

# *Worthy Is The Lamb (I): Things That Must Shortly Come To Pass*

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

## **Introduction**

Our subject is one that proves to be mysterious and often confusing, even unapproachable to the average Christian. For this reason, it has been exploited by the devil through human speculators to the disillusionment of millions. Our goal in examining the book of Revelation is to accomplish a respectful study of God's final scriptural message to mankind prior to the commencement of the end of time. We will not be able to answer every question, but we do seek to couch the entire text of this book is an unmistakable timeframe that will eliminate 99 percent of the wild speculation that surrounds it. In this first lesson, we begin by introducing some background material to set the stage for this grand drama that is the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

## **Discussion**

### I. Chronological Context

#### A. A Time Of Intense Persecution

1. sadly, every generation since the resurrection of Christ has believed it was surely the last
  - a. because evil men tend to wax worse and worse, it always seems to the current generation of saints as if God must be about to act (Second Thessalonians 2:1-12)
  - b. he has acted before, in destroying the world of Noah and then wiping out Sodom and Gomorrah and he has promised to act once more in destroying this Earth and inaugurating eternity both for the righteous and the wicked (Second Peter 3:1-13)
  - c. the fine line we are required to walk is in being constantly prepared for the day of judgment while not becoming so consumed with it that we neglect every other necessity of life
2. yet with all the immorality surrounding us and as much as we may believe that the persecution of Christians has grown so great, there was a much earlier generation who was persecuted far more sorely than ours and the world continued anyway
  - a. Christians of the first and second centuries were persecuted by the Jews and then by the Romans, who held the power of law over the world and could execute anyone who refused to worship Caesar
  - b. the saints may very well have expected the gospel age was expiring, but in fact, the faith would rise even higher in a few generations and so God's patience would bear fruit
3. if a termination of the Earth was not the solution the early saints sought, then what was?
  - a. the apostles had forewarned every convert of this threat (Second Timothy 3:10-13)
  - b. they had borne the force of persecution themselves, from governments, countrymen and even brethren
  - c. some, like Stephen and James, were martyred for their faith, thus planting the notion in every saint's mind that he or she could be next (Acts 9:1-2, 12:1-4)
  - d. the book of Hebrews was written primarily to convince Jewish Christians not to revert to Judaism just to ward off persecution from unbelieving family and friends (Hebrews 10:32-39)
  - e. and, lastly, John was disturbed on the island of Patmos in order to receive a consoling Revelation from Jesus that would promise comfort in the short term and victory in the long

#### B. Conditions At The Turn of the First Century

1. imagine that it is just a few years short of the turn of the century-the turn from the first to the second that is
  - a. Jesus Christ was crucified about sixty years ago and since that time, his body, the church, has grown by leaps and bounds wherever the gospel has traveled-and that takes in the entire world (see Colossians 1:6) in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies about the kingdom
  - b. governments have been variously unconcerned and unkind to the church, but that is to be expected of a movement that has changed the world forever
  - c. there have been some martyrs for the cause of Christ since Stephen but now the persecution is becoming quite troubling
  - d. about 25 years ago, a Roman Caesar named Nero troubled the saints, burning the city and blaming the Christians for it
  - e. many of your brethren were abused and some even killed then over that

- f. but still, in the big picture, the gospel has continued to spread and the kingdom of Christ numbers more subjects now than ever
2. but that period of growth and relative peace now seems unalterably threatened by a new Roman ruler whose name is Domitian; it is A.D. 96
    - a. Domitian is a horrible, blasphemous ruler who goes so far as to demand that his royal subjects address him as Lord, God Caesar
    - b. most of his subjects go along with this demand because to refuse may very well mean execution, but this demand is far too much for you and your brethren in Christ
    - c. to call one on earth God is to deny Christ and seal your eternal condemnation where Nero and Domitian will suffer by your side in hellfire
  3. Domitian has even deputized an emperor worship committee to travel to the various provinces, erecting temples to him and forcing the population to worship him
    - a. the committee has arrived in your home of Asia Minor where the church is strong in number and faith
    - b. news has preceded the committee of trouble in other cities (some of your brethren have submitted to Domitian's demands and the churches are in an uproar
    - c. the most striking news, though, concerns your brethren that have refused to bow before Caesar and call him God (quite a few of them have been executed
  4. you haven't said anything, but a friend of yours in the church was discussing the whole sad situation with you this morning before the preaching
    - a. he is concerned that perhaps the God of heaven is no longer watching over his people ("Has God, too, submitted to Domitian? Is he powerless to stop the emperor from persecuting his saints? Why doesn't he act?" (Habakkuk 1:1-4)
    - b. you think of the prophet Habakkuk's questions, eerily similar to these and remember that the answer held that God was still in control
    - c. the number of saints in worship today seems smaller than last Sunday; a number of the new converts are not here
    - d. could it be that they are afraid of the committee? What will become of the church of Christ, the very cause of Christ, if God does not act? When will we ever find consolation and overcome? Or will we at all?
  5. but, then a speaker stands up and proclaims that news has come from Patmos where the apostle John is
    - a. John has received a revelation from God that will bring comfort to you all and settle your hearts and furnish you with new courage to resist the devilish emperor and hold true to your confession
    - b. the speaker says that the message has been encrypted in a code of numerical and scriptural symbolism
      1. you are familiar with this type of Apocalyptic literature, for the prophets Zechariah and Ezekiel used it and you understand from the fulfillment of those prophecies what the symbols mean
      2. the numbers will denote very general characteristics while the scriptures will describe specific kinds of events
        - a. two symbolizes strength, courage and energy
        - b. three symbolizes divinity
        - c. three and one half symbolizes incompleteness and imperfection
        - d. four symbolizes the world where we live
        - e. six is a bad omen, similar to our view of 13
        - f. seven is perfection and completeness
        - g. ten symbolizes human completeness
        - h. twelve symbolizes organized religion
        - 1000 symbolizes ultimate completeness
      3. infidels like the emperor may understand the numbers if they intercept the message but they will never see into the scriptures for they are naturally untrained
      4. God has seen that this message will only encourage his people and not tip off Domitian's servants to the way in which the Lord will cease the persecution, punish the guilty and set the church back to its mission
        - c. perhaps most encouraging to you and your brethren is God's timetable
          1. the opening of the message informs you that these things will come to pass shortly (Revelation 1:1-3)

2. if the message had told of events 2000 years from now, it would have only discouraged you more, but the turn of events is promised to happen shortly and so it is a consolation to you
  - a. such language is not new to scripture and God had never failed to make words mean things (Genesis 41:25-32)
  - b. he had even told the Roman brethren that he would bruise Satan's power shortly in using false doctrine if they would adhere to the truth (Romans 16:17-20)

## II. Keys To Understanding

### A. Shortly Come To Pass

1. in the first three verses, you can learn everything you need to know relative to when these predictions were to be fulfilled
  - a. for the purposes of an early twenty-first century study, were they intended for the year 100 or 2003?
  - b. if words still mean things and the promises of a caring God can still be trusted, these comforting predictions were to find fulfillment long ago, not today
2. verse one says that the things we are about to read of "must shortly come to pass"
  - a. *must* is an impersonal verb that indicates a moral necessity is involved; the nature of the case is such that the things revealed here must take place as and when prophesied
  - b. God, the eternally vigilant protector of widows and orphans, is making a statement that he will soon strike in defense of his faith, and he adds a guarantee that all here prophesied will be fulfilled just thus
    1. for God to offer these Christians false hope of swift relief would violate his honor and record (see he would be the God of good intentions rather than remarkable results)
    2. therefore, it was a moral imperative that God act then to relieve his disciples from the tyranny of Domitian
    3. did God act or did he fail, allowing them to be swallowed up whole?
      - a. is this prophecy delayed at least 1900 years while they rot in their graves?
      - b. can we count on God to say what he means, mean what he says, and make it happen when a moral imperative is involved?
      - c. I believe so, for I am faithful in the God of the Bible who does not fail (Hebrews 13:5-6)
      - d. therefore, the prophecy related by John must have been carried out "shortly" from when that term was attached to it
3. furthermore, when this book was first read and verse 3 promised blessing upon all those who heard and kept it, that original audience who suffered so greatly that they required a book like this, would surely have known it was meant for them that the time was near

