

**BEHOLD, A DOOR OPEN IN HEAVEN**  
**A Guide for the Interpretation of Revelation**

By William H. Lawson

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Title and Cover

The title comes from Revelation 4:1,

After these things I looked, and behold, a door open in heaven.

Then the first voice which I heard speaking to me like a trumpet says,  
"Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

The cover shows a door open in heaven. Indeed, Revelation opens  
a door in heaven and helps us to have a heavenly perspective so  
that we can deal with earthly trials and temptations.

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Dedicated to my Christian family in Asia.

May you overcome earthly trials and temptations  
through the grace and might of God.

## PREFACE

Christians and even ministers often struggle to hear God speak through the Bible. The problem in part is that sound principles and methods for interpreting the Bible are not known or practiced. Instead, everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

In Ears to Hear: A Guide for the Interpretation of the Bible I provide principles, methods, and procedures for Christians and ministers as they seek to hear God speak through the Bible and communicate the message of the Bible to those who need a word from God. This guide supplements Ears to Hear by illustrating the principles, methods, and procedures introduced in that guide through practicing them on Revelation. Other volumes are also available that illustrate these principles, methods, and procedures on other biblical books including Obedient unto Death: A Guide for the Interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians and The Lion Roars: A Guide for the Interpretation of the Book of Amos.

Revelation contains an urgent message from God to Christians living in a hostile world. What follows is my interpretation of this message. I am focused on this message and I don't attempt to explain all the mysteries of Revelation. It is my earnest desire that you will not only benefit from my study of Revelation but that you will also use the methodologies illustrated within this book in your own interpretation of the Bible.

William H. Lawson

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

#### Background and Purpose

##### Authorship

The author identifies himself as John (1:4), describes himself as a Christian brother and a servant and witness of Christ, and indicates that he has been exiled to Patmos (1:8). Traditionally he has been identified as John the Apostle. Nonetheless, many have questioned whether John the Apostle wrote Revelation. Most early church leaders, including Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, believed that this John was the Apostle. However, some early church leaders, including Dionysius and Eusebius, questioned whether John the Apostle wrote Revelation and there was a significant dispute about whether or not Revelation should be admitted into the canon. There may also have been two significant leaders in the early church in Asia Minor named John. According to Dionysius, there were two monuments to early church leaders named John. In addition, Papias may indicate that there were two leaders named John in Asia, one the Apostle and the other an elder (though it is uncertain whether he is referring to two men or only one). Furthermore, non-canonical apocalyptic literature is often attributed to significant figures of the past, so much so that pseudonymous authorship is often regarded as a characteristic of apocalyptic literature.

As a result several positions have emerged regarding the authorship of Revelation. First, some deny that the Apostle John wrote Revelation and maintain that an elder named John wrote Revelation. Second, some accept that the Apostle John wrote Revelation, but deny that the same man could have written the Gospel and Epistles of John. Third, some propose that John the Apostle used an amanuensis who exercised some freedom when writing down what John was saying. Fourth, some propose the existence of a Johannine school and that the disciples of John the Apostle had a role in shaping the final form of Revelation. Fifth, some deny that anyone named John wrote Revelation based on the common practice of using a pseudonym in apocalyptic literature. Finally, some maintain that the Apostle John wrote Revelation and the Gospel and Epistles of John in spite of their differences. The first five of these positions propose solutions to the problem of the many differences between Revelation and the Gospel and Epistles of John. These differences are significant and should not be minimized. Revelation has ideas, vocabulary, and Greek writing style that differ significantly from the Gospel and Epistles of John. Nonetheless, I wonder whether the proposed solutions to the problem are more problematic than the problem of the differences between Revelation and the Gospel and Epistles of John. The evidence for the existence of an elder named John is rather sketchy and it is by no means certain that he ever existed. Denying that John wrote the Gospel and Epistles traditionally attributed to him is too radical a solution for me. There is no evidence of John the Apostle using an amanuensis or the existence of a Johannine School and these are postulated for the sake of solving the problem. Pseudonymous authorship was probably an accepted literary convention employed to enhance the credibility of a document. However, it does not appear as though pseudonymous authorship is being employed in Revelation since the author is not an exalted figure of the distant past and speaks for his contemporaries. The final position postulates that the Apostle John wrote Revelation and the Gospel and Epistles of John in spite of their differences. Indeed, due to the distinctive character of apocalyptic literature, these differences should not be

overemphasized. In addition, there are significant similarities in thought and vocabulary between Revelation and the Gospel and Epistles of John. Osborne even concludes that coupled with the external evidence for John the Apostle writing Revelation "the similarities between the Gospel and the Apocalypse are sufficient to support that decision" Osborne, (Kindle Locations 584-585). Mounce concurs, "Since internal evidence is not entirely unfavorable to apostolic authorship and external evidence is unanimous in its support, the wisest course of action is to accept as a reasonable hypothesis that the Apocalypse was written by John the apostle, son of Zebedee and disciple of Jesus" (Mounce, 15). My working hypothesis is that John the Apostle wrote Revelation. I have only given you a summary of my thinking and conclusions with regard to the question of the authorship of Revelation. If you want a detailed treatment of all the positions regarding authorship and the arguments used to support them I recommend the discussions by Fanning, 24-28, and Mounce, 8-15, and Osborne, Kindle Locations 509-592.

In the end, solving the question of human authorship makes little difference in the actual interpretation of Revelation since this is "The revelation of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1). As Fanning says, "none of these conclusions impair our ability to interpret the book within its original setting or to assign inspired authority to its teachings" (Fanning, 28). This raises another question: "What was the role of John in transmitting the revelation of Jesus Christ?" Though John certainly had a role in choosing the words to communicate what Jesus was revealing to him, we must always bear in mind that John was inspired even as he chose the words to use and that Jesus is the ultimate author of Revelation.

### **Place and Date**

John indicates that he was on the Island of Patmos when he received his vision. However, he may have returned to Asia Minor by the time he finished recording it. Two primary possibilities exist for the date when Revelation was written. Both of these possibilities are based on the assumption that Revelation reflects a time when the church was encountering significant persecution. First, Revelation could have been written during the persecution of the reign of Nero (Around AD 68). This possibility is based on the seeming indication that the temple remains intact (11:1f), the feasibility of deciphering 666 as Nero (13:18), and the plausibility of understanding the seven heads of the beast (17:10f) in relation to the political situation of the time. Second, Revelation could have been written during the persecution of the reign of Domitian (Around AD 95). This possibility is based on a closer parallel between the situation reflected in Revelation and the nature of the persecution during the reign of Domitian. The persecution during the reign of Domitian was widespread and based on the requirement for all to espouse the state religion, whereas the persecution during the reign of Nero was localized and based on political expediency. As Summers observes, "The persecution of the Christians which is reflected in the book fits the Domitianic period alone . . . Domitian (c. 81-96) is the emperor who has gone down in history as the one who bathed the empire in the blood of the Christians" (Summers, 83). In addition, the church has traditionally related Revelation to the reign of Domitian. My working hypothesis is that John wrote during the persecution of Domitian (Around AD 95) based on the closer correspondence in the character of the persecution. However, knowing the precise place and date of writing is not absolutely necessary for interpretation since the situation and purpose of Revelation is apparent from its contents. I have only given you a summary of my thinking and conclusions with regard to the place and date of writing. However, this is a complex issue and if you want a detailed analysis of all the

possibilities and evidence I recommend Fanning, 28-30, Mounce, 15-21, and Osborne, Kindle Locations 593-680.

### **Situation and Purpose**

Revelation clearly indicates those for whom the book was primarily written, "the seven churches in the province of Asia" (1:4) and the letters in chapters 2-3 identify the specific location of these churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Revelation primarily reflects a time of persecution. John himself was exiled because of his witness (1:7). John warned the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia of a time of trial and tribulation, including imprisonment. John also warned of the possibility of martyrdom (6:9; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; and 20:4). In fact, he indicates that a man named Antipas has already suffered martyrdom because of his witness (2:13). The primary reason for the persecution of the church seems to be the imposition of emperor worship on the populace of the Roman Empire. The beasts of Revelation would have been understood by the churches of Asia Minor as the emperor and his cult. The populace was required to acclaim the emperor as their sovereign Lord. Acclaiming the emperor as their sovereign Lord was impossible for Christians who were devoted to Jesus as their one and only sovereign Lord. As a result they endured economic sanctions, imprisonment, and even death.

Revelation also reflects a time of worldliness. The church in Laodicea is rebuked for being lukewarm, probably meaning that they had lost their heartfelt devotion for God. The reasons is that they say, "I am rich and I have become wealthy and I have need of nothing," Indeed, Babylon the Great is described as a Great Prostitute "with whom the kings of the earth committed immorality and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk from the wine of her immorality." The churches of Asia Minor would have understood Babylon the Great to be Rome with its great economic power and wealth. Christians could have easily been enticed by Rome's prosperity and compromised their commitment to God in order to share in her pleasures. But God gives them another alternative, "I also saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband" (21:2).

Other dangers are also reflected in the letters to the churches. First, the Jews seem to have been a significant danger. They are depicted as a synagogue of Satan that is lying and slandering the church (2:8; 3:9f). Second, heresy seems to have been a significant danger. A heretical group called in Nicolaitans is mentioned (2:15) and Libertinism is described as a threat (2:14, 20-25). Third, other more subtle dangers are addressed such as diminished devotion to God (2:4) and spiritual vitality (3:1).

The purpose of Revelation was primarily to encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him rather than compromise their commitment by submitting to emperor worship or allowing themselves to be corrupted by the world. In addition, the purpose of Revelation was to assure Christians of their vindication so that they will not be discouraged by the lies and slander of the Jews, warn Christians to avoid heretics and heresies like the Nicolaitans and Libertinism, and encourage Christians to remain devoted to God and spiritually vital. This depiction of the situation and purpose has been based primarily on the content of Revelation and is the summary of my conclusions on the subject. For a more detailed evaluation of this issue I recommend Osborne, Kindle Location 681-728.

## **Biblical Context and Role**

The New Testament is organized generally by different types of literature and is composed the Gospels, the Book of Acts (a historical book), the Epistles, and Revelation (an apocalyptic book). The first division of the New Testament is commonly called the Gospels. The Gospels serve generally within the New Testament canon to present the essential truths of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and interpret their implications for faith and practice. The second division of the New Testament is composed of only the Book of Acts. Acts supplements the basic revelation of the Gospels by demonstrating how challenges can be overcome through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit within the church. The third division of the New Testament is commonly called the Epistles. The Epistles serve to further supplement this basic revelation in the Gospels and the Book of Acts by addressing specific problems and providing practical help for overcoming difficulties. The Book of Revelation is the only book in the fourth division of the New Testament. Revelation concludes the New Testament by challenging and encouraging Christians as they faced challenges and difficulties in a resistant and hostile world. Therefore, it is closely related to the Prophetic Books of the Old Testament that serve a similar purpose. Indeed, Revelation contains many quotations and allusions to the Old Testament and specifically the Prophetic Books. Fanning has a helpful discussion of the use of the Old Testament and specifically typology and prophecy in Revelation (Fanning, 40-49). Osborne's discussion of the use of the Old Testament in Revelation is also enlightening (Osborne, Kindle Locations 1002-1042). Revelation is closely related to other apocalyptic material in the Bible as well. Therefore, familiarity with the apocalyptic sections of the Book of Daniel and portions of other biblical books that share the characteristics of apocalyptic literature is extremely helpful for understanding Revelation. In fact, familiarity with non-canonical apocalyptic books such as 1 Enoch, The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, 4 Ezra, and the Apocalypse of Baruch would also be helpful for understanding Revelation. Ashcraft (242-244) and Summers (8-16) include helpful summaries of the major non-canonical apocalypses.

## **Genre and Function**

Revelation is a complex literary work and actually combines the characteristics of four major genres: apocalyptic, prophecy, dramatic narrative, and epistle.

### **Revelation as Apocalyptic**

John identifies Revelation as an apocalypse in 1:1, "The revelation (apocalypse) of Jesus Christ." In fact, this genre designation originated in Revelation 1:1 and has been applied to other books with a similar nature. Non-canonical books that are frequently classified as apocalyptic include 1 Enoch, The Assumption of Moses, 2 Enoch, 2 Baruch, and 4 Ezra. The Book of Daniel also contains apocalyptic material and a smattering of material in other biblical books is apocalyptic-like in character..

These apocalyptic writings were produced during times of trial and suffering. In fact, persecution is one of the reasons that they have such a mysterious form. As Summers explains, "The personal safety of both the writer and reader was endangered if the persecutors understood the true meaning of the book. For this reason the message of the apocalypse was written so as to conceal and to reveal--to conceal the message from the outsider but to reveal its message to the initiated" (Summers, 5).



Apocalyptic has a distinctive outlook, which is found to a degree in Revelation. First, apocalyptic describes a world that is caught up in a dualistic struggle between God and good on the one hand and Satan and evil on the other hand. Second, apocalyptic depicts the current age as a time in which from all appearances Satan and evil are dominant. Third, apocalyptic depicts the future age as a time when God and good will triumph.

Apocalyptic has a distinctive nature and characteristic features that are found to a degree in Revelation. First, the framework of apocalyptic is intricately and purposefully structured. Through this structure, apocalyptic enables the readers to reconcile the seeming complexity of human history with the sovereign control of God. Second, apocalyptic is dominated by visions. Through these visions, apocalyptic enables the reader to glimpse the true nature of their present experience as well as what will happen in the future. Third, apocalyptic visions are filled with symbolic images and numbers. My explanation of these symbolic images and numbers is limited and I recommend the more thorough explanations of Fanning (33-37), Mounce (1-8), Osborne (Kindle Locations 793-850), and Summers, (19-25). Through these symbolic images and numbers, apocalyptic enables the readers understand the true nature of reality. For example, through the symbolic language Revelation enables the readers to identify the present world order as an evil beast or to acknowledge that God is still on his throne.

However, even though Revelation shares some of the outlook and characteristics of apocalyptic and is the origin of the name, it is distinct in several ways (See especially Mounce, 6-8) First, non-canonical apocalypses are attributed to venerable personages of the distant past whereas Revelation is attributed to John who was writing in response to contemporary events. Second, non-canonical apocalypses normally have a negative view of the present age, whereas in Revelation God is depicted as having won the decisive battle already through Jesus Christ and he is more clearly at work within the present world age to bring about the future age in the way that he has determined. Revelation is a distinctly Christian apocalypse!

### **Revelation as Prophecy**

John identifies Revelation as prophecy in 1:3 and 22:7, 10, 18, and 19. Fanning even says, "Of the three major genre types, prophecy is the one John explicitly identifies as most characteristic of his book. He calls the work a 'prophecy' five times (1:3; 22: 7, 10, 18, 19) and uses the verb 'prophesy' of what he is commissioned to do (10: 11)" (Fanning, 31). Though Revelation does not correspond precisely to the nature of prophetic literature, Revelation does share three characteristics with prophetic literature. First, Revelation shares the same perspective as prophetic literature. Both Revelation and prophetic literature look to the future, assuring the faithful of the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises and warning the rebellious of God's imminent judgment. Second, Revelation shares the same purposes as prophetic literature. Both Revelation and prophetic literature seek to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comforted. Third, Revelation shares one formal feature with prophetic literature. Some prophecies include vision reports. These vision reports serve to illustrate part of the prophetic message, such as the assurance to the faithful of the fulfillment of God's promises or the warning to the rebellious of God's judgment. Revelation also uses visions; however, the visions in Revelation are much more intricate.

### **Revelation as Dramatic Narrative**

One thing that makes the visions of Revelation more intricate is the use of dramatic narrative. The visions are not simply symbolic images, but these symbolic images interact with one another

in a developing plot. In fact, some scholars have even made the proposal that Revelation was produced as a stage play and performed in Ephesus. Though this proposal is a bit far-fetched, the character of Revelation as a dramatic narrative should not be overlooked in interpretation. The dynamic elements of narrative are setting, character, and plot.

Setting is the physical and temporal background described within the narrative. The setting of Revelation shifts from the present to the future with occasional glimpses at the past. The present is depicted as a time of trial that is still under the sovereign control of God and the future as a time when God's promises to the faithful will be fulfilled and the rebellious will be judged. God is also portrayed as having demonstrated his sovereign control in the past. Through the setting, the readers are enabled to recognize the peril of their own situation and encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him in order ensure that they will receive God's promises along with the faithful rather than be judged along with the rebellious. The setting is predominantly on the earth, but glimpses are given of heaven as well. These glimpses of heaven and earth from a divine perspective enable the readers to recognize God's sovereignty over the seeming chaos and ultimate triumph and trust him.

Revelation contains numerous characters, many of whom are rather bizarre. These characters include God, the Lamb, one like a son of man, and the rider on the white horse; a dragon, several beasts, a woman dressed in purple and scarlet, and Satan, the 144,000, the great multitude, the two witness, a woman clothed with the sun, as well as many angels. Through God, the Lamb, one like a son of man, the rider on the white horse, etc., God and Christ are revealed to be in control and victorious and the readers are encouraged to turn in faith to them. Through the dragon, beasts, the woman dressed in purple and scarlet, Satan, etc., the Devil and his allies are revealed to be depraved and doomed and the readers are warned to reject them. Through the 144,000, the great multitude, the two witnesses, the woman clothed with the sun, etc., the ultimate deliverance of the faithful is depicted and the readers are encouraged to emulate them. The angels are essentially the agents and interpreters of God's revelation. In addition to the angels, other voices are heard that provide further insight and interpret the visionary images.

The plot of Revelation moves generally from the crisis of the end times, to the ultimate triumph of God and judgment of Satan and the wicked, and concludes with the creation of the new heaven and earth as the blessed eternal home of the faithful. This general plot movement enables the readers to see the future and encourages them to be faithful so that they can live with God and the rest of the faithful in the new heaven and earth and discourages them from being rebellious so that they can avoid the doom of Satan and his allies.

### **Revelation as Epistle**

Strangely, Revelation also shares some of the characteristics of epistles. In fact, Revelation is placed in the general framework of an epistle with a characteristic introduction, including an address and blessing in 1:4-5 and benediction (22:21). However, the correspondence between Revelation and epistles is most clearly evident in 2:1-3:22, which actually contains brief letters to seven churches. Though these letters are unique among New Testament epistles, they do employ some of the characteristic forms of New Testament Epistles including address, commendation, rebuke, and exhortation. The most significant of these forms is exhortation. In exhortation the appropriate response is normally indicated with commands and/or prohibitions. These commands and prohibitions are normally supplemented and reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify issues and provide motivation for obedience. In addition, a

distinctive feature of New Testament epistles is that for the most part they are addressed to the immediate issues with which the churches were dealing. As Beasley-Murray says, "The situation and needs of the churches in proconsular Asia were as truly in John's mind while he wrote as, say, the situation of the nearby churches of Galatia was present in Paul's mind and spurred him to write them in the manner that he did a generation or so earlier" (Beasley-Murray, 13).

### **Approaches to Interpretation**

Revelation has been interpreted in many different ways over the centuries. These interpretations have arisen primarily because the prophecies of Revelation were not fulfilled within the time of the early church. These approaches seek to deal with this problem and reinterpret Revelation so that it remains relevant. These approaches include the Historic Approach, the Continuous Historical Approach, the Idealistic Approach, the Futuristic Approach, and a hybrid approach that combines elements from the Historic, Idealistic, and Futuristic approaches. My evaluation of these approaches is limited and you can supplement your understanding of these approaches by examining the excellent treatments of Mounce (24-30) and Osborne (Kindle Locations 851-941).

#### **The Historic Approach**

The Historic Approach (Often called the Preterist Approach) maintains that Revelation was written for Christians undergoing persecution in Asia Minor and envisioned the triumph of God over the forces that opposed these beleaguered Christians. As Osbornesays, "This approach argues that the details of the book relate to the present situation in which John lived rather than to a future period" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 871-872). According to this approach it was intended to encourage Christians to remain faithful and it served this purpose although it was not totally fulfilled. The strength of this approach is it provides the most natural means for understanding the visionary images of Revelation within its original historical context. The weakness of this approach is that the assurances of God's triumph over the forces of evil were not realized. As a result, this approach is not very satisfying and other approaches to interpreting Revelation have emerged.

#### **The Continuous Historical Approach**

The Continuous Historical Approach (Often called the Historicist Approach) presupposes that Revelation is a symbolic chronicle of church history until the end of time. Those who employ this approach have related the symbolic images in Revelation to various epochs in church history with the beast and false prophet usually identified as the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy. This approach originated with the reform movements of the 13-15th centuries and became dominant among Protestants through Luther, Calvin, and other reformers. This approach is still popular today. The strength of this approach is that it takes seriously the symbolic nature of the images in Revelation. However, the weaknesses of this approach are that it interprets symbolic images with too much imagination, its subjectivity leads to diverse results, and it seems to make Revelation meaningless for its original readers.

#### **The Idealistic Approach**

The Idealistic Approach (Sometimes called the Symbolic Approach) maintains that Revelation sets forth principles for God's work in the world and is to be interpreted broadly rather than in terms of specific fulfillment. Osbornesays that this approach "concerns the battle between God and evil and between the church and the world at all times in church history"

(Osborne, Kindle Locations 894-895). This approach maintains that Revelation teaches the overthrow of evil and the need for faithful living without identifying specifics. As Mounce summarizes, "Its proponents hold that Revelation is not to be taken in reference to any specific events but as an expression of those basic principles on which God acts throughout history" (Mounce, 28). This approach is a relatively recent development. The strength of this approach is that it takes seriously the symbolic nature of the images in Revelation and the contemporary relevance of its message. The weakness of this approach is that its interpretations are rather vague and do not allow for sufficient concrete historical fulfillment.

### **The Futuristic Approach**

The Futuristic Approach (Sometimes called the Eschatological Approach) regards the book of Revelation primarily as the disclosure of what will occur in the last days. The two major forms of this approach are dispensationalism and classic premillennialism (Osborne, Kindle Location 907). As Mounce observes, "Many futurists (especially dispensationalists) regard everything from Rev 4:1 on as belonging to a period of time yet future" (Mounce, 28). This approach has significant strengths, especially its strong biblical orientation and stress on concrete fulfillment. Nonetheless, this approach also has significant weaknesses, especially that it seems to make most of Revelation irrelevant for its original readers. As Mounce adds, "It would be little comfort for a first-century believer facing persecution to learn that at some point in the far distant future Christ would return and punish the enemy" (Mounce, 28).

### **The Hybrid Approach**

The Hybrid Approach (Osborne, Kindle Location 907, calls this the Eclectic Approach) combines some of the characteristics of the Historic, Idealistic, and Futuristic Approaches. Osborne observes that all of the approaches have something to contribute (with the exception of the Continuous Historical Approach), but can be dangerous when taken to the extreme and concludes that "The solution is to allow the preterist, idealist, and futurist methods to interact in such a way that the strengths are maximized and the weaknesses minimized" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 924-925). Revelation was written for Christians facing persecution in the early church and must be interpreted accordingly in accordance with the Historic Approach. Revelation has continuing relevance for Christians facing opposition throughout history in accordance with the Idealistic Approach. Revelation is definitely eschatological in perspective in accordance with the Futuristic Approach. As Mounce says, "the central message of the book is eschatological, and to whatever extent the End has been anticipated in the course of history, it yet remains as the one great climactic point toward which all history moves" (Mounce, 29). This approach is consistent with the approach of the early church, declined during the growth of secular power in the church, and is reemerging as an accepted approach for understanding Revelation. This approach maintains the relevance of Revelation for the original recipients while asserting its continuing relevance, thereby avoiding the pessimism of the Historic Approach. This approach takes the symbolic nature of Revelation seriously while avoiding the vague future fulfillment of the Idealistic Approach. This approach maintains the objective fulfillment of the symbolic images of Revelation while avoiding the hyper-literalism of the Futuristic Approach.

### **The Approach of This Interpretation**

The approach I am taking in this interpretation is a Hybrid or Eclectic Approach. I basically use the same interpretation methodology I have laid out in [Ears to Hear: A Guide for the Interpretation of the Bible](#) and used in my interpretations of other biblical books such as [The](#)

Lion Roars: A Guide for the Interpretation of the Book of Amos and Obedient unto Death: A Guide for the Interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. In this approach I seek to understand the message of the text in the original situation by examining it from the perspectives of text and translation, situation and purpose, literary context and role, form and function, and strategy and structure. Thus my approach is in line with the Historic Approach. Once I have determined the message of the passage in its original context I seek to apply it to the modern situation by establishing a correspondence between the original and modern situations, distinguishing the differences between the original and modern situations, and restating the message in a way that is meaningful for the modern situation. Thus my approach is in line with the Idealistic Approach. These messages will naturally have a future orientation since the message of Revelation has an eschatological perspective. However, I will avoid speculation about how the message of Revelation will be played out in the future. I will let some of the mystery remain a mystery. If you are expecting me to spell out what will happen in the last days you will be disappointed. I will remain focused on the message at all times.

Nonetheless, Revelation is a difficult book to interpret and can be quite intimidating for those who seek to understand its message. When I was a young Christian I heard a sermon illustration that has had an impact on the way that I interpret Revelation. The preacher told of a New Testament scholar who went to preach at a church way out in the country. While he was there he saw a man that he knew had very little formal education reading Revelation. The New Testament scholar thought this was funny since he knew how difficult Revelation was to understand, even for a scholar. So he asked the man, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The uneducated man replied, "Sure I do! God is going to win in the end!" Though the message of Revelation is more sophisticated than this, the story taught me an important lesson that I have applied to my interpretation of Revelation. The message of Revelation is understandable if we don't complicate it too much. Indeed, as intimidating as reading Revelation is, it is even more intimidating to read a commentary on Revelation. Therefore, I have taken steps to simplify my interpretation of Revelation.

Some of the steps I have taken are inherent in my approach to biblical interpretation while others are necessitated by the sophisticated nature of Revelation. First and foremost, my focus in interpretation is always on the message. As scholars we sometimes feel obligated to explain everything. However, there are many things in the text of Revelation that are not essential for understanding the message. Trying to explain everything is simply impossible and attempting to do so ends up distracting from the message. Therefore, I do not pursue any avenues of study that do not contribute to an understanding of the message. Second, I limit the number of commentaries I consult and only refer to them when they have contributed to my understanding of the text. This is intentional rather than just laziness. I learned early that the priority of biblical interpretation is to focus on the text and its message rather than what other scholars say about the text and its message. Certainly I have considered what scholars have to say and adjusted my own understanding accordingly. However, I do not engage in debate with them in my interpretation because this would cloud my interpretation. Third, I discipline my imagination and avoid trying to solve all the mysteries of Revelation. Revelation contains a lot of mysterious language. Indeed, it sometimes seems that Revelation raises more questions than it answers. It is certainly possible and even essential to understand, at least in part, some of this language. However, as scholars we often try to answer the unanswerable questions and get distracted from the message. Therefore, I have tried to discipline my imagination and focused on explaining the explainable to simplify my interpretation. Fourth, I have limited my references to similar

language in the Old Testament. The language of Revelation frequently echoes the language of the Old Testament, especially the Prophetic Books. However, this language often takes on a new form and spin in Revelation and the Old Testament background is not always relevant for understanding the message of Revelation. I have certainly considered the Old Testament background; however, in order to simplify my interpretation I only refer to these Old Testament passages when they provide significant insight for understanding the message. Fifth, I limit my attempts to point out other places in Revelation where similar language is employed. Revelation has a very sophisticated strategy and structure and a high degree of interconnectedness. However, the significance of the important language is usually transparent enough without tracing its use throughout the book and doing so adds a complication that can distract from the message. I have certainly considered how this language is developed throughout Revelation; however, I have not traced its development unless it was necessary to clarify the message. Sixth, I try to avoid reconciling what Revelation says with my personal theological perspective. It is impossible to avoid doing this completely because we use what we know (or think we know) as the basis for evaluating anything. Revelation is a provocative book that often challenges what we believe. I have tried to stay out of the way as much as possible and take the message of Revelation at face value even if it challenges my presuppositions. Finally, I have limited my attempts to relate the language of Revelation to the specific historical situation of John and the churches of Asia Minor. Indeed, it is often difficult to do so because this language serves double duty and even though it does sometimes reflect the specific historical situation of John, it primarily reflects the situation at the end of time. Therefore, I do generally relate the language to John's historical situation, but interpret this language more broadly in order to simplify my interpretation.

In addition, I had a recent experience that has changed my perspective on interpreting Revelation. Years ago I gave my wife a set of Barclay's commentaries on the New Testament for her birthday and over the years she has used it as the basis for her devotions. She recently approached me as I was beginning to revise my interpretation of Revelation. She was confused because Barclay was continually describing how John shaped the text of Revelation to convey his message to the churches of Asia Minor. This puzzled her because she was under the impression from reading Revelation that it was a visionary revelation of the exalted Christ and John was only recording what he saw and heard. Indeed, this is the impression that is given from a simple reading of the text. However, evangelical scholars are taught that one of the principles of biblical interpretation is to determine the author's intent. Thus many evangelical scholars, even scholars much more conservative than Barclay, consistently refer to John's creative role in writing Revelation. Certainly John as a divinely inspired author had some role in describing and relating what he saw and heard, but I have taken a more naïve perspective in this commentary. Thus I use language that speaks of John describing and relating what he saw and heard rather than shaping the text to communicate his message to the churches of Asia Minor. In the end I don't really think that this has affected my understanding of the message that much. Nonetheless, it has given me a new appreciation for the timeless message of Revelation.

Even with all of this seeking to understand the message of Revelation remains an intimidating task. I do not claim to have found any magical key for unlocking the message of Revelation. My interpretation of Revelation is simply that, my interpretation and I undertake it with a sense of awe and wonder. You will see me using language like "may" and "might" and "could" and "possibly" and "perhaps." Whenever I start using the first person as I am now, this is usually a

good sign that I am expressing my personal perspective. I encourage you to venture into the world of Revelation and seek to hear what the exalted Christ has to say to you.

### **Strategy and Structure**

Like other examples of apocalyptic literature Revelation has an intricate strategy and structure. Even though the structure of Revelation is intricate it is still reasonably clear. What is not clear is the strategy that underlies this structure. As Mounce observes,

At times John moves ahead quickly to the eternal state in order to encourage the redeemed with a vision of the bliss that awaits them. At other times he returns to the past to interpret the source of the hostility being experienced by the church in the present time. He is bound by neither time nor space as he moves with sovereign freedom to guarantee the final destruction of all evil and the vindication of those who follow the Lamb. The Apocalypse is a broad canvas upon which the Seer paints without restrictions the ultimate triumph of God over evil (Mounce, 32).

Nonetheless, I believe that the outline below provides a good general guide for understanding the strategy and structure of Revelation. The first division of Revelation introduces the book and encourages the readers to heed its message (1:1-20). The second division of Revelation contains the letters to the seven churches and provides direct exhortation for Christians calling them to remain faithful and guard against apostasy (2:1-3:22). The third division of Revelation contains visions of God on his throne and the Worthy Lamb who is able to open the seven seals (4:1-5:14). These visions introduce the judgments that follow and provide assurance of God's sovereign control over all that happens. The fourth, fifth, and seventh divisions contain descriptions of God's judgment of the world (6:1-17 and 8:1-5; 8:6-9:21 and 11:14-19; and 15:1-16:21). Set within the visions of judgment are additional vision that stress the need for faithfulness and give assurances to the faithful (7:1-17 and 10:1-11:13). Set within the second and third descriptions of God's judgment of the world is the sixth division that provides additional visionary images warning of judgment and assuring of deliverance to encourage Christians to remain faithful (12:1-14:20). The eighth division is the climax of Revelation and contain visions that describe God's ultimate victory over Satan and his worldly allies and the blessed eternal state of the faithful in the restored heavens and earth (17:1-22:5). These visions provide further encouragement for faithfulness by describing the ultimate fate of the faithful and the wicked. The final division of the Revelation concludes the book by encouraging Christians to heed Revelation and reinforcing some of the key messages (22:6-21). However, the strategy is more complicated than the preceding explanation sets forth and I will try to go into greater detail under the heading of Literary Context and Role within the study of individual passages.

- I. Introduction (1:1-20)
  - A. The Revelation of Jesus Christ--Prologue (1:1-8)
  - B. Write on a Scroll What You See--Inaugural Vision and Commission (1:9-20)
- II. The Letters to the Churches (2:1-3:22)
  - A. To the Angel of the Church in Ephesus--Letter to the Church in Ephesus (2:1-7)
  - B. To the Angel of the Church in Smyrna--Letter to the Church in Smyrna (2:8-11)
  - C. To the Angel of the Church in Pergamum--Letter to the Church in Pergamum (2:12-17)
  - D. To the Angel of the Church in Thyatira--Letter to the Church in Thyatira (2:18-29)
  - E. To the Angel of the Church in Sardis--Letter to the Church in Sardis (3:1-6)

- F. To the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia--Letter to the Church in Philadelphia (3:7-13)
- G. To the Angel of the Church in Laodicea--Letter to the Church in Laodicea (3:14-22)
- III. Visions of God on His Throne and the Worthy Lamb (4:1-5:14)
  - A. Behold, a Door Open in Heaven--Vision of God on His Throne (4:1-11)
  - B. Worthy Is the Lamb Who Was Slain--Vision of the Worthy Lamb (5:1-14)
- IV. Vision of the Seven Seal Judgments (6:1-8:5)
  - A. I Saw the Lamb Open the Seven Seals--Vision of the Seven Seal Judgments (6:1-17 and 8:1-5)
  - B. Behold, a Great Multitude--Visions of the 144,000 and the Great Multitude (7:1-17)
- V. Vision of the Seven Trumpet Judgments (8:6-11:19)
  - A. Then the Seven Angels Prepared to Sound--The Seven Trumpet Judgments (8:6-9:21 and 11:14-19)
  - B. So I Took the Little Scroll--The Little Scroll and Renewal of John's Call (10:1-11)
  - C. I Will Give Authority to My Two Witnesses--Measuring the Temple and Two End-time Witnesses (11:1-13)
- VI. Visions Warning of Danger, Assuring Victory, and Appealing for Faithfulness (12:1-14:20)
  - A. A Woman Clothed with the Sun--Vision of a Woman, Her Child, and the Dragon (12:1-16)
  - B. Here Is the Patient Endurance of the Saints--Vision of the Dragon and His Two Beasts (12:17-13:18)
  - C. The Lamb Stood on Mount Zion--Vision of Heavenly Messengers and Earthly Harvests (14:1-20)
- VII. Another Great and Marvelous Sign--Vision the Seven Last Plagues (15:1-16:21)
- VIII. Visions of Victory and Eternal Judgment and Blessedness (17:1-22:5)
  - A. I Saw a Woman Sitting on a Scarlet Beast--Vision of the Ruin of the Great Prostitute (17:1-18)
  - B. Fallen! Fallen Is Babylon the Great!--Voices from Heaven Announce the Doom and Mourning for Babylon (18:1-20)
  - C. Salvation Power and Glory Belong to Our God--Vision of the Overthrow of Babylon and the Victory Celebration (18:21-19:10)
  - D. With Righteousness He Judges and Makes War--Vision of the Rider on the White Horse and Victory over the Beast (19:11-21)
  - E. They Came to Life and Reigned with Christ--Vision of the Millennium and Ultimate Doom of Satan (20:1-10)
  - F. Then I Saw a Great White Throne--Vision of the Final Judgment and the New Heaven and Earth (20:11-21:8)
  - G. Behold, I Will Show You the Bride--Vision of the Holy City Jerusalem (21:9-22:5)
- IX. "Behold, I Am Coming Soon"--Conclusion (22:6-21)

### **Message or Messages**

The message of Revelation is far too sophisticated to be adequately dealt with here. Even though "God is going to win in the end" reflects a clear understanding of the basic message of



Revelation there is much more that is revealed. The interpretations of specific passages that follow each provide specific statements of the message. Nonetheless, the general message of Revelation with regard to God and Jesus, Satan and the world, and Christians and people can be summarized. Revelation affirms that God is the Sovereign Lord of human history, will ultimately be victorious over Satan and his allies in the world, and will judge, rewarding the faithful and condemning Satan and his allies, the ungodly world, and the unfaithful. Revelation affirms that Jesus is the mediator of God's victory and rule, the helper of faithful Christians as they struggle against Satan and the evil forces of the world, and the agent of God's wrath on Satan, the world, and the unfaithful. Satan is a real power standing in opposition to God, who seeks to discourage Christians by threats and entice Christians by temptations, but is doomed and will ultimately be condemned. The world is under the power of Satan and is used by him to threaten and entice Christians, but will ultimately be condemned along with Satan. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so that they can overcome during the time of trial and share in the bliss of God's blessed eternal kingdom.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### Prologue

#### Revelation 1:1-8

This passage contains some diverse elements. Nonetheless, I have chosen to combine them for the sake of convenience. This decision is justified in part because all of these diverse elements encourage trust in God and the message of the book. Thus the passage as defined is an appropriate prologue to the book.

#### Study of the Passage

##### Text and Translation

1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, everything he saw.

3 Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and those who keep what is written in it, because the time is near.

4 John, to the seven churches the ones in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from the one who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him [be] glory and power unto the ages of the ages! Amen!

7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even the ones who pierced him, and all the races of the earth will mourn because of him. Yes! Amen!

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

##### Situation and Purpose

The passage is rather general and does not provide specific insight into the situation. Nonetheless, the rest of Revelation reflects a time of great crisis in which Christians were encountering opposition from Satan and his allies in the world which seek to intimidate and entice them to doubt God and compromise their commitment to him so that they can avoid difficulty and enjoy the pleasures of the world. The Christians in the original context were under a great deal of pressure from the Roman authorities to profess Caesar as their sovereign Lord. They could not do so because of Jesus Christ was their sovereign Lord. This pressure could easily have undermined their faith and commitment to Christ. The purpose of this passage was to encourage these beleaguered Christians to heed God's message in Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to him.

##### Literary Context and Role

This passage is part of the introduction of Revelation. This introduction commends the book and its message to the readers. This passage stands at the beginning of the introduction of Revelation and serves to encourage the readers to read and take to heart the message that God has revealed based on the source of the revelation, the process of the revelation, the blessing that those who read it and take it to heart will receive, and anticipation of the coming of Jesus. The subsequent passage continues to encourage readers to read and take to heart the message of the book because it was revealed by Jesus Christ, the awe-inspiring judge of the Day of the Lord and the one who is eternally alive, won the victory over death, and has authority to liberate from death. This passage also introduces a number of themes that are developed within Revelation.

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be generally classified as a prologue and more specifically classified as a commendation of the book it introduces. The revelation is commended in a variety of ways. First, the revelation is commended by a description of the source and process of the revelation (1-2). This encourages readers to heed the revelation both by identifying the source of the revelation as God and providing assurance that it has been handed down reliably. Second, the revelation is commended with a blessing of those who read the book and take its message to heart (3). The blessing encourages readers to read and heed the Revelation by describing the benefits of reading and heeding. Third, the book is commended by the address and another blessing (4-5a). The address and blessing encourage the readers to heed the book by further identifying the source of the revelation and the blessing of grace and peace. Fourth, the book is commended by a doxology (5b-6). This doxology encourages the readers to heed the revelation and remain faithful based on who Jesus is and what he has done. Fifth, the revelation is commended by a prophetic declaration (7). This prophetic declaration encourages the readers to heed the revelation and remain faithful based on the assurances of Jesus' return and vindication. Sixth, the revelation is commended by a divine declaration (8). This divine declaration encourages the readers to heed the revelation and remain faithful based on God's eternal sovereignty. Though not stated, the passage implies the command, "Read and heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust in Jesus Christ and remain faithful to him."

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage encourages the readers to heed the revelation and remain faithful by describing the source and process of revelation (1-2), pronouncing a blessing on those who read it and heed its message (3), identifying the sender and recipients and pronouncing the blessing of the eternal God, the seven spirits, and Jesus Christ (4-5a), praising Jesus for his love, calling, and eternal glory and power (5b-6), and declaring that Jesus is coming again and will be vindicated (7). The passage concludes with God himself declaring that he is eternal and almighty (8).

- I. The Source and Process of Revelation (1-2)
  - A. God's Revelation through Jesus Christ for his Servants
  - B. Made Known by Sending His Angel to His Servant John
  - C. John's Testimony to Everything He Saw--the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ
- II. The Blessing for Those Who Read and Heed the Prophecy (3)
  - A. Blessing for Those Who Read the Prophecy
  - B. Blessing for Those Who Hear It and Take It to Heart
  - C. Explanation that the Time Is Near

- III. Address and Blessing(4-5a)
  - A. Address (4a)
    - 1. Sender--John
    - 2. Recipients--the Seven Churches in the Province of Asia
  - B. Blessing (4b-5a)
    - 1. Blessing--Grace and peace to you
    - 2. Source
      - a. The eternal God
      - b. The seven spirits before God's throne
      - c. Jesus Christ
        - 1) The faithful witness
        - 2) The firstborn from the dead
        - 3) The ruler of the kings of the earth
- IV. Doxology (5b-6)
  - A. Identification of the One Who Is Worthy of Praise
    - 1. The one who loves and liberates them
    - 2. The one who has made them a kingdom and priests
  - B. Expression of Praise
- V. Prophetic Declaration (7)
  - A. Jesus' Coming
  - B. Jesus' Vindication
  - C. Concluding Affirmation
- VI. Divine Declaration (8)
  - A. The Eternal God
    - 1. The Alpha and Omega
    - 2. The beginning and the end
    - 3. The one who is, was, and is to come
  - B. The Almighty

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should heed the message of Revelation because it is God's revelation through Jesus Christ for his servants, God made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, and John testified to everything he saw--the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Christians should heed the message of Revelation because those who read and heed it will be blessed and the time is near. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to Jesus Christ because they have grace and peace from the eternal God, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to Jesus Christ because he loves them and has freed them from sin, he has made them a kingdom and priests to serve God, and he is worthy of eternal glory and power. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to Jesus Christ because he is coming with the clouds, he will be seen by all, and he will be vindicated before the peoples of the earth, including those who killed him. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to God because he is the eternal and Almighty God.

## **Analysis of the Details**

### **The Source and Process of Revelation**

John encourages Christians to read and heed the revelation by describing the source and process of transmission in verses 1-2. John commends the content of the revelation by describing it as God's revelation through Jesus Christ for his servants in the first part of verse 1, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place." The urgency of taking the content of the revelation seriously is stressed not only by identifying it as the revelation of God through Jesus Christ, but also because of its imminent fulfillment. The imminence of fulfillment may be seen as a problem since nearly 2000 years have passed; however, as Osborne says, "The language of imminence intends to draw the reader into a sense of expectation and responsibility, a sense meant to characterize every age of the church" (Osborne, 55). John also affirms that what is revealed "must soon take place" to indicate that God is in control of whatever happens. As Fanning says, "Certain events 'must happen' because they are set out by God in his sovereign plan for this world and its inhabitants" (Fanning, 75). Mounce explains, "History is not a haphazard sequence of unrelated events but a divinely decreed ordering of that which must take place" (Mounce, 41). John commends the content of the book by describing it as having been made known by God sending his angel to his servant in the second part of verse 1, "He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John." There is an unbroken chain of evidence that begins with God, was given by him to Jesus Christ, who sent his angel to his servant John. John commends the revelation by describing it as the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ in verse 2, "who testified to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, everything he saw." John stresses that even though he has recorded what he saw and heard, ultimately it is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. As Osborne observes, the frequent appearance of "the word of God and testimony of Jesus" are "a semitechnical formula for gospel truth and faithful Christian witness to it" (Osborne, 56). In addition, John commends the content for its completeness--he "testifies to everything he saw." Therefore, Christians should heed the message of Revelation because it is God's revelation through Jesus Christ for his servants; God made it known by sending his angel to his servant John; and John testified to everything he saw--the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

### **The Blessing of Those Who Read And Heed the Prophecy**

John encourages Christians to read and heed the message by pronouncing a blessing on those who do so in verse 3, "Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and those who keep what is written in it, because the time is near." The revelation is here identified as prophecy. Biblical prophecy does not just reveal the future but seeks to lead those who hear it to respond appropriately. Three distinct responses to the prophecy are commended. First, Christians are encouraged to read the words of the prophecy. Revelation was written to be read aloud in the churches and those who read it are blessed. Second, Christians are encouraged to hear the words of the prophecy. Those who hear the prophecy are blessed. However, reading and listening to the prophecy are not enough. Third, readers are encouraged to keep what is written, probably in the sense that they must act on what is revealed. The words of the prophecy will only benefit them if they act on what is revealed. The urgency of acting on the revelation is reinforced again by stressing the imminent fulfillment of the revelation, "because the time is near." Though the time of the end did not prove to be imminent for John and his

contemporaries, Christians of every age are compelled to regard their time as the time of the end and live accordingly. As Beasley-Murray observes, "In reality the human measures of time demand that the temporal relationship of John's day to the last day be corrected. Nevertheless John's readers in all times are under the obligation of letting the light of the last day fall on theirs, and of relating the issues of their day to the kingdom of God" (Beasley-Murray, 53). Fanning explains, "It is better to understand that these expressions reflect a 'soon' occurrence not in the sense of an exact chronology but in a prophetic time frame, describing what is certain to occur and could occur at any time without any delay. The timing, however, is subject to God's calendar, whose timetable is different from human calculation" (Fanning, 75). Therefore, Christians should read and heed Revelation because those who read and heed it will be blessed and the time is near.

### **Address and Blessing**

The entire book is introduced like a letter with an address and blessing in verse 4 and the first part of verse 5. John addresses the letter in the first part of verse 4, "John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia." Though the letter is addressed to the seven churches in the province of Asia, the use of the number seven probably indicates that these churches are representative of all Christian churches. John pronounces a blessing on those addressed on behalf of God, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ in the remainder of verse 4 and in verse 5, "Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." The blessing is "Grace and peace." These are the characteristic blessings of the Christians life. Christians have received grace in that Jesus Christ died so that they could be forgiven and experience life with God. Christians also have received peace in that Christ has won the victory over death and they have no reason for anxiety no matter what trials they encounter. These blessings of grace and peace come from God, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ. God is not named directly but referred to as "the one who is, and who was, and who is to come." As Beasley-Murray observes, "The description of God . . . is an adaptation of the name of God made known to Moses at the bush, Exodus 3:14" (Beasley-Murray, 54). This designation emphasizes that God is eternal and much more. As Mounce says, "An uncertain future calls for One who by virtue of his eternal existence exercises sovereign control over the course of history" (Mounce, 46). The Spirit is referred to as "the seven spirits before his throne." This odd designation must refer to the Holy Spirit because of its placement between God and Jesus Christ in the blessing and is another use of the number seven, this time to refer to the Spirit in all its fullness. As Beasley-Murray explains, John has "interpreted the concept of seven spirits of God in accord with his use of seven as the sacred number of completeness. The seven spirits of God represent the Holy Spirit in its fullness of life and blessing" (Beasley-Murray, 56). Jesus Christ is referred to directly, but he is further designated as "the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." The first of these designations, "the faithful witness," refers to his faithful witness during his life. The word translated "witness" is *martyrs*, from which the English word martyr is derived. Jesus was faithful in his witness to the gospel even though it resulted in his death and established a pattern of faithful witness for Christians. Mounce says, "To the Asian Christians about to enter into a time of persecution, Jesus is presented as the faithful witness. He is the model of how to stand firm and never compromise the truth of God" (Mounce, 48). The second of these designations, "the firstborn from the dead," refers to his resurrection from the dead. Jesus was raised from the dead and through his sacrifice those who are committed to him also have hope of the resurrection. They have hope of life after death so

they can remain faithful witnesses even if it means death. As Fee says, "Christ is not just God's 'firstborn' in terms of position, but is especially 'the firstborn from the dead,' who thus through his own resurrection is the guarantor of the final resurrection of all who belong to him" (Fee, 8). The third of these designations, "the ruler of the kings of the earth," refers to his sovereignty over earthly rulers. Though Christians were being persecuted by the kings of the earth, Jesus is the King of kings. The Christian experience of grace and peace through God, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ, provides a firm basis for Christians to heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust God and remain faithful to him during tribulation. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to God because they have grace and peace from the eternal God, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

### **Doxology**

John breaks out in a doxology, praising Jesus Christ in the remainder of verse 5 and in verse 6. John begins by identifying the one who is worthy of praise in the remainder of verse 5 and the first part of verse 6, "To the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God and Father." Though Jesus Christ is not specifically named, it is clear what is said that this is the one whom John is praising. Jesus Christ demonstrated the extent of his love when he liberated believers from sin by his death on the cross. The present participle is employed ("To the one who loves us") to emphasize Christ's continual love for believers. Jesus fulfilled God's promises for a messianic kingdom ("has made us to be a kingdom") and given believers a privileged relationship with God ("priests to his God and Father"). As Wall says, "The essential and concrete result of Jesus' messianic love is the creation of a new people who live under God's reign as a community of servants, and who bear witness to God's rule by offering themselves to the Lord in worship" (Wall 59). Osborne adds, "In spite of the persecutions and suffering that the saints are enduring, John wants them to know that they already inhabit a high position with Christ before God" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 1869-1870*). John then expresses his praise to Jesus Christ for what he has done in the remainder of verse 6, "to him [be] glory and power unto the ages of the ages! Amen!" John's use of "Amen!" emphatically reinforces that Jesus Christ is worthy of praise. This doxology provides a firm basis for Christians to heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust in Jesus Christ and remain faithful to him during tribulation. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to Jesus Christ because he loves them and has freed them from sin, he has made them a kingdom and priests to serve God, and he is worthy of eternal glory and power.

### **Prophetic Declaration**

John makes a prophetic declaration that Jesus Christ is coming and will be vindicated in verse 7. John emphatically declares that Jesus Christ is coming, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds." As Osborne observes, "Behold" is "a term used twenty-six times in the book to highlight critical prophetic oracles. As elsewhere it means "pay attention" or "listen carefully" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 1932-1933*). John then declares that Jesus Christ will be vindicated, "and every eye will see him, even the ones who pierced him, and all the races of the earth will mourn because of him." Though he says that "every eye will see him," he emphasizes that "even the ones who pierced him" will see him. They will come to regret their rejection of him along with all the races of the earth who "will mourn because of him." John concludes by doubly reaffirming what he has said, "Yes! Amen!" This prophetic promise provides a firm basis for

Christians to heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to Jesus Christ because he is coming with the clouds, he will be seen by all, and he will be vindicated before the peoples of the earth, including those who killed him.

### **Divine Declaration**

John relates a divine declaration that identifies God as the ultimate source of the revelation of the book in verse 8, "'**I am** the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'" This divine declaration emphasizes that God is eternal. The eternal nature of God is illustrated through the Greek alphabet. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. In other words, God is all in all, everything from A to Z. As Fee puts it, "God announces himself as the One who embraces all that language could possibly express, the Alpha and Omega (in English, "the A to Z"), and thus everything in between" (Fee, 11). This declaration is made emphatic by the use of the personal pronoun as an emphatic subject (literally "I, I am" and indicated in translation with bold print). The eternal nature of God is also emphasized in the identification of the speaker as "him who is, and who was, and who is to come." The phrase may be derived from the divine name as revealed to Moses. John uses this and similar descriptive phrases to emphasize God's eternal control of human history and destiny. The declaration also identifies God as "the Almighty." As Osborne observes, "It occurs nine times in Revelation (1: 8; 4: 8; 11: 17; 15: 3; 16: 7, 14; 19: 6, 15; 21: 22; elsewhere only in 2 Cor. 6: 18 in an OT quotation), always with the connotation of God's absolute power and control" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 1978-1980). This divine declaration provides a firm basis for Christians to heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to God. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to God because he is the eternal and Almighty God.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today continue to experience opposition from Satan and his worldly allies that may cause them to doubt God and compromise their commitment to him. Indeed, Christians in some locations are even suffering martyrdom because of their commitment. These similarities between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of the passage to the modern situation. There is very little of a contextualized nature in this passage to require that its message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should heed the message of Revelation because it is God's revelation through Jesus Christ for his servants, God made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, and John testified to everything he saw--the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Christians should heed the message of Revelation because those who read and heed it will be blessed and the time is near. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to God because they have grace and peace from the eternal God, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to Jesus Christ because he has freed them from sin, he has made them a kingdom and priests to serve God, and he is worthy of eternal glory and power. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to Jesus Christ because he is coming with the clouds, he will be seen by all, and he will be vindicated before the



peoples of the earth, including those who killed him. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to God because he is the eternal and Almighty God.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to read and heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful to God.

**Proposition:** Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because it is God's revelation through Jesus Christ, those who read and heed it will be blessed, they have grace and peace from God, Jesus has freed them from sin, Jesus has made us a kingdom and priests, Jesus is coming soon with the clouds, and God is eternal and the Almighty.

#### **Introduction**

Christians today experience opposition from Satan and his worldly allies that may cause them to doubt God and compromise their commitment to him. *Illustration of Christians Being Opposed by Satan and His Allies*. Today we begin our series on the Book of Revelation. Revelation provides encouragement for us as we experience opposition from Satan and his worldly allies. *Read Revelation 1:1-9*.

**I. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because it is God's revelation through Jesus Christ.**

**II. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because those who read and heed it will be blessed.**

**III. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because they have grace and peace from God.**

**IV. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because Jesus has freed them from sin**

**V. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because Jesus has made them a kingdom and priests.**

**VI. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because Jesus is coming soon with the clouds.**

**VII. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because God is eternal and the Almighty.**

#### **Conclusion**

We continue to experience opposition from Satan and his worldly allies that may cause us to doubt God and compromise our commitment to him. As we begin our series on Revelation we are challenged to heed its message and continue to trust God and remain faithful. We should heed the message of Revelation because it is God's revelation through Jesus Christ for his servants. We should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because those who read and heed it will be blessed. We should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because we have grace and peace from God. We should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because Jesus

has freed us from sin. We should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because Jesus has made us a kingdom and priests. We should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because Jesus is coming with the clouds. We should heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust and remain faithful because God is eternal and the Almighty.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **WRITE ON A SCROLL WHAT YOU SEE Inaugural Vision and Commission Revelation 1:9-20**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

1:9I, John, your brother and partner in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance in Jesus, came to be on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10I came to be in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11saying, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: To Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

12I turned around to see the voice that was speaking with me and having turned around I saw seven golden lampstands; 13and in the middle of the lampstands was one like a son of man, dressed in a long robe and girded with a golden sash around his chest. 14His head and hair [were] white like wool, white like snow, and his eyes [were] like a blazing fire. 15His feet [were] like burnished bronze as if glowing in a furnace and his voice [was] like the voice of many waters, 16having in his right hand seven stars, and coming out of his mouth a sharp double-edged sword, and the appearance of him [was] like the sun shining with all its might.

17When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead and he placed his right hand on me saying: "Stop being afraid. **I am** the First and the Last 18and the Living One. I came to be dead and behold I am alive unto the ages of the ages and I have the keys of Death and Hades. 19Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what is about to happen after these things. 20The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands [is this]: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage is rather general and does not provide specific insight into the situation. Nonetheless, the rest of Revelation anticipates a time of great crisis in which Christians would encounter opposition from Satan and his allies in the world which would seek to intimidate and entice them in order to undermine their faith and commitment to remain faithful. In the original context, Christians were under a great deal of pressure from the Roman authorities to renounce their faith in order to avoid difficulty and compromise with the world in order to enjoy its pleasures. The purpose of this passage was to encourage these beleaguered Christians to heed God's message through Revelation and continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

##### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is part of the introduction of the Book of Revelation. This introduction commends the book and its message to the readers. This passage continues to encourage the readers to read and take to heart the message of the book, primarily because it was revealed by Jesus Christ, the awe-inspiring judge of the Day of the Lord and the one who is eternally alive, won the victory over death, and has authority to liberate from death. This passage is also closely related to the subsequent division. In the letters to the churches in that division the visionary

images introduced in this passage are used to encourage and warn the readers. Indeed, Osborne includes 1:9-20 in a division of Revelation he entitles "Churches Addressed (1:9-3:22)" (Osborne, Kindle Location 2103). This passage also introduces other images that are developed throughout Revelation.

### **Form and Function**

This passage can be classified as a commissioning vision report. John begins by establishing his kinship and partnership with the churches. This kinship and partnership serves as the bases for the readers to accept what he reveals to them. John then describes his commission to write. Through the description of his commission the readers are encouraged to read and heed Revelation because it comes from heaven. John then describes his vision of the exalted Christ. Through this vision of the exalted Christ, the readers are encouraged to read and heed the revelation because it comes from the majestic and holy son of man. John concludes by describing his reaction to this revelation and the encouragement of the exalted Christ. Through the encouragement of the exalted Christ the readers are also encouraged to be courageous by the exalted Christ who has won the victory over death. Though not stated, the passage implies the command, "Read and heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust in Jesus Christ and remain faithful to him."

### **Strategy and Structure**

John begins by establishing his kinship and partnership with churches in their suffering for the word of God and testimony of Jesus in verses 9. Next, John describes his commission to write in verses 10-11. Next, John describes his visions of the seven golden Lampstands and one like a son of man in verses 12-16. Finally, John describes his reaction to the vision and the encouragement given to him by one like a son of man in verses 17-20.

- I. John's Kinship and Partnership with the Churches (9)
  - A. John's Kinship with the Churches
  - B. John's Partnership with the Churches
  - C. John's Exile for the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus
- II. The Voice Like a Trumpet Commissioning John to Write (10-11)
  - A. John's Spiritual State on the Lord's Day (10a)
  - B. John's Hearing of a Voice Like a Trumpet (10b)
  - C. John's Commission to Write to the Seven Churches (11)
- III. John's Vision of the Seven Golden Lampstands and One Like a Son of Man (12-16)
  - A. John's Vision of The Seven Golden Lampstands (12)
  - B. John's Vision of One Like a Son of Man (13-16)
    1. His long robe
    2. His golden sash
    3. His white head and hair
    4. His blazing eyes
    5. His glowing bronze feet
    6. His voice like the sound of rushing waters.
    7. The seven stars in his right hand
    8. The sword that came out of his mouth
    9. His face shining like the sun

- IV. John's Reaction and the Encouragement of One Like a Son of Man (17-20)
- A. John Falls at His Feet as Though Dead (17a)
  - B. One Like a Son of Man Places His Hand on John and Commands Him Not to Be Afraid (17b)
  - C. One Like a Son of Man Identifies Himself as (17c-18)
    - 1. The First and the Last and the Living One
    - 2. The one who was dead and is now alive forever and ever
    - 3. The one who holds the keys of Death and Hades
  - D. One Like a Son of Man Commands John to Write (19)
  - E. One Like a Son of Man Explains the Seven Stars and the Seven Lampstands (20)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because it was revealed through John, who is a Christian brother and partner in suffering, the kingdom, and patient endurance for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by a voice like a trumpet while he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by Jesus, the majestic and holy son of man who ministers among the churches through his angels and judges with penetrating power. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by Jesus, the First and the Last and the Living One, who was dead and is now alive forever and ever, and he holds the keys of Death and Hades.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **John's Kinship and Partnership With the Churches**

John establishes his kinship and partnership with the churches in verse 9. First, John establishes his kinship with the churches, "I, John, your brother." The designation of "brother" denotes a close relationship like that of brothers. John was a brother to the Christians of Asia Minor based on their close relationship with one another in Jesus Christ. Second, John establishes his partnership with the churches, "and partner in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance in Jesus." The grouping of suffering, kingdom, and patient endurance is significant--suffering is inseparable from kingdom and calls for patient endurance. As Mounce explains, "The order of the three is instructive. Since the present is a time of suffering and the kingdom a period of future blessedness, believers must during the interim period exercise that kind of patient endurance which was exemplified by Jesus" (Mounce, 54). John identifies himself as a partner in tribulation. As Summers observes, "The word used here for tribulation is a word which pictures the grinding of wheat in the mill or the crushing of grapes in the wine press. It is outside pressure which appears at first sight to crush and ruin, but it proves to make the grain (as flour) and grapes (as wine) to be of greater service" (Summers, 103). Osborne observes that tribulation is regarded as a privilege in the New Testament, "In a very real sense, affliction in the name of Christ was perceived as sharing in his life and glory (1 Pet. 1:11, in which 'the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow' become a model for Christian endurance in the rest of the epistle" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 2192-2194). In order to overcome tribulation and share in the kingdom it is essential that Christians endure. As Osborne says, endurance "means both to wait upon God and to stand up against the temptations and evil

of the world" (Osborne, Kindle Location 2174-2175). Fanning adds, "Christians must exercise such active, faithful endurance. And the only way to do it is reflected in the phrase that is added, 'in Jesus'" (Fanning, 94). Third, John further establishes his partnership by describing his exile for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, "came to be on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Though he could be saying he was on the island of Patmos to proclaim the gospel, it is more probable he is saying that he has been exiled because of his proclamation of the gospel. He truly was experiencing hardship like them because of his commitment to Christ. As John establishes his kinship and partnership with afflicted Christians he is encouraging them to heed the message of Revelation. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because it was revealed through John, who is a Christian brother and partner in suffering, the kingdom, and patient endurance for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

### **The Voice Like a Trumpet Commissioning John to Write**

John relates how he heard a voice like a trumpet commissioning him to write in verses 10-11. First, John describes his spiritual state on the Lord's Day when he received his commission to write in the first half of verse 10, "I came to be in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." The Lord's Day is probably a reference to Sunday, the day on which Jesus was resurrected and which became the day in which the church gathered for worship. He had his vision on the day set aside for the commemoration of Jesus' resurrection and set aside for seeking God. He describes himself as being in the Spirit, probably meaning that he was under the control of the Holy Spirit. Second John relates how he heard a voice like a trumpet in the second half of verse 10, "and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet." The trumpet-like voice is probably the voice of Jesus Christ since when he turns to see the source of the voice, the person he sees standing among the lampstands is the majestic and holy son of man who is ultimately revealed to be Jesus. Trumpets were used to warn of danger and to proclaim victory. Either understanding could be the background intended here since the revelation both warns of danger and proclaims victory. Third, John relates his commission to write to the seven churches in verse 11, "saying, 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: To Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.'" As John relates hearing the voice like a trumpet commissioning him to write, Christians would be encouraged to heed the message of Revelation. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by exalted Christ with a voice like a trumpet while he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.

