



Chapter One

Introduction, Prologue, Greetings and Doxology, and Vision of The Son of Man Among the Seven Churches.

Revelation has become a word used widely by preachers. Unfortunately, many times it is used in sermons or prophetic utterances in a way which seemingly **attributes to them some special privilege or knowledge**.

Outside of the Word of God, there is no more revelation given. There is however, illumination given to spirit filled believers that help them see scripture in a way perhaps never seen before.

There are not “different interpretations” of the Bible. God intended for there to only be **one interpretation** yet **many applications**.

2 Peter 1²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 2 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ²And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Revelation comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, meaning to expose in full view what was formerly hidden, veiled, or secrete.

In Verse 1, we are introduced to **two main focal points**: 1) The significance of angels in the worship of God, revelation of His Word, and in the execution of His judgements. 2) The word “servant” (doulos) which means slave/servant.

All of God’s people in the book of Revelation are referred to as servants/slaves (doulos). You can be ‘believer’ and not a servant! Are you a servant/slave to Jesus Christ?

Do you wake up in the morning, seeking Him in prayer and asking how you can best serve Him today?

Biblical servants were constrained by the authority of their masters. **Note:** Biblical slavery was nothing like the slavery we are familiar with in our worldview. With that being said, servants were constrained by the ways, rules, preferences of their master.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14... “The love of Christ constrains me...”.

There should be areas of the Believer’s life that are constrained by the Word of God. There are places I don’t go anymore, people with whom I don’t interact anymore because the ways of God constrain me.

In verse 2 there are two elements that are of chief importance:

- a. The Word of God
- b. The Testimony of Jesus Christ

Testimony is a key word used throughout the book of Revelation. “**Testimony**” (martyria) comes from the Greek word where we get the word *martyr* from. Testimony means witness, verification, or validation.

A martyr becomes a testimony (witness, verification, or validation) of their convictions.

In verse 3 John emphasizes the need to **read, hear, and keep** everything contained within the book of Revelations.

Some would prefer to avoid this book altogether because of its difficulty with interpretation. John warns against this; however, the promise is to those who **read, hear, and keep everything contained**.

Similarly, there are those **within the church** who would like to **selectively read, hear, or keep** certain preferable snippets of the Bible.

*Revelation 22¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone **adds** to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone **takes away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

In verse 4 John makes his intentions clear; this book is authored to **seven churches** in Asia.

We must begin with the understanding that biblically, the number seven represents **completeness**. The number seven will be seen often within the book of Revelation.

In verse 5 John makes a seemingly odd statement, “*seven spirits before his throne*,”. Are these seven angels? Does God have seven spirits?

The translation is better rendered **sevenfold spirit of God**.

This is in reference more to certain attributes of God and the ministry of His Spirit.

Isaiah 11² And the Spirit of the Lord (active presence) shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. ³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. (Known as the sevenfold ministry of God).

*Zachariah 3⁹ For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with **seven eyes**,^[a] I will engrave its inscription, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. ¹⁰ In that day, declares the Lord of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree.”*

Revelation 5⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Revelation 3“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

Isaiah 61

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to **bring** good news to the poor;^[a]
he has sent me to **bind** up the brokenhearted,
to **proclaim** liberty to the captives,
and the **opening** of the prison to those who are bound;^[b]
² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to **comfort** all who mourn;
³ to **grant** to those who mourn in Zion—
to **give** them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified*

The seven attributes of the ministry of the Spirit of God:

- Preach
- Heal
- Proclaim
- Comfort
- Open
- Console
- Give

Verse 5 Describes Jesus Christ in three unique ways:

- a. **Faithful Witness.** His credibility is proved by His earthly life of obedience in the past; is proved in the present by His witness of the true condition of the church; and will be proved in the future by the consummation of all things.
- b. **Firstborn** from the dead (prototokos) – meaning first/having authority over

Roman 8²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

This doesn't mean Jesus was firstborn of his brothers. For example, James name appears first in lists, typically signifying he was born first.

Colossians 1¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by^[d] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

The key word here is “preeminence”.

Verse 5 doesn't mean Jesus was the first raised from the dead (example would be Lazarus). **It means that of all have been and will be raised from the dead, Jesus Christ is superior!**

- c. **Ruler of the kings of the earth** – three possible interpretations here

Physical kings/rulers

Revelation 6: 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave^[d] and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains,

Spiritual kings/rulers

Revelation 1¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Redemptive

Revelation 2: ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,

Revelation 3 ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

All three interpretations are accurate! It is not important however, to know which one John was exactly referring to; **what is important is understanding the Jesus Christ is supreme Ruler of rulers and King of kings!**

“Who freed us from our sins by His blood...”

- Israel's sin was covered by the Passover lamb.
- This covering, however, was temporary.
- When Jesus Christ came, He came to be our perfect/forever sacrifice.

Mathew 26 When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples,² “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”

John 1 ²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Revelation 12 ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

In verse 8 we are not only reminded of His triumph, but his imminent return!

- In addition, we see John refer to Him as both (Alpha) and (Omega) which are the first and last letters in the Koine Greek alphabet.

In verses 9-11 John references his tribulation. John was a prisoner incarcerated on the island of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor.

According to the writings of Tertullian, John was exiled by Rome after being dipped into boiling oil! This was under the rule of Roman emperor Domitian.

While Paul was there, he was moved upon by the Holy Spirit and **wrote regarding the seven churches back on the mainland.**

THIS WAS THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK! JOHN WROTE TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES!

Why only seven? Because there were other churches at the time?

Remember, seven is the number of completeness.

- Witnessed within these seven churches are seven spirits/characteristics found.
- Every church will have one of these main characteristics!

The seven churches are: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicia. (All these churches are found in Asia Minor in the western part of modern Turkey).

Verses 12-20 John writes regarding two main things:

- a. Seven Golden Lampstands
- b. Seven Stars in the Hand of God

The Bible clarifies that the Seven Golden Lampstands are the Seven Churches, and The Seven Stars are the Seven “Angels” of each church!

Two possible interpretations – Angelic Beings and *angelos* as messengers of the Lord (ministers).

The more powerful thing to realize is that not only does God place angels over his church, but John clearly demonstrates that God Himself is in the midst of His Churches!

