

The Book of
Revelation
Unveiled



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Revelation
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The Book of Revelation: Is It Relevant Today?

Is the book of Revelation relevant today? Is it possible for us to understand it? Can we know to whom it was written—and why? What are the meanings of its mysterious symbols?

The name of the book, Revelation, is a translation of the title in the original New Testament Greek, *Apokalypsis*—the origin of the other name by which the book is now known, the Apocalypse. The Greek term denotes an unveiling or uncovering—thus, a revelation. It here signifies an opening up of hidden knowledge to understanding.

This book has perplexed readers for almost 2,000 years. Over the centuries it has been one of the world's most misunderstood and misinterpreted books. Yet it need not be so.

The fundamental message of the book of Revelation is simple. It promises that God will institute universal peace, prosperity and cooperation over all the earth immediately after the return of Jesus Christ. It reveals how this wonderful new world will be established and why it will never be destroyed or superseded by any other way of life or social order.



Many people believe the book of Revelation is all about bad news. Although it reveals where our actions and decisions will take us, it also shows how mankind will finally experience a world of peace.

The book of Revelation also describes an incredibly deceptive alliance of internationally powerful political and religious entities attempting to prevent Jesus' reign from ever being established. Their opposition to Him and His saints will result in a time of international turmoil and suffering unlike anything the world has ever seen.

The terrifying weapons developed and manufactured using modern

technology are an indication that the terrible time of trouble may be much nearer than we think. Nations have already stockpiled more than enough weapons to annihilate all human life from the face of the earth. Rogue nations increasingly gain the ability to produce and use horrifying weapons of mass destruction.

Even more frightful are terrorist groups, unable to attain their goals by conventional arms or diplomacy, that now have access to such deadly weapons. Respected advisers on international security warn that the danger of nuclear weapons being used by rogue nations or terrorist groups grows ever higher. Nuclear weapons are only one of several

means of mass destruction available to unscrupulous leaders and terrorists bent on achieving their ends by any means, including mass carnage.

The book of Revelation presents us with good news and bad news about the future, giving us both aspects of the picture. On the one hand it describes



Where is mankind's race to develop ever-more-destructive weapons taking us? The book of Revelation describes how we will ultimately reap what we have sown, bringing on ourselves unimaginable human suffering before God intervenes.

the terrifying tools of destruction our advanced technology will produce—and a deceived humanity will use—at the end of this age. But it also reveals how the living God, the Creator of the universe, will intervene to prevent the annihilation of humankind. It further reveals the wonderful time of peace and a transformed world that will follow those horrible days.

You need to understand God's description of what lies ahead—and what it means to you. You need to understand how you can be a part of the good news He reveals about the future. Once you grasp the message of Revelation, you, too, will see that it contains the most remarkable message of hope ever written. Its fundamental message is plain and its conclusion certain.

Keys to Understanding Revelation

Why was the book of Revelation written? As mentioned before, the book's very name means to *reveal*—to unveil, to open to understanding what otherwise could not be comprehended. Yet most people believe that this final book of the Bible cannot be understood at all—that its language and symbols are too confusing to make sense.

Revelation puts many of the earlier prophecies of the Bible into an understandable context and reveals a much-needed *framework* for prophecies relating to the end of the age. It accomplishes this partly through the use of symbols and figurative language that relate directly to some of the Bible's other prophetic writings.

For example, the prophetic book of Daniel uses similar language and symbols. Many of its visions and figures of speech are clearly explained. But God revealed to Daniel that the meanings of others were to remain mysteriously obscured until the time of the end. Then they, too, would be understood.

Revelation contains many fundamental keys to that understanding, and the book of Daniel contains keys that help us understand the book of Revelation.

Notice Daniel's explanation of one of his visions: "Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, 'My lord, what shall be the end of these things?' And he said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are *closed up and sealed till the time of the end*'" (Daniel 12:8-9, emphasis added throughout unless otherwise noted).

Contrast this with God's purpose for the book of Revelation. God the Father gave the prophecies contained in the book of Revelation to His Son, Jesus Christ. He passed it to Christ in the form of a *scroll* sealed with seven seals (Revelation 5:1). But as John—who wrote the book under God's inspiration—tells us in his concluding chapter, an angel specifically commanded him, "*Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book ...*" (Revelation 22:10).

John explains that God the Father gave most of the book of Revelation to Christ in the form of a scroll sealed with seven seals. Jesus

then broke those seals and *opened* the scroll.

“And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne [God the Father] a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it... But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals’” (Revelation 5:1-5).

Here is the key to understanding the book. Jesus alone can unlock the meaning of its symbols, visions and descriptions. The first verse of this book announces that it is “the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him” (Revelation 1:1). Christ reveals its meaning. He unlocks its seals. But how does He do it?

Two factors are crucial. First, the keys to unlocking the content of seven seals must be explained by Jesus Himself in His own words.

Second, the Bible tells us that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore we can expect clarification of some

The Story Flow of the Book of Revelation

Seven seals

- 1 Religious deception (*Revelation 6:1-2; compare Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 23-25*)
- 2 War (*Revelation 6:3-4; compare Matthew 24:6-7*)
- 3 Famine (*Revelation 6:5-6; compare Matthew 24:7*)
- 4 Disease epidemics (*Revelation 6:7-8; compare Matthew 24:7*)
- 5 Tribulation and persecution (*Revelation 6:9-11; compare Matthew 24:8-12, 21-22*)
- 6 Heavenly signs (*Revelation 6:12-17; compare Matthew 24:29*)

Seven trumpets

- 1 Destruction of vegetation (*Revelation 8:7*)
- 2 Devastation of oceans and sea life (*Revelation 8:8-9*)
- 3 Devastation of rivers and fresh water (*Revelation 8:10-11*)
- 4 Sun, moon and stars darkened (*Revelation 8:12*)
- 5 Torturous human afflictions (*Revelation 9:1-12*)
- 6 Enormous military destruction (*Revelation 9:13-19*)
- 7 Seven last plagues (*Revelation 15:1; 16:1-21*)

Armageddon and return of Jesus Christ

symbols in the book of Revelation in other parts of God’s inspired Word.

By relying on the Bible’s own consistent interpretations of its symbols and figurative language, we can have confidence that our understanding is based on God’s inspired Word rather than on our own opinions (2 Peter 1:20). After all, *revealed knowledge* is what the book of *Revelation* is all about.

Remember, God told Daniel that some of the things revealed to him in visions were sealed, hidden until the time of the end. But then He added: “Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand” (Daniel 12:10). At the time of the end God intends that those He calls “the wise” will understand these prophecies.

Who are the wise in God’s sight?

Those who scorn the concept that the Bible is divinely inspired choose to see its symbols as contradictory and confusing. They perceive no value in them. Because they scoff at the idea of God’s inspiration, they are blind to prophetic understanding. They choose to be ignorant

Chapter Outline of the Book of Revelation

Chapter	Story Flow	Insets*
1	Introduction	
2-3		Message to the seven churches
4-5	Prelude—setting	
6	First six seals	
7	144,000 and the great multitude	
8-10	Seventh seal opened: The trumpet plagues	
11	The two witnesses	
12		The true Church
13		The two beasts
14		The three messages
15-16	The seven last plagues	
17-18		The false church
19	The return of Jesus Christ	
20	The Millennium	
21-22	The new heaven and new earth	

*Several chapters in the book are insets. Although most of the book’s chapters flow in chronological order, these chapters describe background events and conditions that are not part of the story flow and may span centuries.

of what God reveals about the future (2 Peter 3:3-7).

On the other hand, God tells us that those who respect Him and keep His commandments are the ones who are truly wise. As the Scriptures explain: “The fear [respectful awe] of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; *a good understanding* have all those who *do* His commandments” (Psalm 111:10). Scripture also tells us that “the testimony of the LORD is sure, making *wise* the simple” (Psalm 19:7).

The book of Revelation gives us many of the keys that unlock prophetic understanding because it faithfully follows the principle that *the Bible interprets itself*. Therefore, only those who *believe* that the Bible is inspired by God and *trust* what it says will be able to understand the significance of what is revealed in the book of Revelation.

Some of the understanding began in the days of the apostles. One of the stated purposes for Revelation was to reveal to the servants of God “things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1). So some aspects of Revelation applied directly to Christians in the final days of the apostle John’s ministry.

Christ instructed John to record (verse 19): (1) “the things which you have seen”—his visions and their puzzling symbols; (2) “the things which are”—information relating to the Church at that time; and (3) “the things which will take place after this”—prophecies extending far into the future.

Before we examine these keys to the future, we need to understand the circumstances under which this prophetic book was given to the apostle John.

Religious and political setting of Revelation

Within the confines of the ancient Roman Empire, Christianity began in an era of relative peace. The emperors of the time generally followed a policy of liberal religious toleration. This enabled early Christians to evangelize far and wide, both throughout and beyond the empire.

But the situation gradually changed. The Romans introduced and enforced emperor worship in the empire. Suddenly Christians found themselves in an intolerable situation. Jesus, not the emperor, was their ultimate master. They understood that the Scriptures prohibited the worship of anything or anyone besides the true God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Soon incredible pressures were brought to bear on them to participate in the holidays, games and ceremonies honoring the reigning emperor as a god.

Their refusal to participate in emperor worship put them into direct conflict with the authorities at all levels of the Roman hierarchy. By the time Revelation was written, some Christians had already been executed

because of their beliefs. Christians everywhere, especially in Asia Minor, encountered wide-ranging ridicule and persecution.

Adding to Christians’ plight, Roman officials, after Jerusalem’s destruction in A.D. 70, ceased to view Christians as just another sect of the Jews. The religious tolerance Rome had extended to them disappeared.

Christians were now often regarded as a subversive and potentially dangerous religious group. Rome saw their teachings of a coming kingdom and a powerful new king as a threat to the stability of the empire. By this time Emperor Nero had already falsely branded Christians as the perpetrators of the great fire in Rome. Their future looked grim.

The apostle John, imprisoned on the island of Patmos near the coast of Asia Minor during a later wave of persecution near the end of the



first century, explained that he also was suffering persecution, that he was their “companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:9). John fully understood the stress they endured. Yet he reminded them of their goal—the Kingdom of

Emperor Nero had already falsely branded Christians as the perpetrators of the great fire in Rome. Their future looked grim.

God. He emphasized the patience and faith they must exercise to endure opposition and abuse until the return of Jesus the Messiah to permanently deliver His servants from persecution and grant them salvation.

This is the context in which Jesus revealed to John when and how this satanic persecution, already responsible for the murder of loyal and faithful servants, would be permanently stopped. He pointed out that the roots of the problem go back to the beginning of humankind—to the birthplace of this age of man so filled with human sin and evil.

The archdeceiver

In the Garden of Eden man first encountered “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9; Genesis 3:1). That evil being’s deception has been so successful that most people scoff at the idea that a devil even exists. But the writers

of the Holy Scriptures regarded his existence and power as an unquestionable reality. They reveal him as the unseen driving influence behind evil and suffering. (For clear evidence of his existence, download or request our free booklet *Is There Really a Devil?*)



The apostle John was imprisoned on the island of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation.

Christians that the book of Revelation includes both “the things which are, and the things which will take place after this” (Revelation 1:19). Its prophetic fulfillments began in the days of the apostles and extend to our day and beyond.

The Day of the Lord in prophecy

Most of John’s visions focus on that time mentioned by God’s prophets throughout the Scriptures as “the day of the Lord,” also known as “the day of the Lord Jesus Christ,” “the day of Christ” and, here in Revelation, “the Lord’s Day” (Revelation 1:10; compare Isaiah 13:6; Joel 2:31; Zephaniah 1:14; Acts 2:20; 1 Corinthians 1:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:2).

Paul plainly spoke of this prophesied time: “For you yourselves know perfectly that *the day of the Lord* so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

Some people assume that when John said he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” in Revelation 1:10 he was referring to worshipping on Sunday. But the *context* of Revelation clearly shows that John was not referring to worshipping on a day of the week but to experiencing a vision of the coming Day of the Lord mentioned directly or indirectly in more than 50 passages in the Old and New Testaments.

The book of Revelation sums up the impact the devil has, not just on Christians but on all mankind, from the time of John until the return of Christ. It reveals that the ancient conflict between the forces of good and evil *will* be resolved.

As noted earlier in this chapter, John told early

As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains: “John’s revelation occurred on the Lord’s Day while he was in the Spirit. Some have indicated that ‘the Lord’s Day’ refers to the first day of the week. However, the word ‘Lord’s’ is an adjective and this expression is never used in the Bible to refer to the first day of the week. Probably John was referring to the day of the Lord, a familiar expression in both Testaments . . . He was projected forward in his inner self in a vision, not bodily, to that future day of the Lord when God will pour out His judgments on the earth” (John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, 1983, p. 930).

The mistaken assumption that John was referring to the first day of the week, Sunday, has no biblical support at all. The only day of the week, biblically speaking, that could possibly be called “the Lord’s day” is the Sabbath or Saturday, the seventh day of the week. Jesus specifically referred to Himself as “lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28). And, through the prophet Isaiah, God also refers to the Sabbath as “the holy day of the LORD” (Isaiah 58:13). (To learn more, request or download our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest.*)

Again, though, John was not referring to any day of the week but to the prophetic time that is the *primary subject* of the book of Revelation. John specifically tells us that what he wrote is *prophecy* (Revelation 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19). Therefore, John is merely explaining that “in the Spirit”—in divinely inspired *visions*—he was *mentally* transported to the coming *Day of the Lord*.

The Day of the Lord is described throughout the Scriptures as a time of God’s direct intervention in human affairs. It is a time of His *judgment* on His adversaries—on those who defy His correction and refuse His commandments. Isaiah succinctly sums up the Day of the Lord: “Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! *It will come as destruction from the Almighty*” (Isaiah 13:6).

Who is the object of the destruction? “Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and *He will destroy its sinners from it*” (verse 9). As Jeremiah explained: “. . . This is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, *that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries*” (Jeremiah 46:10).

Notice the prophet Zephaniah’s description of the time of God’s intervention: “The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of *wrath*, a day of *trouble* and *distress*, a day of *devastation* and *desolation*, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers.

“I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men,

because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse” (Zephaniah 1:14-17).

Notice how John describes the awesome events that follow the sixth seal of Revelation: “For *the great day of His wrath has come*, and who is able to stand?” (Revelation 6:17). Just before this, the martyred servants of God are represented as symbolically crying out from their graves: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You *judge and avenge* our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (verse 10). Later in this book of prophecy an angel is sent with the message: “Fear God and give glory to Him, *for the hour of His judgment has come ...*” (Revelation 14:6-7).



“Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east.”

