

Revelation

The Mystery Unveiled!



Revelation: *The Mystery Unveiled!*

by John H. Ogwyn

Many consider Revelation the most difficult-to-understand book in the Bible. Some dismiss its complicated narrative and vivid descriptions as mere allegory. Others assume that it recounts past history. The truth, however, is far more remarkable: if you understand Revelation, you can know the future of our world!

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Can You Know the Future?

Can you *really know* what the future holds? Many people are beset with anxiety and uncertainty about the years ahead. Are you? Our world is filled with widely varying predictions of what lies ahead in this 21st century. Whose predictions are correct? How can you possibly be sure?

Did you know that One claiming to be the Almighty Creator dares to proclaim the future **in advance**? God asserts that He declares the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10), and that His purpose shall stand. The Bible declares that human life is not a purposeless existence caused by blind chance or evolution. We are part of a planned creation, and there is a great *purpose* being worked out in our world. **You** can understand that purpose!

Today, terrorist threats grip the Western world and preoccupy many people's thinking. Many worry about "rogue states" that may possess nuclear bombs and other weapons of mass destruction. Will we face the ravaging ecological disasters predicted by many environmentalists, or will dazzling futuristic technology finally solve mankind's age-old problems?

Politicians regularly describe what they think lies ahead. Think tanks and analysts seek to point the way to the future, though disagreeing widely in their conclusions. Add to that the best-selling religious novels that claim to tell you what the Bible foretells. How can you possibly *know* what the future holds?

The book of Revelation is undoubtedly the most mysterious book in the Bible. Shrouded in symbols, it is a book that is

absolutely closed to most people. Yet, over the years, readers have purported to find just about *anything* currently happening around them *somewhere* in its pages.

Is it true, as some claim, that you can prove virtually anything by the Bible? The answer is emphatically “*No!*”—*if* you take it in context and let the Bible interpret itself.

The ancient prophet Daniel was given an outline of what the future held, from his day (in the sixth century BC) until the time when Christ would finally establish the Kingdom of God on earth (cf. Daniel 2, 7). In addition, Daniel was given several specific prophecies that related to “the time of the end.” Daniel greatly desired to understand the meaning of those intriguing prophecies, **yet he could not**. They were sealed up until “the time of the end” (Daniel 12:4, 9).

God’s time for us to understand these prophecies *has arrived!* We are now in the *time of the end*—described as a time when “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” In the last century, and especially since World War II, we have seen a **transportation revolution** and a **knowledge explosion**. In just 66 years, mankind went from the Wright brothers’ first flight to Neil Armstrong walking on the moon!

The Old Testament book of Daniel reveals prophecies of the end-time—recorded, but *sealed*. The New Testament book of Revelation depicts Jesus Christ *opening* the seals to *reveal* the future to His true servants (Revelation 1:1; 5:5). In other words, it is **now** possible to understand the future with clarity.

Millions have wondered if they will perish in a terrible world war. Others have wondered whether Christ might come at *any* time, and they may find themselves “left behind.” Do you *know* the answers to these questions? You **can** know! The answers to these and other questions are recorded in the final book of your Bible—the book of Revelation. This mysterious book, understood by very few, can become **clear** to you. There are vital keys that will make it possible for *you* to understand what even many of the prophets of old desired to know, but were denied.

Does that sound incredible? Well, it is **true!** If you really want to **know** what lies ahead in the 21st century, then read on.

Seven Keys to Understanding

Most scholars, surprisingly, do not truly understand the Bible. All you have to do is to read some articles in theological journals, or read some of the many books in print on religious and theological subjects, to see the utter confusion that abounds. Holding widely divergent views, religious authors contradict one another in a way and to an extent seen among writers on virtually no other subject. Do you know why?

The most important single key to understanding the Bible is the *attitude* in which you approach it. The Bible is God's book, and only those who approach it as God's book have any real hope of understanding its message. "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor [humble] and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). The Creator claims that His word is generally hidden from the "wise and prudent" but is revealed to "babes" (Matthew 11:25). God is not talking about babies in age or understanding, but rather those with a simple, humble, teachable attitude that one might call "childlike."

Along with this humble and teachable outlook must be a willingness to actually *obey* God. "A good understanding have all those who do His commandments," the psalmist declares (Psalm 111:10). The natural or carnal mind is "enmity against God" (Romans 8:7). It is rebellious against God's law and wants its own way. Many religious people *talk* about "knowing the Lord" but, as Paul told Timothy, have a mere *form* of religion, while denying the Bible's authority to *rule* and *regulate* their lives (2 Timothy 3:5).

If you will approach the Bible in a humble and teachable way, and are truly willing to *obey* God and *keep His commandments*, the following keys will make the book of Revelation *come alive* before your very eyes. You can have this seemingly mysterious book's message open up to you in a way you probably never thought possible.

Key 1—Christ Is the Revelator

In some Bibles, the book of Revelation is titled “The Revelation of Saint John the Divine.” It is important to remember that this title was added by men, and is not in the original text. In fact, the very first verse flatly contradicts this humanly devised title, explaining that this book is the direct revelation of Jesus Himself, which He received from the Father.

When Jesus Christ walked the earth, He frequently talked about the future. However, He never did so in a speculative or wishful sense. He spoke authoritatively, because He had come directly from the Father and spoke the words that the Father gave Him, not mere human ideas (John 14:24).

Jesus Christ came with a message: the good news about God's coming kingdom and how we could become part of that kingdom (Mark 1:14–15). Yet when He was here on earth almost 2,000 years ago, He did not establish that kingdom. Only days before His crucifixion, as He traveled to Jerusalem one last time, He spoke a parable to His disciples, who mistakenly thought that the kingdom would immediately appear. Jesus told a story about a young nobleman who first had to go away into a far country to be invested with kingly power, before returning to possess his kingdom (Luke 19:11–12).

How excited would *you* be if you had the opportunity to ask Jesus Christ *in person* about the events that would precede His return and the establishment of His kingdom? Some of the 12 apostles *did have* exactly that opportunity! Jesus' answer is preserved in the parallel accounts of Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, in what is often called the Olivet Prophecy. Seated privately with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, a hill just east of

Jerusalem, Jesus described the signs of His future coming, and the end of this current age. In this Olivet Prophecy, Jesus used plain language to describe many events that would later figure in the apostle John's symbolic visions, when he opened Revelation's seven seals. In Revelation, as in the Gospels, it is vital to remember that *Christ* is the Revelator.

Key 2—Start With the Text

Many who study Bible prophecy will first look at the world around them, then look at certain Bible symbols or descriptions in order to find something that “fits.” In doing so, they have simply read their world's current events back into Scripture. This is a backwards approach.

If we want to understand God's revelation to mankind, we must start with Scripture and understand the story flow that God lays out. We cannot understand John's description of a mysterious “beast” in Revelation 13, unless we look at what else Scripture has to say on the matter. We need to look at the earlier inspired information on this subject, given in the book of Daniel. Daniel, after all, recorded the divinely inspired foretelling of the rise and fall of great powers between his day (the sixth century BC) and the final establishment of the Kingdom of God on this earth.

We have to let the Bible interpret itself, rather than trying to read our own preconceived notions or current world events back into the text. Only in this way can we see Bible prophecies in their proper context.

Key 3—The Purpose of Revelation

Modern scholars disagree about what they consider the purpose of the book of Revelation. However, careful Bible students will see that the book's very first verse describes its purpose! Jesus Christ gave Revelation to John so that he might **show the servants of God the things that must shortly come to pass** (Revelation 1:1). It was intended as a *revealing* or *unveiling* of the future. It was given so that God's true servants could understand where world

events are headed, and could know what the future holds. It was a message of encouragement to God's people, showing that—even in the midst of turmoil and persecution—they need not become anxious about the future. God the Father allowed Christ to unveil, through John, the final culmination of future world events.

Therefore, it is wrong to think that Revelation is merely a vague allegory about good versus evil, or that it simply describes the historical circumstances and difficulties faced by first-century Christians. The entire book must be understood as laying out the future in advance.

Key 4—The Day of the Lord

Most commentators completely misunderstand Revelation 1:10. As a result, they do not understand the perspective from which the entire book was written. When John declared that he was in the Spirit in the Lord's Day (Note that, elsewhere in the New Testament, the Greek word *en* is almost always translated "in," though many wrongly render it here as "on"), he was not talking about the day of the week on which he received the prophecy. Rather, he was describing the future prophetic time that he saw in vision—a time when God will intervene powerfully in end-time world affairs. John's perspective in writing Revelation was this vision of the future.