### **John's Vision of Seven Golden Lampstands And One Like a Son of Man**

John describes his vision of seven golden lampstands and one like a son of man in verses 12-16. John describes his vision of the seven golden lampstands in verse 12, "I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me and having turned around I saw seven golden lampstands." Later the lampstands are revealed to be the churches (v. 20). Perhaps the imagery of the churches as lampstands relates to their function of bringing the light of Jesus to the world. John describes his vision of one like a son of man in verses 13-16. This imagery seems to reflect the vision in Daniel 7. The son of man in Daniel was given dominion, glory, and kingdom from God. The image of one like a son of man among the lampstands could provide comfort or warning. First, John describes his robe, "and in the middle of the lampstands was one like a son

of man, dressed in a long robe." Though the robe could identify him as a priest, it is more likely that the long robe simply identifies him as a prominent person. Second, John describes his sash, "and girded with a golden sash around his chest." The golden sash also serves to emphasize his status since workmen normally wore belts around their waists, whereas prestigious persons wore sashes around their chests. His exalted status is further emphasized by the sash's golden color. As Osborne concludes, "In short, the first description depicts Christ as an exalted, dignified figure" (Osborne, Kindle Location 2377). Third, John describes his head and hair, "His head and hair were white like wool, white like snow." This depiction of the son of man seems to be based on the description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 and thereby depicts him as sharing in divine glory. Underlying this depiction is probably the understanding that old age and white hair are indications of wisdom that is worthy of respect. John then describes his eyes, "and his eyes [were] like a blazing fire." His blazing eyes probably also serve to stress his holiness along with his penetrating judgment. Fifth, John describes his feet, "His feet were like burnished bronze as if glowing in a furnace." The glowing bronze feet probably symbolize his majesty and strength. Bronze was the strongest metal used at that time. Osborne writes, "Since feet in the ancient world portrayed the direction of one's life, the image here depicts Christ's life in both its strength or stability and its absolute purity" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 2404-2405). Sixth, John describes his voice, "and his voice [was] like the voice of many waters." The description of his voice as being like many waters portrays his awesome power and majesty (See Ezekiel 43:2). Seventh, John describes the contents of his right hand, "having in his right hand seven stars." The right hand is the hand of power and authority and the seven stars are later interpreted as being the angels of the churches. Thus he is described as having authority over the angels, who are his ministers. Eighth, John describes the sword coming out of his mouth, "and coming out of his mouth a sharp double-edged sword." The imagery of the double-edged sword comes from Daniel 10 and probably portrays Jesus as the all-discerning judge. This imagery is later used as a warning to the church in Pergamum (2:12, 16). Finally, John describes his face, "and his appearance was like the sun shining with all its might." This underscores the divine and majestic glory of Jesus. As John relates his vision of the seven lampstands and one like a son of man, Christians would be encouraged to heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by Jesus, the majestic, powerful, and holy son of man who ministers among the churches through his angels and judges with penetrating power.

### **John's Reaction and the Encouragement Of One Like a Son of Man**

John describes his reaction to the vision and the encouragement of one like a son of man in verses 17-20. John describes his reaction to the vision in the first part of verse 17, "When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead." This is a common reaction of those who are confronted by the divine presence in the Old Testament. As Osborne says, "John's reaction heightens the sense of apocalyptic power, for God/Christ is indeed present in all his glory" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 2463-2464). John describes how the one like a son of man encouraged him in the second half of verse 17, "and he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Stop being afraid.'" The right hand is again the hand of power and by placing his hand upon John, Jesus probably strengthens him. As Mounce says, "The laying on of the right hand communicated power and blessing" (Mounce, 61).

John relates that the one like a son of man reveals who he is in the last part of verse 17 and in verse 18, "I am the First and the Last and the Living One. I came to be dead and behold I am alive unto the ages of the ages and I have the keys of Death and Hades." The self-identification "I am the First and Last" echoes Isaiah 44:6 where God is speaking. However, here it is augmented by "and the Living One. I came to be dead and behold I am alive unto the ages of ages!" and must certainly be spoken by Jesus. Thus Jesus is closely identified with God, especially with regard to his eternal existence. Jesus is the Living One because he has won the victory over death through his resurrection and lives forever. The periphrastic construction of the present tense verb and participle emphasizes his continued existence ("I am alive"). This emphasis is extended with the addition of "unto the ages of the ages!" Not only has he won the victory over death, but he has secured that victory for the faithful. His possession of the keys of Death and Hades indicates that he has the authority to free people from Death and Hell. As Beasley-Murray says, "To the risen Lord has been given power over death as the last enemy of man and the realm of death into which all men pass" (Beasley-Murray, 68). Summers summarizes the significance of the Jesus' victory over death by putting words into the mouth of the exalted Christ: "Stop fearing. I was dead. I am alive forever. More than that, I hold in my hand the keys to death and the grave. You should not fear to go to any place to which I hold the key. You may be persecuted to death but I am still your king" (Summers, 105).

John relates how the one like a son of man commands him to write in verse 19, "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." There are many proposals for "what you have seen" and "what will take place later" but the simple way of understanding is that "what you have seen" refers to the vision that John has already received and "what will take place later" refers to the visions that will be revealed to him subsequently. Finally, John relates how the one like a son of man clarifies the meaning of the seven stars and seven candlesticks in verse 20, "The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." Throughout Revelation the angels are God's servants both to minister to the faithful and to bring judgment on the wicked. Thus his could contain an element of warning as well as assurance. That the exalted Christ stands among the seven lampstands (13) probably indicates that he is close by. As Fanning says, "He is not distant even in his glorified present condition; he knows their triumphs and their failures as they try to represent God in the world, because he is vitally connected to them, right in their midst (see also 2: 1 "he walks among them")" (Fanning, 107). Osborne adds, "In the midst of their precarious situation in an evil world that both despises and persecutes them, Christ is with them, protecting and vindicating them. At the same time he holds them accountable to persevere and remain faithful throughout their ordeal, as we will learn in each of the letters" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 2597-2599*). As John describes his reaction to the vision and his ministry of the one like a son of man to him, Christians would be encouraged to heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by Jesus, the First and the Last and the Living One, who was dead and is now alive forever and ever, and holds the keys of Death and Hades.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today continue to experience opposition from Satan and his worldly allies which seek to intimidate and entice them to compromise their commitment to him. As a result Christians were in danger of forsaking their commitment to God in order to avoid difficulty and



enjoy the pleasures of the world. There is very little of a contextualized nature in the passage to require that its message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore the statements of the applied message below are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because it was revealed through John, who is a Christian brother and partner in suffering, the kingdom, and patient endurance for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by Jesus with a voice like a trumpet while he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by Jesus, the majestic and holy son of man who ministers among the churches through his angels and judges with penetrating power. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by Jesus, the First and the Last and the Living One, who was dead and is now alive forever and ever, and holds the keys of Death and Hades.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** WRITE ON A SCROLL WHAT YOU SEE

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful.

**Proposition:** Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because it was revealed through John their brother and partner in suffering, the kingdom, and patient endurance by Jesus, the majestic and holy son of man who ministers among the churches through his angels and judges with penetrating power and is the First and the Last and the Living One, who was dead and now is alive forever and ever, and who holds the keys of Death and Hades.

#### **Introduction**

Christians experience opposition from Satan and his worldly allies which seek to intimidate and entice them to compromise their commitment to God. *Illustration of Christians Being Intimidated and Enticed by Satan's Allies.* The Book of Revelation was written for times like these. In Revelation 1:9-20 John relates his vision and call to write Revelation. As he does so he encourages us to heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful. *Read Revelation 1:9-20.*

**I. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because it was revealed through John, who was a Christian brother and partner in suffering, the kingdom, and patient endurance for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.**

**II. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by Jesus, the majestic and holy son of man who ministers among the churches through his angels and judges with penetrating power.**

**III. Christians should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by Jesus, the First and the Last and the Living One, who was dead and is now alive forever and ever, and who holds the keys of Death and Hades.**

#### **Conclusion**

We often experience opposition from Satan and his worldly allies which seek to intimidate and entice us to compromise our commitment to God. The Book of Revelation was written for

times like these. In Revelation 1:9-20 John relates his vision and commission to write Revelation. As he does so he encourages us to heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful. We should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because it was revealed through John, who was a Christian brother and partner in suffering, the kingdom, and patient endurance for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. We should heed the message of Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned by Jesus, the majestic and holy son of man who ministers among the churches through his angels and judges with penetrating power. We should heed Revelation and remain faithful because John was commissioned to write by Jesus, the First and the Last and the Living One, who was dead and is now alive forever and ever, and who holds the keys of Death and Hades.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS**

#### **Letter to the Church in Ephesus**

#### **Revelation 2:1-7**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

2:1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These [things] says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

2 I know your deeds and your hard work and your steadfast endurance, that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles and are not and found them false, 3 and that you have steadfastly endured and tolerated [many things] because of my name and have not grown weary.

4 But I hold against you that you have forsaken your first love. 5 Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, repent, and do the first works. But if not I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

6 But you have this: You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will give to him to eat from the tree of life the one which is in the paradise of God.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

This passage reflects a situation in which the Christians in Ephesus had worked hard, persevered, resisted evil, and rejected false apostles and teachers (the Nicolaitans). Nonetheless, their fervent devotion to God had waned. The purpose of the passage was to exhort and encourage these Christians to repent and renew their ardent devotion to God. In addition, the passage served to encourage these Christians to continue to work hard, persevere, resist evil, reject false apostles and teachers, and overcome the many challenges they faced.

##### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is the first letter in the series of letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor located in chapters 2-3. The messages of these letters are reinforced by the preceding and following divisions that introduce the book and depict the trial of the last days, ultimate victory of God, and establishment of his eternal kingdom. This passage is closely linked to the preceding passage. Verse 1 contains an allusion to the one who holds the stars and walks among the lampstands who is described in that passage. These letters reinforce and supplement one another through their general call to faithfulness and specific exhortations with regard to various problems. Indeed, all of the letters were intended to be read in every church since each of the letters ends with a call for all to hear "what the Spirit says to the churches." This letter provides specific exhortation with regard to waning devotion to God.

##### **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a letter or epistle. More specifically, this passage contains an address, commendations, warnings, and exhortations. The address not only identifies the

recipients, but also the ultimate source of the message. This identification of the source as the one who holds the stars and walks among the lampstands serves to emphasize the need for the readers to heed the message of the letter. Though not specifically stated, the identification of the source implies the command, "Read and heed this letter." The commendations identify commendable conduct and serve to encourage the readers to continue to behave in the way commended. Though not specifically stated, the commendations imply the commands, "Continue to work hard and persevere, avoid wickedness, reject false teaching, and overcome." Exhortations normally indicate the appropriate response with commands and prohibitions. These commands and prohibitions are normally supplemented and reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify issues and provide motivation for obedience. In this passage, the specific response of the exhortations is indicated with commands, "Remember," "repent," "do the things you did at first," and "let him hear." These commands are reinforced with warnings of the consequences of disobedience and assurances of the benefits of obedience.

### **Strategy and Structure**

This letter follows generally the characteristic pattern of most of the seven letters: address, commendations, rebuke and exhortation, and concluding exhortation and commendation. The only variation from this pattern is that an additional commendation is included between the rebuke and exhortation and the concluding exhortation and commendation. The address introduces the letter and a visionary image of its source to encourage the readers to heed the message of the letter in verse 1. This visionary image also provides the basis for the warning and assurance that are developed later in the letter. The commendations in verses 2-3 encourage them to continue to work hard and persevere without growing weary. The rebuke and exhortation in verses 4-5 lead them to remember their first love and repent and return based on a warning of the removal of their lampstand. The concluding exhortation and commendation reinforce the need for the readers to heed the message of the letter by commanding them to hear and commending overcoming based on the assurance of eternal life in the paradise of God.

- I. Address (1)
  - A. Command to Write to the Angel of the Church in Ephesus
  - B. Source--He who holds the seven stars and walks among the seven lampstands
- II. Commendations (2-3)
  - A. Deeds, Hard Work, and Perseverance (2a)
  - B. Intolerance of Wicked Men and Discernment of False Apostles (2b)
  - C. Perseverance and Endurance without Growing Weary (3)
- III. Rebuke and Exhortation (4-5)
  - A. Rebuke for Forsaking Their First Love (4)
  - B. Commands (5a)
    1. Remember
    2. Repent
    3. Return
  - C. Warning--Return to Remove Lampstand (5b)
- IV. Commendation for Hating the Practices of the Nicolaitans (6)
- V. Concluding Exhortation and Commendation (7)
  - A. Command to Hear

## B. Assurance to Those Who Overcome

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should heed the words of this letter for it contains the words of Jesus Christ who ministers to them through his angels and is close by to encourage and support them, but also to rebuke and discipline them. Christians should continue to work hard, persevere, and be intolerant of wickedness and discerning of false teachers because these are pleasing to the exalted Christ. Christians should remember the fervor of their first love for Christ, repent of their waning devotion, and return to their ardent devotion or the exalted Christ will judge them and they will cease to exist as an authentic church. Christians should hate the practices of the Nicolaitans because the exalted Christ approves and also hates their practices. Christians should heed what is said in this letter and renew their love for Christ and continue to work hard and persevere and oppose false teaching because the exalted Christ is speaking through the Spirit and those who overcome will have eternal life in the paradise of God.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Address**

The letter is addressed to the angel of the church in Ephesus in verse 1. First, John is commanded to write to the angel of the church in Ephesus, "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write." This seems a bit odd and it has been suggested that "the angel of the church" be translated "the messenger of the church." Though this is possible, the word is ordinarily used for heavenly beings who serve God throughout Revelation. The city of Ephesus was a prominent city in the region and the church there also became influential. John lived there before his exile to Patmos and he was closely associated with that church. Second, the source of this commission to write and the words that follow is identified, "These [things] says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands." The person who holds the seven angels and walks among the seven churches is certainly the exalted Christ. The seven stars have already been identified as the seven angels of the churches and the seven golden lampstands have been identified as the seven churches. Here it says that he "holds" the seven angels in his right hand and "walks" among the seven lampstands. That he holds the angels probably indicates that he exercises authority over them and they are his servants throughout Revelation both to minister to the faithful and to enforce judgment on the wicked. That he walks among the churches probably indicates that he is actively involved with them and close by in a position to know what is happening among them and both encourage and support them or rebuke and discipline them. As Fanning says, "He knows intimately their hard circumstances (cf. vv. 2-3, 6) and their successes, as well as their failings, and is vigilant to guard their fidelity" (Fanning, 116). This assurance/warning provides strong motivation for heeding the words that follow. Therefore, Christians should heed the words of this letter for it contains the words of the exalted Christ who ministers to them through his angels and is close by to encourage and support them, but also to rebuke and discipline them.

#### **Commendations**

The exalted Christ commends the church in Ephesus in verses 2-3. First, he commends them for their deeds, hard work, and perseverance in the first part of verse 2, "I know your deeds and your hard work and your steadfast endurance." "I know" is the characteristic assertion of the exalted Christ in the letters to stress his awareness of all that is happening in the churches, both

good and evil. It may also indicate his care and concern for them. The word translated "deeds" is a general term that is clarified somewhat by "and your hard work and your steadfast endurance." They are working hard even though the challenges are great. They are steadfastly enduring in this work even though they are encountering difficulties. Second, he commends them for their rejection of wicked men and testing of false apostles in the second part of verse 2, "that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles and are not and found them false." These wicked men who say they are apostles are probably itinerant preachers who are claiming to have been commissioned and sent out by God; however, they have perverted the gospel. The Ephesian church is commended for examining or testing them and determining that they are false apostles. As Osborne says, the word tested "is the basic term in both OT and NT for a critical examination of a person's claims" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 2877-2878*). Though some scholars have concluded that they were preaching antinomianism, their wickedness may be that they are preaching a false gospel. As Fee says, what is at stake "is the truth of the gospel over against those who would twist it into a 'gospel' of their own making" (Fee, 26). Third, he commends them for their perseverance and endurance because of his name in verse 3, "that you have steadfastly endured and tolerated [many things] because of my name and have not grown weary." The verbs translated "have steadfastly endured and tolerated [many things]" are used synonymously in this context to stress their determination in the face of difficulty. In fact, he underscores their determination by stating that they "have not grown weary." Though the exalted Christ gives no specific reasons for continuing with their conduct, their conduct is encouraged by the commendation itself. They should do so because it pleases the exalted Christ. Therefore, Christians should continue to work hard and persevere, be intolerant of wicked men and reject false apostles, and persevere and endure without growing weary because these are pleasing to the exalted Christ.

### **Rebuke and Exhortation**

The exalted Christ rebukes and exhorts the church in Ephesus in verses 4-5. The exalted Christ rebukes them for forsaking their first love in verse 4, "But I hold against you that you have forsaken your first love." Their first love is probably their love for Christ. It is not so much that they don't love Christ anymore, but that the fervor of their initial devotion to Christ has waned. As a student of Ray Summers exclaimed, "The honeymoon is over!" (Summers, 111). Based on the commendations that have preceded it may be possible to conclude that they have devoted so much effort to working hard, defending orthodoxy, and persevering difficulties, that they have been distracted from authentic devotion to Christ. As Osborne observes, "They had lost the first flush of enthusiasm and excitement in their Christian life and had settled into a cold orthodoxy with more surface strength than depth" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 2918-2919*). Fanning adds, "The actions themselves, admirable and important as they may be, count for little apart from genuine love (1 Cor 13: 1-13; 1 Tim 1: 5; 1 John 4: 11, 19-21)" (Fanning, 118). The exalted Christ commands them to remember, repent, and return in the first part of verse 5, "Remember from where you have fallen, repent, and do the first works." The command to remember is a present imperative and probably stresses that they need to continually remember or never forget. The imagery of falling from a great height is used to contrast the glory and satisfaction of a life lived in devotion to Christ as opposed to a life that merely appears to be devoted to him and encourage the former. Remembering the height from which they have fallen provides the impetus for repenting and returning to a life characterized by complete devotion to Christ. As Mounce observes, "Repentance is an active step. It is a radical redirection of one's entire life" (Mounce, 70). Third, the exalted Christ warns them that he may return to remove their

lampstand in the second part of verse 5, "But if not I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." If they do not repent and return to a life of complete devotion to Christ they will not only lose their witness as the light of the world but cease to exist as a church because love is the essential characteristic of authentic Christianity. As Fanning says, "Consistent failure to exhibit this cardinal Christian virtue forfeits their right to bear the name of Christ" (Fanning, 119). As Mounce succinctly puts it, "Without love the congregation ceases to be a church" (Mounce, 70). Therefore, Christians should remember the fervor of their first love for Christ, repent of their waning love, and ardently love him as they did at first or the exalted Christ will come and judge them and they will cease to exist as an authentic church.

### **Commendation for Hating the Practices Of the Nicolaitans**

The exalted Christ commends the Ephesian church for hating the practices of the Nicolaitans in verse 6, "But you have this in your favor: You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." The identity of the Nicolaitans is uncertain; however, they are related to those who hold to the teaching of Balaam who advised Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the sons of Israel and specifically to eat meat sacrificed to idols and commit sexual immorality (2:14). Therefore, the Nicolaitans probably taught that it was acceptable to compromise with pagan culture and they are normally associated with the libertine branch of Gnosticism. They are encouraged to continue hating the practices of the Nicolaitans and presumably opposing their teaching by Christ's own approval of and hatred of the practices of the Nicolaitans. Therefore, Christians should hate the practices of the Nicolaitans because the exalted Christ approves and also hates their practices.

### **Concluding Exhortation and Commendation**

In conclusion, the exalted Christ exhorts them to hear and commends overcoming in verse 7. First, he commands them to hear, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This command is similar to Jesus' command to his early disciples (Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; and Luke 8:8) and emphasizes the need for Christians to hear what the exalted Christ is saying. They should take advantage of the fact that they have ears and use them to hear what he says. In fact, it seems to indicate that all they need is one ear. As Osborne says, "God has made these truths available; now it is up to us to heed them" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 3050-3051). They are further encouraged to hear what the exalted Christ is saying by the identification of the contents as a revelation of the Spirit. The verb translated "let him hear" has a broader meaning than simply to listen and in this context probably means that they should also heed what is said and act on it. Second, he commends overcoming, "To him who overcomes, I will give to him to eat from the tree of life the one which is in the paradise of God." The struggle of Christians is depicted as warfare throughout Revelation. Christians need to be victorious in this battle by overcoming the difficulties and challenges they face, in the case of this letter primarily their waning devotion to Christ. However, they also need to continue to work hard and persevere and be discerning of false teachers. Osborne helpfully adds, "To be an "overcomer" in the eschatological war demands a day-by-day walk with God and dependence on his strength" (Osborne, Kindle Location 3076). Those who overcome are assured that they will be able to return to paradise and eat from the tree of life. This assurance of God's eternal destiny for the faithful is developed more fully in chapters 21-22. Through sincere devotion to God they will be able to realize God's plan and purpose for them from the beginning--eternal life in fellowship

with him. Therefore, Christians should heed what is said in this letter and renew their love for Christ and continue to work hard and persevere and oppose false teaching because the exalted Christ is speaking through the Spirit and those who overcome will have eternal life in the paradise of God.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today often become burnt out from working hard, persevering opposition, and resisting evil and their devotion to God sometimes wanes. As a result they may appear to be an authentic church but they lack the devotion to God that is the essential ingredient. These similarities between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the contemporary context. There is very little of a contextualized nature in this passage to require that its message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. However, I have generalized the reference to the Nicolaitans to refer to those who promote compromise. Nonetheless, these statements of the applied message of this passage are nearly identical to the statements of the message in the original context. Christians should heed the words of this letter for it contains the words of Jesus Christ who ministers to them through his angels and is close by to encourage and support them, but also to rebuke and discipline them. Christians should continue to work hard, persevere, and be intolerant of wickedness and discerning of false teachers because these are pleasing to the exalted Christ. Christians should remember the fervor of their first love for Christ, repent of their waning devotion, and return to their ardent devotion or the exalted Christ will judge them and they will cease to exist as an authentic church. Christians should hate the practices of those who promote compromise because the exalted Christ approves and also hates their practices. Christians should heed what is said in this letter and renew their love for Christ and continue to work hard and persevere and oppose false teaching because the exalted Christ is speaking through the Spirit and those who overcome will have eternal life in the paradise of God.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** YOU HAVE FORSAKEN YOUR FIRST LOVE

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to heed the words of Christ, continue to work hard and guard the purity of the gospel, and repent and return to the fervor of their first love.

**Proposition:** Christians should heed the words of Christ because he is close by to encourage and support them, but also to rebuke and discipline them; continue to work hard and guard the purity of the gospel because these are pleasing to Christ; remember the fervor of their first love and repent and return to it because this is the height of the Christian life and essential for being an authentic church; and heed the words of Christ and overcome the challenges they face so that they will be assured of eternal life in the paradise of God.

### **Introduction**

Christians often become burnt out from working hard, persevering opposition, and resisting evil and their devotion to God sometimes wanes. *Illustration of a Christian with Waning Devotion.* The church at Ephesus had a similar problem with waning devotion and the exalted Christ addresses a letter to them in Revelation 2:1-7. Indeed, "These [things] says the one who



holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands." Let's let the exalted Christ speak to us as well. *Read Revelation 2:1-7.*

**I. Christians heed the words of Christ because he is close by to encourage and support them, but also to rebuke and discipline them.**

**II. Christians should continue to work hard and guard the purity of the gospel because these are pleasing to Christ.**

**III. Christians should remember the fervor of their first love and return to it because this is the height of the Christian life and essential to be an authentic church.**

**IV. Christians should heed the words of Christ through the Spirit and overcome the challenges they face so they will be assured of eternal life in the paradise of God.**

### **Conclusion**

We often become burnt out from working hard, persevering when we are opposed, and resisting evil and our love for Christ sometimes wanes. The church at Ephesus had a similar problem with waning devotion and the exalted Christ addresses a letter to them in Revelation 2:1-7. Indeed, the exalted Christ says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Let's let the exalted Christ speak to us as well. We should heed the words of Christ because he is close by to encourage and support us, but also to rebuke and discipline us. We should continue to work hard and guard the purity of the gospel because these are pleasing to Christ. We should remember the fervor of our first love and repent and return to it because it is the height of the Christian life and essential to be an authentic church. We should heed the words of Christ and overcome the challenges we face so that we will be assured of eternal life in the paradise of God.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA**

#### **Letter to the Church in Smyrna**

#### **Revelation 2:8-11**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

2:8 To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These [things] says the one who is the First and Last, who died and came to life again:

9 I know your affliction and your poverty, yet you are rich, and the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Don't be afraid of anything you are about to suffer. Behold, the Devil is about to throw some of you in prison to test you and you will have persecution for ten days. Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life.

11 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who overcomes will by no means be harmed by the second death.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage reflects a situation in which the Christians in Smyrna were afflicted and poor as well as slandered by the Jews. The passage also anticipates a coming trial in which they will be put in prison and even put to death. Underlying this general situation could be the growing imperial cult. The Jews, who had already compromised their commitment by special arrangement, were probably accusing Christians of sedition. As a result, the property of some Christians may have already been confiscated and imprisonment and martyrdom were growing threats. The purpose of the passage was to exhort and encourage Christians to be courageous and remain faithful even to the point of death.

##### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is the second letter in the series of letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor located in chapters 2-3. The messages of these letters are reinforced by the preceding and following divisions that introduce the book and depict the trial of the last days, the ultimate victory of God, and the establishment of his eternal kingdom. This passage is closely linked to 1:9-20 by the identification of the source of the letter as "the First and Last, who died and came to life again." These passages provide additional background for understanding this letter. These letters reinforce and supplement one another through their general call to faithfulness and specific exhortation with regard to various problems. Indeed, all of the letters were intended to be read in every church since each of the letters ends with a call for all to hear "what the Spirit says to the churches." This letter provides specific exhortation with regard to increasing persecution.

##### **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a letter or epistle. More specifically, this passage contains an address, exhortations, and a commendation. The address not only identifies the recipients, but also the ultimate source of the message. This identification of the source as "the First and Last, who died and came to life again," serves to emphasize the need for the readers to heed the

message of the letter and remain faithful in spite of persecution. Though not specifically stated, the identification of the source implies the command, "Read and heed the message of this letter." Exhortations normally indicate the appropriate response with commands and prohibitions. These commands and prohibitions are normally supplemented and reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify issues and provide motivation for obedience. In this passage, the specific response of the exhortations is indicated with a prohibition and commands, "Don't ever be afraid," "Remain faithful," and "let him hear." The prohibition and commands are reinforced with assurances of the exalted Christ's knowledge of their situation and the benefits of obedience. In addition, the commendation in verse 11 implies the command, "Overcome" based on the assurance of being exempt from the second death.

### **Strategy and Structure**

This letter follows generally the characteristic pattern of most of the seven letters: address, commendations, rebuke and exhortation, and concluding exhortation. The only variation from this pattern is that no specific commendations or rebukes are given. Instead, the address and concluding exhortation frame a warning and exhortation to courage and faithfulness. The address introduces the letter and a visionary image of its source to encourage the readers to heed the message of the letter in verse 8. This visionary image also provides the basis for the assurances that are developed later in the letter. The exalted Christ then assures the church that he knows about their affliction, poverty, and slander in verse 9. The exalted Christ then exhorts the church to be courageous and faithful in the coming of trial in verse 10, warning them of the severity of the coming trial but also giving them assurances for the trial as well as for the ultimate outcome. The concluding exhortation and commendation in verse 11 command the readers to hear what the Spirit says to the churches and commend overcoming by assuring those who do that they will receive the crown of life and not be harmed by the second death.

- I. Address (8)
  - A. Command to Write to the Angel of the Church in Smyrna
  - B. Source--The First and Last, Who Died and Came to Life Again
- II. The Exalted Christ's Knowledge of Their Affliction, Poverty, and Slander (9)
  - A. The Exalted Christ' Knowledge of Their Affliction and Poverty
  - B. The Exalted Christ' Knowledge of Their Slander by the Jews
- III. The Exalted Christ Exhorts Them to Be Courageous and Faithful (10)
  - A. The Exalted Christ Commands Them Not to Be Afraid
  - B. The Exalted Christ Warns Them of the Severity of the Test
  - C. The Exalted Christ Commands Them to Remain Faithful and Assures Them of the Crown of Life
- IV. Concluding Exhortation and Commendation (11)
  - A. Command to Hear and Assurance of Receiving the Crown of Life
  - B. Assurance that Those Who Overcome Will Not Be Harmed by the Second Death

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should read and heed the message of the letter because these are the words of the exalted Christ who is First and the Last and who died and came to life again. Christians should remain faithful in spite of difficulties because the exalted Christ knows about their affliction, poverty, and the slander of the Jews and they are rich through their life in Christ. Christians

should be courageous and remain faithful even though the Devil may put some of them in prison because the Devil is testing them, but the exalted Christ has put a limit on the test and he will give those who remain faithful the crown of life. Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome be courageous and faithful because these are the words of the exalted Christ through the Spirit and those who overcome will in no way be hurt by the second death.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Address**

The address of the letter is found in verse 8. First, John is commanded to write to the angel of the church in Smyrna, "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write." Smyrna was a prosperous city on the trade routes with long established ties with Rome and the imperial religion. There were a large number of Jews in the city who were hostile to Christianity. Second, Jesus is identified as the source of the words in the letter, "These [things] says the one who is the First and Last, who died and came to life again." That he is the First and Last means that he was there in the beginning and will continue to be at the end and probably that he is in control of everything in between. That he is the one who died and came to like stresses his victory over death and continuing life, thus establishing a connection with the persecuted Christians in Smyrna and implying a promise of life that is more specifically stated later. Since he has won the victory over death they also have hope for life. As Osborne says, Christ is the eternal one, guaranteeing vindication for his suffering followers" (Osborne, Kindle Location 3185). Since these are the words of the exalted Christ, heeding what is said is encouraged. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of this letter because these are the words of the exalted Christ who is the First and Last and who died and came to life again.

#### **The Exalted Christ's Knowledge of Their Affliction, Poverty, and Slander**

The exalted Christ assures the church in Smyrna that he knows about their affliction, poverty, and slander by the Jews in verse 9. First, he assures the Christians in Smyrna that he knows about their affliction and poverty, "I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich!" "I know" is the characteristic expression used in the letters to stress the exalted Christ's awareness of what is happening in the churches. It probably also expresses his care and concern for their them as well. "Afflictions" is a general word for persecution that is more specifically described in what follows. "Poverty" probably has resulted from the confiscation of their property because of their refusal to submit to the imperial religion. Morris notes that the word translated "poverty" is strong and concludes that "The poverty of the Smyrnaeans was extreme" (Morris, 63-64). The parenthetical statement, "yet you are rich," stresses that their material poverty has been more than compensated for by the wealth of their life in Christ. As Fanning says, "Christ reminds them, however, of the paradoxical status of God's people in a sinful world: they are often poor in this world's wealth (outward, material, ephemeral) but 'rich' inwardly, spiritually, and eternally" (Fanning, 127). As Osborne puts it, "in spite of the affliction you are going through, God has given you spiritual riches beyond your wildest dreams." (Osborne, Kindle Locations 3231-3232). What they have in Christ is well worth the afflictions and poverty they may have to endure.

The exalted Christ assures the Christians in Smyrna that he knows about the slander of the Jews, "I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of

Satan." Mounce observes that The Martyrdom of Polycarp illustrates the opposition of the Jews to Christianity in Smyrna, "After the venerable Polycarp confessed that he was a Christian, 'the multitude of heathen and Jews living in Smyrna cried out with uncontrollable wrath.' They then joined (although it was the Sabbath) with the mob in gathering wood to burn Polycarp alive" (Mounce, 75). Again the exalted Christ assures them that he knows and cares about them being slandered by the Jews. They claim to be Jews but are not because even though they are ethnically Jewish they have abandoned what should have characterized them, faith in God. They deserve to be called a synagogue of Satan because they have allied themselves with Satan, the great accuser, and slandered Christians by accusing them of sedition before their Roman overlords. Though not specifically stated, the exalted Christ's assurance that he knows their situation is intended to encourage them to remain faithful in spite of these attacks by the Jews. Though this assurance may seem a bit hollow, it is encouraging nonetheless that he knows and cares about what is happening to them even though in his sovereign will he does not immediately intercede on their behalf. Therefore, Christians should remain faithful in spite of difficulties because the exalted Christ knows about their affliction, poverty, and the slander of the Jews and they are rich through their life in Christ.

### **The Exalted Christ Exhorts Them to Be Courageous and Faithful**

The exalted Christ exhorts them to be courageous and faithful in verse 10. First, he commands them to not be afraid, "Don't be afraid of anything you are about to suffer." The present imperative in this context probably stresses that they should always be fearless (Translated "Don't be afraid"). The negative pronoun translated "anything" probably underscores that they should be afraid of nothing. Second, the exalted Christ warns about the severity of their trial and implies that it will not last long, "Behold, the Devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will have persecution for ten days." This warning begins with an interjection translated "Behold" which is characteristically used in Revelation to introduce significant observations that should be heeded. The reality is that they will encounter opposition. Though from a worldly perspective the opposition is from the Jews and representatives of the Roman Empire, the ultimate source of the opposition is from the Devil. It is a test from the Devil but ultimately the exalted Christ is in control and has placed limits on the test. The ten days are difficult to interpret and should probably not be taken literally. It is probably an indication that the time of trial will not last long or at least that it has limits. Third, the exalted Christ commands the Christians in Smyrna to remain faithful and assures them that they will receive the crown of life, "Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life." The crown of life should probably be understood based on the background of the games where victorious athletes received a crown to honor them for their triumph. Fanning says that the crown is a symbol of "joyful victory or celebration of accomplishment, especially to recognize difficult, self-sacrificing service (e.g., 1 Cor 9: 24– 26; Jas 1: 12; 1 Pet 5: 4; Rev 3: 11). Such a crown (a garland or wreath of greenery) honors commendable service or conduct" (Fanning, 130). The crown is specifically identified as the crown of life and refers to the eternal life that they will have with God even if they die. Therefore, Christians should be courageous and remain faithful even though the Devil may put some of them in prison because the Devil is testing them, but the exalted Christ has placed limits on the test and he will give those who remain faithful the crown of life.

### **Concluding Exhortation and Commendation**

In conclusion the exalted Christ exhorts the church in Smyrna to hear and commends overcoming in verse 11. First, he exhorts them to hear, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This command is similar to Jesus' command to his early disciples (Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; and Luke 8:8) and probably emphasizes the need for Christians to hear what the exalted Christ is saying. They should take advantage of the fact that they have ears and use them to hear what he says. In fact, it seems to indicate that all they need is one ear. They are further encouraged to hear what the exalted Christ is saying because the letter is a revelation of the Spirit. The verb translated "let him hear" has a broader meaning than simply to listen and in this context probably means that they should also heed what is said and act on it. Second, he commends overcoming, "He who overcomes will by no means be harmed by the second death." The Christians in Smyrna could overcome or be victorious over their afflictions by being courageous and remaining faithful. His assurance that they will not be harmed by the second death is stated absolutely ("will by no means be harmed"). The second death relates to eternal destiny rather than the first or physical death. The second death is described in Revelation 21:8, "But the cowards, unbelievers, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars--their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death" (Rev 21:8 CSB). Certainly Christians will experience the first death, but if they overcome they will be in no danger of the second. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of this letter and be courageous and faithful because these are the words of the exalted Christ speaking through the Spirit and those who overcome will in no way be hurt by the second death.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may make them afraid and lead them to compromise their commitment to Jesus Christ. These similarities in the situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern context. Christians today are sometimes slandered by Jews, but I would like to generalize the message here to relate to the slander against Christians by society in general. Also Christians in some locations are put in prison because of their commitment to Christ, but that is as of yet not the case for Christians in the West. As a result I have generalized the warning of imprisonment to refer to opposition. Therefore, the statements of the applied message vary slightly from the statements of the message in the original context. Christians should read and heed the message of the letter because these are the words of the exalted Christ who is First and the Last and who died and came to life again. Christians should remain faithful in spite of their difficulties because the exalted Christ knows about their affliction, poverty, and the slander of their enemies and they are rich through their life in Christ. Christians should be courageous and remain faithful even though the Devil may test them, but the exalted Christ has placed limits on the test and he will give those who remain faithful the crown of life. Christians should heed the message of this letter and be courageous and faithful because these are the words of the exalted Christ through the Spirit and those who overcome will in no way be hurt by the second death.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** I KNOW YOUR AFFLICTIONS

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians experiencing affliction to be courageous and remain faithful.

**Proposition:** Christians should be courageous and remain faithful because Jesus is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again; he knows their afflictions and poverty and they are actually rich; the Devil is testing them but the exalted Christ has put limits on the test, the exalted Christ has promised those who remain faithful the crown of life, and those who overcome will in no way be hurt by the second death.

## **Introduction**

Christians today often encounter opposition and difficulty that may make them afraid and lead them to compromise their commitment to Jesus Christ. *Illustration of a Christian Who Compromises His Faith because of Opposition and Difficulty.* The church in Smyrna also faced opposition and difficulty and the exalted Christ addresses them in this letter. Indeed, "These [things] says the one who is the First and Last, who died and came to life again." Let's listen carefully to what the exalted Christ says about responding to opposition and difficulty. *Read Revelation 2:8-11.*

**I. Christians should be courageous and remain faithful because Jesus is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.**

**II. Christians should be courageous and remain faithful because the exalted Christ knows about their afflictions and poverty and they are actually rich.**

**III. Christians should be courageous and remain faithful because the Devil is testing them, but the exalted Christ has put limits on the test.**

**IV. Christians should be courageous and remain faithful because the exalted Christ will give them the crown of life.**

**V. Christians should be courageous and remain faithful because those who overcome will in no way be hurt by the second death.**

## **Conclusion**

We often encounter opposition and difficulty that may make us afraid and lead us to compromise our commitment to Jesus Christ. The church in Smyrna also faced opposition and difficulty and the exalted Christ addresses them in this letter and instructs them on how they should respond. Let's listen carefully to what the exalted Christ says about responding to opposition and difficulty. Indeed, the exalted Christ says, "The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." We should be courageous and remain faithful because Jesus is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again; he knows our afflictions and poverty and we are actually rich; the Devil is testing us but the exalted Christ has put limits on the test; the exalted Christ will give them the crown of life; and those who overcome will in no way be hurt by the second death.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM**

#### **Letter to the Church in Pergamum**

#### **Revelation 2:12-17**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

2:12 To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These [things] says the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword:

13 I know where you are living, where the throne of Satan [is]. Yet you are holding on to my name and did not renounce faith in me even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed in your presence--where Satan lives.

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: That you have some there who hold on to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to throw a stumbling block before the sons of Israel to eat food sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Likewise, you also have those who hold on to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Therefore, repent or else I am coming to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes I will give to him some of the hidden manna and I will give to him a white stone and upon the stone a new name has been written, which no one knows except the one receiving [it].

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage reflects a situation in which Christians in Pergamum were threatened by the imperial cult as well as other false teachings. The reference to Satan's throne indicates that Satan exercised great authority in the city and probably refers to the imperial cult. Pergamum was known for its acropolis where many gods were worshiped and it was the center of the imperial cult in the region. The Christians in Pergamum were under a great deal of pressure to acknowledge Caesar as their Lord and it appears that one person had already been martyred because of his refusal. The reference to Balaam probably indicates that some members of the church were encouraging compromise. The Nicolaitans could be the same or a separate but similar threat of corruption. The Nicolaitans are often identified as a Gnostic group that condoned licentiousness based on the freedom found in Christ. The purpose of the passage was to exhort and encourage Christians to remain faithful and avoid compromise.

##### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is the third letter in the series of letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor located in chapters 2-3. The messages of these letters are reinforced by the preceding and following divisions that introduce the book and depict the trial of the last days, the ultimate victory of God, and the establishment of his eternal kingdom. This passage is closely linked to 1:9-20 by the identification of the source of the letter as "the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword." This passage provides additional background for understanding this letter. These letters reinforce and supplement one another through their general call to faithfulness and specific exhortations with regard to various problems. Indeed, all of the letters were intended to



be read in every church since each of the letters ends with a call for all to hear "what the Spirit says to the churches." This letter provides specific exhortation with regard to moral and spiritual corruption.

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a letter or epistle. More specifically, this passage contains an address, commendations, and exhortations. The address not only identifies the recipients, but also the ultimate source of the message. This identification of the source as "the one who has the sharp, doubled-edged sword" serves to emphasize the need for the readers to heed the message of the letter. Though not specifically stated, the identification of the source implies the command, "Read and heed the message of this letter." Commendation is a type of exhortation that does not contain a command but encourages conduct by identifying it as good or resulting in a positive outcome. Though not specifically stated, the commendation in verse 13 implies the command, "Continue to hold on tight and not renounce your faith" by implicitly indicating that the exalted Christ approves of this behavior. The commendation in the second part of verse 17 implies the command, "Overcome" by assuring those who overcome that they will receive some of the hidden manna and a white stone. Exhortations normally indicate the appropriate response with commands and prohibitions. These commands and prohibitions are normally supplemented and reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify issues and provide motivation for obedience. In this passage, the appropriate response of the exhortations is indicated with the commands, "Repent" and "let him hear." These commands are reinforced with warnings of the consequences of disobedience and assurances of the benefits of obedience.

### **Strategy and Structure**

This letter follows generally the characteristic pattern of most of the seven letters: address, commendations, rebuke and exhortation, and concluding exhortation and commendation. The address in verse 12 introduces the recipients and identifies the source of the words to encourage the readers to heed the message of the letter. The commendations in verse 13 encourage faith and faithfulness based on the exalted Christ's knowledge and approval of their holding on to his name and not renouncing their faith. The rebuke and exhortation in verses 14-16 commands those who hold to the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans to repent based on Christ's warning that he will come to them and fight against them with the sword of his mouth. The concluding exhortation and commendation in verse 17 command them heed the message of the letter and encourage them to overcome the challenges they are facing based on the exalted Christ's promise of giving them hidden manna and a white stone.

- I. Address (12)
  - A. Command to Write to the Angel of the Church in Pergamum
  - B. Source--The One Who Has the Sharp, Double-edged Sword
- II. Commendation of Holding Tight and not Renouncing Their Faith (13)
  - A. The Exalted Christ's Knowledge of Where They Live
  - B. Commendation of Their Holding Fast and not Renouncing Their Faith
  - C. Commendation of the Extent of Their Faithfulness
- III. Rebuke and Exhortation to Repent (14-16)
  - A. Rebuke of Corruption by False Teaching
    1. Corruption by the teachings of Balaam

- 2. Corruption by the teachings of the Nicolaitans
  - B. Command to Repent
  - C. Warning of Judgment
- IV. Concluding Exhortation and Commendation (17)
- A. Command to Hear
  - B. Assurances to Those Who Overcome
    - 1. The hidden manna
    - 2. A white stone with a new name

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should read and heed the message of this letter because these are the words of the exalted Christ, who has ultimate authority to judge. Christians should continue to hold on to the name of Jesus and not renounce their faith in him even though it could result in death because the exalted Christ knows their situation and so that they can be his faithful witnesses. Christians should repent of corruption by pagan religion, culture, and morality because the exalted Christ will come quickly and rebuke and judge them for their behavior. Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome because the exalted Christ is speaking to them through the Spirit and he will provide spiritual sustenance for them, admit them into the great celebration of the union of Christ with his church, and mark them as belonging to God.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Address**

The address of the letter is located in verse 12. First, John is commanded to write to the angel of the church in Pergamum, "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write." Pergamum was a prominent city where many gods were worshiped and the emperor cult was long established and fervently practiced. This church was in a difficult position and definitely needed a word from the exalted Christ. Second, the source of the words in the letter is identified, "These [things] says the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword." This is an obvious allusion to the vision of 1:9-20 that portrays the discerning judgment of the exalted Christ. This serves to remind Christians that Christ is the ultimate judge rather than the Roman Empire which also wielded the sword of judgment. As Osborne says, "This tells the church that it is the exalted Christ, not Roman officials, who is the true judge. The ultimate power belongs to God, and nothing the pagans can do will change that" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 3445-3446*). This could be used to encourage Christians based on the exalted Christ's judgment of their enemies, but it is developed later in the passage as a warning to the church of Christ's judgment if they do not repent. Therefore, Christians should read and heed the message of this letter because these are the words of the exalted Christ, who has ultimate authority to judge.

#### **Commendation of Holding On and Not Renouncing Their Faith**

The exalted Christ commends holding on and not renouncing their faith in verse 13. The exalted Christ assures them that he knows where they live, "I know where you are living, where the throne of Satan [is]." The verb translated "I know" probably means more than that the exalted Christ is aware of their situation; it probably also means that he is concerned for them and their difficult circumstances. The extent of their difficult circumstances is stressed by describing the city as the place "where the throne of Satan [is]." This description emphasizes

that Pergamum was the center of satanic authority, where he was working in an especially powerful way. This description could refer specifically to the city itself that was set up high and throne-like or the prominent pagan temples located there, including a temple dedicated to emperor worship. As Fanning says, "What is certain, however, is that Satan's evil was particularly virulent in Pergamum and constituted a continuing menace to the Christians there, in the form of both deadly persecution from outside the church and doctrinal deception within the church" (Fanning, 136).

The exalted Christ commends them for holding fast and not renouncing their faith, "Yet you are holding on to my name and did not renounce faith in me." To hold onto the name of Christ can be understood as continuing to affirm that Christ is Lord rather than deny him in order to avoid the hardship that was being directed at Christians by the Roman government and pagan society. It can also be understood specifically as continuing to affirm that Christ is Lord rather than affirming that Caesar is Lord. This was an either/or choice; they could not affirm that both Jesus and Caesar were Lord. To affirm that Caesar was Lord was to renounce faith in Jesus. The verb translated "are holding on" is a progressive present and stresses their continual faithfulness. The word itself emphasizes a tight grip. As Osborne says, "The verb means to "grasp forcibly" or, in this figurative use, to "remain firm" (Osborne, Kindle Location 3470).

The exalted Christ commends them for the extent of their faithfulness, "even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed in your presence--where Satan lives." Again Satan's presence and authority are stressed, this time by asserting that this is where he lives. Pergamum is Satan's hometown and he is very present and active. The verb employed here is in the present tense, emphasizing Satan's continual presence in this city ("where Satan lives"). Antipas is used as an extreme example of their faithfulness. They saw Antipas die when he remained faithful; nonetheless, they maintained their faithfulness even when they saw that it could lead to death. The word translated "witness" is the Greek word *martyrs* and the use of the word in this context was very influential in the later development of the English word martyr. The exalted Christ encourages Christians to be faithful even unto death by commending Antipas for being his "faithful witness." This is the same terminology used to describe Jesus Christ in Revelation 1:5 and is presented here as the goal for every Christian. Therefore, Christians should continue to hold on to the name of Jesus and not renounce their faith in him even though it could result in death because the exalted Christ knows their situation and so that they can be his faithful witnesses.

### **Rebuke and Exhortation to Repent**

The exalted Christ rebukes them for their corruption and exhorts them to repent in verses 14-16. He rebukes them for their corruption by false teaching in verses 14-15. First, he rebukes them for being corrupted by the teachings of Balaam in verse 14, "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: That you have some there who hold on to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to throw a stumbling block before the sons of Israel to eat food sacrificed to idols and commit sexual immorality." Even though they are holding on to the name of Jesus, some are holding on to the teaching of Balaam. Balaam is not the name of the teacher that is corrupting the church, but he is used to illustrate the nature of the teaching. As Mounce says, "Balaam became a prototype of all corrupt teachers who betrayed believers into fatal compromise with worldly ideologies" (Mounce, 81). This rebuke alludes to the historical epoch of Israel's wilderness wanderings as recorded in Numbers 22-25. According to Jewish interpreters, Balaam advised Balak to bring about the fall of Israel by using Moabite harlots to lead them into

immorality and idolatry based on Numbers 31:16. In this context, this rebuke probably refers to those who advised compromise with pagan culture in general and emperor worship in particular. They probably rationalized that Christians had freedom in Christ and were not bound by the law and confessing "Caesar is Lord" was an expression of loyalty that did not infringe on their commitment to Christ. The areas of compromise with pagan culture are specifically identified as "eating food sacrificed to idols and committing sexual immorality." Eating food sacrificed to idols was in most contexts closely associated with idolatry and a violation of their commitment to Christ. It is possible to understand the rebuke for committing sexual immorality as another way of rebuking them for idolatry since the worship of other gods is often depicted as sexual immorality in the Old Testament. However, it could be taken literally as well since this was a widespread practice in pagan religion. Through this rebuke, Christians are led to see the error of this teaching and repent. Second, the exalted Christ rebukes them for being corrupted by the teaching of the Nicolaitans in verse 15, "Likewise, you yourselves also have those who hold on to the teaching of the Nicolaitans." Their culpability is stressed in the Greek text by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "you, you also have those who hold on to the teachings of the Nicolaitans" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun). Though the Nicolaitans could be a separate group encouraging compromise with pagan culture, it is possible that the group that was described in previous verse is now being named in this verse. In either case they also probably encouraged compromise with pagan religion, culture, and standards of morality.

The exalted Christ commands them to repent and warns them of judgment in verse 16, "Therefore, repent or else I am coming to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." As Beasley-Murray says, "The whole Pergamene church is called on to repent--not only they who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, but the rest who tolerate them" (Beasley-Murray, 87). Any such compromise was not allowable for Christians. Instead they are commanded to repent, to turn away from worldly conduct in general and renounce emperor worship in particular. They needed to be careful to orient their lives to Jesus Christ and his standard of behavior. Otherwise he will judge them. Christ emphasizes the urgency of repenting by warning that he is coming quickly. His use of the present tense ("I am coming") coupled with the adverb translated "quickly" stresses the need for immediate action. He somewhat obviates the warning by saying that he will "fight against them," probably meaning those who are teaching and encouraging compromise with pagan culture and emperor worship; however, anyone who compromised could certainly expect to experience his righteous rebuke and judgment. As Osborne says, "the judgment will be upon the whole church, for undoubtedly if the church had taken a strong stand, there would have been far fewer defections" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 3572-3573*). The sword of his mouth is certainly his word of rebuke and condemnation of those who compromise. Osborne observes, "The verb carries a strong meaning, 'to wage war'" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 3567-3569*) and as Fee says, "Christ intends to purify his church and will personally do battle against those who would pervert his pure gospel into something else" (Fee, 36). Therefore, Christians should repent of corruption by pagan religion, culture, and morality because the exalted Christ will come quickly and rebuke and judge them for their unfaithfulness.

### **Concluding Exhortation and Commendation**

The exalted Christ concludes by exhorting the Christians in Pergamum to hear and heed what he has said and encouraging them to overcome in verse 17. First, he exhorts them to hear, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This command is similar to

Jesus' command to his early disciples (Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; and Luke 8:8) and probably emphasizes the need for Christians to hear what the exalted Christ is saying. They should take advantage of the fact that they have ears and use them to hear what he says. In fact, it seems to indicate that all they need is one ear. The verb translated "let him hear" has a broader meaning than simply to listen and in this context probably means that they should also act on what has been said. The identification of the letter as a revelation of the Spirit further encourages them to hear and heed what the exalted Christ is saying.

Second, the exalted Christ encourages them to overcome, "To him who overcomes I will give to him some of the hidden manna and I will give to him a white stone and upon the stone a new name has been written, which no one knows except the one receiving [it]." The hidden manna is an allusion to the manna given in the wilderness and expected at the time of the second Exodus led by the Messiah. Here it denotes the spiritual provision given by God through Christ and participation in the messianic kingdom. As Summers says, this "hidden manna" is "spiritual sustenance which the world cannot understand" (Summers, 116). This assurance of manna stands in contrast to the meat sacrificed to idols offered by those who hold on to the teachings of Balaam. White stones were produced in Pergamum and used for various purposes including an indication of acquittal in court, a ticket of admission a feast or event, a token of release from slavery, a prize for the winner of a race, and a medal for a victorious warrior. All of these uses have possible implications for the message of this passage. Though it is impossible to know for certain, I like the proposal that the stone is a ticket of admission to a feast, specifically "the marriage feast of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). It would certainly be ironically appropriate that those who refused to compromise by attending pagan cult meals would be given admittance to this eschatological wedding banquet because of their faithfulness. The significance of the new name is uncertain, but probably should be understood based on Revelation 3:12, "I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God, and my new name." If this is the case it would probably be best understood as a mark identifying them as belonging to God and having a part in the glorious destiny of the faithful. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome because the exalted Christ is speaking to them through the Spirit and he will provide spiritual sustenance for them, admit them into the great celebration of the union of Christ with his church, and mark them as belonging to God.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today often experience opposition that seeks to intimidate or deceive them so that they compromise their commitment to Jesus Christ. These similarities with the original situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. Though this passage does contain some specific elements, I have already stated the message generally and there is very little of a contextualized nature that requires that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should read and heed the message of this letter because these are the words of the exalted Christ, who has ultimate authority to judge. Christians should continue to hold on to the name of Jesus and not renounce their faith in him even though it could result in death because the exalted Christ knows their situation and so that they can be his faithful witnesses. Christians should repent of corruption by pagan religion, culture, and morality because the exalted Christ will come quickly and rebuke and judge them for their unfaithfulness. Christians should heed the message of this

letter and overcome because the exalted Christ is speaking to them through the Spirit and he will provide spiritual sustenance for them, admit them into the great celebration of the union of Christ with his church, and mark them as belonging to God.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** I KNOW WHERE YOU ARE LIVING

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to remain faithful rather than compromise their commitment to Christ.

**Proposition:** Christians should remain faithful without compromise because the exalted Christ has ultimate authority to judge and he will hold them accountable, because the exalted Christ knows and cares about their struggles, so that they can be faithful witnesses like Jesus Christ, because the exalted Christ will give them spiritual sustenance, because the exalted Christ will admit them into the great celebration of his union with his church, and because the exalted Christ will mark them as belonging to God.

#### **Introduction**

Christians today often encounter opposition and difficulty that may make them afraid and lead them to compromise their commitment to Jesus Christ. *Illustration of a Christian Who Compromises His Faith because of Opposition and Difficulty.* The church in Pergamum also faced opposition and difficulty and the exalted Christ addresses them in this letter. Let's listen carefully to what the exalted Christ says. Indeed, "These [things] says the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword." *Read Revelation 2:12-17.*

- I. Christians should remain faithful without compromise because the exalted Christ has ultimate authority to judge.**
- II. Christians should remain faithful without compromise because the exalted Christ knows and cares about their struggles.**
- III. Christians should remain faithful without compromise so that they can be faithful witnesses like Jesus Christ.**
- IV. Christians should remain faithful without compromise because the exalted Christ will give them spiritual sustenance.**
- V. Christians should remain faithful without compromise because the exalted Christ will admit them into the great celebration of his union with his church.**
- VI. Christians should remain faithful without compromise because the exalted Christ will mark them as belonging to God.**

#### **Conclusion**

We often encounter opposition and difficulty that may make us afraid and lead us to compromise our commitment to Jesus Christ. The church in Pergamum also faced opposition and difficulty and the exalted Christ addresses them in this letter. Let's listen carefully to what the exalted Christ says about responding to opposition and difficulty. As the exalted Christ says, "The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Christians should remain faithful without compromise because the exalted Christ has ultimate authority to judge and he will hold them accountable. We should remain faithful without compromise because the

exalted Christ knows and cares about our struggles. We should remain faithful without compromise so that we can be faithful witnesses like the Jesus Christ. We should remain faithful without compromise because the exalted Christ will give us spiritual sustenance. We should remain faithful without compromise because the exalted Christ will admit us into the great celebration of his union with his church. We should remain faithful without compromise because the exalted Christ will mark us as belonging to God.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA Letter to the Church in Thyatira Revelation 2:18-29**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

2:18 To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These [things] says the Son of God, the one having eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze:

19 I know your works and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and [that] your later works [are] more than your first. 20 Nevertheless, I have against you that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, the one who calls herself a prophetess, and teaches and leads astray my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent, but she is unwilling to repent of her immorality. 22 Behold, I am casting her into a bed [of suffering] and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works. 23 I will kill her children with death and all the churches will know that **I am** the one who searches the hearts and minds and I will give to each of you according to your works. 24 But I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, as many as do not hold to this teaching, whoever has not learned the so-called deep things of Satan: I am not putting another burden upon you; 25 nonetheless, hold on to what you have until I come.

26 The one who overcomes and keeps my works until the end, I will give him authority over the nations--27 "He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will shatter [them] like the pottery of the potter"--just as I have received [authority] from my Father. 28 I will also give to him the morning star. 29 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage reflects a situation in which a self-acclaimed prophetess was condoning sexual immorality and religious corruption. Though her teaching had not misled most of the Christians in Thyatira, the church tolerated her and as a result many were misled. Her teaching may be related to the Nicolaitans. Though her teaching does not necessarily relate to the threat of the imperial cult, the assurance of authority over the nations is suggestive. It may be that part of her teaching allowed for Christians to acclaim Caesar as Lord. There is evidence that trade guilds were very prominent in Thyatira and they could have contributed to the pressure on Christians to compromise. In order to succeed in business they would be pressured to join in these guilds and participate in events where pagan gods were worshiped and food sacrificed to idols was served. The purpose of the passage was to exhort and encourage Christians not to tolerate or be misled by Jezebel, but repent of any corruption and hold on to what they have until Jesus comes.

##### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is the fourth letter in the series of letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor located in chapters 2-3. The messages of these letters are reinforced by the preceding and following divisions that introduce the book and depict the trial of the last days, the ultimate victory of God, and the establishment of his eternal kingdom. This passage is closely linked to 1:9-20 by the identification of the source of the letter as "the Son of God, whose eyes are like a



blazing fire and feet are like burnished bronze" and this passage provides background for understanding this letter. These letters reinforce and supplement one another through their general call to faithfulness and specific exhortations with regard to various problems. Indeed, all of the letters were intended to be read in every church since each of the letters ends with a call for all to hear "what the Spirit says to the churches." In addition, in this letter the exalted Christ specifically asserts the relevance of this letter for the Christians of the other churches in verse 23, "I will strike her children dead and all the churches will know that **I am** the one who searches the hearts and minds and I will repay each of you according to your deeds." This letter provides specific instruction with regard to moral and spiritual corruption.

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a letter or epistle. More specifically, this letter contains an address, commendations, warnings, and exhortations. The address not only identifies the recipients, but also the ultimate source of the message. This identification of the source as "the Son of God, whose eyes are like a blazing fire and feet are like burnished bronze" serves to emphasize the need for the readers to heed the message of the letter. Though not specifically stated, the identification of the source implies the command, "Read and heed this letter." Exhortations normally indicate the appropriate response with commands and prohibitions. These commands and prohibitions are normally supplemented and reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify issues and provide motivation for obedience. In this passage, the appropriate response of the exhortations is indicated with the commands, "keep on holding on" and "let him hear." However, these commands do not exhaust what is implied about the appropriate response. Commendation is a type of exhortation that does not normally contain a command. Instead commendation encourages conduct by indicating that it is good or beneficial. Though not specifically stated, the commendation in verse 19 implies the command, "Continue to excel in works, love, faith, service, and perseverance" by indicating that this conduct is pleasing to the exalted Christ. In addition, the commendation in verse 26 implies the command "Overcome and do Christ's works until the end" based on the benefits. Rebuke and warning is also a type of exhortation that does not normally contain a command. Instead rebuke and warning discourages conduct by indicating that it is bad or harmful. The rebuke and warning in verse 20 implies the command "Stop tolerating that woman Jezebel" based on the harmful consequences. The warning in verses 21-23 implies the command "Repent of her ways" also based on the harmful consequences.

### **Strategy and Structure**

This letter follows generally the characteristic pattern of most of the seven letters: address, commendation, rebuke and exhortation, and concluding exhortation. The address in verse 18 introduces the letter and a visionary image of its source to encourage the readers to heed the message of the letter. This visionary image also provides the basis for the warning and assurance that are developed later in the letter. The commendations in verse 19 identify and encourage commendable conduct--work, love, faith, service, and perseverance based on the exalted Christ's approval. The rebuke and exhortation in verses 20-25 identify and deal with dangerous conduct, warning the church of their need to repent of tolerating Jezebel and succumbing her teaching and exhorting those who have not succumbed to her teaching to hold on to what they have. The concluding commendation and exhortation in verses 26-29 encourage Christians to heed the letter and do Christ's will until the end based on his promise that he will give them authority over

the nations and the morning star. What is different from preceding letters is that the concluding commendation precedes the exhortation. This same pattern is followed in subsequent letters.

- I. Address (18)
  - A. Command to Write to the Angel of the Church in Thyatira
  - B. Source--the Son of God, Whose Eyes Are like Blazing Fire and Feet Are like Burnished Bronze
- II. Commendation for Their Works, Love, Faith, Service, and Perseverance (19)
- III. Rebuke, Warning, and Exhortation (20-25)
  - A. Rebuke and Warning for Tolerating Jezebel (20)
  - B. Warning for Those Who Follow Jezebel to Repent (21-23)
    - 1. The unwillingness of Jezebel to repent (21)
    - 2. The judgment of Jezebel and her followers unless they repent (22)
    - 3. The lesson to the churches from the judgment (23)
  - C. Exhortation for the Faithful to Keep Holding On (24-25)
- IV. Concluding Commendation and Exhortation (26-29)
  - A. Commendation of Overcoming and Doing Christ's Will (26-28)
    - 1. Assurance of authority to those who overcome and do Christ's will to the end (26-27)
    - 2. Assurance of hope (28)
  - B. Exhortation to Hear (29)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should heed the message of this letter because these are the words of the Son of God who has divine glory and authority and all-penetrating judgment. Christians should continue growing in works, love, faith, service, and perseverance because the exalted Christ knows and commends these practices. Christians should oppose the teachings of this so-called prophetess, repent of her works, and hold on to what they have until Christ comes because her teachings are satanic and will lead them astray, she and her followers will be judged severely, and the exalted Christ searches the hearts and minds and repays each according to their works. Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome by doing Christ's work until the end because this is what the exalted Christ is saying through the Spirit to the churches, they will share in his victory and authority over the nations, and he will be their hope in the darkest of times.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Address**

The address of the letter is found in verse 19. First, John is commanded to write to the angel of the church in Thyatira, "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write." Thyatira was an important city but probably the least prominent of the seven cities. It is often pointed out that the trade guilds were prominent in this city and that Christians were under a great deal of pressure to compromise their commitment to Christ in order to succeed in business since participating in these trade guilds involved attending events where pagan gods were worshiped, meat sacrificed to idols was served, and young girls were provided. Second, Christ is identified as the source of the words found in the letter, "These [things] says the Son of God, the one having eyes like

blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze." The designation "Son of God" certainly indicates that the exalted Christ is divine. The Roman emperors were also called sons of God and this designation of the exalted Christ as the Son of God probably stresses that he is the true Son of God. This designation probably anticipates the quotation of Psalm 2 in verse 27. This quotation relates a promise to the Son that he shares with all who overcome. This would certainly be encouraging to Christians being oppressed by the nations. They will share in his victory and rule over the nations. The "eyes like a blazing fire" and "feet like burnished bronze" are images drawn from Daniel 10:6 where they are used to describe the glorious heavenly man who reveals what is to come to Daniel. The "eyes like a blazing fire" probably implies penetrating judgment and anticipates "he who searches the hearts and minds" in verse 23. Nothing can be hidden from the exalted Christ and he will hold them accountable if they are unfaithful. At this point it is neutral and potentially assures Christians of the exalted Christ's discerning judgment of the nations and warns them of his discerning judgment of Christians. The "feet like burnished bronze" is based on the description of the exalted Christ in 1:15 and at the very least emphasizes his divine glory and majesty. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of this letter because these are the words of the Son of God who has divine glory and authority and all penetrating judgment.

### **Commendation**

The exalted Christ commends the church in Thyatira for its works, love, faith, service, and perseverance in verse 19, "I know your works and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and [that] your later works [are] more than your first." The verb translated "I know" probably means more than that the exalted Christ is aware of their good works; he knows and approves their good works. The word translated "works" is general and is defined more specifically by love, faith, service, and perseverance. They have love for God and as a result love others. They have faith in God and are living faithfully for him. They serve and seek to meet the needs of others. They persevere in a difficult environment where compromise would be easy. Furthermore, they have not regressed or remained static in their works, but they are increasing in their love, faith, service, and perseverance. Therefore, Christians should continue to grow in good works, that is in love, faith, service, and perseverance because the exalted Christ knows and approves of these practices.

### **Rebuke, Warning, and Exhortation**

The exalted Christ rebukes, warns, and exhorts the church in Thyatira with regard to Jezebel and her teaching in verses 20-25. The exalted Christ rebukes and warns them for tolerating Jezebel in verse 20. First, he rebukes the church for tolerating Jezebel, "Nevertheless, I have against you that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, the one who calls herself a prophetess." In contrast to his approval in the preceding verse, this verse expresses his disapproval. The exalted Christ has a contention against them. They tolerate Jezebel rather than take appropriate actions to restrict her and her teaching. "Jezebel" is almost certainly not the name of this self-proclaimed prophetess, but a historical allusion to the wife of King Ahab who led Israel into the immorality and idolatry that resulted in God's judgment. As Mounce says, "The Thyatiran Jezebel is probably some prominent woman within the church who, like her OT counterpart, was influencing the people of God to forsake loyalty to God by promoting tolerance toward and involvement in pagan practices" (Mounce, 87). As this allusion is developed in the subsequent verses, the readers are warned of the danger of allowing this woman to influence the church--the church will be judged just like Jezebel and her followers in Israel. The implication of "who calls

herself a prophetess" is that she is not God's spokesperson despite her claims. Second, he warns the church of the consequences of tolerating Jezebel, "and teaches and leads astray my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols." Her misleading teachings seem to encourage compromise and even full participation in pagan culture and religion. Sexual immorality could be another way of speaking of unfaithfulness to God through idol worship as it clearly is later in the passage; however, it is more likely that it is used literally here. She is actually encouraging sexual immorality. Eating meat sacrificed to idols was probably a grave threat to the Christians in Thyatira because of the prevalence of the trade guilds. In order to survive in a competitive business environment they were under a lot of pressure to join and participate in the trade guilds which often involved attending events where pagan gods were worshiped and the food had been sacrificed to these idols. She was encouraging full participation!

The exalted Christ warns those who follow Jezebel to repent in verses 21-23. First, the exalted Christ asserts that he has been patient but that Jezebel refuses to repent in verse 21, "I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling to repent of her immorality." Second, the exalted Christ warns that he will judge Jezebel and her followers unless they repent in verse 22, "Behold, I am casting her into a bed [of suffering] and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works." This warning is introduced with the interjection translated "Behold" which is used to introduce things of great import that should be heeded. The present tense verb is often translated as present of the immediate future, "I will cast" (CSB, ESV, NAS, NIV, and NKJ), but I have translated it "I am casting" to stress even more that this judgment is on its way and the urgency of repenting (See also NRS). The bed that he is casting her on is not literally "a bed of suffering" but that is implied in the context. As Osborne observes, "'bed' was often used as a metaphor for serious illness (Exod. 21: 18; Ps. 6: 6; 41: 3)" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 3840-3841). The exalted Christ is going to discipline her in order to get her to repent. That the exalted Christ should "cast her on a bed [of suffering]" is ironically appropriate since she is described as a harlot who plied her trade on a bed (See also Fee, 40). "Those who commit adultery with her" could be understood literally, but is probably to be understood figuratively to depict their unfaithfulness to Christ through devotion to her teaching. He stresses the intensity or greatness of the suffering or tribulation that he is going to inflict upon them to encourage them to repent. Third, the exalted Christ explains the lesson that he will teach to the church through their judgment in verse 23, "I will kill her children with death and all the churches will know that **I am** the one who searches the hearts and minds and I will give to each of you according to your works." This takes the warning of the consequences of holding to the teaching of Jezebel even further. Indeed, those who have been corrupted by her have previously been called "those who commit adultery with her" (probably those who succumb to her influence but who have not totally bought into her teaching), but now are called "her children" (probably those who have refused to repent and are totally committed to her and her teaching). Those who refuse to repent and persist in her teaching will be killed as a lesson to the rest of the churches. The exalted Christ stresses that he is the one who searches the hearts and minds by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "I, I am the one who searches the hearts and minds" and indicated in translation with bold print). Indeed, nothing escapes the gaze of the one with blazing eyes and who even is able to search their hearts and minds. The exalted Christ speaks of their works, her works, and his works in this passage. They were faced with a choice. They can continue in their good works, which are also the works of the exalted Christ, or they can follow after her works and suffer the consequences. As

Fanning says, "The prospect of facing his discerning and fully righteous judgment should prompt all humans to cry out for mercy and commit themselves to true obedience" (Fanning, 154).

The exalted Christ exhorts the faithful to keep holding on in verses 24-25, "But I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, as many as do not hold to this teaching, whoever has not learned the so-called deep things of Satan: I am not putting another burden upon you; nonetheless, hold on to what you have until I come." The "so-called deep things of Satan" could be an ironic reference to her so-called godly teachings as a Christian prophet. However, the exalted Christ reveals what they really are, teachings that come from Satan. As Fee says, "Very likely she was promoting her own teaching as "the deep things of God," whereas reality is that she was teaching the deep things of Satan" (Fee, 42). It could also identify her teachings literally. In this case, she is probably encouraging them to explore satanic teaching based on their freedom authority in Christ. In either case her teachings are satanic and off limits to Christians. Instead of holding on to her teaching the exalted Christ commands them to keep on holding on to what they have. The command "keep on holding on" is a present imperative emphasizing the need for continual faithfulness. He further emphasizes the need for continual faithfulness by adding "until I come." However, as Fanning observes, "Putting no 'further burden on them does not deny that they must take responsibility to ensure that she is not allowed to teach freely within their congregation" (Fanning, 155). Therefore, Christians should oppose the teachings of this so-called prophetess, repent of her works, and hold on to what they have until the exalted Christ comes because her teachings are satanic and will lead them astray, she and her followers will be judged severely, and the exalted Christ searches the hearts and minds and repays each according to their works.

### **Concluding Commendation and Exhortation**

The exalted Christ concludes the letter by encouraging the Christians in Thyatira to overcome and do his will and exhorting them to hear what his Spirit is saying in verses 26-29. The exalted Christ commends overcoming and doing his will to the end in verses 26-28. First, he encourages them to overcome and do his will to the end based on his assurance of authority in verses 26-27, "The one who overcomes and keeps my works until the end, I will give him authority over the nations--"He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will shatter [them] like the pottery of the potter"--just as I have received [authority] from my Father." He elaborates on what it means to overcome here. They must also keep his works until the end. Psalm 2 is a song of promise to the king/Messiah. It is used here as an assurance to those whose lives appear to be under the control of others that they will share in the victory and authority of Christ if they overcome (See also Revelation 5:10; 20:4 and 6; and 22:5). The "iron scepter" is a symbol for the exalted Christ's authoritative rule over the nations. The decisive victory of the exalted Christ is emphasized by "he will shatter [them] like the pottery of the potter." Like fragile pottery they will easily be destroyed. Second, he encourages them to overcome and do his will to the end based on his assurance of the hope in verse 28, "I will also give to him the morning star." The "morning star" was a sign of hope after a dark night and became a symbol of victory in the ancient world. It serves here as a promise of hope and ultimate victory during a time when the forces of darkness seemed to be prevailing. As Summers says, "One who has frequently observed the brilliant beauty of this morning star in the dark hour which precedes the dawn will understand the beauty of this promise (Summers, 119). The morning star was Venus and it became a symbol of the power and sovereignty of the Roman emperor. However, later in 22:16 the exalted Christ is identified as "the bright and morning star." The exalted Christ is the

Christians hope in dark times (For additional possibilities for understanding this image see Mounce, 90-91).

The exalted Christ exhorts them to hear what the Spirit is saying in verse 29, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This command is similar to Jesus' command to his early disciples (Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; and Luke 8:8) and probably emphasizes the need for Christians to hear what the exalted Christ is saying. They should take advantage of the fact that they have ears and use them to hear what he says. In fact, it seems to indicate that all they need is one ear. The verb translated "let him hear" has a broader meaning than simply to listen and in this context probably means that they should also act on what has been said. They are further encouraged to hear what the exalted Christ is saying by describing the contents as a revelation of the Spirit. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome by doing Christ's work until the end because this is what the exalted Christ is saying through the Spirit to the churches, they will share in his victory and authority over the nations, and he will be their hope in the darkest of times.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today are often exposed to false teachers who may deceive them and ruin all the good that Jesus Christ is doing in their lives. These false teachers in some cases may encourage them to compromise and live in a worldly way. Business may be a specific arena of compromise. They may feel pressured to go along with questionable business practices in order to succeed. These similarities between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. The statements of the message in the original context include some very specific references to the situation in the original context such as a specific false teacher and teaching. In the statement of the adjusted message below I have generalized these specific references in the statements of the applied message so that they can be meaningful to a broader audience. Nonetheless, they are still very similar to the statements of the message in the original context. Christians should heed the message of this letter because these are the words of the Son of God who has divine glory and authority and all penetrating judgment. Christians should continue to grow in works, love, faith, service, and perseverance because the exalted Christ knows and commends these practices. Christians should oppose false teaching, repent of their corrupt works, and hold on to what they have until the exalted Christ comes because these teachings are satanic and will lead them astray, those who follow these teachings and practices will be judged severely, and the exalted Christ searches the hearts and minds and repays each according to their works. Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome by continuing to do Christ's work until the end because this is what the exalted Christ is saying through the Spirit to the churches, they will share in his victory and authority over the world, and he will be their hope in the darkest of times.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** HOLD ON TO WHAT YOU HAVE UNTIL I COME

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to excel in works, not tolerate false teaching, repent of any compromise they have made, and keep holding on and doing Christ's work.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to excel in good works because the exalted Christ knows and approves these practices, not tolerate any false teachings because these teachings are

satanic and will lead them astray, repent of any compromises they have made because those who don't will be judged severely, and overcome by keeping on doing Christ's work until the end because they will share in his victory and he will be their hope the darkest times.

## **Introduction**

Christians are often exposed to false teachers who may deceive them. Many false teachers today encourage Christians to embrace a worldly lifestyle. *Illustration of a Christian Who Was Led Astray by False Teaching.* The Christians in Thyatira were being led astray by a false teacher who claimed to be a Christian prophetess. Let's listen carefully to what the exalted Christ has to say. Indeed, "These [things] says the Son of God, the one having eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze." *Read Revelation 2:18-29.*

- I. Christians should continue to excel in good works because the exalted Christ knows and approves these practices.**
- II. Christians should not tolerate false teaching because these teachings are satanic and will lead them astray.**
- III. Christians should repent of any compromise because those who don't will be judged severely.**
- IV. Christians should overcome and keep on doing the Christ's work until the end because they will share in his victory and he will be their hope in the darkest times.**

## **Conclusion**

We are often exposed to false teachers who may deceive us. Many false teachers encourage Christians to embrace a worldly lifestyle. The Christians in Thyatira were being led astray by a false teacher who claimed to be a Christian prophetess. The exalted Christ had John write a letter to this church in order to meet this threat. Let's listen carefully to what the exalted Christ has to say. Indeed, the exalted Christ says, "The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." We should continue to excel in good works because the exalted Christ knows and approves these practices, not tolerate any false teachings because these teachings are satanic and will lead us astray, repent of any compromise because those who don't will be judged severely, and overcome by keeping on doing Christ's work until the end because we will share in his victory and he will be our hope in the darkest times.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SARDIS**

#### **Letter to the Church in Sardis**

#### **Revelation 3:1-6**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

3:1 To the angel in the church in Sardis write: These [things] says the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be continually alert and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete before my God. 3 Therefore, continually remember what you have received and heard and keep [on doing it] and repent. But if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you will by no means know at what hour I will come against you.

4 Yet you have a few names in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes and they will walk with me in white for they are worthy. 5 In the same way the one who overcomes will be dressed in white clothes and I will by no means blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. 6 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

This passage reflects a situation in which the Christians in Sardis had a reputation for spiritual life while in reality they were spiritually dead. Apparently one of the primary problems was that they had compromised due to the threats and enticements of the world as reflected in the image of the soiled clothes. Mounce suggests, "Apparently untroubled by heresy and free from outside opposition, it had so completely come to terms with its pagan environment that although it retained the outward appearance of life, it was spiritually dead" (Mounce, 92). They seem to have forgotten the message that they have heard or at least stopped obeying it. Their situation appears to be quite urgent because even what remains is described as being on the verge of death. The purpose of the passage was to exhort the Christians in Sardis to wake up, strengthen what remains, remember what they have heard, repent, and obey.

##### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is the fifth letter in the series of letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor located in chapters 2-3. The messages of these letters are reinforced by the preceding and following divisions that introduce the book and depict the trial of the last days, the ultimate victory of God, and the establishment of his eternal kingdom. This passage is closely linked to 1:1-8 and 9-20 by the identification of the source of the letter as "the one who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." These passages provide additional background for understanding this letter. These letters reinforce and supplement one another through their general call to faithfulness and specific exhortation with regard to various problems. Indeed, all of the letters were intended to be read in every church since each of the letters ends with a call for all to hear "what the Spirit says to the churches." This letter provides specific instruction with regard to spiritual deadness and moral corruption.



## **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a letter or epistle. More specifically, this letter contains an address, rebuke, commendation, and exhortations. The address not only identifies the recipients, but also the ultimate source of the message. This identification of the source as "the one who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars" serves to emphasize the need for the readers to read and heed the message of the letter. Though not specifically stated, the identification of the source implies the command, "Read and heed this letter." Exhortations normally indicate the appropriate response with commands and prohibitions. These commands and prohibitions are normally supplemented and reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify issues and provide motivation for obedience. In this passage, the appropriate response of the exhortations is indicated with the commands, "Be continually alert," "strengthen what remains," "Continually remember," "keep [on doing it]," "repent," and "let him hear." These commands are reinforced with rebukes and warnings of the consequences of disobedience and commendations and assurances of the benefits of obedience. Commendation is a type of exhortation that does not contain a command. Instead commendation encourages conduct by indicating that it is good or beneficial. The commendation in verse 4 encourages continued purity based on the assurance that they are worthy to walk with Christ dressed in white. Though there is no command, the commendation implies the command, "Continue to remain pure." The concluding commendation in verse 5 encourages overcoming based on assurances that they will be clothed in white, their names will not be blotted out of the Book of Life, and the exalted Christ will acknowledge them. Though there is no command, the commendation implies the command, "Overcome."

## **Strategy and Structure**

This letter follows generally the characteristic pattern of most of the seven letters with only minor variations: address, rebuke and exhortation, commendation, and concluding commendation and exhortation. The only variations from the normal pattern are that the commendation comes after the rebuke and exhortation and this commendation is closely linked to the concluding commendation and exhortation. The address in the first part of verse 1 introduces the letter and a visionary image of its source to encourage the readers to heed the message of the letter. This visionary image also provides the basis for the warning and assurance that are developed later in the letter. The rebuke and exhortation in the second part of verse 1 through verse 3 identify dangerous conduct and command the readers to respond appropriately, warning of the danger to those who fail to heed the exhortation. The commendation in verse 4 identifies and encourages commendable conduct, continuing to remain pure, based on the assurance of walking with Christ dressed in white. The concluding commendation and exhortation in verses 5-6 reinforces the need for the readers to heed the teaching of the letter based on assurances to those who overcome and listen.

- I. Address (1a)
  - A. Command to Write to the angel in the church in Sardis
  - B. Source--The one Who Holds the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars
- II. Rebuke and Exhortations (1b-3)
  - A. Rebuke for Having a Reputation for Being Alive but in Reality Being Dead (1b)
  - B. Exhortation to Be Continually Alert and Strengthen What Remains (2)
  - C. Exhortation to Continually Remember, Keep on Obeying, and Repent (3)

- III. Commendation of Those Who Have Remained Pure (4)
  - A. Acknowledgement of a Few People Who Have Remained Pure
  - B. Assurance that They Will Walk with Him and Be Dressed in White
  - C. Explanation that They Are Worthy
- IV. Concluding Commendation and Exhortation (5-6)
  - A. Concluding Commendation of Overcoming (5)
    - 1. Assurance of purity
    - 2. Assurance of security
    - 3. Assurance of vindication
  - B. Concluding Exhortation to Hear (6)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should heed the message of this letter because it contains the words of the exalted Christ, who has the Spirit of God in all its fullness as well as the angels at his disposal to revive the church. Christians should be continually alert, strengthen what remains, remember the gospel and the life of faith and commitment, keep on practicing it, and repent because they are dead in spite of their reputation, their deeds are incomplete in the sight of God, and Jesus Christ will return unexpectedly to judge them. Christians should remain pure because those who do so will be with the exalted Christ dressed in white and participate in the parade celebrating his ultimate victory for they are worthy. Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome because they will be pure and justified before God, they will be unalterably registered in the Book of Life, they will be acknowledged by Christ before God and his angels, and these are the words of the Spirit to the churches.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Address**

The address of the letter is found in the first part of verse 1. First, John is commanded to write to the angel in the church in Sardis, "To the angel in the church in Sardis write." Sardis was a prominent city in the region that was on the trade routes and was of strategic importance. However, it apparently had been more prominent in the past and the glory of the present city did not rival its former self. Second, the source of the words in the letter is identified, "These [things] says the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." The seven spirits are mentioned elsewhere in Revelation (1:4; 4:5; 5:6) where they are identified with the Holy Spirit and probable indicate the Spirit in all its fullness. As Osborne says, "The church of Sardis, nearly dead (3: 1– 2), can be revived only if the Spirit takes over, and Christ has the power of the Spirit available for them" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 4153-4154*). Thus Christ is identified as the one who has the fullness of the Spirit at his disposal to revive the church in Sardis. The seven stars are also mentioned elsewhere in Revelation (1:16, 20; 2:1) where they are identified with the seven angels of the churches. Based on what has preceded, that Christ has the seven angels of the churches probably means that he also has these angels at his disposal to revive the church in Sardis. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of this letter because it contains the words of the exalted Christ, who has the Spirit of God in all its fullness as well as the angels at his disposal to revive the church.

#### **Rebuke and Exhortation**

The exalted Christ rebukes and exhorts the church in Sardis in the second half of verse 1 through verse 3. The exalted Christ rebukes them for having a reputation for being alive but in reality being dead in the second part of verse 1, "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." The verb translated "I know" is characteristically used to introduce commendations in these letters to the churches. Here it is used ironically to introduce a rebuke and serves to heighten the fact that the exalted Christ is not fooled by their reputation for having life. The church is dramatically depicted as a dead corpse rather than a living being. The church and its members were obviously alive in the sense that they continued to exist and appeared to be alive; however, they lacked the spiritual life that comes from an authentic experience and relationship with Christ. Beasley-Murray compares the church to "a beautifully adorned corpse in a funeral parlour" (Beasley-Murray, 95). The spiritual condition of the city is remarkably similar to the historical condition of the city. Sardis had been a city of great renown but had deteriorated and was living on its reputation. In a similar fashion the church had flourished but had gone into decline and only appeared on the outside to be a vibrant church.

The exalted Christ exhorts them to be continually watchful and strengthen what remains in verse 2. First, he commands them, "Be continually alert and strengthen what remains and is about to die." The present imperative and participle translated "Be continually alert" stress the need for continual vigilance. The Christians in Sardis had become so complacent that they were unconscious of their own condition. They needed to recognize their desperate situation. This is probably also an allusion to the history of the city, which appeared to be secure because of the sheer cliffs that surrounded it, but fell to invaders because of the failure of the inhabitants to be watchful. They needed to learn from the city's history and be continually vigilant or suffer similar consequences. Summers says that it as if the exalted Christ is saying, "Remember your history. If you do not watch, the same fate will come to you" (Summers, 121). The command to "strengthen what remains" implies that all is not lost. The church and its members are not totally dead; however they need to take action to rectify the situation. The need for immediate and decisive action is stressed by the addition of "and is about to die." They need to act and deal with their spiritual decline before there is nothing left to save. Second, he warns them that their deeds are incomplete in the sight of God, "for I have not found your deeds complete before my God." What is lacking is not spelled out and could refer to an attitude of commitment that does not accompany their deeds, the insufficiency of their deeds, or probably both. Osborne suggests, "The great temple of Artemis in Sardis was unfinished, and perhaps John is saying that they resemble that building-- unfinished and worthless" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 4207-4208). Mounce adds, "They lacked the appropriate motivation and spiritual orientation, without which all external activity is morally impotent" (Mounce, 94).

The exalted Christ exhorts them to continually remember, keep on obeying, and repent in verse 3. First, he commands them, "Continually remember what you have received and heard and keep [on doing it] and repent." The verbs translated "Continually remember" and "keep [on doing it]" are present imperatives, emphasizing the need to continually remember and obey. What they are called upon to remember and keep is almost certainly the message of gospel and teachings on discipleship. In order to experience revival they need to get back to the basics of faith in Christ and obedience to him as Lord. Osborne says that the verb I have translated "keep [on doing it]" means "not only to 'keep' or 'guard' but to 'obey.'" Spiritual vigilance is seen in perseverance and obedient living of these spiritual realities" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 4223-4224). The verb translated "repent" is an aorist imperative, probably indicating that this should be a decisive action. They have departed significantly from what they have heard and received

and need a complete change of direction. As Fanning puts it, "Reversal of their current moral and spiritual trajectory is urgently required" (Fanning, 165). They need to decisively turn from their complacent way of living the Christian life and determine to strengthen what remains of their commitment, continually remember their experience of Christ and the life of faith, and keep on living based on faith and commitment. Second, he warns them of unexpected judgment, "But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will by no means know at what hour I will come against you." The reference to the thief is an obvious allusion to Jesus' saying with regard to the thief who comes at night and the emphasis is on the need to be prepared (See Matthew 24:43-44; and Luke 12:39-40). This emphasis is intensified in the Greek text by the use of a double negative with the subjunctive mood (Translated "you will by no means know"). This same image is repeated with a similar emphasis in Revelation 16:15. Therefore, Christians should be continually alert, strengthen what remains, remember the gospel and the life of faith and commitment, keep on practicing it, and repent because they are dead in spite of their reputation, their deeds are incomplete in the sight of God, and Jesus Christ will return unexpectedly to judge them.

### **Commendation of Those Who Have Remained Pure**

The exalted Christ encourages continued purity by commending those who have remained pure in verse 4. First, he acknowledges that a few people who have remained pure, "Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes." They are described as having "not soiled their clothes." The figure of unsoiled clothes is probably intended to convey that in contrast to the rest of the church these have not been compromised by pressure and enticement from the world. Second, he assures them, "and they will walk with me in white for they are worthy." "They will walk with me" is at least a promise of their acceptance and presence with Christ and "in white" should probably be taken as a symbol of purity in contrast to the soiled clothes of the others. In addition walking with the exalted Christ dressed in white may indicate that they will participate in the victory parade when Christ returns, defeats his enemies, and establishes his eternal kingdom. As Fee says, "this metaphor is very likely an allusion to the Roman triumphal procession, where to honor their returning, conquering heroes the citizens lined the streets in white and thus joined in the parade" (Fee, 48). In addition, white clothes may be an indication that they will be justified and acceptable in God's presence. They will have these privileges because "they are worthy." They have not compromised their character and conduct based on the standards and expectations of the world. Therefore, Christians should remain pure because those who do so will be with the exalted Christ dressed in white and participate in the parade celebrating his ultimate victory for they are worthy.

### **Concluding Commendation and Exhortation**

The exalted Christ concludes by encouraging the church in Sardis to overcome and exhorting them to hear in verses 5-6. He encourages them to overcome in verse 5, "In the same way the one who overcomes will be dressed in white and I will by no means blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels." They can overcome by living a life of faith and commitment to the exalted Christ without compromising with the world. They are encouraged to overcome based on three assurances. First, overcomers are assured by the exalted Christ that they will be dressed in white, probably meaning that they will be pure and justified before God. Second, overcomers are assured by the exalted Christ that he will not blot out their names from the Book of Life. The Book of Life is based on Exodus

32:32 and came to be a figure for security in both the Old and New Testaments. They are secure because their names are recorded in the book along with all those who have eternal life. The extent of their security is emphasized by Christ's promise that he will not blot out their names. This security is underscored in the Greek text by the use of a double negative with the subjunctive mood (Translated absolutely "I will by no means blot out his name"). Fanning says, "This expresses the idea negatively as a way of asserting the positive sense more powerfully: the overcomer will always be included among those who will live forever with God" (Fanning, 166). Third, overcomers are assured by the exalted Christ that he will acknowledge them before his Father and his angels. This language is based on the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:32, "Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in Heaven" (CSB; see also Luke 12:8). Christ will attest to the worthiness of those who have lived a life of faith and commitment to be accepted by his Father. As Beasley-Murray observes, "In the judgment of God (20:11), the confession or denial of the Son is decisive" (Beasley-Murray, 99). Morris adds, "When Jesus Christ vouches for a man he is accepted" (Morris, 77).

The exalted Christ exhorts them to hear in verse 6, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This command is similar to Jesus' command to his early disciples (Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; and Luke 8:8) and emphasizes the need for Christians to hear what the exalted Christ is saying. They should take advantage of the fact that they have ears and use them to hear what he says. In fact, it seems to indicate that all they need is one ear. The verb translated "let him hear" has a broader meaning than simply to listen and in this context probably means that they should also act on what has been said. They are further encouraged to hear what the exalted Christ is saying by describing the contents as a revelation of the Spirit. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome because they will be pure and justified before God, they will be unalterably registered in the Book of Life, they will be acknowledged by Christ before God and his angels, and these are the words of the exalted Christ through the Spirit to the churches.

### **Applying the Message**

Nominal Christianity is a major problem among churches today. People call themselves Christians, but they have so accommodated themselves to the world that there is very little that distinguishes them as authentically Christian. A preponderance of nominal Christians result in nominal churches and denominations. These similarities with the original context provide a strong basis for apply the message of this passage to the modern situation. There is very little of a contextualized nature in this passage that would require that the message of this passage be limited or adjusted when applied to the contemporary situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message that follow vary little from the statement of the message in the original context. Christians should heed the message of this letter because it contains the words of the exalted Christ, who has the Spirit of God in its fullness as well as the angels at his disposal to revive the church. Christians should be continually alert, strengthen what remains, remember the gospel and the life of faith and commitment, keep on practicing it, and repent because they are dead in spite of their reputation, their deeds are incomplete in the sight of God, and Jesus Christ will return unexpectedly to judge them. Christians should remain pure because those who do so will be with the exalted Christ dressed in white and participate in the parade celebrating his ultimate victory for they are worthy. Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome because they will be pure and justified before God, they will be unalterably registered in the

Book of Life, they will be acknowledged by Christ before God and his angels, and these are the words of the Spirit to the churches.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** BE CONTINUALLY ALERT!

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to repent of worldliness and be constantly alert and faithful.

**Proposition:** Christians should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because Christ will revive them through the Spirit, Christ will return unexpectedly, those who remain pure will be worth to join Christ's victory parade, those who overcome will be pure and holy before God, those who overcome will be unalterably registered in the Book of Life, and Christ will acknowledge those who overcome before God.

### **Introduction**

Nominal Christianity is a major problem among churches today. Some people call themselves Christians, but they have so accommodated themselves to the world that there is very little that distinguishes them as authentically Christian. *Illustration of a Nominal Christian.* A preponderance of these nominal Christians results in nominal churches and denominations. The church in Sardis had a similar problem and the exalted Christ had John write a letter to this church in order to meet this threat. We should listen carefully to what the exalted Christ says about nominal Christianity because "These [things] says the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars" (1). *Read Revelation 3:1-6.*

**I. Christians should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because Jesus Christ is able to revive them through the Spirit.**

**II. Christians should repent worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because Jesus Christ will return unexpectedly.**

**III. Christians should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because those who remain pure will be worthy to join Christ's victory parade.**

**IV. Christians should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because those who overcome will be pure and justified before God.**

**V. Christians should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because those who overcome will be unalterably registered in the Book of Life.**

**VI. Christians should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because Christ will acknowledge those who overcome before God.**

### **Conclusion**

Nominal Christianity is a major problem among churches today. Some people call themselves Christians, but they have so accommodated themselves to the world that there is very little that distinguishes them as authentically Christian. A preponderance of these nominal Christians results in nominal churches and denominations. The church in Sardis had a similar problem and the exalted Christ had John write a letter to this church in order to meet this threat. Let's listen carefully to what the exalted Christ says about nominal Christianity. As the exalted Christ says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." We should

repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because Jesus Christ will revive us through the Spirit. We should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because Jesus Christ will return unexpectedly. We should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because those who remain pure will be worthy to join Christ's victory parade. We should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because those who overcome will be pure and justified before God. We should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because those who overcome will be unalterably registered in the Book of Life. We should repent of worldliness and be continually alert and faithful because Christ will acknowledge those who overcome before God.

## CHAPTER NINE

### **TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA**

#### **Letter to the Church in Philadelphia**

#### **Revelation 3:7-13**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

3:7 To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These [things] says the Holy One, the True One, the one having the key of David, the one who opens and no one will shut and shuts and no one opens:

8 I know your works. Behold, I have given before you a door which has been opened which no one is able to shut because you have little strength, but have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 Behold, I will give [those] who are from the synagogue of Satan, who claim themselves to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--Behold, I will make them come in order to prostrate themselves at your feet and acknowledge that I myself have loved you. 10 Since you have kept the word of my steadfast endurance, I myself will also keep you from the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Keep holding on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

12 The one who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God and he will never leave it. Indeed, I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God, and my new name. 13 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage reflects a situation in which the Christians in Philadelphia were weak and under pressure to renounce their faith in Christ and compromise their commitment to him. Though the imperial cult may have been the source of this pressure, the passage stresses the role of the Jews in their struggles. The Jews were probably ridiculing Christians and the church, denying that they were loved by God. They were also probably denouncing Christians to the Roman authorities as being a cult with no ties to Judaism and not covered by the exemption that Jews had from affirming Caesar as their Lord. Even though the Christians were continuing to keep Jesus' words, refusing to deny his name, and enduring patiently, their strength was nearly gone. The purpose of the passage was to exhort and encourage these struggling Christians to keep holding on and overcome by obeying Jesus' words, refusing to deny his name, and enduring patiently.

##### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is the sixth letter in the series of letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor located in chapters 2-3. The messages of these letters are reinforced by the preceding and following divisions that introduce the book and depict the trial of the last days, the ultimate victory of God, and the establishment of his eternal kingdom. This passage is closely linked to 1:1-8 and 1:9-20 by the identification of the source of the letter as "the Holy One, the True One, the one having the key of David, the one who opens and no one will shut and shuts and no one opens." These letters reinforce and supplement one another through their general call to



faithfulness and specific exhortation with regard to various threats. Indeed, all of the letters were intended to be read in every church since each of the letters ends with a call for all to hear "what the Spirit says to the churches." This letter provides specific instruction with regard to spiritual fatigue and endurance.

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a letter or epistle. More specifically, this passage contains an address, commendation, and exhortations. The address not only identifies the recipients, but also the ultimate source of the message. This identification of the source as "the one who is holy and true, who holds the key of David" serves to emphasize the need for the readers to heed the message of the letter. This identification of the source implies the command, "Read and heed this letter." Exhortations normally indicate the appropriate response with commands and prohibitions. These commands and prohibitions are normally supplemented and reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify issues and provide motivation for obedience. In this passage, the appropriate response of the exhortations is indicated with the commands, "keep holding on to what you have" and "let him hear." The command to keep holding on is reinforced by an assurance of Christ's imminent return and a warning against allowing anyone to take their crown. Commendation is a type of exhortation that does not contain a command. Instead commendation encourages conduct by indicating that it is good or beneficial. The commendation in verses 8-10 encourages readers to continue to remain faithful based on assurances of an open door, vindication, and deliverance from the coming trial. These commendations imply the commands, "Continue to work, keep my word, and refuse to deny my name." The concluding commendation in verse 12 encourages overcoming with assurances that those who overcome will be made a pillar in the God's temple and never leave it and be securely sealed. This commendation implies the command, "Overcome."

### **Strategy and Structure**

This letter follows generally the characteristic pattern of most of the seven letters: address, commendations, rebuke and exhortation, and concluding exhortation. The only variation from this pattern is that this passage contains no rebuke. The address introduces the letter and a visionary image of its source to encourage the readers to heed the message of the letter (7). This visionary image also provides the basis for the warning and assurance that are developed later in the letter. Christ's commendation of them encourages them to remain faithful to his word and name by assuring them of an open door, vindication, and deliverance from the coming trial (8-10). Christ's exhortation to keep holding on appeals to them to remain faithful to his word based on his imminent return and concern that someone might take their crown (11). The concluding commendation and exhortation reinforces the need for the readers to heed the teaching of the letter and overcome based on assurances that they will be made a pillar in God's temple and never leave it and they will be securely sealed (12-13).

- I. Address (7)
  - A. Command to Write
  - B. The Source of the Letter
- II. Commendation of Their Faithfulness to His Word and Name (8-10)
  - A. Commendation of Their Deeds (8a)
  - B. Assurance that He Has Given Them an Open Door because of Their Faithfulness to His Word and Name (8b-9)

- C. Assurance that He Will Make the Jews Acknowledge that He Loves Them (9)
  - D. Assurance that He Will Keep Them from the Coming Trial because of Their Steadfast Endurance (10)
- III. Exhortation to Faithfulness (11)
- A. Assurance of His Imminent Return
  - B. Command to Keep Holding on to What They Have
  - C. Warning of the Danger that Someone Might Take Their Crown
- IV. Concluding Commendation and Exhortation (12-13)
- A. Concluding Commendation of Overcoming (12)
    - 1. Assurance of being made a pillar in the temple
    - 2. Assurance that they are securely sealed
  - B. Concluding Exhortation to Hear (13)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should heed what the exalted Christ says in this letter because he is the Holy and True One, who has absolute authority over who is admitted into the messianic kingdom. Christians should continue to be faithful to Christ's word and name because he knows and approves, he has opened a door for them to his messianic kingdom that no one can shut, the Jews will have to humble themselves before them and acknowledge that he loves them, and he will keep them from the trial that is coming on sinful humanity. Christians should keep holding on by remaining faithful to Christ's word and name because he is coming soon and so that they can ensure that they will receive his commendation, good and faithful servant. Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome because those who do will be secure and live forever in God's presence, be sealed as the property of God and Jesus and as citizens of the New Jerusalem, and these are the words of the exalted Christ speaking through the Spirit.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Address**

The address of the letter is located in verse 7. First, John is commanded to write to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write." Philadelphia was named after Attalus II, who was also called Philadelphus because of his love for his brother, the former king. Philadelphia was on the trade routes to the east and was well-known for its vineyards. Therefore, it was an important and prosperous city. However, it was located on a fault line and suffered from periodic earthquakes that made the lives of its inhabitants insecure. Second, the source of the letter is revealed, "These [things] says the Holy One, the True One, the one having the key of David, the one who opens and no one can shut, and shuts and no one can open." The epithets "the Holy One, the True One" are used to describe God in 6:10 and the exalted Christ shares the divine nature. The word translated "the Holy One" means "one who is set apart" and probably stresses the wholly otherness of Christ and his worthiness of worship (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 4452-4453). The title translated "the True One" can mean either that he is "the legitimate one" or "the faithful one" or could combine both ideas. If the latter is the case, he is both the legitimate Messiah and he can be relied on to support them. The reference to the key of David and the authority to open and shut are allusions to Isaiah 22:22; however, its meaning is expanded here as an indication of the exalted Christ's authority. Some have understood this open door as the unlimited opportunity for evangelism in accordance with

Pauline usage of this terminology, but in this context it probably indicates the exalted Christ's authority over entrance into the messianic kingdom. The addition of "the one who opens and no one can shut, and shuts and no one can open" stresses that his authority is absolute. Since the exalted Christ is the Holy One and the True One he has absolute authority over entrance into the messianic kingdom. Through this identification of the exalted Christ, readers are encouraged to heed what he says in this letter. Therefore, Christians should heed what the exalted Christ says in this letter because he is the Holy and True One, who has absolute authority over who is admitted into the messianic kingdom.

### **Commendation of Faithfulness to His Word and Name**

The exalted Christ commends them for their faithfulness to his word and name in verses 8-10. The exalted Christ commends them for their works in the first part of verse 8, "I know your works." The verb translated "I know" implies more than that the exalted Christ is aware of their works; he also approves these works. Thus he commends them for their works and implicitly encourages them to continue in them. The word translated "works" is a general term that includes all the good things that they are doing. Subsequently he specifically commends them for their faithfulness to his word and name and steadfast endurance.

The exalted Christ assures them that he has given them an open door because of their faithfulness to his word and name in the remainder of verse 8, "Behold, I have given before you a door which has been opened which no one is able to shut because you have little strength, but have kept my word and have not denied my name." As was noted above, this assurance is sometimes interpreted as an open door to evangelism in accordance with Pauline usage of the imagery of an open door. However, it is probably an assurance that he has opened the door to them into the messianic kingdom. Though the language is not repeated, his absolute authority is probably implied. No one can close this door that he has opened. As Fanning says, "Christ's own divine authority guarantees that their access will never be taken away" (Fanning, 173). Since no one can close a door that he has opened, they are totally secure. Mounce suggests that they had been excluded from the synagogue by the Jews. So the exalted Christ is assuring them "No matter if the door to the synagogue has been closed, the door into the messianic kingdom remains open" (Mounce, 101). The exalted Christ describes them as having "little strength," probably meaning that they do not have power to resist the powerful forces that are aligned against them. This description serves to emphasize their remarkable faithfulness to Jesus' word and name. They have continued to obey the gospel and Jesus' teaching on the demands of discipleship without compromise with the world and they have not renounced the name of Jesus in order to make life easier on themselves. Fanning adds the further insight, "Their faithfulness commended in the rest of the verse testifies to their grasp of the wider Christian truth that God's strength must supply what they lack in their own spiritual resources (cf. 1 Cor 1: 26– 29; 2 Cor 12: 9– 10; Phil 4: 13)" (Fanning, 173).

The exalted Christ assures them that the Jews will be forced to acknowledge that he loves them in verse 9, "Behold, I will give [those] who are from the synagogue of Satan, who claim themselves to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--Behold, I will make them come in order to prostrate themselves at your feet and acknowledge that I myself have loved you." The grammar is very dramatic in this verse. He begins to assure them, but then stops and starts again. Each time he begins with the interjection translated "Behold." This word is used at strategic points to emphasize something noteworthy and here it is used twice. He emphatically denies that

these opponents are actually Jews in the true sense; the church is the True Israel. Instead, their true character has been demonstrated by their rejection of the Messiah and their opposition to the church. They are "the synagogue of Satan" and "liars." As Jesus says in John 8:44, "You are of your father the Devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of liars" (CSB). These lies could possibly be the disparaging things that they are saying about Christians and the church. As Fanning says, "Based on what Christ says here, it is easy to envision some in the Jewish community mocking and castigating an outwardly powerless church as rejected by their God and certain to be judged in the future" (Fanning, 174). The language assuring Christians of their vindication before the Jews is very strong. They will come and prostrate themselves at the feet of Christians. The verb translated "prostrate themselves" is normally used in the context of worship and is sometimes translated "worship." However, they will prostrate themselves at the feet of Christians and acknowledging that the exalted Christ, the true Messiah, loves them. This affirmation is made emphatic by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "I, I have loved you" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "I myself have loved you"). The Jews expected to be vindicated before the gentiles based on Isaiah 60:14, but ironically gentile believers will be vindicated before the Jews. As Osborne says, "The OT teaches that the Gentiles would be forced to pay homage to the Jews at the eschaton, and now this promise is turned on its head: Jewish oppressors would be forced to pay homage to Gentile believers" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 4535-4536).

The exalted Christ assures them that he will keep them from the coming trial because of their steadfast endurance in verse 10, "Since you have kept the word of my steadfast endurance, I myself will also keep you from the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth." Though many modern versions translate the possessive pronoun "my" as though it qualifies "word" based on its use with "word" in verse 7 (CSB, ESV, NIV, NKJ, and NRS), the Greek text seems to more naturally relate it to "steadfast endurance" (See also NAS). The difference in meaning is not all that much but lays more stress on their faithfulness to emulate Jesus' commitment and sacrifice. They were truly taking up their cross and following Jesus. The same verb is used to describe their faithfulness to obey his word ("you have kept") as is used to relate his assurance ("I will also keep"). This play on words serves to emphasize the appropriateness of his assurance to them based on their conduct. He also stresses his assurance to them by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "I, I will also keep" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "I myself will also keep"). It is reasonably clear that the trial that is being described is eschatological, relating to the end times. The assurance that he gives is ambiguous and could be understood as removal from the tribulation or protection during the tribulation. This mystery may never be known until the end. Nonetheless, the exalted Christ assures the church of his protection of some kind when the end time trial comes. These assurances of the exalted Christ to those who are faithful to his word and name would encourage Christians to continue to be faithful. Therefore, Christians should continue to be faithful to Christ's word and name because he knows and approves, he has opened a door for them to his messianic kingdom that no one can shut, the Jews will have to humble themselves before them and acknowledge that he loves them, and he will keep them from the coming trial that is coming on sinful humanity.

### **Exhortation to Keep Holding On**

The exalted Christ exhorts them to hold on to what they have until he comes in verse 11, "I am coming soon. Keep holding on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." First, he assures them that his return is imminent, "I am coming soon." This primarily serves to encourage Christians to remain faithful since they will not have to endure for long. Second he commands them to hold on to what they have, "Keep holding on to what you have." The verb is a present imperative and emphasizes the need to continue to hold on. The verb itself means "to hold fast" and stresses the need for faithfulness. Based on what they have been commended for, this especially means that they need to keep on faithfully obeying Christ's word without compromise with the world and refusing to deny Christ's name even though they must endure intense pressure. Third, he warns them of the danger that someone may take their crown, "so that no one will take your crown." The image of the crown comes from the games and stresses the importance of diligence in competing victoriously. The crown should probably be understood as an assurance of commendation they will receive from Christ if they continue to remain faithful, his "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21). As Fanning says, "The "crown" represents the joyful celebration of accomplishment awaiting them when Christ comes" (Fanning, 178). But the exalted Christ warns them, "so that no one will take your crown," probably meaning that they should not allow someone to entice or pressure them into something that would deny them the joy of receiving this commendation from Christ. Therefore, Christians should keep holding on by remaining faithful to Christ's word and name and enduring because he is coming soon and so they can ensure that they will receive his commendation, good and faithful servant.

### **Concluding Commendation and Exhortation**

The exalted Christ concludes the letter by encouraging the Christians in Philadelphia to overcome and exhorting them to heed the words of the letter in verses 12-13. The exalted Christ encourages the Christians in Philadelphia to overcome in verse 12. First, he assures those who overcome that they will be made a pillar in the temple of God, "The one who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it." Those who overcome are those who continue to obey the word of Christ rather than compromise with the world and refuse to denying the name of Christ to ease their suffering. Oddly, they are assured by the exalted Christ that they will be pillars in God's temple. Pillars were an essential feature of ancient architecture. The promise that he will make them a pillar in the temple of God is at the very least an assurance of their acceptance into the presence of God. In addition, the sturdiness of a pillar probably indicates their secure position in God's presence. The final line is stated very strongly in the Greek text and underscores their perpetual position in God's presence ("Never again will they leave it." Second, he assures those who overcome that they will be securely sealed, "Indeed I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write upon him my new name." Sealing was a common practice guaranteeing the security of the contents thus sealed. This imagery intensifies the promise of security given to those who overcome. The name on the seal indicated property rights so the Christians in Philadelphia are identified as the property of God and Jesus and citizens in the New Jerusalem (See also Revelation 14:1 and 22:4). There is much speculation about the new name that the exalted Christ will have (Also mentioned in Revelation 19:12). That is another mystery that is best left for the end. Many commentators relate this assurance to the instability of earthquake ravaged Philadelphia and Fee concludes, "Thus these believers in earthquake-prone Philadelphia will inherit a city that will endure--and will exist without the tremors!" (Fee, 56). They are secured as the property of God and Jesus and

assured of entry into the New Jerusalem that is described in chapter 21-22 as the blessed state of the faithful in the coming age. Mounce summarizes, "The impact of the threefold inscription is to show that the faithful belong to God, hold citizenship in the New Jerusalem, and are in a special way related to Christ" (Mounce, 105). Since those who overcome will be secure and live forever in God's presence and will be sealed, Christians are encouraged to continue to be faithful to Christ's word and not deny his name.

The exalted Christ exhorts Christians to heed the words of the letter in verse 13, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This command is similar to Jesus' command to his early disciples (Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; and Luke 8:8) and emphasizes the need for Christians to hear what the exalted Christ is saying. They should take advantage of the fact that they have ears and use them to hear what he says. In fact, it seems to indicate that all they need is one ear. The verb translated "let him hear" has a broader meaning than simply to listen and in this context probably means that they should also act on what has been said. They are further encouraged to hear what the exalted Christ is saying by describing the contents as a revelation of the Spirit. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome because those who do will be secure and live forever in God's presence, be sealed as the property of God and Jesus and citizens of the New Jerusalem, and these are the words of the exalted Christ speaking through the Spirit.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today also encounter opposition and abuse because of their commitment to Jesus Christ and may be in danger of compromising their commitment to Jesus Christ. There is very little of a contextualized nature that requires that its message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. However, a few specific elements do reflect the original context and need to be generalized in order to be relevant for a broader situation. Chief among these is the assurance that they will be vindicated before the Jews, who are castigated for being "the synagogue of Satan" and "liars." As Fanning says, "No Christian should read Jesus's assurance to the church in Philadelphia about its ethnic Jewish opponents as a justification for anti-Jewish animus today" (Fanning, 180). Nonetheless, the assurance of vindication still stands and I have generalized this assurance to apply to all those who ridicule Christians for their faithfulness to Christ. Nonetheless, the statements of the applied message are nearly identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should heed what the exalted Christ says in this letter because he is the Holy and True One, who has absolute authority over who is admitted into the messianic kingdom. Christians should continue to be faithful to Christ's word and name because he knows and approves, he has opened a door for them to his messianic kingdom that no one can shut, those who ridicule and abuse them will have to humble themselves before them and acknowledge that he loves them, and he will keep them from the trial that is coming on sinful humanity. Christians should keep holding on by remaining faithful to Christ's word and name because he is coming soon and so that they can ensure that they will receive his commendation, good and faithful servant. Christians should heed the message of this letter and overcome because those who do will be secure and live forever in God's presence, be sealed as the property of God and Jesus and as citizens of the New Jerusalem, and these are the words of the exalted Christ speaking through the Spirit.

### **Communicating the Message**

## **Title: KEEP HOLDING ON TO WHAT YOU HAVE**

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to keep holding on and overcome by continuing to be faithful to the words and name of Christ.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to be faithful to Christ because he knows and approves, he has opened a door for them into his kingdom that no one can shut, they will be vindicated before those who ridicule and abuse them, he will keep them from the trial that is coming on sinful humanity, he is coming soon and so that they will receive his commendation, and those who overcome will be secure forever in God's presence and belong to God and Jesus and be citizens of the New Jerusalem.

### **Introduction**

Christians today often encounter opposition and abuse because of their commitment to Jesus Christ. As a result they may be in danger of compromising their commitment to Christ in order to fit in and make their lives easier. *Illustration of a Christian Who Has Compromised with the World.* The church in Philadelphia also encountered opposition and abuse. Nonetheless, they continued to be faithful to Christ's word and name and steadfastly endured. The exalted Christ commended them for their faithfulness and steadfast endurance and encouraged them to keep holding on and overcome. We should listen carefully to what the exalted Christ says because, "These [things] says the Holy One, the True One, the one having the key of David, the one who opens and no one will shut and shuts and no one opens." *Read Revelation 3:7-13.*

- I. Christians should continue to be faithful to Christ because he knows and approves.**
- II. Christians should continue to be faithful to Christ because he has opened a door for them to his kingdom that no one can shut.**
- III. Christians should continue to be faithful to Christ because they will be vindicated before those who ridicule and abuse them.**
- IV. Christians should continue to be faithful to Christ because he will keep them from the trial that is coming on sinful humanity.**
- V. Christians should keep holding on because he is coming soon and so that they can ensure that they will receive his commendation.**
- VI. Christians should overcome because those who do will be secure and live forever in God's presence.**
- VII. Christians should overcome because those who do belong to God and Jesus and are citizens of the New Jerusalem.**

### **Conclusion**

We often encounter opposition and abuse because of our commitment to Christ. As a result we may be in danger of compromising our commitment to Christ in order to fit in and make our lives easier. The church in Philadelphia also encountered opposition and abuse. Nonetheless, they continued to be faithful to Christ's word and name and steadfastly endured. The exalted Christ commended them for their faithfulness and steadfast endurance and encouraged them to keep holding on and overcome. As the exalted Christ says in the last verse of this letter, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." We should continue to be faithful to Christ because he knows and approves, he has opened a door for us into his kingdom

that no one can shut, we will be vindicated before those who ridicule and abuse us, he will keep us from the trial that is coming on sinful humanity, he is coming soon and we desire to receive his commendation, and those who overcome will be secure forever in God's presence and belong to God and Jesus and be citizens of the New Jerusalem.



## CHAPTER TEN

### **TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA**

#### **Letter to the Church in Laodicea**

#### **Revelation 3:14-22**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

3:14 To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These [things] says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation:

15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! 16 So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth. 17 Because you say, "I am rich and I have become wealthy and I have need of nothing," and you do not realize that you yourselves are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked, 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be not exposed; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

19 If as many as I myself love I rebuke and discipline, then be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.

21 To the one who overcomes I will give [the right] to sit with me on my throne, just as I myself overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The church in Laodicea does not seem to have been significantly affected by the trials tormenting the other churches in Asia Minor. There is no indication in the passage that they were persecuted by Rome because of the imperial cult. Neither is there any indication that the Jews were slandering them. There is not even any indication that they were endangered by false teachers. Instead, the exact opposite seems to be the case. They appear to be prospering. As a result they have become self-sufficient and their commitment is only half-hearted. They had probably compromised their commitment to Christ in order to share in the prosperity of the city. They are described as being neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. This seems to indicate that they have some commitment to Christ, but that it is half-hearted at best. They are described as saying that they have need of nothing but are described as being "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." They think that they are doing well and are ignorant of their true spiritual condition. The invitation of the exalted Christ to answer his knock and allow him in implies that they in some sense have excluded him from their lives. The purpose of the passage was to exhort and encourage Christians to be zealous and repent of their self-sufficiency and complacency and allow Jesus back into their lives.

##### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is the final letter in the series of letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor located in chapters 2-3. The messages of these letters are reinforced by the preceding and

following divisions that introduce the book and depict the trial of the last days, the ultimate victory of God, and the establishment of his eternal kingdom. The identification of the source of the letter as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation" is not in this case linked to the imagery of the exalted Christ in 1:1-8 and 9-20. These letters reinforce and supplement one another through their general call to faithfulness and specific exhortation with regard to various problems. Indeed, all of the letters were intended to be read in every church since each of the letters ends with a call for all to hear "what the Spirit says to the churches." This letter provides specific instruction with regard to half-hearted commitment, complacency, and self-sufficiency.

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a letter or epistle. More specifically, this letter contains an address, exhortations, rebuke and warning, invitation, and commendation. The address not only identifies the recipients, but also the ultimate source of the message. This identification of the source as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation" serves to emphasize the need for the readers to heed the message of the letter. Though not specifically stated, the identification of the source implies the command, "Read and heed this letter." Exhortations normally indicate the appropriate response with commands and prohibitions. These commands and prohibitions are normally supplemented and reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments that clarify issues and provide motivation for obedience. In this passage, the appropriate response of the exhortations is indicated with the commands, "be zealous and repent" in verse 19 and "let him hear" in verse 22. In addition, verse 18 contains an indirect command that could be stated more directly, "Buy all that you need from Jesus." Rebuke and warning is a type of exhortation that does not include a command. The rebuke and warning in verses 15-16 imply the prohibition, "Don't be indifferent and complacent" by expressing Christ's displeasure and describing the negative consequences. Invitation is also a kind of exhortation that does not contain a specific command. The invitation in verse 20 implies the command "Open the door to the exalted Christ" by describing the benefits. Commendation is another kind of exhortation that does not contain a command but encourages conduct based on its goodness or benefits. The commendation in verse 21 implies the command "Overcome" by describing the benefits.

