did you learn about Jesus last week?
2. What did the features of the vision show us about Jesus?
3. Why was He walking among the lampstands?
4. What is the critical question this vision presents to everyone?
5. Why would anyone trust such a terrifying person?
6. Jesus is on patrol. This magnificent warrior patrols the churches to guard and protect us from the enemy. This doesn't mean we won't suffer – for there is a war on. Yes, we'll suffer – but the presence of Jesus guarantees that we will win. The Terminator comes to kill, and anyone who attacks His church will die. That's good news for us!
7. Jesus is also the faithful witness. Revelation is about judgment, and Jesus is the faithful witness. He knows all, and He always tells the truth. Judgment will be based upon His report to the court. In today's passage Jesus gives us His evaluation of the churches who received this letter.
8. Read Revelation 2:1-7.
9. Ephesus was the most prominent city in Asia Minor. Although not the capital of the Roman province of Asia, she possessed the right of *cata-plous*, first landing, “which meant that senatorial governors must land there when they arrived to enter on their year of office.”<sup>1</sup> Ephesus was the largest port and the most prosperous city in the province. Paul spent two

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<sup>1</sup> G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1966) p. 29.

years establishing the church there – his longest stay in any city. The amazing temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

10. How does the message to the church in Ephesus begin? (v. 1)
11. Why does Jesus refer to Himself in this way?
12. What does Jesus know about this church? (vv. 2-3)
13. What is the problem in this church? (v. 4)
14. What must they do to correct this problem? (v. 5)
15. How does Jesus close this message? (v. 7)
16. What does Jesus mean by “the one who conquers”?
17. What is the tree of life? The Paradise of God?
18. Does this sound like our church? Does this commendation and warning fit our congregation?
19. This was a strong church, at least by appearances. She consistently identified and expelled false apostles and heretics. But the church at Ephesus had a potentially fatal flaw. Her love had grown cold. Jesus was very pleased with her doctrinal zeal, but her lack of love was such a serious problem that she was in danger of being “removed”. Notice that Jesus does not specify *which* love had grown cold – for Him or for their neighbors. That is because the two are linked. John explained this in his first letter. 1 John 4:8 says, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” And in verse 20 he says, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” It is not enough to seek God. The one who truly seeks God also seeks to love his neighbor, particularly the poor and oppressed. Now Jesus says, if you do not love others, you will be removed. Correct doctrine is not enough. The demons have correct doctrine. You will go to hell with your correct doctrine unless you love others.

20. Read Revelation 2:8-11.

21. Smyrna was also a great seaport. This very ancient city had been destroyed in 600 B.C. and was rebuilt by Alexander the Great. It was one of the oldest allies of Rome and thus competed with Ephesus and Pergamum for the title “first in Asia”. To this premier city which died and came back to life Jesus revealed Himself as “the first and last, who died and came to life.”

22. What does Jesus know about this church? (v. 9)

23. What was the synagogue of Satan?

24. Isn't this a dangerously anti-Semitic statement?

25. What makes these Jews a synagogue of Satan?

26. Jesus tells them not to fear tribulation. Is that a promise that they will be rescued from death? (v. 10)

27. What does Jesus promise this church? (v. 11)

28. What is the second death?

29. Does this sound like our church?

30. Is our church poor, persecuted, and faithful? The important lesson here is that Jesus sometimes allows the godly faithful to die – and that is not a tragedy, because eternal life awaits them after death. The early church really believed this – to the point that some Christians provoked the authorities so that they would be thrown to the lions and die sooner. The bishops tirelessly rebuked this tactic, but it shows how vividly they believed in the resurrection. Do you welcome death? Do you seek the crown of life? Or would you compromise to save your life?

31. Read Revelation 2:12-17.

32. How does Jesus approach the church in Pergamum? (v. 12)

33. What is the sharp two-edged sword?
34. Where is Pergamum? (v. 13)
35. Pergamum was the capital of Roman Asia and “the centre for the worship of Asclepius, the serpent-god”<sup>2</sup>. Thus Jesus said Satan’s throne was there.
36. What does Jesus know about Pergamum?
37. What are Pergamum’s problems? (vv. 14-15)
38. What was the teaching of Balaam? (Numbers 22-25)
  - Balak was a prophet who was hired by Balaam, king of Moab, to trouble the Israelites as they traveled from Egypt to Canaan. Balak proposed using Moabite women to entice the Israelite men with sex and lead them into idol worship, knowing this would provoke God’s anger.
39. How must this church correct their problems? (v. 16)
40. What will Jesus do if they do not repent?
41. What is the promise for those who conquer? (v. 17)
42. Like the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamum was faithful through persecution, even when one of their members was executed for his faith. But to this church Jesus said faithfulness and bravery in persecution is not enough. Doctrinal faithfulness and moral purity are necessary also. Nothing is known about the Nicolaitans outside of these references in Revelation, but presumably they also taught false doctrine and promoted immoral behavior. As in centuries before, this provoked God’s anger – and Jesus warned the church in Pergamum that He would come personally and attack them unless they repent of this sin.
43. Does this sound like our church?

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

(If you have less than ten minutes left, jump to #59.)

44. Read Revelation 2:18-29.
45. How does Jesus present Himself to the church in Thyatira? (v. 18)
46. What does Jesus know about this church? (v. 19)
47. That's a pretty impressive resume! What else does Jesus have to say to this church? (v. 20)
48. Who is Jezebel?
49. Why is she a problem?
50. Are Thyatira and Pergamum facing the same issues?
51. How are Balaam and Jezebel similar or different?
52. What is Jesus going to do about Jezebel?
53. Why not come with His sword, like He threatened with Pergamum?
54. What is the promise to those in Thyatira who conquer?
55. Thyatira was the opposite to Ephesus. This church was full of love and service, but was doctrinally careless. They would have said, "Doctrine doesn't matter as long as we all love Jesus." Wrong. Doctrine matters to Jesus. He threatened to come and strike down their prophetess who was misleading them and kill her followers. He reminded this church that He knows the mind and heart. They will not escape His judgment. This church must act quickly to expel this prophetess and anyone who refuses to repent of her teaching. Beside this, the church was doing well. Their love and service were commendable. If they were faithful to rule their own affairs well, Jesus would give them a role in ruling the earth.
56. Does this sound like our church?
57. Is our church active in ministry, but careless about doctrine and morality?

Some churches build houses for the homeless and go on mission trips, but neglect solid teaching in your Sunday school. Recent polls show that doctrine among evangelicals is shamefully weak. We tend to be ignorant of even the most basic teachings of scripture. Similar studies also show that evangelicals are not morally distinguishable from unbelievers. Recently I heard a campus minister say that Christian students are telling him any sort of sexual intimacy is moral as long as there is no penetration. Such people must be taught the truth and called to repentance. And any church that refuses to rule her own affairs will have to contend with Jesus when he comes to clean house. I fear that many of our churches will not survive His coming. The application for us is this. Do not think that by doing ministry activity we will be pleasing to God. We must serve others. But we must also apply ourselves to a careful study of doctrine, and pursue purity.

58. Thyatira was a commercial center. Among her many trade guilds, one of the foremost was the bronze guild. The world translated “burnished bronze” is found in no other Greek literature. Some scholars think it may be the brand name for the particular bronze made in Thyatira. Jesus is saying, “My feet are stronger than your world-famous bronze armor.”
59. Each of these messages begins with the phrase “I know”. Jesus knows. You cannot hide from Him. His fiery eyes penetrate into every place and every heart. No one escapes His judgment. You may hide your true self from your parents, your pastor, and even your friends – but Jesus knows. He knows your good deeds and your bad, the motives of your heart and the thoughts of your mind. So when Jesus speaks, what He says is irrefutably true. And what He predicts is certain to happen.
60. These messages were directed to real churches in Asia Minor (present day Turkey) in the middle of the first century. They apply to us as warnings and encouragements. Jesus is the same today as two millennia ago. The church in every age must listen to His voice and obey His commands. As we read through these chapters, you must ask yourself, “Does this describe my church? Does this describe me? What must we do to obey?”

**Lesson 5**  
***Battlefield II***  
 Revelation 3:1-22

*Main Point:*

*Main Application:*

1. Last week we read and discussed four first century churches in Asia Minor. Why did we do this?
2. What did you learn from these churches?
3. What did you learn about Jesus?
4. Jesus is the Terminator. With His x-ray eyes He sees everything. No good or evil act, no thought or desire goes unnoticed. Jesus has the bronze all-terrain legs. There is nowhere He cannot go, and nothing can stop Him. Jesus has the invincible double-edged sword. Jesus sees everything, goes everywhere, and kills anyone who is His enemy.
5. Jesus is terrifying, but it's a good thing – because we are under attack by a vicious enemy. If Jesus were not fighting for us, we would be finished. But with Jesus on patrol, the church is safe. We are confident that He will not hurt us because once He died for us, but we must beware lest we fall into the enemy camp. If Jesus finds us on Satan's side, we will suffer the same fate as that enemy.
6. Let's continue reading about the churches who first received this vision.

(If you skipped Thyatira last week, go back to question 44 of the previous lesson.)

7. Read Revelation 3:1-6.
8. How does Jesus introduce Himself to the church in Sardis?
9. What does Jesus know about the church in Sardis? (v. 1b)
10. Jesus said, "I know your works" to the church in Ephesus and Thyatira.

What is different about the works of the church in Sardis?

11. What are the strengths of this church?
12. So far we've seen these churches struggle with cold love, weak doctrine, sexual immorality, false teachers, persecution, and compromise with idols. Is Sardis troubled by any of these issues?
13. Why is this church about to die? (v. 2)
14. What is incomplete about their works?
15. The church in Sardis appeared to be the perfect church. They were at peace, undisturbed by doctrinal disputes or persecution. They had a positive reputation in the community. They should have remembered Jesus' words, "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." (Luke 6:26) The peace of Sardis was not the peace of perfection, but the peace of death. This church did not dispute theology because they did not know any theology. They did not care about the poor. And they did nothing positive to spark opposition from Satan. This is a church that is AWOL in the spiritual battle surrounding them. They are content and at peace while others are fighting and dying for Jesus. No wonder Jesus threatened to attack them. They were spiritual traitors. Sardis was built on an impregnable spot. She had never been taken by assault, but twice she had been defeated when an enemy sneaked in. Jesus promised to sneak into this apparently prosperous church and destroy it unless they repent.
16. Is our church happy and at peace? Are we AWOL in the spiritual battles of our day?
17. Read Revelation 3:7-13.
18. How does Jesus introduce Himself to the church in Philadelphia?
19. What does Jesus know about this church? (v. 8)
20. Sardis was also known by her works, but was almost dead. Is this church also almost dead?

21. Why is Jesus giving them an open door?
22. Twice Jesus praises them for the same thing. What is it?
  - They kept His word
23. What is keeping Jesus' word linked to? (vv. 8, 10)
  - Not denying Jesus' name in the face of persecution
24. What command did Jesus give them? (v. 11)
25. Doesn't this seem passive? How do you square this with Jesus' commands to other churches to be active in serving Him?
26. What does Jesus promise those who conquer? (v. 12)
27. What does it mean to be a pillar in the temple of God?
28. Jesus identifies Himself to Philadelphia as the one "who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens." He also has set before them "an open door, which no one is able to shut." Some people see this as a reference to opportunities for successful evangelism, but that is unlikely. The keys of the Kingdom are for opening and closing the entry to the Kingdom. (See Matthew 16:18-19) So the door is not an opportunity for witness, but an opening into the presence of God. This is especially clear in the next message to Laodicea. Jesus is saying this faithful church will always be able to look forward to unimpeded fellowship with Him. Is that what you want? The message is clear – if you want to know Jesus, keep His word and stay faithful to Him.
29. Does this sound like our church?
30. Read Revelation 3:14-22.
31. How does Jesus introduce Himself to the church in Laodicea?
32. What does Jesus know about this church?
33. What's wrong with being lukewarm?

34. Laodicea was situated between Hierapolis and Colossae. Hierapolis had medicinal hot springs, and Colossae was watered by a cold mountain stream, but the water of Laodicea was lukewarm and disgusting. It was useful neither for healing nor for drinking.
35. Why was this an apt metaphor for the church in Laodicea?
36. How was this church “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked”? (v. 17)
37. What did they need to do? (v. 18)
38. What does it mean to buy these things from Jesus?
39. What does Jesus promise to those who repent? (v. 20-21)
40. What does it mean to eat with Jesus?
41. What does it mean to sit with Jesus on His throne?
42. The church in Laodicea thought they were rich, prosperous, and self-sufficient, but in reality they were “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” Laodicea had a thriving textile industry, a medical school, and was a banking center. The church made the mistake of thinking that since they were materially prosperous they were pleasing to God. Big mistake! Jesus has the x-ray vision to see under the surface, and He saw that these proud Christians were spiritually bankrupt. Jesus urged them to get true riches from Him. They must trade the rich garments, their famous eye salve, and the gold deposits of Laodicea for the white garments, spiritual ointment, and heavenly gold that Jesus offers. If they do, He will fellowship with them. But if they do not repent, their spiritual nakedness, blindness, and poverty will be exposed – to their shame. Jesus offered this stern rebuke because He loved the Laodiceans. He did not want these Christians to be humiliated. He did not want to remain locked out of their lives. Jesus was knocking to be admitted into their lives.
43. We live in a rich, prosperous, and peaceful country. Almost everyone in America is in danger of the sort of blind complacency of the Laodicean church. When you can sleep in to 10:00 A.M., go to a one-hour service on

Sunday, and be thought a decent Christian – something is dreadfully wrong with the church. Jesus is disgusted by this sort of Christianity! Such people may be born again, but they are an embarrassment to the faith. Jesus sees through superficial Christianity. He has the x-ray eyes, and He knows! He knows your mind and heart. Jesus says, “You are naked, blind, and poor. Do not be deceived by your material wealth and prosperity. You cannot clothe yourself, or heal yourself, or prosper yourself. Come to me! I have the clothes, the medicine, and the wealth you need. I will give you *all* you need. Come to me!”

44. Every message to these churches ends with the phrase, “to the one who conquers.” This is the big question before us today. Will you be a conqueror? Or will you be a loser?
45. Jesus revealed Himself first as the Terminator because there is a war on. You probably are not often aware of it. Most of the time we go about our business at work, attending class, eating lunch with friends, watching TV, etc. We are oblivious to the unseen war about us, and our Christian friends are just as bad. Satan hates Jesus, he hates all who love Jesus, and he will do anything to destroy Jesus’ Kingdom. He will try to kill your friends, torment you, and persecute you if he thinks these things will erode your faith. What is even worse, Satan will assist you in gaining wealth, popularity, and success – because he knows that these are even more effective in killing your spirit. On your own you are no match for him, but Jesus is on your side – and with His help, you can defeat all the attacks of the enemy. You can be a conqueror if you stick close to Jesus! But if you stray, you will fall.
46. Note that this battle does not require heavy weaponry. It does not require physical strength, social skills, or intelligence – money, or possessions. All it requires is faithfulness to Jesus and His word. Never deny Jesus, and always cherish His word. If you do, you will apply yourself to learn the doctrine taught in the scripture, and you will love and serve people around you. If you are truly faithful to Jesus and His word, serving Him will be the first, last, and all-encompassing goal in your life. If you refuse to dabble in Christianity, but throw yourself into the fight – with whatever resources you have – you will conquer. This is Jesus’ promise.
47. Jesus promised each church a reward for conquering with Him. But these

are not solely future rewards they are available now in some measure. If you will give up this rotten life that looks so good and follow Jesus instead, He will give you these gifts to sustain you along the way. Jesus will give you first life, then strength, food, His name, most profoundly Himself, and finally eternal life. You are not in this alone! Jesus the Terminator has given Himself to you. You will conquer if you stick with Him. Trust Him who died for you to give you the victory over all your enemies. Only remain faithful.

**Lesson 6**  
**Command Center**  
Revelation 4:1-5:14

*Main Point:*

*Main Application:*

1. In the past two weeks we've read and discussed seven first century churches. What have you learned from these churches?
2. Each church had its strengths and weaknesses, but Jesus expects one thing from all of them. What did Jesus say at the end of the message to each church?
3. What does it mean to conquer?
4. Perhaps you've noticed that we've been using a lot of military terminology so far. That's because this is a book about warfare, and the climax to Revelation is the battle in chapter 19. After the prolog we were introduced to the Warrior. It is Jesus, and He is revealed as invincible. The past two weeks we've been reviewing the battlefield – for the war will take place within these seven churches. This week we're going to see the command center – headquarters, where the supreme commander is seated with His generals. I guarantee it's not like any military command you've ever seen.
5. We're going to read chapter four in a minute, but first a word about how to read a picture book. By picture book we don't mean that there are actual drawings, but that the words describe pictures and they do this using symbols. Now how do you look at a picture? Do you immediately begin to examine the brush strokes, the variations of color, the fine details in composition? No, you first identify the subject, and then you determine what the artist is saying about the subject. You notice that it is a painting about Washington crossing the Delaware, and the courage of the Continental Army. Or perhaps it is a painting of Main Street Bethlehem in winter, and the Victorian street lamps cast a welcoming glow on the new-fallen snow. Later, if you care to, you might wonder exactly how the painter made it appear as though the canvas was actually glowing, and then you will examine the color and the brush strokes.

6. People stumble immediately when they read Revelation because they home in on the details. You will never understand the book if you do this. First you must look at the whole picture. First you must determine what the picture is about and what it means. Then you can dive into the details. In our study of Revelation we will always look for the meaning of the pictures. Along the way we will look at some of the details, but we will not have time to examine them all. And that is perfectly fine. We don't need to know all the details to have a solid understanding of this book.
7. Read Revelation 4:1-11.
8. So what's the big view? What is this picture?
  - Heaven
9. What is in this picture? What is happening here?
10. What is in the center of the picture? (v. 2)
  - Throne
11. What is on the throne?
  - God
12. What does God look like? (v. 3)
  - Jasper and carnelian
13. Is God two minerals? No. What does it mean that he had the appearance of jasper and carnelian?
14. Why is there an emerald rainbow around the throne?
15. Who are the 24 elders seated on thrones? (v. 4)
16. What was in front of the throne? (v. 6a)
  - Sea of glass
17. What was around the throne? (v. 6b)
18. What are all of these characters doing? (vv. 8-11)
  - Worshiping

19. Now let's pick up a few details we overlooked. What is coming from the throne? (v. 5)
  - Lightning, rumbling, thunder, fire
20. Where have we seen God revealed in lightning, earthquake, thunder, and fire – with a trumpet announcement?
  - Exodus 19
21. Let's read Exodus 19:16-20.
22. So God wasn't simply putting on a sound and light show to impress the Israelites in the desert. God was actually lowering heaven and opening it a crack so that the people could get a small impression of God's presence.
23. Now let's look at the four living creatures. What did you notice about their wings?
  - Six wings each
24. What did you notice about their song?
  - Similar to the cherubim of Isaiah 6
25. So we see that God from time to time has given men glimpses of the heavenly throne room. Ezekiel also saw some of these same things, notably the living creatures and the glass sea. But now Jesus has thrown open the door to heaven and we can look around and see the whole place.
26. This is the center of the universe. This is where everything originates. Here is where all events are planned and the course of history is prepared. This is where God sits. We are stunned by its beauty and awestruck by its glory. No wonder the living creatures and elders worship. Who wouldn't worship God if he saw Him in all His glory?
27. Let's read Revelation 5:1-5.
28. What's the deal with the scroll? Why is it so important?
29. What are the seven seals?
30. What would qualify someone to open the scroll?

31. The scroll is full, with writing on both sides of the parchment. Along the edge it is sealed with seven wax seals, In those days it was customary to seal an important document by rolling it up, tying with a string, dribbling wax on the edge, and pressing a seal into the wax. No one was allowed to open the document except the one to whom it was sent. He alone could break the seals and read it. As Revelation unfolds it becomes clear that the scroll, in the hand of God, is the plan for completing our redemption.

32. Why was John so upset about it?

33. Nothing sustains hope in trying circumstances like knowing there is an end. Conversely, there is no despair so deep as the knowledge that there will be no end. The Sisyphus myth is powerful because we all can relate to the horror of having to haul a huge rock up a mountain only to have it fall back down, and to do this for all eternity. As long as there was hope that there was an end, the early Christians could hold on. Jesus said He would return. He promised to destroy His enemies, and this hope gave courage to John and his companions. But what if deliverance was stalled? What if the plan of redemption was halted? Would John and his friends suffer forever, with no hope of relief? Would all their suffering for Jesus be for nothing? It is enough to make you cry in despair, frustration, and anguish.

John sees the plan of redemption right there in God's hand. All that remains is to open and implement it. But no one was worthy to open it. The angels searched heaven and earth. The cherubim flew into the farthest reaches of the universe, but no one was worthy. After all this, John breaks down in uncontrollable weeping. Was his whole life a waste?

34. What is the Lion of the tribe of Judah?

35. What qualifies him to open the scroll?

36. What does it mean that he has conquered?

37. Let's keep reading – Revelation 5:6-8.

38. Where's the Lion?

39. Why is there a Lamb instead of a Lion?
40. What does this Lamb look like?
41. Let's read Revelation 5:9-14.
42. Who is being described in verses 9-10?
43. How is Jesus both a Lion and a Lamb?
44. Judah is the royal tribe. From her came the kings that sat on God's throne in Jerusalem. In Judah rested the hope that a son of David would someday come to save Israel and rule again. Jesus came as this son of David, and received the Kingdom of His Father. When He ascended to heaven, He sat down on the throne of God, as the book of Hebrews plainly tells us. "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high... 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.'" (Hebrews 1:3, 8)

But there is more! Jesus was not only from the royal tribe, and is presently the reigning King – He is also the Root of David. He is the source of David's line of kings. Jesus created this world and placed man on it. In Colossians we read,

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17)

So Jesus is simultaneously the creator and offspring of David. Jesus is the first and the last! And now this great conquering Lion has arrived to complete what He began when He was on earth. The end of our salvation is here, and He will open the seals. We hold our breathe as we prepare to be awed by a vast lion, golden mane flowing from side to side, casting golden beams around the room. We wait for Him to open His mouth and roar with a mighty voice – a voice that commands all worlds and shakes the universe down to its sub-atomic particles. Here He comes – our hero!

But when John looked in the direction of this great Lion, there was no

lion at all. There was nothing but a murdered Lamb! Where is the Lion who will save us from our enemies? The Lion who will bring to an end all struggle and suffering? The Lion who rules heaven and earth? Where is the mighty roar which we expect to announce the end of our salvation? Why do we have a silent lamb, murdered and bloody? Is this some trick? Is God laughing at us? Or did Satan defeat God after all?

John looks in unbelief at this scene, as the lamb goes to the throne and takes the scroll from Him who sits there. Then the whole court bursts into song. The living creatures and the elders take golden harps and bowls of incense. They fall down before the lamb and sing:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,  
for you were slain,  
and by your blood you ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth.”

Here is the central mystery of the Christian faith. Jesus is the conquering King. Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. But His method of conquering was to die. Only by becoming a Lamb and die could He win the war.

The mystery of the Christian faith is that victory comes through death. When Jesus died He satisfied God’s justice for our sin, He broke the power of sin, He crippled the activity of Satan, and he ushered in a whole new world. Satan thought that death was the end, but death was Jesus’ ultimate weapon. Now Jesus lives for ever, the victorious Lamb who is simultaneously the Lion of Judah. We who are followers of Jesus also conquer. Remember Jesus’ promise in each of the letters to the seven churches? He promised wonderful things to those who conquer. Now we see that our supreme weapon – the nuclear bomb of spiritual warfare – is death. We also will see more of this later in Revelation.

Is this the Jesus you worship – the magnificent Lion, the dead Lamb? Is your Jesus a conqueror – or do believe in Him only to save you from the punishment for your sin? Or do you believe in Jesus only because such belief makes your life easier? The real Jesus is far more wonderful than you can imagine. When you see the real Jesus, you cannot help but wor-

ship. And so as the Lamb is revealed, worship spreads throughout all creation, as all angels, every man and woman, all animals, every bird and fish – the octopuses and worms – every bubbling brook and exploding volcano – every quark and muon in the universe – all creation reverberates in a lion's roar of overpowering praise to the Lamb who conquered by death.

This is what we do every week. We join the cherubim and the 24 elders and the great host of saints in heaven, along with all creation in praising Jesus who died for our sins, defeated Satan, and now rules the earth, conquering His enemies everywhere.

**Lesson 7**  
**Seven Seals**  
 Revelation 6:1-17

*Main Point:*

*Main Application:*

1. Last week we saw a vision of heaven. What is heaven like?
2. But all was not well in heaven. John even came to tears at one point. What was wrong?
  - No one could open the seals on the scroll
3. When John looked for the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, what did he see?
  - A lamb as though it had been slain
4. What does this mean?
  - Jesus conquers through death
5. It's been a whole week, and the suspense is killing us! What is in that scroll?! Let's open it and find out.
6. Read Revelation 6:1-8.
7. OK, there's a lot of action here. But first let's step back and put these seals in perspective.

The scroll. It has seven seals. Later we will see seven trumpets, then seven bowls. We're going to see that they are a lot alike. How are they different? What is the difference between a seal, a trumpet, and a bowl?

8. What do you use a scroll for?
  - To write something
9. What do you use a trumpet for?
  - To announce something
10. What do you use a bowl for?
  - To hold something – in the Bible, either blessing or wrath

11. Here is how these three sevens are related. The scroll contains God's plan for completing our salvation. The trumpets announce that plan, and the bowls are the execution of the plan. God shows us what He's going to do, He announces it to the nations, and then He executes. And He reinforces it by a three-fold repetition.
12. This scroll has seven seals on it. If this were a literal physical scroll, you couldn't read anything until you opened all seven seals. But the seals serve symbolically as chapters in the book. One by one we see what God has in store for this generation.
13. Let's look at the first horse. Who rides the white horse? (v. 2)
14. Who wears a crown?
15. In the book of Revelation, what does it mean to conquer?
16. Let's look at the second horse. Why is it red? (vv. 3-4)
17. Who takes peace from the earth?
18. How does he slay people?
19. Who slays with a sword?
20. What do you make of the third horse? (vv. 5-6)
21. Who eats wheat and barley?
22. Who eats oil and wine?
23. What does the fourth horse accomplish? (vv. 7-8)
24. Let's stop and think about this. What changes as we go from the first horse to the fourth?
25. What is causing all this? What could have prevented all this death and destruction?

26. The first horse carries Jesus bringing the gospel over the earth conquering sin and evil. Revelation is not primarily about political events. It is about spiritual events – the operation of the angels and messengers of the gospel that shape the surface political events. So the white horse is not about a human king and his wars. It is about Jesus and the war of the gospel against sin and evil. This horse rode out on the day of Pentecost when Jesus sent His Spirit to empower the disciples to proclaim this gospel.

The second horse brings conflict. This is spiritual conflict provoked by the gospel. Jesus predicted that the gospel would do this. In Matthew 10:34-36 Jesus said,

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

The sword of the second horseman is not the ordinary battle sword, but a short sword or knife, which would be used to prepare a sacrifice. When the gospel is preached, conflict erupts and people get hurt and even killed. Those who die in Jesus' service are offered as a sacrifice for Him.

The third horse brings shortage, but not a complete famine. Grain is the food of common people, while the wealthy could afford oil and wine. The empire would not suffer famine, but poor Christians would struggle to survive. Bread is also Old Covenant food, while wine is New Covenant food. Oil is a common symbol for the Holy Spirit, so this might indicate the passing of the Old Covenant and the coming of the New by the Holy Spirit.

As the gospel spread through the empire the conflict intensified. The book of Acts describes the struggle of the early church. Stephen was killed, followed by the apostle James – and no doubt there were others. The Jews chased Christians from city to city in their zeal to stamp out the gospel of Jesus. Eventually the Romans turned against the church and sent some believers to the lions. Thus the fourth horse brings persecution and death.

27. The point to grasp here is that these persecutions and disasters were not accidental, but were part of the plan. God wrote all this into the scroll, and Jesus opened each seal – each one unleashing worse suffering than before. So is God a sadist? What is He thinking? Let's see what the fifth seal brings.
28. Read Revelation 6:9-11.
29. Who do we see here?
30. Why were these killed?
31. What are they doing? What do they want?
32. Is it right for Christians to seek vengeance against their enemies?
33. Does God rebuke them?
34. Let's move on to the sixth seal.
35. Read Revelation 6:12-17.
36. Remember, Revelation is a picture book, and its pictures are interpreted by scripture. What picture do you see in verses 12-14?
37. What is this a picture of? Where have you seen this picture before?
38. Read Isaiah 13:9-13.
39. You see the same symbolic language. Sometimes people mistakenly think that this passage in Isaiah refers to some far distant time in the future. But verse one of this chapter makes clear that this is about Isaiah's own era. "The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw." (Isaiah 13:1) And within 200 years, Babylon was destroyed. Collapsing universe language is symbolic of the end of the socio-political order. This is what it meant in the Old Testament, and this is what it means in the New. So the sixth seal refers to the end of society as the first century church knew it. In particular, it refers to the end of the Jewish-Roman alliance which was persecuting the church, and the end of the Old Covenant which

fueled that fire.

This passage does not refer to an atomic explosion or the sun burning out, but even social revolutions are catastrophic. As society unravels the kings, generals, powerful, and everyone suffers. They recognize that the end of their world is coming, and that Jesus is responsible. He is bringing justice against those who have been killing His followers. They run to hide, but they do not turn from their evil ways and embrace the Lamb who can save them.

40. How does this chapter apply to us, Christians living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
41. The main point of this passage is this: the Lamb Rules! Jesus controls history. He sends out His gospel, He allows the wicked to prosper for a time, and finally He brings judgment. In all this He loves His followers and cares for His saints.