The Bible nowhere defines the first day of the week as "the Lord's Day." That usage developed among the early Roman Catholic "church fathers," decades after Revelation was written. However, more than 30 times in the Old Testament, the future time of God's judgment is called the "Day of the Lord." When you look at the contents of Revelation, it is clear that the time of Christ's coming is the focal point of the visions John saw.

The *time of God's future intervention and judgment* is the theme that runs throughout Revelation. John wrote from that future perspective. Notice that in Revelation 1:12, when John saw the lampstands representing God's Church through the ages, he looked *behind* him to do so. From the perspective of John's vision, Church

history was almost completely in the past.

Key 5—What John Recorded

Revelation 1:2 shows us that John wove together three strands of vital information—the “word of God... the testimony of Jesus Christ, and... all the things that he saw.”

The Old Testament authors used, as a standard phrase, “the word of the LORD came, saying” or “the word of God came, saying” (cf. 1 Kings 12:22; 13:9). When Revelation was written, “the word of God” primarily referred to what we now call the Old Testament.

More than 100 times throughout Revelation—more often than in any other New Testament book—John either quotes or paraphrases verses from the Old Testament. Most Old Testament prophets simply recorded God’s messages in the order that they received them. If you only had the Old Testament, you would be totally at a loss to fit many of the Old Testament prophecies into a clear time frame. But by weaving references throughout, John enables us to see *where* these different messages, previously recorded by the prophets, fit into God’s plan for the future.

The “testimony of Jesus Christ” describes the good news that Jesus brought from heaven. His “testimony” is simply what He bore witness to. In the book of Revelation, Christ’s direct testimony is primarily found in the messages to the seven churches.

Revelation 19:10 tells us that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” This means that the *gospel message* gives life and breath to prophecy. If you do not understand the *gospel message* that Jesus taught, then you certainly cannot understand prophecy. As we read through Revelation, we find John alluding to Jesus’ words in the Gospels, and also recording what he heard Jesus say during his visions.

In addition to weaving together strands from both the Old and New Testaments, John recorded a series of visions of the future. Some visions were filled with mysterious symbols, while others pictured events and weapons so far beyond his day that John struggled to find words to describe what he saw. For example, he

could only compare futuristic weapons to first-century objects with which he and his readers were familiar.

Key 6—The Bible Interprets Its Own Symbols

To properly understand Scripture, we must let the Bible interpret itself. Most of the Bible is written as a straightforward narrative account, though some parts—such as Psalms and Proverbs—rely on poetic imagery. Revelation and some of the Old Testament prophets, particularly Daniel and Zechariah, describe symbolic visions. However—and this is a vital key—the Bible interprets its own symbols. When John saw the seven lampstands and seven stars recorded in Revelation 1, for instance, he was told that the seven lampstands represented seven churches and that the stars represented angels (v. 20).

Daniel not only recorded symbolic visions of a great image (Daniel 2) and of creatures emerging from the sea (Daniel 7), but he also gave the interpretation of these symbols. He explained to King Nebuchadnezzar that the great image with a head of gold, chest of silver, thighs of brass and legs of iron represented four successive world-ruling empires that would stretch from the days of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon all the way down to the future time when the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that would endure forever (2:31–44). The nightmarish creatures Daniel saw in Daniel 7 are also interpreted to represent the same succession of world-ruling governments that will conclude with the future establishment of the Kingdom of God (7:17, 23–27).

Elsewhere in Revelation, we read of symbols such as a dragon, a lamb, women, mountains and horns. Again the Bible interprets its own symbols. Revelation 12:9 identifies the dragon as a symbol of Satan the devil. This harkens back to Genesis 3, which records Satan's appearance in the guise of a serpent. In John 1:29, John identifies the "lamb" as symbolic of Jesus Christ. The Bible pictures the true Church as a woman—Christ's virgin bride (2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:7–8)—so a harlot, or "fallen woman," represents a false church that has not been faithful to Christ. Mountains represent kingdoms or governments (17:9–10),

while horns represent kings or rulers (vv. 12–13). We will never properly understand Revelation unless we are willing to let the Bible explain its own symbols rather than relying on human imagination.

Key 7—The Book of Revelation Is Primarily in Time Sequence

In Revelation 5, John saw a vision of One (clearly God the Father) sitting upon the throne in heaven, holding a scroll sealed with seven seals. The only One authorized to open the seals, and therefore to reveal the contents, was Jesus Christ. A scroll must be unrolled sequentially, and the seals must be broken one at a time to reveal what comes next. This vital key, when properly understood, makes plain that the book of Revelation is written in chronological order. While there are a few “insets” that go back and let a reader “catch up” on certain events, Revelation’s narrative flows chronologically.

The opening of the seven seals begins in Revelation 6. When the seventh seal is opened in Revelation 8, the seven trumpets begin to sound. After the seventh trumpet is blown, seven angels are given seven bowls containing God’s wrath to pour out.

Understanding this key point clears up many issues. It also sheds light on events such as the mysterious sealing of the 144,000 recorded in Revelation 7. In context, we can understand that this is a yet future event—not something that happened in the past. The book of Revelation allows us to view all the prophecies of the Bible in their proper time sequence, and to have an overview of God’s plan from start to finish.

With these keys in mind, we can proceed to examine the contents of Revelation itself.

A Final Vision for the End of an Era

The close of the first century was a bewildering and discouraging time for many of God's people. Years earlier, after the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Church of God had begun in a very dramatic fashion on Pentecost, 31AD. Three thousand people were baptized on that day. In the months that followed, the number of disciples multiplied greatly. God's miraculous intervention was evident on a regular basis.

Three decades later, however, the situation seemed to have changed. God's people were discouraged and confused by events both in the Church and on the world scene. In 62AD, Jesus' brother James, who served as leader of the Jerusalem Church, was killed by a mob in Jerusalem. A few years later, the Roman government arrested Paul and transported him to Rome a second time, this time to be executed. Soon after, the Jerusalem Church had to flee the city to escape advancing Roman armies. By 70AD, both Jerusalem and its magnificent temple lay in ruins, destroyed by General Titus and his army. Nearly all the original leaders of the Church were dead. The only original apostle still alive was the aged John. After 70AD he made Ephesus, located in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) near the Mediterranean coast, his primary base of operations.

Around 96AD, the Roman government arrested this elderly apostle and banished him to the isle of Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor (Revelation 1:9). Patmos was a place where political prisoners were exiled, and from which few ever returned. For

someone of John's advanced age, exile to a prison island must have seemed like a sentence of certain death. But it was in this context that John was given the visions that were to be recorded in the final book of the Bible.

God used John, almost 30 years after the deaths of the other original leaders of the Church, to complete the New Testament. John carried out this commission by writing a fourth Gospel and three letters, all probably completed before his Patmos exile, and finally by writing the book of Revelation. As such, John was responsible for putting the New Testament into its final form.

The Final Message

God the Father has reserved authority over the times and seasons of human history (Acts 1:7). The ebb and flow of the tide of world events is *not* simply a matter of chance. The rise and fall of great powers is *not* just determined by human decisions. Rather, God established limits for the roles of various nations. These limits include both length of time on the world stage and the extent of their geographic dominance (17:26).

Though God the Father has determined the nations' roles in advance, how can we possibly understand unless *He* chooses to reveal them? It was precisely at the end of the first century that the Father did just that. He gave Jesus Christ an *unveiling* of what had previously been hidden, that Christ in turn would reveal to the Church. Christ did this by sending an angel to the aged apostle on Patmos (Revelation 1:1). Through a series of visions at the end of an era, John was allowed to see the future—and to record it in advance.

The book of Revelation is an **unveiling**. The English word “revelation” comes from the Greek word we also render as “apocalypse”—literally meaning a “revealing” or an “unveiling.” While the future is veiled and mysterious to human beings, it is plain to God. Man tries in vain to look through the mists of time to perceive what the future might bring. But while men can only guess, the great God who inhabits eternity is able to declare, from the very beginning, what the end will be.

As an elderly man, in exile on Patmos, John had the most remarkable experience of his long life. In a vision, he saw himself transported into the future, to the time of God's impending intervention and judgment, which the Old Testament calls "the Day of the Lord." Hearing a powerful voice behind him, John turned to gaze upon seven golden lampstands, then saw One, whose face shone like the sun in its full strength, standing in the midst of those lampstands. Absolutely overwhelmed by what he saw, John collapsed in a faint. The One he saw standing there was the very One with whom he had walked and talked as a young man; the One beside whom he had sat and upon whom he had leaned at their last Passover meal together. John had last seen Him about 65 years earlier, when he stood with the other disciples on the Mount of Olives, gazing up and watching Him disappear into the clouds. As John lay collapsed, that One reached down and touched him gently with His hand. "Do not be afraid, John," He declared, "It is Me." Christ went on to reveal Himself to John as the One who is the first and the last, the One who was dead but is now alive forevermore. John was then told to write down what he had seen and what would yet be shown to him.