- We see in the Old Testament (Exodus 25) where God commands priests to manage the tabernacle.
- An important feature within the tabernacle was the golden lampstand (which had seven arms).
- It was the only source of light for the tabernacle – without, it would be utter darkness.
- So, the priest would have to continually trim the wicks and fill the oil to ensure the lamps would continue to burn and provide light!

Matthew 5¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that^[b] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

The church is the light of the world! But God (the high priest) is in the midst of His church! He moves within, trimming and filling – managing and ensuring His church continues to shine bright!

1 Peter 2 ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.



Chapter Two and Three
Message to The Seven Churches

Introduction

The basic structure of these seven letters follows the same pattern: 1) The addressee is first given, 2) The speaker/author is mentioned, 3) The divine knowledge of the speaker is asserted, 4) an assessment of good works is mentioned along with lacking areas which require repentance (not every church is confronted with works requiring repentance), 5) A promise to those who endure and remain faithful.

The Church at Ephesus (The Doctrinally Pure, Yet Unloving Church)

- *Ephesus was known as the supreme metropolis of Asia”.*
- *The Roman governor resided there*
- *It was known as a “free city” that was self-governed*
- *It has often been referred to as the “Vanity Fair” of the ancient world.*
- *Three major highways converged and was a major trade city.*
- *It was the center of worship for the Greek fertility “bee” goddess Artemis or Romanized as “Diana” (Acts 19:23).*
- *Thousands of priests/priestesses were involved in the service of the temple of Artemis.*
- *Priestesses were dedicated to temple prostitution.*
- *Heraclitus, one of Ephesus’ own citizens said the inhabitants of the city were “fit only to be drowned and that the reason he could never laugh, or smile was because he lived amongst such terrible uncleanness” (433).¹*

The Ephesus church was the orthodox church. The doctrinally pure church passionately refuted both false teaching and false prophets.

Verse 1 – Again we see God’s care and concern for the church. He **walks among His churches**. **Even churches with issues and in need of repentance, God is not seen forsaking these**. Instead, He is walking among, trimming the lampstands, and maintaining the oil – God is performing that **priestly function** ensuring everything is done in order that the church can shine. This of course parallels the Old Testament priestly function of maintaining the candlesticks in the tabernacle. This was done in order to provide light within the tabernacle.

Verse 2 – The speaker acknowledges the churches **perseverance** and **resistance to false apostles**.

Verse 3 – This perseverance was faithful, even to **the point of hardship**.

Verse 4 – The church at Ephesus had **forsaken its first love**. This was its great sin mentioned by the speaker. **“The majority of commentators take the first love to refer to the original Christian love the Ephesians had for one another**. Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesian elders to “help the weak” (Acts 20:35) and the warm commendation he gives them in their early years for their fervent love of one another (Eph 1:15) may lend support to this view” (434).¹ “Other commentators, however, see the “first love” as a reference to their inner devotion to Christ that characterized their earlier commitment, like the love of a newly wedded bride for her husband. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the letters to the other churches reveal problems of inner betrayal to Christ as subjects of his complaint. **Loving devotion to Christ can be lost in the**

¹ Gaebelein, Frank E. *The Expositors Bible Commentary*. p434.

midst of active service, and certainly no amount of orthodoxy can make up for a failure to love one another” (434).¹

Verse 5 – This verse is characterized by a **call to repentance** – “**remember...repent...do.**” Remember where you came from and your first love, change your ways, and then continue in your service to The Kingdom of God.

Verse 6 – “Christ adds a further commendation concerning the Ephesians’ hatred of the practices of the Nicolaitans (2:15) – a hatred directed at the practices of the Nicolaitans, not the people themselves (Ps 139:21). It is difficult to determine exactly who the Nicolaitans were and what they taught. Etymologically the name means conquer (or ‘consume,’ *nikao*) the people (*laos*).” (435).¹ **There is a similar reference to the Balaamites in 2:14-15 which seems similar to that of the Nicolaitans.** If there is a link, it would mean the **Nicolaitans taught falsely**, promoted **false prophets**, ate food sacrificed to idols, and participated in sexual immorality.

Verse 7 – The verse references the second coming of Christ; during which, all will bear witness of Him. In closure, an assertion of the omnipresence is stated. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letter in Koine Greek. Jesus Christ is the One God who is, was, and forever will be.

The Church at Smyrna (The Persecuted Church)

- *About 40 miles north of Ephesus.*
- *The city was exceptionally beautiful and large*
- *The city is known as the birthplace of Homer and was also an important seaport that commanded the mouth of the Hermus River valley.*
- *Smyrna was a wealthy city and like Ephesus, a self-governed city under Tiberius and other successive emperors.*
- *Among the beautiful, paved streets traversing it from east to west was the “Golden Street,” with the temples of Cybele and Zeus at either end and along which were temples to Apollo, Asclepius, and Aphrodite.*
- *Smyrna was a center of the emperor worship, having won the privilege from the Roman Senate in A.D. 23 of building the first temple in honor of Tiberius. Under Domitian (A.D. 81-96) emperor worship became compulsory for every Roman citizen on threat of death.*
- *Once a year, a citizen had to burn incense of the altar to the godhead of Caesar, after which he was issued a certificate.*
- *Such an act was probably considered more as an expression of political loyalty than religious worship, and all a citizen had to do was burn a pinch of incense and say, “Caesar is Lord (Kyrios).” Yet, most Christians refused to do this! Perhaps nowhere was life for a Christian more perilous than in this city of zealous emperor worship.*
- *About sixty years later, Polycarp was burned alive at the age of eighty-six as the “twelfth martyr in Smyrna”.*
- *His words have echoed through the ages: “Eighty-six years have I served Christ, and he was never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” (436-437).¹*

Verse 8 – Again, a reference to Jesus Christ (the one who died and came to life) as the eternal God manifest in the flesh.

Verse 9 – The church in Smyrna is characterized by 1) **tribulation** and 2) **poverty**. **Tribulation is most likely a reference to persecution. Poverty however, most likely is a reference to physical/financial poverty.** This seems to make the most sense by the statement “but you are rich”; likely being a reference to spiritual wealth.