The application of this passage is to follow the example of the saints and pray. Pray for God to be merciful while there is time, and pray for God to bring justice against the wicked. Perhaps you are not accustomed to praying this way, but I hope you can see it is biblical. Today Christians are persecuted in Nigeria, in Iraq, in China, in North Korea, in India, and elsewhere. Pray for God to turn the hearts of their tormentors to serve Him. And pray that if they refuse, may the Lamb destroy them so that the church may worship in peace.

**Lesson 8**  
***Sealed and Saved***  
Revelation 7:1-17

*Main Point:*

*Main Application:*

1. Aren't you glad we're finally into the good stuff of Revelation? Let's review the overall picture of the three sevens. What are the seven seals?
  - chapters of the scroll
2. What does the scroll contain?
  - the plan for completing our salvation
3. What are the seven trumpets?
  - announcements of the plan
4. What are the seven bowls?
  - execution of the plan
5. How are the seals, trumpets, and bowls related?
  - all pertain to the completion of our salvation which Jesus accomplished in the first century
6. What was the progression from the first horse to the fourth?
  - conditions went from bad to worse
7. Who makes these things happen? Who rides the white horse? Who removes peace from the earth?
  - Jesus
8. What happened to those believers who died in all the turmoil?
  - they prayed for vengeance
9. What did the sixth seal open up?
  - universal disaster
10. What was the application of last week's passage?

– pray for the destruction of God’s enemies

11. It’s harsh to pray for God to hurt people! Why would you pray that way?
12. We’ve seen six seals opened – six pictures of what is about to happen in the world of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. First there was Jesus riding a white horse across the earth, conquering with the gospel. Persecution and death followed, as the gospel made enemies of neighbors. Third we saw economic and liturgical dislocations, and then we saw widespread slaughter. The fifth seal showed us the dead saints with Jesus, praying for justice, and the sixth seal showed us the answer to those prayers – the collapse of the socio-political-religious establishment. This is the plan that was written on the scroll. Now, before these things happen, God has planned it all.

We saw in chapter 1, and we also previewed chapter 22 and saw that Revelation is about things which are soon to take place. But as we proceed, we’ll notice that the book occasionally dips briefly into the recent past, and also briefly looks ahead. Jesus rode out of the temple with the gospel on the Day of Pentecost. So the events of the seals began several decades before John received this revelation. They were in process as John wrote. The disasters would continue until the final collapse of the sixth seal sometime in the near future. The point of the seals is to show that God had planned everything from the beginning. The death of Stephen, the death of James, the persecution of Christians, the conversion of Saul, the preaching and beatings of Paul, the spread of the church over the whole empire, the rising animosity of Rome – none of these things were accidents. None were unexpected problems which God had to solve. They were all planned and intended by God.

13. Now we’re going to take a break from the seals. We’ll see the seventh seal opened in chapter 8. But before that, chapter 7 shows us a different perspective.
14. Read Revelation 7:1-8.
15. What are the four winds of the earth? (v. 1)  
(– Daniel 7:2; Matthew 24:31)
16. What picture is created by the four winds of the earth?

17. What are the four angels doing to the four winds?
  - holding them back
18. What will happen when the angels let go of the four winds? (vv. 2-3)
  - the earth and sea will be harmed
19. What has to happen before the winds are let loose? (v. 3)
  - the servants of God must be sealed
20. What does it mean to seal people?
  - different kind of seal from the scroll seals; this is a seal of ownership; it is for protection
21. Where are they to be sealed? (v. 3)
  - on their forehead
22. Why seal people on their forehead?
  - the forehead is the place for marking people (Genesis 3:19)
23. Who does verse 3 say is to be sealed?
  - “The servants of our God”
24. And who is actually sealed in verse 4?
  - the “sons of Israel”
25. How many sons of Israel are sealed?
26. Where does this leave gentile believers? Aren't they also servants of God?
27. What do you make of these numbers? Doesn't it seem odd that every number is a round number? And that 144 is 12 squared? Doesn't this seem quite artificial?
28. And where are all these tribes located now, in the first century?
29. These verse introduce some significant puzzles, but the following verses clear things up.

30. Let's read Revelation 7:9-12.
31. Now what did John see?
32. Where did this innumerable multitude come from?  
– every nation, tribe, people, and language
33. What are they doing?
34. Would you say they are servants of our God?
35. Where are the 144,000 Israelites?
36. This chapter presents us with two different visions of the same thing. We've read the plan. The horse is out of the stable – or temple. Jesus is riding across the earth conquering sin and Satan, converting the nations. Those who will not bow to Him He destroys, and those who follow Him are attacked by their enemies. We're building to a climax in which the world as we know it will be destroyed. This is the plan.

But before the plan is executed, before things get really bad, God moves to protect His chosen people. They go by various names: worshipers of God, servants of Yahweh, children of Israel, followers of Jesus, Christians, servants of our God. God's people are one body from Adam until the end, even though they are known by different names at different times. They always were those who believed in God – whether they were physical descendants of Abraham, converts to Judaism, or pious gentiles. Israel played an important role as a nation until Jesus came, but now Israel as a nation is useless to Jesus. The apostles even speak of gentile believers as being part of spiritual Israel now. And they make clear that physical descendants of Abraham are not part of true Israel if they refuse to believe in Jesus. Ethnic Jews who reject the gospel are now a synagogue of Satan.

Twelve is the symbolic number for God's people, and 1,000 is the symbolic number for a vast multitude. In the first century there was only one tribe of Israel – Judah. All the other tribes were either carried captive by the Assyrians, or absorbed into Judah. That is why in the first century the Israelites were called Jews. Judah was the only tribe of Israel left. So it

was literally impossible to seal 12,000 Reubenites, Gadites, etc. 144,000 is the symbol for the impossibly large number of all God's people, and 12,000 from each tribe is the symbol for the complete gathering. No one will be overlooked.

Notice that John "heard" the number of those sealed in verse 4. Then in verse 9 he "looked" and saw people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. This is a parallel construction to that in chapter 5 where John *heard* the announcement of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, but *saw* a Lamb as though slain. The Lion and the Lamb are the same. Both are symbols for Jesus. Jesus is both the roaring, ruling Lion, and the silent, suffering Lamb. Now we notice that John *heard* the number of Israelites sealed, and he *saw* a multinational multitude. Two pictures of the same thing. 144,000 is the symbolic number for the vast number of God's servants. They come from every tribe and nation and are the new spiritual Israel.

The message here is that even as God planned to destroy the world as they knew it, He also planned to rescue His own people. His people are all those who believe in Jesus. They are the new Israel, spiritual Israel, followers of Jesus, Christians. The point is that every single tribe will be counted. Not a single person will be overlooked. You can be sure that God will protect His people from the terrors to come.

37. What was this great multitude doing?
  - celebrating their salvation, rejoicing that God rescued them
38. Now let's read Revelation 7:13-17.
39. What more do we learn about these people? (v. 14)
  - they came out of the great tribulation
40. What does it mean that they came out of the great tribulation?
41. How is this crowd related to the crowd we saw in the fifth seal? (Revelation 6:9-11)
42. The fifth seal shows us those who had been killed for faith in Jesus as the great tribulation of the first century wore on. Those people prayed for

vengeance against the enemies of Jesus. God answered those prayers, but they had to wait a while for the answer. Eventually all those who belong to God will be gathered to the heavenly throne. The great tribulation will be over, vengeance will be served, and then there will be great rejoicing.

But did you notice that these people who were “rescued” from the great tribulation were killed by unbelievers. The seal of God will grant them entry into heaven, but it does not protect them from death. In fact, it even seems as though death *was* the rescue. The more we look at Revelation, our notions of life and death will be turned on end. Just as Jesus conquered sin and Satan by death, so His people find victory and joy through death.

Jesus the Terminator is on patrol. He is guarding His churches. He is riding the white horse across the earth, subduing the nations with his gospel sword. As He rides, He finds those marked by God for salvation, and He brings them into heaven to join the heavenly worship. He does this by allowing them to be killed, and therein lies the ultimate joy of salvation.

43. How does this passage apply to us? First, know that God has definitely marked all His people for salvation from the beginning of time. If you believe in Jesus, you *will* conquer. This is God’s eternal, irreversible plan. But also know that Christian conquest comes through death, and you will die physically or figuratively as you conquer for Jesus. And when you do, you will discover unbelievable joy.

**Lesson 9**  
***Seven Trumpets I***  
Revelation 8:1-13

*Main Point:*

*Main Application:*

1. Perhaps no book of the Bible has more vividly caught mankind's imagination than the Revelation to St. John. What are some of the images from this book that have been incorporated into art and literature?
2. Two weeks ago we saw the four horsemen who bring death and destruction on the earth, and last week we saw the 144,000 Israelites who were sealed. What does it mean to seal someone?
  - place a mark of ownership on him
3. Where was the seal placed?
  - forehead
4. So did you notice that before we get to the mark of the beast we have the mark of God? So who were those 144,000 Israelites?
  - a great multitude from every tribe and nation
5. We noticed that the 144,000 Israelites are a spiritual symbol for a vast multitude from every tribe and nation. John "heard" the number 144,000, but he "saw" the multinational throng. It is two ways of picturing the same thing. What did it mean that God marked these people? Were they protected from death during the calamities on earth?
6. So we saw last week that God cares for His people even in death, and sometimes by taking them through death.
7. Last week was a break in the action as we watched the Lamb open the seals on the scroll. We've got seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls coming. Quick review: what do the seals, trumpets, and bowls symbolize?
  - the plan, the announcement, and the execution of God's salvation
8. OK, so we've seen the Lamb break open the first six seals. The first four

brought increasing devastation on the earth as Jesus spread the gospel all over the empire. The fifth seal showed us the dead saints praying for vengeance, and the sixth seal showed us the answer to those prayers – the collapse of the social order. This is God’s plan for the middle of the first century. Last week we saw that God wanted to impress upon us that during these calamities, He is carefully watching over His own people. Now this week we return to the scroll, and the final seal!

9. Read Revelation 8:1-5.
10. What a let down! The seventh seal is nothing – silence for half an hour. And why a half an hour? Why not 23 minutes?
  - silence in heaven is necessary so that we can hear the trumpets
11. In verse 2 we see the seven angels with their seven trumpets. What about this other angel shown in verses 3-5?
12. Why did he take fire from the altar and throw it on the earth?
13. What is the meaning of the peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and earthquake?
  - signs of God’s presence (Exodus 19:16-19; 20:18)
14. Here we have a recapitulation of the Exodus scene where God came down to earth and talked to man. He appeared in fire and smoke, thunder and lightning – and the sound of a trumpet. The trumpets symbolize more than a message about God, or even from God. The trumpets announce the coming of God – the terrifying God. When God appeared to Israel, the people were so frightened, they begged Moses to go talk to God for them. The trumpets are the coming of God to declare His judgments, and no man is able to stand when God appears.
15. Read Revelation 8:6-13.
16. What do you notice about these trumpets?
  - each one brings destruction to a third of something
17. What was destroyed when the first trumpet sounded?
  - 1/3 of the earth

18. What was destroyed when the second trumpet sounded?
  - 1/3 of the sea
19. What was destroyed when the third trumpet sounded?
  - 1/3 of the rivers and springs
20. What was destroyed when the fourth trumpet sounded?
  - 1/3 of the heavenly bodies
21. Earth, sea, rivers, heavenly bodies. What picture do these images create? What do you get when you put them all together?
  - the whole created order
22. The trumpets announce the coming of the Lamb in judgment. And when He comes, the whole created order will be affected. Everything – land, sea, fresh water, even the stars and planets. But God is not going to obliterate the wonderful universe He created. These are just warning shots – designed to call mankind to wake up, hear the voice of the Lamb, repent of their evil deeds and believe in Jesus. One third of the universe will be affected to warn man to repent.
23. But there's a better way to look at these trumpets. Remember, Revelation is a picture book of spiritual realities. It is the view from the throne in heaven. Revelation is not really much concerned about physical and political problems. Revelation uses physical problems as symbols for spiritual realities. So what could these four physical things represent?
24. What might be symbolized by the earth?
25. The word translated “earth” is the Greek word  $\gamma\eta$ . It means earth, ground, land, or country. Which of these it means is found only by its use in context. In the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, you find this word used in all these ways. It is used for the planet earth, for specific geographic areas, and for specific countries. Particularly it is the word used to denote the land promised to Israel. When  $\gamma\eta$  is used for the planet, English translations usually employ the word “earth”. When it is used for the place promised to Israel, English translations use the word “land”. But those choices simply reflect the translators' interpretations. You find the same patterns of use and translation in the New Testament.

When we read Revelation, we might ask when we encounter this word, does it mean the whole planet, or only the land of Israel? Either is possible.

26. What might be symbolized by the sea?
27. Israel was not a maritime nation, so the sea is largely absent from the historical books of the Bible. It is mentioned mainly as a border of Israel. The prophetic books contain more discussion of the sea, partly in reference to sea-faring nations such as Phoenicia. But the prophets also use the sea as a symbol for the nations, the gentiles – those people far off geographically, and far off from God. Turn to Isaiah 17:12-13.

Ah, the thunder of many peoples;  
 they thunder like the thundering of the sea!  
 Ah, the roar of nations;  
 they roar like the roaring of mighty waters!  
 The nations roar like the roaring of many waters,  
 but he will rebuke them,  
 and they will flee far away,  
 chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind  
 and whirling dust before the storm.

Now if you are looking for a verse that says, “Look out! From now on sea = gentiles,” you will be disappointed. Poetry does not communicate that way. Hebrew poetry uses parallel lines to make its point. Isaiah is using the sea and its waves as a symbol for the peoples of the earth. Turn now to chapter 60:1-5.

Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
 and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.  
 For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,  
 and thick darkness the peoples;  
 but the LORD will arise upon you,  
 and his glory will be seen upon you.  
 And nations shall come to your light,  
 and kings to the brightness of your rising.  
 Lift up your eyes all around, and see;  
 they all gather together, they come to you;

your sons shall come from afar,  
 and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.  
 Then you shall see and be radiant;  
 your heart shall thrill and exult,  
 because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,  
 the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

This is a prophecy of the restoration of Israel after her exile in Babylon. Isaiah foresees that nations and kings shall come to Israel, and she shall be glorious again. The next to the last line uses the sea as a symbol for the gentile nations. There are many other Old Testament references to the gentiles as the sea (Isaiah; 21:1 ff; 42:10; Jeremiah 6:22-23; Ezekiel 26:15-18; Daniel 7:1-3; Habakkuk 1:14; 3:1-16; Zechariah 10:9-11). Now perhaps you are wondering about the role of the sea in the New Testament. Did you never think it strange that so much of Jesus ministry centered on the sea? Or that He called fishermen to be His apostles? Or that He said they would be fishers of men? To Jewish ears this would have been a strange and unusual title. Unless Jesus planned from the beginning to minister to the nations. Then these would have been powerful symbols.

28. What might be symbolized by rivers and springs?
29. Rivers play a more prominent role in the Old Testament. There was the original river which watered the Garden of Eden. The Euphrates and Jordan rivers were significant in Israel's history. But when you turn to Ezekiel you see the river developed fully into a symbol. Turn to Ezekiel 47:1-3.

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. <sup>2</sup> Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. <sup>3</sup> Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep.

This comes at the end of Ezekiel's vision of the temple. It is a symbolic temple. The measurements are impossible to construct. It is symbolic of

God's return to Israel after her exile in Babylon. After Ezekiel tours the temple he sees this stream of water running from the door of the temple. As it flows, the stream becomes deeper and deeper. Eventually it empties into the sea and the sea becomes fresh. It is a symbol of the spirit of God flowing out over all the earth and converting the nations (the sea). John uses this fresh water symbol extensively in his gospel, most famously in Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well in chapter four. Reading verses 13-14,

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Like Ezekiel's river that grows deeper by the mile, the Spirit wells up in a believer and flows out to all around him. So fresh water – springs, rivers, and streams – are symbols for the Spirit of God which comes from the temple.

30. Last, what might be symbolized by the heavenly bodies?
31. We discussed the heavens a few weeks ago. The sun, moon, and stars are symbols of governing authorities, and the collapsing universe is a symbol for the collapse of the socio-political-religious order.
32. To summarize, the first four trumpets herald woes upon the Jews, the gentiles, the temple, and the rulers. In other words, all facets of the Roman Empire will be hit by Jesus as a warning to believe in Him. These are not so much natural disasters as socio-religious disasters. In particular, they strike at the distinctions between Jew and gentile set up by the Old Covenant. We will discover that these symbols are key to understanding the rest of this book.
33. This is the meaning of the trumpets, but who sounds them? Each trumpet is blown by an angel, and we saw earlier that angels can be human messengers – pastors. The scroll held God's plan for the first century, and as the seals were peeled back, we saw progressively more of the plan. The trumpets are the announcement of this plan and warning to repent. The apostles, elders, and first century pastors proclaimed the gospel, an-

nounced the coming judgment, and called people to repent. Their preaching was the trumpet blast of gospel promise and judgment.

But notice also that the Lord appears at the sound of the trumpet. The preaching of the apostles and pastors not only proclaims the gospel, but also is the voice of the Lord who has come into our midst and is present among us. The trumpet announces coming judgment, and also declares the presence of God already.

34. One application to this chapter is to heed the promise of the gospel. When you read the Bible, when scripture is read in worship, and when the gospel is preached, do not be like the Israelites who sent Moses to hear God, or the men of John's time, who stopped their ears and refused to repent. Hear the trumpet of the Lord's presence, and fall on your knees to worship.

Another application is that you, in your place, in your manner, and as God gives you opportunity, be an angel sounding the trumpet to your friends. You also can be a messenger of the gospel to those in danger of destruction. Take what opportunities you have to warn your friends of the judgment to come.

**Lesson 10**  
***Seven Trumpets II***  
 Revelation 9:1-21

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. We've covered four trumpets, and there are three more coming. Seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. The seals open chapters of the scroll which came from the heavenly throne. What was in the scroll?
2. What are the trumpets?
3. What are the bowls?
4. In spite of many opinions to the contrary, we believe that the best understanding of Revelation is as a mid-first century document written to encourage Christians undergoing persecution. It is about their present situation and how it is going to turn out. The scroll is the plan. Now the scroll was written long ago – in eternity past. God planned everything even before creation. It was only about A.D. 60 that He revealed these things to John.
5. Sp here's the plan. Jesus will ride forth across the earth on the white horse spreading the gospel everywhere. Division, persecution, and death will follow, along with physical and social disruptions. As more and more Christians are killed for their faith, they will pray for God to take vengeance on their enemies. At last God will answer those prayers and destroy the ruling powers who are engaged in the persecution. But all God's people will be marked and saved through these calamities. That's the plan.

When John received this revelation, the plan was already in operation. Jesus rode out of Jerusalem with the gospel on the Day of Pentecost. He did this by the Holy Spirit working through His apostles, evangelists, pastors, and ordinary people to proclaim the gospel. By A.D. 60 churches had been established in many parts of the empire and persecution had been going on for several decades. It was about to intensify significantly, and the death count was going to skyrocket. This Revelation is preparing

God's people to know what is happening and what to expect in the coming years.

6. As we go through Revelation, let's remember our fundamental interpretive rules. This book gives us the view from the throne. John was taken up into heaven, and that is where he saw all these things. The issues and events here are primarily about the situation on earth, but we are seeing it how God sees it. And while God is certainly concerned about physical and political issues, the central issue is spiritual. Much of this vision is about the spiritual world, and usually the visions are symbolic of spiritual realities.

Interpreters often shoot far off the mark when interpreting the symbols of Revelation because they make up interpretations. We have seen that all the symbols in Revelation come from earlier scripture. We must interpret these symbols consistently with their standard biblical usage. And when we do, the meaning of Revelation begins to fall neatly into place.

7. As John broke the seals he was able to read through God's plan for the first century. Now John is seeing seven trumpets blowing. What do trumpets symbolize in scripture?
8. You must get this: trumpets symbolize the voice of God. But the voice of God is always linked to the presence of God. This is different than human voices. If I ask Rachel to tell Benjamin I want him to get off Facebook and mow the grass, it doesn't have the same impact as if I visit Benjamin in person and deliver this message. Even a phone call is not as meaningful as a personal visit. But it doesn't work that way with God. When God speaks – either through writing, a vision, or another person – God is personally present.

The paradigmatic voice of God was the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai. God spoke by fire and smoke, wind and earthquake, trumpet and words. But it was more than sound and words. God Himself was personally present on the mountain. It is always this way. Today, when you read your Bible, it is not like reading a novel, or the newspaper, or even a devotional book. When you read the Bible, you encounter God personally. When scripture is read in worship, God is here in person, in the person of the Holy Spirit, speaking to us. So the trumpets of Revelation are the voice of

God, and that means the presence of God to save and destroy.

9. The angels of the seven churches are the pastors of those churches, and the angels of the trumpets are the pastors, evangelists, elders, and ordinary people who proclaim the gospel. We saw the plan for the first century. The gospel will be proclaimed, persecution will intensify, and finally God will destroy the persecutors. During this time God is warning the nations to repent. Pastors, evangelists, elders, and ordinary people are proclaiming, "Jesus has died for your sins, He has risen for your justification, He has ascended to reign. Repent of your sins and be saved before the judgment comes." This is the message of the trumpets.
10. When we put it this way, the sounding of the trumpets corresponds to the first seal. The trumpets proclaim the gospel, and that is what the rider on the white horse was doing. And as the trumpets sound, the earth convulses. Each trumpet blast destroys 1/3 of the creation. This is what we saw in the subsequent seals, and this is what always happens when the gospel is proclaimed. Now, destruction is both good and bad, depending on what is destroyed. The proclamation of the gospel destroys sin in your heart and the work of Satan in the world. But as we are seeing in Revelation, the proclamation brings about the death of the saints. But in God's plan, this also is positive. While death is sorrowful for us on earth, death is the triumphant home-going of the saints, who are welcomed into heaven with great celebration.
11. Last week we spent considerable time on the meaning of the calamities brought on by the first four trumpets. What was destroyed when the first trumpet sounded?
12. The second trumpet?
13. The third?
14. The fourth?
15. I think this means that the proclamation of the gospel in the first century brought with it real natural disasters. But that is not the main point, is it? Revelation is a view from the throne, and is primarily concerned with spiritual realities. Looking at these four scenes that way, what did the

earth symbolize?

16. The sea?
17. The rivers?
18. The heavenly bodies?
19. Last week Donato asked how we could know these things, and that is a natural question. That is why we read several Old Testament passages last week. The Old Testament is pretty clear about how the land, sea, rivers, and heavens are used as symbols. Now the Old Testament is a very large collection of books, and most of us have a hard time becoming familiar with it. But as you do, you see that these symbols are not hard to understand.
20. Today we're going to look at the fifth and sixth trumpets.
21. Let's read Revelation 9:1-12.
22. Let's look at the star fallen from heaven. Some of you might have an idea what this means, but let's think about it. What do heavenly bodies symbolize?
23. What do you notice about the verb?
24. Have any other figures in Revelation fallen?
25. What does he cause to happen?
26. Putting this all together, who does this seem to indicate?
27. Does anyone know exactly when this happened?
28. We can locate this event, because Jesus described it. In Luke 10:18 Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." This was after the 72 disciples had been touring through Judea preaching the gospel.
29. Now let's look at the bottomless pit. What do you think about that?

30. The bottomless pit corresponds to “the pit” in Hebrew. Read Psalm 28:1.
31. The Hebrew word בור means pit or cistern. In an arid climate, water is precious and it’s necessary to capture and save all the water you can. Cisterns were constructed with a narrow opening to prevent evaporation, with the belly of the cistern spreading out under the ground. It was a great prison, for it was impossible to escape.
32. Read Psalm 40:1-2
33. No one, no matter how skilled or athletic, could pull himself out of the oozing muck in the bottom of the cistern and scale the smooth slippery walls that sloped inward toward its mouth. So this pit becomes a symbol for hopeless imprisonment, a torment from which there is no escape. Only if an outsider came to your aid could you ever escape from the pit.
34. The New Testament equivalent is the bottomless pit, or the abyss. In Luke’s gospel, when Jesus encounters the man possessed by a legion of demons, the demons beg Jesus not to cast them into the abyss. This is the same Greek word which in Revelation is translated “bottomless pit.” It is a place of utter despair and the home of the demons. It is so bad that even the demons dread it.
35. If the bottomless pit is the home of the demons, then what do the locusts symbolize?
36. What does this demon horde do?
37. Jesus predicted that the Jews would be tormented by demons. During His ministry on earth Jesus cleansed the land of demons, but the people refused to believe in Him. Consequently, more demons came rushing back upon the Jews. Read Matthew 12:43-45.
38. “So also will it be with this evil generation.” The land, the Jewish people who refused to believe in Jesus, were invaded by this demon horde.
39. Who is in charge of the demons? (v. 11)

40. The king of the demons is the star that fell from heaven. His name is Abaddon and Apollyon – destruction and destroyer. We know him as Satan.
41. It seems that when people talk about Satan they allow their imaginations to run wild. People fear Satan and his power, but Jesus said we should not fear him. We should fear God instead. Notice in this passage that everything Satan does is permitted by God. Satan could not rescue his demons until God gave him the key to the bottomless pit. He was their king, but he could lead them in attack for only five months. Satan is a vicious enemy, but he is on a tight leash. He can do only what God permits him to do.
42. Let's keep going. Read Revelation 9:13-21.
43. Now we hear a voice from the altar. The altar is where the prayer of the saints had been offered. We are led to see that the prayers of the saints lead to the voice of God speaking judgment against His enemies.
44. Who do you think the four angels are?
45. Notice that these angels are bound. These are not the servants of God, either human or not. These are evil spirits, and they are the commanders of the unbelievably massive army that floods into the land.
46. What do you notice about the sixth trumpet compared to the fifth trumpet?
47. How do the locusts compare to the mounted troops?
48. In A.D. 66 the Roman armies began a series of operations against the Jews. The first move came from an army located in the north, in the vicinity of the Euphrates River. That seems to fit this vision of an invading army. But more significant is the nature of this army. Whether or not it refers to a coming Roman invasion, it is clearly demonic in nature. The fire, smoke, and sulfur that come from their mouths are descriptive of hell. The Lamb has the sword of the gospel coming from His mouth. Then these horses have tails like serpents, the age-old symbol for Satan. And besides, Roman armies had cavalry, but the main fighting forces were infantry. The mounted troops of the sixth trumpet bear closer resemblance to the locust

cavalry of the fifth trumpet than to the Roman legions. Both the fifth and sixth trumpets declare a demon invasion of the Jewish nation.

49. Moses warned that apostasy would lead to national calamity. In Deuteronomy 28:33-34 we read, “A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually, so that you are driven mad by the sights that your eyes see.” As the decade of A.D. 60s wore on, the Jews progressed from madness to greater madness. It was madness to reject their Messiah, to kill Him, to ally themselves with Rome, and to persecute the church. This they did from the time Jesus walked the earth through the middle of the first century. But as the decade of the 60s wore on, the insanity of the Jews increased. Not content with killing Christians, they turned on the Romans, to whom they had pledged allegiance when they killed Jesus. Josephus, the Jewish historian, records the terrors that seized Jerusalem as the Jewish frenzy drove them to unbelievable horrors.

“These men, therefore trampled upon all the laws of man, and laughed at the laws of God; and as for the oracles of the prophets, they ridiculed them as the tricks of jugglers.” 256

“Neither did any other city suffer such miseries, nor did any age breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world.” 256

Josephus records how the people of Jerusalem were reduced to eating their own dung, men killed their own families, mothers cooked and ate their children, while gangs tore through the city raping, torturing, and murdering bystanders for pleasure. The demons turned men into worse than demons, yet men refused to repent. Their hatred for Jesus overwhelmed any reason. They would rather be tormented beyond despair than bow to the Lamb.

50. Had you been there, what would you have thought? When you saw these horrors unfolding, would you have concluded that Satan was finally winning? Would you have thought that Jesus lost control of the world? Would you have concluded that the gospel had lost its power?

**Lesson 11**  
***General and Troops***  
Revelation 10:1-11:19

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. We're almost halfway through the book of Revelation. We've seen a vision of Jesus, heard His messages to the churches, seen the heavenly throne room, watched as the Lamb opened the scroll, and now we're hearing the trumpets blow.
2. What do the trumpets symbolize?
3. Who blows the trumpets?
4. The trumpets are the message preached by the apostles, evangelists, and pastors in the first century. It was a message of warning to flee from the wrath of the Lamb, but hope for those who follow Jesus. Which audiences are represented by the first four trumpets?  
– Jews, gentiles, temple, rulers
5. What happens when the fifth and sixth trumpets sound?
6. What do the locust horde and the mounted troops symbolize?
7. We've heard six trumpets. Only one more is left. But before the seventh trumpet sounds, we have a couple of other visions.
8. Read Revelation 10:1-7
9. Who is this mighty angel?
10. Where has he been?
11. Who rides the clouds?
12. Who wears a rainbow?