Zechariah graphically described Christ’s return: “Behold, *the day of the LORD is coming ... I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem ... Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.*

“Then the LORD [Jesus, the prophesied Messiah] will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south” (Zechariah 14:1-4). At the end of this battle “the LORD shall be King over all the earth” (verse 9).

From these scriptures the main thrust of Revelation becomes clear. It portrays in vivid symbols the judgment of God in the last days—at, and

just before, the return of Christ. He will oversee the final destruction of the satanic system labeled in Revelation as Babylon the Great.

The real issue: Whom shall we worship?

At the heart of the end-time conflict is a crucial question: Who will mankind worship—Satan or God? Notice the religious orientation of most of humanity: “So *they worshiped the dragon* who gave authority to the beast; *and they worshiped the beast*, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’” (Revelation 13:4).

How extensive will this idolatrous worship be? “*All who dwell on the earth will worship him*, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life ...” (verse 8). Even now, almost everyone on earth is unwittingly “under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19)—“that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan *who deceives the whole world*” (Revelation 12:9). Satan’s direct control over humanity will dramatically intensify at the time of the end.

Man is not left without a warning, however. John records his vision of an angel “having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people; saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and *worship Him who made heaven and earth ...*’” (Revelation 14:6-7).

God sends a clear message through the book of Revelation: The time draws near when He will no longer tolerate humanity’s rejection of Him or its worship of the devil. Satan’s system of idolatrous worship must be wiped from the face of the earth before Christ begins His rule as King of Kings.

Pleas of God’s people answered

The temple in Jerusalem was the center of ancient Israel’s worship of God. God’s presence was manifested there (2 Chronicles 5:13-14).

In the book of Revelation God is frequently portrayed as seated in a heavenly temple on His throne (anciently represented by the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant in the holiest part of the earthly temple). As he watches angels dispense some of the final punishments mentioned in this book, the apostle John notes that “a loud voice came out of *the temple of heaven*, from the *throne*, saying, ‘It is done!’” (Revelation 16:17).

An angel had told John earlier, “Rise and measure *the temple* of God, *the altar*, and *those who worship there*” (Revelation 11:1). Inside the temple God is pictured receiving the prayers of His servants. “Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints

upon the golden altar which was before the throne” (Revelation 8:3).

What prayer does God hear from His true servants over and over again? “And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” (Revelation 6:10). Revelation reveals the circumstances under which those who are *the true worshippers of God* will finally have that prayer for justice answered in full.

John quotes Jesus promising His servants: “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar *in the temple of My God* ... I will write on him the name of My God *and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem* ...” (Revelation 3:12). The tables finally will turn. God’s faithful servants will be the real winners. God will greatly reward them for their patience and endurance while they waited for Him to fulfill His promises and answer their prayers.

As God intervenes in world affairs and makes His great power visible to the nations, His true worshippers are represented in Revelation as joyfully singing: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. *For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested*” (Revelation 15:3-4).

Revelation’s patterns of sevens

Another noticeable feature of the book of Revelation is its organization according to patterns of sevens. The first chapter alone mentions seven churches, seven golden lampstands, seven spirits, seven stars and seven angels.

The major events of the book are organized under seven seals, seven trumpets, seven thunders and seven bowls containing the seven last plagues. We also encounter seven lamps of fire and a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes.

Then there is a dragon dominating a beast having seven heads and 10 horns. Seven mountains and seven kings are associated with the heads of that beast. What do the messages conveyed by the repeated use of *seven* have in common?

In the Bible the number *seven* reflects the idea of *completeness*. For example, seven days make up a complete week. God introduced this concept immediately after He finished creating our first human parents: “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:2-3).

Revelation explains how God will bring His master plan to completion. It outlines a framework on which the prophetic part of that plan is carried out, especially in the last days.

The representation of completeness is also important in understanding the messages to the seven churches in chapters 1-3. When we compare these symbolic expressions in Revelation to imagery in other parts of the Bible, a much more meaningful picture emerges.

In Revelation God is revealing to His servants a *comprehensive*



overview of the most significant factors that will affect their lives—including their hardships and rewards—until His plan for humankind is completed. The concluding chapters (21-22) even give the righteous a brief glimpse into the nature of their relationships with God and each other for

The temple in Jerusalem was the center of ancient Israel’s worship of God. God’s presence was manifested there.

eternity. God emphasizes the thoroughness and completeness of this revealed prophetic summary by presenting its most significant aspects in patterns of sevens.

Although biblical patterns of sevens are symbolic in that they represent completeness, they also usually have some real, literal fulfillment. For example, God gave the Pharaoh of ancient Egypt a dream in which seven lean cows ate seven fat cows. Then God arranged for Joseph to explain to Pharaoh that the dream signified that seven years of agricultural plenty would be followed by seven years of devastating famine.

By revealing this information to Pharaoh in a dream, God inspired him to promote Joseph to a powerful role in Egypt. Joseph was then in a position to shelter and feed his father’s family—a small clan destined to become the nation of Israel—during the terrible years of famine. God was in control of the dream and its outcome.

In the same way God can foretell the result of any aspect of history (Isaiah 46:9-10). He can intervene to bring events to pass as He desires (verse 10). He can reveal details about the future with unwavering accuracy and precision. So we should not carelessly assume, as some do,

that the patterns of sevens in Revelation have only symbolic value. They generally foretell real events and should be taken seriously.

The role of the saints

When John wrote Revelation, Christians were being persecuted, at times martyred, with the approval of the Roman emperors. Revelation frequently contrasts the injustice of the age by emphasizing the future *governing* role of both the Messiah and the saints.

This is another important aspect of Revelation. The identity of who will have future control of the world is one of the central features of its prophecies.

At the return of Christ we learn: “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall *reign with Him* a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6). In the final chapter we read that God’s faithful servants, given eternal life in the resurrection, “shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5).

Also significant is *where* they will initially assist Jesus in their governing role. “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign *on the earth*” (Revelation 5:10, New International Version).

Even at the very beginning of Revelation John speaks of “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the *ruler over the kings of the earth*” (Revelation 1:5). Then John tells Christians that Jesus “has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever” (verse 6).

Will servants of God who endure trials and persecutions—past and future—be given real authority in the Kingdom of God under Christ? Indeed they will. As the apostle Paul reminded Christians in Corinth: “Do you not know that *the saints will judge the world?*” (1 Corinthians 6:2).

Notice Christ’s revelation to John: “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, *and judgment was committed to them*. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. *And they lived and reigned with Christ* for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

This is part of the incredible future Jesus Christ has planned for His faithful followers—to live and reign with Him forever! Now let’s learn what was prophesied to happen to those true followers of Christ down through the centuries until His return.

God’s Church in Prophecy

For whom was the book of Revelation written? The first verse gives us the answer: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him *to show his servants* what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John” (Revelation 1:1, NIV).

Revelation was written specifically for God’s servants, the Church of God. So it should come as no surprise that the Church itself is the primary topic of discussion in the first three chapters. (See “What Is the Church?,” page 18.)

Jesus commissioned His Church to be the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:14-16). Here in Revelation He symbolically introduces seven specific congregations of the Church as seven lampstands (Revelation 1:12, 20).

This imagery reminds us of the lampstand or menorah, with its seven branches, in ancient Israel’s tabernacle and later in its temple (Exodus 25:37; Zechariah 4:2). Now, however, God regards the Church itself as His spiritual temple (Ephesians 2:19-22).

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Since *seven* often represents completeness in Scripture, as earlier noted, these seven lampstands seem to portray a *composite* picture of the Church of God, the light of the world. Paul explains that the Church is *one body* (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:4). However, it has multiple congregations and members scattered throughout the nations. Therefore, these seven specific assemblies of believers appear to effectively represent the *totality* of the Church.

It appears likely that the prophecies of the Church in Revelation 2 and 3 have multiple meanings and applications. As one authority on the book of Revelation writes:

“There has been some debate concerning the theological significance of these seven churches. It is obvious, as there were many churches located in the area where these churches were found, that God divinely

What Is the Church?

Many people have misconceptions about what the word *church* means. Most equate it with a building. But throughout the Scriptures, *church* and *congregation* refer to *people*, never to a building. In fact, we find several verses in the New Testament where the “church” (people) were meeting inside certain members’ homes (buildings) in the local area (Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; and Philemon 2).

The Church is made up of people called to follow Jesus Christ. That group of people collectively is called “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:12). It is a spiritually transformed body of believers not limited to a particular locale, organization or denomination.

The *Holman Bible Dictionary*, in its article “Church,” explains the background of the word *church*:

“Church is the English translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*. The use of the Greek term prior to the emergence of the Christian church is important as two streams of meaning flow from the history of its usage into the New Testament understanding of church.

“First, the Greek term which basically means ‘called out’ was commonly used to indicate an *assembly of citizens* of a Greek city and is so used in Acts 19:32, 39. The citizens who were quite conscious of their privileged status over against slaves and noncitizens were called to the assembly by a herald and dealt... with matters of common concern. When the early Christians understood themselves as constituting a church, no doubt exists that they perceived themselves as *called out* by God in Jesus Christ for a *special purpose* and that their status was a privileged one in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:19).

“Second, the Greek term was used more than one hundred times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in common use in the time of Jesus. The Hebrew term (*qahal*) meant simply ‘assembly’ and could be used in a variety of ways, referring for example to an assembling of prophets (1 Samuel 19:20), soldiers (Numbers 22:4), or the people of God (Deuteronomy 9:10). The use of the term in the Old Testament in referring to the people of God is important for understanding the term ‘church’ in the New Testament.

“The first Christians were Jews who used the Greek translation of the Old Testament. For them to use a self-designation [given by Christ (Matthew 16:18)] that was common in the Old Testament for the people of God reveals their understanding of the continuity that links the Old and New Testaments. The early Christians, Jew and Gentile, understood themselves to be people of the God who had revealed Himself in the Old Testament (Hebrews 1:1-2), as the true children of Israel (Romans 2:28-29) with Abraham as their father (Romans 4:1-25), and as the people of the New Covenant prophesied in the Old Testament (Hebrews 8:1-13).

“As a consequence of this broad background of meaning in the Greek and Old Testament worlds, the term ‘church’ is used in the New Testament of a local congregation of *called-out Christians*, such as the ‘church of God which is at Corinth’ (1 Corinthians 1:2), and also of the entire people of God, such as in the affirmation that Christ is ‘the head over all things to the church, which is his body’ (Ephesians 1:22-23)” (emphasis added). To better understand how the Bible defines and describes the Church, please request your free copy of the booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.

selected seven and seven only, and did not send messages to other churches that conceivably might have been more important...

“There were from five hundred to one thousand townships in the province of Asia in the first century, some of them far larger than the cities of Thyatira and Philadelphia, and undoubtedly a number of them had Christian churches... It is understandable that the number of churches should be limited to seven as this is the number of completeness or universality in the Scripture, but there undoubtedly were other principles which determined the selection.

“First of all, each church needed a particular message, and the spiritual state of each church corresponded precisely to the exhortation which was given. The selection of the churches was also governed by the fact that each church was in some way normative and illustrated conditions common in local churches at that time as well as throughout later history. The messages to the seven churches therefore embody admonition suitable for churches in many types of spiritual need.

“Along with the messages to the churches were exhortations which are personal in character constituting instruction and warning to the individual Christian. Each of the messages as given to the churches therefore ends in a personal exhortation beginning with the phrase ‘He that hath an ear, let him hear.’

“Many expositors believe that in addition to the obvious implication of these messages the seven churches represent the chronological development of church history viewed spiritually. They note that Ephesus seems to be characteristic of the Apostolic Period in general and that the progression of evil climaxing in Laodicea seems to indicate the final state of apostasy of the church... The order of the messages to the churches seems to be divinely selected to give prophetically the main movement of church history” (John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 1989, pp. 51-52).

The overall message is, of course, that Christ reveals the dominant strengths and weaknesses of the Church both in John’s day and through the ages. He plainly tells each congregation, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7). He reveals what appears to be a sweeping picture of the future of His Church. In the midst of the seven lampstands representing His Church until the end of this present age, He appears in all His glory as its Head and High Priest (Revelation 1:13; Ephesians 4:15; Hebrews 8:1-2).

Responding to the Church’s intense persecution of the time, Christ assures His faithful servants that their suffering is not in vain. He, too, had suffered persecution and death. So He reminds them: “I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and

of Hades [the grave]” (Revelation 1:18, New Revised Standard Version).

Then He urges: “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

At that moment in time Christ’s true followers were a persecuted and discouraged body. They longed for Jesus to return in power and glory to judge their adversaries and establish the Kingdom of God. They desperately needed encouragement and desired a better understanding of what their future held.

They also needed to be put back on the right path spiritually. That was exactly what Christ did for them through this book. During this time of extreme adversity, directly instigated by Satan, Christ was revealing to John the framework of future events and reminding His faithful servants what He expects of them.

Works and faithfulness evaluated

Each congregation exhibits its own set of characteristics. But within these seven assemblies are common virtues and problems that Christians in all generations should either emulate or avoid. These messages make it clear that some congregations and individual members of the Church were developing serious spiritual deficiencies—some even allowing Satan to lead them away from their calling. Christ clearly distinguishes the spiritual works of those acceptable to Him from the works of those flirting with the “depths of Satan” (Revelation 2:24).

He begins with the congregation in the city of Ephesus: “I know *your works*, your labor, your patience ...” (verse 2). In the following verses Jesus evaluates the works and faithfulness of each congregation. He compliments the members for their strengths. But He also uses expressions like “Nevertheless I have this against you ...” (verses 4, 14, 20). He tempers His praise with words of warning.

He is particularly complimentary toward those who “have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary” (verse 3). He makes the point: “... The churches shall know that I am He who *searches the minds and hearts*. And I will give to each one of you according to your works” (verse 23). He appreciates those who “cannot bear those who are evil” and “have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars” (verse 2).

Notice Christ’s promises to the faithful: (1) They will “eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” (2) They will “not be hurt by the second death.” (3) They will receive “a new name.” (4) They will be given “power over the nations.” (5) They will “be clothed

Duality in Bible Prophecy

Prophetic statements sometimes apply to more than one fulfillment, a principle we could call “duality.” A prime example of duality is Christ’s first coming to atone for our sins and His second coming to rule as King of Kings.

Such dual themes are common in Bible prophecy. Jesus specifically alluded to the dual application of some prophecies in Matthew 17:11-12. Asked about the prophecy of “Elijah,” who would precede the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5), Jesus responded: “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already ...” (Matthew 17:11-12).

The disciples understood that the “Elijah” who had come already was John the Baptist (verse 13). Jesus Himself explained that John, already dead when Christ uttered these words, was a first fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy.