This final book in your New Testament, then, is **Jesus Christ's unveiling of the future—your future!** It is a book written as Christ's final message to His Church, showing what will happen. Though most people have considered it a mysterious and closed book, it can now be open to *your* understanding. If you really want to know what lies ahead, then keep reading!

Setting the Scene

Revelation's first chapter sets the scene, and provides an introduction to the book. As we have already seen, the Day of the Lord (Revelation 1:10) is the time setting from which events in the book are viewed. From this standpoint, John saw *behind him* the lampstands representing the seven churches, symbolizing God's Church down through the ages.

Remember, Revelation was given as a prophecy to show God's servants what would come to pass. Therefore, the messages to the seven congregations (Revelation 2–3) are far more than a mere historical account of circumstances extant in the last decade of the first century. These seven churches in Asia Minor represent the stages (or eras) through which the true Church would pass before Christ's return.

After receiving the messages to the seven congregations, John received in Revelation 4—*in vision*—an invitation to come up to heaven. He described God's throne in heaven, and noted that the One sitting on it held a sealed scroll in His hand. There was no one worthy to break the seals and open the book except Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah. As Christ, the Revelator, opened the seals one by one, John was invited to come and look. Beginning in Revelation 6, he described what he saw when each seal was opened.

The first six of the seven seals are opened in Revelation 6. Revelation 7 tells of a pause before the opening of the seventh seal. During that pause in the action, 144,000 servants of God are sealed to ensure their protection from the plagues of the Day of the Lord that would follow.

The story continues in Revelation 8 with the opening of the seventh seal. When that seal is opened, John watches as seven angels are given seven trumpets, which they sound one after another. The first four trumpet blasts are revealed as ecological disasters. Revelation 9 describes the blowing of the fifth and sixth trumpets, and the dramatic military events that unfold in their aftermath.

Revelation 10 recounts a pause in the action before the seventh and final trumpet is sounded. At this point John is given a small scroll, which he is symbolically to eat, and he is told that more prophecies concerning nations and rulers must be delivered. Revelation 11 opens by describing what the Two Witnesses—special servants of God at the time of the Great Tribulation—are doing during the three-and-a-half years leading up to Christ's return.

The seventh trumpet, described in Revelation 11:15, is central to Revelation both in the book's length and in its importance. It is the "last trump"—the time of the saints' resurrection to immortality. This verse is vital for understanding the rest of Revelation, because it marks the point at which the saints come out of their graves to enter into glory. The events from this point through the beginning of Revelation 20 all occur within a very short time. Except for inset accounts, the entire period covered by these chapters is *after the first resurrection* and *before the onset of the Millennium*.

An inset in the story flow occurs in Revelation 12 and 13. These chapters pick up the story at an earlier period, and bring it up to date, presenting the stories of the Church (Revelation 12) and of the beast (Revelation 13). These contrasting stories of the persecuted and the persecutors need to be understood as the background to the events surrounding Jesus Christ's return as King of kings.

Revelation 14 and 15 contrast the newly resurrected saints rejoicing in glory, with the final preparation for God's wrath to be poured out upon rebellious mankind. God will need to punish severely the "sons of disobedience" (cf. Colossians 3:6) and the system that has persecuted His faithful servants through the centuries, because they have refused to respond to previous calls to

repentance. Then, in Revelation 16, we learn the details of the pouring out of the seven bowls that contain the fullness of God's wrath.

Revelation 17 and 18 provide another inset into the story flow, giving an overview of the end-time system called Babylon the Great. This is an alliance of false religion, military-political power and commercial dominance that will hold sway before Christ's return. Revelation 18 describes this entire system's absolute destruction.

The first verses of Revelation 19 reveal a celebration at God's throne. This is the prelude to both the marriage supper of Christ and the Church, and the actual arrival on earth of the all-conquering Jesus Christ to destroy the leaders and armies of Satan-inspired human rebellion against God.

Satan the devil is then placed under restraint for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2) and the remainder of Revelation 20 introduces Christ's and the saints' millennial rule on the earth. At the Millennium's end, the rest of mankind will be resurrected (vv. 11–15).

After reading, at the close of Revelation 20, about the destruction of the incorrigibly wicked in the lake of fire, we learn in Revelation 21 and 22 about the new heaven and new earth that God promises to create. The new Jerusalem will come down to the earth and will be the dwelling place of God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Church. The book of Revelation ends with a look at what God has in store for those who love Him. It leaves us standing on the threshold of eternity with an assurance of the certainty of Christ's return and the fulfillment of God's promises.

Having completed this brief overview of the book, we can now examine the story in greater detail, to understand what lies ahead for us and for all mankind.

The Seven Churches

Jesus Christ, the great Revelator, inspired John to record a message to His Church. While there were other Christian congregations in Asia Minor at the first century's close, seven particular

congregations were singled out. The Bible frequently uses numbers in a significant way, and this is certainly true in the book of Revelation.

In the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—we see particular emphasis on two numbers—seven and 12. The number seven denotes completion and perfection, as in the Genesis account of creation, where the seventh day of the week was hallowed and set apart as the Sabbath (Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 20:11). Later, in Leviticus 23, God gave Israel seven annual festivals that outlined His plan of salvation. Even the economic life of ancient Israel was regulated by cycles of seven years. The sabbatical year came every seventh year, during which the land was to lie fallow and personal debt was to be forgiven (Leviticus 25:1–4). The 50-year jubilee cycle came at the end of seven cycles of seven years, marking the time when slaves were to be set free and land was to revert to its original owners (vv. 9–10). Throughout the book of Revelation, the number seven is used over and over. As just some of the many examples, there are seven lampstands, seven churches, seven angels, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls of wrath and seven heads on the beast.

Genesis introduces the number 12 with Jacob's 12 sons who gave rise to the 12 tribes of Israel. Throughout the Torah, 12 is used as the number indicating "organizational beginnings." When we look at Revelation, we again see this same pattern. Revelation 7 recounts the sealing of the 144,000 with 12,000 selected from each of the 12 tribes. It also reveals the new Jerusalem with 12 foundations, named after Jesus' 12 apostles, and 12 gates named for the 12 tribes. Even the measurements of the city are based on the number 12.

We should take special note when Revelation uses numbers such as seven and 12. The descriptions of seven churches are not coincidental, but are clearly used in a symbolic way to represent the Church in its entirety. Jesus Christ is pictured as standing in the midst of the seven lampstands, which represent far more than a handful of first-century congregations. The cities in which those congregations were located were linked by Roman roads, and were successive stops on an ancient Roman mail route. Each of these

seven congregations was used to typify or represent one of the seven successive stages or eras through which the true Church of God would pass from the time of the first century until the time just before Christ's return. The church at Ephesus, for instance, represented the early Apostolic Church, from its beginnings on Pentecost 31AD until shortly after John's death. Using this prophecy, the true Church's story can be traced through the centuries, step by step.

It is beyond the scope of this booklet to offer a detailed history of the seven stages of the Church, but we encourage you to write for our free booklet, *God's Church Through the Ages*, to help you understand this important subject. It is fully documented with historical sources to help you see how this remarkable prophecy has been fulfilled. Most commentators are unable to understand this prophecy properly, because they are looking at the *wrong* church! Not realizing that the Church that Jesus built was never to grow into a large worldly organization, entering into political intrigues and alliances—but was to remain a “little flock” separated from the world—most do not recognize the striking fulfillment of these prophecies.

We should especially note Christ's words to the last two congregations: Philadelphia and Laodicea. These represent Christ's true Church at the end time, and understanding His message to them will help make sense of a key prophecy recorded in Revelation 12. In Revelation 3:8, the living Christ tells the Church at Philadelphia that He has set before them “an open door.” Scripture uses the term “open door” to describe an opportunity to proclaim the gospel (cf. Colossians 4:3). Because of their faithful endurance, Philadelphians are promised protection from the great time of severe trial that will come upon the whole world in the end time (Revelation 3:10). By contrast, Christ rebukes the Church at Laodicea, representing the final era, for its lukewarm spirit. Lacking in zeal, Laodicea is beset by compromise with the world, unaware that it is spiritually impoverished and naked. Because of its attitude, the living Christ will have to spew Laodiceans out of His mouth and right into the Great Tribulation, to wake them up and bring them to ultimate repentance and com-

plete surrender to Him. Understanding this distinction between the final two eras allows us to understand prophecies in Revelation 12 that describe Satan’s attempt to make war with the “woman”—the true Church.