### B. Sent and Signified

1. the book is addressed, not to modern churches or authorities, but to the seven churches of Asia Minor, which no longer even exist; there is no question among the first audience as to whether it describes their ordeal or events some 2000 years in the future, for it promises blessing and grace in a time that is near
  - a. the first beatitude of Revelation is found in verse 3 ("Blessed is he who read and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.")
  - b. now hope is renewed, but how?
2. Revelation is sometimes call the "Apocalypse," not because it describes some great destruction, but because it is given in signs and symbolism
  - a. the word "Apocalypse" means the use of signs and symbols and any other meaning has simply been added by speculators
  - b. this book is not to be read with an eye toward the literal fulfillment of every prophecy
3. Revelation is filled with vibrant images, many of them recycled from previous use in the Old Testament, which makes them more understandable to an audience steeped in Mosaic reading
  - a. it becomes somewhat more difficult then for modern men to deduce exactly what historical event may have been fulfilling what sign, but that is less than necessary anyway
  - b. understanding the book's purpose and timing is enough, and knowing that the church did survive the threat of the Roman empire lends comfort to all who feel similarly threatened today

### C. Greetings From The Godhead (Revelation 1:9-20)

1. contrary to Premillennialism, after the day of Pentecost, the kingdom is always spoken of as being in existence, for Jesus established it on the cross and took its throne when he ascended into heaven (see Acts 2:29-33); we are conveyed into it by conversion (see Colossians 1:13); yet we are also a kingdom of priests (First Peter 2:9-10)

2. John is told again to grab his quill and start writing down what he sees

a. the seven stars are identified as the angels, or messengers, of the seven churches of Asia Minor; they were closely united to the sword of his word in verse 16 and seem to be the men who would proclaim the message in each church as they received it

b. the lamp stands symbolize the seven churches themselves

### **Conclusion**

The Revelation has barely begun but for the original persecuted audience, the anticipation and comfort must be palpable. In our next lesson, we will meet the seven churches of Asia Minor that received this Revelation first, to learn of their specific conditions and what this message would have meant to them.

# *Worthy Is The Lamb (2): The Seven Churches of Asia Minor*

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

## **Introduction**

As we move on into the second and third chapters of the Revelation, we arrive at the most familiar texts in the book. While everything else seems to be so apocalyptic and difficult to apply, these chapters are instantly relatable to conditions in churches in every age. Revelation 1 described our Lord as standing in the midst of the churches and he continues there today, watching over our affairs and ruling his kingdom. While there were certainly more than seven congregations in Asia Minor, these churches are chosen for their very different conditions, to represent the stations of soundness and variety of issues that churches can confront over time. No doubt, the church where you worship will find things positive and perhaps negative about itself in these descriptions. We will discuss the churches and the scriptures first and then turn to look at some themes that emerge from Christ's letters to them.

## **Discussion**

### I. The Seven Churches

#### A. Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)

1. the ancient city of Ephesus numbered about a quarter of a million residents, making it the fourth largest city in the Roman world

a. Ephesus was very fortunately located on a natural harbor that made it the most important seaport of Asia Minor; it was called the "Supreme Metropolis of Asia," a melting pot where people of every class met, lived and did business

b. Ephesus was also blessed with a limited self-government from the Roman Empire; she was wealthy, prosperous and magnificent and an obvious distraction to faith

2. in about the year A.D. 52, the apostle Paul visited Ephesus on his way from Corinth to Jerusalem as part of his second journey (see Acts 18:18-21)

a. on his third journey, he preached about the baptism of Christ and the church and he contrasted his genuine miracles with those of the magical arts (see Acts 19:1-20)

b. it was not until he trifled with the beloved temple of Diana, however, that he got into big trouble (see Acts 19:21-20:1)

1. the temple of Diana was at once "a treasure house, a museum, and a place of refuge for criminals. It furnished employment for many, including the silversmiths who made miniature shrines of Diana" (Hendriksen 60)<sup>1</sup>

a. Diana was considered the mother goddess of the Earth, who tradition says was born in the woods outside Ephesus when her image fell from the sky

b. her icons were crafted with a chest completely covered with breasts to signify her claim to be the mother of the Earth

c. the most renowned of her statues stood at the entrance to her temple in Ephesus, where she was worshiped

2. such idolatry formed a great challenge to preaching Christ and a single God

#### B. Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)

1. Smyrna was located 35 miles up the coast of the Aegean Sea from Ephesus and actually rivaled Ephesus in prosperity and commerce

a. at the same time, Smyrna fell all over itself to venerate the Roman emperor

b. as far back as 195 B.C., Smyrna was building a shrine to the goddess of Rome and by A.D. 26, Smyrna beat out ten other cities for the honor of building a temple unto Emperor Tiberius

c. imagine, if instead of Presidential Libraries in Austin and College Station, we had temples to deify Lyndon Johnson and Bush the Elder, and all within walking distance were expected to worship them there; that was the situation the Christians faced in Smyrna

2. we know nothing at all about the founding of the church at Smyrna concerning who was involved and when the work was done

---

<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen, William. "More Than Conquerors." Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1995.

- a. quite clearly, however, a good work had been accomplished, for this church was standing strong in the midst of intense pressure to compromise faith in Jehovah with veneration of the empire
- b. it is during the age in which Revelation is written, during the reign of Emperor Domitian, that every citizen was required to burn a pinch of incense on the altar of the shrine to the deity of Caesar
- c. once he had done so, the citizen was given a certificate of compliance to prove that he had done his duty, and then could even go and worship all and any gods and goddesses that he liked
- d. if he refused to burn his incense to the godhead of Caesar, as any faithful Christian would, he would be branded a troublemaker and enemy of the state
- e. you can imagine the pressure and persecution that would result from this constant state of affairs

#### C. Pergamos (Revelation 2:12-17)

1. Pergamos was the most northern of the seven cities, the official capital of Asia Minor; Pliny, her governor, said that she was "the most illustrious city of Asia"
  - a. Pergamos was a very religious city, but then again so is Mecca today
  - b. Pergamos was the most pagan of the seven cities, all of which were devoted to some false deity
  - c. Pergamos became known for its sensuous worship and imperial cult, enforcing loyalty to the "Lord Caesar"
  - d. as a legal center for the region, tests of loyalty that would challenge the faith of Christians were simple to administer
2. outside of these six verses, we know nothing about the church at Pergamos; what we can learn here is that she was an ancient forbear of the modern tendency toward religious compromise to keep the peace and maintain a big tent

#### D. Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)

1. Thyatira was located about 40 miles southeast of Pergamos and was probably a military outpost when settled
  - a. she was an idolatrous city in which one's livelihood often depended upon a willingness to go along with the course of things and submit to popular opinion
  - b. the trade guilds sponsored pagan feasts, serving meat from the idol's altar and conducting immoral fertility rituals
  - c. the Christian probably felt real pressure to participate, because to refuse would lead to ostracism in the marketplace
2. the earliest mention of the gospel reaching Thyatira finds a Thyatiran actually coming to it instead (see Acts 16:11-15)
  - a. whether Paul traveled to Thyatira to evangelize while residing in Ephesus (see Acts 19:1-10), we are unsure; perhaps Lydia brought the truth back with her and another preacher built upon Paul's foundation
  - b. whatever the case is, a church had been established there and was now under attack by the devil