Verse 10 – Clearly, the “tribulation” is not over as the speaker warns of more suffering which is to come. **The reference to Satan throwing some into prison for *ten days* should be taken as a short period of time and not literal.**

“In the first-century Roman world, prison was usually not punitive but the prelude to trial and execution, hence the words “Be faithful, even to the point of death (438).””¹

Verse 11 – The “faithful” who receive their reward from verse 10 seem to be the ones who will not be hurt by the “second death”. The second death is a reference to God’s eternal judgement. “Death was a real possibility for these believers. But far greater than the fear of physical death should be the fear of God’s eternal judgement (Luke 12:4-5)...it was reassuring indeed to hear the Lord himself say that his followers would not be harmed by the second death – viz., the lake of fire (20:14; 21:8)” (439).¹ It should be noted, there are no instructions given to the Smyrna church to repent because a persecuted church is typically a pure church.

The Church at Pergamum – (The Church Which Tolerates Sin)

- *Pergamum lay about sixty-five miles north Smyrna.*
- *Pergamum held the official honor of being the provincial capital of Roman Asia.*
- *Among its notable features were its beauty and wealth; its **library of nearly two hundred thousand volumes**; its famous sculpture; its temples to Dionysus, Athena, Asclepius, and Demeter and the three temples to the emperor cult; its great altar to Soter Zeus; and its many palaces.*
- *Tradition records that in Pergamum, King Eumenes II planned to build a **library** to rival the one in Alexandria. Ptolemy Epiphanes of Egypt took action to stop this venture by cutting off the export of papyrus sections. It was this embargo that forced Eumenes to develop parchment, a writing material made from animal skins (439-441).¹*

Verse 12 – Another reference to God – **the one with a sharp two-edged sword**. This should not be taken literally; but rather as a reference to His **Word** (see Heb 4:12). God doesn’t need superior weaponry; His Word is enough.

Verse 13 – The Smyrna church is acknowledged for their strong faith and standing firm for the name of God. The reference to Satan’s throne “certainly refers to the fact that Pergamum was a

center for worship of the pagan gods, especially the emperor cult. Pergamum was an idolatrous center; and to declare oneself in that place a Christian who worships the one true God and Savior, Jesus Christ, would certainly provoke hostility” (440). Antipas, though little is known about him, seems to have been a well-known martyr among the church who was also unwavering in his faith to the point of death.

Verse 14-15 – The Pergamum church tolerates the sinfulness of some within the church. The list of sins is 1) holding the teachings of Balaam, 2) eating food sacrificed to idols, and 3) practicing sexual immorality. Additionally, there was infiltration of the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

“The OT names Balaam and Jezebel serve to alert the church community to the insidious nature of the teaching that was not until now recognized as overtly evil. Since Satan’s chief method is deception, his devices are not known until they are clearly pointed out. The prevalence of sexual immorality in first-century pagan society makes it entirely possible that some Christians at Pergamum were still participating in the holiday festivities and say no wrong in indulging in the “harmless” table in the temples and the sexual excitement everyone else was enjoying (1 John 5:21)” (441)¹.

“At the center and summit of each Greek city was the shrine of the city god; participation in the worship of the god was the sign, the privilege, and the requisite of citizenship. In the spring, the Greek cities celebrated the Athesterion, or feast of flowers, a three-day festival to Dionysus (a chief deity at Pergamum!) in which wine flowed freely and everybody was more or less drunk. At the end of March came the great Dionysia, a widely observed series of processional and plays accompanied by general revelry. At the beginning of April various cities in Greece celebrated (Aphrodite’s) great festival, the Aphrodisia; and on that occasion, for those who cared to take part, sexual freedom was the order of the day” (75, 185).²

Verse 16 – Again, a command is given for repentance. With the command is a warning issued to those who refuse to repent. For those apostate people, God declares He’ll fight against them with the *sword of His mouth* – a direct reference to His Word.

Verse 17 – Again shows a reward for repentance and faithfulness. Three difficult symbol are given: 1) hidden manna, 2) a white stone, and 3) a new name.

Hidden Manna- “The hidden manna is reminiscent of the manna hidden in the ark of the covenant by Moses (Exodus 16:33-34; Heb 9:4). Since Moses’ pot of manna was designed to remind the Israelites of God’s grace and faithfulness in the wilderness (Ps 78:24), there may be a similar thought here. To those at Pergamum who refused the banquets of the pagan gods, Christ will give the manna of his great banquet of eternal life in the kingdom (John 6:47-58)” (442).¹

The White Stone-

The New Name- “is either the name of Christ himself, now hidden from the world but to be revealed in the future as the most powerful of names (3:12; 14:1), or the believer’s new name or changed character through redemption (Isa 62:2; 65:15)” (442).¹

² Simon and Schuster. *The Story of Civilization, vol 2 Life of Greece*.

The Church at Thyatira (The Church That Hates Spiritual Authority)

- *Forty-five miles east of Pergamum was the city of Thyatira.*
- *Thyatira was not known as a “great” city, it was nevertheless important through commerce in wool, linen, apparel, dyes, leatherwork, tanning, and excellent bronze work.*
- *It was a “blue collar” type of town. It was a town of hard-working people.*
- *Associated with its commerce was an extensive trade guild or labor union network, which must have played a prominent role in the social, political, economic, and religious life of the city.*
- *Each guild had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal festivities that included sexual revelries (443-444).¹*
- Known for its work and labor unions, it’s no mystery why God, attempting to get His church’s attention began with, “I know your works!” and “I know that you’re doing more now than what you did at first.”

Verse 18 – Is a simple address and in-depth description of the Son of God.

Verse 19 – The good works cited of the church at Thyatira are: love, faith, service, perseverance, and growth (doing more than you did at first).

Verse 20 – The sins cited however, is that this church tolerates “that woman Jezebel”, who calls herself a prophetess. This is clearly not a reference to the Old Testament Jezebel, but more likely the spirit of Jezebel. The spirit of Jezebel attacks and misleads leadership.

In order to expose her true character, she is labeled “Jezebel” – the name of the Canaanite wife of Israel’s King Ahab. Jezebel had not only led Ahab to worship Baal but through Ahab had promulgated her teachings of idolatry throughout all Israel (1 Kings 16:31-33; 2 Kings 9:22). As this wicked and deceptive woman in the OT led Israel astray and persecuted the true prophets of God, so this woman at Thyatira was enticing the servants of God to abandon their exclusive loyalty to Christ” (444).¹The reference to “sexual idolatry” is thought to be either spiritual idolatry or literally sexual idolatry (which wouldn’t be uncommon in this region).