At the Throne of God

Beginning in Revelation 4, John is given an astounding privilege. *In vision*, he is actually invited into the heaven of God’s abode, and is allowed to record some of what he saw. Obviously, pen and paper cannot adequately convey the glory and grandeur of God’s heavenly court, but several features of John’s description do stand out. John does not try to describe the appearance of the great Being on the throne, but does mention the beautiful colors and light surrounding the throne. The lightning and thunder that proceed from the throne are reminiscent of Exodus 19, in which the glory of God came down and settled on Mount Sinai before the giving of the Law.

We then find a description of the vastness of the heavenly court, including the presence of millions of angels (Revelation 5:11). There is a great crystalline expanse upon which the throne sits. From Revelation 15:2, we will learn that the expanse, called a sea of glass, has the appearance of fire embedded within it. Also present are four strange-looking creatures with six wings and the faces of a man, an ox, a lion and an eagle (4:6–8). John’s readers, familiar with the Old Testament, would recognize the similarity of the description of the seraphim recorded in Isaiah’s vision (Isaiah 6:1–2).

There are 24 elders who sit on 24 smaller thrones surrounding God’s throne. Many have tried to imagine who these elders are and some have tried to identify them with certain men mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. In fact, however, these elders are part of the *angelic* realm. They play an important part in God’s government (the number 24—12 doubled—makes this plain), probably in managing the millions of angels. God is not the author of confusion, and in heaven has a highly organized realm that is responsive to His will.

Revelation 4:5 mentions “seven lamps” before the throne, defined as the seven spirits of God, whom we are told in Revelation 5:6 are sent forth into all the earth. The ancient prophet Zechariah alluded to the same in Zechariah 4:10, referring to the seven “eyes” that God sends to run to and fro throughout the entire earth. Hebrews 1:7, referring to this created angelic realm, tells us that God “makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.” In some way that we cannot fully fathom, God uses these spirit creatures, which looked to John like flames of fire, to gather information from all over the earth.

Next, John describes Jesus Christ standing before the throne in the midst of this great assembly (Revelation 5:5–6). Here, Christ is described by two symbols: a Lamb who was slain, and the Lion of Judah. The Lamb of God describes Jesus Christ in His sacrificial role, taking our place and dying in our stead. The Lion of Judah describes Him in His kingly role, as the One who will conquer rebellious mankind and sit on the throne of David, ruling over the earth.

Revelation 4 and 5 also allude to an aspect of John’s vision which is developed more fully in later chapters: the heavenly connection with the earthly temple. Remember, the earthly sanctuary was modeled after a heavenly reality (Hebrews 9:24). So, as we go through the book of Revelation and read about the altar of sacrifice, the altar of incense and the heavenly Ark of the Covenant, we should realize that these were the heavenly originals after which the furniture of the tabernacle—and later of the temple—were modeled.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

One of the best-known images from the book of Revelation is of “the four horsemen of the apocalypse.” Though most have heard the term, hardly anyone actually knows who or what it describes. Yet Christ is the Revelator, so in order to understand these symbols we must find where, in Scripture, He explained in plain language the events portrayed here. Is there such a place? Absolutely! It is Christ’s famous response when He was asked

what would be the signs of His coming and of the end of the age (Matthew 24:3–31).

In Matthew 24, outlining a scenario that begins with false prophets and proceeds on through war, famine, disease, tribulation and dramatic heavenly signs, Christ describes the events leading up to His return from heaven. The parallel with Revelation 6 is remarkably clear. Notice what John records. He first sees Jesus Christ take the scroll from the Father and open the first seal. When this occurs, an angel tells John to come and look. John then sees a rider on a white horse wearing a crown and holding a bow (Revelation 6:1–2). Many have carelessly assumed that the rider is Christ, since Revelation 19 describes the returned Christ riding a white horse. This assumption could not be more wrong! In Matthew 24, and in the parallel accounts of Mark 13 and Luke 21, Jesus talks about *false* “Christs.” He says that some “will come in *My name*” and say that Jesus is the Christ, yet will deceive many. How can someone use Christ’s name, yet deceive people? By substituting a **different message** in place of the one He actually taught (Mark 7:7)!

History shows that there have been false teachers, wars, diseases, famines and religious persecutions throughout the almost 2,000 years since Jesus Christ spoke those words on the Mount of Olives. What is different about the events occurring after the seals are opened? Revelation 6 reveals that, in the end time, mankind will experience these age-old scourges occurring with far **greater magnitude** than ever before.

Notice what Paul taught regarding the Day of the Lord and the events surrounding the time of Christ’s return. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, he explained that the Day of the Lord “will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.” Who is that “man of sin”? Down through the centuries, there have been many men of sin and many antichrists (1 John 2:18; 2 John 7). However, the one of whom Paul speaks in 2 Thessalonians is the specific one whom Christ will destroy at His coming (v. 8). This connects him with the one labeled the False Prophet, whom Christ will destroy at His return (Revelation 19:20).

2 Thessalonians 2 tells us more about this end-time False Prophet. He will make blasphemous claims, proclaiming his divinity and demanding worship (v. 4), and will work miraculous signs through satanic power (v. 9; cf. Matthew 24:24; Revelation 13:13–14). This *final* false religious leader, undoubtedly a very smooth and charismatic individual, will cut a dramatic swath on the world scene. He will *not* label himself as “antichrist,” but rather will present himself as the leader of the entire Christian church.

Remember, Jesus said that individuals would come *in His name* saying that Jesus is the Christ, not in the name of some false gods or merely in their own names (Matthew 24:5). Paul also explained that Satan appears as an “angel of light,” and that his ministers seek to appear as “ministers of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14–15). The religious system that will yet produce this end-time man of sin was already at work in Paul’s day. Paul called this system the “mystery of lawlessness”—an outgrowth of the old Babylonian mystery religion that promoted the false idea that God’s law was “done away” and no longer need be kept. Though this system of false Christianity was already beginning in the first century, the final man of sin would not be allowed to emerge until the proper time (2 Thessalonians 2:6–7).

When this final False Prophet arises on the world scene, true Christians will be able to recognize exactly where we are in the scope of prophecy. The first seal will have been opened, and its end-time fulfillment will have been manifested. The opening of the other seals will follow quickly thereafter.

The Seven Seals of Revelation

First Seal	Second Seal	Third Seal	Fourth Seal	Fifth Seal	Sixth Seal	Seventh Seal
<p>White Horse: Deception</p> <p>Revelation 6:1-2</p>	<p>Red Horse: War</p> <p>Revelation 6:3-4</p>	<p>Black Horse: Famine</p> <p>Revelation 6:5-6</p>	<p>Pale Horse: Pestilence</p> <p>Revelation 6:7-8</p>	<p>Martyrdom and Great Tribulation</p> <p>Revelation 6:9-11</p>	<p>Heavenly Signs</p> <p>Revelation 6:12-17</p>	<p>Seven Trumpet Plagues</p> <p>Revelation 8:2</p>

Silence in Heaven
Rev. 8:1-6

Seven Trumpets: The Day of the Lord

First Trumpet	Second Trumpet	Third Trumpet	Fourth Trumpet	Fifth Trumpet	Sixth Trumpet	Seventh Trumpet
<p>Green grass and one-third of the trees are burned up.</p> <p>Revelation 8:7</p>	<p>One-third of sea becomes blood; one-third of ships and sea life are destroyed by fire.</p> <p>Revelation 8:8-9</p>	<p>One-third of waters turn bitter.</p> <p>Revelation 8:10-11</p>	<p>One-third of sun, moon and stars do not shine.</p> <p>Revelation 8:12</p>	<p>"Locusts" wield the Beast's military power.</p> <p>Revelation 9:1-12</p>	<p>200 million-man army gathers.</p> <p>Revelation 9:13-21</p>	<p>The Kingdom is proclaimed.</p> <p>Second Coming</p> <p>Revelation 11:15-19</p>

Seven Last Plagues

First Plague	Second Plague	Third Plague	Fourth Plague	Fifth Plague	Sixth Plague	Seventh Plague
<p>Sores afflict those who accepted the mark of the Beast.</p> <p>Revelation 16:2</p>	<p>Sea turns to blood; all sea creatures die.</p> <p>Revelation 16:3</p>	<p>Rivers turn to blood.</p> <p>Revelation 16:4-7</p>	<p>Mankind, scorched by the sun, blasphemes God.</p> <p>Revelation 16:8-9</p>	<p>The Beast's seat of government is afflicted.</p> <p>Revelation 16:10-11</p>	<p>The Euphrates is dried up; world armies gather to Armageddon.</p> <p>Revelation 16:12-16</p>	<p>The earth is utterly shaken.</p> <p>Revelation 16:17-21</p>

Tribulation and Trumpets

Revelation 6:3 records the opening of the second seal, revealing a rider on a red horse. This rider is given a great sword, the symbol of powerful war-making ability. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24 shows us that this seal portends regional wars and world wars. As we near the end of the age, a great military power will emerge.