13. Whose face is bright like the sun?
14. Who has the fiery legs?
15. What is meant by his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land?
16. Who has a voice like a lion's roar, and like seven thunders?
17. This is Jesus!
18. What is the mystery of God? (v. 7)
19. Read Ephesians 3:1-6.
20. The mystery is that there will be no more sea, but that gentiles will be full members of Israel. Israel as we know it will be destroyed, and a new Israel will emerge which will encompass Jew and gentile.
21. Read Revelation 10:8-11.
22. Why was John told to eat the scroll?
23. Why was it sweet in his mouth, but bitter in his stomach?
24. The message of the victory of Jesus is sweet, but the message of doom for Israel is bitter.
25. Read Revelation 11:1-3.
26. Why would John measure the temple?
27. We will learn more about the two witnesses in a moment, but what is the meaning of 1,260 days?
28. If you read Ezekiel 40-47 and Zechariah 2 you will find the prophets measuring the temple and Jerusalem. This symbolized establishing the boundary of God's people. Here in Revelation John is told to measure the temple, the altar, and the people worshiping there. He is not to measure the court outside the temple. Now the temple was a very large complex, with

several courts. We can get a better picture of this by considering the Greek word translated “temple” in verses one and two. It is the word ναός. There is another word for temple, ἱερόν. As is usually true in such cases, there is some overlap in the use of these two words. But for the most part ἱερόν is used for the temple in general, and ναός is used for the inner court, the holy place. It might be better to translate this word “sanctuary”. Then verse two would read, “do not measure the court outside the sanctuary.” So we have a picture of the temple complex, with the inner sanctuary “measured”, and the outer area left unmeasured. The inner area, the sanctuary, is the holy place. This is where the altar is, and the true worshippers. The altar is where sacrifices were offered for sin. The outer court has worshippers, but they are not holy, and there is no atonement for sin there. This area will be trampled by the nations.

This passage is an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets. It parallels a similar interlude between the sixth and seventh seals. If you look back to chapter seven you will find the sealing of 144,000 Israelites and the vast multitude of gentiles worshiping before the heavenly throne. Before the final calamity God will designate His own people with a mark on their foreheads. This does not mean that they will escape suffering. Revelation 7:14 says, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.” It means that they will survive suffering with their faith intact. The measuring of the sanctuary is another way of showing symbolically that God marked His own people. There will be suffering and great calamity. God’s people will suffer, too. But they will survive with their faith intact. Meanwhile those who are not brought near to God by the blood of Jesus will be trampled in the ensuing turmoil.

29. Read Revelation 11:4-14.
30. The two witnesses are two olive trees and two lampstands. What does that mean?
31. They kill their enemies by breathing fire. Are they dragons?
32. What scriptures does verse six allude to?
33. What is the great city in verse eight?

34. What about verse ten? Where else in scripture do we see people giving gifts after a great enemy was killed?
35. What is different about this enemy?
36. What does it mean that the witnesses came to life and rose to heaven?
37. First, they have authority and prophesy clothed in sackcloth. This is a clear description of Old Testament prophets. They are two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord. This is a symbol borrowed from Zechariah chapter four, where they represent the Lord's anointed ones. Trees are common symbols for men, and olive trees represent Israelites. Lampstands produce light, of course, as Israel was to be a light to the nations. In Zechariah's vision the lampstands are fed by a continuous stream of oil. Oil is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. So this is a picture of a Spirit-empowered light. Next we see that these two witnesses can kill people by fire from their mouths. It should seem obvious that this refers to the effect of their message. There are numerous Old Testament instances where God consumed His enemies by fire. In Numbers 16 this was directly connected to the words of Moses. Elijah killed the messengers of the wicked Israelite king by commanding fire to come down from heaven and consume them. (2 Kings 1) In Jeremiah 5:14 God said to Jeremiah, "Because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them."

Verse six describes the witnesses in terms unmistakably reminiscent of Elijah and Moses. Their ministry spans 42 months, or 1260 days, which is three and a half years. Elijah prayed for a drought, and no rain fell for three and a half years. Moses turned the water of Egypt to blood, and brought many plagues on that land. Moses and Elijah were the two most prominent figures of the Old Covenant. Moses gave the law, and Elijah was the first of the prophets. The Jews often referred to their scriptures as "the law and the prophets". So Moses and Elijah represent the totality of God's word. They also performed the most powerful miracles in the Old Covenant. When Jesus went up on the mountain to meet God, Moses and Elijah joined him, indicating their role as representatives of God's people. Finally a beast arises from the abyss and kills them. We already know that the abyss is where the demons live, and the Old Testament is full of

beasts which war against God's people.

Now we are told how people will respond to the death of the two witnesses. But first we get a vital piece of information. In simple language we learn that the city where Jesus died is symbolized by Sodom and Egypt. That city, of course, is Jerusalem. Last week we noticed the pervasive Exodus imagery. We also noticed that Satan, under the name of Wormwood, had polluted the temple. John is telling us that Jerusalem has become the new Egypt, and God is going to torment her until His new, true Israel escapes from her murderous grip.

Verse nine says, "some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb." This phrase "peoples and tribes and languages and nations", or some variant of this four-part term, is used repeatedly in Revelation for the gentiles – all non-Jewish people. Apparently the gentiles are stunned that such powerful figures could be killed. The Jews have a very different reaction. Verse 10 says, "those who dwell in the land will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell in the land." We already established that the land is Judea, and the dwellers in the land are the Jews. They throw a party and give each other presents when the witnesses are killed. They rejoiced when Stephen was stoned (see Acts 7), and they are still at it. In the book of Esther the Jews sent presents to each other when God defeated their enemies. This is now used as a symbol for deliverance from a deadly enemy. The two witnesses had been prophesying destruction on those who refuse to worship the Lamb. The Jews who rejected Jesus were tormented by this message. The death of the witnesses was a great relief to them. They perceived that a terrible enemy had been defeated. Then just when they were relieved to be rid of their torment, the witnesses came back to life!

OK, so who are these two witnesses? Let us remember our interpretive principles. These are pictures of reality – symbols. There is no reason to think they must be two real people. We need to look to scripture for advice on how to understand these symbols. And keep in mind that this is a heavenly perspective – an account of spiritual developments.

What would be represented by a symbol of an olive tree? Who is the light

of the world? Who is empowered by the Holy Spirit? Who has a prophetic message? Who speaks with the power of Moses and Elijah? Who was made a witness to Jesus? There is only one possibility – the church! Romans 11 speaks of the church as the wild olive branch that was grafted into the cultivated olive tree. Jesus said in Matthew 5:14 that the church is the light of the world. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the church at Pentecost, and He told the apostles that when the Spirit came they would do greater works than He did. Jesus commissioned the church with the gospel message, and sent her out into the world as His witness. Just as Moses and Elijah represented the Old Covenant people and ministry in the minds of the Jews, so these two witnesses represent the New Covenant witness of the church. Ultimately the witness of these two figures will lead to the execution of their murderers. In keeping with God’s law it is necessary that there be two witnesses for a capital crime to be prosecuted. Symbolically that is what we have.

What about the 42 months, the 1260 days, which equal one plus two plus a half years? Although the trumpets show pictures of the gospel witness throughout the mid first century period, I think this passage focuses on the last three and a half years before the fall of Jerusalem. During that time the beast raged against the church in full fury. At first he had no success, but finally he killed the church. Or so it seemed. But God miraculously resurrected the church and gave it a place in heaven formerly reserved for the angels.

38. Read Revelation 11:15-19.
39. How would you describe this scene?
40. Why is all of heaven worshiping God?
41. What is significant about the opening of the temple in heaven?
42. This passage is a powerful message for us now because *we* are that church which overcame the beast and now occupies a heavenly position. The church did not change into something different after Jerusalem fell. Although some people seem to act as though *they* invented the church, it has been around for 2,000 years, and it is the same church. As much as the first century church, we are the witness of Christ. We are the light of the

world. Nations that have little Christian presence are dark places. Islamic, Buddhist, and animist cultures are beautiful in many ways, but God sees them as plagued by darkness. Only the church can enlighten them. The church is empowered by the Spirit to spread the gospel. We slay men and women, nations and kings with our fiery message. In biblical terminology slaying can either be conversion or death. We possess the power of Moses and Elijah to destroy nations and kingdoms opposed to Jesus by converting them with the gospel.

You may be thinking, “You’ve got to be kidding! I’ve never seen a church with that kind of power.” Yes you have. If our church is a true church that believes the Bible and trusts in Jesus, our church has this power. In fact, if you are a true believer, you also have this power. Paul said to the Romans, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16) Paul says the word of the gospel, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, is a power which breaks through sin and hearts hardened in hatred toward God. The gospel attacks angry sinners and destroys them. It turns them into lovers of God. Paul should know. He was the worst enemy of the church. But when He met Jesus, He turned from His sin and embraced the gospel.

Do you know what the real problem of the church is? It is not the lack of power. It is the refusal to believe God. God says, we have the power to convert the nations. So what do we do? We play with Facebook and video games and worship Jesus for one hour on Sunday and study sometimes and try to get a good job. These things are good in themselves, but there is much more to the Christian life. If we find ourselves in a conversation about Jesus with an unbeliever, we try to share the gospel. And if he does not believe, we think it is because the message was not persuasive enough. We send soldiers to Iraq, but we refuse to send missionaries there. God says we have the power to convert the nations, and we do not believe Him. We believe we are weak, so we refuse to do anything that requires strength. In a fundamental way the church believes God is deceiving us.

Do you know what your problem is? You do not know what is real. That is because you are trapped in an earthly perspective. Reality can only be seen clearly from the throne of God. Revelation is the accurate vision of

reality that corrects your pitiful eyesight. Do you want to know what is real? I will tell you what is real. When you tell your lab partner that Jesus died for your sins, you breathe fire into his soul. He may look unfazed on the surface, but you have opened up gaping holes in his demonic armor. When you write for the school newspaper and explain that Jesus is the answer to the problems of education or poverty, you explode a spiritual bomb within the high school or university. When you feed the poor in the name of Jesus, you terrorize the forces of evil. And when the gospel is preached in Iraq, peace will follow. In all these cases you will seldom see any observable change right away. That is why most Christians give up the fight. The witness of the church is a spiritual battle. It cannot be seen with the eyes of flesh. But over time the gospel changes the earth. Meanwhile we must persevere because God tells us we are defeating our enemies.

Just as the church essentially died in the first century holocaust, so the church in the ensuing centuries has almost died. Gnosticism almost destroyed the church from within in the third century. The Romans tried to exterminate the church until the fourth century. Islam tried to wipe out the church in the seventh century. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century communism tried to eradicate the church in Russia and China. Now Islamic radicals are murdering, torturing, and raping Christians. But all these efforts fail. Why? How can we explain the survival of the church? We cannot. There is no explanation. The survival of the church is a miracle. God intervenes in human affairs and supernaturally revives the church when evil men have essentially killed it. This will always be the case until Christ returns.

Do you believe Jesus, or is He pulling your leg? Are appearances more reliable than the word of God? Does your witness really have this explosive impact, or are you genuinely powerless? Everyone knows the answer. It is written in your daily actions.

43. Revelation opened with the statement that Jesus is the faithful witness. Are you skeptical that you can be a powerful witness for Jesus? Take comfort. It is not your job to be a witness. Jesus knows that it is a calling you are not capable of. Jesus is the true and faithful witness, and He will speak and act through you. When Jesus calls you to speak, do so. When He calls you to serve, obey. Ask your friend if he knows why Jesus died. Go to lunch with your classmates or colleagues and ask them if they think

Jesus rose from the dead. It may appear that you sputter and mix up the message. Your service may appear confused and shabby. But the promise of the gospel is not that Jesus uses eloquent, skilled servants. The power is not in you. It is in the gospel, and Jesus is the witness. He speaks as you speak. He serves as you serve. Believe in Jesus by acting like you expect Him to use you powerfully.

**Lesson 12**  
***Woman, Child, and Dragon***  
 Revelation 12:1-17

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. For the past several weeks we have been studying the trumpets in Revelation. We have seen that the trumpets are the message preached by the apostles, evangelists, and pastors in the first century. It was a message of warning to flee from the wrath of the Lamb, but hope for those who follow Jesus. The first four trumpets represent the message preached to the Jews, the gentiles, the temple, and the rulers. The fifth and sixth trumpets are two different visions, but refer to the same thing. These trumpets called forth an army of demons which tormented the Jews – so much that the Jews became mad to the point of their own destruction.

Last week we studied the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets – two witnesses. Structurally this is parallel to the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, and in fact it deals with the same subject. In both cases this break in the action focuses on what is happening with God's people. In the first interlude, the one between the seals, we saw God's people marked for salvation. In last week's interlude we saw God's people giving their lives as a witness. It is tempting to see the two witnesses as mythical figures, end-time heroes come to supernaturally intervene at a crucial moment. But instead that was a picture of the whole church, constituted as a two-fold witness and therefore able to deliver a death sentence on their tormentors. In what looked like failure, the church was killed – but in an astonishing reversal, the church was resurrected. This is in fact what happened in the first century, as the Jewish apostolic church was essentially exterminated, but then came back to life as a largely gentile church.

We concluded last week with the cosmic celebration of the reign of Jesus. There will be a final trumpet – a final proclamation of salvation and judgment. When the first century apostles, evangelists, and pastors have finished their ministry, Jesus will be King of kings and Lord of Lords, and He shall reign over the whole earth.

In a little bit John will see visions of the execution of God's plan for salvation. The plan in the scroll will be executed by the emptying of seven bowls. But first we are going to be introduced more fully to the major characters in this cosmic drama. Coming up in the next few chapters are the heavenly woman, the seductive woman, the male child, the dragon, the sea beast, the land beast, and the knight in shining armor. Let's take a look and see who these figures represent.

2. Read Revelation 12:1-6.
3. Which characters are introduced here?
4. Sometimes when you are trying to understand the Bible, it is best to proceed like a jigsaw puzzle. The best way to assemble a jigsaw puzzle is to do the easy parts first. Then the hard parts aren't so hard. Similarly, if you figure out the easy parts of the Bible, the hard parts aren't so hard. In this passage we're going to tackle the easy image first, and that is the male child.
5. Who is the male child?
6. If the male child is Jesus, who is the woman?
7. Does scripture ever portray Israel as a woman? Where?
8. Why was she in the agony of childbirth?
9. What does it mean that she fled into the wilderness?
10. If the male child is Jesus and the woman is Israel, what is the dragon?
11. What do the seven heads mean?
12. What do the seven horns mean?
13. What are the stars cast down to earth?
14. How did Satan attempt to devour Jesus?

15. The woman bears a child who becomes a ruler. Before that He is attacked by a dragon. The sun, moon, and stars make her a glorious figure. There are twelve stars. Twelve is frequently used as a symbol for Israel, after the twelve tribes that constitute that nation. And when we look into the scripture, Israel is often presented as a woman, particularly in the prophets. Isaiah opens his prophecy calling Israel the “daughter of Zion” (1:8), and in her sinful condition a whore (1:21). In chapter 54 Israel is commanded to sing, though she is a disgraced, barren woman – for she will have many children. God declares that He will become her husband. He will visit her in the desert of her sinfulness and shame and make her glorious. Jeremiah takes up this theme. In chapter 2 God says,

I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride,  
how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. (2:2)

The prophet Hosea dramatized the relationship between God and Israel by marrying an unfaithful woman. So the best way to understand the woman is as a symbol for Israel – the people of God. Backing up to the beginning, we can see that this symbol began in the Garden of Eden, when God predicted that the serpent would attack the offspring of the woman. Eve had children, and her godly offspring made war against the serpent through all the ages. Then at the end of the ages, the woman bore an offspring that would win a decisive victory. That woman is the people of God.

In rushing to identify the woman, we neglected to note the visual impact of this vision. Clothed with the dazzling sun, resting on the moon, a blazing crown of stars on her head – this is a wondrous woman. She is beautiful and glorious. This is the heavenly view of God’s people. Even with all her sins, in spite of the real ugliness in her midst, with all her failures – the church is God’s beloved. God is not star-struck. Read the Bible. He knows best of all how miserable the church is. But God loves her, and so He also sees her in all the splendor of her potential.

Is our church a glorious bride for Jesus? Yes, she is! You may think our pastor has flaws, our elders are lacking, our outreach weak and our worship lame, our presbytery frustrating and our general assembly a mess – but you are looking with the wrong eyes. The only opinion that matters is God’s and He is thrilled with our church. There is always room for improvement, but there is no room for a critical attitude. See our church

as God's glorious bride. Then love our church the way Christ loves her.

16. Let's read Revelation 12:7-12.
17. Now we know for certain that the dragon is Satan. See how easy this is? Where was the dragon at the beginning of this chapter?
18. How could Satan be in heaven? Why would God allow this? That can't be right.
19. What does this passage accuse Satan of?
  - Deceiving (v. 9), accusing (v. 10)
20. Who defeated Satan?
  - Michael and his angels (vv.7-8), "our brothers" (v. 11)
21. How was Satan defeated?
22. Who is Satan going to attack next? (v. 12)
23. Now we learn that the dragon is also the devil. And in case you missed the point, he is the ancient serpent – the snake who tempted the woman in the garden. You see how symbols work? They are designed to evoke a response and to carry connotations. Some people completely misunderstand Revelation because they try to make it speak a language foreign to it. If you are trying to figure out the difference between the serpent, the dragon, and the beast, you miss the whole point! They are all variations of the same symbol. Each works best in its own context, but they are all the same creature.

The dragon is great and red – an awe-inspiring figure. He has seven heads and ten horns. The head is a symbol for authority, and the horn is a symbol for power. Here the seven heads indicate complete authority and the ten horns indicate massive power. The dragon rules everywhere and with unsurpassed power. If the dragon is Satan, the stars he swept from heaven must be the angels he persuaded to rebel against God.

Satan is supremely intelligent and diabolically cunning. He knew that the woman would bear a child who would attempt to crush his head. God's

promise to Eve was no secret. He discovered the angel's announcement to Mary. So he waited. He planned to exterminate the child as soon as it was born. He had his chance when his servant, Herod the Great, learned from the magi that a king had been born in Bethlehem. Herod killed all the babies in the region in an attempt to kill the child, but God sent Jesus to Egypt for protection. It is not necessary to recount here the battles between Jesus and Satan while Jesus was on earth, so the picture leaps to Jesus' ascension to heaven and session on the throne. Meanwhile God protected the woman, the people of God, by sending them into the gentile wilderness for a time. We see this happening in the book of Acts.

24. Now a new vision opens up – a war in heaven. Michael appears to be the chief angel. He is the archangel who turned the tide in the war with the demons of Persia in Daniel's day (Daniel 10:13) and fought Satan for the body of Moses (Jude 9). Now he attacks Satan and his demon army. Michael wins, and Satan is expelled from heaven with all his evil angels. Revelation will have more to say about Satan, but for now we should remind ourselves that Jesus plainly declared His authority and power over Satan. In His earthly ministry Jesus demonstrated complete control over Satan by casting out demons at will. Before He left earth Jesus claimed *all* authority in heaven and on earth, and that would include authority over Satan and the demons. Satan is real. He hates God, he hates the people of God, and his greatest pleasure is to ruin God's creation and torture His people. But God controls Satan.

Why does God allow Satan to continue to attack the church? Surely God could destroy Satan at any time. I do not know what God's purpose is with Satan. But it appears that God even allowed Satan to enter heaven. There is a vivid account of this in the first two chapters of Job. The heavenly court assembles, and all the angels take their place. Satan is right there among them, and holds a conversation with God. He had been roaming the earth. God asked Satan if he had noticed Job, and Satan had. So here we see this evil angel with free access to all heaven and earth. Does this seem bizarre to you? It does to me. But although strange, the picture is unmistakably clear. This scene also reveals one of the chief activities of Satan. "Devil" means "accuser", and "Satan" means "adversary". Satan is our enemy who accuses us to God. He accused Job of hypocrisy – serving God only for personal gain instead of out of devotion. Satan also accuses you. It is a very effective attack, because we are guilty of many failures.

Satan attacks, torments, and cripples people by constantly reminding them of their miserable failure to live up to their ideals.

But there came a day when Satan's picnic in heaven came to an end. When Jesus ascended the throne of heaven it was time to cast Satan out for good. Before this Satan had a valid point to make. All people were in fact guilty. Everyone sinned. The people of God offered sacrifices for their sin, but nothing about the blood of animals was able to cleanse them from sin. Generation after generation of guilty people died in the hope of salvation, but until Christ there was no effective sacrifice. Now Jesus has died for us. The perfect Lamb of God took the guilt of all our sins – all people who believe in Him in all time – and died in our place. That means we are acquitted! We are legally innocent. Even when we sin in the future, our sins are covered by the sacrifice of Jesus. So there is no condemnation any more for those who believe in Jesus. Satan no longer has any valid accusations against man. Furthermore, now a man is enthroned in heaven. Not only is the guilt of man's sin removed, man now rules! Satan's day in heaven is over, so God threw him out.

25. Let's read Revelation 12:13-17.
26. If the woman is the people of God, how can she be given two wings?
27. What is the water that came out of the mouth of the dragon?
28. What happened to the water?
29. What would happen if the Jews swallowed the words of the dragon?
30. Satan has been exiled from heaven. The third vision of chapter 12 shows him in his rage tearing after the people of God. Continuing the exodus imagery, God led the church into the wilderness. Moses told the Israelites, "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." (Exodus 19:4) Scripture speaks of the wilderness wandering as the honeymoon of God and the bride in whom He delights. Returning to Jeremiah 2:2,

"Thus says the LORD,  
 'I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride,

how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.”

Our passage says the woman will be nourished in the wilderness. This reflects Psalm 78:23-25:

...he commanded the skies above  
and opened the doors of heaven,  
and he rained down on them manna to eat  
and gave them the grain of heaven.  
Man ate of the bread of the angels;  
he sent them food in abundance.

The dragon was thrown out of heaven. Enraged, he pursued the woman to persecute her. But God flew the woman into the wilderness where she would be safe, fed, and loved. Satan changed tactics and poured a flood of water after the woman to sweep her away. But the land swallowed the water. This enraged the dragon even more, so he went off to attack the woman's children. What is the flood of water?

The source of the water is the mouth of the dragon. This is the poison water of Wormwood – the false salvation coming from a temple infiltrated by Satan. It should be easy to see that this indicates words, a message from the dragon. It is a message which is eagerly absorbed by the land. Now we have learned that the land represents the Jews. What is the teaching that could have destroyed the church, but was absorbed by the Jews? The New Testament tells us in many places. It is the message of salvation through Jesus *and* the law. You may be thinking, “Come on! That sounds like a pretty mild problem. And are you saying that Satan was promoting belief in Jesus?” Yes. I most certainly am. Because belief in Jesus plus the law will send you to hell. By including Jesus, the great deceiver masked the deadliness of his false gospel. And if you cannot see how deadly this message is, that is proof of how dangerously insidious it is.

The gospel is that salvation comes through Jesus, and Him alone. Read the gospels. Did Jesus ever say, “Believe in me and keep the law”? Read the epistles. Did the apostles ever say we are saved through faith in Jesus and in keeping the law? No! In fact, they denounced this very doctrine with utmost vigor. Many Jews believed, and they were incorporated into

the woman, the people of God. Many refused to believe in Jesus, and they spread the doctrine that anyone must keep the law in order to be accepted by God. “Its fine that you believe in Jesus,” they said. “Now you need also to keep the law, beginning with circumcision.” Listen to Paul as he attacks this teaching in his letter to the Galatians.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8-9)

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?... Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? (Galatians 3:1-2)

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. (Galatians 3:10)

But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! (Galatians 5:11-12)

Do you see how upset Paul is? What would cause him to curse his adversaries and wish they were castrated? It is because this doctrine of salvation by Jesus plus works is an extremely dangerous plot to destroy the church. “Believe in Jesus and keep God’s law” sounds so good. But as Paul said, the law kills. Jesus alone saves. You cannot trust in Jesus and something else. You cannot serve two masters. You will hate the one and love the other. If you seek salvation in anything plus Jesus, Jesus will have nothing to do with you.

Revelation shows us the heavenly perspective on this great battle. On earth it was a struggle between the apostles and the Jews. But from the throne we can see that it is a war between the dragon and the woman. Paul was so upset about this false doctrine because he saw that it was demonic. It was an attempt by Satan to destroy the church by corrupting the only means of salvation – the gospel. This is a battle that Paul and the apostles

won. But the Jews eagerly drank in this demonic false gospel. To this day Judaism proclaims salvation by keeping the law, and so persists in advancing a demonic false gospel.

31. The persistent application in Revelation is to conquer. The promise to all seven churches was conditioned upon conquering in the face of overwhelming opposition. This chapter tells us how to do that. Return to verse 11. “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” You see here three components to conquering. First is the blood of the Lamb. Second, the word of testimony. Third is the desire to die.

Jesus is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last. Salvation begins with Him. Nothing happens apart from Jesus, and the key turning point in the battle with Satan was Jesus’ death on the cross. There, where Jesus hung in agony, He took upon Himself the sins of mankind. God vented His righteous anger on Jesus. God killed Him to set us free from the guilt, power, and pollution of sin. If you believe in Jesus, you are innocent, free, and clean from sin. Satan’s grip over the human race was broken. Until Jesus, Satan terrorized earth and disturbed heaven. Jesus kicked out the lion’s teeth. Satan is now a pitiable foe. You can conquer because Jesus conquered first. His victory on the cross paves the way for you to be victorious over Satan.

The second component in your conquest is your testimony. When you tell others about Jesus, you wage spiritual war. Your testimony to others is a direct attack upon Satan. When you tell people about Jesus, Satan flees and sin withers.

You can trust in the blood of Jesus and tell others about Him, yet still fail to conquer – if you love life. The gospel calls us to love Jesus, and nothing else – not father or mother, wife or children, property or life. If you follow Jesus you may incur the anger of your parents. Your husband or wife may leave you. You may lose your job. You may become poor, and you may die. If you fear these things, you do not fear God. If you protect your family, your marriage, your career, your property, and your life by softening your witness, you will lose the war. You may get through life a success by the world’s standards, but you will be a spiritual failure. You may look like a good Christian on the surface, but underneath you will be

a traitor. You may contribute to the work of the church, but in the decisive moments where the war is won or lost, you will turn on Jesus in order to save your life.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Russian dissident who was sent to the gulag, said, “You only have power over people so long as you don’t take everything away from them. But when you’ve robbed a man of everything, he’s no longer in your power – he’s free again.”<sup>3</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn conquered the Soviet state because he lost everything. That made him more powerful than his captors. When you lose everything, Satan cannot touch you. When you have nothing, he cannot hurt you, because you have nothing to hurt. But as long as you hang on to family, career, property, and life – you cannot win. When the decisive moment comes in the spiritual battle, you will surrender to protect what you hold dear.

Will you be a winner or a loser? Anyone can conquer. You do not have to be intelligent, or popular, or skilled, or knowledgeable, or strong. All it takes is the desire to die for Jesus. If that is your life goal, you will enter heaven a mighty warrior and a conqueror – no matter how insignificant you appear here on earth. Do not be a coward. Die to this life so that you might conquer with Jesus. Help us, Lord Jesus!

32.

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn, (<http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/11419.html>) Accessed 3/9/2007.

**Lesson 13**  
***Two Beasts***  
 Revelation 13:1-18

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. The plan has been opened, and the world has been warned. God will save His people! Believe the gospel! Flee from the wrath to come! Worship the lamb!

Soon we're going to see the wrath of God poured out upon the persecutors of the church, but first we're being introduced to the primary characters in this cosmic drama. Last week we saw several characters.

2. Which characters did we see last week?
  - heavenly woman, male child, great red dragon
3. Remember, these are signs. John tells us that explicitly in chapter 12, verse 1. We don't just make up meanings for these signs – we go into the Bible to find their meaning.
4. What does the heavenly woman symbolize?
  - people of God, Israel, church
5. What does the male child symbolize?
  - Jesus
6. What does the great red dragon symbolize?
  - Satan
7. We also saw war in heaven. What was the outcome?
  - Satan was cast out of heaven, down to the earth
8. What did the dragon do when he was cast out of heaven?
  - pursue the woman
9. How did the dragon attempt to sweep away the woman?
  - with a flood of water

10. Where did the water come from? What does this symbolize?
  - the dragon’s mouth; the words, teaching of the dragon
  
11. In the coming weeks we’re going to see how deadly the teaching of the dragon could be. But now, what was our application from last week? How do we conquer Satan?
  - the blood of the Lamb, the word of testimony, and willingness to die
  
12. Christianity is not a religion of a sliding scale. You either side with Jesus and win, or you side with the dragon and lose. There is no middle ground, no compromise, no partial allegiance. The message of the gospel is that if you side with Jesus, you gain life, eternal life – but if you side with the dragon you die and receive eternal punishment. What causes us to pause is that by siding with Jesus, you may very well die during your stay on earth. And if you are not killed, you may suffer the loss of family, friends, home, and job. That is because we are caught up in a cosmic war between Jesus and the dragon. There are casualties in this war. The good news is that if you follow Jesus, you win! And that includes eternal life. But only if you are willing to lose everything. If you hold out on Jesus, you lose – and that includes eternal death. I hope you decide for Jesus, for winning, and are willing to lose everything to win.
  
13. Last week we left the dragon standing by the sea. Let’s read Revelation 12:17 to get back into the story.
  
14. There he is, standing on the seashore. What will he do now?
  
15. Let’s read Revelation 13:1-4.
  
16. Another beast! What does it look like?
  - 10 horns, 7 heads, leopard/bear/lion
  
17. This beast has seven heads and 10 horns, just like the dragon. Is this beast the same as the dragon?
  - no
  
18. Some commentators think that because of the striking similarity of heads and horns, this beast and the dragon are the same creature. But this cannot be the case. Besides the fact that the rest of their appearance is so differ-

ent, these two creatures interact with each other. Verse two tells us that the dragon gives things to the beast, and verse four says that people worshiped both the dragon and the beast. The similarity of heads and horns is supposed to help us see that the beast is a sort of image of the dragon. They look a lot the same because they are of the same nature.