### **Strategy and Structure**

This letter follows generally the characteristic pattern of most of the seven letters: address, commendations, rebuke and exhortation, and concluding exhortation. One variation from this pattern is that no commendation of their conduct is given. Another unique feature of this letter is the invitation in verse 20. The address in verse 14 introduces the letter and a visionary image of its source to encourage the readers to heed the message of the letter. This visionary image also provides the basis for the warning and assurance that are developed later in the letter. The rebuke and counsel in verses 15-18 warns them of the exalted Christ's displeasure with their half-hearted commitment and seeks to lead them to acknowledge their wretched condition and seek him for what they truly need. The exhortation and invitation in verses 19-20 takes this a step further by leading them to be zealous and repent of their half-hearted commitment and allow the exalted Christ back into their lives (19-20). The concluding commendation and exhortation in verses 21-22 reinforces the need for the readers to heed the teaching of the letter and overcome through assurances to those who listen and overcome.

#### **I. Address (14)**

- A. Command to Write to the Angel of the Church in Laodicea
  - B. Source of the Words in the Letter
- II. Rebuke and Counsel (15-18)
- A. Rebuke and Warning for Being Lukewarm (15-16)
    - 1. Rebuke for being lukewarm (15a)
    - 2. Preference that they were either cold or hot (15b)
    - 3. Warning that he is about to vomit them out of his mouth (16)
  - B. Counsel to Seek the Exalted Christ for What They Need (17-18)
    - 1. Rebuking explanation of their wretched state (17)
    - 2. Counsel to seek him for what they need (18)
      - a. Gold so they can become truly rich
      - b. White clothes to cover their shame
      - c. Salve so that they can see
- III. Exhortation and Invitation (19-20)
- A. Exhortation to Be Zealous and Repent (19)
  - B. Invitation to Open the Door to the Exalted Christ (20)
    - 1. His availability
    - 2. His condition
    - 3. His assurance
- IV. Concluding Commendation and Exhortation (21-22)
- A. Commendation of Overcoming
    - 1. Assurance of exaltation to those who overcome
    - 2. Example of exaltation through overcoming
  - B. Exhortation to Hear

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should heed the message of the letter because it contains the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, who spoke the world into being and has preeminence over God's creation. Christians should repent of their half-hearted commitment because the exalted Christ knows their works, is disgusted with their half-hearted commitment, and is about to reject them. Christians should repent of their self-sufficiency and seek the exalted Christ because they are wretched and pitiful despite their claims and only he can truly make them rich, cover their shame, and enable them to see. Christians should be zealously committed to Christ and repent of their complacency and self-sufficiency because all those whom Christ loves he also rebukes and disciplines. Christians should let Christ back into their lives because he is urgently and persistently seeking them and if they do he will come in and have intimate fellowship with them. Christians should heed the message of the letter and overcome by being zealous and relying completely on Christ because those who do will share in his reign and this is what Christ is saying through the Spirit to the churches.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Address**

The address of the letter is located in verse 14. First, the exalted Christ commands John to write to the angel of the church in Laodicea, "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write." Laodicea was located on the trade routes and was an extremely wealthy commercial center. This

church was probably started by Epaphras (Colossians 1:7). The city was known for banking, textiles, and medicine. Moreover, the city was very self-sufficient; so much so that when it was destroyed by an earthquake it did not accept help from the Roman Empire to rebuild as did other cities. The church in many ways mirrored the city and these similarities are used in subsequent verses as the exalted Christ rebukes and exhorts the church. Second, the source of the words of the letter is identified, "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation." "Amen" is transliterated from the Hebrew of a word meaning "truly" and is used as a title applied to the exalted Christ to assure the reliability of his revelation. "Faithful and true" further emphasize the reliability of the exalted Christ's revelation. The implication of these titles is that the exalted Christ and what he says is reliable because he is the faithful and true witness to what God has said. As Beasley-Murray says, "Jesus as the embodiment and expression of the truth of God" (Beasley-Murray, 103). The word translated "beginning" often means "origin" and can be used to refer to someone preeminent or a ruler. The identification of the exalted Christ as "The beginning of God's creation" should not be understood to indicate that he was the first thing God created, but that he is the one through whom God created the world and who has preeminence over all creation. As Ashcraft says, "If taken to mean that Christ was the first creature, then one has ignored the Christology of Revelation (Ashcraft, 275). The exalted Christ is the one who spoke the world into being and has preeminence over all of God's creation so his words should be heeded. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of the letter because it contains the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, who spoke the world into being and has preeminence over God's creation.

### **Rebuke, Warning, and Counsel**

The exalted Christ rebukes, warns, and counsels the Christians in Laodicea in verses 15-18. The exalted Christ rebukes and warns the Christians in Laodicea against being lukewarm in verses 15-16. First, he rebukes them for being neither hot nor cold in the first part of verse 15, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot." The exalted Christ knows their works, but in this case the implication is not that he knows and approves as in most of the letters, but that he knows and disapproves. The problem is that their works do not come from complete devotion to him. Instead, they "are neither cold nor hot." This should probably be understood in relation to the Christ's description of their condition and exhortation to be zealous which follow. In this case they are neither totally apathetic nor extremely zealous. Instead, as Beasley-Murray says with regard to their commitment to the gospel, "They maintain it without conviction, without enthusiasm, without reflection on its implications for life" (Beasley-Murray, 104). Second, he expresses his preference that they were either hot or cold in the second part of verse 15, "I wish you were either one or the other!" Indeed, his desire is that they would be hot and in fact he exhorts them to be zealous in verse 19. However, being cold or totally apathetic would be preferable to being lukewarm or half-hearted in their devotion because then they would be more likely to recognize their condition. As Fee says, "In actuality, of course, he would prefer them to be "hot"; but if they were "cold" then they could more easily recognize their situation and be helped" (Fee, 58). Third, he warns them that he is about to vomit them out of his mouth in verse 16, "So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about vomit you out of my mouth." The background for this description of them is probably the mineral laden water from the hot springs in nearby Hierapolis that became tepid as it flowed across a plateau and over a cliff opposite Laodicea. As Beasley-Murray says, "Owing to the white incrustation of lime, left by the waters, the cliff was perpetually visible in Laodicea, and so its citizens could hardly forget the lukewarm water which would make a man sick if he drank it" (Beasley-Murray, 105).

Similarly the Christians in Laodicea had become lukewarm or half-hearted in their commitment to Christ. Like the tepid and mineral laden water they were unpalatable. Indeed, the exalted Christ says that they are so disgusting to him that he is about to vomit them out of his mouth. As Osborne says, the exalted Christ is essentially "challenging them with a powerful rhetorical question, 'Don't you realize that you make me sick?'" (Osborne, Kindle Location 4861). Indeed, his warning that he is about to vomit them out of his mouth is severe and implies extreme disgust and perhaps even rejection (Thayer Greek-English Lexicon). Therefore, Christians should repent of their half-hearted commitment because the exalted Christ knows their works, is disgusted with their half-hearted commitment, and is about to reject them.

The exalted Christ rebukes and counsels the Christians in Laodicea to seek him in verses 17-18. First, he gives a rebuking explanation of their need to seek him for what they need in verse 17, "Because you say, 'I am rich and I have become wealthy and have need of nothing,' and do not realize that you yourselves are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." Note the preponderance of "I" in the words attributed to them by the exalted Christ. At the heart of their problem was that they were self-sufficient and self-centered. Like the city of Laodicea which did not seek aid from Rome when it was destroyed by an earthquake, they were relying on their own resources rather than seeking God for their needs. As Osborne concludes, "The problem was, the city had no perceived need for help from Rome, and the church had no perceived need for help from God" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 4877-4878). As a result they are described as "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." The words translated "wretched" and "pitiful" describe the extent of their condition in contrast to their claims to be wealthy and have need of nothing. In fact they are destitute and should be pitied. The words translated "poor, blind, and naked" describe their specific condition and are clarified somewhat in the next verse. He stresses their true condition by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "You, you are" and indicated in translation with a reflexive pronoun "You yourselves are"). Second, he counsels them to seek him for what they need in verse 18, "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see." His counsel to buy from him what they need seems a bit odd, but is probably based on Isaiah 55:1, "Come, everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters; and you without money, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost!" (CSB). Ironically, what they really need they cannot buy with their wealth and comes only from seeking the exalted Christ. The city of Laodicea was quite prosperous and three leading industries are used to develop metaphorically the spiritual need of the Christians in Laodicea despite their material prosperity--banking, clothing, and eye ointment. Though the Christians in Laodicea were wealthy materially, they lacked the true spiritual riches that are only found in Christ. The proven value of the riches found in Christ is emphasized by describing them as "refined in the fire." Though the Christians in Laodicea shared the material prosperity of the garment industry, they lacked a covering to hide their sinfulness and shame and needed the white robes of holiness that are only available through Christ. As Mounce notes, "In the biblical world nakedness was a symbol of judgment and humiliation" (Mounce, 111). Though they shared the material prosperity of the eye salves, they were spiritually blind to their own condition and they needed to turn to Jesus so that they could discern what was truly important. As Mounce says, "Confident of their clear vision into spiritual matters, the Laodiceans needed, as it were, their own eye salve to restore sight" (Mounce, 111-112). Osborne concludes that they chose the wrong store and bought into the prosperity of Laodicea rather than Christ and concludes that "they have to switch their broker from the marketplace to him" (Osborne, Kindle Locations

4907-4908). Fanning adds, "the most important point of the verse is that the remedy in each case is something beyond their own vaunted resources and must be obtained from Christ" (Fanning, 188). Therefore, Christians should repent of their self-sufficiency and seek the exalted Christ because they are wretched and pitiful despite their claims and only he can truly make them rich, cover their shame, and enable them to see.

### **Exhortation and Invitation**

The exalted Christ exhorts and invites the Christians in Laodicea in verses 19-20. The exalted Christ exhorts the Christians in Laodicea to be zealous and repent in verse 19, "If as many as I myself love I rebuke and discipline, then be zealous and repent." The good news is that the exalted Christ loves them even with their half-hearted commitment and proud self-sufficiency. He stresses his love for them by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "I, I love" and indicated in translation with a reflexive pronoun "I myself love"). Indeed, he rebukes and disciplines them because he loves them! His rebuke and discipline have a redemptive purpose--to lead them to "be zealous and repent." He uses the relative adjective to state absolutely that he rebukes and disciplines everyone whom he loves ("as many as"). To "be zealous" is to be fervently committed and is the opposite of their lukewarm and half-hearted commitment. The present imperative translated "be zealous" probably stresses the need for continual zeal.. To "repent" is to turn from one's current direction and commit to a new course of action. In this case it is a call for them to turn from their self-reliance and instead rely completely on Christ. Therefore, Christians should be zealously committed to Christ and repent of their complacency and self-sufficiency because all those whom Christ loves he also rebukes and disciplines.

### **Invitation to Open the Door to Him**

The exalted Christ invites the Christians in Laodicea to open the door to him in verse 20. First, he assures them of his availability, "Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking." This imagery implies that Christ is on the outside of their lives. They have excluded him through their half-hearted commitment, complacency, and self-sufficiency. As Fee says, "This is a call for a church that thinks of itself far better than it should to wake up; not just to recognize their actual present condition, but to come to terms with the fact that Christ is pictured on the outside, not inside!" (Fee, 60). This imagery also beautifully portrays the urgent longing of Jesus for intimate fellowship with them. It is introduced with the interjection translated "Behold" which is used in Revelation to point out something important that needs to be heeded. The combination of the perfect tense "I stand" and present tense "am knocking" stresses the persistence of Christ in extending the invitation. Second, he states his condition, "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door." This condition also stresses Christ's urgent invitation. He is portrayed as not only knocking on the door, but also calling to them from outside. However, they must open the door to him or allow him to come back into their lives. Third, he assures them that he will come in and eat with them, "I will come in and eat with him and he with me." Meals were an important part of Hebrew society. They were not only occasions to enjoy a meal, but times of social interaction and intimate fellowship. As Osborne says, "the promise here is of acceptance, sharing, and blessing, a deep fellowship with the one offering forgiveness and reconciliation with God" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 4993-4994). The exalted Christ desires for intimate fellowship with them. Therefore, Christians should let Christ back into their lives because he is urgently and persistently seeking them and if they do he will come in and have intimate fellowship with them.

## **Concluding Commendation and Exhortation**

The exalted Christ concludes the letter by encouraging the Christians in Laodicea to overcome and exhorting them to heed the message of the letter in verses 21-22. The exalted Christ commends overcoming to the Christians in Laodicea in verse 21, "To him who overcomes I will give [the right] to sit with me on my throne "just as I myself overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne." Overcoming for the Christians in Laodicea required that they repent of their half-hearted commitment and self-sufficiency and be fervently committed to Christ and rely completely on him. If they do this they are assured that they will sit with him on his throne; they will share in his victory and reign. He likens their potential victory and enthronement to his own victory and enthronement. He stresses his victory by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "I, I overcame" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "I myself overcame"). They must also take up their own cross and follow him. As a result of his victory through suffering he sat down with his Father on his throne. Thus Christ's victory and glorification serves as a guaranty that they will also share in his victory and reign if they overcome as he did.

The exalted Christ exhorts the Christians in Laodicea to heed the message of the letter in verse 21, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This command is similar to Jesus' command to his early disciples (Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; and Luke 8:8) and probably emphasizes the need for Christians to hear what the exalted Christ is saying. They should take advantage of the fact that they have ears and use them to hear what he says. In fact, it seems to indicate that all they need is one ear. The verb translated "let him hear" has a broader meaning than simply to listen and in this context probably means that they should also act on what has been said. They are further encouraged to hear what the exalted Christ is saying by describing the contents as a revelation of the Spirit. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of the letter and overcome by being zealous and relying completely on the exalted Christ because those who do will share in his reign and this is what Christ is saying through the Spirit to the churches.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians often compromise their commitment to Christ in order to share in the prosperity of the world. As they do so they rely more and more on themselves and the world and less and less on Christ. In the end Christ seems like a stranger who has very little impact on their lives. These similarities in the situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the contemporary situation. As Osborne observes, "The Laodicean church is unfortunately a perfect parallel for some of the greatest problems in the church at the start of the twenty-first century" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 5039-5040*). Indeed, there is very little of a contextualized nature in the passage that require that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to modern Christians. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original context. Christians should heed the message of the letter because it contains the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, who spoke the world into being and has preeminence over God's creation. Christians should repent of their half-hearted commitment because the exalted Christ knows their works, is disgusted with their half-hearted commitment, and is about to reject them. Christians should repent of their self-sufficiency and seek the exalted Christ because they are wretched and pitiful despite their claims and only he can truly make them rich, cover their shame, and enable them to see. Christians should be zealously

committed to Christ and repent of their complacency and self-sufficiency because all those whom Christ loves he also rebukes and disciplines. Christians should let Christ back into their lives because he is urgently and persistently seeking them and if they do he will come in and have intimate fellowship with them. Christians should heed the message of the letter and overcome by being zealous and relying completely on the exalted Christ because those who do will share in his reign and this is what Christ is saying through the Spirit to the churches.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** I AM ABOUT TO VOMIT YOU OUT OF MY MOUTH

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and warn Christians to repent of their complacency and self-sufficiency and allow Christ back into their lives .

**Proposition:** Christians should seek Christ, live fervently for him, and relying completely on him because he is disgusted with their half-hearted commitment, they are wretched and pitiful without him, only he can meet all their needs, he disciplines those whom he loves, so that they can have intimate fellowship with him, and so they can share in his victory and eternal reign.

#### **Introduction**

Christians often compromise their commitment to Christ in order to share in the prosperity of the world. As they do so they rely more and more on themselves and the world and less and less on Christ. In the end Christ seems like a stranger who has very little impact on their lives.

*Illustration of a Self-Reliant Christian Who Has Drifted Away from Christ.* The Christians in Laodicea had also compromised their commitment in order to share in the prosperity of the world and drifted further and further away from Christ. The exalted Christ rebuked and warned them that they needed to repent and be fervently committed to him and rely on him completely. We should listen carefully to what the exalted Christ says because, "These [things] says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation." *Read Revelation 3:14-22.*

- I. Christians should be fervently committed to Christ because he is disgusted with their half-hearted commitment.**
- II. Christians should repent of their self-sufficiency and rely on Christ because they are wretched and pitiful without him.**
- III. Christians should repent of their self-sufficiency and rely on Christ because only he can really meet all their needs.**
- IV. Christians should be fervently committed to Christ because all those whom he loves he also rebukes and disciplines.**
- V. Christians should let Christ back into their lives so that they can have intimate fellowship with him.**
- VI. Christians should overcome so that they can share in Christ's victory and eternal reign.**

#### **Conclusion**

We often compromise our commitment to Christ in order to share in the prosperity of the world. As we do so we rely more and more on ourselves and the world and less and less on Christ. In the end Christ seems like a stranger who has very little impact on our lives. The



Christians in Laodicea had also compromised their commitment in order to share in the prosperity of the world and drifted further and further away from Christ. The exalted Christ rebuked and warned them that they needed to repent and be fervently committed to him and rely on him completely. As the exalted Christ says in the last verse of this letter, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." We should be fervently committed to Christ because he is disgusted with our half-hearted commitment. We should repent of our self-sufficiency and rely on Christ because we are wretched and pitiful without him. We should repent of our self-sufficiency and rely on Christ because only he can really meet all our needs. We should be fervently committed to Christ because all those whom he loves he also rebukes and disciplines. We should let Christ back into our lives so that we can have intimate fellowship with him. We should overcome so that we can share in Christ's victory and eternal reign.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### **BEHOLD, A DOOR OPEN IN HEAVEN**

#### **Vision of God on His Throne**

#### **Revelation 4:1-11**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

4:1After these things I looked, and behold, a door open in heaven. Then the first voice which I heard speaking to me like a trumpet says, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things." 2At once I came to be in the Spirit, and behold, a throne set in heaven with someone sitting on the throne. 3The one sitting there [was] similar in appearance to jasper and carnelian and a rainbow similar in appearance to an emerald [was] around the throne. 4Around the throne [were] twenty-four thrones and upon the thrones were sitting twenty-four elders in white garments and with crowns of gold on their heads. 5From the throne are coming flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder. Seven lamps are blazing before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. 6Also before the throne [was] something like a sea of glass, like crystal. In the midst of the throne and around the throne [were] four living creatures, full of eyes in front and in back. 7The first living creature [was] like a lion, the second [was] like an ox, the third had a face like a man, and the fourth [was] like a flying eagle.

8The four living creatures, each one of them having six wings and around and inside full of eyes, day and night never stopped saying:

"Holy, holy, holy [is] the Lord God Almighty;  
who was, and is, and is coming."

9Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to the one who sits on the throne and who lives unto the ages of the ages, 10the twenty-four elders fall down before the one who sits on the throne and worship the one who lives unto the ages of the ages and throw down their crowns before the throne, saying:

11"You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power;  
for you yourself created all things,  
and by your will they came to be and were created."

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage is rather general and does not provide specific insight into the situation. Nonetheless, the rest of Revelation seems to be addressing a time of great crisis in which Christians were being intimidated and enticed by Satan's allies in the world. This could have undermined their faith in God and threatened their continued faithfulness to him. This time of great crisis is most probably the crisis during the reign of Domitian when the church was opposed because of the refusal of Christians to acknowledge Caesar as Lord. As a result, many Christians endured hardships and some even died because of their commitment to Jesus as Lord. As Mounce says, "The great throne-room vision of chapters 4 and 5 serves to remind believers living in the shadow of impending persecution that an omnipotent and omniscient God is still in

control" (Mounce, 116). The more specific purpose of this passage is to encourage these beleaguered Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage and the subsequent passage contain visionary pictures of God on his throne and Jesus Christ as victorious and worthy Lamb. These visionary pictures reinforce the messages of letters to the churches that have preceded and introduce the depiction of the crisis of the last days that follows. As Beasley-Murray says, Chapters 4-5 may be viewed as the fulcrum of the Revelation (Beasley-Murray, 8). This passage focuses on the portrayal of God, whereas the subsequent passage focuses on the portrayal of Jesus Christ. Even before he overthrows Satan and his allies on earth and establishes his eternal kingdom, God is portrayed as sitting on his throne in sovereign control of all that happens and worthy of eternal praise. The rest of Revelation demonstrates God's sovereign control and validates the message of this passage.

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a vision report. Like most vision reports in Revelation it describes a visionary narrative. The invitation of the voice like a trumpet not only invites John but the readers to get a glimpse of heaven so that they can better deal with their earthly trial. The visionary description of God on his throne, the rainbow encircling the throne, the twenty-four elders surrounding the throne, the lightning and thunder coming from the throne, the seven lamps blazing before the throne, the sea of glass before the throne, and the four living creatures all about the throne employs symbolic pictures to present God as sovereign, majestic, powerful, and transcendent. This visionary portrayal of God serves to inspire praise, faith, and faithfulness in the readers. The visionary portrayal of the heavenly worship also serves to inspire faith and faithfulness based on what the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders declare about God.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage is dominated by the vision of God on his heavenly throne in verses 1-7. John is invited to come to the doorway of heaven where he sees a throne and someone sitting on it, who is described as being like jasper and carnelian, with an emerald-like rainbow around the throne, twenty-four elders surrounding the throne, thunder and lightning coming from the throne, seven lamps blazing before the throne, a sea like glass before the throne, and four living creatures all about the throne. This vision of God on his heavenly throne depicts God in his awesome majesty and serves to inspire faith and faithfulness. Next, John describes the heavenly worship in verses 8-11. He describes the worship of the four living creatures in verse 8 and the corresponding worship of the twenty-four elders in verses 9-11. The worship of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders also inspires faith and faithfulness.

- I. Vision of God on His Heavenly Throne (1-7)
  - A. Invitation to Come to the Doorway into Heaven (1)
  - B. Vision of the Throne and the One Sitting in It (2-3)
    1. The throne and the one sitting on it (2)
    2. The appearance of the one sitting on the throne (3a)
    3. The emerald-like rainbow encircling the throne (3b)
  - C. The Twenty-four Elders Surrounding the Throne (4)
  - D. The Lightning and Thunder Coming from the Throne (5a)

- E. The Seven Lamps Blazing before the Throne (5b)
- F. The Sea of Glass before the Throne (6a)
- G. The Four Living Creatures all about the Throne (6b-7)
  - 1. Their position and eyes (6b)
  - 2. Their appearance (7)
- II. Vision of the Heavenly Worship (8-11)
  - A. The Worship of the Four Living Creatures (8)
  - B. The Worship of the Twenty-Four Elders (9-11)
    - 1. Their continuous worship (9)
    - 2. Their submissive worship (10)
    - 3. Their declaration of praise (11)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he reigns forever on his throne and is majestic, holy, and awesome. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is other than and superior to everything and everyone, the Lord God Almighty, and the eternal God who is coming to bring all things to fulfillment. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he lives and rules forever on his throne and deserves to be glorified and honored because he is all powerful and created and sustains all things by his will.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Vision of God on His Heavenly Throne**

John describes his vision of God on his heavenly throne in verses 1-7. John describes a door open in heaven and his invitation to come up in verse 1, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. Then the first voice I heard speaking to me like a trumpet says, 'Come up here and I will show you what must take place after these things.'" This voice is identified as the same one that spoke to him before--the voice of the exalted Christ. John is invited to look at world events from the divine perspective and through him the Christians of Asia Minor are also able to see. As Mounce says, "A true insight into history is gained only when we view all things from the vantage point of the heavenly throne" (Mounce, 119). Summers adds, "From the heavenly angle there is no doubt about the outcome of the struggle in which the Christians were engaged" (Summers, 130). The purpose of the summons was to discover what is going to be the outcome of human history and points to the rest of the book. The verb indicates that these things "must take place," indicating that God has ordained what will take place and so it must happen. As Osborne says, "Note the emphatic 'must' of divine necessity. God once more is seen as in sovereign control of history, determining the progress of events according to his divine plan" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 5233-5234).

John describes his vision of God on his heavenly throne in verses 2-3. As Fee says, "the One sitting on the throne is the central reality in the entire vision" and "God's presence predominates in every way" (Fee, 67). First, John describes the throne and the one sitting on it in verse 2, "At once I came to be in the Spirit, and behold, a throne set in heaven with someone sitting on the throne." He indicates that he was immediately in the Spirit, probably meaning that he was caught up in profound spiritual experience like that of the prophets in the Old Testament. Though John does not identify the one on the throne it is clearly God and this will be made

explicitly clear later in the vision. The throne is clearly intended to depict God's sovereignty over the world and especially human rulers like the Roman emperor. He is the King of kings! Second, he describes the appearance of the one sitting on the throne in the first part of verse 3, "The one sitting there [was] similar in appearance to jasper and carnelian." The pure white of jasper is often understood as a symbol of God's holiness and the bright red of the carnelian as a symbol of God's righteous judgment. However, the colors of these stones are not altogether clear and they may simply be a way of portraying God in his majesty. As Morris observes, "The lack of scientific terminology among the ancients makes identification of precious and semi-precious stones a somewhat hazardous business" (Mounce, 87). Therefore, Mounce concludes, "Rather than assigning specific qualities to each of the gems it is better to take them as part of the overall portrayal. They describe in symbolic form the majesty of God, resplendent and clothed in unapproachable light" (Mounce, 120-121). Third, John describes the emerald-like rainbow encircling the throne in the second part of verse 3, "and a rainbow similar in appearance to an emerald [was] around the throne." The rainbow is a well-established image, used in Genesis for God's mercy and the green of the emerald could represent life. However, again this could simply be a way of portraying the majesty of God. Osborne observes that the emerald "can be a bright green precious stone or a transparent rock crystal that could serve as a prism and yield a 'rainbow' of colors" and concludes that "Either way, the imagery is that of the glory surrounding God on his throne" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 5279-5281*).

John describes the twenty-four thrones and twenty-four elders surrounding the throne in verse 4, "Around the throne were twenty-four thrones and upon the thrones were sitting twenty-four elders in white garments and crowns of gold on their heads." Speculation abounds with regard to the identity of the twenty-four elders. They are described as sitting on thrones, wearing white garments, and having gold crowns on their heads, probably representing their holiness and authority. They have been understood in a variety of ways; however, their identity is never clearly revealed even though they appear repeated in Revelation (4:4, 10; 5:8; 11:16; and 19:4). Whatever their identity, they do serve as models of the worship that is due to God. Here they are simply introduced as part of the throne room scene. Subsequently they fall prostrate before God, cast their crowns before his throne, and declare his praise.

John describes the thunder and lightning coming from the throne in the first part of verse 5, "From the throne are coming flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder." He uses the present tense to make the description more vivid ("are coming"). Lightning and thunder are portents that accompany the presence and awesome power of God such as when he appeared to the people of Israel on the mountain in Exodus 19-20, "Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.'" (Exodus 20:18-19 ESV; see also Judges 5:4-5; Psalms 18:7-15, 68:7-8, 77:18; Isaiah 13:13, 64:2-4; Jeremiah 10:10; Ezekiel 1:13; and Haggai 2:6-7, 21). These portents of God's presence and awesome power occur at key points in Revelation and are also associated with judgment (4:5; 8:5; 11:19; and 16:18).

John describes the seven lamps blazing before the throne in the second part of verse 5, "Seven lamps are blazing before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God." He uses the present participle to make the description more vivid ("are blazing"). The seven spirits were introduced as being before the throne in 1:4. The letter to the church in Sardis is introduced as the words of the one who has the seven spirits in 3:1. Subsequently, in 5:6 the exalted Christ is described as a

Lamb with seven eyes that are the seven spirits of God sent out to all the earth. Fanning concludes that "the lamps or torches as symbolic of God's ability to see and act powerfully by his Spirit to accomplish his will across the whole earth" (Fanning, 202). Seven is a symbolic number that indicates completeness. Thus the seven lamps should probably be understood as the Holy Spirit in all its fulness, working to accomplish the purposes of God and the exalted Christ.

John describes the sea of glass before the throne in the first part of verse 6, "Also before the throne [was] something like a sea of glass, like crystal." His description is similar to Exodus 24:10, "and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness" (Exodus 24:10 ESV). The significance of the image of the sea of glass is made clearer by its development in the book. In Revelation 15 the saints are encamped by the sea in anticipation of the time when they could cross into the presence of God and in chapter 21 the sea is no more. This image therefore probably portrays the transcendence of God. As Osborne says, "The emphasis is on God's awesome vastness, his transcendence and his holiness that separate him from his creation" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 5372-5373*).

John describes the four living creatures all about the throne in the second part of verse 6 through verse 7. First, he describes their position and eyes in the second part of verse 6, "In the midst of the throne and around the throne [were] four living creatures, full of eyes in front and in back." The eyes of the creatures are everywhere, probably indicating their eternal vigilance to offer praise to God. I have translated the words describing the position of the four living creatures literally though it is not very clear how they can be "In the midst of the throne and around the throne." At any rate this description emphasizes they were all about the throne. Second, he describes their general appearance in verse 7, "The first living creature [was] like a lion, the second [was] like an ox, the third had a face like a man, and the fourth [was] like a flying eagle." The four living creatures are interpreted in a variety of ways. The four living creatures play a key role in Revelation and are clearly servants of God and the exalted Christ and especially leaders of worship (4:6, 8; 5:6, 8, 14; 6:1, 6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; and 19:4). They are frequently understood as representative of different varieties of creatures: wild animals, domesticated animals, humans, and flying animals. Fanning suggests that "they may represent his good and useful creation, fully devoted to him as it ought to be" (Fanning, 203). What they represent is difficult to determine with certainty. Subsequently they declare God's praise. As John describes his vision of God on his heavenly throne, the persecuted Christians of Asia Minor would be encouraged to continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he reigns forever on his throne and is majestic, holy, and awesome.

### **Vision of the Heavenly Worship**

John describes his vision of the heavenly worship in verses 8-11. John describes the heavenly worship of the four living creatures in verse 8, "The four living creatures, each one of them having six wings and around and inside full of eyes, day and night never stopped saying: 'Holy, holy, holy [is] the Lord God Almighty; who was, and is, and is coming.'" Strong emphasis is placed on the continuous praise of the creatures who worshiped "day and night" and "never ceased." Their wings and eyes may even depict their readiness and vigilance to praise God. Their song of praise is similar Isaiah 6 and stresses the total holiness and authority of God. They declare three times that God is holy, stressing his complete otherness and superiority to everything and everyone. They also declare that God is "the Lord God Almighty," stressing that

his authority and power surpasses all others. "Almighty" is an often-used title for God in Revelation to stress his power and authority (See also 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; and 21:22) As Mounce says, "Nothing lies beyond his control, for he is all-mighty" (Mounce, 126). He is the Lord of lords! They praise God because he is eternal, "he was, he is, and he is coming." Fanning adds that this "refers not only to his future existence but to his final coming to bring all things to fulfillment in his eternal future" (Fanning, 204). As John describes the worship of the four living creatures, the persecuted Christians of Asia Minor would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is other than and superior to everything and everyone, the Lord God Almighty, and the eternal God who is coming to bring all things to fulfillment.

John describes the heavenly worship of the twenty-four elders in verses 9-11. First, he describes their continuous worship in verse 9, "Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever." Since he describes their worship as an accompaniment to the worship of the four living creatures their worship is also continuous. To give glory and honor to God is to glorify and honor him, to praise him for his glory and honor. They specifically glorify, honor, and thank him for his sovereignty ("who sits on the throne") and eternity ("who lives forever and ever"). Second, he describes their submissive worship in verse 10, "the twenty-four elders fall down before the one who sits on the throne and worship the one who lives unto the ages of the ages and throw down their crowns before the throne." They again praise God for his sovereignty ("who sits on the throne") and eternity ("who lives unto the ages of the ages"). By falling down and worshiping and throwing down their crowns before the throne they express their recognition of the authority of Almighty God and submission to it. Even the verb translated "worship" literally means "to prostrate oneself in worship." Third, he relates their declaration of praise in verse 11, "and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power; for you yourself created all things, and by your will they came to be and were created.'" In the first line the twenty-four elders echo the praise of the four living creatures. Their Lord and God is worthy to receive glory and honor; he deserves to be glorified and honored. He is also worthy to receive power; he deserves to be worshiped because of his power. They also declare that he is also worthy to be worshiped because he created all things. Indeed, their affirmation that he created all things is made emphatic by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "you, you created all things" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "you yourself created all things"). I have translated the imperfect tense verb as inceptive, "by your will they came to be." God is worthy of praise because he is the sovereign Creator. However, this verb is often understood as being a progressive imperfect and translated accordingly (CSB, NKJ "they exist" and NIV "and have their being"). If this is correct, the implication is God with worthy of praise because he sustains the created order. As John describes the worship of the twenty-four elders, the persecuted Christians of Asia Minor would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he lives and rules forever on his throne and deserves to be glorified and honored because he is all powerful and created and sustains all things by his will.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today also experience opposition and difficulty that may discourage them and lead them to doubt God. Indeed, opposition to Christianity is mounting in the West and Christians in some places of the world are actually being persecuted. These similarities provide a strong basis

for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. I have already stated the message in the original context generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that it be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message that follow are identical with the statements of the message in the original context. As Osborne says, "As we center on the God who controls the future, we can overcome the difficulties of the present." Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he reigns forever on his throne and is majestic, holy, and awesome. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is other than and superior to everything and everyone, the Lord God Almighty, and the eternal God who is coming to bring all things to fulfillment. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he rules forever on his throne and deserves to be glorified and honored because he is all powerful and created and sustains all things by his will.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** THERE BEFORE ME WAS A THRONE IN HEAVEN

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians who are encountering opposition and difficulty to continue to trust and worship God.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he lives and reigns forever on his throne and is majestic, holy, and awesome; he is holy, holy, holy, the Lord God Almighty, and the one who is, was, and is coming; and he lives and reigns forever on his throne, is worthy of all glory and honor, and he created and sustains all things.

#### **Introduction**

Christians often experience opposition and difficulty that may discourage them and lead them to doubt God. Indeed, Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world and opposition is mounting even here in the West. *Illustration of the Persecution of Christians.* Christians were also being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ invited him to the doorway of heaven to see a vision of God enthroned to encourage beleaguered Christians. We need to look on with John so that we can have a heavenly perspective. *Read Revelation 4.*

**I. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he lives and reigns forever on his throne and is majestic, holy, and awesome.**

**II. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is holy, holy, holy, the Lord God Almighty, and the one who is, was, and is coming.**

**III. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he lives and rules forever on his throne, is worthy of all glory and honor, and he created and sustains all things.**

#### **Conclusion**

We often experience opposition and difficulty that may discourage us and lead us to doubt God. Indeed, Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world and opposition is mounting even here in the West. Christians were also being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ invited him to the doorway of heaven to see a vision of God enthroned in heaven to encourage



beleaguered Christians. We need to look on with John so that we can have a heavenly perspective. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he lives and reigns forever on his throne and is majestic, holy, and awesome. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is holy, holy, holy, the Lord God Almighty, and the one who is, was, and is to come. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he lives and rules forever on his throne, is worthy of all glory and honor, and he created and sustains all things.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### **WORTHY IS THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAIN**

#### **Vision of the Worthy Lamb**

#### **Revelation 5:1-14**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

5:1 Then I saw on the right hand of the one who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on the inside and backside and having been sealed with seven seals. 2 Then I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who [is] worthy to open the scroll and break the seals?" 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or even to look at it. 4 I was weeping much because no one worthy was found to open the scroll or look at it. 5 Then one of the elders says to me, "Stop weeping! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed in order to open the scroll and its seven seals."

6 Then I saw in the middle of the throne and the four living creatures and in the middle of the elders, a Lamb standing as if having been slain with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the [seven] spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He came and took it from the right hand of the one who sits on the throne.

8 When he took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints, 9 and they sing a new song saying:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,  
because you were slain, and with your blood you redeemed for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

10 And you have made them to be a kingdom and priests for our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth.

11 Then I saw and heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was *myriads of myriads* and *chiliades of chiliades*,  
12 saying in a loud voice:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom  
and strength and honor and glory and praise!

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and upon the sea,  
and all that is in them, saying:

To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
[be] praise and honor and glory and power unto the ages of the ages!

14 Then the four living creatures were saying, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage is rather general and does not provide specific insight into the situation. Nonetheless, the rest of Revelation seems to be written in response to a time of great crisis in which Christians were being intimidated and enticed by Satan's allies in the world and were in danger of compromising their commitment to God in order to escape difficult and enjoy the pleasures of the world.. This time of great crisis was most probably the crisis during the reign of Domitian when the church was opposed because of the refusal of Christians to acknowledge Caesar as Lord. As a result, many Christians endured hardships and some even died because of their commitment to Jesus as Lord. The purpose of this passage was to encourage these beleaguered Christians to continue to trust Jesus Christ and remain faithful to him.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage, along with the preceding passage, contain visionary pictures of God on his throne and Jesus Christ as the victorious Lamb that precede the depiction of the unfolding of the last days. Even before he overthrows Satan and his allies in the world and establishes his eternal kingdom, Jesus Christ is portrayed as the Lamb, who reigns with God and by his sacrificial death has won the decisive victory that makes him worthy to control human destiny. The rest of Revelation demonstrates Jesus' sovereign control and validates the message of this passage. This passage is a continuation of the vision of the exalted Christ in 1:9-20. This passage also has a close relationship with the next division of Revelation in which the seven seals of the scroll are opened (6:1-8:5).

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a vision report. Like most vision reports in Revelation it describes a visionary narrative. This narrative has a definite plot. The narrative begins with a scroll that no one can open. However, one is found who is worthy to open the scroll. This discovery results in the praise of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, the vast multitude of angels, and every creature everywhere. Through the development of this plot the readers are encouraged to continue to trust the exalted Christ and remain faithful based on what is revealed about the Lamb by the elder, the vision of the worthy Lamb, and what the four living creatures and twenty-four elders, the angels, and every creature everywhere declare about the Lamb. The encounter between John and the elder encourages faith and faithfulness based on the elder's revelation that the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll. The vision of the worthy Lamb employs symbolic images to encourage faith and faithfulness by depicting Christ as one who was sacrificed, but is sovereign, powerful, and fully aware of what is transpiring in the world. The worship of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, the vast multitude of angels, and every creature everywhere encourage faith and faithfulness through what they declare about the exalted Christ.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The vision opens with the drama of the scroll that none can open which emphasizes that the Lamb is the only one worthy to open the scroll (1-5). This drama is strategically structured to heighten the suspense and dramatically reveal that the Lamb is the only one who is worthy to open the seals of the scroll. Next, the Lamb is more thoroughly described so that it is clear that even though he was slain, he reigns on the throne with God and is in control of human destiny (6-7). Next, the living creatures and twenty-four elders (8-10), the vast multitude of angels (11-12), and every creature everywhere (13) declare the praises of the Lamb and emphasize that he is

worthy of all praise. Though these declarations of praise are united in form, I have divided them into two divisions in the outline below for the sake of effective analysis (8-10 and 11-14).

- I. The Drama of the Scroll that No One Can Open (5:1-5)
  - A. The Scroll in the Right Hand of God (1)
  - B. The Failed Search for Someone Worthy to Open the Scroll (2-3)
  - C. John's Weeping Because No One Was Found Worthy to Open the Scroll (4)
  - D. The Elder Commands John to Stop Weeping because There Is Someone Worthy to Open the Scroll (5)
- II. The Vision of the Worthy Lamb (6-7)
  - A. The Lamb Looking Like It Had Been Slain Standing in the Center of the Throne (6)
  - B. The Lamb's Taking of the Scroll from the One Sitting on the Throne (7)
- III. The Worship of the Living Creatures and Elders (8-10)
  - A. The Prostration of the Living Creatures and Elders in Preparation for Praising the Lamb (8)
  - B. The New Song of the Living Creatures and Elders to the Lamb (9-10)
    - 1. The worthiness of the Lamb because he was slain and purchased men for God
    - 2. The worthiness of the Lamb because he made them a kingdom of priests
    - 3. The worthiness of the Lamb because he enabled them to reign forever and ever
- IV. The Universal Worship of the Lamb (5:11-14)
  - A. The Worship of an Innumerable Angelic Host (11-12)
  - B. The Worship of Every Creature Everywhere (13)
  - C. The Amen of the Living Creatures and Worship of the Elders (14)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because God is still on his throne and Christ, the Messiah from David's line, has triumphed by his death as the Lamb of God and is worthy to bring about God's eternal plan. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he died for them as the Lamb of God, but he now lives and reigns, has all power and knowledge, and is in control of human destiny. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is the worthy Lamb who redeemed them from sin and Satan by his blood, made them a kingdom and priests, and they will reign with him forever and ever. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is truly worthy of honor and glory and praise due to his power and wealth and wisdom and strength and he will be praised universally forever and ever.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **The Drama of the Scroll that No One Can Open**

John describes the drama of the scroll that no one can open in verses 1-5. John relates that he saw a scroll in the right hand of the one sitting on the throne in verse 1, "Then I saw on the right hand of the one who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on the inside and backside and having been sealed with seven seals." Though the one sitting on the throne is not identified here it is certainly God as will be clarified later. Many have speculated about the nature of this document and especially whether it is a contract or a will (See Osborne Kindle Locations 5720-5761). The

simplest approach is probably to allow Revelation to explain the nature of this scroll. Subsequently as the seals are opened God's judgments against sinful humanity, victory over Satan and his worldly allies, vindication of his saints, and establishment of his eternal kingdom are related. This scroll represents God's eternal purpose or plan. As Mounce says, "it contains the full account of what God in his sovereign will has determined as the destiny of the world" (Mounce, 129). That God holds the scroll in his right hand, the right hand being the hand of power and authority, indicates that he is in control of everything that happens. That the scroll has writing on the inside and backside probably indicates the fulness and completeness of God's plan. Summers adds, "that it was covered on both sides with writing indicates that it was filled with meaning and importance" (Summers, 134). The use of the perfect passive participle (Translated "having been sealed") and the use of seven seals, seven being the number of completion, indicates that God's plan is inviolable--it cannot be altered and is certain to be fulfilled.

John relates that he saw a mighty angel who was searching for someone worthy to open the scroll in verse 2, "Then I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who [is] worthy to open the scroll and break the seals?'" John emphasizes that the angel is mighty and proclaims continually in a loud voice so that he could be heard far and wide. Nonetheless, John relates that no one was found anywhere who could open the scroll in verse 3, "But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or even to look at it." Though the mighty angel searched everywhere (in heaven, on earth, and even under the earth) no one was found who could open the scroll. Indeed, no one was worthy even to look at the scroll. The unworthiness of anyone to open the scroll accentuates the uniqueness of the Lamb as the only one worthy to open the scroll. However, it also probably conveys the idea that people do not control their own fate; the exalted Christ alone is in control of what will happen. As Fanning says, "Human destiny, and that of the universe, hinges on the person and work of Jesus Christ" (Fanning, 215).

John relates that he wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll in verse 4, "I was weeping much because no one worth was found to open the scroll or look at it." John uses the imperfect tense, probably to emphasize his continual weeping. This is further emphasized by the addition of the adverb translated "much." Though not literal, the translations "I wept and wept" (NIV) and "I cried and cried" (CSB) express what is described well. John probably wept because God's plan to judge the wicked and vindicate his saints seems to be frustrated. The readers could easily identify with him since in their persecution it was hard to see that God would judge the wicked and vindicate them. But as Osborne concludes, "There is no need for sorrow in light of the power of God soon to be demonstrated" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 5816-5817*).

John relates that one of the elders commanded him to stop weeping because there was someone worthy to open the scroll in verse 5, "Then one of the elders says to me, 'Stop weeping! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed in order to open the scroll and its seven seals.'" He makes the account vivid and immediate by using the present tense ("Then one of the elders says to me"). The elder uses the present imperative in his prohibition to stress the need for John to stop what he is doing. There is no need to cry because there is someone worthy to open the scroll. The one who is worthy is described as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" and "the Root of David." The Lion of the tribe of Judah" is an allusion to Genesis 49:9-10 which promises, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, or the staff from between his feet, until He whose right it is comes and the obedience of the peoples belongs to

Him" (Genesis 49:10 CSB). "The Root of David" is an allusion to Isaiah 11 which promises a future kingdom of peace that will be led by a descendant from David's line who "shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked (Isaiah 11:4 ESV). This messianic figure has triumphed so that he is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals. As John describes the drama of the scroll that no one could open, persecuted Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust the exalted Christ and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because God is still on his throne and Christ, the Messiah from David's line, has triumphed through his death as the Lamb of God and is worthy to bring about God's eternal plan.

### **The Vision of the Worthy Lamb**

John describes his vision of the worthy Lamb in verses 6-7. John relates that he saw a Lamb that looked like it had been slain in verse 6, "Then I saw in the middle of the throne and the four living creatures and in the middle of the elders, a Lamb standing as if having been slain with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the [seven] spirits of God sent out into all the earth." As Osborne observes, "Here lies the great paradox of Christianity: victory comes from apparent defeat; evil is conquered through the terrible sacrificial suffering of the cross (1 Cor. 15: 54)" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 5822-5823). The language John employs could suggest that the Lamb had not actually been slain. However, as he will state explicitly later the Lamb has indeed been slain. John asserts that the Lamb appeared to have been slain to emphasize that the Lamb is now standing in the middle of the throne and among the creatures and elders. He is very much alive! The background for the slain Lamb is certainly the Passover lamb and its fulfillment in the death of Jesus on the cross. Ironically, the Lion of the tribe of Judah is triumphant through his sacrificial death on the cross. According to Mounce, "The use of the Greek perfects ("having taken his stand" and "having been slain") emphasizes the lasting benefits of his sacrificial death and resurrection" (Mounce, 134). The specific benefits of Jesus' sacrificial death will be spelled out more fully in the praise of the living creatures and elders. Nonetheless, as Mounce observes, "By his sacrificial death the Lamb has taken control of the course of history and guaranteed its future" (Mounce, 138). The Lamb's position in the middle of the throne conveys his sovereignty. This is no ordinary Lamb! This Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes! Horns are symbolic of power and seven is the number of perfection or completeness. Thus the Lamb is depicted as having complete power and authority. This could reflect the language of apocalyptic literature where a conquering lamb from among the flock of God's people defeats their foes and reestablishes the nation (See especially The Testament of Joseph 19). Similarly, the seven eyes probably depict the Lamb's complete awareness and knowledge. The seven eyes are also interpreted as being "the [seven] spirits of God which are sent into all the earth." The seven spirits should probably be understood as the Holy Spirit in all its fulness that is present everywhere ministering on behalf of the exalted Christ. As Fanning observes, "The Lamb will appear repeatedly in the rest of Revelation, and the value of his sacrificial death is continually evoked, but he is no longer seen as a slain victim but instead as consistently dominant and mighty (e.g., Rev 6: 16; 14: 10; 17: 14; 22: 3)" (Fanning, 219). This description of the Lamb's power and knowledge would be especially relevant for persecuted Christians who did not seem to be experiencing much of his power and may have been questioning whether he is aware of their plight and availability to them.

John observes that the Lamb took the scroll from the one sitting on the throne in verse 7, "He came and **took** it from the right hand of the one who sits on the throne." John uses the perfect

tense, probably to dramatically emphasize the ease by which the Lamb took the scroll (Indicated in translation with bold print). He had no difficulty at all taking the scroll because he had triumphed and was worthy to take the scroll. Thus John indicates that the Lamb has authorization from God to oversee and control human destiny. As Fanning says, the Lamb taking the scroll from God is "his assumption of authority, as the Lord's agent, to initiate and control the events recorded in the scroll" (Fanning, 220). As John describes his vision of the worthy Lamb, beleaguered Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust in Christ and remain faithful to him during trials. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he died for them as the Lamb of God, but now he lives and reigns, has all power and knowledge, and is in control of human destiny.

### **The Worship of the Living Creatures And Elders**

John describes the worship of the living creatures and elders in response to the Lamb taking the scroll in verses 8-10. John describes the prostration of the living creatures and elders before the Lamb in preparation for praising him in verse 8, "When he took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." Their prostration and praise are clearly a response to the Lamb taking the scroll. Prostration was a common position in worship and expresses submission based on the recognition of the exalted position of the one being worshiped. Harps were commonly used in worship and depict their readiness to praise the Lamb. The seven bowls of incense are interpreted as representing the prayers of the saints. As Fee says, "they remind John's readers that the prayers offered in light of their present suffering are being heard in heaven" (Fee, 84). This image probably points to the Lamb as the answer to their prayers and assures beleaguered Christians that God is in the process of answering their prayers. As Morris adds, "In heaven their prayers are precious, being brought into the very presence of God himself, while the bowls in which they are offered are golden" (Morris, 98).

John relates the content of the new song of praise that the living creatures and elders sing in verses 9-10. First, they sing the new song, declaring the worthiness of the Lamb because he died to redeem men for God in verse 9, "and they sing a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain, and with your blood you redeemed for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.'" Though many modern version translate with the past tense ("they sang" CSB, ESV, NAS, NIV, and NKJ), John actually uses the present tense, probably to add vividness to the account ("they sing"; see also NRS). This description of their song as a "new song" occurs occasionally in psalms of praise for new acts of mercy and deliverance (Psalm 144:9; see also Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 149:1) and is used in Isaiah 42:10 for the new song to be sung at God's new and climactic act of deliverance. As Beasley-Murray says, "A new song is raised in thanksgiving for the accomplishment of the promised redemption and advent of the new age" (Beasley-Murray, 127). The exalted Christ reveals to John that there will be a new heaven and new earth and a New Jerusalem (22:1-2) and that God is going to make all things new (22:5). Thus, a new song is appropriate. As Osborne says, "For the 'new' age soon to appear, there is a 'new' kind of song to celebrate its coming" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 5964-5965*). The Lamb is worthy of praise because he was slain to redeem men for God. To redeem is to pay the price to purchase someone's freedom and the background is probably redeeming people out of slavery. Jesus is worthy because he paid the price to free men from bondage to sin and Satan through his sacrificial death. But not only did

Jesus free men from bondage, he also bought them "for God." They now belong to God and are his. Their song stresses the inclusiveness of the Lamb's redemption. He has redeemed people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (See also 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; and 17:15). As Fanning says, "No grouping of humans is excluded; every society, culture, populace, and tradition conceivable will be part of God's redeemed community" (Fanning, 225). Second, they sing a new song, declaring that the Lamb is worthy because he made the redeemed a kingdom of priests who will reign on earth in verse 10, "and you have made them to be a kingdom of priests for our God and they shall reign on the earth." The assurance of becoming a kingdom and priests was introduced in 1:6, "and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--to Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (CSB). Priests and Levites were servants of the LORD, which was considered a great privilege. As Joshua 18:7 says, "But the Levites among you do not get a portion, because their inheritance is the priesthood of the LORD" (CSB). The assurance that the redeemed will reign with Christ is found throughout Revelation and reaches its climax in 22:5, "And they will reign unto the ages of the ages.". This indicates that through Jesus, the Lamb, the redeemed have the assurance of sharing in the blessings of his eternal kingdom. As John describes the worship of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders persecuted Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is the worthy Lamb who redeemed them from sin and Satan by his blood, made them a kingdom and priests, and they will reign with him forever and ever.

### **The Universal Worship of the Lamb**

John describes the universal worship of the Lamb in verses 11-14. John describes the worship of the angelic host in verses 11-12. First, he relates that he heard the voice of many angels in the first part of verse 11, "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering *myriads* of *myriads* and *chiliades* of *chiliades*." It may be possible to translate "*myriads* of *myriads* and *chiliades* of *chiliades*" with "ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands" but these words don't have precise meanings (especially "*myriads*") and I have chosen simply to transliterate them. This description dramatically emphasizes the vast number of the heavenly host. They are innumerable! Second, he describes the position of the angels encircling the throne in the second part of verse 11, "around the throne and the living creatures and the elders." This depiction of the position of the angels' places Jesus, the Lamb, at the very center of and as the focus of this heavenly worship. Third, he relates the words the angels' song of praise to the Lamb in verse 12, "saying in a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'" Though the language seems a bit awkward, the intent is clearly to affirm that the exalted Christ is worthy of honor and glory and praise because of his power and wealth and wisdom and strength. The acknowledgement of the exalted Christ's power, wealth, wisdom, and strength would be especially meaningful to beleaguered Christians who lacked all of these resources.

John describes the worship of every creature everywhere in verse 13. First, he relates how he heard the voice of every creature everywhere, "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing." As the angelic host was innumerable so is the congregation of created beings. This congregation of worshipers includes "every creature" whether they fly in the heavens, live on the earth, burrow in the ground, or reside in the sea. Indeed, to make sure that none are left out he adds the redundant "and all that is in them." This description stresses that Jesus, the Lamb, will be universally



worshiped and is reminiscent of other passages such as Philippians 2:9-10, "Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Second, he relates the words of the song of every creature everywhere, "To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb [be] praise and honor and glory and power unto the ages of the ages!" The song of every creature everywhere essentially repeats what has already been declared by the innumerable angelic host. However, whereas the angelic host praised the Lamb, the choir of every creature everywhere praises both God and the Lamb. In addition, they declare that this praise should be never-ending ("unto the ages of the ages").

John relates the "Amen!" of the living creatures and the prostration and worship of the elders in verse 14, "Then the four living creatures were saying, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshiped." The verb "were saying" is in the imperfect tense, probably indicating that they kept on repeating their emphatic declaration. Their declaration "Amen!" is often used to affirm the truth of what has been said and could be translated "Truly!" The living creatures affirm all that has been said by the innumerable angelic host and every creature everywhere. With the "Amen!" of the living creatures and the prostration and worship of the elders the account of the worship of Jesus, the Lamb, comes full circle and Christians are encouraged to continue to trust and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is truly worthy of honor and glory and praise due to his power and wealth and wisdom and strength and he will be praised universally forever and ever.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today also experience opposition and difficulty that may discourage them and lead them to doubt Christ and forsake their commitment to him. Indeed, in some places of the world Christians are being actively persecuted and opposition to Christianity is mounting in the West. These similarities provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. As Mounce says, "A vivid portrayal of the one who has won the crucial battle against sin supplies the confidence that in the troubled times to come there remains a hope that is steadfast and sure" (Mounce, 138). I have already stated the message in the original context generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that it be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message that follow are identical to the statements of the message in the original context. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because God is still on his throne and Jesus Christ, the Messiah from David's line has triumphed through his death and the Lamb of God and is worthy to bring about God's eternal plan. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because Christ died for them as the Lamb of God, but now lives and reigns, has all power and knowledge, and is in control of human destiny. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is the worthy Lamb who redeemed them from sin and Satan by his blood, made them a kingdom and priests, and they will reign with him forever and ever. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is truly worthy of honor and glory and praise due to power and wealth and wisdom and strength and he will be praised universally forever and ever.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** WORTHY IS THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAIN

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is the promised Messiah from David's line, he has triumphed through his sacrificial death, he has all power and lives and reigns forever, he has been given authority to execute God's eternal plan, he has redeemed them from sin and Satan by his blood, he has made them a kingdom of priests who will reign with him forever, and he is worthy of eternal honor and glory and praise.

### **Introduction**

Christians often experience opposition and difficulty that may discourage them and lead them to doubt Christ and forsake their commitment to him. Indeed, Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world and opposition is mounting even here in the West. *Illustration of the Persecution of Christian.* Christians were also being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ invited him to the doorway of heaven to see a vision of the victorious and worthy Lamb to encourage these beleaguered Christians. We need to look on with John so that we can have a heavenly perspective. *Read Revelation 5.*

- I. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is the promised Messiah from David's line.**
- II. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he has triumphed through his sacrificial death as the Lamb of God.**
- III. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he has all power and lives and reigns forever.**
- IV. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he has been given authority to execute God's eternal plan.**
- V. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he has redeemed them from sin and Satan by his blood.**
- VI. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he has made them a kingdom of priests who will reign with him forever.**
- VII. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is worthy of eternal honor and glory and praise.**

### **Conclusion**

We often experience opposition and difficulty that may discourage us and lead us to doubt Christ and compromise our commitment to him. Indeed, Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world and opposition is mounting even here in the West. Christians were also being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ invited him to the doorway of heaven to see a vision of the victorious and worthy Lamb to encourage beleaguered Christians. We need to look on with John so that we can have a heavenly perspective. We should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is the promised Messiah from David's line, he has triumphed through his sacrificial death, he has all power and lives and reigns forever, he has been given authority to execute God's eternal plan, he has redeemed us from sin and Satan by his blood, he has made us

a kingdom of priests who will reign with him forever, and he is worthy of eternal honor and glory and praise.

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **I SAW THE LAMB OPEN THE SEVEN SEALS Vision of the Seven Seal Judgments Revelation 6:1-17 and 8:1-5**

This division may seem odd because of the gap between 6:1-17 and 8:1-5; however, it is justified in that 8:1-5 complete the seven seal judgments in 6:1-17 and the intervening verses are an excursus that will be interpreted separately.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

6:I saw that the Lamb opened one of the seven seals and I heard one of the four living creatures saying in a voice like thunder, "Come!" 2I looked, and behold, a white horse and the one sitting on it having a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and in order to conquer.

3When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come!" 4and another horse came out, a fiery red one, and the one sitting on it was given to him to take peace from the earth and in order to [make men] slay each other, and to him was given a large sword.

5When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come!" and I looked and behold, a black horse and the one sitting on it having a scale in his hand. 6I heard something like a voice in the middle of the four living creatures saying, "A liter of wheat for a denarius and three liters of barley for a denarius and do not harm the oil and the wine!"

7When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come!" 8and I looked and behold, a pale horse and the one sitting on it was named Death and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

9When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony which they were having. 10They called out in a loud voice saying, "How long, Lord, holy and true . . . are you not going to judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" 11Then a white robe was given to each of them, and it was told to them to rest a little time, until should be completed their fellow servants and brothers who are about to be killed like them.

12I looked when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; the sun turned black like sackcloth made of hair and the whole moon became like blood. 13The stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree throws its late figs while being shaken by a strong wind. 14The sky split like a scroll being rolled up and every mountain and island was removed from their places. 15Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the mighty and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16They are saying to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one sitting on the throne and from the fury of the Lamb, 17for the great day of their fury has come and who is able to stand?"

8:1 Whenever he opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 I saw the seven angels who had taken their stand before God and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 Another angel came and stood before the altar, having a golden censer, and was given to him much incense so that he will offer the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne. 4 The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it from the fire of the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage anticipates a future time when God will intervene in history to judge the world and vindicate those who have been faithful to him. The broader context reflects a situation when the Christians of Asia Minor were subject to persecution and were threatened with death if they did not forsake Christ and pledge their allegiance to Caesar. As a result many Christians were in danger of forsaking their commitment to Christ in order to ease their suffering and avoid death. The purpose of the passage was to encourage these persecuted Christians to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what they suffered, even death.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is very closely related to its context. The preceding division portrayed God on his throne and the worthy Lamb who alone is able to open the seals (4:1-5:14). This passage reinforces and supplements that division and especially the second passage in that division (5:1-14) by asserting the Lamb's control over the coming trial, protection, vindication, and faithfulness to answer the prayers of those who remain faithful to the word of God and their testimony. Therefore, the preceding division provides significant background for understanding this passage. This passage also is closely related to the subsequent divisions. Two of these divisions also depict the coming trial in terms of a series of seven judgments--the seven trumpet judgments (8:6-11:19) and the seven last plagues (15:1-16:21). These two divisions reinforce and supplement this division. This division has an especially close relationship to the seven trumpet judgments because it introduces the angels who are given these trumpets in 8:2. This passage also is very closely related to 7:1-17 which is located between the sixth and seventh seal judgments. This passage provides assurances for those who are going through trials.