Just as the rider on the white horse reminds us of the role that the end-time False Prophet will play, so the rider on the red horse may remind us of the crafty military-political leader who will emerge on the scene in Europe—undoubtedly claiming to be a man of peace. In the name of “peace” he will launch preemptive strikes and wars in the Middle East and even against America and our allies in Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In close alliance with the False Prophet, this great military-political leader (called “the Beast” in Revelation 13 and elsewhere) will seek to dominate and control all nations. He will bear responsibility for a final round of warfare that will conclude only in the aftermath of the armies of the world gathering at Armageddon.

Soon after this dramatic upsurge in global strife and warfare, these events will combine with terrible weather upsets to produce massive food shortages and famine. This is pictured by the opening of the third seal, and a rider astride a black horse holding a set of balance scales. While basic foodstuffs (symbolized by barley and wheat) will be sold only in small amounts for vastly inflated prices, luxury items (symbolized by the wine and oil) will still be available for the wealthy. The *denarius*, or “penny” (KJV), was a

day's wages for laborers in the first century, showing that many ordinary people will be spending all of their earnings just trying to feed themselves and their families.

Disease and pestilential death will follow in the wake of food shortages, symbolized by the rider on the pale horse, revealed at the opening of the fourth seal. This grim rider is pictured as holding sway over a quarter of the earth when he emerges for his end-time ride. The events symbolized by the seals are cumulative and the seals, once opened, remain open.

The Great Tribulation

Jesus warned us of the Great Tribulation—a time unique in all history (Matthew 24:21–22). The Great Tribulation begins shortly after the “abomination of desolation” (v. 15), and is the result of the final end-time fulfillment, in rapid succession, of the first five seals. After the first four seals were opened and John saw the “four horsemen” ride forth for their end-time fulfillment, the fifth seal was opened and he was again called to come and watch. He saw a strange vision that, when properly understood, was the harbinger of terrible religious persecution on a scale that is almost unimaginable to us in the modern Western world. John described seeing “souls under the altar” and hearing them cry out asking God “how long” until they would be avenged. The answer is that the time of God’s judgment on their oppressors will not come until the number of martyrs is filled up. There is to be an end-time martyrdom that must yet take place.

Notice the symbols that John described. As is often the case in Revelation, it is important to understand the symbolism of the Jerusalem temple. What is meant by “souls under the altar”? The Bible uses the term soul (*nephesh* in Hebrew and *psuche* in Greek) to refer to creatures with life—both human and animal. Leviticus 17:11 states that the life is in the blood. The blood of sacrificial animals was poured out at the base of the altar of sacrifice, one of two altars in the temple. The altar of sacrifice was outside the sanctuary, and the altar of incense was inside, directly in front of the mercy seat. (In the temple at Jerusalem, before the earthquake

that followed Christ's death, a veil separated the altar of incense from the mercy seat). The altar of sacrifice is the basis of the symbolism used in Revelation 6.

In Genesis 4:10, we are told that the blood of righteous Abel figuratively "cried out" from the ground, demanding retribution from a God of righteous judgment. If the blood of one martyr cried out, with how much louder voice would the collective blood of *all* the righteous martyrs down through time cry out? In the vision, John heard them being told that they must continue to rest in their graves. More martyrs would die before the time would come for God's judgment to be poured out.

This future time of trouble will clearly be a time of intense religious persecution, when all will be forced to conform to false religious practices that will be portrayed as "Christian." All will be required to give their devotion to the great false church and its hierarchy, labeled in Revelation 13:15 the "image of the beast." An outward sign of conformity called the "mark of the beast" will identify those whom Scripture labels as the children of disobedience.

There is another aspect of this coming Great Tribulation that is often overlooked. It is not only a time of religious persecution but it is also identified as "the time of Jacob's trouble" in Jeremiah 30:7. We know that this is identical with the time of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 24:21, because in both places we are told that it is a unique time, a time such as never was before nor ever again shall be. *There cannot be two separate times like that!*

If you are not familiar with the identity of Jacob's end-time descendants, we invite you to write in for our free booklet, *The United States and Great Britain in Prophecy*. This will give detailed explanation and proof that is beyond the scope of this current booklet. The coming Great Tribulation will be a time of intense pressure and persecution directed against both spiritual Israel (the true Church of God) and physical Israel, which includes not only the Jews, but also the modern descendants of the so-called "lost ten tribes." It represents Satan's wrath and begins in deadly earnest once he is cast back to earth for the final time (Revelation 12:12–13).

Prelude to the Day of the Lord

When the sixth seal is opened, John sees dramatic signs in the heavens. He describes great meteor showers—so intense that it appears that the very stars are falling out of the sky! He also describes events, resembling eclipses, involving the sun and the moon. The sun becomes dark, just as during a solar eclipse, and the moon takes on a reddish hue, just as it often does during a lunar eclipse. These dramatic and frightening events, accompanied by massive volcanic and earthquake activity (cf. Joel 2:30–31), are the prelude to the time of the Creator’s intervention, called throughout Scripture “the Day of the Lord.”

At this point, there is a pause in the action before John sees the seventh seal opened. Revelation 7:1–4 makes plain that this pause is for a very specific purpose. Before the outpouring of God’s wrath, 144,000 saints from the 12 tribes of Israel are to be sealed so that they might be spared from what God is preparing to pour out on rebellious mankind.

A parallel can be found in Ezekiel 9, where Ezekiel saw a vision about God’s punishment on the rebellious people of Jerusalem. In the vision, he saw an angel clothed in linen with a writer’s inkhorn by his side standing beside the altar in front of the temple. The angel was told to go throughout the city, putting a mark on the foreheads of those who “sighed and cried” for all of the abominations of Jerusalem. In the wake of the angel with the writer’s inkhorn, the other angels were to go out as avenging angels to slay the rebellious and ungodly. In the same way, Revelation 7 describes that a remnant of Israel will respond to God’s grace with repentance. They are servants of God, and are to be set apart so that they might be spared God’s wrath that will be poured upon the children of disobedience during the coming Day of the Lord.

In the closing verses of Revelation 13, and the opening verses of Revelation 14, we see a contrast drawn between those who accept the mark of the Beast in their foreheads and the 144,000 who have the Father’s name in their foreheads. The forehead is the seat of intellect, and this pictures our choice of obedience—either to God or to Satan.

Many fail to notice that Revelation 7 records two different groups. They are both introduced by the same phrase, “after this I saw,” recorded in verses 1 and 9. The 144,000 drawn from the 12 tribes precede the description of a multitude of indefinite number drawn from every nation and people. This great multitude is described in a victory celebration before the throne of God, an event that is future to the time sequence that John has been describing. In the course of seeing the remnant of Israel sealed before the Day of the Lord, he also was allowed to look even further into the future. Who is this great multitude? Revelation 7:14 defines them as coming out of “the Great Tribulation.” Even though they may have perished as martyrs during that hellish time, thereby representing a completion of the martyrdom foretold in Revelation 6:11, they are actually victors. They will be resurrected in glory and will receive comfort and blessing from the Father and from Christ.

One other observation about the 144,000 should be made. We need to understand that the Day of the Lord is primarily the time of the seventh seal and the year-long period (Isaiah 34:8; 61:2) leading up to Christ’s second coming. But, in another sense, it stretches on into the future to include not only the year of God’s wrath, but also the thousand-year reign of the Messiah, the Great White Throne Judgment period and the introduction of the new heavens and the new earth (2 Peter 3:10–13). There will ultimately be a great harvest, numbering into the billions, brought in during this extended Day of the Lord, but these 144,000 from Israel will represent a firstfruits of those redeemed to their Creator during that time. 144,000 is the number of organized beginnings squared and multiplied a thousandfold. It represents the starting point of the Creator’s harvest of the nations after He has begun His direct intervention in judgment.

The First Four Trumpets Sound

Revelation 8 continues the flow of events that began with the opening of the first seal. In verse 1, John sees the seventh seal opened, as seven angels standing before God are given seven

trumpets to be sounded, one by one, signaling God's judgments. The seventh seal consists of these seven trumpets.