19. So what is this beast? Where does it come from?
  - the sea, the gentiles
20. What do the animal features indicate about it?
  - ferocious and powerful
21. What did everyone say about the beast? (v. 4)
  - “Who can fight against it?”
22. In the first century, who was invincible on the battlefield?
  - Rome
23. Let’s keep reading. Read Revelation 13:5-10.
24. What more do we learn about this beast?
25. How long did its authority last?
  - 42 months
26. Have you seen this number before? Where?
27. 42 months equals 1260 days equals 3½ years. These numbers show up a lot in Revelation, so they are important. But they are not so easy to understand. There are numerous biblical references, but I think the simplest Old Testament reference is the 3½ year drought that Elijah brought upon Israel. Israel was deeply mired in the worship of Baal. Hardly any true believers were left in the whole country. God was about to come in judgment, to slaughter all the prophets of Baal, and execute King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. But before the judgment God sent this 3½ year warning period – a 3½ year drought. Three and a half years, 42 months, 1260 days is a warning period – a time of danger and trouble before God comes in judgment. This beast is going to revel in his supernatural authority, but it is only temporary. What he does not know is that his evil reign is actually

God's warning of judgment soon to come.

28. What did this beast do to Christians?
  - conquer them
29. What is the relationship of this beast to the dragon?
  - the dragon made war against the offspring of the woman, this beast conquered the saints
30. How extensive was the authority of this beast?
  - every tribe, people, language, nation
31. Let's sum up the picture so far. Satan knew God planned to save the world through a child born of a woman who is Israel. When Jesus was born, Satan recognized him as the savior and tried to kill him, but failed. When Jesus ascended to His throne in heaven, Satan was cast out to the earth. Enraged, he sought to kill the church with a flood of false teaching, but failed again. Then he called up a beast from among the gentiles – the Roman Empire.

Rome was an empire built upon a demonic foundation. Rome's blasphemous nature became more evident as the first century proceeded. Caesar Augustus declared Julius Caesar divine after his death. Of course this made Augustus, his son, the son of a god. Caesar Nero took this process one step further and declared himself a god. Rome was hideously blasphemous all the way through.

Nero viciously persecuted the church and practically killed it. He "conquered" the church. This is the death of the two witnesses from chapter 11. The two witnesses are the church, testifying in a capital case. The witnesses die, but the case is decided against their persecutors. The witnesses rise again and the enemy is executed. This beast is worshiped by everyone in the world because he is invincible, but he will die.

32. Let's read Revelation 13:11-18.
33. Ah, now we're getting into the good stuff – the mark of the beast. Is it your Social Security number, a chip embedded in your body, or a good old tattoo? We'll find out soon. But first let's figure out this new beast.

34. Where does this beast come from?
  - the land
35. What does the land symbolize?
  - the Jews
36. So what sort of beast might this be?
  - a Jewish beast
37. What does it mean that it looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon?
  - looks like Jesus, but its message is Satanic
38. The middle part of this passage is tough to unravel. Oddly enough, the mark of the beast is easier. Let's look at that next.
39. When I was a child, there was a lot of argument about whether 666 was the symbol for Leonid Brezhnev or Henry Kissinger. Brezhnev is dead and Kissinger is out of the limelight. If we are going to look for the meaning of 666, where should we go?
  - the Bible
40. And where in the Bible can you find 666?
  - 2 Kings 10:14
41. Someone read 2 Kings 10:14.
42. Why would the weight of gold coming to Solomon have anything to do with Revelation?
43. Solomon came to the throne of Israel after his father David, and sought to serve God. He was a better administrator than his father, and the nation grew immensely wealthy under his rule. The temple he built was stunningly beautiful. When he dedicated it, the fiery glory cloud of God's presence filled the holy of holies. God rested there in the temple above the cherubim. But Solomon's love grew cold. Wealth poured in, and with it came apathy toward God. He made alliances with foreign powers. He married foreign wives. He instituted a massive military build-up.

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 contains the laws specifically for kings. There were three commands. First, he must not acquire many horses. Second, he must not acquire many wives. And third, he must not acquire a lot of gold. 1 Kings 10:14-11:8 tells the sad tale of Solomon's fall. Solomon broke every one of the commands to the king. Solomon is the man who built the temple of God, but lost his love for God. 666 is the number of Solomon, the man who turned from God.

44. The land beast is the Jews. In years past they, like Solomon, had loved God. But no more. Now they have joined forces with the sea beast and are at war with God. They killed God's Son and are attempting to exterminate His followers. Judea looks like a lamb, but it speaks like a dragon. The land has swallowed the river that came from the mouth of the dragon. The Jews are completely committed to the false gospel of salvation by the law. Now that they have absorbed this false gospel, they are preaching it. The land beast sounds like the dragon. The image of the beast is not a sculpture of an animal. It is the physical manifestation of dragon worship. That is the temple. The temple, which like Solomon and Israel was once dedicated to God, is now devoted to the worship of Satan and the service of Rome. Jew and gentile are united to destroy the children of Jesus.
45. This chapter is about Satan and his effort to destroy God's people. Satan has three primary strategies: intimidation, confusion, and seduction. This week we saw his efforts to intimidate and confuse us. When we get to chapter 17, we will see how he seduces us.
46. Satan's first strategy to destroy the church was intimidation. By bringing the power of Rome against the church Satan hoped to frighten and entice the church into abandoning her Lord. Compared to the alternatives, life in the empire was good. There was general peace and prosperity. Who would not wish to live there? And all you needed to do was offer a little incense to the genius of Caesar. Such a small thing. It does not mean much, really. And after all, Caesar really is Lord of the empire, isn't he? But Jesus claims exclusive Lordship. You should honor and obey your king, president, governor, and mayor – but worship belongs to Jesus alone. Christians in all ages refuse to worship Caesar – whoever he may be – and they will die for their loyalty to Jesus.

Although Revelation addresses a first century problem, the issues are by

no means limited to the first century. I hope you can see the obvious parallels between Rome and the United States. For all of its very real problems, there is no place on earth where peace and prosperity are so widespread and easy to access as the United States. And we are an unrivaled military power. We can crush any other country or alliance of countries if we choose. Consequently people simultaneously hate us and lust after us – just as they did to ancient Rome. But, you say, the United States does not persecute the church. It even defends freedom of worship at home and promotes it abroad. That is true. But there are other ways in which Christians may be cowed into worshipping the state.

What would you do if you mother – or husband or wife or child – developed cancer and needed surgery followed by chemotherapy. These are expensive treatments. What would you do if you could not pay for it? What will you do if twenty years from now Social Security goes broke and payments to retirees are stopped? Will you expect your parents to live in poverty? Or will you bring your parents into your house, and you women – will you quit your jobs to care for them? What would you do if someday the only way to get a good job is to sign a document agreeing that all beliefs are equal and promising not to promote your beliefs anywhere? You see, you can survive without a good job. You can take a low-paying job. Although it is hard, you can have your parents live with you. People have been doing it for 6,000 years. And life will go on if your loved ones die of cancer. But you will not enter eternal life if you betray Jesus.

Science, technology, and the modern welfare state are the forces which squeeze Christians today. The foremost issues are health and retirement. I fear that many Christians – perhaps millions – would betray Jesus for health and prosperity. They are willing to serve Jesus as long as they can get good health care and live comfortably. But take these away, and you may see massive defections. Science and the prosperity it enables are good things – *very* good things. Peace and prosperity are very good things. A government powerful enough to protect its people is a good thing. But in the hands of sinful people, these good things can be used to corrupt the church. Where do you stand? Are you prepared to conquer? Or will you be intimidated by a powerful state?

47. The second part of Satan's strategy to destroy the church is confusion.

Satan will succeed in intimidating some of the church to defect. They will fear the terrible power of the state and cave in to its demands. But what about the rest of the church? If Satan simply came and said, “Hey, I’m over here. I deserve equal time. Why not worship me, too?” Christians would recognize him and refuse his offer. Instead Satan seeks to lure Christians away from Christ by confusing them. Satan offers a religion which looks very much like Christianity, but at its core is Satan worship. We saw last week that one of his tactics is to add law to the gospel. The apostles fought this tooth and nail because they knew that Jesus plus anything will not save anyone. At first it seems right that in addition to believing in Jesus you must also live a good moral life. But this is a distortion. Only Jesus, and Jesus alone can save you. Of course godly behavior flows from true belief in Jesus – but you cannot add a set of ethics to the gospel as a condition of salvation. This was the first and most insidious method of confusing the church.

Now Satan has gone further and embodied this false gospel in a false religion. The Jewish leadership claimed authority. But they had compromised such a claim by rejecting Jesus, their true King. Since they switched allegiance to Caesar they can no longer legitimately claim to lead God’s people. The temple claimed to be the house of God, but it had ceased to be God’s house. It was built and maintained by Caesar and the false leaders. At Pentecost God moved into His new house, the church. The wind and fire of Pentecost were the sign that God now lived in the church – just as the cloud and fire had been the sign that God had moved into Solomon’s temple. The Jewish leaders and the temple worship look like they constitute biblical religion, but it is a mirage. Underneath it is demon worship inspired by Satan. But on the surface it looks real – and this is its deadly potential. By looking so real, it can confuse people and lead them away from Jesus.

Satan was so successful in confusing the Jewish people, he has been doing it ever since. For 2,000 years false gospels and false religions have sprung up in the church and led people away from Jesus. In the second and third centuries Satan used Gnosticism to attack the church – and he almost succeeded. This intoxicating mixture of gospel with Greek philosophy was irresistible to thousands of Christians, and they abandoned the faith in seeking a higher spirituality. The third and fourth centuries saw attacks on the nature of Jesus. Some taught that He was a man who was

made God, and others taught that He was God who only appeared to be a man. The council of Chalcedon finally put this argument to rest. The seventh century brought the false gospel of the Koran and its companion religion Islam. These grew out of a corrupted form of Christianity in the Arabian peninsula. Islam is so appealing and so compelling because it is so close to the truth. Over the Medieval period the view gradually developed within much of the church that the sacraments of the church save us. The Reformation reminded us that only Jesus, and He alone, saves us.

The nineteenth century saw the rise of two vicious counterfeits – Mormonism and Christian liberalism. Although Mormon belief deviates wildly from the Bible, they claim to be Christians, and call themselves a church. Liberalism was an attempt to accommodate Christianity to science so that religion would be more appealing to modern people. Their primary means of doing this was to remove the supernatural from Christianity. This false religion is still prevalent in some of our major denominations, and is currently causing a brutal and public battle in the Anglican Church. The Jehovah's Witnesses arose in the twentieth century. They deny the deity of Christ and demand strict adherence to their laws, yet still claim to be true to the Bible. All these heretical movements have seen some measure of success because they mix truth and error, and in the process they confuse people.

Satan is still confusing people, and you are not immune to his temptations. The root of all Satan's confusions is to replace the real gospel with a false gospel. The greatest danger for most of us is not an outright rejection of Jesus, but adding something else to Him. In the eastern church this most often takes the form of tradition. Orthodox Christianity rightly respects the rich tradition of our faith, but often goes beyond respect to putting tradition on the same level as Jesus. But only Jesus, and He alone, saves. Roman Christianity tends to teach salvation by Jesus plus the sacraments. They rightly recognize the huge value of the sacraments, but the sacraments do not save. Only Jesus, and He alone, saves. The Protestant temptation is closest to the first century situation. We tend to teach salvation by Jesus plus law. We emphatically deny this, but what ultimately convinces us someone is saved is when his life conforms to our personal moral standards, or when he has performed the work of saying the sinner's prayer. If you tell some Protestants that you believe in Jesus, but you cannot name when you prayed to receive Him into your

heart, they will not think you are a Christian. For others, you must fall in line with their own particular moral standard – either liberal or conservative – to be accepted as a true Christian. But only Jesus, and He alone saves.

48. Do you know how to spot a counterfeit? The surest way to be able to identify counterfeits – whether they be money, or art, or religion – is to be thoroughly familiar with the real thing. You cannot examine all the possible ways people may concoct to make fake money, art, or Christianity. But you can thoroughly know the real thing. Then when you see the counterfeit, you will spot it immediately. Today's lesson is simple, but vital. Learn about Jesus. Do not be satisfied with a passing acquaintance. That may be enough to lead you to happily hell. Apply yourself to a life-long study of the scripture. Read the Christian tradition. Use the sacraments. Listen to sound teaching. Do what Jesus says. But always beware of adding anything to Jesus. Only Jesus, and He alone, saves.

**Lesson 14**  
***Harvest of the Faithful***  
 Revelation 14:1-20

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. Do you know why the book of Revelation is so popular? It must be because it's about Satan. Well, that's not really true, but Satan plays a major role. If Jesus is the hero of Revelation, Satan is the villain. Evil is bewitching, and Satan captures our imaginations. So what have you learned about Satan from our study of Revelation so far?
2. After he failed to conquer the male child and the heavenly woman, what did he do?
  - brought forth two beasts
3. What was the sea beast?
  - Rome
4. What was the land beast?
  - the Jewish religious establishment
5. What was the mark of the beast? Where did we find it in the Old Testament?
  - 666, 1 Kings 10:14
6. What was 666 in 1 Kings?
  - the number of talents of gold delivered to Solomon each year
7. 666 is the number of man gone apostate. Solomon once loved God, but he turned and loved gold, women, and horses more. The Jews once loved God, but they turned against Jesus and therefore are at war with God.
8. The land beast is the Jewish religious establishment. They have joined forces with the sea beast and are at war with God. They killed God's Son and are attempting to exterminate His followers. Judea looks like a lamb, but it speaks like a dragon. The land has swallowed the river that came from the mouth of the dragon. The Jews are completely committed to the

false gospel of salvation by the law. Now that they have absorbed this false gospel, they are preaching it. The land beast sounds like the dragon. The image of the beast is not a sculpture of an animal. It is the physical manifestation of dragon worship. That is the temple. The temple, which like Solomon and Israel was once dedicated to God, is now devoted to the worship of Satan and the service of Rome. Jew and gentile are united to destroy the children of Jesus.

9. Toward the end of class last week we mentioned that Satan has three strategies to conquer us: intimidation, confusion, and seduction. The sea beast, representing the invincible power of Rome, is the intimidation. Satan will attempt to scare us into turning away from Jesus. The land beast, representing the corrupt gospel of the Jews, is the confusion. Satan will attempt to turn us from Jesus by confusing the true gospel with false gospels. In chapter 17 we will see the seduction of Satan.

Satan still uses these same strategies today, and we must be alert and vigilant lest we fall away from Jesus. Today in some parts of the world the state can torment you if you believe in Jesus. Today people are confused by the corrupt gospels of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unification Church, and other false religions which nevertheless claim to be Christian.

10. Let's move on to Revelation chapter 14. This chapter is neatly divided into three parts. I think we will discover that the first and third part are about the same people.
11. Read Revelation 14:1-5.
12. Where is the Lamb standing? Why?
  - Mount Zion
13. Read Psalm 2:1-6.
14. Who does God put on Mount Zion?
15. Now going back to Revelation, who else is on Mount Zion with the Lamb?

16. Where have we read about the 144,000 before?  
Revelation 7
17. Who are these 144,000?
  - the faithful Jews
18. Remember when we studied chapter 7, we noticed that the first half of the chapter points to faithful Jews, while the second half of the chapter points to faithful gentiles. But they are all together in one church. To remain faithful, Jews will have to leave Jerusalem, and gentile believers will be made part of a New Israel. Since Jesus has come, the view from the throne is that there is no longer a distinction between Jew and gentile. Everyone who follows Jesus is part of the New Israel that is being persecuted by the Jewish leaders.
19. What is the noise that John hears?
  - the singing of the faithful sounds like the voice of the Lamb
20. Are all these people bachelors and bachelorettes?
21. What does it mean that they are firstfruits for God?
22. This picture draws together many of the images we have seen before. This is faithful Israel, chosen and marked by God, the multitude from every tongue, tribe, and nation which no man can count. These are the followers of the Lamb, who have conquered and stand on the victory mountain. Their song sounds like the Lamb because they are like the Lamb. They are the spiritually pure, who have not fornicated with a false gospel. They are the beginning of the harvest of the faithful, the best of the crop, offered to God.
23. Read Revelation 14:6-13.
24. So now we see three flying angels. What did the first angel say? (v. 7)
25. How is the announcement of judgment good news?
26. What is the message of the second angel? (v. 8)

27. This introduces a new figure in Revelation – Babylon. We will see more of her in chapter 17. What is her signature sin?
  - sexual immorality
28. What is the message of the third angel? (vv. 9-11.)
29. What conclusion can we draw from these three message? (v. 12)
30. What do you think of verse 13? Is it really a blessing to die?
31. Do we consider it a blessing to die? How do we think about death?
32. Let's read Revelation 14:14-20.
33. Who do we see in verse 14? Why do you think that?
  - Jesus
34. What does Jesus reap at first? (vv. 15-16) What do you reap with a sickle?
  - grain
35. What does grain symbolize?
36. What might it mean that Jesus reaps Christians?
37. What does he reap next? (vv. 18-19)
38. What do grapes symbolize?
39. How is the grape reaping different than the grain reaping? (v. 19b-20)
40. The last two paragraphs in chapter 14 each describe a harvest. First there is a grain harvest, then a grape harvest. Harvest imagery is common in the Bible, and this particular scene is eerily reminiscent of Joel 3:13. Commentators debate whether the two harvests represent a gathering of the same group or two different groups. The grain harvest fits well with Jesus' parables in which His followers are likened to grain. The grape harvest initially seems different. Verse 19 tells us that the harvest was thrown "into the great winepress of the wrath of God." Clearly believers would not be destroyed in God's wrath, so perhaps this is a harvest of unbeliev-

ers. However the phrase “the wrath of God” can have two possible references here. It can refer to God’s anger against the grapes. Or it can refer to His anger at those who crushed the grapes. Either is grammatically possible. But there are other clues. The winepress was trampled outside the city – a clear reference to Jesus’ own crucifixion outside the city. In the book of Hebrews believers are urged to suffer with Jesus “outside the camp.” (Hebrews 13:13) And in chapter 17 Babylon drinks the blood of the saints, which brings God’s wrath upon her. The best explanation is that the grain harvest and the grape harvest both represent the death of the 144,000 faithful servants. Their blood will arouse God’s anger and bring about the destruction of their murderers.

41. Chapter 14 is about the first century martyr army of Jesus. These are believers chosen by God to die for their faith. They go into battle trusting in the blood of the lamb, bearing witness to Jesus, and fearless of death. Armed with these invincible weapons, they conquer the beast. But notice that they die in the process. And far from a tragedy, their death is a great victory – for through death they receive rest. They die, not because God loves them less or cares for them less than other people. They die because they are special to God. When God went out into the field to harvest the ripe grain, these are the ones He chose. When God sought grapes to make the best wine, these are the ones He picked. Their death was a sign of God’s special care for them. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”
42. Let’s talk about how this applies to us. What does your life look like when you are blessed by God? Does a blessed life consist of getting good grades on your exams and completing your projects on time? Is it good friends with whom you can enjoy the weekends? Does God’s blessing include a satisfying and financially rewarding job? Surely it must include a wonderful man or woman who loves you. Shall we add children to the list? No doubt, all these are blessings from God. We could even find scripture verses which say specifically that success, job, mate, and children are gifts from God. But would you ever think to include death as one of God’s blessings?

Chapter 14 concludes, “‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...’” Does this verse offend you? Is God making light here of the tragedy of death? Is God callous to the pain – physical and emotional – that death

entails? Is this just an attempt to pump up gullible believers to fight God's wars for Him? Is God a shrewder, more powerful, more manipulative leader than George Bush who tricked us into the war in Iraq to serve his own purposes? What, exactly, is blessed about death?

First, God does see death as a tragedy. You only have to look at Jesus as He stood before the tomb of Lazarus. His tears and His tender words to Mary and Martha show that God weeps with us in our suffering – especially at death. But the greatest tragedy about death is that it was totally unnecessary. Death was not part of creation. God never intended that man should die. God created man as an eternal being. Death entered this world as a result of Adam's sin. Ever since, death has been corrupting the whole world, bringing upon us disease, crime, and war. As long as we are in this world, we cannot escape the reality of death.

The reason death is a blessing for Christians is that it is the means of escape. By death we may escape this dying world and enter an eternal world where there is no death. Life is in Jesus, and to be with Jesus is eternal life. So it is good to trade this fading life on earth for eternal life with Jesus.

Verse 13 continues, “‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’” This tells us two additional blessings of death. First, by death we find rest. Verse 11 tells us that those who worship the beast have no rest. Unbelievers may seem to have a good life – and some do for a while. But there is no rest for them. Life is a continual rat race, and then they die. Even in death they have no rest. Eternity is continual torment for them. Christians have real rest here, but it is partial and fleeting. All your life you will experience a never-ending parade of struggles. Periodically you may find some rest in a vacation or happy event, and then you go back to the grind. But there is the promise of complete, permanent rest. Death is the passage to that rest. The other blessing of death is that your works go with you. You will be able to enjoy the fruit of your labors in this life when you enter eternity.

Death is always awful, but the alternative is worse. It would be horrible to be trapped in this world forever. Your greatest hope is to escape and live with Jesus. Sadly, many Christians cling to this life. When death approaches, they grasp at any means of prolonging their life a little more.

This is pathetic. It is like a little boy refusing to leave his mud puddle to go on a trip to the beach. The application of this passage for Christians is to live without fearing death. Learn to face death as a blessing from God, a hero's welcome into the Eternal Kingdom. If you do not believe in Jesus, the application for you is to flee God's anger. Believe in Jesus tonight. Then you also will be able to enter eternal life.

The 144,000 were the firstfruits of the harvest. Jesus loves all His people enough to gather them into their eternal home. Ultimately He will harvest all Christians. All believers will be blessed with death. Then when the last Christian is gathered, eternity begins!

**Lesson 15**  
**Seven Bowls**  
 Revelation 15:1-16:21

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. We're two thirds of the way through Revelation, and a lot of the things we've been discussing are starting to come together. Today we're going to study the last of the three sevens – the seven bowls of God's wrath. After that the book wraps up the message of Jesus for the first century church and puts it in an eternal context. So we need to keep track of the images we've been seeing throughout this book.
2. Going back a couple of weeks, what is the sea beast?
  - Rome
3. What is the land beast?
  - the Jewish religious establishment
4. What is the relationship between the two?
  - cooperative
  - land beast exercises the authority of the sea beast
  - land beast makes everyone worship the sea beast
5. What causes these beasts to come forth? What creates them?
  - Satan (Revelation 12:17b)
6. Chapter 12 ends with the dragon standing by the sea. He had attempted to kill the heavenly woman – the people of God, the church – but had failed. There he is, standing by the sea. And out of the sea comes a beast. We discover that this beast is Rome, which was founded 800 years before. Rome was not a beast at first. Now under the influence of Satan Rome becomes a beast which persecutes the church.

Satan also brings forth a land beast, the Jewish religious establishment. The Jews also were formerly not beastly, but they have swallowed the demonic false gospel of salvation by law which poured from the dragon's mouth. Now they have joined forces with Rome, the sea beast, and are at

war with God. They killed God's Son and are attempting to exterminate His followers. Judea looks like a lamb, but it speaks like a dragon. The Jews are completely committed to the false gospel of salvation by the law. Now that they have absorbed this false gospel, they are preaching it. The temple, which like Solomon and Israel was once dedicated to God, is now devoted to the worship of Satan and the service of Rome. Jew and gentile are united to destroy the children of Jesus.

7. Last week we saw again the 144,000 marked from every tribe of Israel. Let's begin pulling together the images we've been seeing. Notice that in chapter 14 these people are simply called the 144,000. The reference to Israel has been omitted. They were introduced in chapter 7, along with the great multitude which no one could number from every nation, tribe, people, and language. This is the church. The church is everyone chosen and marked by God – the New Israel, the multinational community. In chapter 11 the church is two witnesses. In chapter 12 it is the heavenly woman and also her offspring. In chapter 14 the church is the virgin followers of the Lamb, the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, the firstfruits of the grape harvest, the saints, and the martyrs of Jesus.

Do you see what is happening in this book? John is drawing together images from all over the Bible and flooding our senses with overpowering pictures of God's cosmic work in the world. It is wrong to think that these images of His people represent different things. All through the Old Testament the people of God are represented by these images in many ways. Now John is pulling them all together in one literary sound and light show to display the glory of God's climactic showdown with Satan. We've been seeing this same pattern in the images for God, Jesus, Satan, the Jews, the gentiles, and others – a multitude of images coalescing into an image complex – a huge mural which reveals God's work.

8. And now we come to the end. Not to the end of John's images, but to the images of the end. Let's study the final seven of God's acts on the earth.
9. Read Revelation 15:1-4.
10. Notice that John saw a sign in heaven. What follows is a sign. The seven angels with seven bowls and seven plagues are not seven events. They *represent* something. Of course what they represent must bear some sim-

ilarity to the sign, or it ceases to be a sign. But we must ask what the sign points to.

Notice also that these seven plagues are the end. With them the wrath of God is finished. This is the same Greek word that Jesus used when He hung upon the cross. His last words were, “It is finished.” Then He died. In the case of Jesus’ death, we believe that it was the end of His work of atonement for us. With His death the payment for sin is complete. The important question for us now is, what does Revelation say is finished? What do these seven plagues bring to an end?

11. John saw a sea of glass mingled with fire. What is this sea of glass? (v. 2)
12. Who is standing beside this sea of glass?
  - Those who had conquered the beast, the martyrs, the firstfruits
13. What are they doing? (v. 3)
  - Singing
14. Why the song of Moses?
15. Who sang the first song of Moses?
  - Israelites who came out of Egypt
16. When did they sing it?
  - After God had conquered the Egyptians
17. Why is it the song of the Lamb?
18. This chapter and the next are full of Exodus imagery. Back in Revelation 11:8 Jerusalem was identified symbolically as Egypt. 1,500 years before this Egypt persecuted the church, so God sent Moses to rescue His people. God told Moses what He was going to do, then Moses declared it to Pharaoh, then God executed His plan. Do you see the parallel with the scroll, the trumpets, and the bowls? Jerusalem has become Egypt, and is persecuting the church. God has a plan to rescue His people. The trumpets are the announcement, and the bowls will be the execution. But even now some of the church has been victorious. The faithful martyrs have conquered the beast by the blood of Jesus, the word of their testimony, and by

giving their lives. These firstfruits have come through the red sea victorious and are now singing the song of victory over the beast. But this time the savior is not Moses. It is Jesus. So the victory song of Moses has now become the victory song of the Lamb.

19. Let's read Revelation 15:5-8.
20. What is the tent of witness? (v. 5)
21. Why is it here?
22. Chapter 11 was about Jerusalem and the temple. Following the Exodus imagery, here we have the tabernacle as the seat of God's presence. This is also consistent with the New Testament's view of the 40 years between Jesus' ascension and His return in 70 A.D. as the wilderness experience of the church.
23. Read Revelation 16:1-9.
24. Where did the first angel empty his bowl? (v. 2)
  - the land
25. What was affected by the sounding of the first trumpet?
  - the land
26. What does the land symbolize?
  - the Jews
27. How much of the land was affected by the trumpet?
  - 1/3
28. How much was affected by the bowl?
  - everything
29. So we see that the trumpets were a warning shot. Even the news of judgment is devastating. The word of God is not merely wave disturbances in the air. It is a power that causes its message to happen. Even as the apostles, evangelists, pastors, and all Christians were warning of the wrath to come, that warning itself was disruptive. That is why the two-witness

church of chapter 11 was killed by the Jews, and the people of the land celebrated when its prophetic message was extinguished. Symbolically the trumpet sound affected 1/3 of the land. But now the time of warning is over. Now is the time for total devastation. Just as 1,500 years ago, the land of Egypt will be completely destroyed – and that land is Judah.

30. What was this first plague?
  - sores
31. Did Moses bring a plague of sores on the people of Egypt?
  - Exodus 9:8-12
32. Where did the second angel empty his bowl? (v. 3)
  - the sea
33. What was affected by the sounding of the second trumpet?
  - the sea
34. What does the sea symbolize?
  - the gentiles
35. What was this second plague?
  - sea turning to blood
36. Did Moses bring a plague of water turning to blood on the people of Egypt?
  - Exodus 7:20-21
37. Where did the third angel empty his bowl? (v. 3)
  - the rivers and springs
38. What was affected by the sounding of the third trumpet?
  - the rivers and springs
39. What do the rivers and springs symbolize?
  - the temple
40. What was this third plague?
  - rivers and springs turning to blood

41. Where did the fourth angel empty his bowl? (v. 3)
  - the sun
42. What was affected by the sounding of the fourth trumpet?
  - the sun, moon, and stars
43. What do the sun, moon, and stars symbolize?
  - rulers
44. What was this fourth plague?
  - the sun scorching the people
45. Did Moses bring a plague of scorching sun on the people of Egypt?
  - No
46. This is odd. A break in the pattern. What would be the meaning of a scorching sun?
  - oppression by rulers
47. Let's finish reading about the bowls
48. Read Revelation 16:10-21.
49. Where did the fifth angel empty his bowl? (v. 3)
  - the throne of the beast
50. What happened when the fifth trumpet sounded?
  - a star fell from heaven
  - Satan opened the bottomless pit
  - a demon army was unleashed
51. Is there a connection between the fifth trumpet and the fifth bowl?
52. What is the throne of the beast?
53. Which beast?
54. What is its kingdom?