### **Form and Function**

The passage is an apocalyptic vision report portraying the judgment of the world. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. This vision report narrates what John saw as the Lamb opened the seven seals. The narrative episodes accompanying the opening of each seal serve to encourage Christians to trust God and remain faithful. God's control of events is portrayed by the fact that the Lamb is the one who opens the seals and releases the forces that bring judgment on the world. The element of judgment is especially found in the opening of seals 1-4, 6, and 7. The cataclysmic nature of this judgment is especially emphasized in the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. This visionary portrayal of judgment assures beleaguered Christians that they will be vindicated. A distinct feature of this apocalyptic vision of judgment is found in the opening of the fifth seal. With the opening of this seal the souls of the martyrs cry out for vindication and they are portrayed as being secure under the altar, given white robes, and are charged to rest "a little longer." In this way beleaguered Christians are encouraged to trust God and be faithful. Another distinctive feature of this apocalyptic vision of judgment is the visionary portrayal of the angel with the golden censer.

The visionary portrayal of the censer provides assurance to the readers that their prayers will be answered. The smoke from the incense that was burned in the censer rose to God. This was a symbol of prayer. These same censers were filled with fire and poured on the earth, indicating that the prayers of Christians for vindication would be answered. Though not specifically stated, the visionary assurances imply that Christians should continue to trust God and patiently endure suffering.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage is clearly and deliberately structured according to the opening of the seven seals. However, the first four are similar to one another and reinforce the same basic message. The last three are also closely related, but each develops a different message.

- I. The First Four Seals--The Four Horsemen (6:1-8)
  - A. The First Seal--The Rider on the White Horse (1-2)
    1. The opening of the first seal and the summons of one of the living creatures (1)
    2. The coming of the white horse and the appearance of its rider
  - B. The Second Seal--The Rider on the Fiery Red Horse (3-4)
    1. The opening of the second seal and the summons of the second living creature (3)
    2. The coming of the fiery red horse and the appearance of its rider
  - C. The Third Seal--The Rider on the Black Horse (5-6)
    1. The opening of the third seal and the summons of the third living creature (5a)
    2. The coming of the black horse and the appearance of its rider (5b)
    3. Something like a voice from among the four living creatures and what it says (6)
  - D. The Fourth Seal--Death Riding on a Pale Horse (6:7-8)
    1. The opening of the fifth seal and the summons of the fourth living creature (7)
    2. The coming of the pale horse and the name of its rider and attendant (8a)
    3. The bestowal of authority upon them to kill (8b)
- II. The Fifth Seal--The Souls of the Martyrs (6:9-11)
  - A. The Opening of the Fifth Seal and the Martyred Souls under the Altar (9)
  - B. The Martyrs Ask How Long before They Are Vindicated (10)
  - C. The Martyrs Are Given a White Robe and Told to Rest a Little Longer (11)
- III. The Sixth Seal--The Peoples of the Earth (6:12-17)
  - A. The Opening of the Sixth Seal and the Cataclysms that Result (12-14)
  - B. The Response of the Peoples of the Earth to the Cataclysms (15-17)
- IV. The Seventh Seal--The Angel with the Golden Censer (8:1-5)
  - A. The Opening of the Seventh Seal and the Silence in Heaven (1)
  - B. The Giving of Seven Trumpets to the Seven Angels Before God (2)
  - C. The Angel with the Golden Censer and the Prayers of the Saints (3-5)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because God and the exalted Christ are in control even in times of warfare and conquest, violence and bloodshed, inflation and famine, and death and the grave. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is in control and even if they die, they are secure; he is the Sovereign Lord, holy and true; he has made them victorious and holy; and they will enjoy rest and only need to wait a little longer. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain

faithful to him because he is in control and the day of judgment is coming when those who have oppressed them will try to hide, desire that the rocks would conceal them from the fury of God and the exalted Christ, and conclude that no one can stand on the great day of their fury. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him even to death because their prayers will rise to God and he will judge their enemies and vindicate them.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **The First Four Seals--The Four Horsemen**

John describes the opening of the first four seals and the four horsemen of the apocalypse in 6:1-8. John describes the Lamb opening the first seal and the white horse and its rider in verses 1-2. First, he describes the Lamb opening the seal and the summons of the first living creature in verse 1, "I saw that the Lamb opened one of the seven seals and I heard one of the four living creatures saying in a voice like thunder, 'Come!'" The fact that the Lamb is the one who opens the seal indicates that the exalted Christ is in control of what results. Second, he describes the rider on the white horse in verse 2, "I looked, and behold, a white horse and the one sitting on it having a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and in order to conquer." The rider on the white horse is certainly a symbol of conquest. Many have tried to identify the rider on the white horse more specifically with little assured results (See Osborne for a full discussion, *Kindle Locations 6315-6334*). The white color of the horse probably symbolizes victory in battle since white horses were commonly used in the victory parade. The rider was given a crown, a symbol of sovereignty. But who gave the rider his crown? This is probably another indication of God's control. As Osborne says, "This means that the activities of the horsemen take place only as authorized by God" (Osborne, *Kindle Location 6236*). The rider on the white horse serves as a warning of coming crisis and an assurance to beleaguered Christians that God and the exalted Christ are in control during times of warfare.

John describes the Lamb opening the second seal and the fiery red horse and its rider in verses 3-4. First, he describes the Lamb opening of the seal and the summons of the second living creature in verse 3, "When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come!'" The fact that the Lamb is the one who opens the seal again indicates that the exalted Christ is in control of what results. Second, he describes the coming of the fiery red horse and its rider in verse 4, "and another horse came out, a fiery red one and the one sitting on it was given to him to take peace from the earth and in order to [make men] slay each other, and to him was given a large sword." This visionary episode intensifies the first by describing the violence and bloodshed resulting from war. The color of the horse is the color of blood and it is emphasized that the warrior was given a large sword to make men slay each other. Osborne observes, "The verb is very strong in this context. It does not simply mean to 'kill' one another but to 'slaughter' each other and so is especially symptomatic of war" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 6378-6380*). The rider was given power to take peace from the earth and a large sword. But who gave the rider this power and sword? This is probably another indication of God's control of events. The rider on the fiery red horse serves to warn persecuted Christians of a coming crisis and assure them that God and the exalted Christ are in control during times of violence and bloodshed.

John describes the Lamb opening of the third seal and the black horse and its rider in verses 5-6. First, he describes the Lamb opening the seal and the summons of the third living creature in the first part of verse 5, "When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying,

"Come!" The fact that the Lamb is the one who opens the seal again indicates that the exalted Christ is in control of what result. Second, he describes the rider on the black horse in the second part of verse 5, "and I looked and behold, a black horse and the one sitting on it having a scale in his hand." This visionary episode further intensifies the first two. Black is frequently used to indicate foreboding or mourning and the imagery that follows depicts famine. As Mounce says, "The balance indicates a time of scarcity when the basic commodities of life are measured out at greatly inflated prices" (Mounce, 144). The image of the scales is expanded in the subsequent verse by the voice from among the living creatures. Third, he describes something like a voice and what it says in verse 6, "I heard something like a voice in the middle of the four living creatures saying, 'A liter of wheat for a denarius and three liters of barley for a denarius and do not harm the oil and the wine!'" The prices given for wheat and barley were exorbitant and would make it nearly impossible for a family to survive. The reference to oil and wine has caused considerable confusion (See Osborne for a full discussion, *Kindle Locations* 6413-6438). The most likely possibility is that harming the oil and the wine should be avoided because they are so expensive that their loss would be catastrophic. As Fanning says, "The sense of 'do not spoil' is 'see to it that the oil and wine are kept safe to be used wisely.' These as well as the grains must be treated as precious and all-too-scarce commodities" (Fanning, 243). Whatever the case, the rider on the fiery red horse serves to warn persecuted Christians of crisis and assure them that God and the exalted Christ are in control during times of inflation and famine.

John describes the Lamb opening of the fourth seal and the pale horse and its rider in verses 7-8. First, he describes the Lamb opening the seal and the summons of the fourth living creature in verse 7, "When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, 'Come!'" That the Lamb is the one who opens the seal again indicates that the exalted Christ is in control of what results. Second, John describes the coming of a pale horse and names its rider and his attendant in the first part of verse 8, "and I looked and behold, a pale horse and the one sitting on it was named Death and Hades was following with him." This visionary episode further intensifies the first three. The fourth horse is appropriately pale--the color of a lifeless corpse and is closely associated in the Old Testament with pestilence. The name of the rider as Death and his companion as Hades accentuates the horror that is coming and conjures up all the fears associated with death. Third, John relates that Death and Hades were given authority to kill in the second part of verse 8, "Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth." But who gave the Death and Hades their authority to kill? This is probably another indication of God's control over events. The rider on the pale horse serves to warn Christians of a time of crisis and assure them that the exalted Christ is in control during times of death. As Morris says, "Once more we read that 'power was given.' God is in supreme control and the little church is reminded that even Death and Hades exercise only the power He has given them" (Morris, 107). As John describes the opening of these first four seals struggling Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him in times of crisis. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because God and the exalted Christ are in control even in times of warfare and conquest, violence and bloodshed, inflation and famine, and death and the grave.

### **The Fifth Seal--The Souls of the Martyrs**



John describes the opening of the fifth seal and the souls of the martyrs under the altar in verses 9-11. John describes the opening of the fifth seal and the souls of the martyrs under the altar in verse 9, "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony which they were having." Again, the opening of the seal by the Lamb indicates that the exalted Christ is in control of events. The visionary image of the souls under the altar certainly depicts their proximity to God, probably due to the sacrifice of Jesus the Lamb. It may also reflect a rabbinic tradition which assured the righteous of a place of refuge under the altar when dead (Mounce, 146-147). Those who face death because of their commitment to Christ and their faithful testimony are assured that even if they die they are secure before God because of the sacrifice of Jesus.

John describes the martyrs asking how much longer before they are vindicated in verse 10, "They called out in a loud voice saying, 'How long, Lord, holy and true . . . are you not going to judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?'" The question of the martyrs expresses more impatience than is usually reflected in English translations. These usually render the question, "how long until you judge and avenge our blood from those who live on the earth?" (CSB; see also ESV, NIV, NKJ, and NRS). In fact, the martyrs seem to start to ask "How long?" and then ask "are you not going to judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Whereas the first question asks God how long it will be, the second questions whether God is going to do it at all. The appeal of the martyrs has been judged by many to be unchristian but it reflects the real feelings of those encountering persecution at the hands of ungodly people and the judgment of the ungodly was a necessary for the vindication of the faithful. (See Mounce for a full discussion, 147-148). The terms by which the martyrs address the exalted Christ add a sense of confidence despite their doubts. The word used to address the exalted Christ is not *kurios* but *despotes* ("Lord"). This word is used for the absolute authority of a master over his slave and is probably used to emphasize the exalted Christ's absolute sovereignty. The exalted Christ is in complete control! The exalted Christ is also addressed "holy and true"--he is not like others and can be counted on to do what he has promised.

John describes the martyrs being given white robes and being told to rest a little longer in verse 11, "Then a white robe was given to each of them, and it was told to them to rest a little time, until should be completed their fellow servants and brothers who are about to be killed like them." The white robe is a token of the victory and righteous standing that martyrs have with God through Jesus Christ and a further assurance to those who face death for the gospel. They are commanded to "rest" rather than simply to "wait" as some English versions translate (See for example the NIV). As Osborne says, "this is a promise that they will 'rest' in the glory of heaven as they 'await' the consummation of God's victory on their behalf" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 6590-6591). Mounce adds, "The charge is not to control their impatience but to rest in the enjoyment of their blessedness" (Mounce, 149). This assurance acknowledges the reality that still others will die for the gospel but that God will not delay long before he vindicates those who have died for him. Christians facing martyrdom would thereby be encouraged to remain faithful based on the assurance that they will not have long to wait before God establishes his kingdom. As John describes the opening of the fifth seal and the souls of the martyrs under the altar persecuted Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is in control and even if they die, they are secure, he is the Sovereign Lord, holy and true, he has made them holy and victorious, and they will enjoy rest and only need to wait a little longer.

## **The Sixth Seal--The Peoples of the Earth**

John describes the opening of the sixth seal and the response of the peoples of the earth in 6:12-17. John describes the opening of the sixth seal and the cataclysms that result in verses 12-14, "I looked when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; the sun turned black like sackcloth made of hair and the whole moon became like blood. The stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree throws its late figs while being shaken by a strong wind. The sky split like a scroll being rolled up and every mountain and island was removed from their places." Again, the opening of the seal by the Lamb indicates that the exalted Christ is in control of events. The phenomena described are similar to the signs of the Day of the LORD in the Old Testament (See especially Joel 2:30-31 and Isaiah 13:9-11; Joel 3:14-15; Amos 5:18-20, 8:9-10; and Zephaniah 1:14-15). The description of the cataclysm seems to emphasize that the end has come and that the Day of the LORD, a day of universal judgment, has dawned. Several ominous signs are described. The turning of the sun to the black of sackcloth is a portent of a time of mourning. The moon turning to blood red suggests violent death from the judgment of God. Stars falling to the earth like overripe figs falling from a tree on a windy day graphically depicts the dissolution of the world. Earthquakes were commonly used as portents of the end of the age in apocalyptic literature. Osborne explains, "The idea of heaven 'receding like a scroll' pictures the universe like a massive scroll that is unrolled; thus at the end of this world the scroll will be released and will roll back up upon itself" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 6671-6672).

John describes the response of the people of the earth in verses 15-17, "Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the mighty and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They are saying to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one sitting on the throne and from the fury of the Lamb, for the great day of their fury has come and who is able to stand?'" The sevenfold listing of humanity emphasizes that all will recognize the reality of their error in not acknowledging the Lamb. The regret of those who seem secure seems to be especially emphasized ("the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the mighty"). As Mounce says, "For a people who held that the well-ordered movements of heavenly bodies were a token of God's providential control, the breakdown of this order would be a grim announcement that the end of the world was at hand" (Mounce, 150). John uses the present tense to vividly depict their response ("They are saying"). This graphic description of terror on the part of the peoples of the earth is really used as an assurance to the hard-pressed Christians of Asia Minor. Their enemies will come to recognize the truth of the claims of the church and regret their hardhearted rejection of the gospel. Their question ("who is able to stand?") is the type of rhetorical question that implies and emphatic negative response and emphasizes that indeed no one, no matter how great and influential in the world, can resist God and will eventually be judged. This would be a great assurance to Christians who were seemingly under the control of these hostile earthly powers. As John describes the opening of the sixth seal and the reaction of the people of the earth persecuted Christians would be encouraged to trust Christ and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is in control and the day of judgment is coming when the inhabitants of the earth will try to hide, desire that the rocks would conceal them from the fury of God and the exalted Christ, and conclude that no one can stand on the great day of their fury.

## **The Seventh Seal--The Angel with The Golden Censer**

John describes the opening of the seventh seal and the angel with the golden censer in 8:1-5. He describes the opening of the seventh seal and the silence in heaven in verse 1, "Whenever he opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." Again, the opening of the seal by the Lamb indicates that the exalted Christ is in control of events. The significance of the silence has been debated thoroughly with little assured results (See Osborne for a detailed discussion, *Kindle Locations 7612-7635*). It is certainly a dramatic pause in anticipation of what is to follow. As such it draws attention to the seven trumpet judgments that are subsequently depicted as a response to the prayers of all the saints. Thus it probably emphasizes God's attention to the prayers of all the saints and his diligence to answer them (See Fanning, 280). John describes the giving of seven trumpets to the seven angels who stand before God in verse 2, "I saw the seven angels who had taken their stand before God and seven trumpets were given to them." This verse anticipates the seven trumpet judgments that are related in 8:6-11:19. Thus the seven trumpet judgments are depicted as an extension of the seventh seal judgment and the continuation of God's answer to the prayers of the saints.

John describes the angel with the golden censer and the prayers of the saints in verses 3-5, "Another angel came and stood before the altar, having a golden censer, and was given to him much incense so that he will offer the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it from the fire of the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake." The depiction of the censer as gold rather than the usual brass probably emphasizes the value of the prayers of the saints. The offering of incense is symbolic of the offering of prayers to God. Here the angel was given much incense and is thereby able to offer the prayers of all the saints. These prayers are depicted as rising in the smoke from the incense into the very presence of God. The angel taking fire from the altar in the censer and hurling it to the ground depicts the answer to their prayers. The peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and earthquake are portents of the coming judgment of the world and vindication of the saints. As Fee says, "Earlier in 6:9-10, the souls of the 'saints' are under the altar, where they cry out, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, until you . . . avenge our blood?' Now, in another great moment in this book, this initial picture of warnings about soon-coming judgment is seen as in direct response to the prayers of the saints" (Fee, 121). This beautiful picture serves as an assurance to beleaguered saints that God will answer their prayers and vindicate their righteous cause. As Beasley-Murray says, "It is difficult to resist the conclusion that this portrays an action expressive of judgment in response to the prayers of the saints" (Beasley-Murray, 151). As Torrance concludes, "more powerful than all the dark and mighty powers let loose in the world, more powerful than anything else, is the power of prayer set ablaze by the fire of God and cast upon the earth" (Cited by Morris, 121). As John describes the opening of the seventh seal and the angel with the golden censer harassed Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him even to death because he is in control and their prayers will rise to God and he will judge their enemies and vindicate them.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today also encounter opposition and difficulty that may cause them to doubt God and compromise their commitment to him. These similarities between the original and modern situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation.

I have already stated the message in the original context generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that it be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of applied message that follow are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because God and the exalted Christ are in control even in times of warfare and conquest, violence and bloodshed, inflation and famine, and death and the grave. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is in control and even if they die, they are secure, he is the Sovereign Lord, holy and true, he has made them holy, and they will enjoy rest and only need to wait a little longer. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is in control and the day of judgment is coming when the inhabitants of the earth will try to hide, desire that the rocks would conceal them from God and the exalted Christ, and conclude that no one can stand on the great day of their fury. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him even to death because he is in control and their prayers will rise to God and he will judge their enemies and vindicate them.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** I SAW THE LAMB OPEN THE SEVEN SEALS

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to trust Christ and remain faithful to him.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is in control even in difficult times; they are safe and secure even if they die; he is the Sovereign Lord, holy and true; he will give them rest and they only need to wait a little longer; the day of judgment is coming and people will regret their rejection of him; and he will answer their prayers and they will be vindicated.

#### **Introduction**

Christians today sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may cause them to doubt God and compromise their commitment to him. Indeed, Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world and opposition is mounting even here in the West. *Illustration of the Persecution of Christians.* Christians were also being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ invited him to the doorway of heaven to see a vision of the victorious and worthy Lamb opening the seven seals of the scroll of human destiny to encourage beleaguered Christians. We need to look on with John so that we can have a heavenly perspective. *Read Revelation 6:1-17 and 8:1-5.*

- I. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is in control even in difficult times.**
- II. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because they are safe and secure even if they die.**
- III. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is the Sovereign Lord, holy and true.**
- IV. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because they will rest and will only need to wait a little longer.**

**V. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because the day of judgment is coming and people will regret their rejection of him.**

**VI. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he will answer their prayers and they will be vindicated.**

### **Conclusion**

We sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may cause us to doubt God and compromise our commitment to him. Indeed, Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world and opposition is mounting even here in the West. Christians were also being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ invited him to the doorway of heaven to see a vision of the victorious and worthy Lamb opening the seven seals of the scroll of destiny to encourage beleaguered Christians. We need to look on with John so that we can have a heavenly perspective. We should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is in control even in difficult times. We should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because we are safe and secure even if we die. We should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is the Sovereign Lord, holy and true. We should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he will give us rest and we only need to wait a little longer. We should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because the day of judgment is coming and people will regret their rejection of him. We should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he will answer our prayers and we will be vindicated.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### **BEHOLD, A GREAT MULTITUDE Vision of the 144,000 and the Great Multitude Revelation 7:1-17**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

7:1After this I saw four angels having taken their stand at the four corners of the earth, holding tightly the four winds of the earth in order that no wind blows on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.

2Then I saw another angel coming up from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels to whom it had been given to them to harm the earth and the sea, 3saying "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we seal the servants of our God upon their foreheads."

4Then I heard the number of those who had been sealed, 144,000 having been sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 5From the tribe of Judah 12,000 having been sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, 6from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, 7from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, 8from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, and from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000 having been sealed.

9After these things I looked and behold, a great multitude that no one was able to count from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed [in] white robes and [with] palm branches in their hands. 10They are crying out with a loud voice saying: "Salvation [belongs] to our God, who is sitting on the throne, and to the Lamb."

11All the angels who had stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength to our God unto the ages of the ages. Amen!"

13Then one of the elders responded, saying to me, "These being clothed [in] white robes, who are they and where did they come from?" 14I said to him, "My Lord, you yourself know!" Then he said to me, "These are the ones who are coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15Because of this they are before the throne of God and are worshiping him day and night in his temple; and the one who sits on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them. 16They will not hunger again, neither will they thirst again; and the sun will not beat upon them nor any scorching heat, 17for the Lamb upon the center of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage does not provide any direct indication of the situation. Instead it describes a future time when God will intervene in history to judge the world and vindicate those who have been faithful to him. Nonetheless, it does identify the 144,000 and the great multitude as those who have come out of the great tribulation. The broader context reflects a situation when the Christians of Asia Minor were subject to persecution and were threatened with death if they did not forsake Christ and pledge their allegiance to Caesar. As a result many Christians were in danger of forsaking their commitment to Christ in order to ease their suffering and avoid death. The purpose of the passage was to encourage these Christians continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what they suffered, even death.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is very closely integrated with the rest of the division. In fact, this passage is placed between the judgments of the first six seals and the judgment of the final seal. This positioning seems to be very critical to the understanding this passage. This passage is placed within the division at a critical point in which the trial has commenced and has reached its peak, but the end has not come. Therefore, this passage is identified by its placement as a key revelation for dealing with trial. This passage is also closely related to other passages that are placed at similar junctures within Revelation, specifically 10:1-11 and 11:1-13. As Fanning says, "Such interludes give time to add background and related details, but they also increase the dramatic tension of the narrative, since it is clear that further judgments are impending and cannot be put off for long" (Fanning, 255). This passage also seems to stand in contrast to the desperation of the peoples of the earth after the opening of the sixth seal in 6:12-17 and answer their question "Who is able to stand?" (6:17). As Mounce observes, "The visions contrast the security and blessedness that await the faithful with the panic of a pagan world fleeing from judgment" (Mounce, 154).

### **Form and Function**

This passage contains an apocalyptic vision report focusing on the 144,000 and the great multitude. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. In the vision of the 144,000 the key images are the four angels holding back the four winds, another angel, and the sealing of the 144,000. Through these images the security of God's people during the time of trial is revealed through a visionary narrative of what is happening in the heavenly realms before the trial begins. The image of the four angels holding back the four winds anticipates the coming time of trial. The image of another angel depicts through his prohibition the security of God's people as does the numbering of those who had been sealed. The image of the sealing of the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel is most difficult. This image could be taken as either an assurance to Jewish Christians or more generally as an assurance to the church, the New Israel. In the vision of the great multitude the key images are the great multitude, the angels, and one of the elders. Through these images the security of God's people is revealed through a visionary picture of what their position will be in the heavenly realms after the trial is over. The great multitude serves to assure the readers that all those who endure the trial will be blessed in the heavenly realms and have reason to praise God. The angelic worship reinforces the worthiness of God to receive the praise of his people. The elder explains and supplements the vision of the great multitude and serves to further assure those who endure the trial that they will be blessed in the heavenly realms. Though not specifically stated, the visionary assurances imply that Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful.

## Strategy and Structure

The passage contains two vision reports--the sealing of the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel in verses 1-8 and the great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language in verses 9-17. The vision of the sealing of the 144,000 begins with a description of four angels holding back the winds. Another angel then forbids them from releasing their judgment until the servants of God are sealed. The vision concludes with a description of the number and identity of those who were sealed. Through this strategy, God's protection of the 144,000 from the coming trial is revealed. The vision of the great multitude begins with a description that emphasizes their blessed state as well as the basis for it--God's work of salvation. The description of the worship of the angels that follows reemphasizes that God's work of salvation is the basis for the blessedness of his people. The vision concludes with an explanation by one of the elders that clarifies the results of dependence upon God's work of salvation and faithfulness during trial.

- I. The Sealing of 144,000 from every Tribe of Israel (7:1-8)
  - A. The Four Angels Holding Back the Four Winds of the Earth (7:1)
  - B. Another Angel with the Seal of the Living God (2-3)
  - C. The Number and Identity of Those Sealed (4-8)
- II. The Great Multitude from Every Nation, Tribe, People and Language (7:9-17)
  - A. The Great Multitude and its Loud Cry of Praise (9-10)
    1. Description of the great multitude (9)
      - a. Their number and inclusiveness
      - b. Their position before the throne and the Lamb
      - c. Their white robes and palm branches
    2. Their loud cry of praise to God and the Lamb (10)
  - B. The Worship of the Angels, Elders, and Living Creatures (11-12)
    1. The position of all the angels around the throne and the prostration of the elders and living creatures before the throne (11)
    2. Their words of praise to God who sits on the throne (12)
  - C. The Elder's Explanation of the Great Multitude (13-17)
    1. The elder's question and John's reply (13-14a)
    2. The elder explains that these are those who came out of the great tribulation and been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb (14b)
    3. The elder explains that they will worship in God's presence and be covered by his protection (15)
    4. The elder explains that they will never be experience physical need or pain (16)
    5. The elders explains that the Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to springs of living water (17a)
    6. The elder explains that God will console them for all they have suffered (17b)

## Message or Messages

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the living God will completely seal and protect all his servants from any ultimate harm from the trials they face. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will stand before God's throne, righteous and victorious, praising God who has saved them and sits on the throne and the Lamb who has made it possible. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is enthroned in heaven and is truly worthy of eternal praise and glory



and thanks and honor because of his wisdom and power and strength. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will be before the throne of God and worship him continually; the one who sits on the throne will protect and provide for them; the Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **The Sealing of 144,000 from every Tribe of Israel**

John describes his vision of the sealing of 144,000 from every tribe of Israel in verses 1-8. John describes the four angels holding back the four winds in verse 1, "After this I saw four angels having taken their stand at the four corners of the earth, holding tightly the four winds of the earth in order that no wind blows on the earth or on the sea or on any tree." He uses the perfect participle, probably to emphasize the established position the four angels have taken at the four corners of the earth ("having taken their stand"). He uses the present participle ("holding tightly"), probably to emphasize the angels' persistent power over and tight grasp on the four winds. The four winds seem to be a representation of judgments that are about to come on the earth like the four horsemen in chapter 6. Nonetheless, he says that they are tightly held in check by the four angels. As we shall see, they are held in check so that the servants of God can be sealed.

John describes the coming of another angel with the seal of the living God in verses 2-3, "Then I saw another angel coming up from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels to whom it had been given to them to harm the earth and the sea, saying 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we seal the servants of our God upon their foreheads.'" The angel comes from the east and in Jewish thought the source of blessing was the east. Seals were a sign of ownership and protection. The sealing here is reminiscent of the mark placed above the entrance to the homes of the Israelites on the first Passover and the mark placed on the foreheads of the righteous in Ezekiel 9 and stands in contrast to the sign of the beast later in Revelation. As Osborne observes, "In this book there is no neutrality. One is a follower of (and owned by) God or of Satan" (Osborne, Kindle Location 7051). In Revelation 9 God's judgment with the sounding of the fifth trumpet is directed at those who don't have the seal of God on their foreheads. This implies that this seal protects them from the judgments that are coming on the peoples of the earth. Though God's servants have to endure trials, this visionary image assures them that they are ultimately secure. As Mounce adds, "Their being sealed does not protect them from physical death but insures entrance into the heavenly kingdom" (Mounce, 158). Further assurance is provided by the identification of the seal as that of the "living" God. This is a title frequently used in the Old Testament to contrast God with idols. God is alive and able to help those going through trials as opposed to idols who have no life and are powerless to help.

John describes the number and identity of those who were sealed in verses 4-8, "Then I heard the number of those who had been sealed, 144,000 having been sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: From the tribe of Judah 12,000 having been sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe

of Joseph 12,000, and from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000 having been sealed." The number and identity of those who are sealed are problematic. At first glance the natural understanding is that those who are sealed are Jewish Christians in contrast to the countless and diverse multitudes in the subsequent vision. Fanning discusses this issue in detail and makes a strong argument for this perspective (Fanning, 260-264). If the 144,000 are literally from all the tribes of Israel this serves as an assurance of God's faithfulness to his promises that the full number of the people of Israel will be saved. However, the fulfillment of God's promises to the nation of Israel does not seem to be a concern in Revelation and a distinction between different groups within Christianity is never clearly made. In addition, "the servants of God" is consistently used in Revelation to refer to all faithful believers (1:1; 2:20; 10:7; 11:18; 19:2 and 5; and 22:3 and 6). Indeed, Revelation 22:3-4 indicates that all Christians are his servants and are sealed in the same way. Therefore, Israel is probably a figure used to represent the church in its entirety (See Summers, 148-150, for a simple and yet comprehensive argument for this position). Chapter 14 reveals that the 144,000 are those that remained pure and faithful during the time of trial. I have understood the 144,000 servants from each of the tribes of Israel and the great multitude to refer symbolically to the church, but at different times. The vision of the 144,000 servants pictures them before the trial and the vision of the great multitude after they have come out of the trial. As Osborne concludes, "The church is "sealed" on earth (7: 1-8) before the time of tribulation, and it is rewarded in heaven (7: 9-17) after the time of tribulation" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 7558-7559*). John uses the perfect participle, probably to stress that the servants of God have been securely sealed ("those who had been sealed"). He repeats this designation using the perfect participle three additional times, probably to underscore that they are securely sealed ("having been sealed" in verses 4, 5, and 8). The subtotals and total are included to further assure that all are sealed and secure. The number 12 is a number of religious significance, indicating completeness. As Summers observes, "The unnecessary naming of each several tribe, with the repeated number 12,000, emphasizes in the strongest possible way the inclusion of every member of God's people" (Summers, 150). As John describes the sealing of 144,000 servants of God from every tribe of Israel Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. As Beasley-Murray says, John writes "to assure his fellow believers that neither these destructive winds nor any other power in heaven or earth or hell can rob them of their part in the promised kingdom" (Beasley-Murray, 140). Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the living God will completely seal and protect all his servants from any ultimate harm from the trials they face.

### **The Great Multitude from Every Nation, Tribe, People and Language**

John describes the great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language in verses 9-17. John describes the great multitude and their loud cry of praise in verses 9-10. He describes the great multitude in verse 9, "After these things I looked and behold, a great multitude that no one was able to count from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed [in] white robes and [with] palm branches in their hands." First, he describes their number and inclusiveness. They are so numerous that it is impossible to count them. The absolute adjective "every" and the list of four categorize of humanity stress the inclusiveness of the great multitude. The great multitude is so inclusive that it contains representatives from every conceivable group of people. As Morris says, "He piles one expression on another to indicate the crowd's universality" (Morris, 116). All the faithful will participate in the victory that awaits on the other side of the trial. Second, he describes their

position before the throne and the Lamb. He uses the perfect participle ("standing"), probably to emphasize their secure position. Their presence before the throne and the Lamb indicates their acceptance before God and the exalted Christ and their assured participation in God's eternal kingdom. Third, he describes their white robes and palm branches. The white robes are a symbol of their victory and righteousness. As revealed later, their victory and righteousness are based on their faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. He uses the perfect participle ("clothed"), probably to emphasize that their victory and righteousness are firmly established. Palm branches were a symbol of victory and joy and were closely associated with the Feast of Tabernacles. As Summers says, "The Feast of Tabernacles was pre-eminently a feast of joy--joy at deliverance and preservation and assurance for the future. So here they are used in the same way" (Summers, 152). The palm branches point to a time when the church will joyfully share in the ultimate triumph of God and the exalted Christ. John describes the multitude's loud cry of praise to God and the Lamb in verse 10, "They are crying out with a loud voice saying: 'Salvation [belongs] to our God, who is sitting on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" Their declaration with "a loud voice" probably emphasizes their heartfelt enthusiasm. He uses the present tense ("They are crying out"), probably to emphasize the continual praise of the great multitude. They praise God for the salvation that is only available through him and the Lamb. In this way, their song of praise identifies clearly the source of the victory that beleaguered Christians will achieve and their hope during tribulation--God who is in control and Jesus who has won the victory through his sacrificial death. As Fanning says, "All credit for their deliverance goes to God and Christ, and they joyfully acknowledge it" (Fanning, 268). John uses the present participle ("who is sitting on the throne"), probably to emphasize God's continual sovereignty. As John describes the great multitude and their loud cry of praise beleaguered Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him in tribulation. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will stand before God's throne, righteous and victorious, praising God who has saved them and sits on the throne and the Lamb who has made it possible.

John describes the worship of the angels, elders, and living creatures in verses 11-12. This description of all the angels, the elders, and the living creatures worshipping God serves to reinforce the vision of the victorious multitude. John describes the position of the angels around the throne and the prostration of the elders and living creatures before the throne in verse 11, "All the angels who had stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God." He stresses the number of angels worshipping. The angelic choir consists of "All of the angels." As Osborne observes, "this is even stronger than 5:11, for there it was "many angels" while here it is "all the angels" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 7284-7285*). Their position around the throne stresses that their worship is directed toward God, the one sitting on the throne, who is absolutely sovereign. The prostration and worship of the elders and living creatures dramatically emphasizes the exalted position of God and that he is worthy of worship. John relates the words of their praise in verse 12, "saying: 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength to our God unto the ages of the ages. Amen!'" Their "Amen" at the beginning and the end affirms the truth of what the great multitude has already declared and the content of their own song of praise. The sevenfold declaration of praise contains some elements that describe the response that is due God ("Blessing and glory" "thanks and honor") and some that describe the characteristics of God that make him worthy of praise ("wisdom" and "power and strength"). God is worthy of blessing and glory and thanks and honor because of his wisdom and power and strength. Each element in

the declaration of praise is emphasized by its own conjunction and definite article. The worthiness of God to receive eternal praise is emphasized by "unto the ages of the ages." As John describes the worship of the great multitude, elders, and living creatures Christians would be encouraged to trust God and remain faithful to him in tribulation. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is enthroned in heaven and is truly worthy of eternal praise and glory and thanks and honor because of his wisdom and power and strength.

John relates the elder's explanation of the great multitude in verses 13-17. John relates the question of the elder and his response in verse 13 and the first part of verse 14, "Then one of the elders responded, saying to me, 'These being clothed [in] white robes, who are they and where did they come from?' I said to him, 'My Lord, you yourself know!'" The elder anticipates a question that was probably already on John's mind. John doubles the subject pronoun in his reply, probably to indicate his confidence that the elder knows the answer to the identity of the great multitude (Literally "you, you know" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun and by making his reply an exclamation, "My Lord, you yourself know!"). Furthermore, the elder's question and John's response probably draws attention to the answer to the question that follows. The elder explains that the great multitude came out of the great tribulation and are those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb in the remainder of verse 14, "Then he said to me, 'These are the ones who are coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" He uses the demonstrative pronoun as the subject of the verb to emphasize the identity of the great multitude. By affirming that they have come out of the great tribulation he probably means that they have overcome difficulties during this great trial and have remained faithful. Ironically they have washed their robes in blood, the blood of the Lamb. In this way he stresses that they are righteous because of their faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus as the Lamb of God. The elder explains that they will worship in God's presence and be covered by his protection in verse 15, "Because of this, they are before the throne of God and are worshiping him day and night in his temple; and the one who sits on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them." He uses present tense verbs ("are before the throne" and "are worshiping") and the adverbial phrase "day and night" to stress their continual acceptance and presence with God and worship of him. The background for the assurance that God "will spread his tabernacle over them" is God's tabernacling presence with Israel in the wilderness. Ashcraft is probably right in saying that this "is an allusion to the Shekinah presence such as was manifested over the tabernacle" (Ashcraft, 291). God who sits on the throne and exercises sovereign control over everything will be close by and protect them with his presence. Thus the ESV translates, "will shelter them with his presence." Those who have put their faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus and remained faithful in trial will be continually accepted into God's presence, worship him perpetually, and be protected by his presence. The elder explains that they will never experience physical need or pain in verse 16, "They will not hunger again, neither will they thirst again; and the sun will not beat upon them nor any scorching heat." He uses the adverb *eti* (Translated "again") in these denials, probably to assure them absolutely that they will never suffer in these ways ever again. Hunger and thirst are probably representative of physical need whereas scorching heat is probably representative of physical pain. As Osborne says, "all earthly sufferings and sorrows will be taken away once and for all" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 7562-7563*). Those who have put their faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus and remained faithful in trial are assured that they will no longer be subject to these privations and difficulties. But as Mounce says, "the promise

goes beyond physical privation. It points to that ultimate satisfaction of the soul's deepest longing for spiritual wholeness" (Mounce, 166). The elder explains that the Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to springs of living water in the first part of verse 17, "for the Lamb upon the center of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to springs of living water." Ironically, the Lamb is described as being in sovereign control ("upon the center of the throne") and the good shepherd ("will shepherd"). He has won the victory through his own suffering, death, and resurrection and is exalted and reigns with God on his throne. Through his victory he "will shepherd them and will lead them to springs of living water." The adjective is placed first in the Greek text ("living water") probably to emphasize that the Lamb is the source of eternal life. Those who put their faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus and remain faithful in trial will be given life by their sovereign Lord. As Osborne says, "the Shepherd-Lamb here leads his people to "life" in all its fullness" (Osborne, Kindle Location 7534). As Fanning summarizes, "Christ, the 'Lamb' who shares with God in his sovereign rule over all creation, will care for them as a shepherd does for his sheep (v. 17a-b)" (Fanning, 273). The elder explains that God will console them for all they have suffered in the remainder of verse 17, "and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." These are almost certainly the tears that they have shed because of their persecution and trials. However, he stresses that "every" tear will be wiped away. Those who have placed their faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus and remained faithful will be consoled by God himself. As the elder explains the great multitude he is encouraging beleaguered Christians to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will be accepted before the throne of God and worship him continually; the one who sits on the throne will protect and provide for them; the Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today also experience opposition and difficulty that may cause them to doubt God and compromise their commitment to him. These similarities between the original and modern situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. I have stated the message in the original context generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of applied message that follow are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the living God will completely seal and protect all his servants from any ultimate harm from the trials they face. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will stand before God's throne, righteous and victorious, praising God who has saved them and sits on the throne and the Lamb who has made it possible. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is enthroned in heaven and is truly worthy of eternal praise and glory and thanks and honor because of his wisdom and power and strength. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will be before the throne of God and worship him continually; the one who sits on the throne will protect and provide for them; the Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** A GREAT MULTITUDE THAT NOBODY COULD NUMBER

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to trust in God and remain faithful to him during times of trial.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the living God will seal them from any ultimate harm; they will stand before God's throne, righteous and victorious; God is enthroned in heaven and worthy of eternal praise and glory and thanks and honor; they will be before God's throne and worship him continually; they will no longer suffer from physical need or pain; the Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to living water; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.

## **Introduction**

Christians today sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may cause them to doubt God and compromise their commitment to him. Indeed, Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world and opposition is mounting even here in the West. *Illustration of the Persecution of Christians.* Christians were also being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ invited him to the doorway of heaven and gave him a vision of the 144,000 servants from every tribe of Israel and a great multitude that no one could number to encourage beleaguered Christians. We need to look on with John so that we can have a heavenly perspective. *Read Revelation 7.*

**I. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the living God will seal them from any ultimate harm.**

**II. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will stand before God's throne, righteous and victorious.**

**III. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is enthroned in heaven and is worthy of praise and glory and thanks.**

**IV. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will be before the throne of God and worship him continually.**

**V. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will no longer suffer from physical need or pain.**

**VI. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to living water.**

**VII. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**

## **Conclusion**

We sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may cause us to doubt God and compromise our commitment to him. Indeed, Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world and opposition is mounting even here in the West. Christians were also being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ invited him to the doorway of heaven and gave him a vision of the 144,000 servants from every tribe of Israel and a great multitude that no one could number to encourage beleaguered Christians. We need to look on with John so that we can have a heavenly perspective. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the living God will seal us from any ultimate harm; we will stand before God's throne, righteous and

victorious; God is enthroned in heaven and worthy of eternal praise and glory and thanks and honor; we will be before God's throne and worship him continually; we will no longer suffer from need or physical pain; the Lamb will shepherd us and lead us to living water; and God will wipe every tear from our eyes.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### **THEN THE SEVEN ANGELS PREPARED TO SOUND**

#### **Vision of the Seven Trumpet Judgments**

#### **Revelation 8:6-9:21, 11:14-19**

This division may seem odd because of the gap between 8:6-9:21 and 11:14-19; however, it is justified in that these verses contain the seven trumpet judgments and the intervening verses are an excursus.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

8:6Then the seven angels who have the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. 7The first sounded and there was hail and fire having been mixed with blood and it was thrown upon the earth and a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. 8The second angel sounded and something like a large mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea and a third of the sea became blood, 9a third of the creatures which were in the sea, the ones having life, died and a third of the ships were destroyed. 10The third angel sounded, and a large star, burning like a torch, fell from heaven and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11The name of the star is called Absinthe and a third of the waters became absinthe and many people died from the waters that were made bitter. 12The fourth angel sounded and a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars was struck so that a third of them were darkened and the day did not shine for a third of it, and likewise the night.

13Then I looked and heard one eagle flying in midair saying with a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe! to those who are dwelling on the earth because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet which are about to be sounded by the three angels!" 9:1Then the fifth angel sounded and I saw a star having fallen from the sky to the earth and the key to the shaft of the abyss was given to it. 2He opened the shaft of the abyss and smoke rose from the shaft like the smoke from a large furnace and the sun and air were darkened by the smoke from the shaft. 3Out of the smoke locusts came out upon the earth and authority was given to them like the power that scorpions of the earth have. 4It was told to them that they should not harm the grass of the earth or any greenery or any tree, but only whatever people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5It was given to them not so that they should kill them, but so that they should be tormented for five months and the torment of them was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes someone. 6In those days people will seek death, but will by no means find it and they will long to die, but death flees from them. 7The appearance of the locusts [was] like horses having been prepared for war. On their heads [was] something like crowns with gold and their faces [were] like the faces of men. 8They were having hair like the hair of women and their teeth were like lions. 9They were having breastplates like iron breastplates and the sound of their wings [was] like the sound of many horse-drawn chariots running into battle. 10They have tails like scorpions and stingers, and in their tails [is] their power to harm people for five months. 11They have a king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew [is] *Abaddon* and in Greek he has the name *Apollyon*.



12The first woe has passed. Behold, two other woes are still coming after these things. 13The sixth angel sounded and I heard one voice from the [four] horns of the golden altar before God 14saying to the sixth angel, the one having the trumpet, "Release the four angels who have been bound at the great river Euphrates." 15So the four angels who had been prepared for [this] hour and day and month and year [were released] to kill a third of mankind. 16The number of the mounted troops was double-*myriads* of *myriads*. I heard their number. 17Thus I saw the horses in the vision and the ones sitting on them: having fiery red breastplates and hyacinth [blue] and sulfurous [yellow]. The heads of the horses [were] like the heads of lions and out of their mouths is coming fire, smoke, and sulfur. 18A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, from the fire, smoke, and sulfur that comes out of their mouths. 19For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails [are] like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. 20The rest of the people who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the works of their hands so that they would not worship demons and golden, silver, bronze, stone, and wood idols, which are not able to see or hear or walk. 21Nor did they repent from their murders, from their magic arts, from their sexual immorality, or from their thefts.

11:14The second woe has passed. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly. 15The seventh angel sounded and there were loud voices in heaven saying, "The kingdom of the world has become [the kingdom] of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign unto the ages of the ages." 16The twenty-four elders, who are sitting on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17saying:

We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the one who is and who was,  
because you have taken your great power and begun to reign.

18The nations were angry and your anger has come  
and the time for the dead to be judge,  
and to give the reward to your servants the prophets,  
and to the saints and to the ones who fear your name, the small and the great--  
and to utterly destroy those who are utterly destroying the earth.

19Then the temple of God in heaven was opened and the ark of his covenant was seen in his temple and there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a great hailstorm.

### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage anticipates a future time of great catastrophe and horror when God will intervene in history to judge the world and vindicate those who have been faithful to him. The broader context reflects a situation when the Christians of Asia Minor were subject to persecution and were threatened with death if they did not forsake Christ and pledge their allegiance to Caesar. As a result many Christians were in danger of forsaking their commitment to Christ in order to ease their suffering and avoid death. The purpose of the passage was to encourage these Christians to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what they suffered, even death.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage and the division in which it is found are closely related to the overall strategy of Revelation. This division is closely linked to two division that portray the end in terms of seven-fold judgments--the seven seal judgments (6:1-8:5) and the seven bowl judgments (15:1-16:21). This passage is especially linked to the preceding to 6:1-8:5 which introduces the angels who are

given the trumpets that are sounded in this passage. Both the preceding division and subsequent divisions describe the ultimate triumph of God and establishment of his reign from various perspectives. This division provides assurance of God's judgment of the wicked and the vindication his faithful servants and establishment of his eternal kingdom. This passage encompasses 10:1-11:13, which is an excursus that provides additional assurances and encouragement for faithful witnesses.

### **Form and Function**

This passage can be classified as an apocalyptic vision report describing the judgment of the world. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. The vision report describes what happens when the seven angels sounded the seven trumpets. Trumpets were used to warn of an approaching peril and announce the coronation of a king. Both backgrounds seem to be employed in this vision report. The visionary portrayal of judgment against wicked and idolatrous people serves to provide assurance to the readers of their ultimate vindication as well as warning of the danger of succumbing to the threats of their tormentors. The vision report of the final trumpet judgment is distinct from that of the other trumpet judgments. This vision report includes a declaration by loud voices in heaven, the worship of the twenty-four elders, and a glimpse into God's temple in heaven. The declaration of the loud voices in heaven provides direct assurance of God's ultimate establishment of his kingdom and reign. The worship of the twenty-four elders provides assurances of God's might, eternity, and ultimate reign as well as his judgment of the wicked and rewarding of the faithful. The glimpse into God's temple in heaven reveals the ark and portents of God's power that provide further assurances of God's faithfulness, presence, and ultimate victory. Though no indication of the appropriate response is provided, the contents of the vision report imply that Christians should trust God and remain faithful to him.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage is structured in accordance with the sounding of the seven trumpets. The first four trumpets are closely related and describe judgments directed toward the earth, sea, fresh water, and heavens and provide assurance of vindication to the faithful and warning to the unfaithful through the depiction of God's judgment of the earth. The last three trumpets are also closely related and called the three woes. The fifth and sixth trumpet or first and second woes describe the coming judgment in terms of a pestilence of locusts coming from the abyss to torment mankind and a vast army released by four angels to kill mankind with plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur. The final trumpet and woe is distinct because it does not describe God's judgment on the earth, but gives a glimpse into heaven, where loud voices declare the end of this present evil age and the coming of God's eternal kingdom, the twenty-four elders praise God for his might and sovereignty, judgment of the wicked, and rewarding of his servants and saints, and a glimpse at the ark in heaven and signs of God's presence and power. The suspension of the description of the sounding of the trumpets between the sixth and seventh trumpets and the second and third woes probably serves to heighten the suspense and provides an opportunity for additional assurances through the interjected visions.

- I. The First Four Trumpet Judgments (8:6-12)
  - A. The Seven Angels Prepare to Sound (8:6)
  - B. The First Trumpet Judgment--Judgment on the Earth (7)
    1. Sounding of the trumpet

2. Description of the judgment
  - C. The Second Trumpet Judgment--Judgment on the Sea (8-9)
    1. Sounding of the trumpet
    2. Description of the judgment
  - D. The Third Trumpet Judgment--Judgment on the Fresh Water (10-11)
    1. Sounding of the trumpet
    2. Description of the judgment
  - E. The Fourth Trumpet Judgment--Judgment on the Heavens (12)
    1. Sounding of the trumpet
    2. Description of the judgment
- II. The Last Three Trumpets or the Three Woes (8:13-9:21 and 11:14-19)
- A. Introduction of the Last Three Trumpet Judgments as the Three Woes (8:13)
  - B. The Fifth Trumpet Judgment and First Woe (9:1-11)
    1. The sounding of the trumpet and the opening of the abyss (9:1-2)
    2. The emergence of a locust plague from the abyss (3-6)
    3. The appearance of the locusts and the identity of their king (7-11)
  - C. The Sixth Trumpet Judgment and the Second Woe (9:12-21)
    1. Transitional warning of two other woes (12)
    2. The sounding of the trumpet and the release of the four angels and the vast army (13-16)
    3. The description of the horses and their riders (17-19)
    4. The refusal of the rest of mankind to repent (20-21)
  - D. The Seventh Trumpet Judgment and Third Woe (11:14-19)
    1. Transitional warning of one more woe (14)
    2. The sounding of the trumpet and declaration of loud voices from heaven (15)
    3. The worship of the twenty-four elders (16-18)
      - a. Their prostration before God (16)
      - b. Their thanksgiving to God because he has taken his great power and begun to reign (17)
      - c. Their thanksgiving because God has judged sinful humanity and rewarded his servants and saints (18)
    4. The opening of heaven and signs of God's presence and power (19)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is in control even when they experience catastrophes that devastate the earth, the seas, fresh water, and even the heavens. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is in control even when the demonic hordes are released from the abyss to torment sinful humanity and they have been sealed by him from any ultimate harm. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is in control even when a vast army is released to punish mankind and those who survive still do not repent. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because this world is coming to an end and God will establish his kingdom and he will reign forever and ever. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the eternal Lord God Almighty is going to reign, condemn wicked humanity, and reward his servants and saints, who reverence his name. Christians should

continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he will be faithful to his covenant and be powerfully present with them and establish his kingdom.

## **Analysis of the Details**

### **The First Four Trumpet Judgments**

John describes the first four trumpet judgments in 8:6-12, "Then the seven angels who have the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. The first sounded and there was hail and fire having been mixed with blood and it was thrown upon the earth and a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. The second angel sounded and something like a large mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea and a third of the sea became blood, a third of the creatures which were in the sea, the ones having life, died and a third of the ships were destroyed. The third angel sounded and a large star, burning like a torch, fell from heaven and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is called Absinthe and a third of the waters became absinthe and many people died from the waters that were made bitter. The fourth angel sounded and a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were struck so that a third of them were darkened and the day did not shine for a third of it, and likewise the night." The cumulative effect of these judgments is more important than the specific meaning of any of the judgments described. These judgments are similar in some ways to the judgments inflicted upon Egypt during the time of the Exodus. They probably would have also brought to mind some of the natural disasters that had occurred in Rome during the first century, including the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. The extent of the devastation is emphasized as it touches the earth, the sea, fresh water and even reaches to the heavens. Nonetheless, at this point God puts limits on the devastation. Only a third of the earth and trees are burned up. Only a third of the sea was turned to blood. Only a third of the creatures in the sea died. Only a third of the ships were destroyed. Only a third of the fresh water was poisoned. Only a third of the sun, moon, and stars were struck so that only a third of the day and night was dark. John's description of the first four trumpet judgments serves as an assurance to beleaguered Christians that even though they are experiencing trials, the exalted Christ is in control. After all, the angels are sounding their trumpets and unleashing the judgments at his command. In addition, John repeatedly uses the divine passive to indicate that God is in control. The large mountain burning with fire "was thrown" into the sea. A third of the ships "were destroyed." Many people died from the waters that "were made bitter." A third of the stars "were struck" so that a third of them "were darkened." Who could do these things other than God alone? As John describes the first four trumpet judgments, Christians would be warned of a coming crisis and encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust in the exalted Christ and remain faithful to him because God is in control even when they experience catastrophes that devastate the earth, the seas, fresh water, and even the heavens.

### **The Last Three Trumpet Judgments And the Three Woes**

John describes the last three trumpet judgments and the three woes in 8:13-9:21 and 11:14-19. John introduces the last three trumpet judgments as the three woes in 8:13, "Then I looked and heard one eagle flying in midair saying with a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe! to those who are dwelling on the earth because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet which are about to be sounded by the three angels!" The warning of the severity of the judgments of God coming with

the fifth through seventh trumpets is made more ominous because it is announced by an eagle or vulture, it takes the form of a woe or lament, and the woe is repeated three times. As Fanning observes, "The eagle is a common image for swift, overwhelming destruction (e.g., Deut 28: 49; Jer 4: 13; Lam 4: 19; Hos 8: 1; Hab 1: 8)" (Fanning, 288). John describes the eagle flying "in midair" and declaring "with a loud voice." The eagle could be seen by everyone and be heard by all.

**The fifth trumpet judgment and first woe.** John describes the fifth trumpet judgment and first woe in 9:1-11. This plague also recalls the deliverance from Egypt, but is closer to Joel's vision of a locust judgment before the Day of the Lord. The origin of the locusts, their description, and their leader all make it clear that this is a demonic invasion. Those who reject God will be given over to Satan and suffer the consequences. John describes the sounding of the trumpet and the opening of the abyss in verses 1-2, "Then the fifth angel sounded and I saw a star having fallen from the sky to the earth and the key to the shaft of the abyss was given to it. He opened the shaft of the abyss and smoke rose from the shaft like the smoke from a large furnace and the sun and air were darkened by the smoke from the shaft." It is usually presupposed that the star was an angel. It is often debated whether or not the star was a fallen angel since it is described as "having fallen from the sky" or simply an angel acting at the direct command of God. Whatever the case, God is in control even in the release of these demonic hordes. God's control is revealed not only as the one who instigated that sounding of the fifth trumpet, but again with the use of the divine passive. The key to the abyss "was given" to the star or angel. God is the one who is in possession of the key to the abyss and he gave it to the angel. As Osborne says, "Even the demonic forces can do nothing, unless God allows it!" (Osborne, Kindle Location 8189). The description of the smoke rising from the abyss like a large furnace and darkening the sky and air is probably included to heighten the horror of locusts and the sense of foreboding.

John describes the locusts emerging from the smoke and their power in verses 3-6, "Out of the smoke locusts came out upon the earth and authority was given to them like the power that scorpions of the earth have. It was told to them that they should not harm the grass of the earth or any greenery or any tree, but only whatever people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. It was given to them not so that they should kill them, but so that they should be tormented for five months and the torment of them was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes someone. In those days people will seek, but will by no means find it and they will long to die, but death continually flees from them." Again, the cumulative effect of this description is more important than the specific meaning of any of the details described. The fifth trumpet is much more severe than the preceding trumpet judgments. Whereas those could conceivably be explained by natural phenomena this judgment seems to be supernatural and demonic. As Mounce says, "Human and bestial qualities are combined in a figure both unnatural and diabolical" (Mounce, 189). The horror of this judgment is again emphasized, but the horror is even greater. Whereas the previous judgments were directed against the natural world, this judgment is directed against mankind. A locust plague would be bad enough, but these locusts have the power of a scorpion to sting. This judgment is so horrible that people will seek and even long to die. Nonetheless, John stresses that they "will by no means find it" because death "continually flees from them." Again there are limits placed on the harm inflicted by the locusts. The demonic locust plague is limited to five months. In addition, they have the authority to torment, but not to kill. The key limitation is that only those who did not have the seal of God would be tormented by the locusts. This provides assurance that God will protect his faithful

servants from this judgment. Again God's control is revealed not only as the one who instigated that sounding of the fifth trumpet, but in the use of the divine passive. Authority "was given" to the locusts, "it was told to them" to only afflict those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads, and "it was given them" to torment people but not to kill them. Who has this authority other than God alone? As Fee says, "what is significant is that God, not Satan, initiates this event. That is, even though the event itself is demonic, its timing and length are under God's rule, not Satan's" (Fee, 129-130).

John describes the appearance of the locusts and identifies their king in verses 7-11, "The appearance of the locusts [was] like horses having been prepared for war. On their heads [was] something like crowns with gold and their faces [were] like the faces of men. They were having hair like the hair of women and their teeth were like lions. They were having breastplates like iron breastplates and the sound of their wings [was] like the sound of many horse-drawn chariots running into battle. They have tails like scorpions and stingers, and in their tails [is] their power to harm people for five months. They have a king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew [is] *Abaddon* and in Greek he has the name *Apollyon*." The cumulative effect of this description is again more important than the specific meaning of any of the details described. Attempts have been made to identify this locust horde and the specific aspects of John's description of them; however, this description of the locusts and their leader probably accentuates the horror of this judgment. They are described as being like war horses that are prepared for battle and sound like chariots running into battle. They have teeth like a lion and tails like a scorpion to torment humanity. Their king is named *Abaddon*, Hebrew for Destruction, and *Apollyon*, Greek for Destroyer. As John describes the fifth trumpet judgment and first woe Christians would be warned of a coming crisis and encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is in control even when the demonic hordes are released from the abyss to torment sinful humanity and they have been sealed by him from any ultimate harm.

**The sixth trumpet judgment and the second woe.** John describes the sixth trumpet judgment and the second woe in 9:12-21. John warns that there are two other woes coming in 9:12, "The first woe is past. Behold, two other woes are still coming after these things." This transitional warning heightens the depictions of God's judgment in the trumpet judgments that follow. The interjection "Behold" is used throughout Revelation to point to important aspects of the vision. These are not just judgments but woes directed on sinful humanity. John describes the sounding of the sixth trumpet judgment and the release of the four angels and their vast army in verses 13-16, "The sixth angel sounded and I heard one voice from the [four] horns of the golden altar before God saying to the sixth angel, the one having the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who have been bound at the great river Euphrates.' So the four angels who had been prepared for [this] hour and day and month and year [were released] to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was double-*myriads* of *myriads*. I heard their number." This voice could be that of God or the exalted Christ or an angel but, whatever the case the voice is speaking with divine sanction and indicates that God is in control. The voice is described as coming from the horns of the altar, probably to identify this judgment as a faithful response to the outpouring of the prayers of the saints (8:3). God's sovereign control is demonstrated by his sanction of the release of these four angels and by the explanation that these angels "had been prepared for [this] hour and day and month and year." As Beasley-Murray says, "The release of the four angels takes place at a time most precisely prepared. It is therefore most precisely defined--'in a definite hour of a definite day, in a definite month, of a definite year' (Charles)"

(Beasley-Murray, 164). The command to release the four angels subsequently results in the unleashing of the vast army to punish sinful humanity. As Fee says, "their release signals an army of unequalled magnitude; a cavalry that is so huge it defies all human attempts to visualize it" (Fee, 135). The size of this army is beyond the number that any army earthly army could possibly have in that day and even today, "The number of the mounted troops was double-*myriads of myriads*" or  $2 \times 10,000 \times 10,000$  or 200,000,000. John says that he heard the number because otherwise he would have no way of numbering this vast horde. Summers adds, "In regular formation this would make a troop of cavalry one mile wide and eighty-five miles long!" (Summers, 158-159). However, as Mounce says, "Attempts to reduce this expression to arithmetic miss the point. A 'double *myriad of myriads*' is an indefinite number of incalculable immensity" (Mounce, 195).

John describes the horrifying appearance of the horses and riders in verse 17-19, "Thus I saw the horses in the vision and the ones sitting on them: having fiery red breastplates and hyacinth [blue] and sulfurous [yellow]. The heads of the horses [were] like the heads of lions and out of their mouths is coming fire, smoke, and sulfur. A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, from the fire, smoke, and sulfur that comes out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails [are] like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury." The cumulative effect of this description is more important than the specific meaning of any of the details described. This detailed description of the army accentuates the terrifying horror of this judgment. Their breastplates (whether of the horses, the riders, or both) are fiery red, blue, and yellow, the colors of a sulfurous fire. The heads of the horses are like the heads of lions and out of their mouths comes fire, smoke, and sulfur. Not only do they have the mouths of lions with which to bite, but they have tails like snakes to inflict injury. As Osborne says, "The real message is that the demonic forces are organized, powerful, terrifying, and filled with hatred and contempt for their followers. As soon as God grants them permission, they torture and kill all who have rejected God in order to worship them" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 8381-8383*).