Verse 21-22 – “Christ’s verdict continues with his strongest accusation directed against, not Jezebel’s perversion, serious as that is, nor even against her successful deception of fellow Christians, but against her refusal to repent” (444).¹

“As in the case with Jezebel, Christ’s strongest threat to the offenders is not in regard to their sin, serious as that is, but to their reluctance to repent” (445).¹

Verse 23 – God searches both heart and mind. “Heart” (Heb., *lēb*; Gr., *kardia*) Hebrew refer to the inner most part of a person; the secret or hidden places of a person. God not only searches our emotions, thoughts and feelings, but the secret places. It should be noted, this is the place from which God desires we seek Him from.

“The reference to “Satan’s so-called deep secrets” is ambiguous (“the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10)). It may mean the “deep things,” i.e., the secret knowledge of God reserved only for the initiates into the heretical teaching” (445).¹

Verses 24-29 – Toward the end of the letter to the church at Thyatira the promises are given to the repentant and the faithful. Promises mentioned are 1) authority over the nations, 2) the morning star. “The first promise is a fulfillment of Psalm 2, which is messianic and tells how the Father gave the Messiah the rule over the nations of the world” (446).¹

“Secondly, the overcomes in Thyatira are promised “the morning star”. Some link this expression to Christ himself as in 22:16. Believers would then receive Christ as their very life. Or it may refer to the Resurrection in the sense that the morning star rises over the darkness of this world’s persecution and offers victory over it” (446).¹

The Church at Sardis (The Deceptively Incomplete Church) (Revelation 3)

- *Sardis enjoyed prominence as a commercially prosperous and militarily strategic city throughout its history.*
- *The acropolis rose about eight hundred feet above the north section of Sardis and was virtually impregnable because of its rock walls.*
- *The north section of Sardis was virtually impregnable because of its rock walls, which were nearly vertical, **except** on the south side.*
- *Formerly the site of the original city, the acropolis became a refuge for the inhabitants in time of siege attacks.*
- *Only twice in the history of Sardis was its fortress ever captured, though attacks on it were frequent.*
- *When Cyrus attacked it in the sixth century B.C., a shrewd Persian soldier observed a Sardinian descending the southern winding path to retrieve his fallen helmet. Unknown to the soldier, the Persians followed his path back up to the summit and captured the whole city, taking them by surprise!*
- *Coincidentally, the other major feature of Sardis was the impressive necropolis, or cemetery, of “a thousand hills” so named because of the hundreds of burial mounds visible on the skyline some seven miles from Sardis (447-448). ¹*
- **No wonder why God opened with, “you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead;” and “What remains is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete”.**

Verse 1 – The church at Sardis had a reputation for being “alive”. They were both in love with their reputation and deceived by their reputation.

Verse 2 – There were alive parts with-in the church at Sardis, but even those were dying.

Verse 3 – The call to repentance is issued and the church is charged to 1) remember what they’ve heard, 2) remember what they’ve received, 3) and obey it.

If the Sardis church refuses to repent, the coming of the Lord will catch them off guard in that they will not have time to repent.

Verse 4 – Like every church, even in a dying church, there are those who are alive. There are those within dying churches that are seen as a remnant.

Verse 5-6 – “He who overcomes” (faithful and repentant) will be “dressed in white”! The color white represents holiness/righteousness. And the promises issued is that they will never be erased from the book of life. Lastly, it should be noted that the speaker continually charges that “those who have an ear should hear”. In other words, don’t become numb to the Word/correction of God.

The Church at Philadelphia (The Uncompromising Church)

- *Twenty-five miles southeast of Sardis, lay the important high plateau city of Philadelphia.*
- *The whole **region was earthquake prone**. In A.D. 17 an earthquake that destroyed Saris and ten other cities also destroyed Philadelphia. Consequently, many people preferred to live in the rural area surrounding the city. The fear of earthquakes caused those who continued to live in the city to leave it at the slightest sign of a tremor.*
- *After the devastating earthquake, Tiberius came to the peoples’ aid and had the city rebuilt. In gratitude the citizens renamed it Neocaesarea (New Caesar).*
- *Later, the establishment of the emperor cult in the city earned it the title “Neokoros,” or “Temple Warden”.*
- *In the fifth century, it was nicknamed “Little Athens” because of its proliferation of festivals and pagan cults.*
- *Though little is known about the Philadelphian church, we know it was faithful and withstood the pressures and persecutions of the culture (451-452).¹*
- *Given the cities instability, God gave the Philadelphian a fitting promise – remain faithful, and I will make you a **pillar in the temple of God**.*

Verse 7-8 – The God who has the “key of David”. “This reference alludes to Isaiah 22:20 and the incident of transferring the post of secretary of state in Judah from the unfaithful Shebna to the faithful Eliakim. The “key” signifies the power of the keys that were normally held by the king himself, unless delegated to another. The use of the name “David” points to Christ as the Messiah, who alone determines who will participate in his kingdom and who will be turned away: “He opens, no one can shut; he shuts, no one can open”” (452).¹

“Little strength” and “open door” are somewhat of an awkward interjection. Philadelphia, however, should be seen as a missionary city. “As the easternmost of the seven cities and an outpost on the high tableland of upper Asia, it was effective in evangelizing the area with Hellenism. **So, the witness of the church in Philadelphia will be effective despite its small**

strength (1 Cor 16:9; Col 4:3)” (452).¹ (Special note: Hellenism is the character/culture of ancient Greece).

Verse 9 – “Those of the synagogue of Satan” is a reference to what the **Smyrna church** was dealing with. It seems that the Philadelphia was dealing with similar issues; mainly, those who are **pretending to be something they are not**. In the end, God promises He’ll sort everything out and even those pretenders (and who persecuted the church) would bow down and confess that the faithful in the church at Philadelphia truly loved God.