55. We're thinking first century here, and I think most of us impulsively think the throne of the beast must be the seat of power, the Roman emperor. His kingdom would be the empire, of course. Or it could refer to the Jewish leaders and their rule in Judea. But neither of those are parallel to the fifth trumpet. Notice that until now the beasts have been carefully distinguished. We have seen the dragon and the sea beast and the land beast. Here the beast is not distinguished. I think it is the power behind the beasts – Satan – the star that fell from heaven and unleashed the demon horde. The demon horde tormented people do much that they wanted to die. The fifth bowl caused them to gnaw their tongues in anguish. So I think the fifth bowl allowed Satan to open the bottomless pit and unleash the horrible demon army that terrorized the people.
56. What was this fifth plague?  
– darkness
57. Did Moses bring a plague of darkness on the people of Egypt?  
– Exodus 10:21-23
58. Where did the sixth angel empty his bowl? (v. 3)  
– the Euphrates River
59. What happened when the sixth trumpet sounded?  
– four angels at the Euphrates were released  
– mounted troops stormed the land  
– this also was the demon army
60. Is there a connection between the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl?  
– the river Euphrates  
– demonic spirits  
– armies are called out
61. Is there a connection between the sixth trumpet and the Exodus?  
– Plague of frogs (Exodus 8:5-6)  
– Dried up the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-23)
62. In the Exodus God dried up the Red Sea so that Israel could escape from Egypt. In Revelation God dries up the Euphrates Rive so that armies could invade Israel. In the past, when God rescued His people, He led

them out. He led Abraham out of Haran to Canaan. He led Jacob out of Canaan to Egypt. He led Israel out of Egypt back to Canaan. When Israel had become irreversibly corrupt, God led a righteous remnant out of the land to Babylon. 70 years later God led that righteous remnant out of Babylon back to the promised land. God always rescued His people by leading them out of captivity and into a new, free land.

Now once again God has dried up the river at the edge of the land, but the people do not leave. This is because Judah is no longer God's people. They have become Egypt. There is an exodus for God's people, but the Jews remain in the land. God's people have gone out of the temple and into the church. Without the presence of God's people, the land will become overrun with demons.

63. Where did the seventh angel empty his bowl? (v. 3)
- the air
64. What happened when the seventh trumpet sounded?
- The kingdom of the world became the kingdom of Christ
  - worship
  - temple in heaven was opened
  - lightning, rumbling, thunder, earthquake, heavy hail
65. Is there a connection between the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl?
- lightning, rumbling, thunder, earthquake, heavy hail
66. Is there a connection between the seventh trumpet and the Exodus?
- Hail (Exodus 9:22-25)
67. So there, it is done. The wrath of God is finished. If you're still not sure exactly what is done, we'll clear that up in the coming weeks. Meanwhile, we can be sure at least that God finished wreaking vengeance on the murderers of His people. I suppose that the end was the end for the two beasts – the Roman and Jewish persecutors of the church. But as I said, we will see more about that in the coming weeks.
68. Revelation is about the first century, but its message applies to every century. God has carefully marked His people and He will save them from their enemies. Satan and his allies are no match for God, and will always

lose in the end. When the dust settled in the first century, the Jewish persecution was halted and has never again been a problem for the church. The Roman persecution was halted for a while, and it also came to a permanent end in 313 when Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal.

So today we can be sure that God will overcome the great threats to the church. The greatest threat is not western secularism. That threat can easily be overcome by energetically preaching the gospel in our free countries. No, the great threats are found in Muslim, Hindu, and communist lands. We see recently the horror of radical Islam in the hundreds of churches burned in Nigeria and the genocide by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. We see the churches bulldozed and pastors tortured in China. All over the world the blood of the martyrs cries out for vengeance. The vision of John in Revelation assures us that, just as in the first century, God will destroy the persecutors of His church.

However, the lesson of Revelation is also that such deliverance may not come soon. From the ascension of Jesus to the destruction of Jerusalem was 40 years – 40 years of persecution and death. And as we have seen, many of the faithful were rescued *by* death. All God's people made it to heaven, but some got there by martyrdom. And so it will always be. Islam will fall to the power of Jesus, but it may take decades. Thousands of Christians may have to die. In fact, Revelation teaches us that it is the blood of the faithful that conquers the beast. So we may be sure that if Jesus is to win, Christians *must* die. But far from a tragedy, the death of the martyrs is a blessing and a triumph.

Where does this leave us? We may not be called to die for Jesus, but if so called, are you willing? Perhaps more to the point, are you willing to let your children die for Jesus? Will you count it a life worthwhile, and a blessing, if your child dies while testifying to Jesus? And if not called to die, surely we are called to pray for those who are called. Let's pray for our brothers and sisters in Nigeria, Iraq, India, China, Vietnam who will not survive until next year. Let's pray that God grant them the courage to testify to Jesus all the way until they die. Let's pray for God to give them a blessed death. And pray for vengeance. Join with the saints on earth and in heaven who cry out for God to destroy those who ravage His church.

**Lesson 16**  
***Enemy Revealed***  
Revelation 17:1-18

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. What just happened? What happened in Revelation chapter 16? Have you absorbed the impact of the bowl judgments? Are you reeling from the force of it? What does verse one say? What do these bowls contain?
  - the wrath of God
2. What did the first bowl do to people?
  - caused painful sores to those who worshiped the beast
3. What would it be like to have terrible sores that could never be healed? What did the second and third bowls bring?
  - water turned to blood
4. What would it be like if there were no water – to drink, to bathe, for cooking – only blood? What did the fourth bowl do?
  - sun scorched people, deadly sunburn
5. The fifth bowl brought darkness. Was that less severe? What does verse 10 say?
  - people gnawed their tongues in anguish
6. Thinking carefully about the fifth and sixth bowls, and comparing them to the fifth and sixth trumpets, it seems that these signify the invasion of the horrible demon army. Already the people were in mortal anguish. Now come the demons to torment them further! Before His crucifixion Jesus predicted a great tribulation. This is it! No one on earth ever suffered worse than these people. These are people striped of all semblance of humanity – these are zombies in search of death.

Then BOOM! The end came like a cascading atomic explosion. Let's read again the climax of God's fierce wrath.

And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and

a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe. Revelation 16:18-21

Folks, this is a first-century description of the end of the world. And the seventh angel said, “It is done!”

7. Now let’s remember what all this is. Chapter 15 began by telling us that this is a “sign in heaven, great and amazing.” These disasters are signs of something terrible – as terrible as these signs – equivalent to the end of the world. It remains for us to discover exactly what that terrible thing is, and what is Babylon the great.
8. Let’s read Revelation 17:1-6.
9. Verse one tells us what this chapter is about. What is it?
  - “the judgment of the great prostitute, seated on many waters”
10. The angel *said* that he was going to show John “the judgment of the great prostitute, seated on many waters.” What did John actually see in verse three?
  - a woman sitting on a scarlet beast
11. Where did John go to see this woman?
  - the wilderness
12. OK, tell me more about this woman. What is she like?
  - gorgeous, immoral, Babylon, drunk with blood, mysterious
13. So this is Babylon! How did John respond to this scene?
14. The Greek word for “marveled” is almost always used in the New Testament for the way people reacted to Jesus. It does not mean worship, but the New Testament uses it in ways that imply worship. I think we’re sup-

posed to see that John practically swooned at the beauty of this mysterious woman.

15. Now tell me about the beast upon which she rode.
  - scarlet, blasphemous, seven heads, ten horns
16. So now we need to figure out who this woman is, and who the beast is. Fortunately, the angel is going to tell us.
17. Read Revelation 17:7-18.
18. Now there are a lot of details here, and honestly, they are pretty confusing. We don't have time to explore each detail, but we can get a firm grasp on the overall picture.
19. What does the angel say first?
  - “Why do you marvel?”
20. First the angel has to get John to stop gawking after the ravishing beauty and pay attention to his explanation of the vision.
21. Verse eight tells us that the beast was, and is not, and is to come. What do you make of that?
22. Verse nine tells us the seven heads represent seven mountains. Now we're getting somewhere! What is known for seven mountains?
  - Rome
23. In verse three we saw that the beast was full of blasphemous names. Have we seen a blasphemous beast before?
  - Revelation 13:5-6 – the sea beast
24. What does the sea beast represent?
  - Rome
25. The seven heads also represent seven kings. Five have fallen, one is currently reigning, and one will come later. Was Rome ruled by a succession of seven kings?

26. This describes the succession of emperors in the Roman Empire. Julius Caesar was first, followed by Augustus, Tiberias, Caligula, and Claudius. Nero was ruling when John wrote this book. He makes six. Following him were the three men who ruled only a matter of months in “the year of the three emperors”. The next significant ruler was Vespasian – the head who had not yet come when John wrote this. You may object that Vespasian does not fit the text, since the text says he will remain only a little while. Vespasian ruled for ten years, but the climax of this book occurred only one year after his reign began.

Julius and Augustus were competent rulers, those following were trouble. Tiberias became deranged, Caligula was crazy, Claudius was not so bad, but Nero was a madman. His behavior was x-rated and destructive. Eventually he committed suicide, and that threw the empire into total chaos. In one year three men seized control of the empire, only to lose it within a matter of months. The thing Rome was especially good at – control, leading to peace and prosperity – she seemed to have lost. It looked like the half-century of relative peace and prosperity that Rome provided was coming to an end as the empire disintegrated. Then after a year of frightening turmoil, Vespasian came to the throne and restored order. The empire which appeared dead came back to life. This is the beast who was, and is not, and is about to rise again. It is the sea beast of chapter 13 who had a mortal wound that was healed. It also seems that John was writing this letter soon after Nero’s death.

(Anyone who attempts to interpret Revelation must come to terms with the heads and horns of this beast. It is a daunting task, and I suppose every writer has a different view. Some scholars interpret the ten horns to be the Roman emperors from Julius to Vespasian, counting the three who only ruled a few months. That relieves them of the awkwardness of skipping those three rulers, but it transfers the difficulty to interpreting the seven heads. But let us look closely at the ten horns. Verse 12 says very specifically that they are “ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, with the beast.”

(17:12) From this verse we can say that whoever they are, they had not yet come to power when John wrote Revelation in early A.D. 60s. Whatever power they had, it was brief. Perhaps they actually ruled longer, but John only saw as far as the end – as we saw in the case with the seventh head. Finally, they all rule simultaneously. This seems to push us to the

conclusion that they were rulers who exercised power during the reign of Vespasian in A.D. 69 and following. So who might they be? I am not sure. I find most suggestions unlikely. My guess is that they were commanders of the legions that sacked and destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It would have been easy to identify them then, but almost impossible now.)

27. Let us take a minute to examine some of the symbols in this passage. Verse one says the prostitute is seated on many waters. Notice also that verse three says she is in the wilderness. She is also seated on a scarlet beast. Verse 15 tells us that the waters upon which she sits are “peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.” Earlier we saw that the sea is a symbol for the gentiles. So we have a whole cluster of symbols that all point to the same general idea. Waters = sea = “peoples and multitudes and nations and languages” = gentiles = wilderness —> Rome. Again we’re seeing John gather up a rich cluster of images to show us one thing. The reason we understand them all to point to one thing is because they are all used the same way in the Bible. We aren’t just making up meaning for these symbols.
  
28. Well if the beast is Rome, then what about the prostitute? What does she represent? Don’t guess! Let’s look at the data. What have we learned about her so far? She’s gorgeous, she’s sexually immoral, she’s drunk with the blood of the martyrs. Just hearing these characteristics, your first thought might be that the woman is Rome. You could fairly say those things about Rome. But we’ve already established that Rome is represented by the scarlet beast. Who is the other villain in Revelation? Who else persecutes the saints?
  - the Jewish religious establishment
  
29. Let’s try out the idea that the prostitute, the sexually immoral woman named Babylon, is the Jewish establishment. What is her relationship to the scarlet beast?
  - sits upon it
  
30. The woman is sitting on the beast. What does this picture mean?
  
31. What else is she sitting on?
  - seven mountains (v. 9)

32. What is famous for its seven mountains?  
 – Rome
33. Based on what we've seen already in Revelation, does it make sense that the Jews are supported by Rome? Does an alliance between them seem reasonable?  
 – Revelation 13:12, land beast worships the sea beast
34. In chapter 12 we saw the glorious woman fleeing into the wilderness to escape the dragon's attacks. This was Paul and other Christians appealing to Rome for protection against the Jews. The wilderness is symbolically equivalent to the sea which represents the gentiles. At first the Romans protected the church from the attacks of the Jews. Now we see the prostitute also in the wilderness. Or, another way of putting it, she is riding a beast. This is the Jews being supported and deriving their power from Rome. Until they revolted in A.D. 66, the Jews were also protected by Rome. The Jewish leaders held power only because Rome permitted them to rule. The lust for power is why the Jews wanted to get rid of Jesus. In John 11:48 the Jewish leaders are talking about the disturbance Jesus is causing. They say, "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." And when Pilate said to the Jews at Jesus' trial, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." (John 19:15) And as the Romans began to turn on the Christians, they came into a closer alliance with the Jews. The many waters also shows the far-reaching influence of Jerusalem. Jews had spread out into all parts of the empire, and their evil influence was everywhere. Rome and Jerusalem were both called by Satan to destroy the church. They were working together, with Jerusalem dependent upon the military might of Rome to keep them in power.
35. Babylon is the land beast, which is persecuting the saints. But what about her other characteristics? Why is she so ravishingly beautiful?  
 – the temple was stunningly beautiful, temple worship was amazing
36. Jerusalem was an amazing city, and the temple was stunningly beautiful. The Jews spent almost a century constructing and adorning the temple, and in A.D. 63 they completed the work. Here is how Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian described the temple.

“Now the outward face of the temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men’s minds or their eyes; for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun’s own rays. But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were coming to it at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow; for as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceeding white.”<sup>4</sup>

Romans and the whole world marveled at the beauty of the temple.

37. If the prostitute is Jerusalem, verse 18 may come as a surprise: ““And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”” Without a doubt the city that ruled the earth was Rome. Should we go back and revise our interpretation? No, because Rome was not the world power in the first century – not according to the view from the throne. Remember, Revelation is presenting God’s perspective. From earth, certainly Rome appears to have the power. But Jerusalem is where the temple was. And there in the holy of holies was the fire and cloud of God’s presence. Which is more powerful, the throne of Caesar or the throne of God? Does God control Caesar, or does Caesar control God? And who will have more influence – the advisors to Caesar, or those who pray to God? Listen to psalm 149.

5 Let the godly exult in glory;  
 let them sing for joy on their beds.  
 6 Let the high praises of God be in their throats  
 and two-edged swords in their hands,  
 7 to execute vengeance on the nations  
 and punishments on the peoples,  
 8 to bind their kings with chains  
 and their nobles with fetters of iron,  
 9 to execute on them the judgment written!  
 This is honor for all his godly ones. Praise the LORD!

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<sup>4</sup> *The Wars of the Jews*, Flavius Josephus Book 5, chapter 5.6.  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2850/2850-h/2850-h.htm>

If nothing else, hasn't this book shown that God rules the nations? Spiritually speaking Jerusalem was the center of the universe – “the great city that had dominion over all the kings of the earth.”

38. Now let's get to the heart of the matter. The fundamental characteristic of this woman is that she is a whore. If the woman is the Jewish religious establishment, allied with Rome in persecuting the saints, in what way is she a whore? Has God ever used this language to describe His people?  
 – Isaiah 1:21, Jeremiah 2:23-24; 3:2, 6-11, Ezekiel 16, Hosea 4:10-15
39. This is a small sampling of scripture which demonstrates God's use of sexual imagery to illustrate His relationship with His people. Over and over the prophets decried the faithlessness of God's people, calling them adulteresses and whores. Often illicit sex was happening along with the worship of other gods. Fornication is wrong. It's a breaking of the sixth commandment. But worse than being unfaithful to your wife is being unfaithful to your God. By the time we get to the last book of the Bible, we know for sure that the whore named Babylon is Israel abandoning her God.
40. So far we have seen the dragon and his two beasts waging war against the Lamb. The whore is another manifestation of the land beast. The land beast looked like a Lamb, but spoke like a dragon. It looked like Jesus, but it was a counterfeit. You could tell by its teaching. The land beast was allied with the sea beast and caused people to worship it. Since the land beast looked like a lamb, it confused people, and some Christians left Jesus to follow this beast. The land beast was the Jewish religious establishment. It said, “Following Jesus is fine. You just need to keep the law, too.” But Jesus requires that we trust in Him alone. The gospel of the land beast will not save anyone.

Now we have Babylon, the luscious pin-up of Revelation. She also is allied with Rome. She also seeks to destroy the church, but she has a different approach. Her strategy is to seduce Christians into abandoning Jesus and worshipping the sea beast. And how successful will she be? Look around you, or read the Bible and you will see how easy it is for Christians to fall into sexual sin and marry unbelievers. Seduction is deadly because it works! It taps into man's deepest longing for a woman. Babylon is Jerusalem, the city which beckons, “Come worship with me! Be

dazzled by my golden temple. Be awed by the drama of sacrifice. Experience the ecstasy of Levitical music. Can you not see that God is here? Leave your pathetic worship of Jesus, and come back to real worship that looks and feels like worship.”

If you had to choose between sneaking into someone’s house to hear someone read and explain a letter from the apostles, say prayers, and eat some bread and wine with a few other believers – or go to the lavish worship at the temple in Jerusalem – which would you choose? If you were a Greek used to worshipping in the amazing temple of Diana or Zeus, don’t you think that Christian worship would begin to seem trivial? If you grew up going to Jerusalem every year at Passover, Pentecost, and Atonement Day – joining the bustling throngs and singing psalms with thousands of other Jews – don’t you think that you would feel cheated by the meager ceremony of Christians? Many Jews felt this way. There is a whole book in the Bible devoted to explaining that Christian worship is much better than temple worship. The book of Hebrews encourages believers to stay with Jesus, even if Christian worship is not as externally lavish as other religions.

The worship in the temple of Jerusalem was not inherently wrong. It was established by God in the Old Testament. Jesus worshiped there, and the apostles continued to pray there after Jesus went to heaven. The issue is not whether one should pray in the temple or not. The issue is a matter of faith. Are you trusting Jesus for salvation, or are you trusting the temple sacrifices? The book of Hebrews teaches with great emphasis that the temple sacrifices cannot save anyone. They never could. Only Jesus can save. So pray in the temple court if you wish – but now that Jesus has come if you trust in the sacrifices to save you, you are damned.

Babylon is delightfully beautiful – but deadly. She lures men into her bed where they burn in hell. Anyone who spurns her beauty inflames her anger – and these she kills. The gorgeous centerfold with the golden chalice drinks a revolting mixture which contains the blood of believers who resisted her charms. The outward beauty is a grotesque monster, a vampire who sucks the life from all around her. Not content merely to kill, she drinks the blood of her victims in an anti-sacrament. Scripture portrays the blood of the innocent as crying out for vengeance. So from the depths of her body goes forth the call for vengeance against Babylon.

The end of chapter 17 explains how she will meet her end. Rome will turn on her and totally destroy her. Jerusalem worshiped Rome. She made others worship Rome. She trusted in Rome. But finally Rome turned on her. Rome saw her as the disgusting whore that she was, and Rome hated her. Verse 16 says, “They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire...” Recoil in horror as you see the one you desired stripped, beaten, torn limb from limb, and burned alive. How awful, that such a gorgeous woman was treated so savagely.

41. Babylon is seductive false religion. It is not weak or troubled churches. It is not the Roman Catholic Church or the Episcopal Church or any other Christian church that is deficient. It is religion opposed to Christ. In the first century it was specifically Jerusalem and the false religion of the Jews who rejected their Messiah. In any age it is any religion which seduces people to trust someone other than Jesus.

Have you ever driven east on the Washington D. C. beltway? There comes a place where you round a bend, and rising up before you is an awesome sight. Pillars of marble penetrate the sky, and towering over all is a golden angel blowing his trumpet. Just the sight from the highway is enough to evoke wonder. If that is what we see here, what must the inside look like? What would it be like to worship in such a place? The way to find out is to become a Mormon.

You are no less susceptible than anyone else to the seduction of false religions. Some, like Mormonism, are visually appealing. Others, like Unitarianism, may be intellectually attractive. Islam draws people because it claims to have a higher moral standard than Christianity. This is a false claim but it appears true sometimes and deceives people. Hinduism and Buddhism are appealing because they claim to be less exclusive than Christianity – a claim which suffers by the persecution of Christians in India. The original whore was destroyed, but this strategy works so well, Satan keeps producing a vast array of false religions to lure people away from Christ. Communism was the false religion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was so effective, it captured the hearts of millions of people, and even had so-called Christians promoting it. Let me add that capitalism, as a way of life, is also a false religion. One of the newest and most vigorous false religions is environmentalism. Al Gore has become the high priest for this religion with his film, “An Inconvenient Truth.” Christians, more than

anyone, should strive to protect the environment, so the concerns of Mr. Gore and others are legitimate. But global warming is not to be feared. God is the one we must fear, and Jesus, not the Kyoto treaty, will be our savior.

I close with the words I used when I preached this chapter at Lehigh University. The most lethal temptation comes in a package of physical and spiritual adultery. Perhaps you will not be seduced by a false religion by itself, but you will be tempted by a man or woman to leave Jesus. Sexual attraction is the most powerful force in your life. This is good. God made you this way. And if you think that you are too strong to be tempted by an attractive unbelieving man or woman, you are very foolish. Men, a fun, warm, beautiful woman can entice you to leave Jesus. Women, a handsome, strong, intelligent man can tempt you to leave Jesus. When you have become emotionally entangled with an unbeliever, you will find a million ways to rationalize your unbelief. Satan would not use this strategy if it did not work, and it works very very well. The remedy is very simple, but it can be very hard to apply. Never become close to an unbeliever of the opposite sex. You are playing with fire. Don't avoid unbelievers of the opposite sex, but keep your friendship superficial. Your deep friendships should be with your own sex and with Christians of either sex. If you are dating or becoming close to a wonderful man or woman who is not a solid Christian, you must terminate the intimacy. Now. Do not make excuses or plead that your case is special. Every case is special. If you cannot see the danger, you are already in too far. Tell your friends you want to back out. Do it today. Let them help you get free from an entanglement which may ruin your life.

**Lesson 17**  
***Lament for Babylon***  
 Revelation 18:1-24

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. Two weeks ago we saw John's vision of the end. Seven angels poured seven deadly bowls out on the earth, with devastating effects. People were in agony. They cursed God and longed for death, but it refused to come. Finally the last bowl came and the torment and destruction was complete. Here is what John saw:

And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe. Revelation 16:18-21

This is first-century language for nuclear-level total destruction.

2. The question hanging over us two weeks ago was, "What is Babylon?" Last week we read Revelation 17 and got the answer to that question. What did we discover last week?
  - Babylon is the Jewish religious establishment
3. What picture was used to represent the Jews in chapter 17?
  - a gorgeous prostitute
4. What was the prostitute sitting on?
  - a scarlet beast
5. What does the scarlet beast represent?
  - Roman empire

6. What was the relationship between the Jews and Rome?
  - Rome supported and protected the Jews
7. If Rome supported and protected the Jews, how then does it say that “the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth?”
  - spiritually, God’s throne was in the temple in Jerusalem; God controls and directs all human affairs from His throne, and those who pray to God ultimately influence the direction of history
8. What did the beast do to the woman at the end of the chapter?
  - “they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire...”
9. What does this mean?
  - Rome will turn on Jerusalem and destroy her
10. Revelation focuses on two crimes that Babylon committed, each of which was worthy of death. What were they?
  - killing the saints; unfaithfulness to God
11. Let’s look again at Revelation 17:1-6. John saw...

“the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk... I saw a woman... holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality... ‘Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.’ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.”

Mingled together like a cocktail are twin charges of murder and adultery. God’s bride, the Jews, had run off with another lover and murdered her true husband. Horrible crimes! Wickedly perverted! Death is too good for such an evil creature. Therefore God will turn her new lover against her, and he will rob her and strip her naked, and eat her alive and burn her bones so that nothing is left of this disgusting whore. Jerusalem must be sieged, starved, raped, plundered, burned, and razed. The wicked city must die a painful death for her unspeakable crimes.

12. In A.D. 66 the Jews revolted against the Romans. War raged across Judea until A.D. 69 Titus led the Roman legions against Jerusalem. Flavius Josephus was a Jewish historian who witnessed the siege, fall, and plundering of Jerusalem. Here are some of his observations, quoted from his history of the war:

And now, as the city was engaged in a war on all sides, from these treacherous crowds of wicked men, the people of the city, between them, were like a great body torn in pieces. The aged men and the women were in such distress by their internal calamities, that they wished for the Romans, and earnestly hoped for an external war, in order to their delivery from their domestical miseries.<sup>5</sup>

It was now a miserable case, and a sight that would justly bring tears into our eyes, how men stood as to their food, while the more powerful had more than enough, and the weaker were lamenting [for want of it.] But the famine was too hard for all other passions, and it is destructive to nothing so much as to modesty; for what was otherwise worthy of reverence was in this case despised; insomuch that children pulled the very morsels that their fathers were eating out of their very mouths, and what was still more to be pitied, so did the mothers do as to their infants; and when those that were most dear were perishing under their hands, they were not ashamed to take from them the very last drops that might preserve their lives: and while they ate after this manner, yet were they not concealed in so doing; but the seditious every where came upon them immediately, and snatched away from them what they had gotten from others; for when they saw any house shut up, this was to them a signal that the people within had gotten some food; whereupon they broke open the doors, and ran in, and took pieces of what they were eating almost up out of their very throats, and this by force: the old men, who held their food fast, were beaten; and if the women hid what they had within their hands, their hair was torn for so doing; nor was there any commiseration shown either to the aged or to the infants, but they lifted up children from the ground as they hung upon the morsels they had gotten, and shook them down upon the floor. But still

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<sup>5</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, trans. by William Whiston (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2850/2850-h/2850-h.htm>) Accessed 12/27/2014; Book 5, Chapter 1, Para 5.

they were more barbarously cruel to those that had prevented their coming in, and had actually swallowed down what they were going to seize upon, as if they had been unjustly defrauded of their right. They also invented terrible methods of torments to discover where any food was, and they were these to stop up the passages of the privy parts of the miserable wretches, and to drive sharp stakes up their fundamentals; and a man was forced to bear what it is terrible even to hear, in order to make him confess that he had but one loaf of bread, or that he might discover a handful of barley-meal that was concealed; and this was done when these tormentors were not themselves hungry; for the thing had been less barbarous had necessity forced them to it; but this was done to keep their madness in exercise, and as making preparation of provisions for themselves for the following days....<sup>6</sup>

...Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine, and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the market-places like shadows, all swelled with the famine, and fell down dead, wheresoever their misery seized them... A deep silence also, and a kind of deadly night, had seized upon the city; while yet the robbers were still more terrible than these miseries were themselves; for they brake open those houses which were no other than graves of dead bodies, and plundered them of what they had; and carrying off the coverings of their bodies, went out laughing, and tried the points of their swords in their dead bodies; and, in order to prove what metal they were made of they thrust some of those through that still lay alive upon the ground; but for those that entreated them to lend them their right hand and their sword to despatch them, they were too proud to grant their requests, and left them to be consumed by the famine...<sup>7</sup>

...Nor would men believe that those who were dying had no food, but the robbers would search them when they were expiring, lest any one should have concealed food in their bosoms, and counterfeited dying; nay, these

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, Book 5, Chapter 10, Para 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, Book 5, Chapter 12, Para 3.

robbers gaped for want, and ran about stumbling and staggering along like mad dogs, and reeling against the doors of the houses like drunken men; they would also, in the great distress they were in, rush into the very same houses two or three times in one and the same day. Moreover, their hunger was so intolerable, that it obliged them to chew every thing, while they gathered such things as the most sordid animals would not touch, and endured to eat them; nor did they at length abstain from girdles and shoes....<sup>8</sup>

...For notwithstanding these men were mad with all sorts of impiety, yet did they still admit those that desired to offer their sacrifices...were yet often destroyed by this sedition; for those darts that were thrown by the engines came with that force, that they went over all the buildings, and reached as far as the altar, and the temple itself, and fell upon the priests, and those that were about the sacred offices; insomuch that many persons who came thither with great zeal from the ends of the earth, to offer sacrifices at this celebrated place, which was esteemed holy by all mankind, fell down before their own sacrifices themselves, and sprinkled that altar which was venerable among all men, both Greeks and Barbarians, with their own blood; till the dead bodies of strangers were mingled together with those of their own country, and those of profane persons with those of the priests, and the blood of all sorts of dead carcasses stood in lakes in the holy courts themselves.<sup>9</sup>

While the holy house was on fire, every thing was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity, but children, and old men, and profane persons, and priests were all slain in the same manner; so that this war went round all sorts of men, and brought them to destruction, and as well those that made supplication for their lives, as those that defended themselves by fighting. The flame was also carried a long way, and made an echo, together with the groans of those that were slain; and because this hill was high, and the works at the temple were very great, one would have thought the whole city had been on fire. Nor can

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Book 6, Chapter 3, Para 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Book 5, Chapter 1, Para 3.

one imagine any thing either greater or more terrible than this noise; for there was at once a shout of the Roman legions, who were marching all together, and a sad clamor of the seditious, who were now surrounded with fire and sword....Yet was the misery itself more terrible than this disorder; for one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething hot, as full of fire on every part of it, that the blood was larger in quantity than the fire, and those that were slain more in number than those that slew them; for the ground did no where appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it; but the soldiers went over heaps of those bodies, as they ran upon such as fled from them....<sup>10</sup>

...neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any .age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world....<sup>11</sup>

13. Which brings us to Revelation 18. This chapter is a song of woe. It is similar to other such songs in the Bible, which we call laments. The book of Lamentations is one large example. It's a song of mourning, of longing, of anguish over the death of the formerly good and beautiful, now turned treasonous. We're going to read this chapter in a moment, but as we do, let's keep in mind whom this is about. Who is Babylon?
  - the Jewish religious establishment, located in Jerusalem
14. Let's take turns reading Revelation 18:1-24.
15. Let's look at verses 2-3. How has Jerusalem become a dwelling place for demons, for every unclean spirit, every unclean bird, and every unclean beast?
16. How have all nations drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth committed immorality with Jerusalem?
17. How have the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living?

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Book 6, Chapter 5, Para 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Book 5, Chapter 10, Para 5.