#### E. Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)

1. Sardis was located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira where five important roads joined to form an important trading center
  - a. so noted for trade was Sardis that she is considered the birthplace of modern money for there the first coins were minted
  - b. yet as one might guess this level of prosperity led many into a state of luxury and decadence
  - c. in addition, Sardis was a militarily secure city, founded, like Edom, in the insurmountable mountains
    1. still, confidence like this can become overconfidence and Sardis had found herself invaded and defeated before
    2. but that was long ago and the people of Sardis had forgotten their history
    3. perhaps this overconfident attitude had infected the Christians as well
2. nothing at all is known about the establishment or early history of the church; perhaps Paul labored there while he lived at Ephesus (see Acts 19:10); what we can discern comes from this letter; we know that Sardis was once a thriving and busy congregation

#### F. Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)

1. twenty-eight miles southeast of Sardis was the ancient city of Philadelphia, a missionary city in the sense that it was built to proselytize the world in the Greek language and culture
  - a. Philadelphia, of course, means "brotherly love" in Greek and the city was named for the loyalty that Attalus II showed to his own brother
  - b. the city was located strategically on one of the Roman empire's most important highways, but was also in an area prone to earthquakes; one such event destroyed the city in A.D. 17 and was followed by years of tremors that kept the residents in constant fear of a repeat catastrophe
2. outside of this letter, the church at Philadelphia is not mentioned anywhere in scripture; we know nothing more than that the church there was quite sound

#### G. Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

1. continuing our circuit around Asia Minor, we travel 40 miles southeast from Philadelphia and arrive at the Lycus valley and the intersection to two major trade routes, the city of Laodicea
  - a. under the Roman empire, Laodicea became the richest of the cities of Phrygia, so well off that even a devastating earthquake in A.D. 60 did not require federal assistance to rebuild
    1. Laodicea was the banking center of Asia Minor with its vaults filled with gold
    2. she was also a center of the ancient garment industry, famous for the dark wool woven from black sheep grazing in her countryside
    3. Laodicea had a notable medical school in her borders where medicines such as the Phrygian eye powder were produced and exported to the rest of the world
  - b. the city did have one glaring weakness—the lack of an adequate source of fresh, potable water; one archaeologist reasons that her water was delivered via aqueduct from the hot springs to the south and thus was not naturally cool and refreshing, but lukewarm and somewhat bitter
2. the elements then of prosperity and self-sufficiency defined the pride of Laodicea and apparently infected the saints in town as well
  - a. decades earlier, she was mentioned in the Colossian letter of the apostle Paul (see Colossians 4:13, 16), but other than the fact that a church then existed there, nothing more is revealed
  - b. this letter in Revelation 3, however, reveals enough to paint a sad picture of the church in Laodicea; a tepid attitude toward spiritual things had been allowed to take over and no fire remained to sustain the church against hard times

## II. Themes

### A. I Know You

1. each of the seven churches is immediately informed that Jesus knows both them and their works
  - a. for some, it became like that moment, when, as a child, you realized that the transgression you thought you were getting away with was being watched all the time by your mother's omniscient eye
  - b. for others, it was that sweet, but tense moment when you submit your best efforts to another for judgment, hoping for the best
2. Jesus knew all their struggles, their challenges, their successes and their failures, just as he knows yours today
  - a. Jesus is close enough to know us better than we know ourselves
    1. we tend to deceive ourselves at times and overestimate our strength or underestimate our weaknesses and sometimes even vice-versa
    2. we have selective memories and conveniently forget the things we want to forget
  - b. with his sharp two-edged sword, Jesus knows us, but that does not have to be a bad thing (Hebrews 4:11-16)
3. it becomes incumbent upon us to know ourselves ("Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves" (Second Corinthians 13:5))?
  - a. the only way you can know for sure that you are headed down the right path is to check the map regularly and make sure you are on course
  - b. some will need to repent and others will need to increase their faith in order to persevere, but none will be served well by ignoring their progress

### B. Declining Zeal

1. by self-examination, three of these congregations would find themselves guilty of declining zeal

- a. Ephesus had left her first love
  - b. Sardis had a reputation that she was alive, but she was in fact dead
  - c. Laodicea was so materially self-confident that she had become spiritually indifferent, lukewarm to all matters of religion
2. Thyatira's zeal had increased, so that her latter works were more than the first, but she was still risking unsoundness and disfellowship because she harbored unrepentant false teachers and sinners
  3. maintaining your zeal, the attraction to your primary love, is vital, but not always easy, as time tends to cause many to take things and people for granted
    - a. don't let the devil drain your zeal by becoming weary of doing the right thing (see Galatians 6:6-10)
    - b. don't lose sight of the objective (First Corinthians 15:54-58)
    - c. throw yourself into God's work (Titus 2:11-14)

#### C. Persecution

1. the church at Pergamos was persecuted so severely that they had to amend their directory at one point to remove the name of Antipas, who had been murdered for his faith
  - a. Smyrna was warned that some of her members were about to be imprisoned for refusing to compromise their convictions and that they might have to hold their faith even to the point of martyrdom
  - b. the Philadelphians had been persecuted by rabid Jews like the former Saul of Tarsus, but they had persevered so far
  - c. Jesus described their circumstances as living near Satan's throne (see the Roman emperor) or Satan's synagogue (see the Jewish leaders)
2. our own circumstances are certainly just as vexing in terms of societal persecution, pressure and influence
  - a. America condones homosexuality, fornication, serial divorce and remarriage and looks the other way at lying, cheating and laziness
  - b. popular entertainment glorifies foul language, filthy jokes and extramarital sex, even among children
  - c. if we are not vexed in the spirit by our surroundings, we are in danger of becoming desensitized to evil, perhaps even swept into it (Second Peter 2:4-9)
3. we must maintain our disdain for every form of evil, quit grading it on the curve and commit ourselves to rising above it (First Peter 1:13-16)
  - a. that means no compromise with peer pressure, the false teacher or an increasingly immoral society
  - b. it means no mental reservation or temporary indulgences, but faith that stands fast and firm

#### D. False Teaching

1. although false doctrine is widespread today, it was no less so in the first century
  - a. the doctrines of the Gnostics, Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel had in common the notion that a Christian's liberty placed him above God's laws on morality, freeing him to commit sexual immorality and idolatry with immunity
  - b. John and Paul had dealt with this prevailing idea before (Galatians 5:13-16; see 1 John 3:1-10)
2. the attitude of tolerance toward doctrinal error that is so popularized today as unity-in-doctrinal-diversity also meets with its condemnation in these letters
  - a. soul-damning error is to be exposed and shunned, not embraced or even tolerated
  - b. that position has never changed in scripture (Second Peter 2:1-3 and Second John 7-11)

#### E. Overcoming

1. each church is promised that Heaven awaits all those members who overcome their weaknesses and persecutions
2. Heaven and Hell are not mandated on a congregation-by-congregation basis, but sound Christians will make up sound churches
3. the wording of those promises ranges from the tree of life to the book of life to hidden manna, but each has to do with eternal reward (First Peter 1:3-9)

#### F. Hear What The Spirit Says to The Churches



1. every word that is said to these churches is intended for universal consumption
2. churches today are obligated to consider these warnings and promises and to make application of them when necessary
3. the church's status as belonging to Christ—its candlestick—is on the line (Revelation 2:5)

### **Conclusion**

The Revelation is addressed initially and primarily to these churches in Asia Minor and the things in the book have meaning for them. At the same time, these seven letters are intensely and sometimes uncomfortably practical. When we continue, the Revelation will proceed to a series of warnings about the coming intensity of the Roman persecution of the churches.



# *Worthy is The Lamb (3): Signs of the Apocalypse*

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

## **Introduction**

The seven letters completed, Jesus now turns to the continuation of the Revelation. Remember, however, that the entire book is primarily addressed to those same saints of first century Asia Minor, and its immediate impact would be upon their lives. The book's chief benefit to modern readers is not in the prediction of future events, but in the comfort of knowing that God secures his people in every tribulation, whether it is the deluge of Noah's time, the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah or the pilgrimage out of Egypt. God begins in chapter four to tell the suffering saints of first century Asia Minor what was about to commence in their struggle with pagan Rome. He reveals the sovereignty of his throne room before turning to the description of three series of seven signs, in which each series predicts intensifying persecution, then judgment and finally comfort. This pattern extends through two interludes and promises divine fellowship with the 144,000 and the great crowd in spite of the hardships that exist.