But Christ’s clear implication is that another Elijah will precede His second coming, announcing His return just as John the Baptist preceded Christ’s first coming. John no longer could do anything in the future. But as a forerunner, John had fulfilled, at least in part, Malachi’s prophecy.

Another prophecy with dual application is Jesus’ Olivet prophecy (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), so named because He gave it on the Mount of Olives or Mount Olivet, overlooking Jerusalem. Many conditions described in this prophecy existed in the days leading up to the Romans’ siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But Christ makes it clear that similar conditions would prevail shortly before His return.

Another example of dual fulfillment is in references to the “Day of the Lord” such as in Isaiah 13:6: “Wail, for the day of the LORD

is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.”

Verse 1 of that chapter identifies the time setting as when the Babylonian Empire threatened the kingdom of Judah (Babylon invaded Judah and captured Jerusalem in 586 B.C.), and it is in this setting that Isaiah wrote that “the day of the LORD is at hand!”

However, he again mentioned the Day of the Lord in verse 9: “Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it.” His subsequent inspired words, though, show that he is writing about the time of the end:

“For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.

“I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger” (verses 10-13).

We must carefully examine the context of prophecies to understand their meaning and discern whether the prophecy seems incomplete after its first fulfillment. It is equally important to avoid reading duality into passages that do not support such interpretation.

We should take great care to properly discern whether duality is a factor in any particular prophecy. Often we may recognize a prophecy’s fulfillment only after it is well under way or already has taken place.

in white garments.” (6) They will be pillars “in the temple of My God.” (7) They will “sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

These promises, along with the assurances in the remainder of Revelation, must have strengthened and encouraged those early Christians.

Historian Will Durant writes: “The influence of the Book of Revelation was immediate, enduring and profound. Its prophecies of salvation for loyal believers, and of punishment for their enemies, became the sustenance of a persecuted Church. Its theory of the millennium solaced those who mourned the long delay in the second coming of Christ. Its

vivid images and brilliant phrases entered into both the popular and the literary speech of Christendom” (*The Story of Civilization: Part III, Caesar and Christ*, 1972, p. 594).

The Church’s battle with Satan

But there is an ominous side to Christ’s evaluation



The church in the city of Ephesus, in modern-day Turkey, was the first of seven churches addressed in Revelation. Long since abandoned, Ephesus was a thriving city in John’s day and is mentioned often in the New Testament.

of His Church. He refers to the active influence of Satan in drawing Church members back into the idolatrous and sinful society from which they had just escaped. To “the church in Pergamos” He says, “I know ... where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is” (Revelation 2:12-13). He also reveals that some in Thyatira had strayed into “the depths of Satan” (verse 24).

False teachers posed another problem. The congregation in Thyatira is censured for allowing “that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (verse 20). The congregation in Ephesus is also accosted by “those who say they are apostles and are not,” but are “liars” (verse 2).

The Smyrna congregation experiences problems from “those who

say they are Jews and are not, but *are a synagogue of Satan*” (verse 9). And Pergamos has “those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.” He adds, “Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate” (verses 14-15).

To the congregation of Sardis Christ says, “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (Revelation 3:1). The description is of people who are Christians in name only. Yet He adds: “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy” (verse 4).

Those in Philadelphia “have little strength” but they at least remain faithful (verse 8). But the Laodicean congregation is described as lukewarm, “neither cold nor hot” (verse 16). Christ tells Laodiceans: “... You say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (verse 17).

These many references and warnings tell us, both from external sources and from within the Church of God itself, that a corrupted form of Christianity was developing through the influence of the devil and those he managed to deceive.

Peter had warned of this dangerous development some years earlier when he wrote: “But there were also false prophets among the people [of ancient Israel], even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And *many will follow their destructive ways*, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed” (2 Peter 2:1-2).

Satan masterminded and manipulated an apostate religion that began to masquerade as Christianity as far back as the days of the apostles. The messages to the seven congregations in Asia Minor also seem to imply that this counterfeit Christianity would be one of Satan’s main instruments of deception across the centuries until the end time.

Warnings of a false Christianity

The idea of an apostate religion masquerading as Christianity may sound shocking. But Jesus Himself told His disciples this would happen. When they asked Him, “And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3), He stated that religious impostors would come in His name. “*Take heed that no man deceive you,*” He warned. “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ;

and shall deceive many” (verses 4-5, King James Version).

This prophecy of Jesus has been—and will be—fulfilled through religious leaders who come in the name of Christ, claiming to be His spiritual representatives but whose teachings in reality are contrary to His instructions and so lead people astray.

What, according to Christ, would be the consequences of this deception? “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then *many* false prophets will rise up and *deceive many*” (verse 9-11).

Christians faithful to God’s Word were prophesied to become a distinct minority and, at the time of the end, be intensely persecuted by a much larger and far more powerful *false* religion claiming to worship Christ.

Throughout the book of Revelation this false religion, posing as the true religion, is presented as wielding incredible influence at the time of the end. The almost unbelievable power that will be displayed by the great “false prophet” of Revelation will be one of the major signs that the end of the age is imminent.

Jesus explained that, at the time of the end, “there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again . . . At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For *false Christs* and *false prophets* will appear and *perform great signs and miracles* to deceive even the elect—if that were possible” (Matthew 24:21-24, NIV).

Christ reveals to His servants that, even during the lifetime of John, Satan was already developing a corrupted version of Christianity. He was already recruiting a following within the Church Jesus had founded. (You can read the history of these two entirely different forms of Christianity, one faithful to Christ and the other deceived by Satan, when you download or request your free copy of the booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.)

The prophecies given by Christ and His apostles concerning the development of a counterfeit Christianity came to pass just as they had predicted. This counterfeit even now dominates the world’s religious scene—but to nowhere near the extent it will in the coming years.

Now let’s examine why we should have confidence in the other prophecies contained in the book of Revelation.

The Book of Revelation’s Divine Authority

Over the years critics have challenged the inspiration of the book of Revelation because its literary form is similar to a controversial body of writings known as *apocalyptic literature*. This type of literature was fairly common just before and during the apostolic era. Well-meaning authors, concerned about conditions in that era (200 B.C. to A.D. 100), often employed this dramatic form of writing to express their views on how the age-old conflict between good and evil finally would be resolved.

Apocalyptic writers frequently borrowed symbols and other imagery from the Old Testament prophets. But far too often they enhanced and embellished biblical material to suit their own fantasies. Hoping to give their theories greater weight and authority, they falsely attributed their writings to notable prophets and figures from the past. By using deceptive pseudonyms, the authors gave their writings the appearance of having been written by well-known prophets of ancient times while concealing their true identity.

As a result, apocalyptic writing as a class of literature is generally recognized as unreliable, lacking credibility and having no legitimate claim to divine authority. Regrettably, far too many scholars and critics place

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the book of Revelation, the Apocalypse of the Bible, in the same class.

They don’t realize that the book of Revelation is in a class of its own. Its dramatic symbolism comes from the divine author of all the other books of the Bible, not from the imaginations of John. John simply recorded what Jesus Christ revealed to him.

The writings of John are of the same genre as Old Testament prophecies. He was a faithful disciple of Jesus Himself. He makes it clear he received his prophetic visions directly from Christ, making him a prophet in his own right. Unlike the apocalyptic writers of his era who hid behind deceptive pseudonyms, John clearly identifies himself

and explains in vivid detail how he received the visions and messages included in the book of Revelation.

John's vision of God's throne

In chapters 4 and 5 John describes being transported in vision into heaven to the very throne of God. Here He sees God the Father holding a sealed scroll containing the prophetic message He wants revealed to His people, the Church of God.

As John is invited to appear before God, a voice tells him: "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this" (Revelation 4:1). Before John relates these prophecies to his readers, he establishes the source and authenticity of his visions: "Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne" (Revelation 4:2). Then he describes, awestruck, how he was taken in a vision to the throne of God to witness a ceremony.

Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel recorded similar experiences. They received visions of God appearing to them on His throne. Isaiah wrote: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1). Notice Isaiah's reaction:

"So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.' Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.'

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.' And He said, 'Go, and tell this people ...'" (verses 5-8; compare Ezekiel 1:26-28; 2:1-5; 10:1, 4; Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14).

God here identifies Himself as the author of the prophecies recorded by these men. Their visions came directly from His throne! They carried His divine authority.

The source of John's visions

The book of Revelation carries the same authority. God was equally careful in revealing to John the source of his prophetic visions. God wanted him—and us—to understand that He, the Supreme Ruler of the universe, personally reveals the contents of the book of Revelation.

John sees God's throne surrounded by heavenly witnesses. During the ensuing ceremony the elders bow in worship before the living Creator

God. Then they sing these words: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

Notice what John saw next: "And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals" (Revelation 5:1). Here is the real author of the book of Revelation, the Supreme Ruler of the universe. In His right hand are the prophecies of the book of Revelation, sealed and unreadable.

That, however, quickly changes. Christ is authorized to open the seals and reveal the contents of the scroll. "But one of the elders said to me

The scroll, now in Christ's hands, contains the answer to the continuous prayers of God's people for justice and deliverance and the establishment of the Kingdom of God to rule on earth.

[John], 'Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals'" (Revelation 5:5). Verses 6-7 then describe how Jesus, the Lamb slain for our sins, takes the scroll from His Father's hand. The audience then kneels before Christ, holding symbolic "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (verse 8).

The message is obvious. The scroll, now in Christ's hands, contains the answer to the continuous prayers of God's people for justice and deliverance and for the establishment of the Kingdom of God to rule on earth (see Matthew 6:33).

Notice the audience's reaction: "They sing a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth'" (Revelation 5:9-10, NRSV).

Here is the heart of the prophecies in Revelation. They explain how and when our faithful God will avenge the enemies of the called, chosen and faithful servants of God. They explain His judgments on all evildoers and the victory He will achieve over them. They explain the reward the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, will bring to His faithful saints.

Now let's examine just what those prophecies contain.

The Seals of the Prophetic Scroll

Revelation's main prophetic message is unveiled primarily through seven sets of symbols sketched on a scroll fastened with seven successive seals. Jesus Christ breaks the seals and opens the scroll before John's eyes (Revelation 6:1). John sees and describes the symbols of the vision, each having a specific prophetic significance.

As we have already seen, Christ alone has the right to unveil the meaning of the seals. But He does not fully explain each seal in this context. In fact, He had already—before His death and resurrection—revealed the keys we need to understand the seals.

This information is recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The writers of each of these three Gospel accounts record Jesus' answer to the questions His disciples asked Him concerning when He would come again and what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the age. "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'" (Matthew 24:3).

Jesus revealed to them the trends and conditions that would dominate the world until His return. The seals of Revelation 6 symbolically portray the same conditions in the same sequence Christ had earlier described.

Most of Revelation—about two thirds of its content—is devoted to the seventh seal. The contents of the first six seals are found in chapter 6 alone.

Chapter 7 interrupts the explanation of the seals to explain that 144,000 of the tribes of Israel, after being spiritually converted, will be protected from the seven plagues heralded by trumpet blasts. It also explains that during the Great Tribulation a great multitude from every nation on earth will repent and turn to God.

The events corresponding to the seventh seal dominate the remainder of the book.

Why God's judgment is needed

The first five seals correspond to adversities that are to afflict vast portions of humanity, including some of God's servants, between the first and second appearances of Christ. These hardships, having already

begun in the lifetime of John, extend to the time of the end.

Concerning these particular afflictions, Jesus had earlier warned that "all these are the *beginning* of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8)—or "of birth pains" (NIV), signifying calamities that would, like labor contractions, escalate in frequency and intensity before the end. He also said: "... Do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, *but the end will not come immediately*" (Luke 21:9).

We should remember that the primary time frame for Revelation's main prophecies is the Day of the Lord. It is the day of God's judgment and wrath on the nations. The occurrences of that time are the specific subject of the seventh seal.

The first five seals describe conditions that predate the Day of the Lord. These are the afflictions that make God's intervention and judgment necessary and just. They describe the particular end-time application of Satan's enduring deception of



The first major trend prophesied in Revelation is the rise of false teachers claiming to represent Jesus Christ, but twisting His teachings for their own ends. "Take heed that no one deceives you," He warns.

humanity, his persecution of the saints and the unending pattern of war—with its horrible consequences—that are the fruits of his deception.

Under the sixth seal we see portrayed a stunning display of signs and wonders in the heavens. This will transpire just before the Day of the Lord, announcing that God's wrath and judgment are at hand.

Now notice Jesus personally identifying the adversities associated with the seals: "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall *deceive many*. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars ... Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be *famines*, and *pestilences*, and earthquakes in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they shall *deliver you up to be afflicted*, and shall *kill you*: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matthew 24:4-9, KJV).

Let's compare what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24 to what

the apostle John saw in vision as each seal was opened.

The first seal: false religion

The opening of the first four seals reveals the ride of the notorious “four horsemen of the Apocalypse.”

John reports on the first: “I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then ... I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest” (Revelation 6:1-2, NIV).

What is the meaning of this mysterious rider? What is the object of his conquest?

In Revelation 19:11, in a later time frame, Jesus Christ is pictured as returning victoriously on a white horse. Does this seal picture the returning, conquering Christ? Certainly this symbolic horseman bears much outward similarity to Christ at His return. But notice significant differences in the details. Christ is wearing many crowns (verse 12), not just the one crown this rider wears, and Jesus is pictured with a sword as His weapon (verse 15) rather than a bow. The horseman of the first seal appears *similar* to the returning Christ, but different. Does he symbolize the real Christ or an impostor?

Now let's compare this symbolic horseman to the first warning Jesus gave His disciples in the Olivet prophecy. He warned them: “Take heed that no man *deceive* you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and *shall deceive many*” (Matthew 24:4-5, KJV).

Jesus warned His disciples that the first adversity they would face would come from deceivers. A few verses later He explained methods impostors would use as they usurped His name. He reveals that they would stamp His name on a religion that is really a *counterfeit* Christianity:

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For *false christs* and *false prophets* will rise and show great signs and wonders *to deceive*, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it” (verses 23-26).

To be consistent with Jesus' prophecies, this first rider can represent only a deceptive power *masquerading* as Christ. Outwardly it will appear Christian, but in reality it will be, like the three riders that follow, a force for evil and destruction.

This deception began in the days of the apostles. But it will reach its greatest fulfillment in the last days. For example, Paul says a “lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming”

(2 Thessalonians 2:8). His influence over humanity will be “according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception ...” (verses 9-10).

At the time of the end the deception of humanity will be so great that most of the world will be under the sway of a corrupt, counterfeit and idolatrous religious system, one that has rejected the true teachings of the Bible.