18. Who is verse 4 addressing? Who are God's people?
19. What are they supposed to leave?
  - Babylon, Jerusalem
20. Why are they supposed to leave?
  - so they do not share in the plagues coming upon Jerusalem
21. Why should she be paid double for her sins?
22. Why is Jerusalem so confident? (v. 7)
23. What do you think of when you read verses 9-10?
24. Look at the list of luxuries in verses 11-13. Does it seem believable that all this stuff was sold in Jerusalem?
25. Is there any evidence elsewhere in the Bible that there was a slave trade in Jerusalem?
26. Don't verses 15-17 seem melodramatic?
27. What new group is shown mourning in verses 17-19?
28. Who is addressed in verse 20?
29. Verses 21-24 are the final crescendo of this lament, in which all sorts of inhabitants are named and declared abandoned. The last line of verse 23 says, "all nations were deceived by your sorcery." What was Jerusalem's sorcery?
30. Verse 24 sums up Jerusalem's crimes. A vicious murderer must face a violent death.
31. All the earth has fornicated with Babylon, and merchants have enriched themselves by her luxury. Here, as throughout scripture, sexual immorality is a metaphor for spiritual unfaithfulness. Jerusalem rejected Jesus and worshiped the false god of Rome. She sought salvation by her own works.

This is spiritual immorality. Then she seduced the whole world to follow her. She must die for her crimes. Jerusalem also grew rich through her false worship. For this also she must die.

32. Now let's put together everything that we've been studying so far. Soon after Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the church, the Jews began persecuting God's people. First they arrested and threatened Peter and John. Then they imprisoned and whipped the apostles. Then they killed Stephen. From then on the Jews maintained a campaign of persecution and murder against believers in Jesus. The book of Acts tells us how Saul was authorized to go all the way to Damascus to hunt down believers and haul them back to Jerusalem to be tried. All the way to the end the Jews persecuted and killed the believers.

Meanwhile the Romans began to join the fray. Christians were having a harder time with Rome as time went on, but when Nero came to the throne persecution moved into high gear. Among his atrocities Nero accused Christians of setting the fire that destroyed Rome in A.D. 64. He used this as a pretext to persecute believers and deflect criticism from himself. Nero was a sadist who entertained his dinner guests with torches made of the bodies of Christians. By the mid A.D. 60s Christians were dying all over the empire. This is the harvest. The cruelty of Rome and Jerusalem was simultaneously the loving care of Jesus as He welcomed home his conquering heroes.

Then in A.D. 68 Nero committed suicide. Without a clear successor, the empire was plunged into chaos. Armies fought back and forth as competing generals battled to gain the throne. A.D. 68-69 is known as "the year of four emperors" as Galba, Otho, and Vitellius struggled for supremacy. No one alive had ever known anything but peace in the empire. Now the empire appeared to be collapsing. Surely this was the end of the world. But in A.D. 69 the empire miraculously came back to life. Vespasian came to the throne and ruled for ten years. He restored peace, and solidified the emperor's grip on power. This is the head wound that was healed, described in chapter 13:3.

Meanwhile sometime in A.D. 62-64 the Jews finished the temple in Jerusalem. Convinced that they now had the power to overcome the hated Romans, they revolted in A.D. 66. The result was complete disaster. After

a terrible siege, the Romans armies broke into the city, butchered the people, burned the temple, and destroyed everything. Satan planned this great battle, bringing Jew and Roman together to annihilate the church. Instead the land beast and the sea beast turned on each other. The hatred and power which was assembled against God was redirected against God's enemies. The Jews brought God's wrath upon Rome, and Rome brought God's wrath upon Jerusalem. And that was the end.

For 2,000 years people have read Revelation as though John were writing specifically to them. He was not, of course. John wrote to first century Christians to encourage them and strengthen their faith for the difficulties that lay ahead.

The last bowl was the end of the plagues. It was the end of God's wrath against those murderers who had persecuted the church. It was also the end of John's world. He, and all the apostles, and everyone in the world had recognized the temple in Jerusalem as a particularly holy place. Even the Romans revered it until the Jewish revolt. Now the temple was burned and Jerusalem was destroyed. It is impossible for us to grasp the magnitude of this devastation. It was the equivalent of a nuclear explosion on Washington D.C. But even more profoundly, this was the end of the Old Covenant.

After the seventh bowl sacrifices were never again offered to God. For 40 years Old Covenant religion overlapped with the New Covenant. Even the apostles prayed in the temple in Jerusalem while preaching the gospel of Jesus. Meanwhile God had occupied his new temple, the church. Now the old temple is gone, and all that remains is the church. But indeed this ushers in a new beginning, which is the topic of the last two chapters of Revelation.

33. The application of this chapter is found in verse 4-5. "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities." Come out of Babylon. The whore's sins are great, and she will die. Leave her while there is time to escape.

The early Christians did this literally, in obedience to Jesus' command. Listen to Matthew 24:15-18.

So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place ( let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.

By the time the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem in A.D. 69 there were no Christians in the city. They all had left.

Smart move. It doesn't take a genius to figure that it's best to flee a city doomed to destruction. The Christians had left, but what about the rest of Jerusalem's inhabitants? When they heard the warning, why didn't they take precautions? When they saw the armies assembling, why didn't they also flee? Why? Because they were seduced. They were intoxicated by the allurements of Babylon, the playgirl of Revelation. Jerusalem was so beautiful, so fun, so rich, so holy, no one could believe she would fall to pagan Romans.

Intimidation, confusion, seduction – Satan's three strategies to destroy the church. Satan is stronger and more crafty than you. You cannot beat him in a battle of strength or wits. On your own, you will cave in to Satan's overpowering fear. You are not strong enough or brave enough to survive his attacks. On your own, you will become lost in the fog of confusion. You are not smart enough to see clearly through his twisted lies. On your own, you will be lured into bed by the irresistible seductress. You are not good enough to resist.

But Jesus rules Satan like a cat with a mouse. You must cling to Jesus. Do not trust your own wisdom. Do not trust your own will power. Do not trust your good works. You, by yourself, are entirely untrustworthy. But Jesus is always faithful. See the filthiness behind the charms of false religions. Be disgusted by the whore. Love Jesus, and be infatuated with His love. Amen.

**Lesson 18**  
***Celebration!***  
 Revelation 19:1-10

*Main Point: Glory*

*Main App:*

1. I suppose most of us here were not alive on May 8, 1945. On that day and for many days afterward wild celebrations broke out all over the world. From Moscow to Los Angeles people threw down their work and thronged the streets in exuberant joy. And what was the cause of this rejoicing? It was the fall of the 1,000 Year Reich. After four horrible, brutal years, Germany surrendered to the Allied Forces in Europe. Fifty million people lay dead, cities were a smouldering ruin, but the war in Europe was over.

What do you think about this? What would you have done had you been there? Think about it – 50 million people dead, cities bombed to the ground, a whole continent in ruins. Is this something to celebrate? What was there to celebrate on May 8, 1945?

2. If you think the end of Hitler's murderous rule was worth celebrating, well enough. But still, what about the casualties? Isn't it barbaric to celebrate when 50 million corpses lay rotting in the fields?
3. Today we're going to read the reaction to the saints when Babylon fell. Last week we read the lament over Babylon, Revelation 18. Before that, Babylon was introduced to us in chapter 17 as the luscious prostitute riding a scarlet beast.
4. Who is Babylon, the prostitute?
  - the Jewish religious establishment, represented by Jerusalem
5. Who is the scarlet beast?
  - gentile power, the Roman Empire
6. What was the relationship between Jerusalem and Rome?
  - Rome supported and protected Jerusalem, Jerusalem offered sacrifices and prayers for Rome

7. What did Rome and Jerusalem have in common? What shared goal did they have?
  - hated Christians, persecuted the saints
8. But at the end of chapter 17 we saw that the scarlet beast will turn on the prostitute and devour her. In other words, there would come a day when Rome would destroy Jerusalem. Last week we sketched out the historical timeline of these events. What was the date when Rome destroyed Jerusalem?
  - A.D. 70
9. What made Rome do this? I thought Rome and Jerusalem were allies against Christians.
  - the Jews revolted against Rome in A.D. 66
10. So in A.D. 70 the Roman legions under Titus turned Jerusalem into a rubbish heap. This was the fall of Babylon. Last week we listed two crimes which brought this disaster upon Jerusalem. What were they?
  - unfaithfulness to God (spiritual adultery)
  - murdering the servants of God (Christians)
11. How were the Jews unfaithful to God? They kept the law and offered sacrifices in the temple.
  - they killed Jesus, God in the flesh. They rejected the true gospel of Jesus and embraced a false gospel of salvation by works
12. People have a hard time understanding the rejection of the Jews, but it's really very simple. They killed Jesus! Then they refused to repent. They killed Jesus' followers and tried to subvert the gospel. They substituted a false gospel for the truth of salvation. That means that they were actively leading people to hell. It didn't matter that they kept the law and offered sacrifices in the temple. It's as if you tortured your wife and killed her children. It wouldn't matter that you are still "faithfully" married to her. It would be a sham marriage. That's what the faithfulness of these Jews was. They pretended to serve God, but it was a vicious lie.
13. So last week we read the lament over Babylon. If the Jews were such awful people, why should we be sad to see them destroyed? Why is there a whole chapter in Revelation sorrowing over the fall of this wicked city?

14. Who was sorrowful for the fall of Babylon?
  - kings, merchants, shipmasters and sailors, craftsmen
15. Why were these people sorrowful for the fall of Jerusalem?
  - they profited by her prosperity
16. So now we come to today's passage. Today we will see how the saints respond to the fall of Jerusalem.
17. Let's read Revelation 19:1-5.
18. The kings, merchants, and craftsmen were horrified at the fall of Jerusalem. How did these people react?
19. Who is speaking in this passage?
  - great multitude, 24 elders, 4 living creatures, throne
20. Where did they come from?
  - some at least were the saints that were harvested during the persecution (Revelation 6:9; 11:7-8; 13:7; 14:1-5, 14-20)
21. Why were they so excited? What made them rejoice so much?
  - justice was done, vengeance was rendered (v. 2)
22. OK, now let's think about this. Isn't this a pretty mean way to behave? There were a lot of innocent women and children in there. We should be sad, rather than joyful – don't you think?
23. Furthermore, if we rejoice in violence, doesn't that make us just as bad as the Romans and the Jews who used violence against the Christians?
24. Let's keep reading. Read Revelation 19:6-10.
25. Now why is the multitude rejoicing?
  - the Lord reigns
  - the marriage of the Lamb has come
26. What does it mean that the Lord reigns? Hasn't God been reigning from

the beginning of creation? The Bible sure makes it seem that way.

27. Let's talk about the marriage of the Lamb. Who is the Lamb?
  - Jesus
28. Who is the bride?
  - the saints, the church
29. (What are the Bride's clothes?)
  - righteous deed of the saints
30. (So who then would the Bride be?)
  - the saints
31. What would it mean that the marriage of Jesus and the church is now ready? Let's begin by discussing what it means for Jesus to be married to the church.
32. Was Jesus not married to the church before the fall of Jerusalem? What was the relationship before this?
33. "And they lived happily ever after." Isn't that how every fairy tale ends? When all hope is lost, the gallant young prince dashes up to rescue the beautiful princess from the clutches of some evil villain. The reason these stories resonate so deeply within us and are found in every culture is that they are versions of the real fairy tale. All of history is the story of a beautiful princess rescued from a villain by a handsome prince.

The story began back in the Garden of Eden. It was paradise. God had created a splendid world full of delights for the man and woman, but evil lurked, and one day the serpent struck and attacked the princess of the earth. The prince had been appointed to guard the garden, but instead of driving out the serpent, he watched as it seduced his bride. Eve sinned first, then Adam sinned, and no one lived happily ever after. Into this heart-rending tragedy God appeared, and promised to rescue them by a child the woman would bear. Ever since, all women have been looking for their prince charming and all men have been striving to rescue their bride. But every story ends prematurely. The prince's rescue is never a complete success, and the princess is never completely faithful to her prince. Every

story is a partial failure, because they both need a savior.

Abraham was a prince among men, and Sarah was the beauty that kings fought over. But Abraham allowed Sarah to be captured, and Sarah struggled to believe in God. Jacob worked seven years for his beloved, and got her sister instead! David circumcised 200 Philistines involuntarily and gave their foreskins to Saul as a dowry for Michal, but she despised David for worshipping the Lord. All these true stories of the Bible are examples of the longing for the fairy tale to come true, and proof that it never does.

When God sent prophets to warn Israel about her sin and call her to repentance, they often used marriage as a metaphor to show God's relationship with His people. Isaiah opened his prophecy crying out, "How the faithful city has become a whore!" (Isaiah 1:21) Jeremiah spoke even more strongly against Israel.

You have played the whore with many lovers; and would you return to me? declares the LORD. Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see! Where have you not been ravished? By the waysides you have sat awaiting lovers like an Arab in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your vile whoredom. (Jeremiah 3:1-2)

God commanded the prophet Hosea to marry an adulteress to illustrate His relationship with Israel. Predictably, Hosea's wife ran away and prostituted herself with other men. Here is how God promises to respond to faithless Israel for whoring with other men.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. "And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Master.'" (Hosea 2:14-16)

This beautiful passage is the promise that there will come a day when the prince will succeed in rescuing the princess for good, and the princess will remain faithful forever. And now we come to the end of history and see that the fairy tale does come true. Finally there is a happily ever after.

Today's passage shows a fantastic celebration. It is the wedding of the king! All of heaven and earth are in a tizzy – everyone is busy getting ready for the great day. Never in the history of the world has anything like this happened – when God took His bride for His own!

This is a doubly festive occasion, for it follows the long, hard war against deadly rebels. It was a pitched battle that dragged on for decades. Two horrible monsters led the rebels as they fought in cities all over the empire. Thousands of faithful soldiers died for their Lord as the monsters chased the bride from place to place. By the end the bride was torn, stripped naked, beaten into unconsciousness. The real beauty of the realm was Babylon, a woman bred for the throne with looks to die for. Until the end she appeared to be the one who would win the hand of the king. But just when the bride breathed her last, the king arrived and turned the battle. He routed the rebels and captured the monsters, who at the last minute had killed Babylon, the secret collaborator. Then He bent down and breathed new life into His bride with His kiss. She was dirty, beaten, and half-dead – not at all the stunning beauty like Babylon. But the king loved her. He gently washed her, fed her, clothed her, and told her that, tattered as she was, He still loved her more than all the beauties, all the treasures of all the earth.

Now look, the bride appears in radiant glory! You could never imagine that the woman battered by the monsters could shine so. She is still the same woman, but her flaws are covered by brilliant clothing. Now she comes as queen, beside the Lamb her husband. She who was so despised on earth is now the queen of heaven! All heaven and earth are rejoicing in the marriage of God and man!

What do these things symbolize, and when shall they happen? The marriage of the Lamb happened when Babylon was destroyed and the monsters put to flight. By A.D. 70 the church was in ruins. Most of the apostles had been killed along with thousands of Christians. Those who had survived were hiding in cities, towns, and the countryside to escape the murderous Jews and Romans. Early in the decade of the 60s they had obeyed Jesus' commands and fled Jerusalem. They came out of Babylon and escaped her destruction. When the dust settled, Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple burned, and all that remained was the half-dead church. Jesus

resurrected the church from these ruins and began rebuilding the new temple He had begun at Pentecost.

Following the wedding metaphor, Jesus was betrothed to the church during His earthly ministry. When He ascended to the Father, He sent wedding gifts to the church – notably the Holy Spirit. But the wedding had to be postponed while the monsters and whore were dealt with. When they were out of the way, the wedding was held and the marriage completed. This means that our relationship to Jesus is much closer than anyone had previously experienced. This is part of what Jesus meant when He said that the one who is least in the Kingdom is greater than John the Baptist.

Now that we are married to Jesus we have free us access to His house. Before you marry someone you may visit him, but you do not live with him until the wedding. Until this point God’s people were visitors to His house. They were *welcome* visitors, and they were far better off than everyone else on earth who was barred from approaching God. But now we have moved in! Did you notice a gradual shift in the description of heaven in Revelation? In chapter 4:1, the beginning of the visions of the future, John enters through a doorway into heaven. Then in chapter 11:19 the temple in heaven was opened, allowing further access to God. In chapter 15:5 the sanctuary was opened. Now in 19:11 all heaven is open. The church is now the queen of heaven, and all heaven is open to her. Now Psalm 27 is fulfilled.

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD  
and to inquire in his temple.

Psalm 27:4

34. Last week someone raised a question about how we’ve been viewing the Jews, if we don’t sound anti-Semitic. This is an important question. It’s not important because it is so hard to answer, but because it is so common. When we say that Revelation is about the persecution of Christians by Jews, and God’s subsequent destruction of Jerusalem, some people impulsively link this to the Nazi holocaust. No! We are saying nothing remotely related to the Nazi holocaust, or any persecution of the Jews. Let’s consider four reasons why our interpretation of Revelation has noth-

ing to do with Jewish persecution.

First, in our interpretation Revelation is about the first century. We believe that leaders of the Jewish nation in the first century turned against Jesus and persecuted His followers, and that God destroyed them for it. Most of them died in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. They're dead! Their behavior has nothing to do with Jews of the second, third, 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. God judged the first century offenders, and that is the end of it. This has no direct bearing on Jews or anyone else in subsequent generations.

Second, as Christians we accept the teaching of Jesus about turning the other cheek. We do not pursue vengeance against our enemies. Quite the opposite, we are instructed to pray for our enemies. Jesus Himself set the example by praying for those who killed Him, and by offering no resistance to them when they came after Him. This is exactly what you see in Revelation. Chapter after chapter shows the suffering and death of the saints, but never do we see the saints resisting their enemies. Vengeance, when it comes, comes from other unbelievers. So today, Christians ought to seek the welfare of all people. It is always wrong to persecute others. Christians ought to stand up for the rights and dignity of Jews and all religions and races. All scripture teaches this, and Revelation does not contradict it.

Third, the warfare of the church is spiritual, not marital. The church does indeed make war against her enemies. But as we've seen repeatedly, their sword is the sword of the Spirit, the words which come from the mouth of Jesus. By the gospel we make war against our enemies. Conquest means conversion, as we spiritually kill unbelief and raise men and women to new life through the power of the gospel. Physical death, when it occurs, happens to us Christians. In this war for the planet, Christians raise others to new life, while we die in the process. This is the exact opposite of jihad, in which enemies die physically if they do not convert.

Fourth, Christians, like God, do not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, but we do rejoice in justice. And in the case of the viciously wicked, death is the only thing that stops them. The first century Jews were so deeply wicked that nothing would stop them but total destruction. This is very seldom the case in history. World War II is another example

of evil so deep that all the forces of the earth had to be marshaled to overcome it, but ordinary police action is usually sufficient to keep evil in check.

On this last point, people get confused about the subject of discussion. They know some Jewish people. They are good neighbors, friendly colleagues, smart businessmen, decent politicians – and they think of these people when we talk thus about the Jews in Revelation. Huge, huge mistake. The Jews in Revelation were like Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Idi Amin – murderous, treacherous animals. Last week we read some eye-witness testimony about how depraved these people were. Here is another excerpt from the first century Jewish historian Josephus about a high-class woman – an example of the best of that generation.

“There was a certain woman...eminent for her family and her wealth, and had fled away to Jerusalem with the rest of the multitude, and was with them besieged therein at this time. The other effects of this woman had been already seized upon, such I mean as she had brought with her out of Perea, and removed to the city. What she had treasured up besides, as also what food she had contrived to save, had been also carried off by the rapacious guards, who came every day running into her house for that purpose. This put the poor woman into a very great passion, and by the frequent reproaches and imprecations she cast at these rapacious villains, she had provoked them to anger against her; but none of them, either out of the indignation she had raised against herself, or out of commiseration of her case, would take away her life; and if she found any food, she perceived her labors were for others, and not for herself; and it was now become impossible for her any way to find any more food, while the famine pierced through her very bowels and marrow, when also her passion was fired to a degree beyond the famine itself; nor did she consult with any thing but with her passion and the necessity she was in. She then attempted a most unnatural thing; and snatching up her son, who was a child sucking at her breast, she said, ‘O thou miserable infant! for whom shall I preserve thee in this war, this famine, and this sedition? As to the war with the Romans, if they preserve our lives, we must be slaves. This famine also will destroy us, even before that slavery comes upon us. Yet are these seditious rogues more terrible than both the other. Come on; be thou my food, and be thou a fury to these seditious varlets, and a by-word to the world, which is all that is now wanting to complete the calamities

of us Jews.’ As soon as she had said this, she slew her son, and then roasted him, and eat the one half of him, and kept the other half by her concealed. Upon this the seditious came in presently, and smelling the horrid scent of this food, they threatened her that they would cut her throat immediately if she did not show them what food she had gotten ready. She replied that she had saved a very fine portion of it for them, and withal uncovered what was left of her son. Hereupon they were seized with a horror and amazement of mind, and stood astonished at the sight, when she said to them, ‘This is mine own son, and what hath been done was mine own doing! Come, eat of this food; for I have eaten of it myself! Do not you pretend to be either more tender than a woman, or more compassionate than a mother; but if you be so scrupulous, and do abominate this my sacrifice, as I have eaten the one half, let the rest be reserved for me also.’ After which those men went out trembling, being never so much affrighted at any thing as they were at this, and with some difficulty they left the rest of that meat to the mother. Upon which the whole city was full of this horrid action immediately; and while every body laid this miserable case before their own eyes, they trembled, as if this unheard of action had been done by themselves. So those that were thus distressed by the famine were very desirous to die, and those already dead were esteemed happy, because they had not lived long enough either to hear or to see such miseries.”<sup>12</sup>

I think that even our Jewish friends would agree that such people, whatever their religion or nationality, must be stopped. Revelation is not against Jews. It is against terminal wickedness wherever it is found.

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<sup>12</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, trans. by William Whiston (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2850/2850-h/2850-h.htm>) Accessed 12/27/2014; Book 6, Chapter 3, Para 4.

## Lesson 19

### *Battle*

Revelation 19:11-21

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. What did we decide last week? Is it OK to celebrate the death of the wicked?
2. If you say “yes,” people are going to ask you about Jesus’ command to turn the other cheek. How do you reconcile these two ideas?
3. We’ve been presenting the book of Revelation as viewing the Jews as the enemies of the church, and that the fall of Babylon was the destruction of Jerusalem. How is this not anti-Semitic?
4. We identified four reasons why our interpretation of Revelation is not anti-Semitic. First, Revelation is about the first century, It in no way provides a pattern for how we should treat Jews now. Second, Christians are called to turn the other cheek and do good to our enemies. Even if Jewish people persecute us, we are not permitted to mistreat them in return. Third, spiritual warfare consists of preaching the gospel, If anyone gets hurt, it is Christians, not our opponents. And fourth, these first century Jews were so unbelievably wicked, any sane person would be glad to see them killed.
5. We’ve come to the end of the story. The next three chapters tell us about the future – John’s future, and partly ours. So let’s recap where we are.

Our best understanding is that Revelation was written early in the A.D. 60s. You might wonder why this is so hard to determine. It’s hard to get accurate data on the *Odyssey* and *Beowulf* because they were written at times and in societies where written literature was scarce and records were not kept. But the Roman Empire in the first century was a well-run operation. The library at Alexandria was well-stocked with all the important literature of the time, and Plato’s Academy in Athens had an abundance of manuscripts. A century earlier Caesar wrote his *Gallic Wars*, and we don’t have trouble locating them with some precision on a calendar.

The difference with the New Testament manuscripts is that soon after they were written, persecution ramped up and the church was under enormous pressure. Many manuscripts were burned. Christians were running for their lives, and in those circumstances it is easy to forget exactly when these things happened. By A.D. 70 most, if not all, of the apostles were dead, along with many of the other early leaders of the church. We see this in Revelation. The church is the double witness which was killed, but came back to life. The first believers were the grain and grape harvest killed in Nero's persecution. In all this turmoil a lot of oral history was lost. When the dust settled after the fall of Jerusalem, Jesus brought the church back to life, but with essentially new leaders.

6. Revelation was written early in the decade of A.D. 60 to a church which was undergoing increasing persecution. Jews and gentiles all over the empire had heard the gospel and believed it. They thrilled to the message of salvation from sin, the wonder of God become man to make man like God, the hope of eternal life. They experienced in their own lives the power of the Holy Spirit. They enjoyed the fellowship of other believers. They had been brought out of darkness into light!

But slowly things began to change. Year by year life became more difficult for Christians. The Jews sowed discord among the believers, and rallied the Romans against them. Christians began to be arrested and tortured. Then Nero came to the throne, and things got really ugly. These new converts began to think longingly about the safety and glory of worship in the temple in Jerusalem. As Paul had warned in his letters, people began to abandon the faith and turn to those who had a more pleasant and comforting message.

This was the context for the book of Hebrews. That author explains that the glory of Jerusalem is nothing compared to the glory of heaven, and that when we worship Jesus, we experience heavenly glory. That experience is by faith, for we cannot see it – but it is real nevertheless. At the same time Jesus sent this Revelation to John to help the church to persevere through persecutions that were hard, and about to get harder.

7. The central message of Revelation is that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus rules heaven and earth. Not only does Jesus know and control what happens on earth, He even planned it. First we are given a pic-

ture of who is sending this message. It is Jesus, your savior and warrior. Jesus is the terminator who patrols the earth to kill His enemies and protect His church. Then we are shown the reason for this message – seven churches under extreme pressure. For each one the urgent exhortation is to conquer. This book will help them do that. Then Jesus showed us that everything that is going to happen was planned from the beginning. God has not lost control. Satan is not destroying the church. As Jesus opened the seven seals, He revealed chapter by chapter God’s plan for the decades following the enthronement of Jesus. It was not a pretty sight. These are going to be rough times. Then Jesus showed us through seven trumpets that He will warn the earth of the coming judgment before it happens. The trumpet warnings are the ministry of the apostles and pastors of the churches during the period A.D. 30-70. Then Jesus showed us through the seven bowls that He will follow through and bring upon the earth the terrible judgements He predicted. Along the way, Jesus introduced us to the main figures in this drama, and showed us their true character. The Roman Empire was not only an efficient government, but had become a vicious beast. Judea was not only the land of Jewish people and the location of the magnificent temple, but it also had become a vicious beast. Year after year they persecuted the church to the point where they almost succeeded in killing it. That is the point at which Jesus intervened and brought the judgment He predicted.

For the first century church, they needed to hear that Jesus was in control, their death is precious in His sight, He will destroy their enemies, and the church will ultimately triumph. With this hope secure, those seven beleaguered churches would have the courage to overcome their enemies and conquer the beasts who seek to kill them. And of course everything happened just as Jesus said it would. Nero almost killed the church, Jesus killed Nero, and Titus destroyed Jerusalem. From then on persecutions would come and go, but never again would two beasts as dangerous as Rome and Jerusalem be able to kill the church.

8. The rest of Revelation fills in some details and provides a glimpse of the future. But be careful how we think about this. The future for John’s original audience might be the past or the present for us!
9. Last week we saw two celebrations. We already talked about the celebration over the fall of Babylon. What was the other celebration?

10. If the fall of Babylon was a symbol for the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and the wedding feast of the Lamb happened after that, what was the relationship between Jesus and the bride from Pentecost to A.D. 70?
11. Scripture teaches us that there is one people of God, one church, from Adam to the return of Christ. But as history unfolds, that church takes different institutional forms. In the time of Abraham, the church took the form of Abraham's household. There were people outside Abraham's household who worshiped Yahweh God, but prayers and sacrifices were offered by Abraham. Later the church took to form of a tribal federation ruled by priests in a tent. Then the church existed within the nation of Israel, and prayers and sacrifices were offered in the temple.

God loved His people. He loved them like a husband loves His wife. And when Israel went astray, it was as if she committed adultery against her husband. Like the prophet Hosea, God pursued faithless Israel into the wilderness and brought her back home. From the return from exile in Babylon until the coming of Christ, the church existed among the Jewish remnant of Israel. As before, there were worshipers of the true God who were not Jewish, but the prayers and sacrifices were offered in the temple in Jerusalem.

Israel went astray again, but this time there was no possibility of reconciliation. Not content merely to fornicate with another lover, this time she killed her husband. Putting Jesus to death was the end for the Jews as the people of God. When Jesus died the Holy Spirit left the temple, and when Jesus rose from the dead, He sent His Spirit into the new temple, the assembly of those who believe in Him. The new temple is not identified by a building, but by believers gathered by pastors around the gospel and the Lord's Supper. This church in its new form is now the bride of Christ.

The forty years from Pentecost to the fall of Jerusalem was the New Testament equivalent of Israel's 40 years in the desert. This was the time of testing, in which the new church was formed. The apostles organized assemblies all over the known world, trained pastors, elders, and deacons, and wrote the New Testament. The Lamb was engaged to the bride, but a lot had to be done to prepare for the wedding. By A.D. 70 everything was ready. The foundation of the church was laid. The temple in Jerusalem

could be destroyed because the new temple was complete. The wedding feast began.

12. Let's read Revelation 19:11-16.
13. This passage begins, "Then." Remember that Revelation is not narrative literature. It is a picture book, not a chronologically sequential story. Some pictures follow each other in time, but not all do. When John says, "Then I saw," what he means is that this is the next picture that he saw, not that it was necessarily about an event to follow what he was just talking about.
14. What is the first thing that John saw in this next vision?
  - a white horse
15. What did he see next?
  - a rider
16. Why would he mention the horse first? Don't you think that the rider is more important than the horse?
17. Let's talk about the rider. How is he described? (vv. 11-13)
18. Who is this?
  - Jesus
19. Why is Jesus described by these terms?
20. How does this picture compare to the one in Revelation chapter 1?
21. What impression does this picture convey?
22. What are the armies of heaven? (v. 14)
  - believers
23. Which Old Testament passages does verse 15 echo?
  - Psalm 2, Isaiah 64
24. What is the mission of this rider?