Note the symbolism in Revelation 8:3–5. Ceremonies carried out in the earthly sanctuary from the days of Moses were patterned after this heavenly reality, providing a key to understanding what is being described. In the earthly sanctuary, every morning and every evening after the daily sacrifice had been offered, the priest took fire from the altar of sacrifice and proceeded into the sanctuary to offer incense on the golden altar in the holy place, located “before the mercy seat”—from which it was separated by a veil (Exodus 30:6). As this account and other scriptures show, the incense offering represented the prayers of the saints coming up before God. The mercy seat, located inside the Holy of Holies and over the Ark of the Covenant, was symbolic of God's throne.

In Revelation 6, we saw that the blood of those martyred down through time called out to God for vengeance. God did not answer that plea earlier, because it was not yet the proper time. In Revelation 8, however, fire from the altar is symbolically slung out upon the earth, and God instructs the seven angelic trumpeters to announce His retribution.

The remainder of Revelation 8 describes the trumpet blasts sounded by the first four angels. Remember, Isaiah 34:8 and Isaiah 61:2 equate the Day of the Lord with the year of God's recompense. This period begins with the first trumpet and concludes with the last, or seventh, trump. When God gave ancient Israel His Holy Days, He ushered in the entire fall festival season by designating the first day of the seventh month as “a memorial of the blowing of trumpets.” Since other of God's festivals received their fulfillment on the very day (note Christ's being offered as the Lamb of God on the day of Passover and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost), it seems likely that the year of God's recompense will begin and end on the Feast of Trumpets.

As each of the first four angels sound, terrible ecological disasters take place on earth. When the first angel sounds, terrible fires break out, ultimately consuming a third of the green vegetation. Next, a great meteor-like object lands in the ocean and causes one-third of the seas to become red like blood. This causes a third

of sea life to die and greatly disrupts shipping and commerce. After the third trumpet, John sees another meteor-like object fall upon one-third of the fresh water rivers and lakes, turning them to poison and causing massive water shortages. When the fourth angel sounds, there follows disruption in the very sky above. Evidently, belts of smoke and debris will block out sight of the sky for one-third of every day. Perhaps this will be caused by massive amounts of smoke from the great fires that engulf virtually one-third of the earth, as well as from debris thrown into the air during increased volcanic eruptions.

The First Two Woes

If these ecological disasters in the opening months of the year of God's recompense sound devastating, think about the even greater devastation that occurs when the final three angels sound. These last of the seven angels are said to announce the "three woes." This involves mankind's unleashing weapons of mass destruction that will imperil the world so severely that if Christ did not return, no flesh would be saved alive (Matthew 24:22).

When the fifth angel sounds his trumpet in Revelation 9:1–2, we find the great abyss opened and demonically inspired forces unleashed. Revelation 17:8 shows us that from this abyss the Beast power symbolically emerges. The forces that are unleashed are first compared to locusts, because John did not have the words to describe modern weapons of mass destruction. Notice that these "locusts" do not harm natural vegetation (which physical locusts would devour), but instead for five months cause incapacitating but not deadly pain—rather like that of scorpions. This describes an attack by the European-led Beast power on the nations of the east, as mentioned in Daniel 11:44.

This surprise attack will provoke a massive Asian retaliation against Europe. This retaliation, signaled by the sixth angel blowing his trumpet, is pictured as spewing out fire, smoke and brimstone, and destroying one-third of humanity (Revelation 9:17–18). This description fits well with modern nuclear weapons and the devastation they can bring.

At the fifth and sixth trumpet blasts, we see that God has removed restraints previously imposed on Satan and his demons. Abaddon or Apollyon, a name for the devil that means “destroyer,” is the one who precipitates the Beast power’s attack with futuristic weapons. Also, we are told that demonic spirits have been associated with the eastern powers that were previously restrained at the Euphrates River. Evidently, the Euphrates will be the dividing line between the eastern and western spheres of influence.

When the sixth angel sounds, two events occur. One is the unleashing of a nuclear attack on Europe, and likely on its Latin American allies as well. The other is the massing of the largest army ever assembled on the east bank of the Euphrates—200 million men (vv. 15–16). At this point, it will have been almost a year since the trumpets began to sound. The earth and its inhabitants will be reeling in what seem to be the very death throes of the planet itself. But this is *not* the end of the story.

Witnesses and Wrath

Revelation 10 opens with another short pause in the flow of action. After the sixth trumpet, but before the sounding of the final seventh trumpet, John sees an angel come down from heaven to give him a small scroll to eat. This is very similar to the Old Testament passages where Ezekiel is told to ingest the contents of a scroll so that he can deliver its message (Ezekiel 2:8–10; 3:1–3). The angel tells John to eat the contents of this little scroll and deliver yet another prophetic message to the nations and rulers of this world. What is that message? Before the abomination of desolation and the onset of the Great Tribulation, the Philadelphia era of the Church of God will *for decades* have gone through the “open door” provided by Christ, proclaiming the gospel and the end-time warning message. Near the time when the Church’s organized proclamation of the gospel is shut down, the Two Witnesses will boldly deliver God’s message, and will die in Jerusalem. Yes, there will still remain a message to be delivered to the world in the waning days of Satan’s rule! That is why John is told, after the sixth trumpet has been blown and just before the seventh trumpet sounds (Revelation 10:7), that there yet remains a message to be delivered to nations and rulers. The Two Witnesses, who “prophesy” (Revelation 11:3) and “finish their testimony” (v. 7), along with three angels whom God dispatches after the sounding of the seventh trumpet (14:6–9), all “prophesy again” after John receives the “little book” from the mighty angel.

Matthew 24:15–21 and Luke 21:20–24 make plain that the multinational army described in Zechariah 14:1–2 will have occu-

piet Jerusalem at the onset of the Great Tribulation. By comparing Luke 21:24 with Revelation 11:2, we see that the Beast power will occupy and control Jerusalem for 42 months, or three-and-a-half years. It is right after the False Prophet desecrates the holy place, revealing his idolatrous symbols and blasphemous claims, that God will empower two of His servants, known as the Two Witnesses, to make their public appearance in Jerusalem, two-and-a-half years before the Day of the Lord begins. God will empower them to deliver His message to a world dominated by the power of the Beast and mesmerized by the illusions of the False Prophet.

God will use these two men to perform miracles similar to those performed by Moses and Elijah. They will announce God's judgments to a world in rebellion against Him, and will confront the power of the Beast and the False Prophet. Throughout the three-and-a-half years of their prophetic career, they will receive God's supernatural protection, just as Elijah did many centuries earlier (cf. 2 Kings 1:9–14). Finally, God will allow them to be killed. Many will celebrate at their deaths, since the False Prophet will have accused them of causing all of the world's troubles. Their unburied bodies will lie in Jerusalem's streets for three-and-a-half days, then they will be restored to life and will rise in the air, disappearing into the clouds while their enemies watch in shocked amazement (Revelation 11:11–12).

The Last Trumpet Sounds

We now come to the mid-point of the book of Revelation and the defining moment of end-time events. What exactly happens when the seventh and final trumpet blast is sounded? Revelation 11:15 states: "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!'" According to verse 18, this final trumpet blast signals the time when the final wrath of God will be poured out and when God will begin to judge the dead and give reward to His true servants.

Paul tells us that this event will occur "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” (1 Corinthians 15:52). It is a time when the dead in Christ, along with those Christians still alive on earth, will undergo an instantaneous change from mortal to immortal and death will be completely swallowed up in victory. It is called the “first resurrection” in Revelation 20:6, and those who are part of it are called “blessed and holy.” They need never worry about death again, but will rule and reign under Christ Himself as He establishes His thousand-year reign on the earth.

At this point, we should note that those who propound the so-called “rapture” theory do not understand Scripture correctly. The Lord will descend from heaven, and the resurrected saints will be caught up to meet Him in the air, *at the seventh and final trump*. As we have seen from the story flow of Revelation, this can only occur *after* all the previously described events have transpired, and is *not* something that could happen “at any moment” as some mistakenly believe.

The Woman and the Dragon

Having described Christ’s opening of all seven seals, John next provides, in Revelation 12, an inset describing the conflict between the woman and the dragon.

John describes a vision of a woman clothed with the sun, the moon and 12 stars. This description harkens back to Genesis 37:9, where in a dream Joseph had seen the family of Israel depicted by the sun, moon and stars. As we have seen earlier, the Bible uses a woman to symbolize a church. In a few brief verses, the entire history of the Church is traced from the time of the Congregation of Israel—the Church in the wilderness—to the end of the Great Tribulation. The woman is said to have brought forth the man child who was to rule all nations—a clear reference to Christ, who sprang out of Israel. The dragon, defined in verse 9 as Satan the devil, attempts to destroy Jesus Christ—who was taken back to heaven after His resurrection.