Verse 10 – “The hour of trial”

“According to some, the hour of trial (time of temptation) is the as the “day of the Lord”, or “The Great Tribulation” (Dan 12:1; Joel 2:31; Mark 13:14; Rev 14:7)” (454).¹ The difference of opinion varies depending on whether on is of post tribulation theology and pre tribulation theology.

Verse 11 – Is a command and encouragement to hold fast to “what you have”. There is a need for the church to hold on to the truth we’ve received from God in the midst of a world who hates truth.

Verses 12 – The promise to the overcomer is again twofold and related to the experience and memory of the inhabitants of the city. First, Christ will make the overcomer a “pillar in the temple of my God.” As has already been noted, the city was constantly threatened with earthquakes. Often the only parts of a city left standing after a severe quake were the huge stone temple columns. Christ promises to set believers in his temple (future kingdom) in such a secure fashion that no disturbance can even force them out” (455).¹

Verse 13 – Again, a warning for the hearer to not drown out the voice of God.

The Church at Laodicea (The Lukewarm Church/The Church That Isn’t Ministry Focused

- *The great Roman road stretching to the inland of Asia from the coast at Ephesus ran straight through its center, making Laodicea an important center for trade and communication.*
- *Most of the city’s great wealth was attributed to the production of a fine quality glossy black wool.*
- *The city’s banking assets were noteworthy as evidenced by the fact that Cicero cashed huge bank drafts in Laodicea.*

- *So wealthy was Laodicea that after the great earthquake of A.D. 17, which destroyed it, the people refused imperial help in rebuilding the city, choosing rather to do it entirely by themselves.*
- *Laodicea had a famous school of medicine; and a special ointment known as “Phrygian powder,” famous for its cure of eye defects, was either manufactured or distributed there, as were ear ointments also.*
- *A six-mile-long aqueduct brought Laodicea its supply of water from the south. The water came either from hot springs and was cooled to lukewarm or came from a cooler source and warmed up in the aqueduct on the way.*
- *For all its wealth, the city had poor water (456-457).¹*

Verse 14 – Again, the assertion is made that Christ is the first and last – and the faithful and true witness.

Verse 15-16 – It is important to note, that this is not referring to hot or cold spiritually. If this was the case it would infer that God would rather someone be spiritually “cold” rather than “lukewarm”. Cities are typically strategically built. It was common for cities to be built around hot springs or clean cold water. Hot water brought healing with its ability to purge parasites and bacteria. Cold water was refreshing and used to help preserve food. Lukewarm water, however, was completely useless and dangerous as it promotes hazardous bacteria growth.

Laodicea was situated in a way that was far from both hot water and cold water. All of the water supply that arrived in the city was lukewarm and therefore useless.

The Laodicea church had allowed what was given to them by God to become useless. In the spiritual sense, we can bring refreshing (cold) to others and bring preservation or be healing (hot) to others. If, however, we lose our sense of ministry, we become useless.

Verses 17-18 – The Laodicean church was successful. They said they were “rich” when really, God seen them as poor. The church thought they could see, but they were blind. The church thought they were clothed in holiness, but God said they were naked.

Verses 19-21 – Notice that God closes out His reproof with hope and promise. “I reprove and discipline only those whom I love.” This is followed by a call to “repent”. Lastly, the writer gives the word picture of Jesus, who stands at and continually knocks on the door of the heart of man – but only we decide whether we’ll open it and invite Him in.

Verse 21 – Serves as essential advice to any follower of Jesus Christ. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church.” There is important insight to be found by studying each of the seven churches.



Chapter 4

Heaven's Throne, The Creatures, and The Twenty-Four Elders

Chapters 4-5 form **one** vision of two parts – the **throne** (Ch.4) and the **Lamb** and the **scroll** (Ch.5). In actuality, the breaking of all seven seals (Ch. 6-8:1) together with the throne vision (Ch. 4-5) form a single, continuous vision and should not be separated. Indeed, the throne pictures (Ch. 4-5) should be viewed as dominating the entire seven-seal vision (4:1-8:1) (461).¹ Perhaps the reason why the picture of the throne room should be dominate is because no matter the future judgments, anti-Christ, symbols, and even rapture theories, the throne room picture depicts Christ's supreme reign and worth of praise. Additionally, those which are "in Him" are victorious no matter what is to come!

The Door – which "stands open in heaven" can be related to **Ezekiel's** vision (Ezekiel 1:1).

Ezekiel 1:1 In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, **the heavens were opened**, and I saw visions of God.

John, however, sees an "open door" and is invited to "come up". It is important to note that John went up in "the Spirit". This is a vision given to John by the Spirit of God – John is not literally in heaven.

The "open door" that John witnesses may or may not be linked with the open door given to the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:8). If the *open door* is simply another way to express that special revelation about to be given, it's hard to see a connection.

"The *door* was *standing open*: the way into heaven was open wide. A minor point is that John uses the singular *heaven* almost invariably (the plural 'heavens' occurs only in 12:12 in fifty-two examples of the term). The word must always be interpreted with care, for John uses it in different ways. Sometimes it is God's eternal dwelling-place (3:12). But it can also be a heaven

which will eventually be destroyed (21:1), and even a place of conflict (12:7). Again, the same word can mean the sky (6:13). Here it is God's dwelling, but also the place where God chooses to reveal himself, the place where heavenly realities are made plain."³

In regard to the timeline and relevance of events revealed in the book of Revelation, one important note is that "the words of the messenger relate to what has just transpired: "I will show you what must take place after this" (*meta tauta*, "after this," "next"; i.e., after the time of the historical churches in Asia (Rev 1:19)" (461).¹

John's purpose initially was writing to the seven churches, upon continued intimacy with the Spirit, further revelation is given regarding the future. This is typical of most biblical prophecy. Old Testament prophets wrote and spoke of the things relevant to their time as well as future events and peoples. This should be noted to the modern reader that the Old Testament never becomes irrelevant or "out of touch" with modern culture. Spiritual application can always be found within the text with the aid and illumination of the Holy Spirit.

We see further connection to Ezekiel's vision again in John's description of heaven's throne room.

Revelation 4³ And the one who sat there had the appearance of **jasper** and **ruby**. A **rainbow** that shone like an emerald **encircled** the throne.

Ezekiel 1: 27 I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. 28 Like the appearance of a **rainbow** in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance **around** him.