25. What role do the armies play in this mission?
26. What is the time frame for this vision? When does this take place?
27. Read Revelation 19:17-21.
28. Here we have another supper. How does this compare to the one earlier in the chapter?
29. Which beast is this in verse 20?
  - Rome
30. Who is the false prophet?
  - the Jews
31. Look at verse 20. What earlier passage in Revelation does this point to?
  - 13:12-14; 16:13-14
32. Who do those passages indicate the false prophet might be?
33. What does it mean that the beast and the false prophet were thrown alive into the lake of fire?
34. If the beast is Rome and the false prophet is Jerusalem, is this a retelling of the final bowl, the fall of Babylon?
35. If this is a retelling of the fall of Babylon, what more do we learn about that event here?
36. We are inevitably drawn to think that the second half of this chapter is about things that follow the marriage of the Lamb, because it follows it in the text. But by the time we get to the end of the chapter, it begins to appear that it is a recapitulation of the fall of Babylon. I think that the purpose of this passage is to provide more details about the fall of Jerusalem – details which will help us to understand chapter 20.

But verses 11-16 are timeless. Jesus has been battling Satan from the beginning and will continue until He returns. And He has always been

assisted by the armies of heaven. This phrase, the armies of heaven, does not refer to angels, or to creatures who dwell in heaven. Similarly, in the Civil War, the Army of the Potomac did not consist of a school of trout, nor was it a company of Navy Seals who fought under water. It was an ordinary group of soldiers who took their identity from the Potomac River. They fought in that vicinity, but more important, they were under the command of the commander on the Potomac, President Lincoln. The armies of heaven are ordinary men and women who are identified as heavenly people, and who are under the command of heaven. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and Daniel were commanders of the armies of heaven. In the first century the apostles led the armies of heaven. Today Pastor Stone, John Kinyon, Tim Keller, and other pastors are leaders of the armies of heaven. And we Christians are those armies.

37. The application of today's passage is to join the battle. Scripture does not call you to join the army of heaven. You're either in or you're not. If you place your faith in Jesus, you are a member of the army of heaven. The challenge is to be a good soldier. Some soldiers are new recruits and need more training. Some are wounded and need healing. Some are lazy and insubordinate, and need harsh discipline. And some are AWOL.

You are a soldier in the army of heaven. Remember, this is not a war of swords and guns. It is a spiritual battle, and is fought with spiritual weapons. You are called to fight with the gospel, with deeds of righteousness, with prayer. As in any army, there are hundreds of different roles. Not everyone is an evangelist or a teacher. But everyone must serve. You can serve by coming to morning prayer here in the church each morning. You can serve by teaching Sunday School. Some of you sing in the choir. Some of you have been active in this neighborhood. Many ordinary activities contribute to the spiritual battle when you do them with prayer, talk about Jesus, and participate with a desire to glorify Christ. There are many ways to serve as a soldier in the army of heaven. Only do not go AWOL, and seek training to serve with greater effectiveness.

- 38.

**Lesson 20**  
***Millennium***  
Revelation 20:1-6

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. We're coming to the end of Revelation, and it's important that we take away a basic understanding of this book.
2. When was Revelation written?
  - A.D. 60s
3. Who was the audience?
  - first century Christians suffering persecution
4. Why was it written?
  - To encourage those persecuted Christians to stand firm in their faith
5. Who was persecuting the Christians in the first century?
  - Romans and Jews
6. What is the basic message, the theme of Revelation?
  - Jesus reigns! He will defeat all His enemies.
7. How did that theme speak to its original audience?
  - They could be confident that God was in control, even though it appeared that the world was falling apart, and He will care for His people.
8. How does that theme speak to us today?
  - We also can be confident that God is in control, even when it appears that the world is falling apart, and He will care for us.
9. Revelation reveals Jesus in all His power and glory. It shows us that God planned everything from the beginning, that He warned people of judgment to come, and that He would certainly destroy His enemies. Seven bowls reveal the plan, seven trumpets announce the warnings, and seven bowls bring the judgment. Along the way we are introduced to the main

characters in this drama, and enlightened as to their real character. So Jesus assured the first century Christians that the deadly enemies from Jerusalem and Rome would be destroyed. Sure enough, in A.D. 70 the Jews and Romans tore into each other, and they were never again a deadly threat to the church. There were Roman persecutions for two more centuries, but not as dangerous as the first.

10. In the next three chapters Jesus shows us what will happen after the disaster of A.D. 70. This is the part of Revelation shows the distant future. But beware! A future which is distant to first century dwellers might be past to us.
11. We begin with the millennium, the 1,000 year reign of Christ – a topic which has sparked fierce debate. For an issue which separates Christians and divides the church, you would think that it would be central to the scripture, but in fact it is found only here in these few verses of Revelation. Perhaps you saw the *Left Behind* movie, or read the books. A generation ago the book by Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, was wildly popular. American Christianity is infused with ideas about a coming tribulation and a 1,000 year reign of Christ to follow, and I am sure most of us here have friends who have strong opinions about this. But as I said, it is curious that such a groundswell of enthusiasm can be based on such little evidence.
12. Since this is a hotly debated topic, I am going to begin by briefly describing the three main views you will hear. There are many variations, but all I can do here is provide a basic outline of the three main views. Each view is named according to when Jesus will return relative to the millennium. First, the most currently popular view is the **premillennial**. This view is that Jesus will return to earth in His human body *before* a thousand year reign, and then the final judgment will come. The **postmillennial** view is that Christians will reign for 1,000 years on earth, and *after* that Jesus will return in His human body for the final judgment. The **amillennial** view is that there is *no* literal period of 1,000 years.

The premillennial view was held by some heretical groups in the second century, but died out until it came roaring back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This view was popularized by the *Scofield Reference Bible*, and is central to Dispensational theology. Most of the church for most of its history has

held to some variation of the postmillennial or amillennial position. The Puritans and their offspring tended toward postmillennialism, but two world wars led most Americans to conclude that postmillennialism is naively optimistic. Most Reformed people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century held to the amillennial view. I think as we look at the actual text, we will see that neither view is entirely satisfactory. But before I bore you any further, let's look now at our text.

13. Let's read Revelation 20:1-6.
14. This is not the first time we've seen the bottomless pit. What did we learn about it previously?
  - The abyss, where the demons are kept
  - Like a Middle Eastern cistern, no hope of escape, despair
15. Who did the angel throw into the bottomless pit?
  - Satan
16. What do we learn about Satan in this passage?
  - He is the dragon, the serpent, the devil
17. What did the angel do with the chain?
  - Bind Satan
18. So is this describing the death of Satan? Is he gone for good?
  - No
19. What can Satan do now?
  - Intimidate, deceive
20. How long is Satan in the bottomless pit?
  - 1,000 years
21. Ah, now we're getting to the millennium! Now if this is describing what happened after the fall of Jerusalem, 1,000 years is up already. But if you're thinking about counting 1,000 years, you're forgetting one of our fundamental principles of interpretation. Revelation is a picture book, and the pictures all mean something. They are symbols. The dragon, the beasts, Babylon – these are all symbols. Now here we come to a thousand

year period, and why would anyone think they should count to 1,000? It makes no sense. But if 1,000 is a symbol, what does it symbolize?

- a very long time

22. One of the easiest places to see this is in Psalm 50:10. Let's read that.

23. Now does anyone really think that God owns the cattle on exactly 1,000 hills? What about the 1,001<sup>st</sup> hill? It's obvious that this is a symbol for vast ownership. You see this all over the Bible. There are of course some places where people and things are counted. But round numbers like seven and twelve and forty and 1,000 often have symbolic value.

People strain at this because they don't stop to think about how we use language. If I asked, "Will Jim produce another Christmas program next year?" and you said, "Now that's a \$64,000 question," we both know what you mean. No one thinks we are going to count thousand dollar bills. It's a figure of speech for a large uncertainty. Did you see that the value of the Swiss franc jumped 30% last week? How will that affect the financial markets? That's also a \$64,000 question, isn't it? But already some brokerages have lost millions, a few are bankrupt. Does that mean that this is a million dollar question because the values are so high? Silly boy! It's just a figure of speech. We can apply it to any extremely large uncertainty, regardless of the number of countable objects.

When 1,000 is used in the poetic and apocalyptic parts of the Bible, it is a figure of speech for vastness. Trying to count the years is silly.

24. So during this thousand years what happens? (vv. 2-6)

- Satan is bound, saints reigned

25. Verse four shows us thrones. Who sits on a throne?

- a king, ruler

26. Who sits on these thrones?

- those with authority

27. Who has authority to judge?

- elders

28. John saw two other groups of people. Who were they?
  - those beheaded, those who had not worshiped the beast
29. What does it mean that they came to life? And reigned for 1,000 years?
30. This is the first resurrection. What is the second resurrection?
31. Verse six introduces the second death. What is that? What is the first death?
32. I am personally less acquainted with the first and second death and resurrection, but I gather from my reading that these also are vigorously argued.
33. Let's see if we can put all this together. What are the features of this thousand year period?
  - It is an extremely long era
  - Satan is chained and imprisoned
  - Christ reigns
  - Christians reign with Him
  - Christians will be priests of God and Christ

Let's begin with the easiest point. Christ reigns. When does this happen? Jesus claimed after His resurrection that all authority in heaven and on earth was given to Him. This is such a foundational point, let's read Matthew 28:18 to fix this in our minds.

Then we have in Acts chapter one Jesus ascending into heaven – a scene which appears to be an act of enthronement. Jesus didn't go to heaven just to cuddle with His Father! Paul clearly thinks that Jesus was reigning, for he said in 1 Corinthians 15:25, "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." In fact, nothing in the New Testament makes sense unless Jesus is presently reigning. And as we've seen, certainly that is the foundational perspective of Revelation. For starters, we can conclude that any interpretation which postpones Jesus' reign until the distant future is hopelessly wrong.

Now the question is how Jesus exercises His rule. Obviously Jesus is not here on earth physically. Clearly Jesus is ruling from His throne in heav-

en. Now that will appear to weaken the argument for some people, but why should it? Do we believe there is such a place as heaven? Is Jesus God? Is He limited by space? The more you explore the objections, it becomes clearer that the issue is not whether Jesus rules from heaven, but whether there is a spiritual dimension to life at all. If the universe is more than matter and energy, if Jesus is God, then of course Jesus can rule from heaven. **Point number one: Jesus began to rule the earth when He ascended His throne, and He will continue to rule until the final judgment.**

Now what about the thrones, the saints, the reign of believers, and the resurrection? There is far more than we can cover this morning, so I will sketch out a basic picture. The first resurrection is when Jesus rose from the grave. The second resurrection is when Jesus returns in His human body and all people receive new bodies. Notice that verse six says, “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!” There is a spiritual sense in which all who believe in Jesus are resurrected. Paul says in Ephesians 2:1-2, “you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” We come into this world physically alive and spiritually dead. When we believe in Jesus, we are joined to Him, like wife to husband, and we receive all the blessings in Jesus. Jesus rose from the dead, and we share in that resurrection. We are not fully resurrected yet. That happens later, at the end. That is the second resurrection. But now we share in the blessings of Jesus’ resurrection. Those blessings are spiritual life and communion with God.

Now since we are joined to Christ and share in His resurrection, we also share in His reign. Makes sense, doesn’t it? Again let’s think about marriage. The wife of the king, or mayor, or president has far more influence than any one else. He loves her, respects her, talks with her, desires to please her. She also wants to see him succeed in his reign. So it is with Jesus. Jesus loves His bride. He wants to hear our view on things, He respects us, He desires to please us. This doesn’t mean that Jesus will do any fool thing we ask. If you wives get into a funny mood and ask for something silly, I hope your husbands will have the sense to resist – and vice versa! But in general, but virtue of our union with Christ, it necessarily means that we reign with Him.

If you think that I am engaging in theological sleight of hand, the rest of

the Bible supports this view. Psalm 149 speaks of God's people ruling kings. Let's read Psalm 150:5-9.

In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul says, "do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" Let's read 1 Corinthians 6:1-3.

This passage is about settling disputes among Christians, but along the way Paul claims that our authority extends to unbelievers and angels.

**Point number two: Christians reign with Christ as He rules the earth.**

Now this thousand years is a vast time period. It's already been almost 2,000 years since Jesus took the throne. It could last for 2,000 more, or 10,000 more. During this time, Jesus is reigning, Christians reign with Him, and Satan is locked up. This does not mean that Christians are, or ought to be, political rulers. Sometimes political rulers will be Christians. But the real power is in heaven, and is executed by Jesus' sharp sword. The world is ruled by the preaching of the gospel and by prayer. This was the point of Psalm 149. When we sing praises to God on our beds, it is unleashing the sword of God's rule on earth. As we've said before, if there is a spiritual dimension to this universe, this is not hard to grasp. The only people who struggle with this are those trapped in a materialistic worldview. And sadly, this is the case for many Christians, including Evangelicals and Presbyterians.

It would also be a mistake to think too much or too little of Satan. Satan is not to be feared. After all, he's locked up! But neither is Satan to be ignored. After all, he's alive! The crucial matter is to understand the nature of Satan's attacks in this age. Since Satan is locked up, he is powerless to hurt us or to prevent us from ruling the earth. This should give us tremendous confidence. This means that our greatest enemy is out of commission. It's like playing against the New England Patriots without Tom Brady! This is a game we can't possibly lose. Now, there are other players on the field. The world is full of sinful people, and they certainly *can* hurt us and hinder our work. What's more troublesome is the sin which lurks in our flesh. We are constantly tempted to sin, and this drags us down.

But Satan can also trouble us, and he does this by intimidation, confusion, and seduction. Sound familiar? He can't get to us, but he pretends that he can. He threatens us. He can't actually follow through on his threats, so he

is harmless – unless we believe him. Sadly, many Christians do. They fear Satan, and this cripples their ability to follow Jesus. He also confuses us with false and corrupt messages. This is easily handled by referring to the scripture, just as Jesus did when Satan tried to confuse Him. The problem is that many Christians know the Bible so poorly, they are easily confused. Satan also seduces us. He tells us that his way is easier/more pleasurable/more respectable/more profitable than Jesus' way, and we are tempted. This also is countered by referring to the truth that Jesus has provided for us in the scripture.

Satan is alive. He has not been destroyed yet. But his power is sharply curtailed. Satan has been chained up, like a vicious dog. I jog through our neighborhood in the morning. The first few times I did this, I was alarmed by a big dog that rushed out barking at me. But there was a fence between me and the dog, so I was safe. Now I run past that property without fear. Sometimes if I am in a happy mood I will say, "Hi doggie!" Other times I may say, "Shut up, you mutt!" Most of the time I ignore him. But if I jumped into his yard, I could get badly hurt. It would be foolish either to try to play with this dog, or to attack him. He is best left alone.

This is how it is with Satan. Most of the time you should just ignore him. Martin Luther recommended, when you are feeling oppressed by Satan, that you mock and jeer at him, because he hates not being taken seriously. Satan cannot hurt you if you leave him alone. Jesus protects you. In his first letter, John said, "...he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4) The Holy Spirit in us is greater than Satan, and He protects us. Satan should be respected for his evil influence, but he should not be feared. Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28) God is the only one who can send you to hell. Fear Him. But beware not to mess with Satan. Do not engage in occult activities or mess with Satan in any way. You could get hurt. **Point number three: Satan cannot hurt you if you leave him alone and do not listen to his lies.**

34. So which millennial view best fits this text? Like the amillennialist, we see the millennium as a symbolic long time period. But unlike the amillennialist, we see Christians ruling with Jesus at present. The postmillennialist also sees Christians ruling with Jesus, but during a future literal

1,000 year period. Any position which holds that Christians participate in Christ's rule will be labeled postmillennial by many people, but some who hold our view call themselves *optimistic amillennials*.

35. The application this week is similar to last week's. Last we saw that we are the army of heaven, and therefore are called to fight the spiritual warfare in which our husband is engaged. This week we see that we occupy a position of authority, and the application is to rule well. Rulers who make mistakes frustrate us, but at least they're trying to do something. What really upsets us are rulers who are lazy. The news outlets are always alerting us to when the president goes on vacation, and for how long. We expect the president to be on the job. President Bush lost respect when he appeared to respond too slowly to hurricane Katrina.

Christians are joined to Christ and share His rule. It is shameful when they are slack in their office. Some are simply lazy, but others are confused. They do not realize the authority they have been granted in Christ. Some are possessed by false humility. They think it is more pious to have low aspirations. This is insulting to their Lord. As true royalty, we should act like princes and princesses. Act with dignity and generosity, and seek to expand your godly influence. Work hard, become skilled in your field, accept promotions, and use your expanding influence to make this world more like heaven – for that is our destiny.

- 36.

**Lesson 21**  
***Last Judgement***  
Revelation 20:7-15

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. Last week we finally got to the good part. The reason you've labored through Revelation all this time is to talk about the millennium, right? Have you been disappointed that it took so long? Did I burst your bubble by alleging that since it only occupies six verses in the Bible, it isn't all that important? So what did we discover? What are the three main positions on the millennium?
  - premillennial
  - postmillennial
  - amillennial
2. What is the reference point in each? What are pre and post in relation to?
  - when Jesus will return to earth relative to the millennium
3. So briefly, what does each position hold?
  - premillennial: Jesus will return to earth in His human body *before* a thousand year reign, and then the final judgment will come
  - postmillennial: Jesus will return in His human body for the final judgment *after* Christians reign for 1,000 years on earth
  - amillennial: there is *no* literal period of 1,000 years
4. Which position did we take on the millennium?
5. Like the amillennialist, we see the millennium as a symbolic long time period. But unlike the amillennialist, we see Christians ruling with Jesus now. The postmillennialist also sees Christians ruling with Jesus, but during a future literal 1,000 year period. So our best understanding of the millennium is a hybrid of two popular views. Some people who hold our view call themselves *optimistic amillennials*.
6. Why do we think this 1,000 year period is symbolic? What is a scripture which supports this view?
  - 1,000 is often used symbolically, especially in poetic and apocalyptic

literature.

7. Psalm 50:10 is a great scripture to remember. Always ask, who owns the cows on the 1,001<sup>st</sup> hill? If 1,000 hills is a symbol that God owns *all* cows, then 1,000 years is a symbol of an enormous length of time.
8. We discussed two more things last week. What role do Christians play during the millennium?
  - rule
9. Are Christians supposed to take over the world? How do they rule?
  - by the power of prayer and the gospel
10. And last, where is Satan during this 1,000 years?
  - chained up in the bottomless pit
11. Does this mean he is unable to tempt us?
  - no
12. How does Satan tempt us if he's chained up in the bottomless pit?
  - intimidation, confusion, seduction
13. Finally, what was the application to last week's lesson?
  - rule well in whatever place God has put you
  - use prayer and the gospel to defeat sin, the world, and Satan
14. The picture Jesus gives us of the millennium is a picture of Christians ruling the earth. This is not wishful thinking, a utopian dream. This is real. This is now. Jesus is seated on His throne in heaven, and He has granted authority to His people to rule on earth. Each of us has his own sphere of influence, and each of us has the ability to take prisoners, spiritually, where we live and work. Our weapons are prayer and the gospel. Often, in fact usually, our spiritual work is invisible. But we believe that as we pray and share the gospel, we change those around us, and we change the world. And we believe this because Jesus has said it.
15. Today we talk about the end of time. The Bible hardly ever talks about the end of time. Again, you wouldn't know that, judging by how much Evangelicals talk about it.

16. Let's read Revelation 20:7-15.
17. The popular Evangelical imagination sees in this passage a global war that dwarfs World War II. Billions of people marching against Jerusalem, a war that destroys the earth, an earth in which most Christians have been airlifted out by the rapture. But let's take a close look at this passage. Let's begin by looking at Satan.
18. How does Satan escape from the bottomless pit?
  - he is released
19. Who will release him?
  - God, we suppose
20. What is his mission when he is released?
  - deceive the nations, gather them for battle
21. What is his deception? What falsehood does he convince them of?
22. Does he succeed?
23. How big is his army?
24. If Satan deceives the nations, does that mean that there are no more real Christians on earth at that time?
25. Does Satan's army attack Jerusalem?
  - attacks the camp of the saints and "the beloved city"
26. What is the camp of the saints?
27. What is the beloved city?
28. Are they the same?
29. In the next two weeks we'll discuss Jerusalem and its relation to Christians and the end of time.

30. How did this battle turn out?
31. How well did the saints fight?
  - it doesn't appear that they fought at all
32. Is the fire from heaven a nuclear explosion, or perhaps an anti-matter bomb?
33. Where does this image of fire from heaven come from?
  - Genesis 19:24-25; 1 Kings 18:36-39
34. What happened to Satan?
  - thrown into the lake of fire
35. Who threw Satan into the lake of fire?
36. How hard was it to defeat Satan?
37. After it's all over, who is left on the earth?
  - the saints
38. Now let's look over these verses again. What did Satan succeed in doing?
  - only in deceiving the nations
39. Last week we said that it is a mistake to think too much or too little of Satan. Satan is not to be feared, because during this millennium he's locked up. But neither is Satan to be ignored. Since Satan is locked up, he is powerless to hurt us or to prevent us from ruling the earth. This should give us tremendous confidence. Remember, it's like playing against the New England Patriots without Tom Brady! This is a game we can't possibly lose. But Satan can trouble us, and he does this by intimidation, confusion, and seduction.

Satan can't get to us, but he pretends that he can. His only real power is the ability to deceive. He pretends to hurt us. He tells us lies so that we become confused about what is true. He lures us with false promises of pleasure and success. Satan cannot hurt us or make us successful – unless we believe his lies. Satan's only power is the ability to deceive.

This is what is so powerfully illustrated in this passage in Revelation. Satan can't get out of the bottomless pit, he can't win a war, heck – he can't even put up a good fight. Satan is a little dog whose master drags him around on a leash. You know – one of those annoying little yippy dogs you could crush under your feet. God tolerates Satan for God's own purposes, and when He's had enough, He squishes Satan.

I will say it again, Satan cannot hurt you unless you believe him. And there is the trouble, because we all at one point or another do fall for Satan's deception. Our protection against Satan is simply the truth, and that is found in the scriptures. We must learn to do as Jesus did when He came face to face with Satan. Jesus knew the Bible well enough that He was able to protect Himself from Satan's lies. As you become more familiar with the Bible, your susceptibility to Satan's deception becomes much reduced.

40. Verses 11-15 describe the judgment at the end of time. I think it's interesting, I don't ever recall anyone disputing the fact of this passage. People argue over some of the details, but the idea that everyone will be judged seems to be generally accepted. I think it's because everyone knows deep down, even those who openly deny it, that people will be judged. And I think also it's because everyone, deep down, including those who object, really *do* want a judgment. Unbelievers who object to God's judgment, when you talk to them, are really objecting to the *terms* of judgment, not to judgment itself. Everyone wants Hitler, Stalin, and bin Laden to burn in hell. It's the beautiful fornicators, the athletic adulterers, and the intelligent abortioners that we don't want to see burn forever.
41. Let's look at our passage. Who is sitting on the throne?
42. What does it mean that earth and sky fled from his presence?
43. What is the judgment based on?
44. Look at verse 13. What does it mean that the sea, death, and Hades gave up their dead?
45. In verse 14, how can death and Hades be thrown into the lake of fire? What does this mean?

46. Who else is thrown into the lake of fire?
  - anyone whose name is not written in the book of life
47. What does this tell us about what is written in those books?
48. Is the lake of fire the same as hell?
49. Is this a literal lake of fire?
50. If not, then what does it symbolize?
51. As so much of Revelation, this passage raises many important questions. We do not have time to delve into them here, but we can come to conclusions about the over all message.

We have a hard time grasping the cosmic significance of Jesus' death and resurrection. Not only did Jesus save us, personally, He also changed the universe. A world polluted by sin and ruled by demons was suddenly seized by a man powerful enough to conquer these enemies. In His death Jesus defeated sin and Satan. The roaring lion has become a toothless pussy cat. In His resurrection Jesus renewed the earth and began the process of replacing death with life. At Pentecost Jesus personally inhabited the world by His spiritual presence in the church. In A.D. 70 Jesus defeated the only enemies who had a fighting chance of destroying the church. Ever since the fall of Jerusalem, Jesus has been leading the armies of heaven across the earth, conquering sin and death everywhere they go. The church sits on the thrones of heaven ruling the earth until every nation confesses the Lord Jesus Christ.

This does not mean that every individual person will be saved. Until the end there will be those who reject Christ. There will always be weeds among the wheat. Thousands of years from now there will be isolated communists, Muslims, Buddhists, atheists, etc. But most people will confess Christ, and all nations will be governed by Christian principles. Life will be so pleasant then, that even unbelievers will accept Christian government. Then far into the future, God will release Satan. Satan will trick those unbelievers scattered all over the world. They will "come to their senses" and realize that they have been tricked into making peace with

those malicious Christians. Unbelievers will arm themselves to throw off the rule of the hated Christian nations. But as they move to strike a deadly blow, God will suddenly consume them.

52. History will be over. All humanity from all ages will assemble before Jesus. Everyone will be judged according to his works. Jesus makes this very clear in the gospels. But remember, at a critical moment when the people asked Jesus what is the work of God, He said the work of God is to believe in the one whom God sent. (John 6:29)

Some of us are compassionate, and feed the hungry. Some of us are sensitive, and care for the hurting. Some of us are financially successful and donate huge sums of money to the needy. There are many good works done by men. But there is one good work which trumps them all, and that is to believe in Jesus. Jesus says that He is the Son of God who came to die for your sins. If you do not believe this, you call Jesus a liar, and you despise His horrible death as useless. Unbelief is so wicked, so vile, that no amount of good works can overcome the stench of its wickedness. Unbelief is the hog manure that drapes itself over you, which no amount of perfume can mask.

The books. Jesus will examine the books to see what deeds are recorded there. But unless your name is listed in the book of life as one of those who believe in Jesus, all your other works are worthless.

Unbelief is so viciously wicked because it is an attack on the infinite, eternal love of God. What must be done for such a person? What is justice for an attack on God's infinite, eternal love? Is it not eternal punishment? Is anything less just? What else would you want done with such people?

- 53.

**Lesson 22**  
***New Universe***  
Revelation 21:1-8

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. Last week we read about the end of history – its culmination in a final judgment. So let’s catch up the last few weeks. Chapter 20 introduced us to the millennium – the 1,000 year reign of Christ.
2. What have we learned about the millennium?
3. How long is the millennium?
4. What scripture verse demonstrates that 1,000 often means a vast number?
  - Psalm 50:10
5. What question can we ask to reveal this?
  - Who owns the cows on the 1,001<sup>st</sup> hill?
6. When does the millennium begin?
  - A.D. 70
7. What do Christians do during the millennium?
  - Rule
8. What have we learned about Satan?
9. What are Satan’s three strategies to tempt us?
  - Intimidation, confusion, seduction
10. What is the one and only thing Satan can do to hurt us?
  - Deceive us into believing his threats and lies
11. What is the last judgment based on?
  - The books, our works
12. What is in the books?

- Our works
13. What is the work of God which overshadows all other works?
    - Believing in Jesus
  14. This week we get a short glimpse of eternity – life after the last judgment.
  15. Let's read Revelation 21:1-8.
  16. That's it, folks! That's all there is in the Bible about eternity. The rest of Revelation provides more details about the new Jerusalem and wraps up the visions. So let's examine some of the features of eternity.
  17. Where are we going to be in eternity – in heaven or on earth?
  18. What's new about the new earth?
    - No sea
  19. Does this mean there will be no huge bodies of water on the new earth?
  20. If the sea is a symbol, what does it symbolize?
    - Gentiles, sin, barrier between earth and heaven
  21. When we studied the trumpets, we discussed the sea as a symbol for the Gentiles. Does this mean that all non-Jews will be in the Lake of Fire?
  22. If the sea is a symbol for Gentiles, what does it mean that there will be no sea in eternity?
  23. The term "Gentile" only has meaning in contrast to Israel. In the Old Covenant Gentiles were all those not part of Israel. In the New Covenant Israel no longer exists. I do not mean there are no longer any ethnic Jews. The Jews today are an ethnic group like Swedes, or Han Chinese, or Tamils, or Hutus. With the coming of Jesus and the installation of the New Covenant, the Jewish race has no special religious significance. This also means that the modern state of Israel has no special place in God's plan. Paul said in the letter to the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28) In his letter to the Ephesians he

said,

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Ephesians 2:14-16)

In this period God used Paul and the other apostles to take the believing Jews and Gentile believers and form them into one church. Where there had in the past been Jew and Gentile, now there are only Christians. As God says everywhere in scripture, all people are saved only by believing in Jesus. With Old Covenant distinctions erased, there are no more Jews or Gentiles – only Christians and unbelievers.

More fundamentally, the sea is a symbol of wickedness and chaos. In the beginning the sea was pictured as a challenge to God's rule. "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:2) Isaiah used the sea as a symbol for the wicked. "But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt." (Isaiah 57:20) This vision of eternity has no sea because there is no wickedness in paradise.

Finally, there is a sea that is a barrier between heaven and earth. Ezekiel described this heavenly sea as a crystal firmament, or expanse. (Ezekiel 1:22-28) He was looking up through the expanse, but we have seen it from above. It is the glass sea around the throne. (Revelation 4:6; 15:2) This glass sea which separated heaven and earth is no more. From now on earth and heaven are joined. The throne of God is in the midst of His people.