In verse 6, we read of the woman having to flee to the wilderness to be protected during a period of 1,260 prophetic “days”—1,260 literal years. Since this occurs after Christ’s ascension, it clear-

ly refers to the New Testament Church. Indeed, in the early fourth century AD, after the Roman emperor Constantine allied with the bishop of Rome, the true Church had to flee to remote areas. Historically, a 1,260-year period can be traced from after the Council of Nicea in 325AD, down to about 1585, when the true Church began to emerge openly once again. You can read this entire remarkable story in our free booklet, *God's Church Through the Ages*.

Also, it should be noted that Revelation 12 describes two different rebellions of Satan. Verse 4 reminds us of the archangel Lucifer's original rebellion (cf. Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28), in which he drew one-third of the angels with him before Adam was created. He was cast to earth, and his name was changed from "light bearer" (the meaning of "Lucifer") to "adversary" (the meaning of "Satan"). In context, verses 7–12—placed in the story flow after the time of the Church in the wilderness (historically the medieval period)—refer to a yet future attempt of Satan to seize power in heaven, just before the final Great Tribulation.

After this future and final casting down of Satan, God will take the "woman"—His true Church—into a special place in the wilderness, to be nourished and protected during this final three-and-a-half-year period. A remnant will be left behind, however, which the devil will go to attack. Scripture shows the Church at Philadelphia being kept from this hour of severe trial, but Christ will *spew out* the Church at Laodicea into the Great Tribulation, because of its *unwillingness* to repent of—or *even recognize*—its lukewarm complacency, materialism, self-righteousness and spiritual blindness and nakedness!

The Beast

Having been given an overview of the history of the true Church in Revelation 12, John was shown another vision in Revelation 13 that gave him an overview of the Beast system. The Beast is first referred to in Revelation 11:7, seeking to destroy the Two Witnesses. It is not further defined until we come to Revelation 13. In this chapter, John saw a vision that hearkened back to what Daniel recorded in Daniel 7.

Daniel had seen four creatures emerge one after another from the sea: a lion, a bear, a four-headed leopard and a terrible creature with iron teeth and ten horns. These are defined in Daniel 7:23 as four kingdoms. When the vision in Daniel 2 is compared to that in Daniel 7, it is evident that this progression of four world-ruling kingdoms started in Daniel's day with Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire and continued down through the successive kingdoms of Persia, Greece and Rome. By the time of John's vision in the book of Revelation, the empires of ancient Babylon, Persia and Greece had passed into history and the fourth kingdom—the Roman Empire—dominated the world scene.

In Revelation 13, John described the Roman Empire as having the characteristics of the earlier empires whose remnants it had absorbed. A detailed study of all the scriptures relating to this and the historical references that prove their fulfillment is given in our booklet, *The Beast of Revelation*. It will give you much detail that is beyond the scope of this present booklet.

John saw the Beast receive a deadly wound. Historically this was the fall of the Roman Empire in 476. Then John saw that the deadly wound was healed, as occurred with the Imperial Restoration by Justinian in 554. The Beast then continued for 1,260 prophetic "days," the duration from Justinian until the fall of Napoleon in 1814. This was the period of the so-called Holy Roman Empire and its alliance with the Roman pontiff. John also saw a second beast, this one looking like a lamb but actually serving as the mouthpiece of Satan, the dragon (Revelation 13:11). Clearly this is symbolic of a religious system that claims to be Christian but actually proclaims the devil's message rather than Christ's gospel. This false religious system is pictured as constructing a model, or an image, based upon the institutions of the old Roman Empire. Ancient pagan Rome was the model upon which papal Rome and its political structure was built. There was an alliance of church and state that continued down through the medieval period. The church used the state to enforce conformity with religious edicts and in turn required its adherents to be loyal to the state.

The mark of the beast, a brand that advertises disobedience to the law of God, is something that goes back to antiquity. It has

been insisted upon ever since this unholy alliance of church and state took place in the days of Emperor Constantine.

The number of the beast, 666, is derived from numeric values anciently assigned to letters of the alphabet, in lieu of separate numerals as we commonly use today. Hebrew, Greek and Latin all used such a system, so all names in those languages had a numerical value. See our booklet on the *Beast of Revelation* for further information on the mark of the Beast, and the detailed proof that the Roman system is branded by the number 666—the number of a name.

It is also vitally important to realize that this medieval alliance of church and state is once again to rear its head. In the days soon ahead of us, the final appearance of the Beast system will emerge once more from out of the abyss. Will you give in to the pressures to fit in with this powerful system that will hold a brief sway over all the earth in the near future? You need to understand this subject for your own sake and for that of your family.

Triumph and Wrath

After these brief insets to bring the story of the persecuted and the persecutors from the time of antiquity down to the time when the seventh trumpet will blow, the story switches to focus on the aftermath of the final trumpet. It will be a time of wonderful triumph for the saints of God. Persecuted and derided down through the centuries, the saints of God are described in glory rejoicing before God the Father and Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the remainder of rebellious mankind is about to receive the undiluted wrath of God Almighty.

The 144,000 whom we had earlier seen sealed to protect them from the wrath of the Day of the Lord are now pictured in glory and are singing a new song as they stand before the throne of God praising Him for their redemption (Revelation 14:1–5). All the while this celebration is taking place, three angels go through the earth proclaiming God’s final message for mankind as He prepares to pour out His final wrath (vv. 6–11).

As the glorified saints rejoice and the three angels proclaim God’s final warning, preparation is made for rebellious

mankind to be cast into the winepress of the wrath of God (v. 19).

Here we should note that Scripture identifies the true saints as those who actually obey God and *keep His commandments*. Revelation 14:12 emphasizes this point by describing the saints in comparison to those who will receive God's punishment. Also, it should be noted that *both* the song of Moses and that of Christ (the Lamb) are sung before the throne (15:3). The messages of the Old and New Testaments are not contradictory or discordant; rather, they are in harmony, as shown by the singing of the glorified saints.

In Revelation 15, John records a vision of seven angels, with seven golden bowls that pour out seven final plagues, one after another. This pouring occurs rather quickly, as we see when we examine the nature of the plagues. If the second and third plagues, for instance, lasted more than a few days, all life would perish from the planet.

When the first bowl is poured out, a grievous sore comes upon those who had disregarded the third angel's message and were still loyal to the Beast system. Then, when the second angel pours out his bowl, **all the oceans** become like "the blood of a dead man" (16:3). All sea life dies. With the pouring out of the third bowl, **all the fresh water turns to blood**, and sources of drinking water are destroyed. Then, the fourth angel pours his bowl, and scorching heat from the sun punishes rebellious mankind. Next, great darkness comes upon Europe ("the seat of the Beast") and its people are in agonizing pain and heat, engulfed in total darkness and lacking usable water all at the same time. The darkness results from the bowl poured out by the fifth angel.

After this, John sees the sixth angel pour his bowl upon the Euphrates. Demon spirits go forth to bring all the armies together north of Jerusalem. The huge Asiatic army that had previously been massed on the east bank of the Euphrates pours into the land of Israel, and converges in the area of *Armageddon* (Hebrew for "mount of Megiddo"). Megiddo is a hill that stands overlooking the Valley of Jezreel, about 55 miles north of Jerusalem. When the final seventh bowl is poured out, there will be a tremendous earth-

quake so massive that the very topography of the earth itself will be altered (vv. 18–20). Very likely this earthquake is the same one that is described in Zechariah 14:4, when the feet of Jesus Christ finally stand once more upon the Mount of Olives, located just east of Jerusalem.

Babylon the Great Is Fallen

Following his vision of the seven last plagues being poured out, John is shown two more visions that represent an inset into the story flow of Revelation. These visions describe Babylon the Great and the final destruction that will come upon that terrible system. In Revelation 17 the focus is upon the religious and political alliance that once again—in the not-too-distant future of you who are reading this booklet—will come to dominate the world. The political system is described as ridden by a woman, but a woman very unlike the chaste virgin bride of Christ. This is a church that is described as a great whore, one that has entered into illicit liaisons with various national leaders. These unions have spawned what the Bible labels as harlot daughters. This whole religious system is defined as an outgrowth of the ancient pagan Babylonian mystery religion.

In Revelation 18, John was shown in vision the announcement of the fall and total destruction of modern Babylon. This chapter reveals that in addition to being a religious and political system, as is emphasized in Revelation 17, Babylon is also a commercial system that seeks to dominate the world economically. Many details of the prophecies recorded in these two chapters are covered in our free booklet, *The Beast of Revelation*.