## **Discussion**

### I. Prelude to the Signs of the Apocalypse

#### A. The Throne Room of Heaven (Revelation 4:1-11)

1. there is nothing so inviting to curious men as an open door and here it is a rare invitation from God for a man to look inside and see what goes on beyond the clouds in Heaven; lest the open door be too foreboding, a voice like a trumpet personally invites John to come up and see what things God had planned for his people in the days to come

2. here again is the moral imperative intrinsic to the word "must," especially when it is attached to the consolation of the troubled saints of Domitian's pagan realm

a. God is about to foretell eventual victory in spite of initial deterioration in conditions and the need for great perseverance (see Psalm 46:1-6)

b. the faithful remained faithful as Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33)

3. like Paul before him, John is transported in the spirit so that he can see into heaven and immediately his eyes are drawn to its throne

a. an empty throne would be cause of consternation, confusion and fear, for it might indicate that the king has been slain or overthrown

b. this throne is occupied, however, and magnificently so; neither the devil nor Domitian has assumed control of the affairs of humankind

4. the figurative nature of the imagery is clear here, as it should be throughout the book; God is not literally made of stones, but his appearance is so awesome that it seems like the blazing glory of the clear jasper and crimson sardius are before him

5. the four living creatures here form a bit of recycled symbolism from the Old Testament, as Ezekiel had used them to describe cherubim, a class of creature that serves God as guardians (see Ezekiel 10:20, 25:18-22; Genesis 3:24)

#### B. Worthy Is The Lamb (Revelation 5:1-14)

1. the Father sits upon his throne in heaven, from which he had thundered forth about Jesus so long ago, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased"

a. we find him still engaged with mankind by holding in his hand a scroll that promises to reveal the answers to the most pressing questions being debated in Asia Minor

b. in a scene that is reminiscent of Arthur and Excalibur in spite of the fact that this one came first, a strong angel asks who will open the scroll by loosening the seven seals

c. as the sword was pulled from the rock by cunning and not by might, so the scroll is not opened by a mighty angel, but by someone worthy

d. when no one in heaven or on the Earth or under the Earth is found to be that worthy, John cries the tears of a man tantalized by the object of his desire just barely out of reach; neither patriarch nor judge nor angel nor apostle is worthy to loose the seals

2. finally, the lion of Judah and root of David prevails (see Genesis 49:9)

a. when John looks to behold the lion, he instead sees a lamb, as if it had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes, representing sacrifice, authority and omniscience

- b. the elders and cherubim see him take the scroll and immediately fall down to worship this conqueror who had prevailed
- c. each has golden bowls of incense, which symbolize the words of the saints' prayers wafting up to God's throne, and harps to symbolize their own musical praise
- 3. the new song that the 28 sing reveals that the Lamb was worthy because he had been slain for the redemption of mankind (see First Peter 2:7-10)
  - a. the saints are a kingdom and priesthood to Jehovah, serving beneath King Jesus and as personal worshipers of his Father
  - b. they reign on the Earth, for they are more than conquerors of the slavery of the devil and the deadly course of this world (Romans 8:35-39)
- 4. the chorus grows beyond the original 28 to an innumerable host of angels and heavenly beings, all singing about the worthiness of the lamb who was slain
- 5. a chapter that began with suspense, disappointment and tears ends with shouts of joy and hopefulness for a worthy, prevailing lamb will surely have something to say about a demonic, murderous emperor

## II. Signs of the Apocalypse

### A. The Seven Seals (Revelation 6:1; see Revelation 6:1-17)

- 1. the first seal unleashes the first horseman of the Apocalypse, a conqueror representing the redemptive work of Christ who conquered the gates of Hades and destroyed the power of death through the promise of eternal life (see Romans 6:23)
- 2. the second seal is of the second horseman of the Apocalypse, riding upon a red stallion, with the image of blood obviously connected to him; he symbolizes the persecution and violence that result when Christianity is taught and decisions must be made
- 3. when the third seal is broken, the third horseman appears in black with a rider holding a balance in his hands to symbolize grief and mourning, famine and societal ostracism on Christians
- 4. the fourth seal reveals a pale horse ridden by Death and Hades, who had power to kill a fourth of the Earth with sword, hunger, death and beasts
- 5. when the fifth seal is opened, heartbreak takes on the human face of martyred souls under the altar asking for vindication for the persecution that killed them
- 6. the sixth seal recycles imagery from the Old Testament which then described the rocking of earthly powers like Babylon (see Isaiah 11:1-14, 24:1-4; Ezekiel 26:15-18, Nahum 1:1-6); here the earthquake and eclipse describe God's impending judgment upon the Roman government

### B. Interlude (The 144,000 and The Great Crowd (see Revelation 7:1-17)

- 1. after the rush forward of the four horseman and then the cries of the souls under the altar and the symbolic earthquake and eclipse, the men of Earth had cried out, "For the great day of his wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (6:17)
- 2. but like the eye of a hurricane, the action suddenly abates and four angels are posted at the four corners of the Earth to hold back the winds that would continue the judgment
- 3. another angel ascends from the east with the seal of the living God (Revelation 7:1-4)
  - a. this lone angel speaks to the other four and instructs them to hold back the winds until the servants of God in the path of destruction have been sealed (see Ezekiel 9:1-11)
  - b. their number is 144,000, a symbolic number based on the religious number 12 squared and then multiplied by one thousand, indicating completeness, to arrive at this sum, which is used to symbolize the "church militant" in the face of persecution, but overseen by a loving God
- 4. while the 144,000 was in the path of God's fury upon their own persecutors, this great multitude is surrounding the throne of Jehovah (Revelation 7:9-14)
  - a. they represent the "church triumphant," having died in faith and been elevated to reward
  - b. their white robes signify purity and their palm branches connect them with Christ's triumphal entry and "coronation parade" into Jerusalem just before his arrest and crucifixion; they lived with Christ and died with him as well (Revelation 8:1-3)

### C. The Seven Trumpets and Seven Bowls of Wrath (see Revelation 8:1-9:21 and 16:1-21)

- 1. with the seven seals opened and completed, the unit of angels then prepared to blow their trumpets one by one

- a. the pouring out of the bowls of wrath later in Revelation 16 simply retells these natural calamities on the Earth, only intensifying the degree of punishment
  - b. these trumpets and bowls are not predicting literal events, but instead symbolizing God's warnings to mankind that repentance is required
  - c. particular warning is made against the government which is motivating the persecution of Christians
2. the first four trumpets and bowls use natural disasters to symbolize God's increasing wrath against the unregenerate spiritual, political and moral forces
  3. the fifth trumpet and bowl show the effects on mankind and a nation that result from moral decay
  4. the sixth trumpet and bowl envision human armies executing divine wrath, even as they did under the Old Testament in Israel and Jericho
  5. the seventh trumpet and bowl culminated the sense of victory that comes when God exercises his vengeance upon the troublers of the faithful; combatants gather at Armageddon, but no war is fought for fighting God is futile