The second seal: the horror of war

“When the Lamb opened the second seal ... another horse came out, a *fiery red* one. Its rider was given power *to take peace from the earth* and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword” (Revelation 6:3-4, NIV).

This horse, the color of blood, matches Christ's second warning. “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars ... Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matthew 24:6-7).

When Jesus founded the Church, the Roman Empire was enjoying a brief period of peace. But this lasted only a few decades, then Rome was again at war. This pattern was to continue until the time of the end when it



The book of Revelation describes massive armies engaged in military actions that will take hundreds of millions of lives.

would reach its climax in “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14; 19:11-21).

But even before that final battle, the book of Revelation indicates that global warfare will already be underway. It describes massive armies engaged in military actions that will take hundreds of millions of lives.

The third seal: war's consequences

“When the Lamb opened the third seal ... I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!’” (Revelation

6:5-6, NIV). This seal portrays an extreme scarcity of food and other basic necessities of life. It corresponds to Christ's third warning: "And there will be *famines...*" (Matthew 24:7).

Scarcity of food and resulting famines are the natural aftermath of war. At the time of the end, military conflicts among nations will destroy property and disrupt agricultural production, leading to widespread and severe scarcity of food and other necessities.

The fourth seal: the mounting toll

"When the Lamb opened the fourth seal ... I looked, and there before me was a pale [sickly looking] horse! Its rider was named *Death*, and Hades [the grave] was following close behind him. They [all four horsemen] were given power over a fourth of the earth *to kill by sword, famine and plague*, and by the wild beasts of the earth" (Revelation 6:7-8, NIV).

The fourth seal describes widespread disease epidemics and death in the wake of the war and famine of the previous seals. This corresponds with the fourth condition listed by Jesus—"pestilence," or deadly epidemics of sickness and disease (Matthew 24:7). His mention of natural disasters such as earthquakes also fits within the context of plagues that bring widespread death.

Moreover, all these elements—



"So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death ..." The apostle John saw, in a chilling vision, four horsemen symbolizing major trends leading up to Jesus Christ's return.

war, famine, pestilence and other calamities—reinforce each other. Wars and other disasters lead to famines and pestilences, which lead to further fighting over resources. The wild beasts of the earth become a concern in times of societal breakdown—and the reference here could also be to disease carriers such as rats or even microscopic pathogens.

At the time of the end we can expect such dire conditions to impact various nations and regions of the world—and the faithful people of God living among them. Conditions in some areas may be similar to the last

Woodcut by Gustave Doré

days of ancient Israel when God told Jeremiah He would "consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence" (Jeremiah 14:12). God does not want His servants to be surprised by outbreaks of such tragedies, but to look to Him for help and deliverance.

The fifth seal: a religious persecution

After the four horsemen, Jesus opens yet more seals. John writes:

"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of *those who had been slain* because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and *avenge our blood?*' Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow-servants and brothers *who were to be killed as they had been* was completed" (Revelation 6:9-11, NIV).

Symbolically pictured at the altar in God's temple, those who have already given their lives as martyrs in His service are still waiting, on the eve of the Day of the Lord, for God's judgment on those who hate Him, His ways and His servants. But they will have to wait a little longer because another massive martyrdom of God's faithful must first occur.

Christ had already explained to His disciples what must take place: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and *kill you*, and *you will be hated* by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:9-12).

The early Church had scarcely been established before persecution set in. Several of the letters of the apostles refer to the suffering and martyrdom of faithful members at the hands of the enemies of the Church. Most of the apostles met a violent and early death. The epistles of 2 Timothy and 2 Peter record the final encouraging thoughts of Paul and Peter as they awaited execution. Brutal persecution and harassment continued in the following decades and on into later centuries. *And it will happen again.*

Jesus explained that the worst persecution and martyrdom would come at the time of the end: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]; but *for the elect's sake* those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22).

As we will see more clearly later, people who refuse to worship "the image of the beast" in the last days will face the possibility of execution (Revelation 13:15). The primary targets of this carnage will be those

“who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

Additional prophecies explain that this time of great tribulation and persecution will also afflict the modern physical descendants of the 12 tribes of ancient Israel (see “The ‘Time of Jacob’s Trouble,’” page 56).

The sixth seal: signs in the skies

Then we come to a major transition.

“I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig-tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place” (Revelation 6:12-14, NIV).

Did Christ earlier explain when, in the sequence of prophesied events, these awesome and fearful heavenly signs would occur? He certainly did: “*Immediately after the tribulation of those days* the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Matthew 24:29).

Now notice, in the concluding description of the sixth seal, what is to follow the heavenly signs: “And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’” (Revelation 6:15-17; compare Zephaniah 1:14-17).

Note the order of these three separate events: First comes the tribulation, as described in the fifth seal. Next the heavenly signs, described in the sixth seal, occur. After the heavenly signs is the Day of the Lord, the day of God’s wrath.

The heavenly signs occur *after* the time of tribulation has begun but *before* the Day of the Lord begins. The prophet Joel confirms this: “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, *before* the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD” (Joel 2:30-31).

Why is this so significant?

Satan lashes out

The end-time persecution and martyrdom of the saints (also directed at the physical descendants of ancient Israel) begins before the heavenly

signs and is both the product and the expression of *Satan’s wrath*. Later John describes hearing a voice from heaven announcing: “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, *having great wrath*, because he knows that he has a short time” (Revelation 12:12).

Knowing his time is short, what does Satan do? “Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he *persecuted the woman* who gave birth to the male Child” (verse 13).

The woman represents the people of God. At the time of the end Satan will trigger many destructive events. Because his time is short, he will mobilize a deceived humanity into a frenzy of hatred and destruction against anything and anyone that represents the true God.

This point is extremely important. Satan’s vindictive rampage of terror will be launched against the natural descendants of the tribes of Israel as well as the converted servants of



Terrifying heavenly signs will precede Jesus Christ’s return, including the moon turning blood-red. Yet in spite of such frightening warnings, few will repent and turn to God.

Christ *before* the heavenly signs announce the Day of the Lord.

This means that *Satan’s wrath*—the time when great tribulation will fall on God’s people—will have been underway for some time *before* the beginning of *God’s wrath*. Even after the time of God’s wrath—the Day of the Lord—Satan’s destructive war on God’s people apparently will not cease until he is bound at Jesus’ return (Revelation 20:1-2).

Notice that the woman of chapter 12 will be “nourished *for a time and times and half a time* [a year, years and half a year], from the presence of the serpent” (verse 14). Even though God will nourish, strengthen and protect some of His people during that terrible time, many others, as we have already seen, will be killed.

Revelation 11:2 tells us that Jerusalem is to be trampled underfoot by gentiles for 42 months (Revelation 11:2). God also promises to raise up two prophets to be His witnesses for 1,260 days (verse 3).

That each of these periods equals 3½ years is significant. These references indicate that a total of 3½ years elapses from the beginning

of Satan's attack on the people of God until his political and religious system is destroyed and he is locked away at Christ's return.

The day of God's wrath will be brief

The length of God's judgment is nowhere specified in Revelation, unless it is implied in the expression "the great *day* of His wrath" (Revelation 6:17). In some other prophetic passages God specifies that a "day" represents a *year* of punishment (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:4-6). If that same principle applies here in Revelation, the Day of the Lord ("the day of His wrath") would be *the final year* before Christ returns. Indeed, Isaiah 34:8 refers to the day of the Lord's anger as a year-long period.

This corresponds to *the last year* of the 3½ years of Satan's wrath. In other words, God's punishments on the Day of the Lord would overlap Satan's vengeance on God's people for a period of one year—the final year of the last 3½ years.

This time frame seems to be what John, under the inspiration of Christ, was indicating for the major end-time events described in Revelation. And it is entirely compatible with Christ's words. As He said: "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22, NIV). He indicates that all the events specifically related to the end time will occur within a *brief* period.

The description of the sixth seal in Revelation 6 ends with the words: "For *the great day of His wrath* has come, and who is able to stand?" (verse 17). This announces the Day of the Lord, the subject of the seventh seal. Yet the opening of the seventh seal is not discussed until the beginning of chapter 8. John interrupts the story flow of the seven seals to show that 144,000 are sealed and a great innumerable multitude are converted from all nations in this time of worldwide turmoil.

The sealing of the 144,000

First, an angel announces, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees [all are mentioned as being devastated by the first four trumpet plagues in chapter 8] till we have sealed *the servants of our God* on their foreheads" (Revelation 7:3).

Why are the 144,000 sealed? One key is given later when another angel commands locust-like implements of war "*not to harm* the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but *only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads*" (Revelation 9:4).

The sealing of those who are chosen by God is now completed. And now the massive devastation of the coming trumpet plagues that God will inflict on mankind during the Day of the Lord will not harm them. They

may continue to experience some of the effects of Satan's vengeance, even during the Day of the Lord, but their sealing guarantees that punishments representing God's wrath will in no way affect them.

Who are these 144,000? How are they identified?

"And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed" (Revelation 7:4). This sealing has to do with receiving God's Holy Spirit so one may become spiritually converted. As Ephesians 1:13-14 says: "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [which] is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession" (NIV, compare Ephesians 4:30; 2 Timothy 2:19).

The 144,000 of Revelation 7 are mentioned again in Revelation 14, where it becomes clear that these spiritual "firstfruits" will have repented and been converted before the beginning of the Day of the Lord. They are described as being redeemed and without fault. They are represented as having a relationship both with God the Father and Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God.

"Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.

"These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Revelation 14:1-5).

The great innumerable multitude

"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10). This multitude is made up of people from the many nationalities and ethnic groups on earth—from their tribes, clans and languages. What makes them special is that they all have "come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the

blood of the Lamb” (verses 13-14). They are converted servants of God, having suffered from and—as seems to be implied—been converted during the first 2½ years of the Great Tribulation, before the beginning of the Day of the Lord.

There is no firm agreement among biblical interpreters as to what the text of Revelation 7 implies about the immediate future of this multitude. These people are, however, promised eternal life—salvation—with the rest of the saints at the return of Christ.

Some interpret the receiving of “white robes” by the great innumerable multitude as an indication they may have been martyred by the beginning of the Day of the Lord. If so, they will be resurrected at Christ’s coming—just as those martyrs given white robes in Revelation 6:11 must “wait” until their deaths are avenged (during the Day of the Lord) to be resurrected to eternal life at Christ’s return.

Another view is that the innumerable multitude will *survive* the Great Tribulation and will continue to live and be sheltered by God during the Day of the Lord.

The New Revised Standard Version seems to advocate this meaning by the way it translates Revelation 7:15: “For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne *will shelter them.*”

Other translations, however, are less specific in their rendering of this verse. The reason for this is that the original Greek wording states only that God will “dwell” (or “tabernacle”) among them. The conclusion that they remain alive and are *sheltered* from further harm during the Day of the Lord is then deduced from this promise.

The promises in the next two verses, though their specific application is somewhat ambiguous, are generally regarded as reinforcements of this deduction: “They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (verses 16-17).

Unmistakably clear in Revelation 7 is that a great harvest of true and faithful Christians will occur during the first years of the great-tribulation period. That immense spiritual harvest will be reaped not only from the literal tribes of Israel but from the others nations and peoples throughout the earth. The powerful preaching of God’s two witnesses (chapter 11) will no doubt contribute greatly to the conversion of this vast number during that frightening and deadly time.

The Day of the Lord Finally Arrives

The opening of the seventh seal is accompanied by “silence in heaven for about half an hour” (Revelation 8:1). All creation is awed by what is about to happen. The Day of the Lord, the event angels and saints have anticipated for thousands of years, has finally arrived. Centuries of prayers from the saints are symbolically compared to the fragrance of burning incense ascending from the temple altar to the very presence of God in heaven (verses 3-5). The answer to those prayers is now imminent.

Once the seventh seal is broken, the entire scroll is finally opened. Much of the remainder of the book of Revelation is subdivided into seven major parts, each signified by the blast of a trumpet.

In the ancient world trumpets often were used to announce the approach or arrival of danger. They serve a similar purpose in Revelation. Here they announce the *main phases* of God’s judgment on this evil world—and on the devil, who has deceived it.

The seven trumpets provide us with a summary of what will happen during the time known as the Day of the Lord. Revelation explains and describes the type of punishment each trumpet blast represents.

Combined, the seven trumpets (chapters 8-11) provide a *summary* of what will happen during the time known as the Day of the Lord. Revelation explains and describes the punishment each trumpet blast heralds.

Most of the following chapters (12-20) fill in details concerning the Day of the Lord, particularly about the persecuting worldly powers led and controlled by Satan and about Jesus’ victory over those powers. Chapters 21-22 give us a brief glimpse of the saints’ eternal reward.

The first four trumpets

The first four trumpets in Revelation 8 herald cataclysmic devastation. The first is a rain of hail and fire (verse 7), perhaps similar to one of the 10 plagues God sent on Egypt at the time of Moses (see Exodus 9:13-35). This could be describing phenomena such as icy hail mixed with lightning, a rain of superheated volcanic material from a gigantic eruption, or a meteor storm from space.

The second trumpet plague, a burning mountain thrown into the sea (Revelation 8:8-9), could also indicate a devastating super volcano or an asteroid impact. The third, a falling star burning like a torch (verses 10-11), also seems to refer to an asteroid or comet impact.

Then, following the fourth trumpet, light from the sun, the moon and the stars is obscured (verse 12)—possibly as a result of the atmospheric debris from the first three catastrophes. A plague of darkness, similar to another of the plagues of Egypt (see Exodus 10:21-29), engulfs at least a third or possibly all of the earth. (An even greater darkness will later ensue during the seven last plagues.)

The targets of the first four trumpets are “the earth and the sea” (Revelation 7:2). Though many deaths will surely result from these plagues, they are primarily directed toward mankind’s earthly life-support system. They devastate earth’s environment. God, our Creator, will provide



ample evidence to every human being that He has full control over our life-sustaining environment.

Notice exactly what is affected by the first four trumpet plagues. First “a third of the trees” and “all green grass” are burned up. Next “a third of the sea”

A series of plagues will strike humanity’s life-support system—earth’s environment. Much of the planet’s vegetation will be destroyed and its water poisoned.

turns to blood. Then “a third of the rivers and . . . springs of waters” are poisoned, bringing many more deaths (Revelation 8:7-12).

Although these events are terrifying, God remains merciful. He always prefers to impose lesser punishments first to give people an opportunity to repent. As He told Ezekiel: “Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live’” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Rarely have whole nations repented and changed because of God’s warning punishments. Most people tend to become bitter toward God rather than admitting their own callous behavior and evil thoughts. Though the first four trumpets may cause a few to abandon their evil ways, most of humanity will not repent, even when later afflicted

PhotoDisc

by far greater punishments (Revelation 9:20-21; 16:9-11).