It is important that we realize now, and in the crucial years ahead, that **God's victory is certain**. This history has already been written *in advance*! Therefore, it is imperative that we *come out* of this world's Babylonish system (18:4) and give our total and true allegiance to Jesus Christ and the *message* that He taught!

Beyond the Chaos

Much of Revelation describes the chaos that results from mankind following Satan and seeking to build its own civilization apart from Almighty God. But neither that chaos, nor God's victory over Satan, is the climax of the book. Rather, Revelation ends with the living Christ showing John what would take place *beyond* the chaos.

After seeing, in vision, the cataclysmic destruction of Babylon the Great, John sees another vision of heaven, and of a celebration before the very throne of God. Babylon's fall is noted in Revelation 19:2, and verse 6 depicts the rejoicing of those before God's throne: "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"

John then learns that the time has finally arrived for the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Church, changed from flesh and blood to immortal spirit at the resurrection, is now ready to marry Christ. The bride—collectively the Church—is pictured as being arrayed in wedding garments of clean white linen, representing the righteousness of the saints.

Understanding ancient Jewish marriage customs may give us some insight into what is being described. The marriage ceremony had three major components, each taking place at a different time, as we know from secular history as well as Scripture. These three components share some of the symbolism of the three festival seasons that God gave to ancient Israel, by which he revealed His great plan of salvation (If you do not already have our free booklet on the Holy Days, then please request your free copy of *The Holy Days: God's Master Plan*).

The first part of the wedding ceremony was the bride price, normally paid by the father of the bridegroom. We see this in Genesis 24, where Abraham offered gifts when arranging to seek a wife for his son Isaac. This parallels the Passover season. The bride price that God the Father offered was the life of His only begotten Son (John 3:16).

The second phase of the wedding ceremony was the espousal, or signing of the marriage covenant. Once this formal agreement was made, the couple was considered married, even before they had celebrated or consummated their marriage. Joseph and Mary were in this espousal stage when it was discovered that Mary had supernaturally conceived Jesus Christ. This second stage of the wedding ceremony parallels the second festival season: Pentecost, the time of the covenants (see Jeremiah 2:2, where the time of Israel in the wilderness was likened to the time of espousal).

The third phase of the wedding ceremony was the celebration of the marriage feast. Normally a week in duration (cf. Genesis 29:27), it was characterized by festivity and celebration (John 2:1–10). This phase usually began with a procession. The bridegroom would go to claim his bride, and the bridal party would go out to meet him (cf. Matthew 25:6). Usually the bride would proceed, together with the bridegroom, from her father's house to the home that her husband had prepared. This was followed by seven days of feasting with friends and family. This final stage of the wedding ceremony parallels the Feast of Tabernacles—seven days of feasting that represent the millennial reign of the Messiah, when He will make a “feast of choice pieces” to the whole world (Isaiah 25:6).

The Kingdom Established

As Revelation 19 concludes, John sees heaven opened and the triumphant Jesus Christ returning to the earth in power and glory, astride a white horse, followed by the armies of heaven. Mankind's armies, which had previously gathered at Armageddon, are destroyed on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The Beast and the False Prophet are taken and thrown into a fiery, molten lake where they are burned up. The blasphemous claims of divinity that they had made are thus shown to be empty and false.

When Christ's feet stand once more on the very Mount of Olives from which He ascended into heaven about 2,000 years ago, the mount will split in two. At that point, a stream will break forth from beneath the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It will flow eastward through the newly divided Mount of Olives, and westward into the Mediterranean Sea. Spreading quickly, this "living water" will supernaturally heal all of the dead waters that had become like blood a few days earlier (Revelation 16:3–4), when the second and third bowls of wrath were poured out. Abundant sea life will be restored (Ezekiel 47:1, 8–9).

The returning King of kings will immediately dispatch a mighty angel to seize Satan the devil and lock him away for a thousand years. This sets the stage for the reign of the Kingdom of God on earth. The symbolism of the Holy Days, which God gave to Israel, can help us understand the meaning of the sequence of events. Just as the Feast of Trumpets represents the time of God's intervention and judgment, so the Day of Atonement—coming nine days later—pictures the time when Satan will be banished and made to bear his responsibility for sin. The fulfillment of what this day symbolized is described in Revelation 20:1–3. Most likely, the action that is described in the book of Revelation as occurring between the blowing of the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 and the putting away of Satan in Revelation 20:2 will take place in a nine day span between Trumpets and Atonement. Satan being put away will represent the liberation of mankind. This is the fulfillment of the symbolism of the ancient year of Jubilee, when freedom was proclaimed (Leviticus 25:9–10). Note that the Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement, the day that symbolized Satan's banishment. At this point, the remnants of all 12 tribes of Israel will begin to be re-gathered from their captivity to the land of Israel (Isaiah 27:1, 13).

In his vision of the future, John described the resurrected and glorified saints carrying out governmental responsibilities (Revelation 2:26–27; 5:10). They will reign on earth carrying out their functions as kings and priests under Jesus Christ. Other scriptures, such as Isaiah 2 and Isaiah 11, describe how God's government will go forth from a rebuilt Jerusalem to encompass all nations. There will be a thousand years of healing and rebuilding, and all mankind will have

the opportunity to learn God's ways. It will be a time of abundance and prosperity, when "everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4).

During the last generation living at the end of the Millennium, Satan will be released for a short time, and he will immediately go out to deceive the nations once more (Revelation 20:7–10). Why will God release him, knowing what he will do? God has always given mankind a choice, desiring us both to choose the right and to reject the wrong. Some, even after experiencing the benefits and blessings of God's government, will allow themselves to fall under Satan's sway. Satan will gather armies, from many nations around the earth, that bear the same rebellious attitude as Gog and Magog—two of the nations that fought against God in the beginning years of the Millennium (cf. Ezekiel 38). These armies will converge on Jerusalem, but will quickly be destroyed, and Satan will be put away forever.

With that, the stage is set for what John described as the Great White Throne Judgment. He explained that there will come a second resurrection after the completion of the thousand years (Revelation 20:11–15). The books of the Bible will be opened up and the Book of Life will also be reopened. At this point the billions who have lived and died without ever having a genuine opportunity to know God will finally receive that opportunity. This is the time that Jesus spoke of when the men of Ninevah will rise in the judgment along with the generation of Jesus' own day (Matthew 12:41). It is the time that Ezekiel described in Ezekiel 37, a time when people who thought their hope was lost (v. 11) will be restored to physical life (v. 6) and finally given an opportunity to know God and receive His Spirit (vv. 13–14). For a thorough explanation of this vital subject, please request our booklet, *Is This the Only Day of Salvation?*

New Heavens and a New Earth

At the close of this period of judgment, when every human being who has ever lived will have had a genuine opportunity to receive God's salvation, there will be a time of reckoning for those who have rejected that free gift. As the earth and the very universe itself appear to dissolve in a fiery cosmic conflagration (cf. 2 Peter

3:10–13), all of the wicked will be burned up completely and for eternity. After the passing of this sin-tainted realm will come new heavens and a new earth.

That new earth will become the dwelling place for God the Father and the family that He has built. John saw the new Jerusalem, which had been under preparation in heaven, descend to the new earth. God the Father will dwell there, with His children, forever.

Near the end of the book of Revelation, John describes the glory of this great city with its 12 foundations and 12 gates. The streets are of gold and the gates are each made of a single pearl. There is brilliant color, and light pervading everywhere, because of the presence of the Father and Christ. Those who are part of Christ's bride will actually dwell *in* the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1–3), while those who came later—during the Millennium and Great White Throne Judgment—will inhabit the remainder of the new earth. The rest of God's glorified family—"the nations of those who are saved"—will have unfettered access to the Father and Christ, as the gates of the city will remain open by day and there will be no night there (vv. 23–26). They will have complete access to the tree of life that grows in the city, and to the river of the water of life (22:1–2).

Death, pain and tears will finally be banished forever. The curse will be removed that came upon mankind, and even upon the earth itself, after the sins of Adam and Eve. Sin and its consequences will at last be totally gone. Whoever desires will be able to take of the water of life freely.

"And behold, I am coming quickly," Jesus declared to John, "and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.... Blessed are those who do His commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (vv. 12, 14).

The book of Revelation tells us of *the end of history and the beginning of forever*. It leaves us standing upon the very brink of eternity, with the assurance that Jesus Christ *really will* return soon. The promises that John was inspired to record are absolutely sure—and *they apply to you and to your family!* "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near" (1:3).

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