#### D. Interlude: The Little Book, Measurement and The Two Witnesses (see Revelation 10:1-11:19)

1. in between the trumpets and the bowls of wrath, John sees another mighty angel descending from heaven in a cloud with a little book in his hand
  - a. John is then instructed to retrieve the opened little book from the strong angel, but when he asks for it, the angel tells him to eat the book, as Ezekiel had been told to do himself (Revelation 10:8-11; see Ezekiel 2:8-3:3, 14)
  - b. John was to fill himself with the book, a figure for mastering the contents of the little book intellectually and spiritually
  - c. the message was sweet like honey in his mouth, for he was a servant of God and its principles appealed to him spiritually and supported his hopes religiously, but it proved to make his stomach bitter because determined infidels would make its proclamation unpleasant and besides, the consequences of not knowing God and not obeying the gospel are heart-rending, even if just
2. John is given a reed like a measuring rod to measure the sanctuary, the altar and the worshipers; the sanctuary of God in this age is the church of Christ (Revelation 11:2; see Ephesians 2:19-22)
  - a. the significance of this measuring is to communicate the fact that God recognizes these people, can count the very hairs upon their troubled heads and is able to comfort them
  - b. John saw only one court, one outside realm, and it was not measured but was left to the unsanctified and those outside the kingdom of Christ
  - c. the outsiders will persecute the saints for 42 months, or three and one half years, an apocalyptic number that is half of the perfect seven and therefore indicative of an indefinite, broken period of time
3. for this same duration, the two witnesses will prophesy in sackcloth (Revelation 11:3-7)
  - a. the persecution will not stop or outlast the proclamation of the gospel
  - b. the two witnesses form a symbolic pairing, not a literal prophesy of two actual, distinct individuals; they anonymously symbolize all who carry the gospel
    1. once the witnesses have completed the delivery of their message, the beast rises from the bottomless pit to kill them
    2. their death will be a cause for rejoicing among people who tired of hearing the witnesses' messages which condemned their acts of worldliness
    3. their merriment proved short-lived, however, for in fine apocalyptic fashion, the faithful two are resurrected from the dead like the man whom Elijah restored to life (see Second Kings 13:21) and the dry bones of the house of Israel (Revelation 11:11-12; see Ezekiel 37:10)
    4. their resurrection is actually the resurrection of their cause

#### E. Church Under Attack (Revelation 12:1-9; see Revelation 12:1-15:8)

1. a great sign is seen from heaven's perspective (a pregnant woman arrayed with the illumination of God's three dispensations (the starlit age of the hopeful patriarchs, the moonlit age of Moses's tutorial Law and the sunlit era of Christ's New Testament of grace)
  - a. she is not the Jewish nation who rejected Christ, or the church which is the product of the word or Mary who is not sufficiently mighty, but all of those who formed the remnant people of God upon a polluted earth and who keep his covenant

- b. hope is assaulted, however, by the appearance of another sign in heaven (a great, fiery red dragon with seven crowned heads and ten horns, who is Satan)
  - 1. the scene does not so much depict the actual night in which Jesus was born, but the entire period from his birth to his ascension back into heaven to sit beside his Father
  - 2. the Child took hold of his scepter to rule in his spiritual kingdom, the church, from the throne of David in heaven (see Hebrews 1:8)
  - 3. he was caught up into heaven, not for his protection, but his coronation (see Acts 2:29-33) and the Woman, representing God's faithful remnant now fully in the church also flees into the wilderness where she was promised protection like Moses, Elijah, Mary and Joseph and the apostle Paul
- 2. the war that breaks out in heaven between Michael and the Devil and their servants is not to be considered literally any more than the picture of the Devil as a Dragon
  - a. the war in heaven symbolizes Satan's defeat by the resurrection and ascension of Christ into heaven and the exposure of his methods in deceiving mankind into choosing sin and death over righteousness and life
  - b. with her child gone, the woman is left to suffer the persecution of Satan—the remnant people of the early church of Christ were afflicted with terrible persecution by the devil through the hands of the ruling Roman Caesars (see John 15:20)
- 3. the antichrist is revealed in chapter 13 (Revelation 13:1-5)
  - a. the sea beast is the Roman empire, apparently mortally wounded by Nero's death but all the more powerful under Domitian
  - b. the land beast acts under the authority of the sea beast; it is the enforcer of emperor worship in Asia Minor; in order to prop up the emperor's claims to divinity, this enforcement crew would travel through Asia Minor perpetrating false miracles and illusions upon the superstitious people (see Matthew 24:24 and Second Thessalonians 2:9-10)
  - c. as God sealed his people with his name upon their foreheads, so now the land beast demands visible signs of allegiance to the sea beast, the empire; 666 is not any one individual, but a symbol of evil imperfection worked by all who serve it
- 4. chapter 14 drives away the despair of the thirteenth chapter with a new vision of the worthy Lamb and his 144,000 sealed believers standing on Mount Zion (Revelation 14:1-5)
- 5. Mount Zion was initially the stronghold of David in the Old Testament (see 2 Sam. 5:7), but came to represent God's presence and protective relationship with his nation
  - a. from Mount Zion, it was believed, refuge and blessing would flow and be found; Mount Zion was like an island of peace in the midst of an unruly and oppressive world
  - b. when we reach the New Testament, Mount Zion is a purely figurative description of the realm of the glorified Messiah (Hebrews 12:22-24)
  - c. the Mount Zion, then, upon which the Lamb and his 144,000 stand is not heaven itself or a literal mountain in Israel, but security of the church militant upon Earth

## **Conclusion**

As the symbolic plagues were poured out on Rome, no refuge was left, for she had refused to repent of her idolatry and pressed forward with her persecutions of the saints. Through John, Jesus is consoling his brethren in Asia Minor with promises of vindication and comfort.

# *Worthy is The Lamb (4): Climax*

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

## **Introduction**

The seven bowls of Armageddon have been poured out upon the world, according to Christ's first century prophecy, and judgment has begun to come upon the persecutors of the saints in Asia Minor, symbolized as awful beasts with evil images. Rome has been characterized symbolically as Babylon, that brutish state of old that afflicted God's people and then was punished herself. The second of two women appears here in the seventeenth chapter of Revelation. Before, the only woman obvious to the text was the one who gave birth to the man-child-she represented God's faithful remnant people; now a second, a harlot, is introduced in clear opposition to the first. The first woman was identified with Jerusalem, but this woman stands with Babylon, or Rome. Who will prevail-the unrepentant harlot or the persecuted, but faithful, remnant?

## **Discussion**

### I. Mother of Harlots (see Revelation 17:1-18)

#### A. The Harlot is Identified (Revelation 17:1-6)

1. the great harlot is seen sitting upon many waters, which symbolize many peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues, according to verse 15

a. like ancient Babylon, Rome's worldwide reach is described by her spanning the known world and owning the seas

b. this Rome is an empire, like Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon before her, and she is just as bloodthirsty in her efforts to maintain power

2. God had described immoral cities before as harlots, including Nineveh (see Nahum 3:1-4), Tyre (see Isaiah 23:15-17), ancient Babylon (see Isaiah 47:5-15) and Jerusalem (see Isaiah 1:21)

a. the kings of the world are indicted in verse 2 for committing political, economic and religious whoredom with Rome in exchange for military peace

b. yet their enslaved citizens often loved to have it so, becoming drunk and addicted to the pleasures that flowed from the Roman way of life

3. the image of the harlot is suddenly transferred in verse 3 to a place upon a red beast, full of blasphemous names and having seven heads and 10 horns

a. she is still the harlot, only meeting her destiny now with the sea beast of chapter 13, the Roman worldwide empire

b. in other words, here, city meets empire

4. her attire in verse 4 is merely the cosmetic mask behind which she hides her seductive intentions and hellish consequences; how often are evils offered in harmless, even attractive vessels?

a. idolatry tends to come in very subtle packages (James 4:1-6)

1. anything that displaces God from the throne of our hearts or invites him to share that seat is spiritual harlotry (see Matthew 6:19-24)

2. covetousness is idolatry, according to the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 5:5) and so are pride, selfish ambition and the lust of the eyes

b. when we put another deity in our hearts by thought or deed, we fornicate with the devil, with the world, with what we covet and God is offended (James 4:7-10)

5. upon her forehead is written a sort of "scarlet letter"; she is emblazoned with a symbol of her identity which cannot be denied

6. behind her makeup and baubles is her true identity and intention; she is drunk upon the blood of the martyred saints, rejoicing in their brutal deaths