John relates that even after this judgment the survivors refused to repent in verses 20-21, "The rest of the people who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the works of their hands so that they would not worship demons and golden, silver, bronze, stone, and wood idols, which are not able to see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent from their murders, from their magic arts, from their sexual immorality, or from their thefts." As Mounce says, "The 200,000,000 demonic horsemen and their plague of death is an eschatological event of fantastic proportions" (Mounce, 194). Nonetheless, even at this point when it is obvious that God is bringing a supernatural judgment against sinful humanity, they still refuse to repent of their sinful evil deeds (their murders, magic arts, sexual immorality, and thievery) and worship of demonic idols. The stupidity of their decision to continue to worship idols rather than repent is underscored by the description of their idols as objects made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood that have no life in them and are unable to see, hear, or talk. As Mounce says, "Although one-third of humankind is massacred by the demonic cavalry, those that remain continue to worship the very malignant forces that are bringing about their destruction. Such is the delusion of sin" (Mounce, 198). As John describes the sounding of the sixth trumpet judgment and second woe Christians would be warned of a coming crisis and encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is in control even when a vast army is released to punish sinful humanity and those who survive still do not repent.

**The seventh trumpet judgment and third woe.** John describes the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the third woe in 11:14-19. He warns that there is still one more woe and describes the sounding of the seventh trumpet; however, what follows is not a description of judgment, but the declaration of loud voices in heaven, the worship of the twenty-four elders, and the opening of heaven and signs of God's presence and power. He warns that there is still one more woe in verse 14, "The second woe has passed. The third woe is coming soon." This transitional warning heightens the depictions of God's judgment in the final trumpet judgment that follows. This is the climactic judgment and woe directed on sinful humanity and the only one that is said to be "coming soon." John describes the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the declaration of loud voices from heaven in verse 15, "The seventh angel sounded and there were loud voices in heaven saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become [the kingdom] of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign unto the ages of the ages.'" Through the declaration of the loud voices from heaven beleaguered Christians are assured that this current evil age is coming to an end and God's kingdom is coming. Though this is a future event, the loud voices declare it as having already happened to emphasize its certainty. Ironically, the good news of the inauguration of the kingdom is bad news for sinful humanity because it is with the coming of the kingdom that their time of judgment has come as will be seen in subsequent verses. The loud voices emphasize that with the coming of God's kingdom he will reign eternally ("unto the ages of the ages"). As John relates the declaration of the loud voices in heaven Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because this world is coming to an end and God will establish his kingdom and he will reign forever and ever.

John describes the worship of the twenty-four elders in verses 16-18. He describes them getting down off their thrones and falling prostrate before God in verse 16, "The twenty-four elders, who are sitting on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God." By getting off their thrones and falling prostrate on their faces and worshiping God they honor God for his greater majesty and sovereignty. John relates the content of their thanksgiving and praise in verses 17-18. He relates that they give thanks because God has taken his great power and reigned in verse 17, "saying: 'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the one who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and reigned.'" Though they thank God for something that still lies in the future, the elders declare it as having already happened in the vision to emphasize its certainty. As Mounce observes, "As the drama of the consummation moves toward the final scene, the hosts of heaven proclaim it *fait accompli*" (Mounce, 226). They give thanks to the "Lord God Almighty," a title frequently used for God in Revelation to emphasize his power and sovereignty. He is the sovereign Lord who exercises his power absolutely! They give thanks to "the one who is and was." Previously in Revelation God has been addressed as "the one who is, and who was, and who is to come" (1:4 and 8 and 4:8). The omission of "who is to come" emphasizes that the time of fulfillment has arrived and God has come. As Fanning says, "In 1:8 and 4:8 a third epithet is included, 'and who is to come,' but here and in 16:5 this phrase is omitted because its sense of God's future coming has now been made real" (Fanning, 341). I have followed most English versions and translated the aorist verb inceptively, "have begun to reign" (CSB, ESV, NAS ['has begun to reign'], NIV, and NRS). John relates that they give thanks because God has judged sinful humanity and rewarded his servants and saints in verse 18, "The nations were angry and your wrath has come and the time for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets, and your saints and the ones who reverence your name, both small and great--and for destroying those who destroy the earth."



Again God's judgment of sinful humanity and rewarding of his servants and saints is described in the past tense from the perspective of the vision to emphasize their certainty. God is going to judge sinful humanity! The ironic appropriateness of God's judgment of sinful humanity is stressed by two play on words, "The nations were angry and your anger has come" and "and the time . . . for destroying those who destroy the earth." As Mounce says, "God repays in kind, and for those who wreak havoc on the earth, there is reserved the wrath of a righteous God" (Mounce, 228). They were angry with God's servants, but God has put a stop to their anger by responding in anger to them! They were destroying God's servants, but God has put a stop to their destruction by destroying them! What is more, God is going to reward his servants and saints! Though the wording is somewhat ambiguous, it is simplest to understand these as two groups: Christian prophets who are further identified as God's servants and saints in general who are further identified as those who fear God's name. As John describes the worship of the twenty-four elders he is encouraging beleaguered Christians to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the eternal Lord God Almighty is going to reign, condemn wicked humanity, and reward his servants and saints, who reverence his name.

John describes the opening of heaven, the ark of the covenant, and signs of God's presence and power in verse 19, "Then God's temple in heaven was opened and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant and there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a great hailstorm." Again, John is given a vision of heaven opened so that he can reveal God's heavenly perspective. The ark of the covenant was a representation of the presence of God among his people and his faithfulness to them. Phenomena like lighting, thunder, earthquakes, and hailstorms are often used as portents of God's presence and power. As Osborne concludes, "God is present in mercy (the ark) and judgment (the storm theophany) to bring an end to this sinful age and to introduce the eternal age of joy" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 9934-9935). Summers puts it this way, "This symbolizes that God has not forgotten his people or his covenant with them. The church will be in conflict with the world, and satanic persecution will rage, but God's covenant with his people is still secure; they will be victorious" (Summers, 166). This glimpse into heaven provides beleaguered Christians with encouragement to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he will be faithful to his covenant and be powerfully present with them and establish his kingdom.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today also encounter opposition and difficulty that may discourage them and cause them to doubt God and compromise their commitment to him. These correspondences between the original and modern situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of the passage to the modern situation. I have already stated the message generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that it be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original context. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is in control even when they experience natural catastrophes that devastate the earth, the seas, fresh water, and even the heavens. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is in control even when demonic hordes are released from the abyss to torment sinful humanity and they have been sealed by him from any ultimate harm. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is in control even

when a vast army is released to punish mankind and those who survive still do not repent. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because this world is coming to an end and God will establish his kingdom and he will reign forever and ever. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the eternal Lord God Almighty is going to reign, condemn wicked humanity, and reward his servants and saints, who reverence his name. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he will be faithful to his covenant and be powerfully present with them and establish his kingdom.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** THE SEVEN ANGELS PREPARED TO SOUND

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him in times of trial.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because God is in control; they are sealed by him from any ultimate harm; he is going to bring this world to an end and establish his eternal kingdom; he is going to condemn wicked humanity and reward his servants and saints; and he is faithful to his promises and will be powerfully present with them.

#### **Introduction**

Christians sometimes encounter opposition and experience trials that may cause them to doubt God and compromise their commitment to him. Indeed, Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world and opposition is mounting even here in the West. *Illustration of the Christians Experiencing Trials*. Christians were also being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ revealed a vision to him of seven angels sounding seven trumpets announcing God's judgment on a wicked world. We need to look on with John so that we can have a heavenly perspective. *Read Revelation 11:14-19.*

**I. Christians should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because he is in control whatever happens.**

**II. Christians should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because they are sealed by him from any ultimate harm.**

**III. Christians should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because he is going to bring this world to an end and establish his eternal kingdom.**

**IV. Christians should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because he is going to judge wicked humanity and reward his servants and saints.**

**V. Christians should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because he is faithful to his promises and will be powerfully present with them.**

#### **Conclusion**

We sometimes encounter opposition and experience trials that may cause us to doubt God and compromise our commitment to him. Indeed, Christians are being persecuted in many parts of the world and opposition is mounting even here in the West. Christians were also being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ revealed a vision to him of seven angels sounding seven

trumpets announcing God's judgment against a wicked world. We need to look on with John so that we can have a heavenly perspective. We should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because God is in control whatever happens. We should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because we are sealed by him from any ultimate harm. We should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because he is going to bring this world to an end and establish his eternal kingdom. We should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because he is going to condemn wicked humanity and reward his servants and saints. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is faithful to his promises and will be powerfully present with us.

## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

### **SO I TOOK THE LITTLE SCROLL The Little Scroll and the Renewal of John's Call Revelation 10:1-11**

This passage is very closely related to the subsequent passage (11:1-13) like the visions of the 144,000 and the great multitude in the previous interlude (7:1-17). However, in this case I have chosen to separate them because uniting them would make the passages too large to interpret efficiently.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

10:1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow upon his head, his face like the sun, his legs like pillars of fire, 2 and having in his hand a little scroll, which had been opened. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land 3 and he cried out with a loud voice just like a lion roars.

When he cried out, the voices of the seven thunders spoke sounds of themselves. 4 When the voices of the seven thunders spoke I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders said and do not write these things." 5 Then the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven 6 and swore by the one who lives unto the ages of the ages, who created heaven and the things in it, the earth and the things in it, and the sea and all the things in it, "There will be no more time! 7 But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, whenever he is about to sound, the mystery of God has been accomplished as he announced to his own servants the prophets."

8 Then the voice that I heard from heaven is speaking with me again and saying: "Go take the scroll having been open in the hand of the angel standing on the sea and on the land." 9 So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little scroll and he says to me, "Take and eat it. It will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet like honey." 10 So I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it and it was like sweet honey in my mouth and when I ate it my stomach was made bitter. 11 Then he says to me, "It is necessary for you to prophesy again concerning many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage is set between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments, at the apex of the end time crisis before the establishment of God's eternal reign. The passage seems to be especially concerned with the proclamation of God's word during this critical period. The passage describes the commission of John to prophesy. Though the passage is rather general, the broader context anticipates a situation in which two witnesses would encounter opposition and be killed. Though the passage relates specifically to John, the readers would be able to identify with this setting to the extent that they were also experiencing trials that undermined their commitment to bear witness to the gospel. The purpose of the passage was to encourage Christians to trust God and remain faithful, especially to their calling to proclaim the gospel.

##### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is very closely integrated with the rest of the division. In fact, this passage is the first of two passages placed between the judgments of the first six trumpets and the judgment of the final trumpet. This passage is also closely related to other passages that are placed at similar junctures within Revelation (7:1-17 and 11:1-13). This positioning seems to be very critical to the understanding of this passage. This passage is placed within the division at a critical point in which the trial has commenced and has reached its peak, but the end has not come. This passage specifically alludes to the consummation of God's plan with the judgment of the final trumpet (7). The details of the consummation of God's plan are elaborated further in the remainder of Revelation. Therefore, this passage is identified by its placement as a key revelation for dealing with trials and serves to encourage Christians to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel.

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. This vision report describes a mighty angel from heaven with a little scroll, a revelation of the seven thunders, a voice from heaven that commands John to seal up the revelation and prohibits him from recording it, the mighty angel's oath that the time of fulfillment would not be delayed; the voice from heaven commanding John to eat the little scroll, John's compliance and the results, and the commissioning of John to prophesy. The visionary portrayal of the mighty angel from heaven with the little scroll serves to emphasize the divine origins and authority of the message in the little scroll. The visionary portrayal of the command to seal up and prohibition of writing down the revelation of the seven thunders combines with the mighty angel's oath to stress the faithfulness of God to inevitably fulfil his eternal plan. The visionary portrayal of the command to eat the scroll and its results combines with the commissioning of John to prophesy to accentuate the necessity of proclaiming the gospel. Though this vision report focuses on John and his need to proclaim God's word, he records it in Revelation to encourage persecuted Christians to trust in God and remain faithful, especially to proclaim the gospel.

### **Strategy and Structure**

This passage contains the visionary portrayals of the mighty angel and the little scroll (1-3a), the command of a voice from heaven and the oath of the mighty angel (3b-7), and the commission of John to eat the scroll and proclaim God's prophetic word (8-11). These visionary portrayals are arranged in a chronological order. However, their primary relationship is that each visionary portrayal provides reasons for trusting God and proclaiming the gospel.

- I. The Mighty Angel with the Little Scroll (1-3a)
  - A. The Mighty Angel Coming Down from Heaven (1)
  - B. The Little Scroll Open in the Mighty Angel's Hand (2a)
  - C. The Mighty Angel's Stance and Loud Shout (2b-3a)
- II. The Command of a Voice from Heaven and the Oath of the Mighty Angel (3b-7)
  - A. A Voice from Heaven Commands John to Seal Up and not Write What the Seven Thunders Say (3b-4)
  - B. The Mighty Angel Swears that there Will Be no more Time (5-7)
    1. The angel raises his right hand to heaven (5)
    2. The angel establishes the basis of his oath (6a)
    3. The angels swears that there will be no more time (6b-7)

- III. The Commission of John to Prophecy (8-11)
  - A. John Takes and Eats the Little Scroll (8-10)
    - 1. He is commanded by the voice from heaven to take the scroll (8)
    - 2. He requests the little scroll from the angel (9a)
    - 3. The angel commands him to eat the little scroll (9b)
    - 4. John takes and eats the little scroll (10)
  - B. John Is Told that He Must Prophecy Again (11)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because it comes from God in heaven, it is open and available for all, and it is urgent. Christians should trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because God will inevitably accomplish his eternal plan to save those who put their faith in Jesus Christ as he announced to his own servants the prophets. Christians should internalize and proclaim the gospel to everyone even though they encounter bitter difficulties and rejection because God says it is necessary and for the sweet joy of proclaiming God's word and leading sinners to salvation.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **The Mighty Angel with the Little Scroll**

John describes another mighty angel with the little scroll in verses 1-3. John describes another mighty angel coming down from heaven in verse 1, "Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow upon his head, his face like the sun, his legs like pillars of fire." His description of the angel coming down from heaven emphasizes that the message of the little scroll comes from God. The angel is described as being mighty, having a rainbow upon his head, a face like the sun, and legs like pillars of fire. This description of the angel is similar to descriptions of God and the exalted Christ elsewhere in Revelation. Some have understood the angel to be a representation of the exalted Christ, but it is probably best to conclude that the angel reflects the glory of God and the exalted Christ. The description of the angel in this way reemphasizes that the message of the little scroll is from God. As Osborne says, "this angel is not Christ but is the special herald of Christ and shares in his glory and his mission" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 8822-8823*). John describes the little scroll open in the hand of the mighty angel in the first part of verse 2, "and having in his hand a little scroll, which had been opened." There is a great deal of discussion about the identification of the little scroll. However, the little scroll is identified with the fulfillment of "the mystery of God" (7) and the mystery of God is consistently understood in the New Testament to be God's plan to save humanity that has been revealed in Jesus Christ (Romans 16:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:51-57; Ephesians 1:7-12, 3:1-11, 5:32, 6:19; Colossians 1:26-28, 2:2, 4:3; 1 Timothy 3:16). Revelation unveils the fulfillment of God's plan to save humanity through Jesus Christ by rewarding the faithful and punishing the wicked. John describes the little scroll as being open. Though the significance of the little scroll being opened is not altogether clear, it may signify that this message is not intended to be hidden but proclaimed as John is later commissioned to do. John describes the angel standing on the sea and land and his loud shout in the remainder of verse 2 and the first part of verse 3, "He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land and he cried out with a loud voice just like a lion roars." Though the significance of the angel's stance is not altogether clear, Summers may be right when he says that it is "to indicate that his message is for the whole world" (Summers, 160). As Osborne says, "By having one foot on the land and the

other on the sea, John was stressing the dominion of the angel over the whole world and the significance of the message in the scroll for all the world" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 8854-8855). The shout probably serves to emphasize the urgency of the message. Osborne observes, "This 'great shout' occurs often in the book (1:10; 5:2, 12; 6:10; 7:2, 10; 8:13; 10:3; 11:12, 15; 12:10; etc.) for important proclamations, but this is especially strong because it is likened to 'the roar of a lion'" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 8858-8860). As John describes the mighty angel and the little scroll Christians would be encouraged to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because it comes from God, it is open and available for all, and it is urgent.

### **The Command of the Voice from Heaven and The Oath of the Mighty Angel**

John describes the command of the voice from heaven and the oath of the mighty angel in verses 3-7. John describes the voice from heaven commanding him to seal up and not write down what the seven thunders said in verses 3-4. First, he relates that the voices of the seven thunders spoke in the second part of verse 3, "When he cried out, the voices of the seven thunders spoke sounds of themselves. The Greek text contains a reflexive pronoun that I have translated literally "of themselves." This reflexive pronoun is often untranslated (ESV, NIV, and NRS) or translated as a personal pronoun, "their voices" (CSB, NAS, and NKJ). However, the use of this reflexive pronoun seems to imply that the thunders spoke on their own without divine consent and were never meant to be heard. Second, he relates that he was commanded by a voice from heaven to seal up and not write what the seven thunders said in verse 4, "When the voices of the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up what the seven thunders said and do not write these things.'" The voice from heaven is probably the voice of God or the exalted Christ. The content of the revelation given by the seven thunders and the reason for it being sealed has been a topic of widespread discussion. It seems most natural to conclude that this is another series of judgments on the world like the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and later the seven bowls. But why was the revelation of the seven thunders sealed? Fanning suggest that "it is an overt reminder that God's counsel has depths that humans will never see or understand." Osborne takes this approach and concludes, "The major message is one of sovereignty. God is in control, and the saints do not need to know all the details" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 8892-8893). However, the context seems to favor the proposal that the sealing of the revelation of the seven thunders depicts a shortening of the time before the fulfillment of God's eternal plan. This seems to be affirmed by the oath of the mighty angel that there would be no more delay that follows. As Mounce says, "The seven thunders would have involved yet another delay had they not been canceled. Now nothing stands in the way of the final dramatic period of human history . . . The appointed delay is over, and the period of the end is irrevocably set into motion" (Mounce, 206).

John describes the oath of the mighty angel that there would be no more time in verses 5-7. The angel's oath serves to stress the certainty that God is about to act inevitable to fulfill his eternal plan. He describes the angel raising his right hand to heaven in verse 5, "Then the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven." The raising of the right hand to heaven was a common gesture used when making an oath that signified the invocation of God as security for the oath. He explains the basis of the angel's oath in the first part of verse 6, "and swore by the one who lives unto the ages of the ages, who created heaven and the things in it, the earth and the things in it, and the sea and all the things in it." The basis that the angel

gives for his oath is God himself. He identifies two things about God that serve as the security for his oath. First, He lives unto the ages of the ages. God is eternal! Second, God is the Creator of everything! He created everything whether in heaven, on the earth, and in the sea. He categorizes the three different arenas of God's creative work to stress the extent of his creation. Thus what the mighty angel swears is certain to occur. John relates the content of the mighty angel's oath in the remainder of verse 6 and in verse 7, "There will be no more time! But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, whenever he is about to sound, the mystery of God has been accomplished, as he announced to his own servants the prophets." My translation of the first line of this oath is literal, "There will be no more time!" However, most English versions translate "There will be no more delay!" and this is the probable meaning of this declaration. As you can see from my translation there is some repetition in verse 7 ("But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, whenever he is about to sound") and most English versions simplify like the NIV, "and in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet." However something may be lost in translation. The literal translation may suggest a sense of ambiguity as to the time when the seventh trumpet will be sounded. There will be no more delay, but everything must happen in accordance with God's timing, whatever that may be. As Osborne says, "Thus 'no more delay' does not mean Christ's return will occur immediately but rather there will be 'no delay' in the events that will inaugurate that return" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 8768-8770). Nonetheless, the angel swears that at that time "the mystery of God has been accomplished." The mystery God should probably be understood as his eternal plan that he has revealed in Jesus Christ to save those who have faith. The tense of the verb in my translation seems odd and indeed most English versions translate with the future like the NIV, "will be accomplished." Indeed, John probably uses the aorist tense to stress the certainty of the fulfillment of God's eternal plan by speaking of it as an established reality. The mighty angel concludes his oath by establishing the continuity of God's eternal plan with what he has revealed through the prophets, "as he announced to his own servants the prophets." It should be noted that the verb translated "announced" is *evangelizo* "to evangelize." Thus he is probably indicating that the gospel (*evangelion*) is God's eternal plan and consistent with all that he has revealed to the prophets (whether Old or New Testament prophets), at least those who are "his own" servants. As Osborne says, "This is both the culmination of all 'gospel' messages and the most important 'good news' ever given. God's plan of salvation is about to be completed" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 8967-8968). As John describes the voice from heaven and the mighty angel's oath Christians would be encouraged to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because God will inevitably accomplish his eternal plan to save those who put their faith in Jesus Christ that he announced to his own servants the prophets.

### **The Commission of John to Prophecy**

John describes his commission to prophecy in verses 8-11. John relates that he was instructed to eat the little scroll in verses 8-10, "Then the voice that I heard from heaven is speaking with me again and saying: 'Go take the scroll having been open in the hand of the angel standing on the sea and on the land.' So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little scroll and he says to me, 'Take and eat it. It will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet like honey.' So I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it and it was like sweet honey in my mouth and when I ate it my stomach was made bitter." The voice from heaven is certainly God or the exalted Christ. The mighty angel is certainly God's emissary. Therefore, what they say must be heeded! To eat the scroll is probably to listen to and apply its message. As Osborne



says, "to 'eat' the scroll means to take its message to heart, to internalize the prophecy and put it to work in one's life" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 9003-9004). The little scroll represents the message that John is called to prophesy in verse 11. Again, there is much discussion about the content of the little scroll and therefore the message that he is to proclaim. As I concluded earlier, the little scroll probably contains a message of encouragement as well as a warning to compel sinners to repent and trust Christ. That his stomach was made bitter from eating the little scroll probably is an indication that proclaiming the message will involve suffering for Christians as well as discouragement because hardhearted people continue to reject the message. That the little scroll was sweet in his mouth probably is a general indication of the enjoyment that comes from receiving God's word. This is certainly in accord with this imagery as it is found elsewhere in Scripture (Psalms 19:10, 119:103; Proverbs 24:13-14). However, I think that it is also an indication of the joy that comes from proclaiming God's word especially when some accept the message.

John relates that he was told that he must prophesy in verse 11, "Then he says to me, 'It is necessary for you to prophesy again concerning many peoples, nations, languages and kings.'" I have translated the introductory words of John's call literally, "Then they say to me" (See also the NAS and NRS). If this is correct then "they" probably refers to both the voice from heaven and the mighty angel. However, most translations translate either with the singular "And he said to me" or as a divine passive "And I was told." In any case John's call to prophesy comes ultimately from God and must be obeyed. The necessity of obedience is stressed further by the way the call is stated, "it is necessary for you to prophesy." God does not just command him to prophesy, but stresses its necessity. The scope of the prophetic ministry that John is called to also seems to be emphasized with another one of his inclusive lists. It concerns "many peoples, nations, languages, and kings." He must urgently prophesy to people from every conceivable grouping ("many peoples, nations, languages") including those with great authority and power ("kings") as Paul did before king Agrippa in Acts 26. As Mounce says, "the prophecies deal with people in general without attention to racial, geographic, ethnic, or social distinctions" (Mounce, 211). As John relates his experience of eating the little scroll and call to prophesy Christians would be encouraged to also internalize and proclaim God's word. As Fee says, "John himself has much more prophesying to do, and the church has much more witnessing to do" (Fee, 144). Therefore, Christians should internalize and proclaim the gospel to everyone even though they encounter bitter difficulties and rejection because God says it is necessary and for the sweet joy of God's word and leading sinners to salvation.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today also encounter opposition and difficulty that may discourage them from proclaiming the gospel. These similarities between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of the passage. I have already stated the message of the passage in the original context generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that it be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original context. Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because it comes from God in heaven, it is open and available to all, and it is urgent. Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because God will inevitably accomplish his eternal plan of saving those who put their faith in Jesus Christ as he announced to his own servants the prophets. Christians should internalize and proclaim the gospel to everyone even

though they encounter bitter difficulties and rejection because God says it is necessary and for the sweet joy of God's word and leading sinners to salvation.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** SO I TOOK THE LITTLE SCROLL

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to not be intimidated but faithfully proclaim the gospel.

**Proposition:** Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel because the gospel comes from God in heaven, the gospel is open and available for everyone, God will inevitably accomplish his eternal plan, proclaiming the gospel is urgent and necessary, and so they can experience the sweet joy of God's word and leading sinners to salvation.

#### **Introduction**

Christians today sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may discourage them from proclaiming the gospel. Indeed, Christians are being intimidated in many parts of the world and opposition to proclaiming the gospel is mounting even here in the West. *Illustration of the Intimidation of Christians.* Christians were also being intimidated in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John has now been transported to earth in his vision and is led to reaffirm his commitment to God's word and proclaiming the gospel. We need to reaffirm our commitment to God's word and proclaiming the gospel along with him. *Read Revelation 10:1-11.*

**I. Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel because the gospel comes from God in heaven.**

**II. Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel because the gospel is open and available for everyone.**

**III. Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel because God will inevitably accomplish his eternal plan.**

**IV. Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel because proclaiming the gospel is urgent and necessary.**

**V. Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel so they can experience the sweet joy of God's word and leading sinners to salvation.**

#### **Conclusion**

We sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may discourage us from proclaiming the gospel. Indeed, Christians are being intimidated in many parts of the world and opposition to proclaiming the gospel is mounting even here in the West. Christians were also being intimidated in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John has now been transported to earth in his vision and is led to reaffirm his commitment to courageously proclaim the gospel. We need to reaffirm our commitment to God's word and proclaiming the gospel along with him. We should courageously proclaim the gospel because the gospel comes from God in heaven. We should courageously proclaim the gospel because the gospel is open and available for everyone. We should courageously proclaim the gospel because God will inevitably accomplish his eternal plan. We should faithfully

proclaim the gospel because proclaiming the gospel is urgent and necessary. We should faithfully proclaim the gospel so we can experience the sweet joy of God's word and leading sinners to salvation.

## **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**

### **I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY TO MY TWO WITNESSES Measuring the Temple and Two End-time Witnesses Revelation 11:1-13**

This passage is very closely related to the preceding passage (10:1-11) like the visions of the 144,000 and the great multitude in the previous interlude (7:1-17). However, in this case I have chosen to separate them because uniting them would make the passages too large to interpret efficiently.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

11:1 Then a measuring rod like a staff was given to me, saying, "Arise and measure the temple of God and the altar and the ones worshipping in it. 2 But exclude the outer court outside and do not measure it because it has been given to the nations and they will trample the holy city 42 months.

3 I will give [authority] to my two witnesses and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, wrapped in sackcloth." 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 If anyone wants to harm them fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. In this way it is necessary for him to be killed. 6 These have authority to shut up the sky so that it does not rain during the days of their prophesying, and they have authority over the waters to turn these into blood and to strike the earth with every plague whenever they want.

7 When they finish their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will make war against them and overcome them and kill them 8 and their bodies [will be] on the street of the great city, which is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt where also their Lord was crucified. 9 Those from every people, tribe, language, and nation look on their bodies three and a half days and do not permit their dead bodies to be put in a grave. 10 The inhabitants upon the earth rejoice over them and celebrate and will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented the inhabitants upon the earth. 11 But after the three and a half days a spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood on their feet and great fear struck those watching them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud and their enemies watched them. 13 At that very hour there was a great earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed and seven thousand people were killed by the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage is set between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments, at the apex of the end-time crisis before the establishment of God's reign. The passage seems to be especially concerned with the proclamation of God's prophetic message during this critical period. The passage anticipates a time when two end-time witnesses would encounter opposition and be killed because of their testimony. Though the passage is futuristic, the readers would be able to identify with this setting to the extent that they encountered opposition and tribulation that discouraged their witness to the gospel. The Christians in Asia Minor encountered significant

opposition because of their faithful witness to the gospel. The purpose of the passage was to encourage Christians to trust God and remain faithful to him, especially to their calling to proclaim the gospel.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is very closely integrated with the rest of the division. In fact, this passage is the second of two passages placed between the judgments of the first six trumpets (8:6-9:21) and the judgment of the final trumpet (11:14-19). This passage is also closely related to other passages that are placed at similar junctures within Revelation (7:1-17 and 10:1-11). It has an especially close relationship with the preceding passage that serves a similar function (10:1-11). This positioning seems to be very critical to the understanding of this passage. This passage is placed within the division at a critical point in which the trial has commenced and has reached its peak, but the end has not come. The details of the consummation of God's plan are elaborated further in the remainder of Revelation. Therefore, this passage is identified by its placement as a key revelation for dealing with trial and serves to encourage Christians to faithfully proclaim the gospel.

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be classified as a vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. This vision report describes the command for John to measure the temple and count the worshipers and assurances of the power, authority, and ultimate vindication of God's two witnesses. The visionary portrayal of the command for John to measure the temple and count the worshipers serves to assure persecuted Christians of God's protection. The visionary portrayal of the God giving power and authority to his faithful witnesses and their ultimate vindication by God's serves to assure beleaguered Christians that God will give them power and authority and ultimately vindicate them as well even though they may be martyred because of their testimony. Though no indication of the appropriate response is provided, the contents of the vision report imply that Christians should trust God and remain faithful to him and proclaiming his word.

### **Strategy and Structure**

This passage contains the visionary portrayals of the measurement of the temple and numbering of the worshipers (1-2) and assurances of the power, authority, and vindication to God's two witnesses (3-13). The first of these visionary portrayals introduces the second and more elaborate visionary portrayal by warning of the coming time of crisis and giving a general basis of hope. The second of these visionary portrayals supplements and specifies the basis of hope, especially with regard to faithful witness.

- I. Exhortation to Measure the Temple and the Worshipers (1-2)
  - A. John Is Commanded to Measure the Temple and the Worshipers (1)
  - B. John Is Prohibited from Measuring the Outer Court (2)
- II. The Revelation Regarding the Two Witnesses (3-13)
  - A. The Power and Identity of the Two Witness (3-6)
    1. The voice from heaven describes the power given them to prophesy (3)
    2. The voice from heaven identifies them as the two olive trees and two lampstands (4)
    3. The voice from heaven describes the power given them to protect themselves (5)

4. The voice from heaven describes the power given them to perform signs (6)
- B. The Vindication of the Two Witnesses (7-11)
  1. The voice from heaven describes the death and humiliation of the two witnesses (7-10)
    - a. They will be attacked, overpowered, and killed (7)
    - b. Their bodies will be left in the street and denied burial (8-9)
    - c. Their deaths will be joyfully celebrated (10)
  2. The voice from heaven describes the vindication of the two witnesses (11-13)
    - a. The resurrection and ascension of the two witness and the terror it causes (11-12)
    - b. The earthquake and the terrified survivors giving glory to God (13)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because even though they may experience opposition for a limited time they are ultimately secure with God. Christians should trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because even though they may experience severe persecution, they stand before the Lord of all the earth and he will protect them and give them power by his Spirit. Christians should trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because whatever trials they face, even death, God will raise them from the dead and they will be with him in heaven and will be used by him to lead people to fear him and give him glory.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Exhortation to Measure the Temple And the Worshipers**

John relates that he was commanded to measure the temple and the worshipers in verses 1-2. He relates that he was given a reed and commanded to measure the temple and the worshipers in verse 1, "Then a measuring rod like a staff was given to me, saying, 'Arise and measure the temple of God and the altar and the ones worshipping in it.'" John again uses the divine passive to indicate that God is the one directing him to measure the temple. The speaker is the voice from heaven--clearly God or the exalted Christ. This imagery seems to reflect Ezekiel 40 and Zechariah 2. The temple and specifically the holy of holies was regarded as the place where God lived among his people. Though he is commanded to measure the worshipers, he is surely being commanded to count them. Measuring the temple and numbering the worshipers probably symbolically represent securing faithful Christians from the ravages of persecution and abuse in God's presence. As Osborne says, "When they are 'measured,' they are identified as belonging to God and under his protection" (Osborne, Kindle Location 9173).

John relates that he was commanded to exclude the outer court in verse 2, "But exclude the outer court outside and do not measure it because it has been given to the nations and they will trample the holy city 42 months." Osborne observes that "exclude," "is a strong command, for the verb normally connotes a violent image of 'driving out' something" (Osborne, Kindle Location 9189). The outer court of the temple was the court of gentiles who came to worship. However, here it is "given to the nations" who will also "trample the holy city 42 months." This picture could be a warning that some faithful Christians will not be removed from the world and its opposition. However, it could also serve to accentuate their security by contrasting it with the chaos completely surrounding them. Faithful Christians will be surrounded by foes and trials,

but they are ultimately secure with God. The 42 months are equivalent to other expressions in Revelation that put a limit on the time of severe trial. John's experience of measuring the temple is intended to encourage Christians as they encounter opposition that could discourage them from proclaiming the gospel. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because even though they may experience severe opposition for a limited time they are ultimately secure with God.

### **The Revelation regarding the Two Witnesses**

The voice from heaven describes the two witnesses in verses 3-13. The voice from heaven describes the authority and identity of the two witnesses in verses 3-6. First, the voice reveals the authority given to the two witnesses to prophesy in verse 3, "I will give [authority] to my two witnesses and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, wrapped in sackcloth." Again the one speaking is the voice from heaven--clearly God or the exalted Christ. God's authoritative action over the situation is asserted directly here rather than by the use of the passive voice. The word in brackets is not in the Greek text, but is implied in the context. The authority of the two witnesses comes from God. The prophetic ministry of the two witnesses lasts 1,260 which is equivalent to other expressions in Revelation that depict a severe but limited time of trial like the 42 months of the preceding verse. An interesting feature of the ministry of these two witnesses is that they wear sackcloth. Sackcloth is associated with sorrow and repentance. Their apparel could represent their distress for the plight of the world or their message calling people to repent of their sin and turn to God. Second, the voice from heaven identifies the two witnesses as the two olive trees and the two lampstands in verse 4, "These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth." The two witnesses are identified in terms of Zechariah, who spoke of two leaders who would be given power to serve the Lord and originally referred to Zerubbabel the king and Joshua the high priest. This imagery has been modified and reinterpreted here to describe these two end-time witnesses. The identification of them as olive trees and lamps probably depicts their divine anointing or empowerment for witness. In Zechariah 4:6 the two olive are linked to the Spirit of God, "Then he said to me, 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts'" (Zechariah 4:6 ESV). As Mounce concludes, "By these two metaphors John is emphasizing a truth concerning the church that has always been true but is especially appropriate in times of persecution--that the power and authority for effective witness lie in the Spirit of God" (Mounce, 218). The addition of "that stand before the Lord of the earth" probably reinforces their divine authority and power by putting them in close proximity to the Lord who has authority over all that happens on the earth. As Osborne says, "the 'Lord of the earth' will watch over them, and he is in control of the entire situation" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 9383-9384). Third, the voice from heaven describes the power given to the two witnesses to protect themselves in verse 5, "If anyone wants to harm them fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. In this way it is necessary for him to be killed." This assurance is so amazing that it is often understood metaphorically to represent the divine authority with which they will speak which is able to silence those who oppose them. Nonetheless, it clearly assures divine protection that will last throughout the period of the severe trial. Fee says, "It is doubtful whether John here actually intended something like 'tit for tat'; rather this is most likely intentionally strong imagery to indicate that during the time of their witness God will protect them so that they may fulfill the divine will" (Fee, 150-151). Fourth, the voice from heaven describes the power given to the two witnesses to perform signs in verse 6, "These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will

not rain during the time they are prophesying, and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague." These witnesses seem to be identified with Elijah and Moses. The power to shut the sky is an allusion to when Elijah prayed and the rain stopped (1 Kings 17). Later, the expectation arose that Elijah would return before the day of God's judgment (Malachi 4:5). The power to turn water to blood and strike the earth with every kind of plague is an allusion to Moses and the Exodus. Later, the expectation arose that another Moses would arise to deliver God's people. Who are these two witnesses? Are they literally Elijah and Moses? Are they two individuals or do they represent the witness of the church during the time of trial? Speculation abounds with no clear answers. Nevertheless, even though we may need to wait until the end to identify the two witness, the revelation of the two witnesses would serve as an indirect assurance from God to Christians encountering opposition as they seek to faithfully proclaim the gospel. Therefore, Christians should trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because even though they experience severe persecution, they stand before the Lord of all the earth and he will protect them and give them power by his Spirit.

The voice from heaven describes the death and vindication of the two witness in verses 7-13. The voice from heaven describes the death and humiliation of the two witnesses in verses 7-10, "When they finish their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will make war against them and overcome them and kill them and their bodies [will be] on the street of the great city, which is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt where also their Lord was crucified. Those from every people, tribe, language, and nation look on their bodies three and a half days and do not permit their dead bodies to be put in a grave. The inhabitants upon the earth rejoice over them and celebrate and will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented the inhabitants upon the earth." The two witness will not just be opposed by men, but "the beast that comes up from the abyss will make war against them and overcome them and kill them." The great city "is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt" cities which became emblematic of wickedness and idolatry in the Old Testament. Their deaths are also linked to the death of Jesus by "where also their Lord was crucified." This could be a reminder that it is an honor to suffer as a martyr like their Lord. Beasley-Murray goes so far as to say "In them the passion of the Christ is set forth afresh" (Beasley-Murray, 185). There is a great deal of discussion about the identity of the great city. Whatever the case the message is not dramatically affected. This description of the treatment of the two witnesses emphasizes the extent of their trial and humiliation. However, note that they will not be overcome and killed until they have finished their witness. God is in control even when his witnesses are being attacked and killed! It is bad enough that they will be overcome and killed, but their bodies will be left in the street and denied burial for three and a half days to be gazed upon by the crowds. The crowds will even joyfully celebrate and give presents to one another to celebrate the death of these two witnesses who testified against them and their wickedness. As Osborne says, "This emphasizes the universal scorn heaped upon the witnesses after they are martyred" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 9479-9480). Nonetheless, God is still in control even when his witnesses are horribly mistreated and humiliated!

The voice from heaven describes the vindication of the two witnesses and the response of the crowds in verses 11-13. First, the voice from heaven describes the resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses and the terror it causes in verses 11-12, "But after the three and a half days a spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood on their feet and great fear struck those watching them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here!' And they went up to heaven in a cloud and their enemies watched them." Appropriately, those who gazed upon their dead bodies and joyfully celebrated their death and humiliation are forced to



watch as God raises his two witnesses from the dead and invites them to come up to heaven. As a result "great fear struck them." As Osborne says, "The unsaved rejoice over an earthly victory that will be very short-lived, while the saints will know an eternal joy" (Osborne, *Kindle Location 9533*). The voice from heaven relates that there was an earthquake and the terrified survivors gave glory to God in verse 13, "At that very hour there was a great earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed and seven thousand people were killed by the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." Some dispute that these are truly saved and equate this to the universal praise that will ultimately be given to God as in Philippians 2:11, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (See also Isaiah 45:23-25 and Romans 14:11). However, the language that is employed seems to suggest genuine conversion. Whatever the case, Beasley-Murray summarizes the point well, "Witnesses may be crushed, and lamps put out, but in the end both witness and light achieve their desired object: men give glory to God" (Beasley Murray, 181). The revelation of the death and humiliation of two witnesses and their vindication would serve as an indirect assurance from God to Christians encountering opposition as they seek to faithfully proclaim the gospel. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because whatever trials they face, even death, God will raise them from the dead and they will be with him in heaven and will be used by him to lead people to fear him and give him glory.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today also experience opposition and difficulty that may intimidate them and discourage them from proclaiming the gospel. These similarities between the original and modern situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern context. I have stated the message in the original context generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that it be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original context. Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because even though they may experience opposition for a limited time they are ultimately secure in God's presence. Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because even though they experience severe persecution, they stand before the Lord of all the earth and he will protect them and give them power by his Spirit. Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully proclaim the gospel because whatever trials they face, even death, God will raise them from the dead and they will be with him in heaven and will be used by him to lead people to fear him and give him glory.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** I WILL GIVE POWER TO MY TWO WITNESSES

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to boldly proclaim the gospel even though they encounter opposition and difficulty.

**Proposition:** Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel because they are ultimately secure in God's presence, the Lord of all the earth will protect them and empower them by his Spirit, God will raise them from the dead and they will be with him in heaven, and God will use them to lead people to fear him and give him glory.

### **Introduction**

Christians today sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may discourage them from proclaiming the gospel. Indeed, Christians are being intimidated in many parts of the world and opposition to proclaiming the gospel is mounting even here in the West. *Illustration of the Intimidation of Christians*. Christians were also being intimidated in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John is commanded to measure the temple and count the worshipers and is given a revelation of God's end-time witnesses. Through this prophetic act and revelation God provides us with encouragement to faithfully proclaim the gospel. *Read Revelation 11:1-13*.

**I. Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel because they are ultimately secure in God's presence.**

**II. Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel because the Lord of all the earth will protect them and empower them by his Spirit.**

**III. Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel because God will raise them from the dead and they will be with him in heaven.**

**IV. Christians should courageously proclaim the gospel because God will use them to lead people to fear him and give him glory.**

### **Conclusion**

We sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may discourage us from proclaiming the gospel. Indeed, Christians are being intimidated in many parts of the world and opposition to proclaiming the gospel is mounting even here in the West. Christians were also being intimidated in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John is commanded to measure the temple and count the worshipers and is given a revelation of God's end-time witnesses. Through this prophetic act and revelation God provides us with encouragement to courageously proclaim the gospel. We should courageously proclaim the gospel because we are ultimately secure in God's presence. We should courageously proclaim the gospel because the Lord of all the earth will protect us and empower us by his Spirit. We should courageously proclaim the gospel because God will raise us from the dead and we will be with him in heaven. We should courageously proclaim the gospel because God will use us to lead people to fear him and give him glory.

## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**

### **A WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN Vision of a Woman, Her Child, the and Dragon Revelation 12:1-16**

The passage does contain some diverse elements that could be separated and dealt with separately. However, the entire passage as defined describes God's victory over Satan and frustration of his diabolic plans. In addition, the passage as defined begins and ends with the visionary images of the woman and the dragon. Some may question why I have not included verses 17-18 in this passage; however, these verses introduce the issue that is addressed in the subsequent passage.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

12:1 Then a great sign was seen in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 Having [a baby] in [her] womb, she cries out having birth pains and being in torment so as to give birth. 3 Then another sign was seen in heaven: Behold, a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. 4 His tail sweeps away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. The dragon stood before the woman who is about to give birth so that he might devour her child whenever she gave birth. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male who is about to shepherd all the nations with an iron staff, and her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. 6 The woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place there having been prepared by God, so that he might nourish her for 1,260 days.

7 There was a war in heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought along with his angels. 8 But he was not strong [enough] and a place was no longer found for them in heaven. 9 The great dragon was cast down, the ancient serpent who is called the Devil and Satan, who leads astray the whole world. He was cast down to the earth and his angels were cast down with him.

10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying:  
"Now have come the salvation and power and the kingdom of our God,  
and the authority of his Christ.  
For the accuser of our brothers was cast down,  
who accuses them before our God day and night,  
11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their life up to death.  
12 Because of this, rejoice heavens  
and the ones who dwell in them.  
Woe to earth and the sea,  
because the Devil has gone down to you,  
having great wrath, knowing that he has [only] a little time."

13When the dragon saw that he had been cast down to the earth, he pursued the woman who gave birth to the male child. 14But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the desert to her place, where she is nourished for a time, times, and half a time, from before the serpent. 15Then the serpent spewed water like a river from his mouth after the woman in order to make a flood against her. 16But the earth helped the woman and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon spewed out of his mouth.

### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage describes a visionary world in which a dragon is waiting for a glorious woman to give birth so he can devour her child; a war is being waged in heaven between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels; and the dragon is pursuing the woman and spewing water from his mouth to overtake her and sweep her away. These visionary images seem to reflect a past situation in which Satan was seeking to kill the Messiah, waging war in heaven against God's angels, and trying to destroy the fledgling church. It also anticipates the continuation of the conflict between Satan and God's people in verse 12 (Also verse 17). This reflects a situation in which the church was encountering opposition from Satan and his worldly allies and Christians were in danger of becoming discouraged and forsaking their commitment to Christ and testifying to the gospel. The purpose of the passage the passage is especially seen in verse 11 where the way to conquer Satan is revealed. They must trust in Jesus sacrificial death and maintain their faithful witness to him even under the threat of death.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This division of the book (12:1-14:20) is in a sense another interlude; however, whereas previous interludes came between the sixth and seventh seal judgments and the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments, this interlude comes between the second and third series of judgments (The seven trumpet judgments in 8:6-11:19 and the seven bowl judgments in 15:1-16:21). This division seems to interrupt these successive descriptions of final judgments in order to provide additional warning, encouragement, and instruction for Christians encountering severe trials. In this sense it could be regarded as the heart of the revelation. Fee even says, "These three chapters serve as the theological epicenter of the entire book" (Fee, 163). Like most of the book, this division anticipates the climax of the book when God's ultimate triumph and establishment of his reign are realized. This passage serves within this division to encourage faithfulness based on the God's victory and frustration of Satan's plans to kill the Messiah, destroy the church, and storm heaven. Subsequent passages in the division encourage faithfulness by revealing the extent of the threat and the need for patient endurance and faithfulness (12:17-13:18) and the hope of standing with the Lamb and singing the new song of salvation rather than sharing in the ultimate defeat and judgment of Satan and his allies (14:1-20). Fee wisely advises, "Before looking at the passage in some detail, it might help for one to read the next three chapters together and, by way of overview, to become aware of the primary theological motifs that one encounters in the text" (Fee, 162).

### **Form and Function**

The passage is an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary story rather than just a visionary picture. This visionary narrative contains four closely related scenes. In the first visionary scene the newborn male child and its mother escape from the dragon. This scene depicts God's frustration of Satan's plan to kill the Messiah and destroy the early church. In the second visionary scene God repels the dragon and his angels from their

attempt to storm heaven and casts them to the earth. This scene depicts God's frustration of Satan's plan to usurp divine authority. In the third visionary scene a loud voice from heaven interprets and explains the significance of what has been revealed so far, providing encouragement and guidance for responding to opposition. In the fourth visionary scene God with the help of the earth enables the woman to escape from the pursuing dragon and a flood of water that spews from his mouth and nurtures her in the desert. This scene depicts God's continued frustration of Satan's plans to destroy the church and God's continuing care for her. These visionary scenes provide encouragement for persecuted Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their witness to the gospel.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage combines a series of visionary scenes that describe God's frustration of Satan's plans: The woman and her child escape from the dragon (1-6); the dragon and his angels are defeated and expelled from heaven (7-9); and the woman is delivered from the continuing attacks of the dragon (13-16). Within this series of visionary pictures a voice from heaven provides additional encouragement and guidance for Christians as they continue to be persecuted by Satan and his allies (10-12).

- I. The Woman and Her Child Escape the Dragon (1-6)
  - A. The Glorious Woman Who Is about to Give Birth (1-2)
  - B. The Frightening Dragon and His Diabolical Intention (3-4)
  - C. The Deliverance of the Child and Escape of the Woman (5-6)
    1. The birth, destiny, and deliverance of the child (5)
    2. The escape of the woman to a place prepared by God (6)
- II. The Dragon and His Angels Are Defeated and Expelled from Heaven (7-9)
  - A. The War in Heaven between Michael and His Angels and the Dragon and His Angels (7)
  - B. The Weakness, Defeat, and Expulsion of Satan and His Angels from Heaven (8-9)
- III. The Declaration of the Voice from Heaven (10-12)
  - A. The Loud Voice Explains that Satan's Defeat Means that the Salvation and Power and Kingdom of God Have now Come (10)
  - B. The Loud Voice Explains that the Church Was Victorious by the Blood of the Lamb, the Word of Their Testimony, and Their Courage until Death (11)
  - C. The Loud Voice Explains that Satan's Defeat Is Already Celebrated in Heaven but He Is Now Directing His Great Wrath on the Earth (12)
- IV. The Deliverance of the Woman from the Dragon (13-16)
  - A. The Dragon Pursues the Woman and She Is Given Wings to Fly (13-14)
  - B. The Dragon Pursues the Woman and the Earth Intervenes (15-16)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he has thwarted Satan's attempts to destroy the Church, who was taken up to God's throne and will rule the nations, and delivered his fledgling church from Satan's attempts to destroy it so that it could be nourished and grow. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan was not strong enough to storm heaven and he was defeated and God expelled him and his angels and hurled them down to earth. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the salvation and power and kingdom of their God and the authority of

his Christ have come; Satan is no longer able to accuse them before God; they can overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and their courage until death; and Satan's defeat is already being celebrated in heaven and even his fury is just an indication of his desperation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God has prepared a place for them and will help them escape, take care of them, and prevent them from being overwhelmed.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **A Woman and Her Child Escape**

##### **The Dragon**

John describes the woman and the child escaping from the dragon in verses 1-6. John describes a glorious woman who is about to give birth in verses 1-2, "Then a great sign was seen in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. Having [a baby] in [her] womb, she cries out having birth pains and being in torment so as to give birth." The identity of the radiant woman has been greatly debated. The simplest approach is probably to identify her as the true people of God. However, her identity adapts to the different historical circumstances portrayed in the vision. At this point it would seem natural to identify the woman as faithful Israel since she gives birth to the child, who certainly is Jesus the Messiah. Some of this description of the clothing, footstool, and crown of the woman indicates that true Israel, those who are faithful to God, reflect the divine glory. Osborne concludes that this signifies "the victory and glory that God has given his people" (Osborne, Kindle Location 10120). Mounce adds, "The world may despise the true Israel and hold it in lowest esteem, but from God's point of view she is a radiant bride (cf. Jer 2:2)" (Mounce, 232). There is a clear contrast between this glorious woman and the Great Prostitute of 17:1 and 19:2 (See Ashcraft, 308 for a comprehensive comparison and contrast). The pregnancy of the woman and her cries indicate that faithful Israel lives in expectation and intense longing for the fulfillment of God's messianic promises. In addition, the cries also probably serve to heighten the expectation and suspense of the visionary scene by indicating that the birth of the child is imminent.

John describes a frightening dragon and his diabolical purpose in verses 3-4, "Then another sign was seen in heaven: Behold, a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail sweeps away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. The dragon stood before the woman who is about to give birth so that he might devour her child whenever she gave birth." The dragon is obviously a visionary representation of Satan and this identification will be made explicit later in the passage. The description of the dragon is meant to emphasize his horrifying authority and strength and evil intent. He is described as being enormous, blood red in color, with seven heads perhaps indicating intelligence, ten horns indicating power, and seven crowns indicating authority. So strong is the dragon that with one swipe of his tale he is able to knock a third of the stars from the sky. Osborne observes that "sweeps" "is a strong verb that pictures a "dragging away" of individuals or fish (John 21: 8; Acts 8: 3), always to a negative end" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 10201-10202). Mounce adds, "The cataclysmic action emphasizes the tremendous size and awesome power of the dragon" (Mounce, 233). However, this description is not intended so much to elicit fear in the readers as it is to set up the emphasis on God's greater power to frustrate Satan's plans. The description of the dragon standing in front of the woman with the intention of devouring the child is probably

an allusion to the attempt to kill Jesus when he was born, the plots against him during his ministry, and ultimately his trial, condemnation, and crucifixion when it seemed like Satan had finally accomplished his plan.

John describes the deliverance of the child and escape of the woman in verses 5-6. First, he describes the birth, destiny, and deliverance of the child in verse 5, "She gave birth to a son, a male who is about to shepherd all the nations with an iron staff, and her child was snatched up to God and to his throne." The child that is born is clearly Jesus. The description of his destiny is based on a line from Psalm 2, which is interpreted messianically. This psalm describes the king surrounded by his enemies, but miraculously delivered by God so that he could fulfill his destiny as the ruler of the entire world. This same line from Psalm 2 is cited in 19:2 when the exalted Christ comes to strike down the nations. Despite Satan's attempts to thwart God's purpose for Jesus Christ he will ultimately reign! The snatching away of the child probably refers to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. This description again emphasizes that Satan could not frustrate the Messiah's destiny and the resurrection of Jesus is the surety that Christ has won the victory over Satan and will ultimately establish his eternal rule.

John describes the escape of the woman to a place prepared by God in verse 6, "The woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place there having been prepared by God, so that he might nourish her for 1,260 days." At this point the identity of the woman has changed slightly because of a change in the historical situation. She is still the true people of God, but those who have responded to the gospel, perhaps including both Jews and Gentiles. Satan continued to attack the fledgling church, seeking to destroy it before it could influence the fate of humanity through its testimony. Mounce suggests, "The flight of the woman may in part reflect the escape of the Palestinian church to Pella at the outbreak of the Jewish war in A.D. 66" (Mounce, 234). Whatever the case, God frustrates Satan's plans again by preparing a place for his infant church so that it can be nourished and grow. The reference to the 1,260 is similar to other expressions used in Revelation for the limited period of extreme tribulation at the end of time. However, in this case it probably refers to a similar period of great trial at the inception of the church. Later, the loud voice from heaven will relate the significance of the experience of the young church for others who are continuing to face severe difficulties. As John describes the escape of the woman and her child from the dragon Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he has thwarted Satan's attempts to destroy the Christ, who was taken up to God's throne and will rule the nations, and delivered his fledgling church from Satan's attempts to destroy it so that it could be nourished and grow.

### **The Expulsion of Satan and His Angels from Heaven**

John describes the expulsion of Satan and angels from heaven in verses 7-9. John describes the war in heaven between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels in verse 7, "There was a war in heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought along with his angels." There is a great deal of discussion about when this conflict took place. Jewish tradition places Satan's defeat and expulsion from heaven at the beginning of the world and this perspective may sometimes be reflected in Scripture (Isaiah 14:12-15 and Luke 10:18). However, the loud voice from heaven seems to attribute Satan's expulsion to Jesus' death on the cross. The simplest way to understand this is that Satan's position in heaven was in some way limited at the beginning, but through Jesus' victory on the cross he no longer has any access

to heaven. Mounce believes that this was a thwarted attempt by Satan to regain his place in heaven (Mounce, 235).

John describes the weakness, defeat, and expulsion of Satan and his angels from heaven in verses 8-9, "But he was not strong [enough] and a place was no longer found for them in heaven. The great dragon was cast down, the ancient serpent who is called the Devil and Satan, who leads astray the whole world. He was cast down to the earth and his angels were cast down with him." The passive voice is used again to indirectly indicate God's activity ("He was cast down to the earth and his angels were cast down with him"). The weakness of the dragon, his loss of his place in heaven, and his expulsion to the earth are all intended to assure beleaguered Christians that Satan and his angels cannot stand before the overwhelming power of God and his angelic army. The dragon is described in terms that acknowledge his power and deceptiveness. As Fanning notes, "The title 'the ancient serpent' (v. 9a) specifies the dragon as the creature who deceived Eve in the garden (Gen 3: 1– 15; cf. 2 Cor 11: 3)" Fanning, 355). He is the Devil, the slanderer, and Satan, the accuser. However, this description again primarily serves to emphasize the superior might of God. He is the great dragon who has deceived the whole world, but he has been decisively defeated by the forces of God and cast out of heaven. Satan and his angels were cast down to earth. As we will see later this means trouble for the church; however, ironically even Satan's presence on earth is evidence of his defeat in heaven (See verse 16). As John describes the defeat and expulsion of Satan from heaven Christians would be encouraged to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan was not strong enough to storm heaven and he was defeated and God expelled him and his angels and hurled them down to earth.

### **The Declaration of a Loud Voice From Heaven**

John relates the declaration of a loud voice from heaven in verses 10-12. Loud voices are used in Revelation to make important announcements. Who this loud voice belongs to is not identified, but it is probably a heavenly being such as an angel or elder and is speaking to and on behalf of other heavenly beings since he refers to God as "our God" and Christians are identified as "our brothers." The loud voice from heaven explains that Satan's defeat means that the salvation and power and kingdom of God have come in verse 10, "And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying: 'Now have come the salvation and power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers was cast down, who accuses them before our God day and night.'" The voice from heaven first provides some assurances to persecuted Christians. These assurances are introduced with the words "Now have come," emphasizing their reality by describing them as already established. First, the loud voice assures persecuted Christians that "the salvation and power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ" have come. For the early Christians who were encountering opposition from Satan and his worldly allies these were not all that obvious. By all appearances Satan was in control and working with power to destroy God's people. Through this assurance, these beleaguered Christians were encouraged to continue to trust in God whose ultimate victory is certain despite appearances. Second, the loud voice assures persecuted Christians that Satan has been cast down from heaven and no longer has access to God and the ability to accuse them. As the loud voice will explain in the next verse, the underlying reason that Satan is no longer able to accuse them is "the blood of the Lamb." Jesus' death on the cross as the Lamb of God is the provision for the forgiveness of sin and Satan no longer has a basis for accusation. As Paul says, "Who shall bring



any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Romans 8:33-34 ESV).

The loud voice from heaven explains that the early church overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and their courage until death in verse 11, "They themselves overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their life up to death." The loud voice doubles the subject pronoun to emphasize early Christians as an example for others who would follow and be persecuted like them (Literally "They, they overcame" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "They themselves overcame him"). Indeed, Fee calls this "the key theological sentence of the entire book" (Fee, 162). As Fanning observes, "Use of the word 'overcome' alludes to the promises Jesus expressed to 'overcomers' in his messages to the churches (cf. 2:7, etc.) as well as to the description of his victory at the cross (3:21; 5:5-6) that alone provides the grounds and pattern for his followers to overcome Satan" (Fanning, 358). The loud voice explains that they were able to overcome Satan and his attacks for three reasons. First, they were able to overcome Satan and his attacks "by the blood of the Lamb." They put their faith in Jesus' sacrificial death as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. As Fanning says, "Ultimately it is not Christians' action but Christ's that defeats the dragon" (Fanning, 358). Second, they overcame Satan and his attacks "by the word of their testimony." They faithfully testified to the gospel, the good news that Jesus had won the victory over death so that others could also experience life in him. Third, the loud voice explains that "they did not love their life up to death." My translation is literal but not very clear. What is probably meant is that they courageously stood firm for their faith for their entire lives, especially when faced with the choice of renouncing Christ or die. As Jesus says, "And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:38 ESV). They could do this because of "the blood of the Lamb." Christ had won the victory over death on the cross and they had confidence that they like him would be raised to life even if they died. As Jesus adds, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39 ESV).

The loud voice from heaven explains that Satan's defeat is celebrated in heaven but that his wrath is now directed on the earth in verse 12, "Because of this, rejoice heavens and the ones who dwell in them. Woe to earth and the sea, because the Devil has gone down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has [only] a little time." Heaven is able to rejoice because from the heavenly perspective Satan has already been defeated. Indeed, those who dwell in heaven probably includes faithful believers who have died. Thus this celebration in heaven may provide additional assurance to persecuted Christians that even if they die they will dwell in heaven where Satan's defeat is already celebrated. However, Christians are warned that the Devil has gone down in great wrath that is directed against them on earth. Nonetheless, even Satan's great wrath against them is an indication of his desperation ("knowing he has [only] a little time"). As John relates the declaration of the loud voice from heaven persecuted Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the salvation and power and kingdom of their God and the authority of his Christ have come; Satan is no longer able to accuse them before God; they can overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and their courage until death; and Satan's defeat is already being celebrated in heaven and even his fury against them is just an indication of his desperation.