"These minerals "jasper and carnelian (ruby)" portray the supernatural splendor of God, while the "rainbow, resembling an emerald" conveys the impression of God's encircling brilliance. But we need not find symbolism in each element of the vision; it is enough to allow the archetypal imagery to create the impression of transcendent glory" (462).¹

The Twenty-Four Elders

Who are the elders? There are roughly **thirteen** different interpretations of which are beyond the scope of this work. Instead, we will focus on what we do know of them. "The elders are always associated with the "**four living creatures**" and engage in acts of **worship** of God and the Lamb" (462).¹

³ Morris, L. (1987). [*Revelation: an introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 20, p. 87). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

One thought is that the elders are a class of spiritual beings along with the creatures and other angels. “From this viewpoint, the “angels,” the “twenty-four elders,” and “the four living creatures” all designate actual supernatural beings involved with the purpose of God on earth and his worship in heaven. They are always distinguished from the “**saints**” (5:8; 11:17-18; 19:1-4), and the text of 5:10 is uncertain” (462).¹

“In the Bible twelve appears to be the number of **divine government** – twelve months in a lunar year, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles, twelve gates in the New Jerusalem, twelve angels at each gate, twelve foundations,...etc. Multiples of twelve – such as twenty-four, etc. – probably have a similar significance” (462-463).¹

Thrones are associated to the heavenly powers in Colossians 1:16.

Colossians 1¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in **heaven** and on earth, visible and invisible, whether **thrones** or **powers** or **rulers** or **authorities**; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

In verse 4, John describes these elders as “seated on thrones,” being “clothed in white,” and having “golden crowns”. White is closely associated with cleanliness/spotlessness/righteousness. As the “redeemed” of Christ, we know we will be also given white garments.

Revelation 3⁵ The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.

Revelation 19¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

Additionally, gold often represents royalty; “here they refer to the royal dignity of those so closely associated with the throne of God (1 Kings 22:19; Ps 89:7)” (463).¹

So here you have these twenty-four elders, perhaps some angelic governing force with white robes and golden crowns eccentrically worshipping God of all creation – The Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world!

The Living Creatures – “ceaselessly proclaim the **holiness** of God: Holy, holy, holy” (v.8; Isaiah 6:3) (463).¹

These four living creatures are most likely connected to the seraphim and cherubim in **Isaiah’s** and **Ezekiel’s** vision.

Ezekiel 1⁴ I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal,⁵ and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures.

Isaiah 6¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.³ And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

“They, like the elders and angels, are heavenly creatures of the highest order involved with the worship and the government of God. “Covering their eyes” may give the impression of their exceeding knowledge of God, while the faces of a “lion,” “ox,” “man,” and a “flying eagle” suggest qualities that belong to God, such as royal power, strength, spirituality, and swiftness of action. Each of the creatures mentioned is the **chief** of its species.” (463).¹ These four living creatures will continue to appear throughout the book of Revelation.

“As we see in Isaiah’s vision as well as here in Revelation, these creatures eternally declare the holiness of God. “In Hebrew, the double repetition of a word adds emphasis, while the rare threefold repetition designates the superlative and calls attention to the infinite holiness of God – the quality of God felt by creatures in His presence” (463).¹

Revelation 4:9-11 we find the second hymn being sung by the elders. Many hymns of praise will be sung throughout the book revelation. “When the living creatures confess the truth God’s holy deeds, the response of God’s holy deeds, the response of the highest order of God’s heavenly creatures is to relinquish their crowns of honor before the feet of Him who alone is “worthy” of “glory and honor and power”” (464).¹

One major application that should be taken away by the reader is the supreme rulership and victoriousness of Jesus Christ! How fitting it is that before the proclamation of judgements, the role of the anti-Christ, and seeming uncertainty of the future, those who are one with Christ will be victorious! This book of Revelation should never be read or preached to those in Christ with a spirit of fear, but rather celebration! No matter what comes, we *have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony* (Rev 12:11).



Chapter 5

The Scroll and The Lamb

In chapter 5, John is privileged to witness a beautiful scene where it is made strikingly evident that no one in heaven or earth possesses the “worth” to open the scroll. Because of this, John begins to weep. John’s weeping, however, only endures for a season **until he is informed that there is One** who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll – The Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world!

“Scrolls, or folded sheets, were sealed with wax and impressed with a signet ring to protect the contents or **guarantee the integrity of the writing**.

Only the owner could open the seals and disclose the contents. Original documents were usually sealed; copies were not. Sealed documents were kept hidden while unsealed copies were made public (Rev 22:10)” (466).¹

It is the opinion of the author that a major key to further understand the scroll and the lamb can be found in Jeremiah 32.

Jeremiah 32:10–15 (ESV)

¹⁰ I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. ¹¹ Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions and the open copy. ¹² And I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of Hanamel my cousin, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. ¹³ I charged Baruch in their presence, saying, ¹⁴ ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware vessel, that

they may last for a long time. ¹⁵ For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.'

In chapter 32, Jeremiah speaks of a **sealed** deed and **Open** deed as well as a **Right** of **inheritance** and **right** of **redemption**.

In this account, Jeremiah mentions his uncle had bought this field from Jeremiah's mother (which probably means his father passed).

His uncle likely bought the field so the family would have money to live off because children would've been too young to work.

And because it was **in** the **family** of **Jeremiah**; and, because Jeremiah was the **first-born son**, he would have the **right to redemption**.

So, his cousin comes and essentially says to Jeremiah, "you're old enough...buy the field back" ... for the **right of inheritance** is yours" and "**the right of redemption** is yours".

In other words, you're the nearest **first-born male** that has the **right of redemption**.

A Closer look at the Sealed deed and Open deed

The sealed deed was **kept with the family** that it **originally belonged to**.

- And that land always went back to the original bloodline of that family.

An **open deed** came into play if the family needed to sell the land for money, they could take that deed and **write on it who's name it was**, (for instance, the uncle) but the **sealed deed** stayed with the original family.

The historical Application was they were being **taken out of their land into captivity in Babylon**.

- And God was essentially saying, "I want you to **redeem this land** because I want my people to know **you will be brought back** to this land again and **you will own land again**.