#### B. The Woman and The Beast (Revelation 17:7-14)

1. the angel recognized that John was curious about the harlot and so he offers to talk about the mystery of her and the beast that bore her

2. John will not be the last to wonder about them, for all whose names are not in the book of life would witness the beast smitten and then temporarily revived

a. perhaps this has reference to the succession of emperors, symbolized in the beast's seven heads, representing a complete list of kings

b. the seven mountains the harlot sat upon relate nicely to the seven hills that bordered the Tiber upon which Rome was built; she became known as the "seven-hilled city" and this figure seems to be one of the least subtle in all the book

3. the ten horns are allies of Rome in one way or another against Christianity; they are vassal kings who rule various ethnic provinces by Rome's mandate

#### C. The Harlot (Revelation 17:15-18)

1. the harlot is simply clarified in these verses; she is an empire which borders many waters and seas and rules many nations and tongues

2. the vassal kings mentioned before as allies of Rome are revealed to be doing so only under duress or ambition, not genuine loyalty

3. God's purpose would be carried out by using the vassals to inflate Rome to untenable proportions and then removing her forever as an impediment to the gospel

## II. Judgment on Babylon (see Revelation 18:1-24)

### A. Is Fallen, Is Fallen (Revelation 18:1-8)

1. although no time lapse is revealed—whether it be days or months or even years—the sequential chronology of these events remains in tact

a. after the things that transpired in chapter 17, Rome, the symbolic harlot of profligacy and immorality is humiliated and about to collapse in a puddle of her own uncleanness

b. yet another angel appears with the power from God to pronounce his sentence and execute his judgment against this Roman Babylon

2. the angel announces her fall as if it has already occurred, a prophetic custom that presupposes any prediction of God to be as good as done

a. the once marvelous woman, dressed in royalty and smugness, is reduced to rags and humiliation, because she used her powers to entice and persecute Christians.

b. the angel relegates Rome to a habitation of demons, foul spirits and every unclean and hated bird; he borrows from the words of Isaiah to illustrate the merciless vengeance of God to come (see 21:9, 13:19-22)

3. the fornication committed with her by the other kings on Earth is not only a habitual sexual immorality, but also a whoredom of political alliances and Machiavellian compromise

4. just then another voice sounds out and calls the saints of God to flee the embrace of Rome as Abraham had fled Haran and Lot had fled Sodom

a. he cannot compel them to leave the Roman empire, for the world was hardly large enough to accomplish such a feat then; he encourages them to flee the figure and lifestyle of Rome, the sins of the flesh and compromises of the world

b. the Christian who gives up his fight and is enticed by the Roman way of living just may end up in the cross hairs of divine vengeance himself

5. as God told Moses that Israel's complaints from Egyptian bondage had reached his ears, so the angel assures John that the church's cries from Roman bondage had touched him as well

### B. Kings and Merchants of the Earth (Revelation 18:9-19)

1. the kings of the Earth who had hated Rome's extortion, but accepted it as the price of safety and luxury will selfishly weep at her fall

2. the merchants will weep even more selfishly, for Rome's demise will bring them great economic depression and no market for their goods especially, the luxuries

3. the market for cattle and slaves will suddenly dry up

4. the shipmasters and sailors who brought the goods from afar will find nowhere to offload their cargo, for the city will not be able to buy, and there will be no other great market to take her place

5. it is materialism and worship of the things that has brought them to this kind of destruction

a. they had fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (see Ephesians 5:8-11) and were swept away by the course of this world (see First Peter 4:1-5)

b. we must be content to be separate (Second Corinthians 6:14-7:1)

### C. Rejoice for Vengeance (Revelation 18:20-24)

1. back in chapter 11, the wicked on Earth had mocked the deaths of the two witnesses, but now the tables are turned



- a. the people of God are not told to rejoice in death, but to find satisfaction in the defeat of evil by good
- b. while the kings, merchants and sailors mourn and weep, the saints, apostles and prophets celebrate for the persecuted have been avenged and every opponent or worldly person has paid a price
- 2. an angel symbolically casts a millstone into the sea to illustrate the rippling effects of Rome's ultimate fall
  - a. musicians, symbolic of joyous times; craftsmen, symbolic of a thriving market; and the millstone, symbolic of healthy sustenance, are silenced as the millstone's plunge ripples through the doomed empire
  - b. the homes of the wealthy had been lighted at night and Nero had even used some Christians as human torches in his gardens, but now they would be extinguished
  - c. wedding bliss will likewise fade away
- 3. three reasons are offered
  - a. her merchants had made materialism a popular form of idolatry
  - b. Rome's deceptive lifestyle had induced many to serve the flesh
  - c. she had spilled the blood of the saints

### III. King of Kings and Lord of Lords (see Revelation 19:1-21)

#### A. Judging the Harlot (Revelation 19:1-10)

- 1. the harlot who is judged in this passage is Rome and her brutal, inhuman, immoral presence; her predicted fall is a cause for great joy among the saints who have suffered indignities and persecution at her hands
- 2. while her accomplices in the market, on the sea and in various vassal states bemoan the loss of prosperity that will follow her fall, the people of God answer "Alleluia" for the execution of God's vengeance
- 3. as the nineteenth psalm says, so Revelation 19 agrees (God's judgments are true and righteous altogether)
  - a. gone will be the smoke of Christians burning in Nero's garden, to be replaced by the exhaust from Rome's fall from power
  - b. three groups shout praise to God for his retribution upon their troublers (the great multitude, the living creatures and elders and the saints on Earth)
  - c. apprehension had centered upon the fear that God had bowed to Caesar like Baal had bowed to him in the Old Testament; this series of events dispels that fear completely
- 4. a third woman joins the radiant one of chapter 12 and the harlot of chapter 17
  - a. she is the Lamb's bride, really the radiant woman from before in a new symbol; she is the church to be joined to Christ in heaven
    - 1. now she is only betrothed to him, as Mary was to Joseph when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, but then the church will join her groom
    - 2. Paul wrote, "I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (Second Corinthians 11:2)
    - 3. even the phrase here in verse 7, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad" is reminiscent of Christ's admonition in Matthew 5:12 to endure persecution for great is the reward in heaven
  - b. to see the bride standing beside the harlot would make the contrast between Rome and the church very clear
    - 1. the harlot dressed in the gaudy, provocative attire of a carnal addict while the bride wears the bright, pure and fine linen of righteousness
    - 2. when the church is wed to Christ, she will not have spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but will be holy and without blemish (see Ephesians 5:27)
    - c. the bride, then is not one person, but represents the entire population of the redeemed from start to finish
      - 1. all such individuals who compose this bride are invited to the marriage supper by the gospel message and respond in faithful, grateful submission (Second Thessalonians 2:13-17)
      - 2. the feast will be described in chapter 21; for now, only the invitations have been mailed
- 5. John is overcome by emotion and perhaps gets confused and falls down to worship the angel, who rejects his adoration

#### B. Faithful and True (Revelation 19:11-16)

1. although the harlot has been destroyed, the two great enemies of God and man, the beast and false prophet remain in place in ultimate service to Satan
2. this passage, then is still not a description of the second coming of Christ, for the circumstances in first century Rome have not been concluded yet
3. Christ appears on a white horse, a conqueror that inspires confidence as God's faithful and true witness
  - a. the unknown name may signify his relationship with God, but since it is unknown, it is futile to speculate; John finally tells us that he is the Word as he was described back in the first chapter of John's gospel record and the King of kings and Lord of lords, as Paul had called him in 1 Timothy 6:13-16
  - b. his robe is stained with his enemies' blood, symbolic of their judgment
4. he is not alone, for the armies of heaven are likewise assembled in white robes upon their white stallions
5. the sword of his mouth is his word, which saves the faithfully obedient and slays those who do not know God and those who refuse to obey the gospel (see Second Thessalonians 1)
  - a. his rod signifies his authority, the power to break men with a rod of iron and to dash them in pieces like pottery (see Psalm 2:9)
  - b. he is prepared to tread the winepress of wrath, a symbol recycled from Isaiah 63:1-6