## **The Deliverance of the Woman From the Dragon**

John describes the deliverance of the woman from the dragon in verses 13-17. John describes the dragon pursuing the woman and her being given wings to fly to the desert in verses 13-14, "When the dragon saw that he had been cast down to the earth, he pursued the woman who gave birth to the male child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the desert to her place, where she is nourished for a time, times and half a time, from before the serpent." The woman still represents the faithful believers of the early church and these verses elaborate on what has already been affirmed in verse 6. The dragon's pursuit of the woman again should be understood as Satan's attempt to destroy the early church. The reference to eagle's wings reflects similar terminology in Exodus 19:4, Deuteronomy 32:10-11, and especially Isaiah 40:30-31, "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:30-31 ESV). The passive voice is used again to indirectly indicate that God is was the one who gave the woman her wings, her means to miraculously escape from the dragon's attempts to destroy her ("was given two wings of a great eagle"). John describes the dragon pursuing the woman and the earth intervening on her behalf in verses 15-16, "Then the serpent spewed water like a river from his mouth after the woman in order to make a flood against her. But the earth helped the woman and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon spewed out of his mouth." The river from the mouth of the dragon should be understood as the trials which Satan was bringing against the church which were intended to overwhelm Christians. The intervention of the earth, which swallows the river is another assurance of God's protection. God the Almighty is in control and uses natural forces to miraculously deliver his people from Satan's attacks. As John describes the deliverance of the woman from the dragon Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God has prepared a place for them and will help them escape, take care of them, and prevent them from being overwhelmed.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today sometimes experience opposition that could undermine their faith and commitment. These similarities between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. I have already stated the message in the original context generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that it be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he has thwarted Satan's attempts to destroy the Christ, who was taken up to God's throne and will rule the nations, and he has delivered his fledgling church from Satan's attempts to destroy it so that it could be nourished and grow. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan was not strong enough to storm heaven and was defeated and God expelled him and his angels and hurled them down to earth. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the salvation and power and kingdom of their God and the authority of his Christ have now come; Satan is no longer able to accuse them before God; they can overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and their courage

until death; and Satan's defeat is already being celebrated in heaven and even his fury is just an indication of his desperation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God has prepared a place for them and will help them escape, take care of them, and prevent them from being overwhelmed.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** A WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians who are encountering opposition to continue to trust and remain faithful to God and testifying to the gospel.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he has thwarted Satan's attempts to destroy the Christ, destroy the church, and storm heaven; they can overcome him by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and their courage until death; and Satan's defeat is already being celebrated in heaven and even his fury against Christians and the church is just an indication of his desperation.

#### **Introduction**

Christians sometimes encounter opposition that could undermine their faith and commitment. Indeed, Christians are being intimidated in many parts of the world and opposition to Christianity is mounting even here in the West. *Illustration of the Intimidation of Christians.* Christians were also being intimidated in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John now describes a bizarre vision of a glorious woman and her child being threatened by a fiery red dragon that even tries to storm heaven. However, the dragon, who represents Satan, is totally frustrated by God. Through this bizarre vision God provides us with encouragement to continue to trust him and remain faithful. *Read Revelation 12:1-16.*

- I. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he has thwarted Satan's attempts to kill the Christ, destroy the church, and storm heaven.**
- II. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they can overcome him by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and their courage until death.**
- III. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's defeat is already being celebrated in heaven and even his fury against Christians and the church is an indication of his desperation.**

#### **Conclusion**

We sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may undermine our faith and commitment to God. Indeed, Christians are being intimidated in many parts of the world and opposition to Christianity is mounting even here in the West. John now describes a bizarre vision of a glorious woman and her child being threatened by a fiery red dragon that even tries to storm heaven. However, the dragon, who represents Satan, is totally frustrated by God. Through this bizarre vision God provides us with encouragement to continue to trust him and remain faithful. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he has thwarted Satan's attempts to kill the Christ, destroy the church, and storm heaven; we can overcome him

by the blood of the Lamb, the word of our testimony, and our courage until death; and Satan's defeat is already being celebrated in heaven and even his fury against us is just an indication of his desperation.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### **HERE IS THE PATIENT ENDURANCE OF THE SAINTS Vision of the Dragon and His Two Beasts Revelation 12:17-13:18**

This passage is united by its description of the threat that the dragon brings against Christians as depicted in the beast arising from the sea and the beast arising from the land. The only question could be the inclusion of 12:17-18 in this passage rather than the preceding passage. I have linked these verses to chapter 13 because they transition to the war that the dragon wages against the rest of the woman's offspring which is described in this chapter.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

12:17Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who are keeping God's commandments and are maintaining the testimony of Jesus--18and he stood on the sand of the sea.

13:1Then I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and ten crowns on its horns, and [a] blasphemous name[s] on its heads. 2The beast which I saw was like a leopard and its feet [were] like a bear and its mouth [was] like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave to it its power and its throne and great authority. 3One of the heads of the beast [was] as if it had been killed unto death, but its killing blow was healed and the whole world was astonished [and followed] after the beast. 4They worshiped the dragon because he gave authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast saying, "Who is like the beast and who is able to make war against it?"

5A mouth was given to it, speaking great things and blasphemies and authority was given to it to act for forty-two months. 6It opened its mouth for blasphemes against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, those who dwell in heaven. 7Was given to it to make war against the saints and to conquer them and authority was given to it over every tribe, people, language, and nation. 8All who are dwelling on the earth will worship it--whose name has not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world.

9If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10If anyone [is to go] into captivity, into captivity he goes. If anyone [is] to be killed with the sword, with the sword [he is] to be killed. Here is the patient endurance and faith of the saints.

11Then I saw another beast, coming up out of the earth and it was having two horns like a lamb, but it was speaking like a dragon. 12It exercises all the authority of the first beast before it and it makes the earth and the ones dwelling on it so that they will worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. 13It performs great signs so that it even makes fire to come down out of heaven to earth before men. 14It leads astray the ones who dwell on the earth through the signs that were given to it to do before the beast, saying to the ones who dwell upon the earth to make an image for the beast who has the wound from the sword and lived. 15Was given to it to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image could even speak and cause as many as did not worship the image of the beast to be killed. 16It makes everyone, small and great, rich and poor,

free and slave, so that they give to them a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, 17so that no one is able to buy or sell except the one having the mark, the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18Here is wisdom. The one having understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man and his number [is] 666.

### **Situation and Purpose**

This passage describes a visionary world in which the beast from the sea joins the dragon and blasphemes God and makes war against the saints, even conquering, imprisoning, and killing them, and leads the inhabitants of the world to follow and worship it and the dragon. The passage also describes a visionary world in which the beast from the earth employs great and miraculous signs to deceive the inhabitants of the world and threats of death and economic sanction to coerce them into worshipping the first beast and receive its mark. This setting reflects a situation in which Satan is using his worldly allies to intimidate, deceive, and coerce Christians into forsaking their faith and commitment to God. The Christians in Asia Minor probably would have understood the beast from the sea to be Rome and the beast from the earth to be the emperor cult. In addition, it reflects a situation in which seemingly everyone in the world was being intimidated and deceived by Satan and his worldly allies. The purpose of the passage was to encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is part of a division of the book (12:1-14:20) that interrupts a series of passages that describe the end as seven-fold judgments--the seven seal judgments (6:1-8:5), the seven trumpet judgments (8:6-11:19), and the seven bowl judgments (15:1-16:21). This division seems to interrupt these successive descriptions of final judgments in order to provide additional assurances and warnings to encourage Christians enduring trials to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Like most of the book, this division anticipates the end and climax of the book when God's ultimate triumph and establishment of his reign is realized. This passage serves within this division to encourage faithfulness based on a warning of the extent of the threat and the need for patient endurance and faith. This passage reinforces and supplements the preceding passage which encouraged faith and faithfulness by describing God's frustration of Satan's attempts to kill the Messiah, storm heaven, and destroy the early church (12:1-16). The final passage in this division encourages faith and faithfulness by describing the faithful with the Lamb singing the new song of salvation and the defeat of Satan and his allies and judgment of the world (14:1-20).

### **Form and Function**

The passage is an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. The passage contains a variety of visionary images. The visionary images of the dragon, the beast arising from the sea, and the beast arising from the land are clearly intended to describe the threat that Christians face from Satan and his allies in the world. The descriptions of the response of most people in the world--astonishment, allegiance, and worship--are probably intended to heighten the warning by illustrating the deceptive and coercive power of Satan and his worldly allies. Nonetheless, underlying these visionary warnings are subtle indications that God is still ultimately in control. The appropriate response to these threats is stated indirectly in verses 9-10. Due to the inevitability of captivity and death, Christians are warned of the need for patient endurance and

faith. Similarly in verse 20, the wise response of Christians to their perilous situation is revealed to be understanding the true nature of their opponents.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage begins with a description of the anger of the dragon toward the woman and warfare against her offspring to reintroduce the threat (12:17-18). This sets the stage for all that follows. Next, the threat is more specifically described through the visionary imagery of the beast from the sea and the response of the world and persecuted Christians are warned of the need for patient endurance and faith (13:1-10). Next, the threat is more specifically described through the visionary image of the beast arising from the earth and persecuted Christians are encouraged to be wise and understand the true nature of their opponent (3:11-18).

- I. The Anger of the Dragon at the Woman and Warfare against Her Children (12:17-18)
  - A. The Anger of the Dragon at the Woman
  - B. The Warfare of the Dragon against Her Children
- II. The Beast Arising from the Sea (3:1-10)
  - A. Description of the Beast from the Sea (1-3a)
  - B. The Amazement, Allegiance, and Worship of the Whole World (3b-4)
  - C. The Mouth and Mission Given to the Beast (5-7)
  - D. The Worship of All Whose Names Are not in the Book of Life (8)
  - E. Warning of the Need for Patient Endurance and Faith (9-10)
- III. The Beast Arising from the Earth (13:11-18)
  - A. The Deceptive Appearance of the Beast (11)
  - B. The Relationship of the Beast to the First Beast (12)
  - C. The Beast's Use of Miraculous Signs to Deceive and Coerce People to Worship the First Beast (13-15)
  - D. The Beast's Use of Economic Sanctions to Compel People to Receive the Mark of the First Beast (16-17)
  - E. Exhortation for Those with Understanding to Calculate the Number of the Beast (18)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully obey him and maintain their testimony of Jesus because Satan is enraged at them and is going to make war against them. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies are terrifying, all the inhabitants of the world are aligned with them, and they are waging war against Christians and defeating them, but God is ultimately in control even if they go into captivity and are killed, and here is where their steadfast endurance and faith are really needed. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies are deceptive in appearance, have authority to promote his evil plans and use miraculous signs and economic sanctions to lead people astray, but God is ultimately in control and those who are wise will understand that Satan's allies are human and evil.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **The Anger and of the Dragon at the Woman And Warfare against Her Children**

John describes the anger of the dragon at the woman and warfare against her children in verse 2:17-18, "Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who are keeping God's commandments and are maintaining the testimony of Jesus--and he stood on the sand of the sea." The dragon was probably enraged because his plans to destroy the woman were frustrated. Since he is unable to destroy the woman, he directs his anger against her offspring and makes war against them. The woman is still the early church and her offspring should probably be understood as her converts to Christianity. This is confirmed by his description of their character; they are obedient to God and faithful to maintain their testimony of Jesus. The description of the dragon standing on the sand of the sea anticipates the coming of the beast that will arise from the sea, which represents the dragon's first worldly ally in its warfare against the Christians and the church. As John describes the anger of the dragon at the woman and warfare against her children he is warning persecuted Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully obey him and maintain their testimony of Jesus because Satan is enraged at them and is making war against them.

### **The Beast Arising from the Sea**

John describes the beast arising from the sea and warns of the need for patient endurance and faith in 13:1-10. John describes the terrifying beast arising from the sea in verses 1-3, "Then I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and ten crowns on its horns, and [a] blasphemous name[s] on its heads. The beast which I saw was like a leopard and its feet [were] like a bear and its mouth [was] like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave to it its power and its throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast [was] as if it had been killed unto death, but its killing blow was healed." The origin of the beast from the sea perhaps identifies it with Leviathan, that evil beast from mythology. The description of the beast's heads, horns, and crowns indicates that it resembles the dragon and is an earthly manifestation of his evil presence. In addition, the imagery indicates that it has great power and authority. The blasphemous names on its heads probably indicate that it makes claims for authority that are only appropriate for God. The description of the beast as resembling a leopard, having the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion, probably stresses that the beast is ferocious, tearing and devouring with vicious claws and teeth. As Osborne says, "His purpose is to present a beast that is incredibly hideous and completely horrifying, for it is the embodiment of all that is evil" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 10859-10860*). Not only does the beast resemble the dragon, but the dragon is the source of the beast's power and authority. One of the heads of the beast also seems to have had a fatal wound, but the wound had been healed. This is a deceptive parody of the Lamb that looked like it had been slain. This beast will seek to deceive the world by copying Jesus' death and resurrection. The beast arising from the sea is clearly Satan's chief worldly ally as he makes war against Christians. The beast is used by Satan to intimidate and deceive the world and destroy the church. John and his contemporaries would understand the beast arising from the sea as being the Roman Empire and specifically the emperor. They would probably understand the recovery from the fatal wound of the beast based on the popular expectation that Nero would return, the recovery of Caligula from a serious illness, or the revival of the Roman Empire under Vespasian after the dark days following the suicide of Nero.

John describes the amazement, allegiance, and worship of the whole world in verses 3-4, "and the whole world was astonished [and followed] after the beast. 4They worshiped the dragon because it gave authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast saying, 'Who is like the beast



and who is able to make war against it?" John's description emphasizes that the whole world was amazed at the power and authority of the beast and especially the fatal wound that was healed. That the whole world followed after the beast means that they gave it their allegiance. Their rhetorical questions express the awe with which they regarded the beast and its unassailable power. Both questions imply an emphatic negative reply. "Nobody is like the beast!" "Nobody can make war against him!" Thus the whole world is depicted as elevating the beast to the position of God and worshiping it along with the dragon. John and the churches of Asia Minor would understand this as the allegiance and worship that the world gave to the emperor and Satan as the power behind the throne.

John describes the mouth and mission given to the beast in verses 5-7, "A mouth was given to it, speaking great things and blasphemies and authority was given to it to act for forty-two months. It opened its mouth for blasphemes against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, those who dwell in heaven. Was given to it to make war against the saints and to conquer them and authority was given to him over every tribe, people, language, and nation." John has already said, "The dragon gave to him his power and his throne and great authority." The beast is described as being given a mouth to speak great things and blasphemies, probably exalting himself above God. The beast is further described as blaspheming against God and his name, probably denigrating God and his reputation. What is more, the beast blasphemes against God's tabernacle, which is clarified as being "those who dwell in heaven," probably meaning God's heavenly court. The beast was given a mission of exalting itself and the dragon at the expense of God. The beast is also described as being given authority to wage war against the saints as well as everyone on earth ("every tribe, people, language, and nation") He was even given authority to conquer them! The beast was given the mission of destroying the church and solidifying the allegiance of everyone else for itself and the dragon. Nonetheless, the passive voice of the verb *didomi* ("was given") is characteristically used in Revelation to indirectly indicate God's activity. Even though it appears that the dragon is in control and giving authority to the beast to accomplish his mission, it is ultimately God who has given authority to the beast to accomplish his own mission. As Osborne says, "Neither Satan nor the beast can do a single thing without permission from God" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 11006-11007). As Beasley-Murray adds, "But in it all one has to say with Luther that even when the Devil works his worst he remains God's Devil" (Beasley-Murray, 213).

John describes the response of all whose names are not in the Book of Life in verse 8, "All who are dwelling on the earth will worship it--whose name has not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world." John again emphasizes that everyone will worship the beast, absolutely everyone who lives on the earth. But wait! He qualifies this absolute statement by adding, "whose name has not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb." The implication is that those whose names have been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb will not worship the beast. The Book of Life is mentioned six times in Revelation (See also 3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15; and 21:27) and contains the names of true believers and is used to indicate that they are securely saved. They will not worship the beast because their allegiance is to the Lamb who was slain so that their names could be included in the Book of Life. Scholars debate as to whether "from the foundation of the world" defines "whose name has not been written" based on the parallel in 17:8 or "the Lamb who was slain" based on the word order of the Greek text. As Osborne observes, "This phrase occurs ten times in the NT and refers to a wide variety of things that are at the heart of salvation history" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 11134-11135). If the line defines "whose name has not been written" it probably

serves to stress the security of those who are saved. If the line defines "the Lamb who was slain" it probably serves to stress God's plan to save humanity through Christ from the beginning of time. I have understood it in this context based on the word order to refer to "the Lamb who was slain."

John warns of the need for patient endurance and faith in verses 9-10, "If anyone has an ear, let him hear. If anyone [is to go] into captivity, into captivity he goes. If anyone [is] to be killed with the sword, with the sword [he is] to be killed. Here is the patient endurance and faith of the saints" First, he urgently calls Christians to listen to what he is about to say using a variation of the command used by the exalted Christ to heed what the Spirit was saying to the churches in the letters (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The idiom may suggest that since they have at least one ear they should use it. As Mounce says, "The contemporary equivalent of v. 9 would be the military command, "Now hear this!" (Mounce, 252). Second, he warns Christians of the inevitability of going into captivity and being killed if that is what is to be. The implication is that if going into captivity and being killed is what God has determined in his divine sovereignty then this is precisely what will happen. Finally, he enigmatically says, "Here is the patient endurance and faith of the saints." What he probably means is that this is where the patient endurance and faith of saints is required and must be found. As Osborne says, "The best translation would probably be 'this demands' in light of the critical nature of the ethical response" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 11193-11194). Mounce concludes, "When the impending persecution breaks upon the church, believers will need to meet it with steadfast endurance and an unwavering faith" (Mounce, 254). Ashcraft helpfully adds, "Faith is that commitment to Jesus Christ which results in the conviction that since he overcame through the cross, we can follow him through trial and death to ultimate victory" (Ashcraft, 314). As John describes the beast arising from the sea and warns of the need for patient endurance and faith Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies are terrifying, all the inhabitants of the world are aligned with them, and they are waging war against Christians and defeating them, but God is ultimately in control even if they go into captivity and are killed, and here is where their steadfast endurance and faith are really needed.

### **The Beast Arising from the Earth**

John describes the beast arising from the earth and exhorts those with understanding to calculate the number of the first beast in 3:11-18. John describes the deceptive appearance of the beast arising from the earth in verse 11, "Then I saw another beast, coming up out of the earth and it was having two horns like a lamb, but it was speaking like a dragon." The origin of the beast from the earth perhaps identifies it with Behemoth, another evil monster from mythology. The description of the beast as having two horns like a lamb probably indicates its appearance is deceptive. It seems to be gentile like a lamb; however, it speaks like a dragon. Indeed, it may appear to have some things in common with the Lamb, but it speaks on behalf of the first beast and ultimately the dragon. As Beasley-Murray says, "whereas the Lamb of God is and speaks the Word of God (19:13, and chs. 2-3), the beast from the land is the 'Lamb' of Satan, and it is and speaks the word of Satan. It looks like a lamb, but its speech betrays its origin" (Beasley-Murray, 216). Thus the beast arising from the earth represents those forces on the earth that promote Satan's agenda and chief ally on the earth. John and the churches in Asia Minor would have probably understood this beast to be the religious establishment that promoted and enforced emperor worship.

John describes the relationship of the beast arising from the earth to the first beast in verse 12, "It exercises all the authority of the first beast before him and he makes the earth and the ones dwelling on it so that they will worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed." The beast arising from the earth seems to be the Public Relations Director for the first beast or its Minister of Propaganda (Mounce, 257). It exercises the authority of the first beast "before him." This probably means that it exercises the authority of first beast in its presence so that the attention is directed toward the first beast and the ones dwelling on the earth will worship it.

John describes the beast using miraculous signs to deceive and coerce the ones dwelling on the earth to worship the first beast in verses 13-15, "It performs great signs so that he even makes fire to come down out of heaven to earth before men. It leads astray the ones who dwell on the earth through the signs that were given to it to do before the beast, saying to the ones who dwell upon the earth to make an image for the beast who has the wound from the sword and lived. Was given to it to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image could even speak and cause as many as did not worship the image of the beast to be killed." Elijah called down fire in his contest with the prophets of Baal and this verified that he was the was the real prophet and the LORD was the true God (1 Kings 18:23-39). Here the second beast is described as performing a similar authenticating miracle so that it is able to lead astray those who dwell on the earth and direct them to make an image for the first beast. The second beast is even able to give breath to the image of the beast so that it could speak in the same way that God gave a breath of life to the two witnesses in 11:11. The point seems to be that this beast will have persuasive power that could easily deceive. It has already been said that "It exercises all the authority of the first beast" (12) and it has already been revealed that the first beast gets its power from the dragon. However, there may again be subtle indications even here that God is ultimately in control. John characteristically uses the aorist passive of *didomi* to indirectly identify the activity of God and in these verses he says that signs "were given to it" and "Was given to it" to give breath to the image. Indeed, these aorist passive verbs are frequently translated "It was allowed" (ESV, NRS) or "He was permitted" (CSB) or "He was granted" (NKJ) which more directly imply God's involvement.

John describes the beast using economic sanctions to compel the ones dwelling on earth to receive the mark of the first beast in verses 16-17, "It makes everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, so that they give to them a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, so that no one is able to buy or sell except the one having the mark, the name of the beast or the number of his name." John stresses that no one was exempt from the second beast's campaign to force everyone to receive the mark of the first beast. Pressure was put on everyone no matter their social or economic status ("everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave"). The second beast made it essentially impossible for anyone to do business without receiving the mark of the first beast. This mark on their hand or forehead would clearly indicate that they have aligned themselves with the first beast and that they are his property. As Osborne observes, "There are no neutralities in this war; not to belong to Christ is to belong to the beast" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 11456-11457*). In the next chapter those who have aligned themselves with the first beast and received his mark are described as being in torment. Thus this is a clear warning against aligning oneself with the first beast.

John relates an exhortation for those with understanding to calculate the number of the beast in verse 18, "Here is wisdom. The one having understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man and his number [is] 666." This exhortation probably serves a

similar function to the warning of the need for patient endurance and faith at the end of his description of the first beast in verses 9-10 . The exhortation is introduced with "Here is wisdom" to identify what is about to be said as the wise response to what he has previously described. Those with understanding are then commanded to calculate the number of the beast and given clues to solve this riddle--it is the number of a man and his number is 666. Using these clues many have tried to solve the riddle of the number of the beast using Hebrew gematria (See Osborne, *Kindle Locations 11471-11526* for a good explanation of gematria). However, the rules of gematria are flexible and it is possible to come to innumerable conclusions (See Fanning, 381 who traces the interpretation of the number of the beast through the centuries). John and the churches in Asia Minor would have probably calculated the number to identify a Roman emperor, perhaps Nero. Perhaps the clues are intended to be interpreted flexibly so they could identify whatever worldly power Satan is using to oppose the church and keep the people of the world in his sway. Perhaps the clues reveal more about the true nature of Satan's ally than the specific identify of his ally. In a context where the beast is described as being supernaturally powerful and making claims to divine authority and being promoted with miraculous signs so that everyone is deceived it is certainly wise to understand that it is human after all ("it is the number of a man"). As Fee says, this designation "is intended to mark him off as merely human, not divine" (Fee, 187). What is more, Summers says, "To the Oriental there was doom in the number '6' when it stood alone. Raise it to a series--'666'--and there is the representation of a potency of evil than which there can be none greater. By symbol the number '666' is evil raised to its highest power" (Summers, 177). As John describes the second beast and relates the exhortation to understand and calculate the number of the first beast, Christians would be encouraged to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies are deceptive in appearance, have authority to promote his evil plans and use miraculous signs and economic sanctions to lead people astray and compel obedience, but God is ultimately in control and those who are wise will understand that Satan's allies are human and evil.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today continue to confront Satan's worldly allies who are seeking to intimidate and deceive them into forsaking their faith and commitment to God. As Fanning says, "Even at a lower level of intensity, Christians must struggle mightily against the authority exerted in this world through the devil's lackeys in our day" (Fanning, 382). Indeed, in some places in the world Christians are being fervently persecuted by Satan's allies and opposition to Christianity and the church is mounting in the West. These similarities provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. I have already stated the message in the original context generally so there is very little need to adjust them in order to apply them to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust God and faithfully obey God and maintain their testimony of Jesus because Satan is enraged at them and is making war against them. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies are terrifying, all the inhabitants of the world are aligned with them, and they are waging war against Christians and defeating them, but God is ultimately in control even if they go into captivity and are killed, and here is where their steadfast endurance and faith are really needed. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies are deceptive in appearance, have authority to promote his evil plans and use miraculous

signs and economic sanctions to lead people astray and compel obedience, but God is ultimately in control and those who are wise will understand that Satan's allies are human and evil.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** I SAW A BEAST COMING OUT OF THE SEA

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony to Jesus.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony to Jesus because Satan is enraged and making war against them, Satan's allies are intimidating and deceptive, and Satan's allies have deceived and coerced the people of the world, but God is still ultimately in control no matter what, it is in this conflict with Satan's allies that steadfast endurance and faith are really needed, and those who are wise will understand that Satan's allies are human and evil.

### **Introduction**

Christians frequently encounter opposition from Satan and his allies in the world. Satan and his allies may try to intimidate and deceive them to renounce their faith in order to avoid difficulty and enjoy the world and its pleasures. As a result their faith in God and commitment to him and proclaiming the gospel may be threatened. *Illustration of the Deception and Coercion of Christians*. Christians were also in danger of being deceived and coerced in Asia Minor at the time when John he received his revelation from the exalted Christ. John describes another bizarre vision of two beasts, one arising from the sea and the other arising from the earth. Through this bizarre vision God provides us with warning and encouragement to continue to trust in him and remain faithful to him and our testimony to Jesus and the gospel. *Read Revelation 12:17-13:18*.

- I. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony to Jesus because Satan is enraged and making war against them.**
- II. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony to Jesus because Satan's allies are intimidating and deceptive.**
- III. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony to Jesus because Satan's allies have deceived and coerced the people of the world.**
- IV. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony to Jesus because God is still ultimately in control no matter what.**
- V. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony to Jesus because it is in this conflict with Satan's allies that steadfast endurance and faith are really needed.**
- VI. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony to Jesus because those who are wise will understand that of Satan's allies are human and evil.**

### **Conclusion**

We sometimes encounter opposition from Satan and his allies in the world. Satan and his allies may try to intimidate or deceive us to renounce our faith in order to avoid difficulty and

enjoy the world and its pleasure. As a result our faith and commitment to God and testifying to Jesus and the gospel may be threatened. Christians were also being intimidated in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes another bizarre vision of two beasts, one arising from the sea and the other arising from the earth. Through these bizarre visions God provides us with encouragement to continue to trust in him and remain faithful to him and our testimony to the gospel. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and our testimony to Jesus because Satan is enraged and making war against us, Satan's worldly allies are intimidating and deceptive and have deceived and coerced the people of the world, but God is still ultimately in control no matter what, it is in this conflict with Satan's allies that our steadfast endurance and faith are really needed, and those who are wise will understand the true nature of Satan's allies.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### **THE LAMB STOOD ON MOUNT ZION A Grand Kaleidoscope of Visionary Images and Voices Revelation 14:1-20**

This passage contains a wide variety of visionary images and voices and could possibly be subdivided further. However, I have chosen to unite all of these together because they present a grand kaleidoscope of visionary images and voices that depict both the blessedness of the faithful as well as God's judgment of the wicked.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

14:1 Then I looked and behold, the Lamb stood on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who have his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 I heard a sound from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of great thunder and the sound I heard [was] like harpists playing on their harps. 3 They are singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one was able to learn the song except the 144,000, the ones who have been purchased from the earth. 4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were purchased from men, firstfruits to God and the Lamb. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are unblemished.

6 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, having the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth and to every nation, tribe, language, and people, 7 saying in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship the one who made the heaven, the earth, sea and springs of water."

8 Another angel, a second, followed saying, "Fallen! Fallen [is] Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink from the wine of the passion (*thumos*) of her immorality."

9 Another angel, a third, followed them saying in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, 10 he himself will also drink the wine of God's wrath (*thumos*), which has been poured out undiluted into the cup of his fury and he will be tormented in fire and brimstone before the holy angels and before the Lamb. 11 The smoke of their torment rises unto the ages of the ages and they have no rest day and night, the ones who worship the beast and his image, or if anyone receives the mark of his name. 12 Here is the patient endurance of the saints, the ones who maintain the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes!" says the Spirit, "so they will rest from their labors, for their deeds are following with them."

14 Then I looked and behold, a white cloud and sitting on the cloud [is] one like a son of man, having a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple crying out in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, "Put forth your sickle and reap, because the hour to reap has come since the harvest of the earth has become fully

mature." 16So the one who sits on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth and the earth was reaped.

17Then another angel came out of the temple, the one in heaven, and he also has a sharp sickle. 18Another angel [came] from the altar, having authority over the fire, and called in a loud voice to the one having the sharp sickle saying, "Put forth your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes have ripened." 19So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vine of the earth and threw [it] into the great winepress of God's wrath. 20The winepress was trampled outside the city and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles for 1,600 *stadia*.

### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage describes a futuristic visionary world in which the faithful are vindicated and the wicked are judged. The broader context describes a visionary world in which the beast from the sea joins the dragon and blasphemes God, makes war against the saints and even conquers, imprisons, and kills the saints, and leads the inhabitants of the world to follow and worship it and the dragon (13:1-10). It also describes a visionary world in which the beast from the earth employs power to do great and miraculous signs in order to deceive the inhabitants of the world and threats of death and economic sanction to coerce the people of the world into worshipping the first beast and receive its mark (13:11-18). This setting reflects a situation in which Satan is using his worldly allies to intimidate, deceive, and coerce Christians into forsaking their faith and commitment. John and the churches of Asia Minor probably would have understood the dragon as Satan and the beasts as the Roman Empire or the emperor and the imperial cult. The purpose of the passage was to warn Christians against being deceived or coerced by the power of Satan's worldly allies and encourage them to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is part of a division of the book (12:1-14:20) that interrupts a series of divisions that describe the end as seven-fold judgments--the seven seal and trumpet judgments (6:1-11:19) and the seven bowl judgments (15:1-16:21). This division seems to interrupt these successive descriptions of final judgments in order to provide additional assurances and warnings to encourage Christians enduring trials to continue to trust God and remain faithful. Like most of the book, this division anticipates the end and climax of the book when God's ultimate triumph and establishment of his reign is realized. This passage serves within this division to encourage faithfulness based on the blessed future that awaits the faithful and dismal fate that awaits the wicked. This passage reinforces and supplements the preceding passages where Christians are encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him based on God's frustration of Satan's attempts to kill the Messiah, storm heaven, and destroy the early church (12:1-16) and the necessity of patient endurance and faith due to the deceptive and coercive power of Satan and his allies (12:17-3:18).

### **Form and Function**

The passage is an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. The passage contains what I have called a grand kaleidoscope of visionary images and voices. The visionary images of the Lamb and the 144,000 on Mount Zion represent Jesus Christ and faithful Christians and serve to encourage



faith and faithfulness based on the hope of being among those who share in Christ's victory and sing the new song of salvation. The message of the angel with the eternal gospel probably serves to encourage faithful proclamation of the gospel based on their identification with the angel what is depicted about his mission. The messages of the second and third angels encourage faith and faithfulness by declaring that Babylon the Great has fallen and warning that those who worship the beast and his image and receive its mark will suffer eternal torment. The message of the heavenly voice that is affirmed by the Spirit encourages faith and faithfulness by pronouncing a blessing on those who die in the Lord. The visionary images of two harvests encourage faith and faithfulness by providing assurance of deliverance of the faithful and warning of God's wrath against the wicked.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage contains a grand kaleidoscope of visionary images and voices that warn and encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony of Jesus. First, they are encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so that they can stand victorious with Christ and sing the new song in verses 1-5. Second, they are encouraged to join the angel with the eternal gospel and urgently proclaim the gospel to everyone in verses 6-7. Third, they are encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him by the second and third angels and their declaration of the fall of Babylon the Great and warning that anyone who worships the beast or its image will suffer eternal torment in verses 8-12. Fourth, they are encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him based on the assurance of the voice from heaven that those who die in the Lord are blessed in verse 13. Finally, they are encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him by the visionary image of the harvest of the saved and the harvest of God's wrath in verses 14-20.

- I. The Lamb, the 144,000, and the New Song (1-5)
  - A. The Lamb and the 144,000 (1)
    1. The Lamb standing on Mount Zion
    2. The 144,000 with the Father's name written on their foreheads
  - B. The Heavenly Music and the New Song (2-3a)
    1. The heavenly music (2)
    2. The new song (3a)
  - C. The Exclusiveness of the Choir (3b-5)
    1. Only the redeemed (3b)
    2. Only those who kept themselves pure (4a)
    3. Only those who followed the Lamb (4b)
    4. Only those who were purchased and offered to God and the Lamb (4c)
    5. Only those who did not lie and remained unblemished (5)
- II. Another Angel and His Message (6-7)
  - A. Another Angel with the Eternal Gospel (6)
  - B. The Loud Exhortation of the First Angel (7)
    1. Exhortation to fear God and give him glory
    2. Exhortation to worship the Creator
- III. Two More Angels and Their Messages (8-12)
  - A. The Second Angel's Announcement of Judgment on Babylon the Great (8)
  - B. The Third Angel's Warning of Judgment and the Need for Steadfast Endurance (9-12)

1. Warning of the judgment of those who worship the beast and his image (9-11)
  2. Warning of the need for steadfast endurance (12)
- IV. The Blessing of the Voice from Heaven and the Spirit's Affirmation (13)
- A. The Blessing of the Voice from Heaven
  - B. The Affirmation and Elaboration of the Spirit
- V. Visions of Two Harvests (14-20)
- A. The Harvest of One Like a Son of Man (14-16)
    1. Appearance of one like a son of man (14)
    2. Appearance of another angel and his call for harvest (15)
    3. The harvest of the earth (16)
  - B. The Harvest of God's Wrath (14:17-20)
    1. The appearance of another angel with a sharp sickle (17)
    2. The appearance of still another angel and his appeal for harvest (18)
    3. The harvest of God's wrath (19-20)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because only those who have been redeemed and follow Lamb wherever he goes without compromise will stand victorious with him and sing the new song celebrating salvation. Christians should urgently proclaim the gospel and call all people to fear God and give him glory because it is the eternal gospel for everyone, the hour of God's judgment is imminent, and he is the Creator. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who compromise with Satan's worldly allies will experience God's undiluted, enduring, and continual wrath and this requires patient endurance, obedience, and faithfulness on the part of the saints. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful because those who die in the Lord are blessed and will rest from their labors for their deeds will follow them. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the hour has come for God's judgment and the Son of Man will come in the clouds to gather those who are his, but all those who compromise with Satan's allies in the world will receive the full extent of God's wrath and fury.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **The Lamb, the 144,000, and the New Song**

John describes his vision of the Lamb, the 144,000, and the new song in verses 1-5. John describes the Lamb and the 144,000 in verse 1, "Then I looked and behold, the Lamb stood on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who have his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." John introduces this visionary image with, "Then I looked and behold" probably to stress the significance of what he is about to describe. Jesus Christ is clearly the Lamb with the focus on his sacrificial death. Though the identity of the 144,000 is disputed, they probably represent the full number of the true people of God. Mount Zion is described as the locale, perhaps because is sometimes associated with God's victory and deliverance (Joel 2:32; See also Isaiah 24:21-23 and Micah 4:6-8). Jesus as the Lamb is the one who made victory possible through his sacrificial death and sets the pattern for the lives of those who share in his victory--faithful sacrifice. That the 144,000 have the name of Lamb and his Father on their foreheads indicates that they belong to God and are under his protection. As Mounce says, "As difficult as the future may be, there remains the joyful prospect of soon standing beyond this sphere of

suffering on the mountain of the Lord and singing with the innumerable multitude of the redeemed the new song of salvation" (Mounce, 269).

John describes the heavenly music and the new song in verses 2-3, "I heard a sound from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of great thunder and the sound I heard [was] like harpists playing on their harps. They are singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders." The description of the music that accompanies the song seems to stress its splendor. It is like the sound of a cascading cataract and reverberating thunder, yet at the same time is musical like harpists playing on their harps. This grand orchestra accompanies the heavenly choir singing the new song. The psalms often speak of new songs celebrating God's new acts of deliverance (Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; and 149:1) and in Isaiah 42:10 a new song is called for to celebrate God's deliverance. Thus the heavenly choir is celebrating God's climactic act of deliverance. Some debate the composition of the heavenly choir, but it seems likely that it consists of the 144,000 who represent the full number of the faithful people of God (See also 7:1-8).

John describes the exclusiveness of the choir in verses 3-5, "No one was able to learn the song except the 144,000, the ones who have been purchased from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were purchased from men, first fruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are unblemished." Those who are able to learn the new song are limited. No one was able to learn the song except the 144,000 who represent the full number of the true people of God. That they are able to learn and sing the new song indicates that they have authentically experienced God's salvation and are able to celebrate it. Their ability to learn the new song is based on two general criteria. The first general criterion is that they have experience of God's grace. Only those who "have been purchased from the earth" and "were purchased from men" can learn the new song. This is the language of redemption. People are enslaved to sin and Satan, but God has redeemed or purchased their freedom through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. Indeed, God's deliverance of his people from sin and Satan is the basis for their ability to sing the new song of salvation. The identification of the 144,000 as "first fruits to God and the Lamb" has been variously understood; however, it probably identifies them as a sacrificial offering that honors God. The second general criterion for learning the new song is their faithfulness. Their faithfulness is defined by specific conduct. First, those who are able to learn the new song are those who "were not defiled themselves with women for they are virgins." This qualification has been the source of considerable debate, but probably should be understood to mean that they have not been unfaithful to God by compromising with the world and its values. Perhaps it should be understood in relation to the depiction of the church as the bride of the Lamb in 21:9. They are virgins in the sense that they have not been corrupted by the world and its "so-called" gods. As Morris says, they "have kept themselves completely free from intercourse with the pagan world system" (Morris, 177). Second, those who are able to learn the new song are those who "follow the Lamb wherever he goes." The identification of Jesus as the Lamb in this verse is very significant. Those who are included in the choir follow Jesus wherever he goes, even to death, rather than compromise with the world. This is the equivalent of Jesus' call for disciples to take up their cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; and Luke 9:23). As Mounce says, "Only those who have paid the full price of endurance in the faith are equipped by experience to give voice to the subsequent anthem of victory" (Mounce, 266). Third, John says of those who are able to learn the new song that "No lie was found in their mouths." This may indicate their honesty, but probably indicates

in this context that they refused to deny Christ and attribute divinity to worldly powers like the emperor. Finally, it is said of those who are able to learn the new song that "They are unblemished." The word translated "unblemished" is often used in the Bible for sacrificial animals that are without defect." In this context, those who are unblemished are especially those who have not contaminated themselves by compromise with the world. As John describes the Lamb on Mount Zion, the 144,000, and the new song, persecuted Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because only those who have been redeemed and follow the Lamb wherever he goes without compromise will stand victorious with him and sing the new song celebrating salvation.

### **The First Angel and His Proclamation Of the Gospel**

John describes the first angel and his proclamation of the gospel in verses 6-7, "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, having the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth and to every nation, tribe, language, and people, saying in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship the one who made the heaven, the earth, sea and springs of water.'" This visionary picture has caused considerable confusion and debate. Indeed, it seems at first glance a bit out of place since it depicts an angel coming with the gospel in a context that describes the vindication of the saints and the judgment of the world as present realities. What is the point? Some have seen it as an indication that God is making every effort to give a chance for everyone who stands condemned to repent. Others question whether the angel is actually proclaiming the gospel and see it as simply another depiction of God's judgment. Though it is far from clear, I see it as an aside that serves to encourage Christians to join the angel in his proclamation of the gospel. The description of the angel's message as the eternal gospel indicates that God had planned to save humanity through Jesus Christ from the very beginning and that the gospel has everlasting validity. The description of the angel's message as being "to those who live on the earth and to every nation, tribe, language, and people" indicates the universal value of the gospel. That the angel spoke "in a loud voice" probably indicates the urgency of the message of the gospel. Some have question whether what the angel actually says is the proclamation of the gospel; however, even though the message of the angel is not stated Christologically, the gospel underlies this declaration based on the way that it is introduced. The angel exhorts people to fear God and give him glory because of the imminence of judgment. Indeed, the imminence of judgment is stressed by stating it as an accomplished reality ("the hour of his judgment has come"). In addition, the angel exhorts people to fear God and give him glory because he is the Creator. As Fanning says, "False gods are capable of nothing and warrant no one's allegiance, but the true and living God, the maker of all, deserves to be worshiped by all people" (Fanning, 392). As John describes the first angel and his proclamation of the gospel Christians would be encouraged to join the angel and urgently proclaim the gospel. Therefore, Christians should urgently proclaim the gospel and call all people to fear God and give him glory because the gospel is the eternal gospel for everyone, the hour of God's judgment is imminent, and he is the Creator.

### **The Second and Third Angels and Their Messages**

John describes the second and third angels and their messages in verses 8-12. John describes the second angel and his announcement of judgment on Babylon the Great in verse 8, "Another

angel, a second, followed saying, 'Fallen! Fallen [is] Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink from the wine of the passion of her immorality.'" This is the first of several references to Babylon the Great in Revelation. Babylon was recognized by the Jews as a city that embodied evil and represents the center of worldliness and evil. John and the churches in Asia Minor would have understood Babylon as the city of Rome. The angel stresses the certainty of the fall of Babylon by declaring its fall twice and using the past tense to speak of the fall of Babylon as if it had already occurred. The clause that follows describes the pernicious influence of Babylon the Great, "which made all the nations drink from the wine of the passion (*thumos*) of her immorality." I have struggled with the translation of *thumos* because I do not want to lose the apparent play on words between two different meanings of the same word. This word is prominent in Revelation and is normally translated "wrath." Indeed, in the following verses the third angel warns that those who worship the beast will drink from the wine of God's wrath (*thumos*). This play on words seems to stress the appropriateness of the nations sharing in the wrath (*thumos*) that God brings on Babylon the Great since they have also shared in the passions (*thumos*) of her immorality. As Mounce says, "By joining the two symbols, the angel may be pointing out that the heady potion of Rome's seductive practices inevitably involves the wrath of God" (Mounce, 272). Osborne adds, "Jewish writings often picture God's wrath as a cup of wine that literally gets the guilty party 'dead drunk'" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 11941-11942*).

John describes the third angel's warning of the judgment of those who worship the beast and the need for steadfast endurance in verses 9-12. The angel warns of the judgment of those who worship the beast and its image in verses 9-11, "Another angel, a third, followed them saying in a loud voice: If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he himself will also drink the wine of God's wrath (*thumos*), which has been poured out undiluted into the cup of his fury and he will be tormented in fire and brimstone before the holy angels and before the Lamb. The smoke of their torment rises unto the ages of the ages and they have no rest day and night, the ones who worship the beast and his image, or if anyone receives the mark of his name." The urgency of the angels warning is stressed by his loud voice. The mark on the forehead or hand is a clear indication of allegiance. The imagery of drinking from the cup of God's wrath echoes Isaiah 63 where it is used as a figure for judgment. The angel stresses that the one who worships the beast or receives its mark will drink the wine of God's wrath by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "he, he will also drink" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "He himself will also drink:"). Appropriately, those who drink from the cup of the passion (*thumos*) of Babylon's immorality will also drink the wine of God's wrath (*thumos*). The severity of their experience of God's wrath is stressed by the description of it being poured "undiluted" into the cup of his fury. Beasley-Murray observes, "Poured unmixed more naturally is rendered by the paradoxical expression 'mixed unmixed'; i.e. mixed with spices to make it powerful but not diluted with water to reduce its strength" (Beasley-Murray, 226). Also appropriately, they will be humiliated before the holy angels and the Lamb because of their allegiance to the beast just as faithful Christians had been humiliated because of their allegiance to Christ. As Mounce says, "Christians had borne the shame of public derision and opposition; soon their antagonists will suffer before a more august gathering" (Mounce, 274). The lasting and continual torment of those who worship the beast is also emphasized. "The smoke from their torment rises unto the ages of the ages" and "they have no rest day and night."

The angel warns of the need for patient endurance in verse 12, "Here is the patient endurance of the saints, they obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." This enigmatic declaration is similar to another declaration in 13:9 and probably means that this is where the patient endurance of saints is required and must be found. It is probably equivalent to saying, "this demands patient endurance." What patient endurance entails is clarified with the addition of "they obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." Probably what is meant by this in the context of his warning of the danger of being corrupted by the beast is that saints must be obedient to God's commandment to worship God alone rather than worship the beast and be faithful to Jesus even if they are threatened by death. As John describes the second and third angels and their messages persecuted Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who compromise with Satan's worldly allies will experience God's undiluted, enduring, and continual wrath and this requires patient endurance, obedience, and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

### **The Blessing of the Voice from Heaven and The Confirmation of the Spirit**

John describes the blessing of the voice from heaven and the confirmation of the Spirit in verse 13, "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes!' says the Spirit, 'so they will rest from their labors, for their deeds are following with them.'" The voice from heaven again is presumably the voice of God or the exalted Christ or at the very least their heavenly representative. Ironically, death is declared to be a blessing when it is normally viewed as a tragedy. As Osborne says, "To "die in the Lord" means to remain faithful to the very end, to make Christ the sphere of your life" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 12035-12036*). This is possible because of Jesus' victory on the cross. Those who have a relationship with the Lord ("in the Lord") are blessed because he has won the victory over death. The certainty of the blessedness of those who die in the Lord is emphatically confirmed by the Spirit, "Yes!" The Spirit also explains further why those who die in the Lord are blessed. They are blessed because their hard labor for the Lord in difficult times is over and now they can enjoy their eternal rest in heaven. Indeed, their deeds follow them, probably meaning that their hard labor for the Lord in difficult times contributes to their blessed state of rest. This is not to deny that they are saved by the grace of God in Christ, but is consistent with the emphasis in Revelation on the need for faithfulness. As Mounce says, "God will not forget all they have endured in loyalty to the faith" (Mounce, 276). As John describes the blessing of the voice from heaven Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who die in the Lord are blessed and will rest from their labors for their deeds will follow them.

### **The Visions of Two Harvests**

John describes his visions of two harvests in verses 14-20. He describes the vision of the harvest of one like a son of man and the harvest of God's wrath. There is a great deal of confusion about the significance of these visions. Some hold that the first harvest is of the redeemed and the second is that of the wicked. Others hold that both harvests are images of God's judgment of the wicked (following Joel 3:13), the first focusing on judgment and the second on its horror. I have chosen to take the first vision as a harvest of the redeemed because the two harvests seem to be contrasted with one another rather than complement one another.

The first harvest is a harvest of wheat by one like a son of man that is not described whereas the second harvest is a harvest of grapes and clearly depicts judgment. Even though the grain harvest is often a symbol of judgment in the Old Testament, it is used multiple times in a positive way in the New Testament and in Mark 4:26-29 Jesus likens the Kingdom of God to a seed growing mysteriously and producing a harvest. Osborne adds,

In Matt. 9:37-38 Jesus calls the harvest of souls "plentiful" and tells the disciples to ask "the Lord of the harvest" for more workers (see also Luke 10:2). In John 4:34-38 Jesus speaks of the fields as "ripe for harvest" and calls on the disciples to "harvest the crop for eternal life." This is the parallel for the grain harvest here (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 12205-12207*).

John describes the vision of the harvest of one like a son of man in 14-16. First, he describes the appearance of one like a son of man in verse 14-16, "I looked and behold, a white cloud and sitting on the cloud one like a son of man, having a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple crying out in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, 'Put forth your sickle and reap, because the hour to reap has come since the harvest of the earth has become fully mature.' So the one who sits on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth and the earth was reaped." If it were not for verse 15 it would be clear that the one like a son of man with the golden crown on his head and riding on a cloud is the exalted Christ. This allusion is to Daniel 7 where "one like a son of man" comes in the clouds to judge the world and establish God's rule. However, some find it inappropriate for the exalted Christ to be commanded by an angel to take up his sickle and reap. Nonetheless, the angel is clearly a heavenly messenger that comes from the temple with a directive from God. This divine directive seems to stress that this harvest is imminent. Indeed, "the hour to reap has come" and the wheat is fully mature, so much so that it has dried up and turned golden brown. As was stated earlier, this visionary image probably depicts the gathering of the faithful and serves to encourage beleaguered Christians of their ultimate deliverance and gathering into God's presence in heaven.

John describes his vision of the harvest of God's wrath in verses 17-20, "Then another angel came out of the temple, the one in heaven, and he also has a sharp sickle. Another angel [came] from the altar, having authority over the fire, and called in a loud voice to the one having the sharp sickle saying, 'Put forth your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes have ripened.' So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vine of the earth and threw [them] into the great winepress of God's wrath. The winepress was trampled outside the city and blood came out (aorist) of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles for 1,600 stadia." This angel could be identified with the angel in chapter 8 who had authority over fire to cast down on the earth in response to the prayers of God's people. The judgment of the world is thus identified as the faithful response of God to the prayers of the martyrs for vindication. As Morris says, "John sees the judgment as God's final answer to the prayers of His suffering saints" (Morris, 186). The gruesome description of the flow of blood is meant to dramatize the extent of God's wrath. Sixteen hundred *stadia* is about 200 miles and a horse's bridle is around five feet off the ground. This gruesome visionary image certainly emphasizes that the unrepentant will experienced the full extent of God's wrath and fury. Osborne may be right when he says, "the judgment of unbelievers 'outside the city' emphasizes their absolute rejection by God and is in contrast with the blessed state of the faithful" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 12273-12274*). As John describes the harvest of the faithful and the harvest of the wicked Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the hour

has come for God's judgment and the Son of Man will come in the clouds to gather those who are his, but all those whose allegiance is with Satan and his allies in the world will receive the full extent of God's wrath and fury.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today are still in danger of being deceived and coerced into forsaking their commitment to Jesus and aligning themselves with Satan and his allies in this world. These similarities between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. I have already stated the message of this passage in a general way and there is very little of a contextual message that would require that these statements be adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message below are identical with the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because only those who have been redeemed and follow Lamb wherever he goes without compromise will stand victorious with him and sing the new song celebrating salvation. Christians should urgently proclaim the gospel and call all people to fear God and give him glory because the gospel is the eternal gospel for everyone, the hour of God's judgment is imminent, and he is the Creator. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who compromise with Satan's allies in the world will experience God's undiluted, enduring, and continual wrath and this requires patient endurance, obedience, and faithfulness on the part of the saints. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful because those who die in the Lord are blessed and will rest from their labors for their deeds will follow them. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the hour has come for God's judgment and the Son of Man will come in the clouds to gather those who are his, but all those who compromise with Satan's allies in the world will receive the full extent of God's wrath and fury.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** THE LAMB STOOD ON MOUNT ZION

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him and their testimony to Jesus and the gospel.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and the proclamation of the gospel because the faithful will stand victorious with Jesus and sing the new song of salvation; the good news of Jesus' sacrifice is the eternal gospel for all people; those who die in the Lord are blessed since they will rest from their labors since their deeds will follow them, and the hour of God's judgment is imminent and Jesus will come and gather the faithful, but the unrepentant will experience God's undiluted and unabating wrath.

### **Introduction**

Christians sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may undermine their faith and commitment to God and discourage them from testifying to Jesus and the gospel. Indeed, Christians are being intimidated in many parts of the world and opposition to proclaiming the gospel is mounting even here in the West. *Illustration of Christians Being Intimidated.* Christians were also being opposed and intimidated in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes a grand kaleidoscope



of visions and voices in Revelation 14. Through these visions and voices God provides us with encouragement to continue to trust in him and remain faithful to him and our testimony to Jesus and the gospel. *Read Revelation 14:1-20.*

**I. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the faithful will stand victorious with Jesus and sing the new song of salvation.**

**II. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and the proclamation of Jesus because the good news of his sacrifice is the eternal gospel for all people.**

**III. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who die in the Lord are blessed since they will rest from their labors since their deeds will follow them.**

**IV. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the hour of God's judgment is imminent and Jesus will come and gather the faithful, but the unrepentant will experience God's undiluted and unabating wrath.**

### **Conclusion**

We sometimes encounter opposition and difficulty that may undermine our faith and commitment to God and discourage us from testifying to Jesus and the gospel. Indeed, Christians are being intimidated in many parts of the world and opposition to proclaiming the gospel is mounting even here in the West. John describes a grand kaleidoscope of visions and voices in Revelation 14. As one of those heavenly voices says, "Here is the patient endurance of the saints," meaning that difficult times like these require patient endurance. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and the proclamation of the gospel because the faithful will stand victorious with Jesus and sing the new song of salvation, the good news of Jesus' sacrifice is the eternal gospel for all people, those who die in the Lord are blessed since they will rest from their labors since their deeds follow them, and the hour of God's judgment is imminent and Jesus will come and gather the faithful, but the unrepentant will experience God's undiluted and unabating wrath.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### **ANOTHER GREAT AND MARVELOUS SIGN Vision of the Seven Last Plagues Revelation 15:1-16:21**

Though it would be preferable to break this long passage into smaller units, the elements in the passage as defined are unified around the seven last plagues and are so closely interrelated that separating them is difficult.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

15:1 Then I saw another great and marvelous sign in heaven, seven angels having the seven last plagues, because with them God's wrath is completed. 2 I also saw something like a glassy sea having been mixed with fire and those who are victorious over the beast and over its image and over the number of its name standing up against the glassy sea having harps of God. 3 They sing the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb saying:

Great and marvelous [are] your deeds, Lord God Almighty.

Just and true [are] your ways, King of the nations.

4 Who will by no means fear, Lord,  
and glorify your name?

For [you] alone [are] holy;  
for all nations will come and worship before you;  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.

5 After these things I looked and the temple, the tabernacle of the testimony, was opened in heaven 6 and the seven angels having the seven plagues came out of the temple, dressed in clean bright linen and wrapped with golden sashes around their chests. 7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives unto the ages of the ages. 8 The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one was able to enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed. 16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

2 The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land and there was a bad and evil sore on the men having the mark of the beast and worship its image. 3 The second poured out his bowl on the sea and it became blood like a dead [man], and every living being which [was] in the sea died. 4 The third poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

5 Then I heard the angel of the waters saying: You are just, the one who is and who was, the Holy One, because you judged these things; 6 for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets and you have given them blood to drink. They are deserving!" 7 Then I heard the altar saying: "Yes! Lord God Almighty, true and just [are] your judgments."

8 The fourth poured out his bowl on the sun, and was given power to it to burn people with fire 9 and they were burned a great burning and they blasphemed the name of God, who has

authority over these plagues, but they did not repent to give him glory. 10The fifth poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom became darkened and they chewed their tongues because of the pain 11and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they did not repent of their works. 12The sixth poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the rising sun. 13Then I saw [coming] from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet three impure spirits like frogs. 14For they are spirits of demons performing signs, who are going out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle of the great day of God Almighty. 15"Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed [is] the one who keeps watch and keeps his clothes so that he may not go naked and they may see his indecency." 16Then they gathered them together to the place that in Hebrew is called *Armageddon*.

17The seventh poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne saying, "It is done!" 18Then there were flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder and there was a great earthquake. Such an earthquake has not been since man has been on earth, so great was the large quake. 19The great city was [split] into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell and Babylon the Great was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the wrath of his fury. 20Every island fled and mountains were not found. 21Great hailstones about the weight of a talent come down from the sky upon people and the people blasphemed God for the plague of hail, because the plague is so exceedingly severe.

### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage anticipates a time when those who have persecuted the church will be judged. The broader context describes a visionary world in which the beast from the sea joins the dragon and blasphemes God, makes war against the saints and even conquers, imprisons, and kills the saints, and leads the inhabitants of the world to follow and worship it and the dragon (13:1-10). It also describes a visionary world in which the beast from the earth employs its power to do great and miraculous signs in order to deceive the inhabitants of the world and threats of death and economic sanction to coerce the people of the world into worshiping the first beast and receive his mark (13:11-18). This setting reflects a situation in which Satan is using his worldly allies to intimidate, deceive, and coerce Christians into forsaking their faith and commitment. John and the churches in Asia Minor would have understood these allies of Satan to be Rome and specifically its emperor as well as the imperial cult. The purpose of the passage was to warn Christians from being deceived or coerced by the power of Satan's worldly allies and encourage them to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him and their testimony.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is the third and final passage in a series of sevenfold judgments: the seven seal judgments (6:1-8:5), the seven trumpets judgments (8:6-11:19), and now the seven bowl judgments. All of these judgement passages are intended to assure believers that God will judge their oppressors and vindicate them when he establishes his kingdom. This series of judgments echoes some of the earlier judgments and escalate what is described about the final judgment. These portrayals of judgment reach their climax in the final major division of the book (17:1-22:5, especially chapters 17-19).

### **Form and Function**

The passage is an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. This passage contains two major visionary images. The first visionary image is that of the victorious singing the song of Moses and the Lamb in 15:2-4. This visionary image looks ahead to the blessed state of the victorious and from their position of victory provides encouragement for those still doing battle with Satan and his worldly allies. Through the song of the victorious God is especially affirmed as "the Lord God Almighty," "the king of the ages," and the one all must fear, glorify, and worship. The second visionary image is that of the seven bowl judgments. These pictures of judgment emphasize that God will ultimately judge Satan and all his worldly allies, represented in the dragon, the beasts, Babylon the Great, the cities, etc. These pictures of judgment serve primarily to encourage Christians by affirming that God is just and will vindicate them, a reality that might be difficult for them to grasp because of their trial. In addition, however, these pictures of judgment also serve as a warning of the need for faithfulness. In fact, these messages of encouragement and warning are made clear by voices. The voices of the angel in charge of the waters and coming from the altar in 16:5-7 affirm God's justice and just judgment. The voice from heaven whose words identify him as the exalted Christ in 16:15 warns and encourages Christians to be alert and ready when he comes. These visionary images and voices imply the need for Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The structure of the passage is built around the seven angels with the seven last plagues. However, this basic structure is interrupted by a number of purposeful insertions. The seven angels with the seven last plagues are introduced in 15:1. This verse seems to stress the completion of God's wrath. However, immediately following this introduction is a vision of the victorious multitude in 15:2-4. This vision serves to encourage persecuted Christians to continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him so that they can be a part of this victorious multitude. The commissioning of the seven angels with the seven last plagues is described in 15:5-16:1. This account of their commission seems to emphasize that the seven angels with the seven last plagues have been sent by God and are acting on his authority. The actual pouring out the bowls of wrath have been grouped in a number of ways with the only consensus being that the seventh should stand by itself. I have grouped the first three bowls together with the affirmations of the justice of God by the angel of the waters and the altar (16:2-7). This division seems to emphasize the justice of God's judgment against an ungodly world. I have also grouped the next three bowls of God's wrath together with the warning and blessing of the exalted Christ (16:8-16). This division seems to stress the need to be alert and avoid doing anything shameful. The passage concludes with the pouring out of the seventh bowl of God's wrath in 16:17-21. This division seems to accentuate the completion of God's wrath like the opening verser of the passage.