When mankind stubbornly refuses to repent, God increases the severity of His punishments. “And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, ‘Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!’” (Revelation 8:13).

Specifying the next three trumpet blasts as *woes* aptly describes the punishments they represent. Now the targets are “the inhabitants of the earth.” The people themselves become the direct recipients of God’s punishments.

The fifth trumpet plague

The affliction of the fifth trumpet, the first woe, emerges out of a darkened atmosphere, again possibly polluted with smoke, dust and ash from the preceding plagues. Like the first and fourth trumpets, the fifth blast is reminiscent of one of the plagues that fell on ancient Egypt—that of locusts (see Exodus 10:1-20). However, these “locusts” in Revelation are apparently not insects but machines, with “breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings . . . like the sound of chariots”—possibly, from John’s first-century perspective, referring to deadly military aircraft such as modern helicopters. These torture people as with the sting of a scorpion (Revelation 9:1-10).

Though the sources of the afflictions are not specified, their effects are strikingly similar to the effects of modern chemical or biological warfare.

The director or “king” of this wave of affliction is described as “the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon” (verse 11, NIV). These titles, in Hebrew and Greek, mean “destruction” and “destroyer,” respectively. And we later see that the Satan-led “beast” power emerges from this abyss or bottomless pit (Revelation 17:8), showing that the locusts here are probably the forces of this Europe-centered power bloc directed by Satan.

As noted earlier, as the end of his reign approaches, Satan is filled with “great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (Revelation 12:12). He is the master manipulator behind the massive armies gathering for their brutal mission. But God remains in control despite Satan’s rebellion against Him.

Notice the limitations God puts on the locust-like conduits of human suffering: “They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (Revelation 9:4).

They are not sent to *kill* people (verse 5), only to torment them. God’s previous punishments were aimed at the environment. But now

they directly target those who still refuse to repent. The agony caused by this plague will be so intense that many will prefer to die. “In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them” (verse 6). God is still giving the world’s inhabitants an opportunity to recognize just how angry He is with their rebellious behavior so they can understand that He will no longer tolerate their sins.

Notice that God’s timetable for this punishment is precise. This plague affects human beings for five months (verse 10). God controls what happens and the length of time it lasts.

After five months of terrible afflictions, an angel announces: “One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things” (verse 12).

The sixth trumpet plague

A voice tells the angel who holds the sixth trumpet: “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates” (Revelation 9:14).

The Euphrates was the easternmost boundary of the Roman Empire at the time of the writing of Revelation. Except for a brief period later during the reign of the emperors Trajan and Hadrian, when Mesopotamia and Assyria became provinces of Rome, the Euphrates was generally considered the dividing line between the Roman provinces and territories controlled by other kings to the east.

It is not clear whether this river will play a similar role at the time of the end. But this could be implied in the wording of Revelation 16:12, where “kings from the east” are again specifically associated with the Euphrates River.

Now to the next event. “And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released *to kill a third of mankind*” (Revelation 9:15, NIV). John then mentions the coming of a 200-million-man army (verse 16). This event, the second woe or sixth trumpet plague, seems to be a massive counterattack against the European-led forces of the first woe or fifth trumpet plague.

By this time in John’s visions all nations have refused to repent. They have refused to respond to God’s warnings through famine, pestilence and environmental disasters, or the agony of the fifth trumpet. Therefore God will no longer restrain the beginning of an all-out world war—a global conflict that will soon climax at Christ’s return.

The time has arrived for God to allow man to slaughter his fellow human beings without restraint (except for those righteous few whom He has already sealed). An unimaginable carnage is about to begin. One third of the earth’s population will die in this conflagration. Apparently

this will be *in addition* to the deaths from famines, disease epidemics and other catastrophes mentioned earlier—such as those over “a fourth of the earth” that were specified under the fourth seal.

John vividly describes this terrifying end-of-the-age conflict in the only way he can—in the language of the first century: “The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulphur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulphur.

“A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury” (verses 16-19, NIV).

John could portray a terrifying array of modern weapons only with the vocabulary available to him at that time. Tanks and missiles and aircraft with machine guns, smart bombs and laser-guided missiles did not exist, so he could not begin to describe such weapons in a way we would immediately recognize. When we get into chapters 13-18 we will learn more details about Satan’s role in these destructive events.

The *titanic war* described in chapter 9 is *the background* of all the remaining punishments in Revelation. Keep this in mind as we continue. Chapter 10 and the first part of chapter 11 in particular must be viewed against this setting. Revelation shows that the final battle at the end of this conflict will be directed against Christ at His return (Revelation 19:19).

As the return of Christ draws near, the book of Revelation describes the stubborn, unyielding attitude of most of mankind. “But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, *did not repent* of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts” (Revelation 9:20-21).

The seven thunders

In chapter 10, as prelude to the seventh and final trumpet—the third and last woe—John sees an angel holding “a little book open in his hand” (verse 2). The angel’s voice is compared with the roar of a lion. As the angel speaks, John hears seven thunderous utterances. Then John says: “... I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them’” (verses 3-4). Notice that God revealed more prophecy to John than He allowed him to record (Revelation 10:1-4).

Next the angel emphasizes the importance of the imminent seventh trumpet. “The angel . . . swore by Him who lives forever . . . that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, *as He declared to His servants the prophets*” (verses 5-7). The climax of the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Bible will occur when Christ returns at the sounding of the seventh trumpet.

John then receives specific instructions: “‘Go, take the little book . . . and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.’ Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter” (verses 8-11). The meaning seems to be that while there is initial joy and wonder in the message, this turns to heartache when the magnitude of the corrective actions required to turn humanity from its wickedness really sinks in (compare Ezekiel 2:9–3:3, 14).

The angel further tells John, “*You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings*” (Revelation 10:11).

The prophecies here will be explained and proclaimed to the nations at the time of the end. God plans to ensure that the final proclamation of His prophecies, and the gospel itself, grabs the attention of all people!

God’s two witnesses

When the time of the end arrives God will raise up, in Jerusalem, two prophets to complete this phase of His work before Christ’s return. As His chosen witnesses, these two will carry out a spectacular mission on God’s behalf. They will perform dramatic miracles as they proclaim God’s plagues and judgments (Revelation 11:1-12).

They will exercise some of the same supernatural powers that God anciently granted to Elijah and Moses, two of the greatest prophets of old. “And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies [reminiscent of Elijah]. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy [as did Elijah], and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues [as did Moses], as often as they desire” (verses 5-6).

The work of the two witnesses is presented between the sixth and seventh trumpet plagues. Yet this is actually the time of the conclusion of their work—their prophesying lasts for 3½ years, the same length of time Jerusalem will be occupied by the gentiles (Revelation 11:2-3). Thus it will have commenced just before the Great Tribulation.

In addition to their activities described here, they appear to be directly associated with certain prophecies of Zechariah (verse 4; compare Zechariah 4:3, 11-14).

We are introduced to the two witnesses *at the temple site* in Jerusalem. This, too, is significant. Throughout Revelation the temple is con-



sistently associated with worship of God. We are told that “the court which is outside the temple . . . has been given to the Gentiles”—along with “the holy city” of Jerusalem (Revelation 11:2).

Jesus had earlier warned that a specific event will trigger many

Opposing the Beast and False Prophet will be God’s two witnesses. Jerusalem will find itself in the vortex of a great spiritual battle as prophesied events reach their climax.

of the events described in the book of Revelation: “So when you see *standing in the holy place* ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” He continued: “For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again” (Matthew 24:15-16, 21, NIV).

Christ’s words indicate that the devil will enable the prophetic Beast and False Prophet to commandeer the temple area, temporarily making it the center of their own satanically inspired system of worship. Opposing the Beast and False Prophet will be God’s two witnesses. Jerusalem will find itself in the vortex of a great spiritual battle as prophesied events reach their climax.

But how will the two witnesses and their message be received? People will loathe them. Like no other prophets in the history of God’s people, the witnesses and their message will be “hated by all nations” (Matthew 24:9).

Yet God is consistent. The effect of His witnesses’ work will be similar to that of other great prophets. For example, God encouraged Ezekiel concerning the effect of his prophecies: “And when this comes to pass—surely it will come—then *they will know that a prophet has been among*

them” (Ezekiel 33:33). We can expect no less from these two dynamic end-time prophets.

They will gain worldwide attention, giving them an unprecedented opportunity to warn the nations that they should repent of their sins and rebellion against God. Then, when God has seen that their message and warning has been delivered, He will allow the Beast to execute them. This, too, is part of God’s plan.

By that time the people of every nation will have seen and heard frequent reports on the activities of the two prophets through worldwide communications systems. This becomes clear from John’s statement that “peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves” (Revelation 11:7-9).

Notice mankind’s reaction to the murder of God’s prophets: “And those who dwell on the earth *will rejoice over them*, make merry, and send gifts to one another, *because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth*” (verse 10). The whole world, having hated the two witnesses’ rebukes and calls for repentance, celebrates their deaths.

But the rejoicing will be short-lived. Three and a half days after their execution, the two prophets will be resurrected (verses 11-13)—at the very time the seventh trumpet announces the return of Christ and the resurrection and reward of God’s servants (see verses 15-18; compare Hebrews 11:39-40). A startled world will have irrefutable proof of who is the true God and which is His religion!

What comes next will occur with astounding speed.

The last trumpet announces Christ’s return

“The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly. Then *the seventh angel sounded*: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:14-15).

We reach the long-awaited return of Jesus, the Son of God, to establish the Kingdom of God. “And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned’” (verses 16-17).

For God’s faithful servants this occasion calls for unrestrained joy and celebration. This is the time when those in the grave receive victory over death, when their faith in God is totally vindicated. The 24 elders’ special prayer of thanksgiving reflects the exuberant gratitude and

excitement both the angels and the saints are certain to experience at that time (Revelation 11:16-18).

Paul explains the importance of this occasion for those in the grave awaiting Christ’s return: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and *the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*.”

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

An angel told Daniel of this wonderful occasion, saying: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life . . .” (Daniel 12:2). He explained: “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (verse 3). (For a fuller explanation of the tremendous importance to you personally of the resurrection at Christ’s return, be sure to download or request your free copy of the booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*)

We should note, however, that Christ’s coming does not immediately bring universal joy. The final “woe” on the inhabitants of earth commences with the sounding of the last—the seventh—trumpet. John notes: “The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for *rewarding* your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and *for destroying those who destroy the earth*” (Revelation 11:18, NIV).

The remainder of the book of Revelation specifies which worldly entities must now quickly be destroyed *before* the Kingdom of God can be established in all its fullness under Christ’s rule.

Jesus also emphasizes the Father’s faithfulness and commitment to fulfill every promise and prophecy He has ever made by showing John, as the conclusion of this particular vision in Revelation 11, “the ark of His covenant . . . within His temple” in heaven (verse 19). He reminds us that God will never forget His covenant promises, which were recorded by His prophets (Daniel 9:4).

One such promise concerns the overthrow of Satan’s system. That is now about to occur. The full measure of God’s judgments is about to be expressed through the seven last plagues (Revelation 15:1). Babylon the Great, the ruling city in Satan’s end-time empire, will be destroyed. But before it is annihilated, Christ reveals to us *what* it is and *why* it must be annihilated.

Satan's War Against the People of God

Revelation 12 first takes us back to the birth of Jesus to show that the Messiah and God's chosen people are the main focus of Satan's hatred and wrath. It then moves us forward to the time of Christ's second coming.

Satan's warfare against God's people—including Jesus Christ, the natural descendants of ancient Israel and all true Christians—is the primary subject of Revelation 12 and 13. These chapters explain the devil's motivation and introduce the worldly powers he employs in his end-time battle against Christ and His servants.

John begins: "Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth" (Revelation 12:1-2). This woman symbolizes the people of God, chosen to be the *light of the world*—in contrast with the woman of Revelation 17, who is the mother of harlots.

The imagery here recalls the ancestral history of ancient Israel. The patriarch Joseph described one of his revelatory dreams to his family: "Then he . . . said, 'Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the *sun*, the *moon*, and the eleven *stars* bowed down to me.' So he told it to his father [Jacob, or Israel] and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?'" (Genesis 37:9-10).

Nevertheless, after Joseph became Pharaoh's chief deputy in Egypt, his family did bow before him. His dream proved to be a revelation from God.

Jacob, Joseph's father, quickly grasped the symbolism in Joseph's dream. The *sun* represented Jacob, the *moon* his wife and the *stars* his sons—12 in all, counting Joseph. In other words, the symbolism in Joseph's dream referred to Jacob's family, from which the ancient nation of Israel developed. The woman in Revelation 12, clothed with these same symbols, also represents Jacob's family, after it has expanded into a nation—God's chosen people Israel.

Many hundreds of years after the time of Joseph, the Jews (descendants of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi) and a few remnants of the other tribes were the only descendants of ancient Israel remaining in Palestine. The mighty Roman Empire dominated them when the time

came for Jesus, the Messiah, to be born in the Jewish nation. "She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne" (Revelation 12:5).

But notice what happened immediately after Christ's birth. Satan, symbolized by the dragon, "stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born" (verse 4). The Gospels record how Satan influenced Herod, the Jews' Roman-appointed king, to murder all male children 2 years old and younger in and around Bethlehem in an attempt to eliminate the potential threat to his throne (Matthew 2:16). The king didn't know God had already spared Jesus by having his human parents whisk Him off to Egypt until Herod died (verses 13-14).

Because of God's loving care, Satan was prevented from destroying the favored woman (Revelation 12:6). Nevertheless, Satan will again relentlessly persecute and kill God's people at the time of the end.

Satan's all-out war

Notice the next event. "And *war* broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought,

These chapters explain the devil's motivation and introduce the worldly powers he employs in his end-time battle against Christ and His servants.

but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; *he was cast to the earth*, and his angels were cast out with him" (verses 7-9).

This event comes shortly before Christ returns to bring "salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God" (verse 10). So God's angel announces: "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath*, because he knows that *he has a short time*" (verse 12).

When Satan loses his battle with God's angels, he directs his fury at the people of God, symbolically represented by the woman mentioned earlier (verses 13), evidently the spiritual "Israel of God" who are now members of His Church (see Galatians 6:16; 3:7, 29; Romans 2:25-29). God promises this favored woman a place "where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time [3½ years], from the presence of the serpent" (verse 14). God will intervene to help the woman survive

during this time of unbelievable affliction (verses 15-16).

Satan's war will be directed not only against the natural, physical offspring of Israel, as at the birth of Christ, but even more specifically against "the rest of her offspring, *who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*" (verse 17).