#### C. The Awful Supper (Revelation 19:17-18)

1. in the great battle between the faith and paganism, the victory of the worthy Lamb will be complete and total
2. a lone angel captures the attention of the universe from his perspective on the sun, symbolically calling the scavenger birds of the Earth to prepare to feast upon the carcasses of those who had troubled the early church
3. Ezekiel, likewise, had been instructed to call birds and beasts to dine upon God's sacrifice of the heathen (see Ezekiel 38-39)

#### D. Battle (Revelation 19:19-21)

1. the beastly Roman Empire summons its royal allies and their armies to this decisive battle, the battle of Armageddon which they had prepared for, but not fought, back in chapter 16
  - a. Armageddon is a term attached today to the prospects of a third world war with nuclear arms or to the second coming of Christ, but in the Bible, it only describes God's resounding judgment upon the Roman Empire that tried to destroy the church
  - b. the King of kings and Lord of lords will emerge victorious over the beast, which never represented anything modern, but was indicative of ancient Rome
2. even now a battle is not actually described, for Christ is too powerful!
  - a. before the battle can really heat up, the invincible Christ captures the beast and his false prophet and casts them into a lake of fire to join their harlot mistress
  - b. the false prophet had assisted Caesar by deceiving his citizens into worshiping their monarch as a deity
  - c. there was never any threat that Christ would lose this battle; his victory is resounding and as quick as he decided to wage it
  - d. emperor worship is thus terminated and even today, it does not exist
3. Armageddon has been fought and won by Christ and as a result, paganism emanating from the Roman throne has been eliminated
4. Daniel's vision from 500 years before has been realized (Daniel 7:1-12)

### Conclusion

The victory over Rome has been secured in prophecy and history tells us that Christ delivered in the years that followed the giving of this Revelation. Much more remains in the book, however, including some of the most perplexing and promising texts in the Bible. What do the thousand years represent? Chapter 20 begins to explain the aftermath of the Armageddon battle already won.

# *Worthy is The Lamb (5): Victory*

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

## **Introduction**

For many centuries, the twentieth chapter of Revelation has been used as the basis for various theories about a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth. What we actually see, though, is a passage with seven parts, each begun with the phrase, "And I saw," which describes the aftermath of the defeat of the beast and false prophet that embodied the old Roman Empire. As Caesar and his allies in the world had been predicted for defeat, the devil was losing his closest allies in the fight against the faith. What becomes of the tempter and the persevering saints is the main subject of this chapter. Then follows a promise of victory, both temporally over persecution and eternally, over death and Hades. These are the most beautiful images in all of literature and they form the basis of the hope that we share with brethren who lived 19 centuries ago.

## **Discussion**

### I. The Thousand Years (see Revelation 20:1-15)

#### A. Thousand Years Begun (Revelation 20:1-6)

1. the angel who appears in verse one is another ministering servant who holds the key to the abyss, or bottomless pit, and a strong chain with which to bind Satan
  - a. earlier, John had observed a fallen star who was given the key to this pit and power to open it and inflict upon Earth smoke and a scourge of locusts (see 9:1-3)
  - b. that same key has been transferred to this angel who now has the power to close and seal the abyss that had been opened like a Pandora's box of misery
  - c. the key and chain are symbolic of authority and restriction, under which Satan is about to go with the demise of his influence through Rome
2. Satan is caught by the angel and bound for 1000 years
  - a. 1000 is one of the book's most clearly symbolic numbers, here representing a lengthy and complete, but undetermined period of time, in which he will remain active and dangerous, but like a dog chained between two trees (First Peter 5:8-9)
  - b. the chained Satan can operate only within the limits of his perimeter, which Christians and infidels enter at their own risk
3. during this symbolically long period of time, Satan is to be held in the abyss, unable to deceive the nations as he had during Caesar's slavery to him
  - a. in Revelation's simple chronology, the period of persecution that had been described variously as 1260 days, three and one half years, or time, times and half a time has come to an end with the last martyr's death
  - b. the saints beneath the altar have rested their little time waiting for the fulfillment of their course and now God is bringing this paganism that killed them to its own end
  - c. this thousand year moment of victory symbolizes the beginning of the reign of the emperor, Constantine, who ended persecution and legalized Christianity
4. after the devil is restrained, John sees the souls of the martyrs and those who had managed to live faithfully on Earth as they sat upon thrones
5. the rest of the dead are the wicked servants of the devil through their allegiance to Rome; they have no part in the images of victory
  - a. the "first resurrection" is not a bodily raising, but a resurrection of the cause of Christ through the saints' and martyrs' vindication over Rome
  - b. Isaiah (26:19), Hosea (13:14) and Ezekiel (37:1-14) had used similar language to describe Israel's triumph over idolatry and captivity as a resurrection of their cause from apparent incurable death

#### B. Thousand Years Conclude (Revelation 20:7-10)

1. Satan's attitude toward the savior is unchanged during this long, complete period of restriction, but he is loosed at the end anyway for a little time (see verse 3)
  - a. the period of victory has lasted now more than a literal thousand years and will come to a close when there are not enough saints left on Earth to justify its continued existence
  - b. without the good leavening influence of a strong population of Christians, the Earth will deteriorate into iniquity and beg God for the end to come

2. unbound, Satan will come forth without the old Roman empire to use in his objectives
  - a. instead, he will employ his power of deception throughout the Earth and with the assistance of nations from the four corners of the globe
  - b. Gog and Magog are borrowed from Ezekiel as symbols of attitudes, theories and amendments to truth that seek to overthrow it and doom men to punishment, including communism, humanism, astrology, materialism and atheism; this looming battle is not literal, but spiritual, and fought daily as we see respect for the Bible decline around the world
3. after one last attempt is made to abolish the church, the devil, the deceiver of Eve and Elymas, will be cast into the lake of fire with his ancient allies to face torment forever and ever; he will not be the ruler of hell, but its most noteworthy prisoner (see Matthew 25:41-46)

#### C. Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15)

1. this passage marks an important transition in the book of Revelation
  - a. we have concerned ourselves with things that were shortly to come to pass when John wrote about them to benefit his beleaguered readers in first century Asia Minor
  - b. the twentieth chapter of this long vision has shown them their victory, celebrated in a symbolic thousand years during which paganism would not trouble the church as it formerly had, but then had also looked forward to the end of that period to Satan's last gasp against the modern church
2. now the chapter ends with something that was not shortly to come to pass for those early saints and may not even be for us (the final judgment day)
3. Christ is prophesied as sitting upon a great white throne to judge the living and the dead (Second Peter 3:10-12)
4. a literal resurrection of all who ever lived has occurred and each one takes his turn standing before the judgment seat to hear his sentence pronounced (see Second Corinthians 5:10)
  - a. the books are symbolic of the histories of each person's life, the omniscience of God who makes each eternal determination
  - b. the book of life, which contains the names of all the faithful, is also present
5. death, the last enemy to be destroyed, is destroyed, being thrown into the lake of fire along with those whose names were not enrolled in the book of life
  - a. the second death is spiritual, eternal, incurable (see Second Thessalonians 1, Romans 2)
  - b. Alford writes, "As there is a second, higher life, so there is also a second, deeper death. And as after that life there is no more death, so after that death there is no more life"