24. What did John see next, verse 2?
  - The holy city
25. What are the other two names given to the holy city?
  - New Jerusalem, bride

26. We've seen the bride before. What is the bride of the Lamb?
  - The church
27. How is the church a holy city?
28. How is the church a new Jerusalem?
29. How is the church a bride?
30. How is the church coming down out of heaven? Isn't the church on earth now?
31. What is the meaning of verse three? Doesn't God live in our midst now? Doesn't He speak to us by His word and Spirit? Doesn't He come to us in bread and wine?
32. This vision began with a new heaven and new earth. Now in verse five God says, "I am making all things new." Does this mean that this planet will be replaced with another one?
33. And just to eliminate any possibility of confusion, what do verses six to eight say about who will be included in this eternal paradise?
  - The thirsty, the conquerors
34. Who will be excluded from paradise? (v. 8)
35. Even the cowardly? Was cowardice ever included in the lists of sins elsewhere in the Bible? Cowardice is not a virtue, but it seems more like a weakness than a sin. Why should it keep someone out of paradise?
36. By now you may be wondering, don't we go to heaven when we die? Isn't eternity a never-ending praise jam like we saw in many earlier chapters in this book? No, it is not. I don't blame Huck Finn for not wanting to go to heaven as Miss Watson described it. The prospect of spending eternity strumming a harp on a cloud bored him, as it would any red-blooded boy. Notice that eternity is not spent floating around in heaven. It is spent on earth. It is a new earth, but it is a very physical place. The biblical view of humanity is a spirit-flesh union. God did not make man a spirit and then give him a body as an afterthought, or as a temporary convenience. This is

a pagan idea, which commanded a huge following under the name Gnosticism in the second to fourth centuries. Man is a spirit-body union, and he needs a physical earth to live in.

Furthermore, this passage as a whole indicates that the new heavens and earth will not be created from nothing, like the first creation, but will be this earth renewed. In verse five God says, “Behold, I am making all things new.” He did not say, “I am making all new things.” Verse 24 describes all the wealth of the earth coming into the New Jerusalem, which indicates that God will preserve the best of this world and incorporate it into the next.

Most people have the idea that this planet will burn up and God will create a new planet. This idea comes from science fiction and a poor understanding of scripture. The scripture that leads to this view is 2 Peter 3:10-12.

37. Let’s read 2 Peter 3:10-12.

The critical word is the Greek word στοιχεῖον, translated “heavenly bodies” in the English Standard Version, and “elements” in the King James Version. It means elements, basic principles, elemental spirits. We think of elements as the building blocks of matter: hydrogen, oxygen, carbon, etc. We are less accustomed to using the word “element” for a foundational principle, as in “the elements of Hebrew.” This word is used five other times in the New Testament (Galatians 4:3,9; Colossians 2:8,20; Hebrews 5:12), where it is translated “elementary principles”, “elemental spirits”, and “basic principles.”

The chemical elements as we know them were not discovered in the first century. Peter is using prophetic language to describe the end of the world as we know it. The Day of the Lord is the second coming of Jesus, when He will defeat the dragon, throw him into the lake of fire, and establish His throne forever. It will be an entirely new world. It will be purified of sin and cleansed of all wickedness. It will operate on fundamental principles of righteousness and holiness – entirely different than the fundamental principles of the world in which we live now. It will be the same planet, but renewed in holiness and fit for eternity.

38. But the heart of this passage is not the location of our eternal destiny. The heart of eternity is the person with whom we will spend it. More important than the presence or absence of large bodies of water or whether there is a replacement planet earth – is the promise that we will be with Jesus forever. Verse three is the heart of this passage as it brings to fulfillment of the promise of the covenant:

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”

Many people misunderstand the nature of God’s covenant. From the beginning God instituted a covenant with His people, and He renewed it several times throughout history. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are packed with the laws God gave His people, and sometimes we get the idea that God’s covenant was mainly a means of keeping people in line. This is entirely wrong. The covenant God made with man was not primarily a governing document like a constitution, although it did contain many civil laws. The covenant was a personal bond between God and man. Let’s take Abraham as an example. God called Abraham to follow Him, and God made powerful promises. He promised to lead Abraham to a new land and make a great nation of him. Then later God made a covenant with Abraham. In Genesis 17:7-8 we read,

“And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

Notice here that the heart of the covenant is that God will be the God of Abraham and his children. For all the centuries following, God was faithful to His covenant – to be a God to His people. Moses repeated this promise and enlarged it in Leviticus 26:11-12: “I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.” This is the goal of the covenant – that God will be our God, and we shall be His people. It is a

perpetual bond of faithfulness. God will never abandon us, and we will never worship another God. God was always faithful to the covenant, but man was often unfaithful. Down through the ages the prophets foresaw a day in which the covenant would be fully realized. Someday man will be faithful, and perfect harmony will exist between God and man.

And so Revelation 21:3 is a cry of triumph! The real goal of history – the ultimate purpose behind everything has been achieved. “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” This was the reason for all those laws in the Old Testament. This is why God raised up David to be king in Israel. This is why He sent the prophets, sent Israel into exile and brought her back. This is why God sent Jesus – to make real the promise of a perfect bond between God and man. The bond of perfect unity that marriage imperfectly shows is now perfected.

When we think about eternity, we tend to focus on where we will be. Men and women are eager to avoid the Lake of Fire, so we say we want to go to heaven instead. Scripture is less interested in *where* we spend eternity and more interested in *whom* we spend it with. We’ve seen that heaven is populated with angels and archangels and the saints from all the ages – and it will be wonderful to join them. But great joy will be to be with our Lord and Savior, the lover of the church, and to know that joy will never end.

39. The application today is to embrace the life of a conqueror. Jesus is The Conqueror. He is the Terminator, the Lion of Judah, the Prince on the White Horse. If you love Jesus, you will follow Him – and Jesus is not in safe places. Jesus is out on the battlefield, conquering sin and winning His enemies to His side. War is hell, they say, but the alternative is worse. True, you might suffer. Actually, you *will* suffer if you follow Jesus into battle. But with Jesus at the head, you are certain of victory and sure of eternal life. The alternative is not ease, but death and the Lake of Fire. Do not be cowardly. Saddle up and ride forth with Jesus, and conquer.

**Lesson 23**  
***New Jerusalem***  
 Revelation 21:9-22:5

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. We're wrapping up the book of Revelation. This is a mid-first century book written to a mid-first century audience about the things they were experiencing. By A.D. 65 the Roman Emperor Nero was burning Christians to light his garden parties, and the Jews were tormenting anyone who claimed to be a worshiper of God but didn't keep their laws. Things were bad for Christians, and getting worse. Jesus sent this message to the apostle John to encourage the Christians. His message was that all this was planned from the beginning, Jesus is in control, and soon both Jerusalem and Rome will no longer trouble the church. Chapter 19 ended with a vision of Jesus' triumph over these enemies.

The rest of the book is a fast-forward to the end of history. Chapter 20 introduces us to the millennium, the 1,000-year reign of Christ and His servants. That is us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The end of chapter 20 shows us the final battle with Satan and the last judgment. Last week we opened chapter 21 and saw a glimpse of eternity. Let's review last week's lesson.

2. How was eternity described in Revelation 21:1?
  - New heavens and new earth
3. What is the special feature of the new earth?
  - No sea
4. We discussed three possible interpretations for the lack of the sea. What are they?
  - No gentiles, no wickedness, no barrier between earth and heaven
5. What three terms are used for God's people? (v. 2)
  - Holy City, New Jerusalem, Bride
6. Who is able to enter this New Jerusalem? (vv. 6-7)
  - The thirsty, the conquerors

7. What is the heart of this passage? (v. 3)
  - The covenant promise fulfilled
8. Remember, *where* you spend eternity is not nearly as important as *who* you spend it with. From the beginning God's intention was to live with His people. But from the beginning God's children rebelled against Him. Adam and Eve ran away and hid. The only reason they spoke with God again is that God went and found them. This is the way it is for every individual and for every nation. We all, individually and corporately, flee from God. But God pursues us. God refuses to let us run away from Him. God loves us, He converts us, He makes us His own people. This process is incomplete now, but the promise is that there will come a day when sin is erased, we will know God's love fully, and we will love Him in return.
9. Today we're going to focus on one aspect of eternity – the New Jerusalem. It's a bit lengthy and goes into some detail, but we're going to read the whole passage.
10. Let's read Revelation 21:9-22:5.
11. What did the angel tell John he was going to show him? (v. 9)
  - The Bride of the Lamb
12. What did John see? (v. 10)
  - Holy city Jerusalem
13. What does this mean?
  - The holy city = New Jerusalem = Bride
14. Why are several symbols used for one thing? Doesn't that just make it more confusing?
15. We've seen this overlapping of symbols before, haven't we? For a book this size, Revelation really has fairly few characters. There are Jesus, Satan, the two beasts, and the church. But there are dozens of symbols. People get confused because they don't pay attention. If you read carefully, it's not that hard to sort out. The reason that many symbols are used for each character is that Jesus has very much to teach us about each one. One symbol is inadequate to convey everything Jesus wants us to know.

In chapter 19 the dominant symbol for the people of God was the Bride. In chapter 21 it is the holy city. This prompts us to wonder, how is the church like a bride? How is the church like a holy city? In particular, how is the church like Jerusalem?

16. There are a lot of details here, which you can ponder at your leisure. This morning we're going to focus on the overall vision. How do you react when we read about this New Jerusalem? What comes to mind?
17. What is the visual impact of this vision? What do you think when you see this city?
18. What is the meaning of the twelve gates? (vv. 12-13)
19. What is the meaning of the twelve foundations? (v. 14)
20. What is the shape of the city? (v. 16)
21. What is the meaning of its shape?
22. Why all the gemstones everywhere?
23. Look at verse 22. It says God and the Lamb are the temple for the New Jerusalem. I thought the temple was a dwelling for God? How can God *live* in the temple and *be* the temple?
24. Verse 24 talks about nations and kings. I never thought there would be nations and kings in eternity. What could this mean?
25. Isn't it odd that verse 27 talks about unclean and detestable things? Shouldn't they be far away in the Lake of Fire?
26. Moving into chapter 22, where is the tree of life? (v. 2)
27. How many trees of life are there?
28. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations. If this is eternity, why would the nations need to be healed?

29. Did you notice that 21:23 and 22:5 both call attention to the point that there will be no need for the sun, because God will be their light? Why would this be emphasized?
30. I think that from chapter 12 to 19 Jesus wants us to know that we are His beloved. Jesus is madly in love with the church, and will turn over heaven and earth to get her. True, the church is a mess. If you read the epistles, you can see that the first century church was a terrible mess – far worse than the church today. And if you have any experience with the church today, you know it is a pretty bad mess. Jesus is not a fool. He knows what the church is. In the first century massive power and seductive beauty were found in Rome and Jerusalem. Jesus saw this, but He loved the church, He wanted the church, He was excited by the church. Jesus is the amazing lover of the church.

Now Jesus shows us another aspect to the church. Now we see that the church is as massive, as strong, and as impressive as a city. Jerusalem was the original holy city – the place where God dwelt in His temple, where the king of Israel ruled, where uncountable wealth poured in from all the lands surrounding – the seat of power in the eastern Mediterranean. But old Jerusalem was also a place of idolatry, injustice, abuse of power. Sin tarnished the best of God’s plans for Jerusalem. But God will not be thwarted. There will come a day when God will have His holy city. There He will live, there He will rule, and there His people will worship Him in perfect holiness.

The holy city is beautiful beyond description. The pearl gates, gold streets, and jeweled walls are an attempt to express the overwhelming splendor of this place. The jewels are the stones that represented the tribes of Israel on the breastplate of the high priest. Now they are incorporated into the city itself. The bride of the Lamb is not a concrete jungle like our cities, but a vast urban park – a garden city. All the features of the Garden of Eden are found here. But unlike Eden, it is a fully matured civilization teeming with people. God’s command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth has been fulfilled. Here is the river, but now it is the river of the water of life. Ezekiel saw the river flowing from the temple, but now we see it flowing directly from the throne. Here is the tree of life – but not just one tree. There are trees everywhere, producing fruit in abundance and leaves that heal the nations. Now there is no curse. Man has borne the

curse for sin in the form of sweat on his forehead ever since Adam. The high priest wore God's name on his forehead as a sign of salvation to come, but now the curse is erased and all people wear God's name on our foreheads. The crowning touch is the eternal light that comes from the presence of God. With God enlightening us we will reign forever in this dazzling city.

31.

32.

**Lesson 24**  
***Jesus is Coming***  
 Revelation 22:6-21

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. As we wrap up our study in Revelation, we've been encountering some new images. Actually, they aren't new images, but they are newly introduced in this book. What image is used for eternity?
  - New heavens and new earth
2. What images are used for the church?
  - Bride, city (New Jerusalem)
3. How is the church like a bride?
4. How does Jesus treat the church as a bride?
5. How is the church like New Jerusalem?
6. How does Jesus treat the church like New Jerusalem?
7. What is the greatest, most important aspect of the new heavens and new earth?
  - Fulfillment of the covenant promise, that God will be our God, and we will be His people, and we will be together forever. (Rev. 21:3)
8. Today we're going to read the rest of Revelation. This is clearly the concluding section of the book – the epilogue. The visions are gone, and now we have a conversation between John and an angel, and some remarks by Jesus. I think this part at first seems a jumble of comments. We're going to read it all at once, and as we do, I want you to be looking for the main ideas. There are several ideas that keep popping up in these final verses. What are they?
9. Let's read Revelation 21:6-21.
10. OK, what did you notice? What are the main ideas in this passage?

11. As at the beginning of the book, we are told when the vision will take place. Which verses refer to its fulfillment?
  - vv. 6, 7, 10, 12, 20
12. How many times is that?
  - 5
13. Wow! It seems like Jesus really wanted those first century Christians to believe that these visions were going to happen soon! If 1,000 is the symbol for a huge amount – all the cows in the world, all the years until Jesus returns – then 2,000 years cannot be “soon”. Revelation can’t be about events now in this century or later. We discussed this at some length in our first lesson, so I am not going to review all the issues about the fulfillment of Revelation today. Many good people think that Revelation is about the distant future, and they have assembled detailed arguments to support that view. But I am convinced that such a view is impossible. Revelation had to be about events that unfolded in the first century. No other view makes sense in the end.
14. Let’s look at verses 11-15. What is the main idea of these verses?
  - Judgment
15. Why does he say in verse 11, “Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy?” doesn’t this sound fatalistic?
16. What is verse 12 referring to?
17. Why is verse 13 here in the middle of a section on judgment?
18. Look at verse 14. How do you wash your robes?
19. Is washing your robes an idiom? What does it mean? How does one do it?
20. Let’s talk about Jesus. Verses 13 and 16 use a lot of images for Jesus. What are they? What do they mean?
21. Verse 17 is an invitation. An invitation to whom? For what?

22. What is the water of life?
23. Who gives this invitation?
24. What picture is created by the Spirit and Bride and hearers calling to come?
25. The title of this lesson is “Jesus is Coming,” and indeed this could be the title of this final chapter of Revelation. It begins in verse seven, “And behold, I am coming soon.” In the middle of the chapter Jesus says, “Behold, I am coming soon,” and Revelation ends with Jesus saying, “Surely I am coming soon.” We have seen that Revelation insists it will be fulfilled soon, and that this has to be within the lifetimes of those who first received it. There are many reasons why people balk at this idea, but one of the most obstinate is this promise that Jesus is coming.

In some circles it is taught that the apostles believed that Jesus would return soon – and when He didn’t, they made up explanations why and wrote them up as our books of the New Testament. This view is dismissive of the Bible as God’s word, and consequently is not held by believing Christians. Christians who believe the Bible *is* God’s word read the New Testament as predicting a second coming of Jesus at the end of history, prior to judgment. Both of these views are half right, but both miss a critical biblical concept.

People consistently miss the teaching of scripture because they expect God to act in ways a human being would. It is not surprising that unbelievers should do this, but it is disappointing when believers do the same thing. If I tell you that I will come to Sunday School next week, you expect to see me, that is, to see my body here. If I tell you that Vladimir Putin will be at my house this afternoon, you will think I am mad, because it is incredible to think that Putin would fly to 631 Fourth Avenue in Bethlehem. But God is a spirit and is not limited by time and space. God can be present, even if there is no physical evidence.

Now applying this insight to scripture, the Bible often speaks of God acting, with no expectation that He will be physically present. In fact, before Jesus was born, God *had* no material form! But all through the Bible, we

hear that God will do this and that, as though He had a body. Consider what God said to the people of Israel, a warning about the consequences of disobedience.

The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch, of which you cannot be healed. The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways. And you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you. Deuteronomy 28:27-29

The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand... Deuteronomy 28:49

As history unfolded, Israel did periodically fall into disobedience, and they did experience the curses listed in Deuteronomy. But not because God came in bodily form. When nations came against Israel for judgment, they were led physically by men such as Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar – hardly theophanies!

A place that clearly illustrates this principle is Micah 1:1-5. This is a prophecy of a judgment about to come upon Israel – not something in the distant future, but about those ancient peoples. Listen how it says that the Lord is coming. We know the history of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar is the man who led the Babylonian armies to destroy Judah. But God says it would be Himself.

The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, you peoples, all of you; pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it, and let the LORD GOD be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For behold, the LORD is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. Micah 1:1-5

So when we come to the New Testament, we should not expect that when God declares He will come in judgment, it means He will appear in bodily form.

Now I realize that there is a difference. As we said a moment ago, before Jesus was born, God *had* no physical nature. It was easier to interpret the prophecies of God's coming to mean that God would be behind the acts of men – that God would use human instruments to accomplish His will. But after the incarnation, God *can* appear physically. Jesus *did* walk the earth, and He certainly can do so again. Furthermore, the Bible *does* say that Jesus will return in bodily form at the end of time. But now you must bear in mind two important points. First, just because Jesus *can* appear in bodily form does not mean that He must or will. Second, Revelation is not about the end of time.

But let's think about this even in human terms. If Donato says that he sold his boat and built a beach house, we don't necessarily think that he applied hammer to nail and erected the structure by his own muscular strength. We might think that he hired a contractor to do the work. Donato would make all the decisions, but the contractor would wield the tools. And we would be completely comfortable saying that Donato built himself a beach house. Similarly, God can say that He will judge Judah, yet send the Babylonians to do the work; and Jesus can say that He will come to Jerusalem, yet send the Romans for Him.

In the century before the fall of Judah to the Babylonians, the Old Testament prophets continually warned that God would come in judgment. In due time Nebuchadnezzar led his troops to demolish Jerusalem and destroy the land. When Jesus was on earth He warned that He would return in judgment, and then He sent this message of judgment to the Apostle John. In due time Titus led his legions to demolish Jerusalem and destroy the land. Just as God had come through Nebuchadnezzar, so Jesus came through Titus.

26. If the basic message of Revelation is that Jesus would come in the first century to judge apostate Israel and pagan Rome, in the process rescuing His bride from her deadly enemies – what does this book have to do with us today? Next week we will conclude our studies with a special attention to application, but for now we can say this: the basic principles always

apply. In every generation Jesus guards His church and destroys His enemies. Often Jesus delays judgment, and Paul tells us in Romans why He does that. It is to give the wicked time to repent. God's patience is a fruit of His mercy. But every enemy will inevitably fall before the invincible blade of Jesus' sword.

So there are two applications. First, if you are one of the evildoers and filthy, you do not have to remain that way. Jesus is always ready to receive sinners who repent and believe in Him. Today is the day of salvation. When Jesus comes, you will certainly be destroyed on earth, and then you will be thrown into the Lake of Fire in eternity. Confess your sin, turn to Jesus, and be saved.

Second, if you *are* a believer in Jesus, take heart. You may encounter hardship and suffering. Evildoers may oppress you. Your friends may suffer for Jesus. But know this: Jesus sees, Jesus knows, and Jesus is coming. And when He comes, He will wipe away every tear, heal every disease, and bring you home to be with Him forever. Jesus loves you, and although that at times seems hard to believe, it is as true today as it was in the first century when His precious children died by Nero's sword.

**Lesson 25**  
***The Conquest of Christ***  
Revelation 1-22

*Main Point:*

*Main App:*

1. God is not haphazard, and He does not inspire scripture without a reason. The book of Revelation came from God at a time when His people had a tremendous need.
2. Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and the Jews heard Him gladly. They chafed under Roman rule, and they longed for a return to the glory of David and Solomon in a restored Kingdom. Jesus promised a glorious Kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount is His Kingdom manifesto. To those who left families, houses, and lands He promised a hundred-fold return in this world, and eternal life in the world to come. Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, refuted the oppressive Pharisees, and preached a dazzling message that captivated the nation. Then in one week it all exploded in Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death.

When Jesus rose from the dead, His followers were delirious with joy. Then He sent the Holy Spirit, and they had the power to preach and convert thousands. The church swelled by the tens of thousands until the Jewish authorities began to take notice. First they killed Stephen, then they mounted a full-scale attack on the church. Many believers fled throughout the empire, taking the gospel with them. Paul and other apostles traveled from city to city converting the people and organizing churches everywhere. Again the Jews took notice, and they began to send false apostles to the new churches with the message that the new converts must keep the Jewish law. Paul led the fierce charge against these Judaizers, and was able to prevent them from perverting the gospel. The book of Acts is the narrative of these events, and Galatians contains Paul's preaching against the Jews.

In A.D. 54 Nero became Caesar, and soon Rome began to persecute Christians also. Caesar's beef with Christians was that he claimed exclusive right to the title Kyrios, Lord. Nero claimed to be divine, and demanded that incense be burned and confession be made that Caesar is Kyrios.

Christians not only refused to worship at the shrine of the emperor, they inflamed the Romans by declaring that Jesus was Kyrios – the only Kyrios. This was equivalent to treason.

In A.D. 64 Rome burned to the ground, and Nero blamed Christians. As Nero sank further into insanity and vile debauchery, he tormented Christians in ways that even other Romans found repulsive. The pinnacle of Nero's crimes was hanging Christians in his gardens and burning them to light his nighttime orgies.

By A.D. 60 the promise of the gospel was gone, or so it seemed. Those Christians who were left were terrorized by the rapacious Jews and Romans. They had seen many of their friends dragged off and killed or imprisoned. The glory that Jesus promised seemed a distant memory or, worse, a cruel joke. Jews began to long for the glory of the temple in Jerusalem – the golden temple, the levitical choirs, thousands of sacrifices, and thongs of people. This miserable life of fear and hiding began to wear out their faith – so God sent the book of Hebrews to show them that the invisible glory of Jesus was far greater than the gold and music of Jerusalem. Greek converts began to deny that the Christ ever was a real man, but only a spirit – so God sent a letter by His apostle John to prove that the Christ was the man Jesus. What the apostles learned, and taught, in those 40 years after Jesus ascended into heaven, was that the glory of Jesus was indeed greater than the glory of Moses and David, but it was visible only to eyes of faith. And for those with eyes to see, the promise of the gospel was more vibrant than ever.

3. To this confused, frightened, suffering church Jesus sent a powerful message. Jesus revealed to the apostle John the unseen spiritual realities behind the terrors of the first century, and the glorious victory that was soon to come. Revelation is a first century book for first century Christians about first century events. Jesus sent it to comfort and encourage His followers who were suffering and dying at the hands of Jews and Romans. But like all scripture, Revelation is applicable for all people in all times. Today we are briefly going to summarize the message of Revelation and how it applies to us. We have six summary points, each with its application.
4. First, Revelation is about Jesus. He is the author and central figure. Jesus

is introduced as an overpowering warrior. Jesus is the Terminator who patrols the churches to guard them from their enemies. He has the x-ray eyes which see all and judge perfectly, and the bronze legs which crush His enemies under His feet. Jesus is the Terminator, and He comes to kill. Jesus is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the king and ruler of all people. He is the Lamb of God, who lay down His life for His people. This terrifying warrior is also the meek servant who offered His life for His people.

This means that we can trust Jesus. The gentle Lamb who died for us will surely not hurt us. The invincible warrior will not allow anyone else to hurt us. If Jesus promises to save anyone who calls on Him, we know for certain that He will care for us and bring us to eternal life. That also means that the suffering we experience here in this life is not an accident. It's not Satan sneaking past Jesus or tricking Him, or overpowering Him. Suffering is allowed by Jesus because it is necessary to perfect us. Like a grueling workout before football season, suffering is Jesus' preparing us for eternity. And even in the worst suffering, Jesus is there with us to comfort and direct our steps.

5. Second, Revelation is about Satan. I think this is the real reason why this book is so popular, because Satan is a fascinating character. Revelation shows that Satan is a pathetic little puppet controlled by Jesus. What little power he has is granted by Jesus for a limited time and a small scope of operation. Satan operates primarily by three strategies: intimidation, confusion, and seduction. Now Satan is chained up in the bottomless pit, so he is unable to get to us directly. Instead he uses his agents to do his work.

Since Satan is chained up, we have no need to fear him. In fact, Jesus tells us not to fear him. We should, however, beware his evil intentions for us. Satan is smarter than we and much more clever. We make a huge mistake if we think that we can outmaneuver him, dabble in his mischief, or ignore his threat.

6. Third, Revelation is about beasts. They are all over the book. Satan himself appears as the dragon. The dragon spawns two dreadful, horrifying beasts – a sea beast and a land beast – images of the power of Rome and the Jews. The sea beast is Satan's primary instrument of intimidation, and Rome used her invincible military power to subdue the Mediterranean

world and force everyone to worship her. If anyone refused to worship Rome, he was thrown to the lions. Rome intimidated the world into worshipping her. The land beast is Satan's primary instrument of confusion, and the Jews used their scriptures to confuse people with the law. They demanded that gentile Christians follow the Jewish law as a condition of salvation, which nullified the promise of the gospel. Anyone who resisted the Jewish leaders was savagely attacked.

In every age the state seeks to force Christians to obey it instead of Jesus. And in every age false religions offer salvation by works rather than through the gospel. The application here is that the church is the army of heaven, and we are in the midst of a cosmic battle for the earth. Jesus is riding across the earth defeating the beasts, and we His people ride with Him. Our battle sword is the gospel, and by the gospel we defeat nations and religions that are opposed to Jesus. And because Jesus has defeated Satan by His death and resurrection, and because Jesus rules from heaven, we know that we will win wherever we fight. Often it appears that we are losing, but by faith we know that Jesus is using us to win the earth for His Kingdom. The only losers are the cowards who are afraid to follow Jesus. Those who seek to save their lives will lose them.

7. Fourth, Revelation is about Babylon. Babylon, the luscious centerfold of Revelation. Even the holy apostle was awed by her beauty. And indeed false worship is alluring. The issue here is not clothing, jewels, or makeup – neither is it art, music, or architecture. Sometimes Christians have possessed zeal without knowledge in attacking the creative gifts God has given His people. The issue is worship which claims to be authentic, looks authentic, has wide appeal – but in fact is not about Jesus. Babylon is Islam with its ethical appeal, Mormonism with its family appeal, Catholicism with its traditional appeal, liberal Christianity with its cultural appeal, and Reformed Christianity when it is about salvation by the law. False worship is dangerous precisely because it is so attractive, and Babylon is Satan's primary instrument of seduction.

The best way to avoid the false is to become ever more familiar with the true. In reality Babylon is a disgusting whore, but you cannot see that until you embrace true worship. The application here is to fix your eyes solidly upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. Worship Jesus. Worship Jesus day by day, but begin each week with worship in the

Lord's house on the Lord's Day with the Lord's people. A habit of faithful worship will build up a love for the true and a hatred of the false, and will make you less and less susceptible to the seduction of Babylon.

8. Fifth, Revelation is about the Bride. In contrast to the lascivious seductiveness of Babylon, the Bride is clothed in linen bright and pure. She rides beside her husband as a warrior queen, subduing the nations with her invincible sword which is the gospel of her Lord. She is "the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." The bride is the joy of the whole earth, for in her is peace and prosperity, and with her is Jesus, her Lord and lover.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the Christian life is loving the church. It is more difficult than enduring suffering from the beasts, or withstanding the seduction of Babylon. The church is supposed to be a refuge and a shelter – and it is. But the church often fails to live up to its ideals, and sometimes even becomes an enemy of those who love Jesus. If you think the church is bad now, it was far, far worse in the first century. Just read Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. Public displays of greed and gluttony, incest and perversion, idolatry and wild worship services. The church in Corinth was shocking even to the pagans. Yet Paul called her holy, and this is the Bride that Jesus loved. Jesus is not love-struck and unable to see the faults of the church. He knows them far better than you do. But He has decided to love His Bride anyway, and cleanse her by His word. The application to you is to love the church. Jesus loves the church, and so must we.

But I'm going to insert another application here, because loving the church is a hard thing to do. Revelation also teaches us that the Bride celebrates the fall of Babylon with the marriage supper of the Lamb. In spite of the hardships, the Christian life is a joyful life – and in spite of the faults of the church, there is real joy here also. We come together from time to time, and faithfully every Lord's Day to rejoice. The central attitude of our worship must be the celebration of Christ's victory over death, the promise of eternal life, and Jesus' victories day by day in our lives and in our world. Every Lord's Day we revel anew in the love of our Lord and bask in the glory of the New Jerusalem.

9. Finally, Revelation is about Jesus. I know, my first point is that Revelation is about Jesus. But we can't say it often enough. And as the book comes to a close, the emphasis shifts from Jesus the Terminator to Jesus the Bridegroom.

Do you remember what it was like to fall in love with your spouse? How your heart raced when you thought of him or her, how you longed to be together, how inexpressibly joyful you were when you saw him/her? Do you remember your wedding day, and your wedding night? And all the days and nights since then? In this life, sin and sadness mar our marriages, but even so, our love for our spouses is the highest pleasure on earth.

God spent 4,000 years preparing for this moment. God came to earth and lived a miserable life among us to accomplish this. Jesus walked to the cross for us. Finally the longing of God's heart was achieved when Jesus took His Bride into His wedding suite. With wonder and joy we hear Jesus say, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." Finally. God is with His people forever.

The application here is to know and believe that Jesus loves us. Accept that we are the delight of His eyes. Don't be ashamed of our flaws. Jesus isn't. Don't hold back, but run into His arms and be ravished by His love. This is eternal life, and this is the beginning of eternity.