Notice that Satan will especially rage against *commandment-keeping* saints who follow the actual teachings of Christ. All of them are destined to be hated. Though some are prophesied to survive the Satan-inspired onslaught, the Scriptures reveal that many others will be martyred. As Christ has already warned: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and *kill you*, and you will be *hated by all nations* for My name's sake" (Matthew 24:9).

The persecuting empire

The geopolitical power most actively involved in this persecution of God's people—an end-time revival of the Roman Empire, as we will see—is introduced in Revelation 13 as "a *beast* rising out of the sea, having *seven heads* and *ten horns*, and on his horns *ten crowns*, and on his heads a blasphemous name" (verse 1). This "beast" receives "his power, his throne, and great authority" from the dragon, Satan (verse 2; compare 12:3). Its characteristics are those of a leopard, a bear and a lion (Revelation 13:2).

Centuries earlier Daniel wrote of these same beasts as symbolic of the successive empires of Babylon, Persia and Greece (Daniel 7:4-6; compare with Daniel 8:19-22), each of which would rule the Holy Land. Later that territory would be captured and controlled by Rome, synonymous with a terrible fourth beast Daniel described. John writes about the revival of this ancient system: "And I saw one of his heads *as if it had been mortally wounded*, and his deadly wound *was healed*" (Revelation 13:3).

At the time of the end all these ancient empires will seem, from a historical perspective, to have been permanently destroyed. But much of their ancient cultural and religious heritage has been carefully preserved. From this heritage the end-time revival of the Roman Empire, a powerful alliance of 10 "kings" or rulers—in our day having titles such as president, prime minister or chancellor—will arise shortly before Christ returns.

In Daniel 2 the heritage of this powerful end-time kingdom or empire is depicted as a statue of a human figure composed of four metals (verses 31-33). Its head represented Nebuchadnezzar's Neo-Babylonian Empire (verses 37-38), which conquered and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The dominant powers after Babylon, represented by other parts of the image, were the Medo-Persian Empire, the

The Mark and Number of the Beast

The *second* beast of Revelation 13 will cause "all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the *mark* or the *name* of the beast, or the *number* of his name" (verses 16-17).

What is behind this strange-sounding practice? How will it affect people as the time of the end draws near?

There is historical evidence that, in the ancient Babylonian culture, slaves "were identified...[by] some kind of mark, either tattooed or branded on the face or the back of the hand..." (H.W.H. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon*, 1962, p. 173). There may be parallels between this ancient practice and what God reveals will happen in the end time.

Many have speculated about the meaning of this puzzling prophecy. Some interpret it in terms of supercomputers, unique personal identity numbers and even microchips embedded under the skin.

However, we should consider that receiving a mark on the hand or forehead could well be figurative. Remember from Revelation 7:3 that God's servants were sealed on their foreheads. And in Deuteronomy 6 Moses told God's people to "keep all His statutes and His commandments," noting, "You shall bind them as a *sign on your hand*, and they shall be as frontlets *between your eyes*" (verses 2, 8). The hand and forehead here represent one's actions and thoughts respectively—which should be dedicated to obeying God.

Likewise the mark of the Beast is evidently a mark of disobedience to God. Many Bible students have pointed to God's seventh-day Sabbath as an identifying sign of His people

in Exodus 31:12-17 and see the mark of the Beast as running counter to it. They believe that forced observance of Sunday—a day originally dedicated to the worship of the sun as a god instead of the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath—could be involved. This view is strengthened by the fact that other prophecies in the book of Revelation show a great counterfeit religious figure and system will play major roles in leading people away from the true God and play into Satan's hands at this time.

The Bible does not explicitly define the *specific methods* that the Beast will use to identify those free to participate in commerce at the time of the end. Some sort of advanced surveillance may be involved.

As to the number of the Beast, 666, we are told to "count the number" and that it is "the number of a man" (Revelation 13:18). One early explanation is attributed to John's disciple Polycarp, who, according to his student Irenaeus, said this number is derived from adding together the numerical equivalents of the letters in the word *Lateinos*, the Greek word for "Roman"—this being the name of the Beast empire, its ruler and everyone in it. So the number may well denote this general distinction, though it could also be more specific.

However this prophecy is fulfilled, it is clear that it will involve compromising and contradicting God's commands. Having proof that one is officially associated in some way with the Beast will be necessary for one to be allowed to engage in commerce.

Exactly how the end-time number of the Beast, 666, will be used and applied is not yet clear. But in some way it will be associated with the Beast's name and applied to his evil activities.

Greco-Macedonian Empire established by Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire (verses 39-40).

The final manifestation of this system is represented by the feet of the statue: “As *the toes* were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay. *In the time of those kings*, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed...” (verse 42-44, NIV). In other words the 10 toes of this image will exist at the time of the end and will be smashed by the returning Jesus Christ (verses 34, 44-45).



The 10 toes on the statue of Daniel 2 apparently correspond to 10 horns on the beast of Revelation 17. What, then, do those 10 horns signify?

“The ten horns which you saw are *ten kings* who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are *of one mind*, and *they will give their power and authority to the beast*. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them...” (Revelation 17:12-14).

In Daniel 2 the heritage of this powerful end-time kingdom or empire is depicted as a statue of a human figure composed of four metals.

The “beast” these horns collectively form will be a short-lived, end-time empire ruled by Satan. As we will see later, it will be a commercially driven political, religious and military entity similar to the empire ruled by ancient Babylon.

The beast that appears to John in Revelation 13 is a composite of the empires represented by the image described in Daniel 2 and the four beasts of Daniel 7. The fourth beast in Daniel 7 was the Roman Empire, described as different from those that preceded it. The composite beast of Revelation 13 is a resurrection of that Roman Empire, incorporating the characteristics of the three earlier empires.

John clearly refers to the other empires when he says: “Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard [the Greek empire], his feet were like the

feet of a bear [the Persian Empire], and his mouth like the mouth of a lion [ancient Babylon]. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority” (verse 2).

Notice how *powerful* this beast, possessing many key characteristics of the persecuting empires preceding it, will be in its end-time manifestation: “And *all the world* marveled and followed the beast. So *they worshiped the dragon* who gave authority to the beast; and *they worshiped the beast*, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’

“And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. *It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them*. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation” (Revelation 13:3-7).

The book of Revelation reveals, from more than one perspective, the emergence of this vast end-time empire governed from a great city God labels “Babylon the great” (Revelation 17:5, 18), the reference here being to Rome. This final resurrection of the Roman Empire, centered in Europe, is destined to



This end-time alliance of nations is introduced as “a beast rising out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.”

become the world’s dominant superpower. Satan will use it as his principal weapon against Christ and His people at the end of the age.

Satan will cause the human dictator of the end-time beastlike empire—who is also referred to as “the beast”—to be worshipped worldwide. Satan will give this coming dictator the power to transform his (and Satan’s) political and military objectives into a worldwide religious crusade.

John explains: “All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose

The Two Women of Revelation

The events described in the second half of the book of Revelation are directly related to the past and future of two symbolic women who are diametrical opposites. The first (Revelation 12) represents those who have been God's covenant people—the "Church of God"—both Old Testament Israel and the New Testament called-out servants of Christ. The identity of this woman (national Israel or the New Testament Church) in Revelation is determined by the context and other scriptures. Jerusalem, the holy city, is portrayed as their spiritual home (Revelation 11:2).

In the future, Christ's faithful followers will become the eternally righteous community of the saved in the city of New Jerusalem. They are those who "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17; compare 14:12; 22:14).

In this age they are despised, rejected and persecuted by most. But this woman, the true Church of God, is cherished by Christ. For a long time she has prepared herself to become His bride (Ephesians 5:27, 29; Revelation 19:7-9). She will sit with Him on His throne and share in reigning over those who have rejected and despised her (Revelation 3:21). She will assist Christ in teaching God's ways to all nations (Revelation 20:6; Micah 4:2).

The second woman, represented as a harlot, is another great city. "And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH . . . [She is] drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Revelation 17:5-6).

What does she symbolize? "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth" (verse 18). She will be the pride of this world. But she will also have been the relentless persecutor of true Christians. God accuses her of being "drunk

with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (verse 6).

Her influential relationships reach into the highest political and social circles—"the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury" (Revelation 18:3). "... Her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities" (verse 5).

God calls this harlot city—with her corrupt entanglements in international affairs—Babylon the Great. Her cultural and religious roots go back to ancient Babylon, the city where mankind rebelled against God soon after the great Flood in the time of Noah (Genesis 11:4, 9). It was in ancient Babylon that Satan reestablished his control over mankind for "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4).

The Encyclopaedia Britannica describes ancient Babylonia as a "cultural region occupying southeastern Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (modern southern Iraq from around Baghdad to the Persian Gulf). Because the city of Babylon was the capital of this area for so many centuries, the term Babylonia has come to refer to the entire culture that developed in the area from the time it was first settled, about 4000 BC" (1999 Multimedia Edition, "Babylonia").

A modern city labeled Babylon the Great will, like ancient Babylon, set the cultural and religious standards for the end-time political-religious empire of the Beast of Revelation.

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible explains the biblical implications of this Babylonian heritage: "As the realm of the devil . . . Babylon is . . . understood as the arche-typical head of all entrenched worldly resistance to God. Babylon is an age-long reality including idolatrous kingdoms as diverse as Sodom, Gomorrah, Egypt, Tyre, Nineveh, and

Rome . . . Babylon, the mother of all harlots, is the great *source and reservoir* of enmity to God, as well as the objectified product of the 'one mind' [Revelation 17:13, 17] which gives power and authority to false gods. As such, she is the antithesis of the virgin bride



of Christ, the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the kingdom of God" (p. 338; "Babylon (NT)").

The primary affairs of ancient Babylon were managed by priests who cleverly blended illicit sexual practices into their idolatrous religion. Traces of these traditions still exist in today's religions. At the time of the end many ancient idolatrous concepts will again be elevated to international acclaim through Satan's influence. Rome—spiritual heir of ancient Babylon's idolatrous traditions—will again emerge as the chief city over a greatly expanded revival of the ancient Roman Empire.

How influential will this great city become? "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were

made drunk with the wine of her fornication'" (Revelation 17:1-2). An angel explains to John that "the waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues" (verse 15).

Citizens of many lands will cheerfully embrace her satanic approach toward personal and spiritual relationships—her spiritual harlotry. They will welcome her influence and power over them. She will boast, "I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow" (Revelation 18:7). God, however, labels her the mother of harlots, a city full of abominations. He condemns her practices and will destroy her along with every corrupt tradition she has preserved.

In contrast, the first woman, "the church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15), will become the bride of Christ at His return (Revelation 19:7-9). Revelation ends with the people of God, after receiving eternal life, dwelling with Christ and the Father forever. "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.'

"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Revelation 21:9-11). Here is the woman who forever will radiate the light and truth of God.

She will expand into an immense city of faithful servants of God—the everlasting holy city of New Jerusalem. Notice God's final warning: "And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:19).

names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

The religious factor

Next John says: “Then I saw *another beast*, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he *spoke like a dragon*. He exercised *all the authority* of the first beast *on his behalf*, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed” (Revelation 13:11-12, NIV).

Who is the second beast? He is a tool of Satan who uses his position and authority to influence humankind to worship the first beast.

The ‘Time of Jacob’s Trouble’

Shortly after the return of Christ, *all* of the descendants of ancient Israel—including the descendants of the so-called lost 10 tribes—will again gather and resettle in Palestine. Jerusalem will once more be the capital of the restored 12 tribes of Israel, as well as the capital of the world.

This reunion of all 12 tribes is described in some detail in Ezekiel 37:15-28. God also explained it to the prophet Jeremiah: “For behold, *the days are coming... that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah... And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it*” (Jeremiah 30:3).

God also indicated to Jeremiah that, while He would allow the future descendants of the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah to fall into captivity, He would also rescue some of them from it.

He calls this end-time catastrophe—especially on the descendants of ancient Israel’s northern kingdom, now known only as the lost 10 tribes—the *time of Jacob’s trouble*: “Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it;

and *it is the time of Jacob’s trouble*, but he shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7).

God revealed to Daniel that such a time of trouble would occur at the time of the end: “At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince *who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time” (Daniel 12:1).



As the time of Jesus Christ’s return draws near, Satan will direct his wrath not only toward faithful Christians, but toward the physical descendants of all Israel. The Bible refers to this as the ‘time of Jacob’s trouble.’

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How will he persuade the masses to accept such arrogance? He will be a skillful deceiver directly manipulated and empowered by Satan. “He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (verses 13-15).

John later describes the powerful religious leader as “*the false*

This and other prophecies indicate that *Satan’s wrath* during the last days will be directed not only toward faithful Christians but *also toward the ethnic descendants of all of Israel*—the Jews as well as the descendants of the lost 10 tribes whose identity Satan has never forgotten.

It will be especially directed toward the United States, Britain, Canada and the other British-descended peoples who are the modern-day descendants of Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh. (To learn more, please request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

Notice the reassurances God gives to all of the beleaguered people of Israel in the last days:

“‘So then, the days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when people will no longer say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,’ but they will say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.’ Then they will live in their own land’” (Jeremiah 23:7-8, NIV).

“‘Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,’ says the LORD, ‘nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, *I will save you* from afar, and your seed from the land of their

captivity. *Jacob shall return*, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid’” (Jeremiah 30:10).

“See, I will bring them from the land of the north and *gather them from the ends of the earth*. Among them will be the *blind* and the *lame*, expectant mothers and women in labor; a *great throng will return*. They will come *with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back... I will lead them... because I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son*” (Jeremiah 31:8-9, NIV).

“On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me... But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid” (Zephaniah 3:11-13, NIV).

Once Christ rescues the ethnic descendants of ancient Israel from this “time of Jacob’s trouble” in the last days, He will use them to fulfill the role their forefathers agreed to carry out in the time of Moses. He will make them the world’s model people, a nation of teachers, a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6; compare Deuteronomy 4:5-8; Zechariah 8:23).

prophet who had performed the *miraculous signs* on his [the Beast's] behalf" (Revelation 19:20, NIV). The False Prophet is evidently the satanically led leader of a false religious system represented by the immoral woman riding the Beast in Revelation 17 (see "The Two Women of Revelation" beginning on page 55).

Paul also foretold the coming of a superpowerful deceiver: "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, *with all power, signs, and lying wonders*, and with *all unrighteous deception* among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10). Tragically, most people will be hoodwinked into believing him.

Is emperor worship again possible?

To most of us the prophesied scenario of the worldwide worship of the Beast—much like the worship of the Roman emperors of old—may appear too incredible ever to recur in this modern era. But as recently as World War II the Japanese people were required to worship the emperor of Japan. Their soldiers enthusiastically waged war on his behalf.