## II. New Heaven and Earth (Revelation 21:1-8)

### A. New Heaven and Earth

1. in a limited, figurative sense, the old heaven and Earth would pass away when Roman persecution finally subsided with Emperor Constantine
  - a. that is, the current, harsh system of things on Earth would be replaced by a new, kinder and more pleasant arrangement among men and saints
  - b. gone would be the emperor worship enforcement squad and Caesar's human torches in his gardens
2. in fact, there are three Bible prophets who utilized the phrase "new heaven and Earth" to make predictions about important shifts in society
  - a. Isaiah used those words when talking about the transition from fleshly Israel to spiritual Israel as God's bride (see Isaiah 65:17-25)
  - b. Peter also used the phrase, but to describe the second coming of Christ and the removal of the church to heaven (see Second Peter 3:10-13)
  - c. finally, John uses those words to describe the same shift from a church among persecutors and troublers to a church unblemished and unharmed in heaven

### B. New Jerusalem

1. this new Jerusalem is new in terms of kind (*kainos*), being superior to earthly Jerusalem which preceded her
  - a. while the Jerusalem on Earth is treated as a holy and historic city today, the new Jerusalem is capital of the new heaven and Earth (Hebrews 12:22-24)
  - b. the Jerusalem which now is corresponds to bondage and the flesh, while the Jerusalem above is free, the mother of all who are saved (see Galatians 4:25-26)

2. the city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God, that the patriarchs believed in (see Hebrews 11:10)

3. the symbolism continues, for New Jerusalem is compared to a bride, in white and adorned for her wedding

- a. formerly, she was only betrothed to her groom, Jesus Christ (see Second Corinthians 11:2)
- b. now she is to be presented to him without spot, wrinkle or blemish (see Ephesians 5:25-27)

#### C. Tabernacle of God

1. an unidentified voice sounds from the area of the throne; this is a voice that employs and binds together all the symbols of the church of Christ

a. she is the bride of Christ, the sanctuary of God, the family of the Lord and a body composed of saved individuals

b. since Eden, God has been redeveloping the possibility of walking among his creatures again as he had then and now that plan has come to fruition

2. the voice emphasizes through repetition that, in this new order, God will again dwell among men and be with them in a way superior to the old order on Earth

#### D. Overcoming or Overcome

1. God reminds us that all this is yet future; now only prophecy, but then fulfillment

2. the theme of overcoming that appeared in the seven letters of Christ at the onset of this long Revelation returns here again

3. they who overcome the trials and tribulations of life will enjoy the inheritance of a son of God—an estate that includes everlasting life and an unending period of pure joy, never interrupted by the agonies of life in the old order on Earth; we are made heirs by adoption when we obey the gospel (see Galatians 4:1-7)

4. some are overcome by sin, doomed to an eternity in the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death

### III. The Lamb's Wife (see Revelation 21:9-27)

#### A. The Bride of Christ (Revelation 21:9-14)

1. one of the seven plague angels returns to show John the bride of Christ in all her unblemished splendor

2. remember that these descriptions are as symbolic as the dragon and harlot were; they are not literal, but suggest something even better than the signs

a. the symbolic city is lit in a way that would be like walking around inside a diamond on a sunny day (see 11)

b. the city is enclosed with walls, broken up only by 12 gates overseen by angels, symbolizing security and protection in God's bosom (see Hebrews 1:14)

c. those saved by the retrospective working of Christ's blood from under the Old Testament are here

#### B. Measurements and Materials (Revelation 21:15-21)

1. back in chapter 11, the church militant upon Earth had been symbolically measured by a seer with an ordinary reed; now a golden reed is employed by the angel to measure the church triumphant, the holy city

2. its foursquare measurements and other proportions confound our imagination, for the city would be literally 1500 miles in length, breadth and height

3. the wall measures 218 feet high according to the angel, certainly secure although nothing remains in the universe to assault it

4. it is made of jasper, a sparkling stone and the entire city was golden in nature, as well, but of a kind that also sparkled like glass; the foundations of the city's walls are inlaid with the most precious stones of John's time

5. the beautiful rainbow of color on the foundation is contrasted with the simple elegance of the famed pearl gates and golden street

#### C. No Temple In It (Revelation 21:22-27)

1. the center of old Jerusalem had been the temple of Solomon, but the center of New Jerusalem is God himself, without any more need for symbols of his presence or divine manifestations of his power
2. the promise of Revelation 3:12 has been fulfilled (those who overcame have become pillars in God's temple, permanent worshipers in the sanctuary of the I AM)
3. even the sun and moon are superfluous where God provides the light from his immediate being
4. the gates to the kingdom of Christ have always remained open to those who would obey him and become his citizens; now in heaven, the triumphant church's gates are left open as well, for there is no more threat from infidels

#### IV. Life (Revelation 22:1-5)

##### A. The River of Life

1. the first thing John sees after considering the gates of heaven is its pure river flowing with living water, like that which was in Eden
2. this river in Heaven contains water of a superior quality, for it sustains life in its fullness after life has been redefined as completely spiritual and devoid of fleshly frailty
  - a. Jesus had promised this very water that John now sees to the Samaritan woman at the well (see John 4:5-14)
  - b. while on Earth, this living water flowed through the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit (see John 7:38), but in Heaven it is only more readily available and abundant

##### B. The Tree of Life

1. the tree of life had been planted in Eden so that man could take of its fruit and live beyond his natural mortality
  - a. when Adam and Eve sinned, immortality on Earth was instantly turned into a negative thing, for man would be compelled to live among temptation forever
  - b. an eternity amidst sin and corruption was prevented by God's tough love in expelling the couple from Eden and cutting off access to that tree of life on Earth
2. access to the tree of life is regained in John's vision of Heaven
3. its 12 crops of fruit refer to its consistency and unending produce
4. its leaves are said to be for the healing of the nations; the disparities and differences that divided people on Earth will be eliminated in Heaven

##### C. Behold Him Face To Face

1. in Heaven, apostasy is abolished along with the curse, and the saved serve God right before his throne
2. we will be near to God that we might behold him face to face (First John 3:1-3)

#### V. Come, Lord Jesus! (see Revelation 22:6-21)

##### A. Faithful and True (Revelation 22:6-13)

1. as the curtain on Earth's drama was raised in Eden, it has now fallen in Heaven; the tree of life which was lost there has been regained beyond the clouds
  - a. man's adversary has been finally conquered and relegated to eternal torment with his angels and the souls of men he managed to deceive and enlist
  - b. sickness, death, sorrow and tears have been abolished among the righteous, who dwell with God in his very presence
2. more immediately, for the first generation of readers, the Roman persecution has been predicted to end one day and God's abiding care has been proven in a faithful and true prophecy
3. the question on the lips of every fearful saint so long ago must have been when and they are reminded that God's answer is shortly to come to pass
  - a. that phrase did not have reference to the second coming of Christ, nor the banishment of Satan himself, but the conflict between Christ and Caesar described at length in the book
  - b. comfort was coming and its signs would begin appearing shortly
4. Christ's swift judgment at the end of this passage has still to do with punishing the persecutors and consoling the persecuted

B. Inside and Outside (Revelation 22:14-17)

1. the seventh and final Revelation beatitude is the most famous; as we sing, "Blessed are they who do his commandments, they shall claim the tree of life."
  - a. or more literally, "Blessed are they that wash their robes."
  - b. our robes are symbolic representations of what resides within us; in God's eyes, we wear our character and motivations and faith so that that they can be seen
  - c. the martyrs of the first century washed their robes in Christ's blood by sharing his fate and others join their ranks by dying to sin and living to Christ
2. left outside the pearl gates of God's eternal presence and comfort are the dogs (see harlots and homosexuals), sorcerers, sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters and those who love and practice lies

C. Grace Be With You (Revelation 22:18-21)

1. this book is to be accepted as scripture, just as much as the four gospels or 2 Corinthians or Genesis; it is not to be dismissed or tampered with
2. one who deletes from it, adds to it, or alters any of it is warned that such a sin will be punished, whether the man be a Christian or not
3. John answers with his hopes and agreement and begs Jesus to come as predicted on that beleaguered ancient Roman world, and he did

**Conclusion**

The Revelation is over and God has proved his power in Asia Minor. The only thing that remains is for us to be faithful and wait for the ultimate reward that those saints also sought.