Messianic Application is of course a type and shadow of Jesus Christ Himself because He is the first-born Son.

- God gave the open deed of the earth to Adam and Eve, but God kept the sealed deed.
- Adam and Eve lost the open deed to Satan.

- Remember what Satan said to Jesus in Matthew 4, “all of these I will give you...”. Satan said this because **he had possession** at that time and **Jesus doesn’t correct him**, because **it was true**.
- But Jesus, as **first born** and having the **right of inheritance** decides to **exercise his option** to **redeem it and buy it back** – this was accomplished of course, through Calvary.
- **Jesus bought back the authority and dominion of this world two-thousand years ago!**

*Revelation 5: Then I saw a scroll^[a] in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. There was writing on the inside and the outside of the scroll, and it was sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a strong angel, who shouted with a loud voice: “Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?” ³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it. ⁴ Then I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and read it. ⁵ But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, “Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David’s throne,^[b] has won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals.” ⁹ And they sang a new song with these words: “You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were slaughtered, and your blood **has ransomed (redeemed)** people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have **caused them to become a Kingdom of priests** for our God And they will reign on the earth.”*

There is an important spiritual application to be gleaned for the believer. If the spiritual authority that was lost by Adam and Eve was redeemed through Christ, those who are *in Christ* exercise that authority in this earth (Acts 1:8, 2 Cor 5:20).

Acts 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

2 Corinthians 5:17–20 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

The Lamb of God (Rev 5:6-7)

“When John speaks of the Lamb *as if it had been slain* there can be no doubt but that he is thinking in terms of sacrifice. But he does not think of the Lamb as ‘slain’.

- The Lamb is ‘**as though slain**’, for he is very much alive.
- The **Greek perfect tense** here signifies that the **Lamb was not only slain** at a **point of time**, but that the **efficacy of his death** is still **present** in all its **power**.

Hebrews 2:17 (ESV)

¹⁷Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

The Lamb had *seven horns*.

- In the Old Testament the **horn is frequently used as a symbol of strength** (e.g. Deut. 33:17).
- Seven is the **number of perfection**, so the seven horns indicate the **perfect might of the Lamb**.
- He is completely adequate for any occasion. He also had *seven eyes*, which are explained as *the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth* (cf. Zech. 4:10)". ⁴

John sees “The Lamb”, the perfect sacrifice. A lamb is an interesting choice to represent the Kingdom of God. Other countries use “mighty” animals to symbolize their kingdoms. Christ uses the image representing what He set forth as the perfect sacrifice for His bride.

John is clear in what he sees, however. He doesn’t just see **The Lamb**, but The Lamb **with seven horns**.

- Seven, again representing perfection or completion indicates that Christ is the perfect sacrifice who holds at the same time complete power!

The Lamb will be a key figure from this point on throughout the book of Revelation.

A New Song

After this scene, it is proceeded with immense worship by the four living creatures and twenty-four elders as **they sing a “new song”** which seems to gradually build.

⁴ Morris, L. (1987). [*Revelation: an introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 20, p. 98). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- This *new* song, which is **initiated by the four living creatures** and **twenty-four elders** is amplified by the joining of the *many* angels (10,000 times 10,000) equaling roughly 100,000,000. The new song seems to reach a crescendo in verse 13 when John hears “every living creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them...”.



Chapter 6

The Seven Seals

Revelation chapter four closes with a magnificent scene of worship in heaven because the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll. The scroll we see in chapter four is essentially the Title Deed to the earth! Roman law required that a will to be sealed seven times. It was rolled and sealed with a seal consecutively and continuously until the final roll and final (seventh) seal with applied. The imagery is depicting the Lamb (the worthy one) unrolling the scroll and breaking each one of the seals. With the breaking of each seal, a corresponding judgement is poured out upon the earth.

“The first four seals are distinct from the last two in that they describe four horses of different colors with four riders who are given different powers over the earth. Background for the imagery of these four seals reflect Zechariah 1:8 and 6:1-8. In Zechariah’s vision the horsemen and chariots are divine instruments of judgement of the enemies of God’s people...” (472).¹

The First Horseman – The White Horse

The first seal that is broken seems to be a seal representing peace. One might ask how can peace be a judgement? The answer is that this release of peace is not true peace, but rather a false peace. With the breaking of the first seal, the first of four horseman is released. The color of the horse is white; which in scripture has come to commonly represent righteousness and Christ – especially in the book of Revelation (7:9, 13-14; 20:11).

Though there are some which believe this could be a reference to Christ Himself, the author sees this as improbably for several reasons. First, in Revelation 6:1 the Lamb is found opening the seals and there is no reason to believe that Christ would be opening the seals in heaven while simultaneously riding one a horse. Secondly, it would be a roll reversal for one of the living creatures (angel) to be giving commands to the Lamb; in this instance summoning Him. The third and fourth reasons coincide in that a *bow* (weapon) and *crown* (royalty/authority) was given to the rider for the purpose of conquering. “A “crown” refers to victorious conquest in 19:12, where Christ wears “many crowns”” (473).¹ The Lamb already holds all authority and therefore is not waiting to receive it. Furthermore, The Lamb is omnipotent, having no need of a weapon given Him whereby to execute His judgement.

“A more probable view is that the rider is the antichrist. “The reference in 19:11-16 to the rider on the white horse as “Faithful and True: and of whom it is said that “with justice he judges and makes war” may stand in contrast to the rider in 6:2 who is not faithful or true and who wages war for unjust conquest” (473).¹

Additionally, it should be noted that the *bow* was given but there is no mention of arrows. The rider was given a crown and rode a white horse representing a victorious conqueror. This first rider is a conqueror with no arrows – no instruments to wage war with. In essence, the rider doesn’t have to wage war (fire arrows) yet is still a victorious conqueror or a peaceful conqueror!

The tribulation period on earth begins with a false peace initiated by the antichrist (Dan 9:27)!

This peace of course doesn’t last long because in verse 4 the second seal is broken, and another horseman is released.