We should also remember that in our lifetime many religious leaders have arisen who have represented themselves as divine beings in the flesh. Some have successfully seduced many thousands of followers from all walks of life. At times deluded disciples have willingly forfeited their lives at such leaders' whims.

The idea that the modern masses could not be deluded by a fanatical leader—especially one with a powerfully charismatic personality—is simply not true. History proves it is all too possible.

The second beast described in Revelation 13 represents himself as a lamb (like Christ) but speaks like a dragon (the devil). He will seduce the world into worshipping the first beast (verse 12). He will even influence and seduce the merchants of international commerce to such an extent "that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (verse 17). (For additional information see "The Mark and Number of the Beast," page 51.)

Winners and losers

The inevitable outcome of Satan's war against the servants of God is the subject of chapter 14 and the first four verses of chapter 15. Here the real winners and losers are clearly delineated in divine messages delivered by angels.

Christ, represented as a Lamb, is pictured in the midst of the 144,000

who have "His Father's name written on their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1). These are described as those who have faithfully followed Christ, the Lamb, instead of the Beast even during this time of great tribulation (verse 4).

John describes these loyal and worthy servants of Christ as "without fault before the throne of God" (verses 4-5). He continues: "And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb..." (Revelation 15:2-3, NIV; compare 14:3).

John sees them, in his vision, singing and rejoicing, ultimately the real winners in this great spiritual conflict.

John also sees that before this war is over "every nation, tribe, language and people" will have this "eternal gospel" message proclaimed to them: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth..." (Revelation 14:6-7, NIV). During this time the impending fall and destruction of that great city Babylon the Great is announced by another angel (verse 8).

John also plainly identifies the losers in the war for the spiritual control of humanity: "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, *he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God*, which is poured out *full strength* into the cup of His indignation" (verse 9-10). The judgment of people who follow the ways of Satan, a judgment God's servants have long anticipated, is at hand.

The saints have every reason to be confident in the outcome. But in the meantime the trials of God's people are not over: "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints *who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus*. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write: Blessed are the dead *who die in the Lord from now on*.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them'" (verses 12-13, NIV). Apparently, to the very end Satan will send his deceived human instruments to pursue and murder those who truly try to obey and serve God.

Then follows a description of Christ and an angel removing the wicked and their wickedness from the earth like a farmer would remove grain from a field with a sickle or "gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine" (verses 14-18, NIV). Those who are gathered are thrown "into the great winepress of God's wrath" (verses 19-20, NIV). God will express His wrath through "the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed" (Revelation 15:1, NIV).

The Destruction of Satan's Kingdom

Down through the ages God's servants have asked certain questions again and again: When will God put an end to wickedness? When will He eliminate Satan's influence? When will man's inhumanity to his fellowman cease?

The book of Revelation answers these questions!

John writes: "Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and amazing: seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for *with them the wrath of God is ended*... Then one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels *seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God*..." (Revelation 15:1, 7, NRSV).

Before we examine the nature of this final phase of God's punishments on human beings who have refused to repent (Revelation 16:9, 11), we need to get our bearings regarding the *setting* of these plagues.

As we have already seen, those who *worship* the Beast will be the recipients of the "full strength" of God's "indignation" that these seven last plagues represent. Also, these things will be *completed* "in the presence of the Lamb" (Revelation 14:9-10). These words indicate that all of the seven last plagues will occur within a brief time. As Christ descends through the clouds, "every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7; compare Acts 1:9-11). These verses imply that, as these punishments occur, Christ's direct involvement with them will be *visible* to the whole world.

It is important to remember that these seven plagues represent final aspects of *the seventh trumpet* or the "third woe," including the return of Christ (Revelation 11:14-15). One purpose for His return is to "destroy those who destroy the earth" (verse 18). In other words, Jesus plans to personally oversee the final phase of the destruction of Satan's kingdom.

The seven last plagues will *complete* God's punishment and destruction of the evil and satanic system of government, culture and religion that began in ancient Babylon. How will God bring this phase of His plan to a close? What impact will its completion have on the nations?

God's plan in destroying Satan's kingdom—with special focus on its leading city, Babylon the Great—is designed to change *the worship patterns and practices* of the whole world. After He completes that destruction, "all nations shall come and *worship* before" God (Revelation 15:4).

That will be an incredible reversal. Why? Because at the beginning of the plagues those nations are engrossed in the "worship [of] the

beast and his image" (Revelation 14:11). This includes the "worship [of] demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk" (Revelation 9:20).

Not only must Satan's kingdom be destroyed, but the citizens of every nation must understand that God, who gave the Ten Commandments to ancient Israel, is the *source* of the destruction. They must see that the gods and idols they serve are utterly defenseless and powerless before God, whom they have refused to obey. Chapters 16-20 of Revelation give us details that show the living God accomplishing this.

The seven last plagues

"Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth'" (Revelation 16:1). God has carefully chosen each of these seven punishments. Each one will cause the kingdom of the Beast to reap what it has sown.

Each is directly related to the sins of that evil system as a whole, a system focused on enjoying pleasures and riches regardless of the harm inflicted on



"The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God..."

others. Many of those living in it who have understood and practiced what is true and just have been persecuted and killed because they were out of step with that society's twisted views and attitudes.

Notice the attitude of people in general "in the last days." Paul describes them as "lovers of themselves, lovers of money... without self-control, brutal, ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, *having a form of godliness* but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

He describes them as obsessed with knowledge but woefully lacking in understanding—"always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (verse 7). This is a thoroughly *deceived* society.

God shows that He will be able to reach their blinded minds only

by causing them to reap what they have been sowing. That is what He intends to accomplish with the seven last plagues.

“The *first* angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and *ugly and painful sores* broke out *on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image*” (Revelation 16:2, NIV). Their misguided worship—their form of godliness without substance—has been the prime cause of the pain inflicted on God’s servants. So the first plague turns that anguish back on its perpetrators.

“The *second* angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and *every living thing in the sea died*” (verse 3, NIV). The kingdom of the Beast had been systematically killing the servants of God. Now the sea becomes a lake of blood—an escalation of the earlier second trumpet plague. Densely populated coastal areas will be blanketed with the stench of blood and dead fish. The returning Christ



“The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven . . .”

will force those supporting the Beast’s warfare against His servants to be personally overtaken with the stench and repugnance of death.

“The *third* angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water [intensifying the impact of the earlier third trumpet plague], and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: ‘You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.’ And I heard the altar respond: ‘Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments’” (verses 4-7, NIV). Remember, all of this is happening very quickly “in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (Revelation 14:10).

“The *fourth* angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were *seared by the intense heat* and

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they cursed the name of God, who had *control* over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him” (Revelation 16:8-9, NIV).

Satan’s kingdom is founded on a “*form of godliness*” (2 Timothy 3:5) that has consistently substituted many of the traditions that began in ancient Babylon for the commandments of God. His kingdom has been at “war with [those] . . . *who keep the commandments of God* and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17). Therefore God, who has control of everything everywhere, will turn against that kingdom the very sun they unwittingly still worship.

The modern custom of substituting *Sunday*—the day originally dedicated by the pagans for worshipping the sun—in place of the biblical seventh-day Sabbath is one clear example of such worship.

Also, the custom of keeping Christmas comes from another ancient tradition of celebrating the annual “rebirth” of the sun at the winter solstice. As almost any encyclopedia will tell you, Dec. 25 was celebrated in ancient pagan religions as the birthday of the sun, then later adopted as the supposed birthday of Christ. (To better understand God’s perspective on such practices, be sure to download or request your free copy of *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*)

Jesus reprimanded the people of His century for substituting human traditions for God’s commands: “In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” and “All too well you *reject the commandment of God*, that you may *keep your tradition*” (Mark 7:7, 9).

“The *fifth* angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into *darkness*. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven *because of their pains and their sores*, but *they refused to repent* of what they had done” (Revelation 16:10-11, NIV). God now adds the terror of total darkness (more so than in the earlier fourth trumpet plague) to the pain of the sores, the stench of blood and the excruciating heat they are already experiencing. Darkness is an appropriate plague because of the spiritual darkness the Beast has cast upon the world.

The nations gather to fight Christ

“The *sixth* angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to *prepare the way for the kings from the East*. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are *spirits of demons* performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty . . . Then they gathered the kings together to the place that

in Hebrew is called *Armageddon*” (verses 12-16, NIV).

Again let’s remember that the seven last plagues are the culmination of the seventh trumpet or the third woe. As we saw earlier, the sixth trumpet (the second woe) introduced a global military onslaught on a scale never before seen. Now the sixth of the seven last plagues presents a mobilization to the final throes of this struggle.

In anticipation of Christ’s appearance in the clouds, God has allowed Satan and his demons to create seemingly miraculous signs to motivate world leaders to move their armies into the Holy Land. While their initial intent may be to fight each other, they will join forces against the returning Christ. Satan’s objective has always been to fight Christ at His coming, using the armies of the world.

The armies are now gathered at Armageddon (the Greek form of the Hebrew *Har Megiddo*, or “hill of Megiddo,” about 55 miles north of Jerusalem), apparently on the vast open plain that lies to the east of this site. The final battle, to take place at Jerusalem (see Zechariah 14), is about to begin.

“Then the *seventh* angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’” (Revelation 16:17). All of God’s efforts to reason with human beings are now over. Yet humanity still stubbornly refuses to repent.

As mankind’s Savior descends to earth, John explains that “great Babylon” is “remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath” (verse 19).

This is accomplished partly by “a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth” (verse 18). Islands and mountains disappear as the earth shakes and shudders (verse 20).

Notice what accompanies these vast earthly convulsions: “From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each” batter the earth and its inhabitants (verse 21, NIV). Satan’s modern “Babylonian” kingdom is being systematically demolished.

Why Babylon the Great is Destroyed

Chapters 17-19 explain the reason for the harlot city’s destruction. They also describe the fate of the armies Satan has persuaded to fight against Christ as He descends to the Mount of Olives just outside the Old City of Jerusalem.

We have already seen that Satan’s influence on mankind, especially over the kingdom of the Beast, emanates from “the great harlot [city] who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the

wine of her fornication” (Revelation 17:1-2). “She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit...” (Revelation 18:2).

More than any other Western city, Rome, heir of ancient Babylon’s mystery cults, has a history of being “drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Revelation 17:6). Influenced by a religious system that has led the way in opposing obedience to the commandments of God, Rome has allowed and often led the charge in persecuting “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

No city in the world fits the description of Revelation 17 as she does. Pictured as a harlot sitting astride the Beast—the 10-king empire of which she is the cultural and spiritual center—this city of John’s prophecy will yet again exert a vast influence over the earth’s “peoples, multitudes, nations and languages” (Revelation 17:15, NIV). As she has so often in the past, she will once more enjoy the fame and status of being “that great city



The armies are now gathered at Armageddon, or “hill of Megiddo,” about 55 miles north of Jerusalem. The final battle, to take place at Jerusalem, is about to begin.

which reigns over the kings of the earth” (verse 18).

In the end, however, her honeymoon with political leaders will turn sour. The kings supporting her widespread influence will come to despise her. Possibly they will finally recognize that God is not with her, that her claims of divine support are a lie.

Whatever the reason, they will turn on her with a vengeance. “The beast and the ten horns you saw will *hate* the prostitute. They will *bring her to ruin* and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled” (verses 16-17, NIV).

Chapter 18 describes the reaction of many of the world’s most prominent people to the burning of this mighty city. “When the kings of

Satan: The Great Seducer

Why will so many people zealously follow Satan's deceptive ways to their death? There are two primary causes. The first arises from human nature and man's innate hostility toward God's ways (Romans 8:7). The second cause is Satan's mastery in deceiving people.

How does Satan achieve his deception? He uses people to deceive other people. He especially likes to use people who appear to be trustworthy.

A faithful follower of God must exercise care that he is "a worker who does not need to be ashamed, *rightly dividing* the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). In other words, he must know what the Bible really teaches and use it correctly. He must refuse to gullibly accept a religious practice just because everyone else does it or because it appears right on the surface. Otherwise he is likely to be deceived.

Paul lamented what was happening to some in his day. "For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, *you put up with it easily enough*" (2 Corinthians 11:4, NIV). When false teachers distort the message of the Scriptures, sincere people often fail to see through their deceptions.

Paul continues: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if *his servants* masquerade as *servants of righteousness*. Their end will be what their actions deserve" (verses 13-15, NIV).

Paul warned that even believers could be led to gullibly accept doctrines taught by false teachers—should they become negli-

gent in studying the Scriptures to verify the truth of their beliefs.

Jesus had earlier warned that Satan and his agents would constantly seek to distract and deceive people in an attempt to turn them against God's truth. "Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown," said Christ. "As soon as they hear it, *Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them*" (Mark 4:15, NIV).

He bluntly warned of Satan's deceptive approach: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:15-16).

At the time of the end Satan will not change his pattern. He will raise up a powerful false prophet whose influence will not be hindered by political boundaries. Satan will lead the Babylonian religious system centered in Rome and use his prophet to deceive a gullible world that will not carefully check the Bible to see if what he says is really from God (Revelation 19:20).

Paul describes the effect of the deception: "The coming of the lawless one will be *in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing*. They perish because *they refused to love the truth* and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that *they will believe the lie* and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, NIV).

Never underestimate the skill Satan uses to deceive humanity. The book of Revelation plainly says he is "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, *who leads the whole world astray*" (Revelation 12:9, NIV).

the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her ... They will stand far off and cry: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, *city of power!* In one hour your doom has come!' The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her ..." (verses 9-11, NIV).

The commercial aspects of Satan's kingdom, as described in chapter 18, reflect the favoritism and greed that have driven the entire system. Those who profited most include the "merchants ... who became rich by her;" the "shipmaster" and "all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea" (verses 15, 17). "Your merchants were the world's great men," proclaims an angel. "By your magic spell all the nations were led astray" (verse 23, NIV).

With her fall the culture of Satan's empire collapses. His kingdom falls apart.

God has warned His people not to get caught up in this evil system lest they, too, become victims of her destruction. "Then I heard another voice from heaven say: 'Come out of her, my people, ... so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself ... She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her'" (verses 4-8, NIV).

All of creation is told, "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!" (verse 20).

The theme of rejoicing continues into the next chapter: "After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants'" (Revelation 19:1-2, NIV).

Christ's victory

John now describes Jesus Christ's magnificent return to Jerusalem: "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice *he judges and makes war* ... and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (verses 11-16, NIV).