The Second Horseman – The Red Horse

This horseman rides on a *red* horse “whose color symbolizes slaughter (2 Kings 3:22-23)” (474).¹ He is essentially a horseman of war and bloodshed, and power is given to him to take peace from the earth. The second seal brings war. “Therefore, he is given the “large sword” because the number of those he kills is so great (13:10, 14). This is most likely a world-wide war. In Revelation 13:10 we see a sobering call to faith regarding the saints, *...if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.*

The Third Horseman – The Black Horse

The third horseman rides a black horse. He is a horseman of global poverty and famine. The effect of world-wide war and bloodshed is world-wide famine and poverty. The horseman is found carrying a *pair of scales* for weighing and balancing out. There are three important statements which demand our focus: (1) *...a quart of wheat for a denarius*; (2) *three quarts of barley for a denarius*; (3) *do not harm the oil and wine!* (Rev 6:6).

A *denarius* was essentially one day's wage. It is clearly seen that this rider brings with him economic disaster as a result of world-wide war and bloodshed. As Gaebelien suggests, this amount suggests food prices about twelve times higher than normal and implies inflation and famine conditions (Matt 24:7). A quart of wheat would supply an average person one day's sustenance. Barley was used by the poor to mix with the wheat. The expression "Do not damage the oil and wine" is less clear. Some view oil and wine as luxuries not necessary for bare survival, and the rich would have them while the poor were starving (474). The first horseman brings temporary peace which then gives way to world-wide war (the second horseman), which in turn gives way to a global economic disaster of famine and poverty (the third horseman) where an individual is described as working a full day to earn barely enough for one person to eat.

The Fourth Horseman – The Pale Horse

The fourth seal is opened, and the fourth horseman comes bringing death. In sequential of the horseman released you have temporary peace, followed by war, followed by famine; and in like fashion, followed by death. Gaebelien elaborates "Pale" (*chlōros*) denotes a yellowish green. This cadaverous color blends well with the name of the rider – "Death" (*Thanatos*) (474).

In verse 8 John states that *Hell follows after him* (death)...", but why? Because he (death) comes along killing and hell follows scooping them all up. We must pay careful attention to what seems to be a gradual increase of intensity of judgement from false peace – to the sword – famine and poverty – and lastly, the wild beasts of the earth! This theme of increasing intensity of judgements will be seen as we move from the seals on to the trumpets and bowls.

At this point, I find it quite relevant to the reader to, in this instance, always read with the end in mind.

Revelation 19⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the

angel said^[a] to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

In verse 9, during the opening of the fifth seal, John sees the souls which had been slain *for the word of God and for the witness they had borne* under the altar of God. These martyrs begin to cry out to God, pleading with Him to avenge their blood *on those who dwell on the earth* (v.10). Who are these that had “been slain”? The response to the slain is the “wait a little longer”. According to Gaebelien the wait of a “little longer” is in God’s estimate but a fleeting moment, though for us it may stretch out for ages (12:12; 20:3) (475).¹

Psalm 90 and say, “Return, O children of man!”⁴ For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past,

2 Peter 3⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

So, who are the slain? We know they’re martyrs that had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. Aune suggests that it is more probable that Christian martyrs are particularly in view, including those who died in the Neronian persecution in A.D. 64.⁵

On the night of July 19, 64 A.D., a fire broke out among the shops lining the Circus Maximus, Rome’s mammoth chariot stadium. In a city of two million, there was nothing unusual about such a fire — the sweltering summer heat kindled conflagrations around Rome on a regular basis, particularly in the slums that covered much of the city. Knowing this, Nero himself was miles away in the cooler coastal resort of Antium. Yet this was no ordinary fire. The flames raged for six days before coming under control; then the fire reignited and burned for another three. When the smoke cleared, 10 of Rome’s 14 districts were in ruin. The 800-year-old Temple of Jupiter Stator and the Atrium Vestae, the hearth of the Vestal Virgins, were gone. Two thirds of Rome had been destroyed. Nero himself blamed the fire on an obscure new Jewish religious sect called the Christians, whom he indiscriminately and mercilessly crucified. During gladiator matches he would feed Christians to lions, and he often lit his garden parties with the burning carcasses of Christian human torches.⁶ It is estimated that by the year 325 A.D. 2 million Christians had been killed for their faith.

David Aune asserts that the implication of the divine response to the petition from the martyrs indicates the necessity of suffering in the plan of God, for more Christians must yet die before the eschaton can be inaugurated. Christian suffering does not hinder the fulfillment of the eschaton but rather inevitably leads to its inauguration (411).⁵

One fact is clearly seen when studying the history of the Apostolic Christian Church, the more it was persecuted the more it spread. One must be careful at this point about presuppositions held regarding rapture theory and God’s people entitled to a pre-rapture immunity from persecution or tribulation. Much rhetoric has been used such as “God (Bridegroom) would never abuse His

⁵ Aune, David E. (1998). Word Biblical Commentary (52B, p. 406). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/secrets/great-fire-rome-background/1446/>

bride (the church)” in justification for a pre-tribulation theory. It is not the intent of the author to prove nor disprove any rapture theory. It is the goal of this author to eliminate rhetorical statements not grounded in biblical truth to justify one’s position. One must take into account that God though out the bible has used persecution to accomplish His purpose. Furthermore, it is important for the western Christian to be cognoscente of current tribulations being faced by Christians living in other parts of the world. Those of us who are blessed to live in a free society must not allow our freedom to make us narrow minded. Lastly, I would remind us of the words of Jesus directed toward Peter when Peter rebuked Jesus about the necessary suffering that would take place in regard to the crucifixion. *Matthew 16²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."* Certainly, more could be said on this subject but would fall beyond the scope of this work.

The sixth seal is broken in verses 12-14 and John sees “certain eschatological signs heralding the imminent, final day of the Lord so often described in Scripture (Isa 2:10, 19, 21; 13:10; 34:4; Jer 4:29; Ezek 32:7-8; Joel 2:31; 3:15; Zeph 1:14-18; Matt 24:29; Luke 21:11, 25-26)” (475).¹

Whether one decides to take this scene witnessed by John as literal or figurative, the end result is destruction and distress for those living on the earth. As we progress from the seals to the trumpets, and lastly the bowls, the judgements seem to worsen and grow more intense. Lastly, verses 15-17 tell us that there will be fear which falls on all demographics of people. The end of verse 17 poses the appropriate question “who can stand”. The applicable answer is *no one* and additionally *every knee will bow...*(Phil 2:10-11).