Let's not forget that Satan has gathered the armies of the nations to Jerusalem to fight Christ (verse 19). At this point God is giving Satan the freedom to instigate the ultimate rebellion. But even in his rebellion Satan is carrying out God's purpose. God wants to make it clear that all the armies of the earth are nothing compared to the power of His King—the conquering Messiah—who returns to the holy city of Jerusalem.

Long ago God prophesied: “I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it... *Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations*, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley” (Zechariah 14:2-4, NIV). He adds: “*The LORD will be king over the whole earth*. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name” (verse 9, NIV).

Notice how Christ destroys the opposing armies: “This is the plague with which the LORD will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. On that day men will be stricken by the LORD with great panic. Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other. Judah too will fight at Jerusalem. The wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected—great quantities of gold and silver and clothing” (verses 12-14, NIV).

An angel then summons scavenger birds to feast on the flesh of the armies (Revelation 19:17-18, 21). Then “the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur” (verse 20, NIV). (See “Satan: The Great Seducer,” page 66.)

As the kingdom of the Beast is dismantled and destroyed, Satan and his demons must be stopped from deceiving and manipulating. Therefore an angel “seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended” (Revelation 20:2-3, NIV).

Satan's control over “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4; 1 John 5:19) is then terminated for the next 1,000 years. The battle for the control of the earth is finished.

Christ makes the saints rulers with Him

The peaceful 1,000-year rule of Christ now begins. John immediately sees Jesus rewarding the saints for the suffering they have endured at

the hand of Satan and his Babylonian system. John watched as martyrs “came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4, NIV; see also Revelation 22:12).

As His faithful servants receive eternal life at the time of their resurrection, Jesus begins fulfilling His word that they would be corulers with Him. He had promised: “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations” and “to him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 2:26; 3:21; NIV).

“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection,” writes John. “The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and *will reign with him for a thousand years*” (Revelation 20:6, NIV).

Daniel long ago also observed this wonderful occasion in a vision: “*Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High*. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him” (Daniel 7:27, NIV).

This is the beginning of the wonderful era often referred to by students of the Bible as *the Millennium*. For details about what will occur during Christ's millennial reign, download or request our free booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom, What Is Your Destiny?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.

The final judgment

We saw earlier that Satan will be constrained during the Millennium. Yet we also read: “After that, he must be set free for a short time” (Revelation 20:3, NIV).

During the Millennium many will be born who will not be exposed to Satan's influence. God's way will be the only way they will have ever known. Yet the Scriptures reveal that God *tests* people to see if their obedience is from the heart (Deuteronomy 8:2; Revelation 2:10). One way He does this is to allow them to *choose* between good and evil (Deuteronomy 30:19). John indicates this will happen at the end of the Millennium.

Notice how it will occur: “When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from

heaven and devoured them” (Revelation 20:7-9, NIV).

God does not reveal if this is the only test He will use during the Millennium to separate insincere people from those who are sincere. But it will certainly be the final and most significant test of the 1,000 years. It will be a vital part of the *judgment* process.

Now comes the time for Satan’s permanent removal from the picture: “And the Devil who deceived them was cast into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet were. And he will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (verse 10, Modern King James Version). He will never again be allowed to deceive anyone.

A second resurrection

But the process of judgment is not yet complete. Those who died without repenting *before* the beginning of the Millennium must be judged. In this final judgment God’s mercy and wisdom become further apparent.

Remember, faithful Christians are resurrected at Christ’s return, at the beginning of the Millennium. Theirs was the “first resurrection” (verse 5). Yet a parenthetical note here states that “the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (same verse).

The dead who are resurrected to appear “before the throne” of God (verse 12) after “the thousand years have expired” (verse 7) have never fully known God and His ways. They have never comprehended what it means to really repent of their sins. Are they resurrected to be condemned forever? Not at all. Notice the purpose of this second resurrection:

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And *I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God*, and books [of the Bible] were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (verses 11-12). They are resurrected, then judged by biblical standards—according to their response to the spiritual enlightenment they now receive for the first time.

The word translated “books” in this passage is the Greek *biblia*, the root of which has given us the English word *Bible*. When God resurrects these people, He will explain the full meaning of the books of the Holy Scriptures to them. When they respond and repent, their names also can be written in the Book of Life.

But notice what happens to those who, after being resurrected and receiving a clear understanding of what God expects of them, still refuse to repent. “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (verse 15).

Punishment of the incorrigibly wicked

Other scriptures indicate that a third group must be resurrected to be included in this final destruction of the wicked in the lake of fire.

Jesus said that some would deliberately and knowingly despise the spiritual knowledge that God would open their minds to understand. This calculated blasphemy “against the Holy Spirit,” He said, will not be forgiven “either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:31-32).

Those who have turned down all opportunities to repent and be forgiven must also be resurrected for judgment at the end (Revelation 21:8).



These are people who have deliberately rejected God’s way of life—even after they have been “once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit” (Hebrews 6:4-6). They once were forgiven and given the Holy

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the LORD of hosts . . .”

Spirit. But afterwards they chose to reject God’s rule over them and blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, say the Scriptures, for those who have maliciously “trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:29), “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and *fiery* indignation which will *devour* the adversaries” (verses 26-27).

It is important that we understand the purpose of the lake of fire. God has judged that *all* the wicked must be burned up. “See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and *all* evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes *shall burn them up*, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch” (Malachi 4:1, NRSV).

Therefore it appears that this final resurrection, of necessity, must include the wicked who have already been condemned to perish in the lake of fire—however few they may be, comparatively speaking.

Victory over death

This brings us to the time when, as Paul said, “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). By the end of the final judgment period all human beings who have ever lived will have been given the opportunity to choose between life and death—to repent and submit to God to receive eternal life or refuse to repent and, by so doing, choose eternal death. There is ultimately no middle ground, no other choice.

Some, sad to say, will stubbornly cling to their self-directed course in spite of all the opportunities to repent that God makes available to them. God will not force eternal life on anyone. Those who knowingly choose not to repent will be judged by their actions and destroyed in the lake of fire. This is truly an act of mercy, since such persons would bring perpetual misery on themselves and others forever.

When all is finished, we are told: “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Revelation 20:14). The judgment of God is complete. Never again will those who receive salvation have to fear death. Death will have been swallowed up in victory.

This fulfills one of Jesus’ prophecies: “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. *Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.* He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 13:41-43).

The inspiring explanation of the resurrections teaches us that the reward of God’s faithful people is not to go to heaven as a disembodied soul right after death. Instead, it begins with waking up from unconsciousness to renewed life in the first resurrection, when Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. (For a more complete explanation of what happens after death, and God’s promised blessings for His obedient followers, be sure to download or request the free booklets *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*)

The Everlasting Kingdom of God

Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father “*Your kingdom come*” (Matthew 6:10). He also tells us to “*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” (verse 33). What is the *Kingdom of God* that it should be our highest priority in life? Is it simply a new or different administrative system directed by faithful servants of God? Or does it exceed our previous concepts of what a kingdom is?

The apostle Paul went right to the heart of the matter by explaining that “flesh and blood”—physical human beings—“cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). The Kingdom of God is the *family of immortal beings*—God and all His children. Those whom God

adds to His family will inherit and oversee “all things” God has created (Revelation 21:7).

Speaking of this destiny of man, the book of Hebrews tells us: “For in that He [God the Father] put *all* in subjection under him [man], *He left nothing that is not put under him.* But now we do *not yet* see all things put under him” (Hebrews



“Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.’”

2:8). Revelation 21-22 describes the time when “all things” will be under those who enter the Kingdom of God.

How, then, does a human being enter the Kingdom? Paul explains: “This perishable body must be clothed with the imperishable, and what is mortal with immortality. And when this perishable body has been

clothed with the imperishable and our mortality has been clothed with immortality, then the saying of scripture will come true: ‘Death is swallowed up; victory is won!’” (1 Corinthians 15:53-54, Revised English Bible). The Kingdom of God is something human beings can enter only by receiving the *gift* of eternal life as children of God.

Notice something essential for receiving the gift of eternal life: “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are *converted* and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.



Jesus Christ will return to establish that Kingdom on earth at His second coming, at last bringing the peace mankind has always longed for but never achieved.

Therefore whoever *humbles himself* as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:1-4).

A necessary *conversion*—a transformation of our way of thinking—is needed. This transformation is possible only through the kind of humility that produces genuine repentance, which, after acknowledgment through the ceremony of baptism, can be completed through the gift of God’s Spirit working in our lives (Acts 2:38).

As mankind’s Savior, Jesus of Nazareth paved the way for us to inherit the Kingdom of God by *opening the door to eternal life* through the forgiveness of sin. That required that *His first coming* be devoted to teaching and explaining repentance and to allowing Himself to be crucified for the sins of humanity. That is why Mark wrote: “After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. *Repent and believe the good news!*’” (Mark 1:14-15, NIV).

At His first coming Jesus trained disciples who would, after His

crucifixion and resurrection, help establish His Church. He came the first time to lay the foundation for the establishing of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ will return to establish that Kingdom on earth at His second coming, at last bringing the peace mankind has always longed for but never achieved. At that time the *firstfruits* of God’s spiritual harvest (James 1:18; John 4:35-36) will receive eternal life and enter the Kingdom. These spiritual firstfruits will then reign with Christ until the last phase of God’s judgment, when the final separation of the righteous from the wicked is complete.

Revelation 21-22 describes at that point a new and dramatically different heaven and earth. It is also at that point that *all* the children of God—all who inherit eternal life in the Kingdom of God—begin to experience the fullness of their salvation. What will it be like?

The community of God’s children

John writes: “Now I saw a new [transformed] heaven and a new [transformed] earth, for the first heaven and the first earth [in their former state] had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw *the holy city, New Jerusalem*, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared *as a bride* adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:1-2).

This description of God’s immortal children is that of a *family community* grown large enough to inhabit a city “fifteen hundred miles” square and equally as high (verse 16, NRSV). This community is described as a bride, “the Lamb’s wife” (verse 9), who will be subject in everything to Christ as her husband (Ephesians 5:24).

This wonderful city will be the home of God’s family. He “will dwell with them, and they shall be His people” (Revelation 21:3). The peace, harmony and contentment in the family community of the saved will be so great that “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (verse 4). All who previously chose to reject the way of life that produces love, peace and cooperation will have already perished “in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (verse 8).

God describes the nature of the city of New Jerusalem. It is depicted as having been built of the finest and most valuable materials. It is exquisitely adorned like a bride wearing the finest of jewelry. It reflects the very “glory of God” (verses 9-11, 18-21).

This family community is organized under “the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel” with its “twelve foundations” having on them “the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (verses 12, 14).

Clearly, this is the end result of what God began with Abraham, the father of the family that became ancient Israel. And that was only a

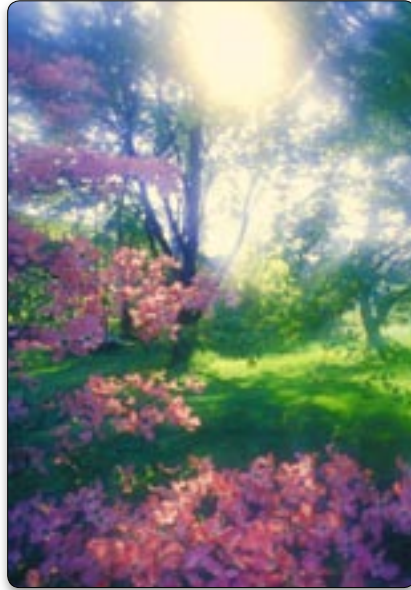
forerunner of the eternal family, the family “of all those who believe” (Romans 4:11). The “light” illuminating New Jerusalem comes from God (Revelation 21:24). Nothing that “defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie” will ever be allowed to enter it.

A summary of the story of man

When God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings, He placed them in a garden with the *tree of life*. The fruit of that tree represented the way of life God wanted them to accept and follow. But near the tree of life was another tree, a tree whose fruit represented a mixture of good and evil. God commanded them to avoid the second tree. He would have preferred to spare them from reaping the fruits of a way of life that is a mixture of good and evil.

But Eve’s curiosity overwhelmed her. She yielded to the deceptive influence of “that serpent of old,” then persuaded Adam to join her in tasting *the fruit of evil*. All of mankind has followed them in that choice. The end result is the nearly unimaginable human tragedy depicted in the book of Revelation.

But God was in no way defeated



The biblical story of man begins in the Garden of Eden with his rejection of the tree of life. It closes with God’s immortal family dwelling before His throne enjoying the fruits of the tree of life.

by this turn of events. He planned and intends to complete the redemption and salvation of all who will repent. When all is said and done, the community of repentant people will fill the vast city of New Jerusalem described in chapter 21.

In Revelation 22 we see the community of the saved in a setting similar to that of Adam and Eve. In New Jerusalem is a river “flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life” (verses 1-2, NIV).

The biblical story of man begins in the Garden of Eden with his

rejection of the tree of life. It closes with God’s immortal family dwelling together before His throne while enjoying the fruits of the tree of life. It is the kind of fruit—the product of righteous relationships—that will make eternal life worth living.

John writes: “The angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place’” (verse 6, NIV).

Our world is confused and deceived. But it won’t forever remain that way. Jesus Christ gave us the book of Revelation to inspire confidence, hope and a clear purpose in life in all who will believe and serve the living God.

Jesus Himself personally utters Revelation’s closing message: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last . . . I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (verses 12-13, 16).

John ends with these words: “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (verses 20-21).

This wonderful future can be yours. You, too, can become one of God’s immortal children, a member of His eternal family in the Kingdom of God. You must, however, experience true repentance, receive God’s Spirit and learn how to “keep the commandments of God” by refusing to be entangled in the ways of this present evil world (Acts 2:38; Revelation 12:17; 2 Peter 2:20-21).

To learn more about how you can accomplish this, be sure to download or request your free copies of *The Ten Commandments, What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Road to Eternal Life*. And for a broader look at biblical prophecy, be sure to download or request *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy, The Middle East in Bible Prophecy, Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.

What Should You Do Now?

The book of Revelation closes with a glimpse into the awesome future God has in store for humanity—to live with Him as His immortal family forever in the Kingdom of God. He invites you, too, to have a part in this wonderful future.

But just learning what God has revealed about the future is not enough. With knowledge comes responsibility. To benefit from what you have learned, you must act on it.

God inspired the writing of the book of Revelation to make you think, to cause you to consider your future, to stimulate you to assume responsibility for your character and behavior. It is only one of the 66 books that make up the Bible, God's written revelation to mankind.

The Bible claims God as its real author—that all Scripture is inspired by Him (2 Timothy 3:16). It claims to reveal His way of life, His values and character. Do you know for certain whether that claim is true or not?

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