- I. The Seven Angels with the Seven Last Plagues (15:1)
- II. Vision of the Victorious Multitude and their Song (15:2-4)
  - A. The Victorious Multitude Standing by the Glassy Sea Mixed with Fire (2)
  - B. The Song of the Victorious Multitude (3-4)
    1. Their praise to the Lord God Almighty because of his great and marvelous deeds (3a)
    2. Their praise to the King of ages because of his just and true ways (3b)

3. Their praise to the Lord because all will fear him and bring glory to his name for his holiness (4a)
  4. Their praise to the Lord because all nations will worship him for the revelation of his righteous acts (4b)
- III. The Commission of the Seven Angels (15:5-16:1)
    - A. The Opening of the Temple, the Tabernacle of Testimony (15:5)
    - B. The Emergence and Appearance of the Seven Angels (15:6)
    - C. The Angels Are Given the Seven Bowls of the Wrath of God (15:7)
    - D. The Smoke from the Glory and Power of God Fills the Temple (15:8)
    - E. The Command to Pour Out the Bowls of Wrath (16:1)
  - IV. The First Three Bowls and Affirmations of God's Justice (16:2-7)
    - A. The First Bowl and the Ugly and Painful Sours (2)
    - B. The Second Bowl and the Sea Becoming Blood (3)
    - C. The Third Bowl and the Rivers and Springs Becoming Blood (4)
    - D. Affirmations of God's Justice and Judgment (5-7)
      1. Affirmation of the angel in charge of the waters (5-6)
      2. Affirmation coming from the altar (7)
  - V. The Next Three Bowls and a Warning and Blessing (16:8-16)
    - A. The Fourth Bowl and Sun Being Given Authority to Burn People (8-9)
    - B. The Fifth Bowl and the Beast's Kingdom Being Plunged into Darkness (10-11)
    - C. The Sixth Bowl and the Water of the Euphrates Drying Up to Prepare for the Kings from the East (12)
    - D. The Coming of Three Evil Spirits and Their Purpose (13-14)
      1. The three evil spirits, their appearance, and their origin (13)
      2. The identity, power, and purpose of the three evil spirits (14)
    - E. A Warning and Blessing from the Exalted Christ (15)
    - F. The Gathering of the Kings to Armageddon (16)
  - VI. The Seventh Bowl and the Completion of God's Wrath (16:17-21)
    - A. The Pouring Out of the Bowl and the Declaration of the Loud Voice from the Throne (17)
    - B. The Lightning, Rumbles, Thunders, and Severe Earthquake (18)
    - C. The Splitting of the City into Three Parts and the Pouring Out of God's Wrath (19)
    - D. The Flight and Hiding of the Islands and Mountains (20)
    - E. The Great Hailstones and the Cursing of Men (21)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can stand with the victorious Lamb and praise the LORD God Almighty for his great and marvelous deeds, the King of the nations for his just and true ways, and the only one worthy of universal worship because he alone is holy and righteous. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because their God is present with them and faithful to them, he lives unto the ages of the ages, he is awesome in glory and power, and he has commanded that his wrath be poured out against an ungodly world. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is the eternal God, the Holy One, the Lord God Almighty, and he is faithful to answer the prayers of his saints and just in judging their persecutors. Christians should continue to trust

God and remain faithful to him because the situation is going to go from bad to worse as people stubbornly refuse to repent and Satan and his allies desperately mount opposition to God as the great day of the Lord Almighty approaches and Jesus will return like a thief and those who remain faithful will be blessed when he comes, but those who compromise to save themselves will be put to shame. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he will pour out his wrath and complete his judgment against the world and specifically the centers of the earth's worldliness and those who remain stubbornly unrepentant.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **The Seven Angels with the Seven Last Plagues**

John introduces the seven angels with the seven last plagues in 15:1, "Then saw another great and marvelous sign in heaven, seven angels having the seven last plagues, because with them God's wrath is completed." This verse introduces the passage and seems to emphasize the completion of God's wrath. As Mounce says, "That there are seven angels having seven plagues speaks of the certainty and completeness of divine wrath against all unrighteousness" (Mounce, 284). The visionary image of the seven angels with the last plagues is described as "another great and marvelous sign in heaven" probably to stress its significance. Fanning observes that the word I have translated "marvelous" denotes "not just wonder or amazement but a note of dread foreboding as well" (Fanning, 405). The seven angels with the last plagues are described further as having the seven bowls of God's wrath (15:5-8) and pouring out these bowls of God's wrath on the earth (16:1-21). That these bowls complete God's wrath is reemphasized in 16:17 with a loud voice from heaven declaring "It is done!"

#### **The Vision of the Victorious Multitude And Their Song**

John describes the vision of the victorious multitude and their song in 15:2-4. This vision seems to overlap with and expound on the vision of the 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion singing the new song in the preceding passage. This vision looks to the time of triumph after the trial and encourages believers by giving them a glimpse of the victory of those who are faithful to God and resist the world powers that are in league with Satan. John describes the victorious multitude standing by the sea of glass mixed with fire in verse 2, "I also saw something like a glassy sea having been mixed with fire and those who are victorious over the beast and over its image and over the number of its name standing up against the glassy, having harps of God." The sea of glass has already been used as an image of God's holiness and transcendence. Those who stand beside the sea are described as those who have been victorious over the beast and resisted the attempts of Satan and his worldly allies to get them to compromise their faith. In light of the context and the Exodus background of the song that follows it would appear that they are on the far side, having crossed through the fiery trial and now stand victorious in the presence of God. As Mounce observes,

They are the overcomers to whom the seven letters hold out promise of eating of the tree of life (2:7), protection from the second death (2:11), hidden manna (2:17), authority over the nations (2:26), white garments (3:5), the honor of becoming a pillar in the temple of God (3:12), and the privilege of sitting with Christ on his throne (3:21). Little wonder that they break out in song! (Mounce, 285).

John relates the song of the victorious multitude in verse 3-4. He identifies the song that they sing as the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb in the first part of verse 3, "They sing the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb saying." This song is similar in theme and structure to the Song of Moses in Exodus 15 (See also Deuteronomy 31:30-32:43). This song celebrated the deliverance of Israel from Egypt at the Red Sea. Moses is identified as "the servant of God" because he was God's servant in delivering Israel from Egypt. But this is not just the song of Moses who was God's servant in delivering Israel from Egypt, it is the song of the Lamb, who saved humanity from Satan by his sacrificial death on the cross. In all probability this is one rather than two separate songs. Perhaps the linking of the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb is to subtly communicate that the deliverance of Israel from Egypt foreshadowed the salvation of humanity from sin and both are part of the eternal gospel (14:6), God's plan to save humanity from the very beginning of time.

John relates the content of their song in the second part of verse 3 and verse 4. First, they praise the Lord God Almighty for his great and marvelous deeds, "Great and marvelous [are] your deeds, Lord God Almighty." God demonstrated that he is the Lord God Almighty through his great and marvelous deeds in delivering Israel from Egypt through Moses and humanity from Satan through Jesus's sacrificial death as the Lamb. Second, they praise God as the King of the nations for his just and true ways, "Just and true [are] your ways, King of the nations." God demonstrated that he is the King of the nations by his authority over Pharaoh through Moses and Satan through Jesus. Third, they praise God as the Holy One who will be feared, glorified, and worshiped by everyone, "Who will by no means fear, Lord, and glorify your name? For [you] alone [are] holy; for all nations will come and worship before you; for your righteous acts have been revealed (aorist passive)." The rhetorical question implies the emphatic response, "Certainly no one will fail to fear and glorify you Lord!" All will come to fear and glorify God!. Indeed their song underscores that "all nations will come and worship before you; for your righteous acts have been revealed." The fulfillment of this is described in the image of the eternal state of the faithful in chapter 21, the Holy City Jerusalem. There John affirms, "The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it." Indeed, as Paul affirms, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11 ESV). The reason that they will fear and glorify God is that he alone is holy, that is he is unique, incomparable, and in a class by himself. As Osborne says, "the message here is that God alone among the 'gods' is holy, which signifies that he is set apart from this world and stands above it. He is the incomparable God who stands alone above all earthly forces" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 12516-12517*). God's just and true ways are specifically revealed in his faithfulness to deliver Israel from Egypt through Moses and humanity from Satan through Jesus' sacrifice as the Lamb. As Fanning says, "He alone deserves the ultimate devotion and reverence of all humanity" (Fanning, 407). As John describes the victorious multitude and relates their song Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can stand with the victorious Lamb and praise the LORD God Almighty for his great and marvelous deeds, the King of the nations for just and true ways, and the only one worthy of universal worship because he alone is holy and righteous.

### **The Commissioning of the Seven Angels**

John describes the commissioning of the seven angels with the last plagues in 15:5-16:1. This commissioning seems to emphasize that the mission of the seven angels comes directly from God. He describes the opening of the temple in 15:5, "After these things I looked and the temple, the tabernacle of the testimony, was opened in heaven." The temple and tabernacle were representations of God's presence among his people. Indeed, the testimony probably refers to the ark of the covenant and its contents that testified to the presence of God with his people and his faithfulness to provide for them through manna, demonstrate his power among them through the rod of Aaron, and lead them through the tablet containing the ten commandments. John describes the emergence and appearance of the seven angels in 15:6, "and the seven angels having the seven plagues came out of the temple, dressed in clean bright linen and wrapped with golden sashes around their chests." Their emergence from the temple seems to indicate that they are coming from the presence of God. Their radiant clothing and golden sashes seem to reflect their holiness and majesty as representatives of their holy and majestic God. John describes the angels being given the seven bowls of God's wrath in 15:7, "Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives unto the ages of the ages." The four living creatures were part of the inner circle and this living creature is clearly passing the bowls of wrath directly from God. John describes the smoke from the glory and power of God filling the temple in 15:8, "The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one was able to enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed." Smoke is commonly described as accompanying the awesome presence of God as a manifestation of his glory and power. That no one could enter the temple probably serves to underscore God's awesome glory and power. John describes a loud voice from the temple commanding that the angels pour out their bowls in 16:1, "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth.'" Though this loud voice is not identified and it is a little odd that God would refer to himself in the third person, this is probably the voice of God since it comes from the temple where only God is present (See the previous verse). The voice is described as being loud or great. In other instances the identification of a voice in this way seems to stress the importance of what is said. Here only the adjective comes first in the Greek text to further stress this urgency. As John describes the commissioning of the seven angels with the last plagues Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because their God is present with them and faithful to them, he lives unto the ages of the ages, he is awesome in glory and power, and he has commanded that his wrath be poured out against an ungodly world.

### **The First Three Bowls and Affirmations Of God's Justice**

John describes the pouring out of the first three bowls and affirmations of God's justice in 16:2-7. He describes the pouring out of the first three bowls in verses 2-4, "The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land and there was a bad and evil sore on the men having the mark of the beast and worship his image. The second poured out his bowl on the sea and it became blood like a dead [man], and every living being which [was] in the sea died. The third poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood." These plague parallel the plagues of boils and blood during the Exodus. They also seem to parallel the trumpet judgments. However, these plagues are much more intense. Indeed, with the second and third bowls of wrath "every living being which [was] in the sea died" and seemingly all the rivers and springs of water were contaminated. In addition, the correlation of "a bad and evil sore" with



"the mark of the beast" suggests that God's poetic justice is emphasized. As Mounce says, "Those who once bore the mark of the beast are now visited by the 'marks' of God" (Mounce, 293).

John relates two affirmations of God's justice in verses 5-7. He relates the affirmation of God's justice by the angel of the waters in verses 5-6, "Then I heard the angel of the waters saying: You are just, the one who is and who was, the Holy One, because you judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets and you have given them blood to drink. They are deserving!" Even the angel who has responsibility for the waters affirms God's justice for turning the water into blood. The angel affirms that God is just, but also that he is eternal and holy. The angel declares that God is "the one who is and who was," again leaving out "and is to come" like the four living creatures did in 11:7 because he has now come. As Osborne says, "The threefold title of 1:4, 8; 4:8 ("the one who is, who was, and who is to come") has been altered (there is no longer an "is to come") because the final act of God has been inaugurated, and the future is here (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 12861-12863*). Now is the time of fulfillment! The angel declares that God is "the Holy One," meaning that he is unique, incomparable, and in a class by himself. The angel also affirms the appropriateness of God's justice. God's judgment is in keeping with their crime. They shed the blood of his saints and prophets and God has given them blood to drink. As Osborne says, "Since the nations shed their blood, God will now give them blood to drink, meaning that the persecutors will have to drink the blood of the seas and the rivers as retribution for the blood they shed" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 12891-12894*). Indeed, the angel reaffirms God's justice by exclaiming "They are deserving!"

John relates the affirmation of God's justice by the altar in verse 7, "Then I heard the altar saying: "Yes! Lord God Almighty, true and just [are] your judgments." As Mounce says, "The speaking altar is obviously a personification (cf. 9:13). It represents the corporate testimony of the martyrs in 6:9 and the prayers of the saints in 8:3-5" (Mounce, 295). The altar's affirmation is an emphatic "Yes!" In 11:3-5 the altar is associated with the burning of incense with the prayers of the saints and the resulting judgment on the earth. Thus the altar's affirmation of God's justice is related to his faithfulness to answer the prayers of the martyrs for vindication. As John relates these two affirmations of God's justice Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is the eternal God, the Holy One, the Lord God Almighty, and he is faithful to answer the prayers of his saints and just in judging their persecutors.

### **The Next Three Bowls and a Warning And Blessing**

John describes the pouring out of the next three bowls and a warning and blessing from the exalted Christ in 16:8-16. These verses seem to depict the intensification of the judgments leading up the seventh bowl being poured out. They also seem to emphasize the stubborn refusal of humanity to repent and the desperate attempts of Satan and his allies to oppose God in response to the intensification of the judgments. John describes the pouring out of the fourth bowl and the sun being given power to burn people in verses 8-9, "The fourth poured out his bowl on the sun, and was given power to it to burn people with fire and they were burned a great burning and they blasphemed the name of God, who has authority over these plagues, but they did not repent to give him glory." This plague has no clear parallel during the Exodus or in previous judgments. The "divine passive" is again used to indirectly identify God as the source

of the sun's power to burn people and this is confirmed by the identification of God as the one "who has authority over these plagues." The severity of the plague is emphasized by the adjective "great" and the object being from the same root word as the verb ("they were burned a great burning"). Nonetheless, even after this severe judgment the ungodly persistently blaspheme God and stubbornly refuse to repent and give him glory.

John describes the pouring out of the fifth bowl and the beast's kingdom being plunged into darkness in verses 10-11, "The fifth poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom became darkened and they chewed their tongues because of the pain and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they did not repent of their works." This plague parallels the plague of darkness during the Exodus but again this plague is more severe. This is the only place where the beast's throne is mentioned. According to Osborne, "The message is clear: the beast has limited authority, and his throne is temporary and soon to be overwhelmed by the act of God" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 12968-12969). Again the intensity of the judgment is emphasized. The darkening of the beast's kingdom is probably a way of saying that it was plunged into dark or desperate times that were void of hope. The reaction of the inhabitants of his kingdom is probably a result of all the plagues to this point, "they chewed their tongues because of the pain." Nonetheless, even after this severe judgment the ungodly persistently blaspheme God and stubbornly refuse to repent.

John describes the pouring out of the sixth bowl and the water of the Euphrates being dried up to prepare for the kings from the East in verse 12, "The sixth poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the rising sun." The kings from the East have been interpreted in various ways. The people of the Roman Empire lived in dread of invasion from the East. Thus the drying up of the Euphrates in preparation for the kings of the East depicts the fear of foreign invasion and defeat. John describes the coming of three evil spirits and their purpose in verses 13-14, "Then I saw [coming] from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet three impure spirits like frogs. For they are spirits of demons performing signs, who are going out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle of the great day of God Almighty." The vomiting of these evil spirits by Satan, the beast, and the false prophet should probably be understood as a desperate attempt to meet the threat of invasion from the East. They intensify their efforts to deceive and enlist the kings of the whole world to support them in their climactic battle with God. The spirits of demons are portrayed as frogs, probably to add a sense of revulsion. As Fanning says, "The repulsive image of 'frogs,' seen then and now as slimy, unhealthful, and ritually unclean (cf. Exod 8:2-6; Lev 11: 10; Ps 78:45; 105:30), communicates at a visceral level how evil these spirits (and the hosts who disgorged them) were" (Fanning, 420-421). Their portrayal as frogs could also identify them as an intensification of the plague of frogs (Exodus 8:1-15) and as Osborne says "may in a sense be seen as a pestilence upon the earth, deceiving the nations and thus leading them into the judgment of God" (Osborne, *Kindle Location* 13064). Though they go out to gather the kings of the whole world for battle, their defeat is foreshadowed by the identification of that battle as "the great day of God Almighty." "The day of the LORD" is described by the prophets as the day that God will intervene in human history and judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous. Here it is called "the great day of the Lord Almighty" It is the great day because it is God's climactic day of judgment at the end of human history. Indeed, God is called "Lord Almighty" because he far more powerful than all the forces that Satan and his allies can muster and that day will be his great day of victory.

John relates a warning and blessing from the exalted Christ in verse 15, "Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed [is] the one who keeps watch and keeps his clothes so that he may not go naked and they may see his indecency." Though the speaker is not identified, the words themselves can only be those of the exalted Christ. What has preceded provides the context for this blessing and warning. Since the ungodly are becoming more hardened in their rejection of God and refusal to repent and Satan and his allies are becoming even more desperate in their attempts to oppose and defeat God, Jesus warns Christians to be alert and remain faithful. He introduces his warning and blessing with "Behold" to emphasize the importance of what he is about to say. He warns Christians that he is coming like a thief; his coming will be unexpected. He blesses those who keep watch. They need to be alert and vigilant because they don't know when he will return. He blesses those who keep their clothes on. What he means by this is clarified by the warning that follows, "that he may not go naked and they see his indecency." They need to avoid doing anything unworthy of saints and bring shame upon themselves such as renouncing Christ. They need to diligently guard their conduct so that they receive Christ's blessing when he comes rather than being made ashamed.

John describes the gathering of the kings to Armageddon in verse 16, "Then they gathered them together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." The identification of Armageddon as an actual place is problematic. However, Megiddo was a city located near the site of many battles on the nearby plains. As Mounce says, "Wherever it takes place, Armageddon is symbolic of the final overthrow of all the forces of evil by the might and power of God" (Mounce, 302). The Greek text actually says, "Then he gathered them together." However, nearly all modern versions translate "Then they gathered them together" or something similar (CSB, ESV, NAS, NIV, NKJ, and NRS) with "the spirits of demons" in verse 14 being the antecedent for the subject pronoun. This is justified because the Greek language commonly uses singular verbs with neuter plural subjects. In addition, the purpose of these spirits has been described previously as being to gather the kings of the earth (14). Thus this verse is a continuation of verses 13-14 and serves to stress the desperation of Satan and his allies as they prepare for their climactic battle with God. Nonetheless, as Ashcraft says, "The evil spirits, playing on demonic-type greed, fear, hatred, ambition, false religious claims, and other motivations that call nations to war, unwittingly accomplish God's summons to judgment" (Ashcraft, 328). As John describes the pouring out of these three bowls of wrath and the exalted Christ's warning and blessing Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the situation is going to go from bad to worse as people stubbornly refuse to repent and Satan and his allies desperately mount opposition to God as the great day of the Lord Almighty approaches and Jesus will return like a thief and those who remain faithful will be blessed when he comes, but those who compromise to save themselves will be put to shame.

### **The Seventh Bowl and the Completion Of God's Wrath**

John describes the pouring out of the seventh bowl and the completion of God's wrath in 16:17-21. Whereas verses 8-16 stressed the escalation and intensification of the conflict, these verses stress the completion of God's wrath. As Beasley-Murray says, "Everything--from the voice in heaven, to the storm in the sky and the quaking of the earth--combines to proclaim that the end has come" (Beasley-Murray, 246). John describes the pouring out of the bowl and the declaration of the loud voice from the throne in verse 17, "The seventh poured out his bowl into

the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne saying, 'It is done!'" This is the seventh and final bowl of God's wrath. The voice from the temple is still the voice of God since as it was in verse 1. This declaration is a single word in the Greek text and therefore emphatic. The single word is perfect tense verb to stress the certainty of the completion of God's wrath against the ungodly. John describes the lightning, rumblings, and thunder and severe earthquake in verse 18, "Then there were flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder and there was a great earthquake. Such an earthquake has not been since man has been on earth, so great was the large quake." Lightning, rumblings, and thunder have occurred earlier and serve as displays of God's presence and power (4:5; 8:5; and 11:19). Notably, they occurred with the sounding of the seventh trumpet judgment (11:19). However, now they are accompanied by "a great earthquake." Indeed, "so great is the large quake" that there has never been an earthquake like it in human history. John describes the splitting of the great city into three parts and the pouring out of God's wrath on Babylon the Great in verse 19, "The great city was [split] into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell and Babylon the Great was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the wrath of his fury." "The great city" called "Babylon the Great" represents the center of worldliness. As Morris says, "It stands for civilized man, man in organized community, but man ordering his affairs apart from God. It symbolizes the pride of human achievement, the godlessness of those who put their trust in man" (Morris, 201). John and the churches in Asia Minor would have identified the great city as Rome. The description of the great city being split into three parts indicates its complete devastation. The description of "the cities of the nations" falling indicates that all other centers of worldliness will be destroyed along with it. The assertion that "Babylon the Great was remembered before God" seems a bit odd but is stated from the perspective of persecuted Christians and stresses God's faithfulness not to forget but to pour out his wrath on Babylon the Great. The description of his wrath as "the cup of the wine of the wrath of his fury" emphasizes the extent of his wrath (See 14:10). John describes the flight and hiding of the islands and mountains in verse 20, "Every island fled and mountains were not found." This verse certainly emphasizes the severity of God's wrath. Either it emphasizes the severity of his wrath by depicting the dissolution of the earth so that the islands and mountains are no more or by personifying the islands and mountains and describing them fleeing in terror from God's wrath. John describes the great hailstones and the cursing of men in verse 21, "Great hailstones about the weight of a talent come down from the sky upon people and the people blasphemed God for the plague of hail, because the plague is so exceedingly great." The intensity of this judgment by hailstones is stressed. They are described as "Great hailstones" and "exceedingly great." They weigh "about the weight of a talent." The weight of a talent is uncertain and estimates vary. Many English versions translate "about 100 pounds" (CSB, ESV, NAS, NIV, and NRS). This is well beyond any hailstones in recorded history. Nonetheless, people continue to stubbornly blaspheme God to the very end rather than repent. As John describes the pouring out of the seventh bowl and the completion of God's wrath Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he will pour out his wrath and complete his judgment against the world and specifically the centers of the earth's worldliness and those who remain stubbornly unrepentant.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today are still in danger of being deceived and coerced into forsaking their commitment to Jesus and aligning themselves with Satan and his allies in this world. These

similarities between the original and modern situations for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. I have already stated the message of this passage in a general way and there is very little of a contextual nature that would require that these statements be adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message below are identical with the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can stand with the victorious Lamb and praise the Lord God Almighty for his great and marvelous deeds, the King of the nations for just and true ways, and the only one worthy of universal worship because he alone is holy and righteous. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because their God is present with them and faithful to them, he lives unto the ages of the ages, he is awesome in glory and power, and he has commanded that his wrath be poured out against an ungodly world. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is the eternal God, the Holy One, the Lord God Almighty, and he is faithful to answer the prayers of his saints and just in judging their persecutors. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because the situation is going to go from bad to worse as people stubbornly refuse to repent and Satan and his allies desperately mount opposition to God as the great day of the Lord Almighty approaches and Jesus will return like a thief and those who remain faithful will be blessed when he comes, but those who compromise to save themselves will be put to shame. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he will pour out his wrath and complete his judgment against the world and specifically the centers of the earth's worldliness and those who remain stubbornly unrepentant.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** SEVEN ANGELS WITH THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can stand with the victorious and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, because he is the LORD God Almighty and great and mighty are his deeds, he is the King of nations and just and faithful are his ways, he alone is holy and righteous and worthy of universal worship, he is eternal and awesome in power and glory and always present and faithful, he is their eternal, holy, and almighty Lord who answers their prayers, and Jesus will come like a thief and those who are ready will be blessed, but those are not will be put to shame.

### **Introduction**

Christians are in danger of being deceived and coerced by Satan and his worldly allies. *Illustration of Christians Being Deceived or Coerced.* Christians were also in danger of being deceived and coerced in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes a vision of the seven angels with the seven last plagues in Revelation 15-16. Through this vision God provides us with warning and encouragement to continue to trust him and remain faithful to him. *Read Revelation 15-16.*

**I. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can stand with the victorious and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.**

**II. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is the LORD God Almighty and great and mighty are his deeds.**

**III. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is the King of nations and just and faithful are his ways.**

**IV. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he alone is holy and righteous and worthy of universal worship.**

**V. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is eternal and awesome in power and glory and always present and faithful.**

**VI, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is their eternal, holy, and almighty Lord who answers their prayers.**

**VII. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Jesus will come like a thief and those who are ready will be blessed, but those are not will be put to shame.**

### **Conclusion**

We are in danger of being deceived and coerced by Satan and his worldly allies. Christians were also in danger of being deceived and coerced in Asia Minor at the time when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes a vision of the seven angels with the seven last plagues in Revelation 15-16. Through this vision God provides us with warning and encouragement to continue to trust him and remain faithful to him. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so we can stand with the victorious and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him, because he is the Lord God Almighty and great and mighty are his deeds. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is the King of nations and just and faithful are his ways. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he alone is holy and righteous and worthy of universal worship. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is eternal and awesome in power and glory and always present and faithful. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he is our eternal, holy, and almighty Lord who answers our prayers. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Jesus will come like a thief and those who are ready will be blessed, but those are not will be put to shame.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO**

### **I SAW A WOMAN SITTING ON A SCARLET BEAST**

#### **Vision of the Ruin of the Great Prostitute**

#### **Revelation 17:1-18**

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

17:1 Then one of the seven angels having the seven bowls came and spoke with me saying, "Here, I will show you the punishment of the Great Prostitute, the one who sits on many waters 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed immorality and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk from the wine of her immorality." 3 Then he carried me away in the Spirit into a desert and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast full of blasphemous names and having seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was wrapped in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold, a precious stone and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and the impurities of her immorality. 5 On her forehead a name was written, a mystery: "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and the Abominations of the Earth." 6 I saw that the woman is drunk from the blood of the saints and from the blood of witnesses of Jesus.

Seeing the woman, I was astonished a great astonishment. 7 Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I myself will tell to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast carrying her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. 8 The beast, which you saw, was and is not, and is about to come up from the abyss and is going to destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose name has not been written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world will be astonished at seeing the beast because it was and is not and will come. 9 Here is the mind having wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills where the woman sits; they are also seven kings. 10 Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he comes, he must remain a little while. 11 The beast who was and is not, it is itself an eighth [king]. He is from the seven and is going to destruction. 12 The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not received a kingdom, but they receive authority like kings for one hour with the beast. 13 These have one purpose and they give their power and authority to the beast. 14 These will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings and with him [are the] called, chosen, and faithful."

15 Then he says to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. 16 The ten horns that you saw and the beast, these will hate the prostitute and will make her desolate and naked and will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17 For God has put into their hearts to do his purpose and to do one purpose, to give their kingdom to the beast, until God's words will be fulfilled. 18 The woman you saw is the great city that has kingship over the kings of the earth."

##### **Situation and Purpose**

This passage describes a visionary world in which a Great Prostitute with whom the kings of the earth committed immorality and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk from the wine of her immorality. This woman is also described as riding on a scarlet beast, being regally dressed, having a cup full of the abominations and impurities of her immorality, and being drunk

with the blood of the saints. She has a mysterious name on her forehead, "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and the Abominations of the Earth." The beast she is riding is described as having seven heads and ten horns one of which has recovered from a fatal wound to the astonishment of the unsaved inhabitants of the earth. This reflects a situation in which Satan's worldly allies are seducing and enticing people to embrace paganism and worldliness and persecuting the church. John and the churches of Asia Minor would have identified the Great Prostitute as the city of Rome, the capital of the Empire and center of its power, corrupting the world and persecuting Christians. They would have understood the beast to be the emperor, manipulating its vassals to oppose Christ and his church. The purpose of the passage was to encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is closely connected to the preceding passage that describes the pouring out of the seven bowls with the seven last plagues. In fact, the angel that interprets John's vision of the prostitute and the beast in this passage is one of the seven angels with the seven last plagues. The book climaxes with a description of God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies, the final judgment, and the restoration of the world order (17:1-22:5). This climax reinforces and supplements what has proceeded by providing assurance of God's ultimate triumph over Satan and his allies as a basis for encouraging and warning Christians to be faithful to God rather than compromise with Satan and his allies. This passage begins the climax and encourages faithfulness by assuring Christians of God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies. This passage has an especially close relationship with the four passages that follow because they all encourage faith and faithfulness by depicting God's judgment of Satan and his allies using similar imagery (18:1-20; 18:21-19:10; 19:11-21; and 20:1-10).

### **Form and Function**

The passage is an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. The vision of the woman and the beast employs imagery to both establish a connection between the vision and the situational context of the readers and accentuate the extent of the threat that they faced. The interpretation of the vision clarifies the connection between the vision and the situational context of the readers and further emphasizes the extent of the threat that they faced. In addition, the interpretation also includes assurances of the destruction of the beast and his allies, the victory of the Lamb, and the ruin of the woman. Through these assurances the readers are encouraged to trust in God and remain faithful to him based on the ultimate triumph of God and Christ over Satan and his powerful allies in the world. Underlying this assurance are the implied commands, "Continue to trust God and remain faithful to him."

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage begins with an introduction to the punishment of Great Prostitute in verses 1 through the first part of verse 6. These verses encourage Christians to trust in God and remain faithful to him based on the assurance of the prostitute's ultimate punishment. The rest of the passage contains the angel's explanation of the Great Prostitute and the scarlet beast. First, the angel explains the beast and assures that it will be destroyed in the second part of verse 6 through verse 11. Second, the angel explains the ten horns and assures that the Lamb will be victorious in verses 12-14. Finally, the angel explains the prostitute and assures that she will be ruined in verses 15-18. These explanations and assurances encourage Christians to trust God and remain



faithful to him based on Christ's victory over Satan allies in the world and their judgment and destruction.

- I. Introduction to the Punishment of the Great Prostitute (1-6a)
  - A. The Angel's Invitation to View the Punishment of the Great Prostitute (1)
  - B. The Angel's Description of the Prostitute as the One Who Corrupted the Kings and Inhabitants of the Earth (2)
  - C. John's Vision of the Woman Sitting on the Scarlet Beast (3-6a)
    1. The woman sitting on the scarlet beast (3)
    2. The woman's regal apparel and golden cup (4)
    3. The woman's mysterious name (5)
    4. The woman's drunkenness from the blood of the saints (6)
- II. The Angel's Explanation of the Beast and Its Destruction (6b-11)
  - A. John's Astonishment and the Angel's Rebuke and Intension to Explain the Mystery (6b-7)
  - B. The Angel's Explanation of the Origin, Impact, and Destruction of the Beast (8)
  - C. The Angel's Explanation of the Seven Heads and the Destruction of the Eighth (9-11)
    1. The angel warns of the need for wisdom (9a)
    2. The angel explains the seven heads (9b-10)
    3. The angel explains that the beast is an eighth head that is going to destruction (11)
- III. The Angel's Explanation of the Ten Horns and the Lamb's Victory (12-14)
  - A. The Angel Explains the Ten Horns and Their Authority and Purpose (12-13)
  - B. The Angel Explains that the Kings Will Make War against the Lamb and Be Defeated (14)
- IV. The Angel's Explanation of the Prostitute and Her Ruin (15-18)
  - A. The Angel Explains that the Waters Are Peoples, Multitudes, Nations, and Languages (15)
  - B. The Angel Explains that the Ten Horns and the Beast Will Hate the Prostitute (16)
  - C. The Angel Explains God Put It into Their Hearts to Fulfill His Word (17)
  - D. The Angel Explains that Prostitute Is the Great City with Dominion over the Kings of the Earth (18)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will view the punishment of Satan's allies who have corrupted the rulers and inhabitants of the earth and reveled in killing God's saints and witnesses. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who are saved have no reason to be astonished by Satan's allies, human history is progressing rapidly toward its climax according to plan, and Satan's allies are going to destruction. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies will not exercise their authority for long, but will be easily defeated by the exalted Christ since he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, and those who have experienced God's grace and are faithful will share in his victory. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies will turn on and destroy one another and God is even in control of them and using them to do his purposes and fulfill his words.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Introduction to the Punishment of**

## The Great Prostitute

John introduces the punishment of the Great Prostitute in verses 1-6. John relates the invitation of the angel to view the punishment of the Great Prostitute in verse 1, "Then one of the seven angels having the seven bowls came and spoke with me saying, 'Here, I will show you the punishment of the Great Prostitute, the one who sits on many waters.'" The identification of the angel as one of those that had the seven bowls of God's wrath links what is revealed here with that outpouring of God's wrath. The angel's invitation to come so that he can show him the punishment of the Great Prostitute anticipates the description of her ruin in verses 15-18 and the subsequent chapter. She is described as sitting on many waters, probably to establish the connection with Babylon and indicate her seemingly ideal position. Later, the waters on which she sits are interpreted "peoples, multitudes, nations and languages" and probably depicts her influence. John relates the angel's description of the woman as the one who corrupted the kings and inhabitants of the earth in verse 2, "with whom the kings of the earth committed immorality and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk from the wine of her immorality." Her corruption of the kings is described as alluring them into sexual immorality. Her corruption of the inhabitants of the earth is described as enticing them with wine into sexual immorality. As Fanning says, "These references to 'sexual immorality' promoted by a sensuous 'prostitute' should be read as symbolic for spiritual and moral sins: she leads the nations away from the true God into idolatrous worship, and away from what is just and decent into moral failings of various kinds' (Fanning, 437).

John relates his vision of the woman sitting on a scarlet beast in verses 3-6. First, he relates that he was carried away to the wilderness and saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast in verse 3, "Then he carried me away in the Spirit into a desert and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast full of blasphemous names and having seven heads and ten horns." The change in location is perhaps intended to convey that this seemingly prosperous city sitting on many waters is really in the middle of a desert. The beast is already established as an image for a frightening world power that is in league with Satan and antagonistic to God. As the steed of the woman the beast is what has brought her to power. The woman will be subsequently revealed to be a city, the capitol of the frightening world power represented by the beast. The scarlet color of the beast perhaps accentuates its frightfulness and identifies it with the fiery red dragon. However, the scarlet color matches the color of the woman's garments and may indicate that the beast matches her regal appearance. The blasphemous names are probably the outrageous claims of the beast that impinge on the authority of God. The seven heads and ten horns will be interpreted later, but for the present they probably just add to the frightening appearance of the beast. Second, John describes the woman's regal apparel and golden cup in verse 4, "The woman was wrapped in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold, a precious stone and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and the impurities of her immorality." The regal apparel and golden cup of the woman depict her deceptive appearance and her deceptive means of enticing people. She is attractively dressed to entice people to adultery. Her drink is served in a golden cup to disguise the true nature of its contents which are described as being "full of abominations and the impurities of her adulteries." Third, John describes the woman's mysterious name in verse 5, "On her forehead a name was written, a mystery: 'Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and the Abominations of the Earth.'" This title clearly identifies the woman as the Great Prostitute of verses 1-2. Prostitutes commonly wore headbands with their names. The reference to Babylon the Great is an allusion to the city of Babylon which became known as the epitome of rebellion against God and worldliness. She is described as "the Mother of All

Prostitutes," an established idiom meaning "The Greatest of All Prostitutes" and probably also implying that she has inspired others to follow her into prostitution. Finally, John describes the woman's drunkenness with the blood of the saints in the first part of verse 6, "I saw that the woman is drunk from the blood of the saints and from the blood of witnesses of Jesus." The imagery here either emphasizes that she has overindulged in the blood of the saints and martyrs or that she has reveled in the death of saints and martyrs, and probably both. As Osborne concludes, "Thus, there are four things Babylon focuses on here: idolatry, immorality, luxury, and persecution" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 13533-13534*). John and the churches in Asia Minor would have identified the Great Prostitute as the city of Rome and the scarlet beast as the Roman Empire. However, the visionary images transcend the city of Rome and the Roman Empire and refer to Satan's allies throughout history and especially at the end of time. As John introduces the punishment of the Great Prostitute Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him because they will view the punishment of Satan's allies who have corrupted the rulers and inhabitants of the earth and reveled in killing God's saints and witnesses.

### **The Angel's Explanation of the Beast And Its Destruction**

John relates the angel's explanation of the beast and assurance of its destruction in verses 6-11. John describes his astonishment and relates the angel's rebuke and intention to explain the mystery in the first part of verse 6 and verse 7, "Seeing the woman, I was astonished a great astonishment. Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I myself will tell to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast carrying her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns." John emphasizes the extent of his astonishment. I have translated the emphatic Greek construction literally ("I was astonished a great astonishment"). This emphasis is expressed in a variety of ways in English versions such as the CSB, "I was utterly astounded." The astonishment of John is significant. John will subsequently relate that the unredeemed inhabitants of the earth will be astonished as well in verse 8. As Fanning says, this suggests "that John may be drawn over from perplexed astonishment to worshipful admiration of the woman or the beast" (Fanning, 442). John represents in himself what the response of Christians might be to this impressive threat. The angel's question should therefore be understood as rhetorical and rebuking. Rhetorical questions that ask why usually indicate that there is no good reason. Therefore, this rhetorical question is equivalent to the exclamation, "There is no reason for you to be astonished!" The angel emphasizes his intention to reveal the mystery of the woman by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "I, I will tell you" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "I myself will tell you").

The angel explains the revival of the beast, its impact on the world, and assures of its destruction in verse 8, "The beast, which you saw, was and is not, and is about to come up from the abyss and is going to destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose name has not been written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world will be astonished at seeing the beast because it was and is not and will come." The beast is an established image to a frightening world power that is in league with Satan and antagonistic to God. The angel explains that this frightening world power seems to have perished, but will return. The angel explains that as a result of the beast's revival all the inhabitants of the earth "will be astonished." The Book of Life is the register of the names of all the redeemed. Therefore, those whose names are not in the Book of Life are the unredeemed. Thus it is the unredeemed that will be astonished. This is the

same verb that is used to describe John's initial response to the great harlot and the scarlet beast. The probable implication is the astonishment of the unredeemed is understandable, but it is not the appropriate response for the redeemed. Indeed, the angel assures that the beast "is going to destruction."

The angel explains the seven heads and assures the destruction of the eighth in verses 9-11. The angel warns of the need for wisdom in the first part of verse 9, "Here is the mind having wisdom." My translation is literal, but this construction expresses the need for wisdom. Though not literal, the ESV conveys the meaning well, "This calls for a mind with wisdom." Indeed, this seems to be an understatement based on the cryptic nature of what follows. Scholars throughout the history of the church have applied their wisdom to what the angel says with no assured explanation. Most of these explanations either explain the heads as a succession of Roman emperors or earthly kingdoms, but all of these explanations are forced to manipulate what the angel says to fit the theory. I am certainly no wiser than these scholars. Nonetheless I will make an attempt to explain what the angel says about the seven heads in broad strokes that may not be very precise but will enable us to at least understand the gist of the message that is conveyed.

The angel explains the seven heads in the remainder of verse 9 and verse 10, "The seven heads are seven hills where the woman sits; they are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he comes, he must remain a little while." Again, I am only attempting to explain the seven heads in broad strokes to provide a basis for understanding the message. The angel identifies seven heads as seven hills. This probably serves to help John and the churches in Asia Minor to relate the woman to the city of Rome since it was built on seven hills. In addition, hills were associated with power and the number seven indicates completeness. Therefore, the identification of the seven heads with seven hills probably indicates their complete power. The angel then identifies the seven heads as seven kings and their succession is described. The number seven indicates completeness. Therefore, these seven kings represent the full number of kings and kingdoms in human history. That five have already fallen, one is, and another has not yet come indicates that the end is drawing near. The angel's assertion that the seventh king "must remain for a little while" probably expresses divine necessity. This is all a part of God's plan.

The angel explains that the beast is an eighth head and assures that it is going to its destruction in verse 11, "The beast who was and is not, is itself an eighth [king]. He is from the seven and is going to destruction." The angel stresses that the beast is an eighth king by doubling the subject pronoun. It is a little odd that the beast with seven horns is itself an eighth horn, but this is the nature of visionary experiences. The beast is depicted as the reemergence of a former world power at the end of the age. Nonetheless, the angel again asserts that it "is going to destruction." John and the churches in Asia Minor probably understood this beast to be the Roman Empire based on the popular expectation that Nero or someone like him would restore the empire to its former glory. Indeed, Rome was overthrown! However, the visionary images transcend the Roman Empire and can be applied to Satan's allies throughout history and especially at the end of time. As the angel explains the beast and assures that it will be destroyed, Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who are saved have no reason to be astonished, human history is progressing rapidly toward its climax according to God's plan, and Satan's astonishing allies are going to destruction.

### **The Angel's Explanation of the Ten Horns**

## **And the Lamb's Victory**

John relates the angel's explanation of the ten horns and assures that the Lamb will be victorious in verses 12-14. The angel explains the ten horns and their authority and purpose in verses 12-13, "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not received a kingdom, but they receive authority like kings for one hour with the beast. These have one purpose and they give their power and authority to the beast." The angel explains that the ten horns are ten kings. Again, there is considerable difference of opinion on the identity of these kings. What is clear is that they have allied themselves with the beast and are united in their support of it against the Lamb. Indeed, they are described as being united with the purpose of giving their power and authority to the beast to defeat the Lamb. However, they will not exercise authority as kings for long. Though they will probably exercise the authority as kings for more than one hour, they and the beast will rule for only a brief period of time. Indeed, as we shall see in the next verse, they are summarily defeated by the Lamb. The angel explains that the kings will make war against the Lamb and assures that they will be defeated in verse 14, "These will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings and with him [are the] called, chosen, and faithful." The kings are quickly overcome because the Lamb has superior power and authority as the Lord of lords and the King of kings. As Osborne says, "the impression is that the victory is virtually instantaneous" (Osborne, Kindle Location 13730). What is more the "called, chosen, and faithful" are with the Lamb and sharing in his victory. They have experienced God's gracious calling and election, but they have also proven themselves faithful during difficult trials. As Beasley-Murray says, "those who were with him in their hour of testimony will be with him in the hour of his triumph" (Beasley-Murray, 259). John and the churches of Asia Minor would probably have understood the ten horns to be nations that would align themselves with the Roman Empire against Christianity. However, the visionary images transcend these nations and can be related to the allies of the world powers that oppose Christianity and especially those at the end of time. As John relates the angel's explanation of the ten horns and assures that the Lamb will be victorious Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies will not exercise their authority for long, but will be easily defeated by the exalted Christ since he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, and those who have experienced God's grace and are faithful will share in his victory.

## **The Angel's Explanation of the Prostitute and Her Ruin**

John relates the angel's explanation of the prostitute and assures that she will come to ruin in verses 15-18. The angel explains that the waters are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages in verse 15, "Then he says to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages." This explanation seems to indicate that the prostitute exercises authority over a large number of people from many racial, national, and linguistic backgrounds. The angel explains that the ten horns and the beast will hate the prostitute and make her desolate in verse 16, "The ten horns that you saw and the beast, these will hate the prostitute and will make her desolate and naked and will eat her flesh and burn her with fire." Surprisingly the ten horns and the beast will all hate and turn on the prostitute. The explanation emphasizes their complete devastation of her. They will make her as desolate as the wilderness. They will strip her naked and put her to shame. They will figuratively eat her flesh and burn whatever remains so that nothing is left but ash. The angel explains that God put it into their

hearts to fulfill his word in verse 17, "For God has put into their hearts to do his purpose and to do one purpose, to give their kingdom to the beast, until God's words will be fulfilled." God is the one directing their actions to fulfill his purpose and words. The angel stresses the unity of their purpose by repeating it twice. This is reflected in my very literal translation ("to do his purpose and to do one purpose"). The NAS is not as literal but is clearer, "For God has put it into their hearts to execute his purpose by having a common purpose." Ironically that purpose is "to give their kingdom to the beast, until God's words will be fulfilled." Not only is God using the ten horns, but he is also using the beast to fulfill his word. As Beasley-Murray says, "The beast and his allies remain in the hand of the God they defy, and by the impulse of the Devil they unitedly fulfill the words of God" (Beasley-Murray, 260). The angel explains that prostitute is the great city with dominion over the kings of the earth in verse 18, "The woman you saw is the great city that has kingship over the kings of the earth." This explanation identifies the prostitute as an influential city that exercises authority over many nations and rulers. John and the churches of Asia Minor would have understood this to be the city of Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. However, this visionary image transcends the city of Rome and includes all major centers of worldly power and especially the end-time center of world power. As John relates the angel's explanation of the prostitute and assurance of her ruin Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies will turn on and destroy one another and God is even in control of them and using them to do his purposes and fulfill his words.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today are also opposed by Satan and his deceptive and powerful allies in the world which seek to entice and coerce them to forsake their faith and commitment to God. These similarities between the original and modern situations for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. I have already stated the message of this passage in a general way and there is very little of a contextual nature in the message that would require that these statements be adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message below are nearly identical with the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will view the punishment of Satan's allies who have corrupted the rulers and inhabitants of the earth and reveled in killing God's saints and witnesses. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who are saved have no reason to be intimidated, human history is progressing rapidly toward its climax according to God's plan, and Satan's astonishing allies are going to destruction. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies will not exercise their authority for long, but will be easily defeated by the exalted Christ since he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, and those who have experienced God's grace and are faithful will share in his victory. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies will turn on and destroy one another and God is even in control of them and using them to do his purposes and fulfill his words.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** I SAW A WOMAN SITTING ON A SCARLET BEAST

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will view the punishment of Satan's allies, those who are saved have no reason to be astonished by Satan's allies, Satan's allies are going to their destruction, Satan's allies will be easily defeated by the exalted Christ since he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, those who have experienced God's grace and are faithful will share in his victory, Satan's allies will turn on and destroy one another, and God is in control of Satan's allies and using them to do his bidding.

## **Introduction**

Christians today are also opposed by Satan and his deceptive and powerful allies in the world which are seeking to entice and coerce them to forsake their faith in God and commitment to him. *Illustration of Christians Being Intimidated and Enticed by Satan's Allies.* Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Satan and his deceptive and powerful allies in the world when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes a vision of the Great Prostitute sitting astride a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns in Revelation 17. Through this vision God provides us with encouragement to continue to trust him and remain faithful to him. *Read Revelation 17.*

**I. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because they will view the punishment of Satan's allies.**

**II. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who are saved have no reason to be intimidated by Satan's allies.**

**III. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies are going to their destruction.**

**IV. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies will be easily defeated by Christ since he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings.**

**V. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who have experienced God's grace and are faithful will share in Christ's victory.**

**VI. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's allies will turn on and destroy one another.**

**VII. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is in control of Satan's allies and is using them to do his bidding.**

## **Conclusion**

We are often opposed by Satan and his deceptive and powerful allies in the world, which are seeking to entice and coerce them to forsake their faith and commitment to God. Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Rome, Satan's ally at the time he recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John recorded the vision he received of the Great Prostitute sitting astride a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns in Revelation 17. Through this vision God provides us with encouragement to continue to trust and remain faithful to him even when we are opposed by Satan and his allies in the world. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because we will view the punishment of Satan's allies, those who are saved have no reason to be intimidated by Satan's allies, Satan's allies will be easily defeated by

the exalted Christ since he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, those who have experienced God's grace and are faithful will share in Christ's victory, Satan's allies will turn on and destroy one another, and God is in control of Satan's allies and using them to do his bidding.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### **FALLEN! FALLEN IS BABYLON THE GREAT! Heavenly Announcements of the Doom and Mourning for Babylon Revelation 18:1-20**

This passage as I have defined it is very difficult to distinguish from what follows because this is a continuous visionary narrative that runs through 19:10. I have included 18:21-24 in the subsequent passage even though it has many connections with this passage because 18:1-20 announces the fall of Babylon the Great and anticipates the mourning that results and 18:21-19:10 again announces the fall of Babylon the Great and anticipates the celebration that results. However, this division is somewhat arbitrary.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

18:1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated from his glory. 2 He cried out with a mighty voice saying:

Fallen! Fallen [is] Babylon the Great!

She has become a dwelling of demons,  
and a prison for every unclean spirit,  
and a prison for every unclean bird  
and a prison for every unclean beast and detested thing.

3 For all the nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her immorality  
and the kings of the earth committed immorality with her,  
and the merchants of the earth became rich from the power of her sensuality.

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven say:

Come out of her my people,  
so that you will not share in her sins  
and so that you will not receive her plagues;

5 for her sins reach up to heaven,  
and God has remembered her iniquities.

6 Give back to her even as she has given  
and double the double according to her deeds.  
In the cup she has mixed, mix double for her.

7 As much as she has glorified herself and lived sensually,  
so much give to her torture and grief.

For in her heart she says, "I sit as queen,  
I am not a widow, and I will by no means see grief."

8 Therefore in one day her plagues will come:  
death, grief, and famine and she will be consumed by fire,  
for mighty [is] the Lord God who judges her.

9 The kings of the earth who committed prostitution and lived sensuously with her will cry and beat themselves over her whenever they see the smoke of her burning, 10 standing at a distance on account of fear of her torment saying:

Woe! Woe, the great city, Babylon, the city of strength,  
for in one hour your judgment has come!

11The merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargo any more--12cargo of gold, silver, precious stone, and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet; every [kind of] citron wood, every article of ivory, and every article from precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; 13cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, and frankincense; wine, olive oil, fine flour, and grain; cattle and sheep and horses and carriages and bodies and souls of men. 14Your fruit, the eager desire of the soul, has gone from you and all your bright and shiny things have perished from you and they will by no means be found any longer. 15The merchants of these things who became rich from her will stand at a distance on account of the fear of her torment, crying and mourning, 16saying:

Woe! Woe, the great city,  
clothed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,  
and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls,  
17for in one hour such great wealth has been desolated!

Every shipmaster, and all who sail to a place, the sailors, and as many as work the sea, stood at a distance 18and were crying out at seeing the smoke of her burning, saying, "What [is] like the great city?" 19They threw dust on their heads, and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying:

Woe! Woe, the great city,  
in which all having ships on the sea became rich from her prosperity,  
for in one hour she has been desolated!

20Rejoice over her, heaven, saints, apostles, and prophets for God judged the judgment of you from her.

### **Situation and Purpose**

This passage continues to describe Babylon the Great, the visionary image that was developed in the preceding chapter. She is described as a great center of power and wealth that is arrogant and complacent, has corrupted the kings and merchants of the earth with riches and luxury, and tortured and given grief to people, especially saints, apostles, and prophets. John and the churches in Asia Minor would have understood the woman as the city of Rome, the capital of the Empire and center of its power and wealth, corrupting the world and persecuting Christians. The passage seems to reflect a danger that oppressed Christians might become discouraged, doubt God, and compromise their commitment. The danger of compromise seems to be reflected in the appeal of the voice from heaven to come out of her in verses 4-5. The purpose of the passage was to encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him rather than be enticed or allured by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage continues the climax of the book. The book climaxes with a description of God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies, the final judgment, and the restoration of the world order and blessed state of the faithful (17:1-22:5). This climax reinforces and supplements what has proceeded by providing assurance of God's ultimate triumph over Satan and his allies as a basis for encouraging and warning Christians to be faithful to God rather than compromise with Satan and his allies in the world. This passage has a close relationship with the five

passages in 17:1-20:10 because they all encourage faithfulness by assuring Christians of God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies in the world using similar imagery (17:1-18; 18:1-20; 18:21-19:10; 19:11-21; and 20:1-10). This passage continues to encourage Christians by describing the doom of Babylon and the mourning of the world. The passage that follows seems to stand in contrast to this passage because it encourages Christians by describing the doom of Babylon and the victory celebration in heaven (18:21-19:10).

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be generally classified as an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. However, in this case the vision is more auditory than visual. The passage contains two messages from heavenly beings. The first is an angel with divine authority and splendor. The second is described only as another voice, but is probably that of the exalted Christ. The message of the angel takes the more specific form of an announcement of the fall of Babylon the Great and the nations that have been corrupted by her. This announcement serves to warn Christians to avoid being corrupted by the wealth and power of Satan's allies in the world. The message of the voice from heaven takes three more specific forms. First, the message takes the form of an exhortation. This exhortation specifically commands God's people to come out of Babylon the Great and avoid her sins. This command is reinforced with a warning of the danger of sharing in her condemnation. Second, the message takes the form of a condemnation of Babylon the Great. This condemnation of Babylon reinforces the command to come out of her and avoid her sin by revealing the ultimate doom of Babylon. Third, the message takes the form of a report of the lamentation by the kings, merchants, and mariners of the earth. This report reinforces the command to come out of her by warning that if they allow themselves to be corrupted by Babylon, they will lament and be terrified like the kings, merchants, and mariners. Finally, the message takes the form of an exhortation. This exhortation specifically commands Christians to rejoice based on God's vindication of them.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage begins in verses 1-3 with an angelic announcement of the fall of Babylon the Great that serves to warn the readers against being corrupted by her and encourages faithfulness. This angelic announcement is followed by the pronouncement of a voice from heaven in verses 4-20. This pronouncement is much more complex. The pronouncement begins with an exhortation for God's people to come out of Babylon the Great and avoid her sin in verses 4-5. This call to come out of her and avoid her sin is reinforced with a pronouncement of judgment against her in verses 6-8 and forecasts of the terrified lamentation of those who have been corrupted by her in verses 9-19. The pronouncement of the voice from heaven concludes with an exhortation to rejoice because of God's judgment of Babylon the Great in verse 20.

- I. The Coming of Another Angel and His Announcement (1-3)
  - A. The Coming of Another Angel from Heaven and His Great Authority and Splendor (1)
  - B. The Angel's Announcement of the Fall of Babylon the Great (2)
  - C. The Angel's Explanation of the Fall of Babylon the Great
- II. A Voice from Heaven Exhorts God's People to Come Out of Her (4-5)
  - A. The Voice from Heaven Exhorts God's People to Come Out of Her so They Won't Share in Her Sins and Plagues (4)

- B. The Voice from Heaven Explains that Her Sins Reach to Heaven and God Has Remembered Her Iniquities (5)
- III. The Voice from Heaven Condemns Babylon the Great (6-8)
  - A. The Voice from Heaven Orders Her Judgment in Accordance with What She Has Done (6)
  - B. The Voice from Heaven Orders Her Torture in Accordance with Her Pride and Sensuality (7)
  - C. The Voice from Heaven Explains that Her Judgment Will Be Swift because the Mighty Lord God Is Judging Her (8)
- IV. The Voice from Heaven Foretells the Mourning that Will Result (9-19)
  - A. The Voice from Heaven Foretells that the Kings of the Earth Will Mourn for Her (9-10)
    - 1. The kings who committed immorality with her will weep and mourn when they see the smoke of her burning (9)
    - 2. They will fearfully stand far off and lament for her because of her swift judgment (10)
  - B. The Voice from Heaven Foretells that the Merchants of the Earth Will Weep for Her (11-17a)
    - 1. They will weep and mourn for her because of their revenue which has been irretrievably lost (11-14)
    - 2. They will fearfully stand far off and lament for her because of the swift ruin of such great wealth (15-17a)
  - C. The Voice from Heaven Foretells that the Mariners Will Weep for Her (17b-19)
    - 1. They will stand far off and cry out in shock at the sight of her burning (17b-18)
    - 2. They will mourn and lament her swift ruin and their lost revenue (19)
- IV. The Voice from Heaven Exhorts Heaven, Saints, Apostles, and Prophets to Rejoice (20)
  - A. The Voice from Heaven Commands Heaven, Saints, Apostles, and Prophets to Rejoice
  - B. The Voice from Heaven Explains that God Has Judged and Vindicated Them

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should be faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because they will certainly fall for their corruption of the world. Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because they are his people and if they share in her sins they will also share in her plagues. Christians should be faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because she is going to be judged quickly and severely in accordance with what she has done and corresponding to her great pride and sensuality for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. Christians should be faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because she will be destroyed and those who compromise with her will mourn their lost power and revenue and be terrified that they are next. Christians should be faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because God will vindicate them by judging her and they will have reason to rejoice.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Another Angel Announces the Fall of Babylon the Great**

John describes the coming of another angel and his announcement in verses 1-3. John describes the coming of another angel from heaven and his great authority and splendor in verse 1, "After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated from his glory." The angel's appearance from heaven, great authority, and illuminating glory emphasize that this angel has come directly from God's presence and possesses his authority and reflects his glory. As Mounce says, "The angel comes from the presence of God, empowered with great authority and reflecting the radiance and glory of God" (Mounce, 324-325). This description stresses the importance of the angel's announcement because it comes from God and is spoken with divine authority.

The angel announces the fall of Babylon the Great in verse 2, "He cried out with a mighty voice saying: 'Fallen! Fallen [is] Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling of demons, and a prison for every unclean spirit, and a prison for every unclean bird and a prison for every unclean beast and detested thing.'" The angel cries out in a mighty voice, probably stressing the urgency of listening to what he says. The angel's announcement is in the past tense to stress that the fall and desolation of Babylon is absolutely certain. As Mounce says, "It is the prophetic way of declaring that the great purpose of God in triumphing over evil is a *fait accompli*" (Mounce, 325). The certain fall of Babylon is also stressed by the repeated cry, "Fallen! Fallen!" Babylon was a great city known for its ambition, oppression, and wickedness and the angel uses it as the epitome of worldly opposition to God. The complete devastation of Babylon is stressed by describing her as having become a dwelling and prison for demons, every evil spirit, unclean bird, and unclean beast, and detestable thing. She is so desolate that she is no longer fit for human habitation!

The angel explains the reason for the fall of Babylon the Great in verse 3, "For all the nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her immorality and the kings of the earth committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth became rich from the power of her sensuality." The angel attributes the fall and desolation of Babylon to her wicked influence on the world. Underlying this explanation seems to be the identification of Babylon the Great as the prostitute in the preceding chapter. This wicked influence is described as seducing the nations, the kings, and the merchants into sexual immorality. Though sexual immorality is often used in the Old Testament figuratively to refer to worshiping idols, in this context it should probably be understood more broadly to refer to Babylon's worldly excess and wickedness. First, the angel explains that "the nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her immorality." They have been seduced by intoxication with passion for her immoral pleasures. The word I have translated "passion" is *thumos* and often means "wrath" in Revelation. It is likely that it has a double meaning here, implying that because they shared in her passion they would also share in God's wrath. As Osborne says, "the nations will be destroyed along with the evil empire because they have freely participated in her debauchery" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 14025-14026*). Second, the angel explains that "the kings of the earth committed immorality with her." They have been seduced by her and have joined in her depravity. Third, the angel explains that "the merchants of the earth became rich from the power of her sensuality." They have been seduced by their ambition to become rich through supplying what she needed to fulfill her desires. John and the churches of Asia Minor would have understood Babylon the Great to be the city of Rome. As another angel announces the fall of Babylon the Great, Christians would be encouraged to avoid being seduced by Rome's power and wealth. Therefore, Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because she will certainly fall for her corruption of the world.

## **A Voice from Heaven Exhorts God's People to Come Out of Her**

John relates that a voice from heaven exhorts God's people to come out of her in verses 4-5. As Morris says, "In a sense this appeal is the key to the whole chapter" (Morris, 216). Everything in the chapter serves to encourage Christians to avoid undue worldly influence. The voice from heaven is not identified, but is either the voice of God, the exalted Christ, or a highly placed heavenly being. The voice is probably that of the exalted Christ since it commands "my people" to come out of her and uses the third person to assert that "God has remembered her iniquities." The voice from heaven exhorts God's people to come out of her so they will not share in her sins and plagues in verse 4, "Then I heard another voice from heaven say: 'Come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins and so that you will not receive her plagues.'" As Osborne says, "my people" is "a semitechnical term in the OT and NT indicating a special relationship with God" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 14065-14066). Thus the voice is appealing to the special relationship that Christians have with God. Though the voice's command could be understood literally, it should probably be understood figuratively for removing themselves from the wicked influence of Babylon the Great. As Osborne adds, "The saints/holy ones are to separate themselves (the very meaning of "holiness") from the things of the world" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 14070-14071). The primary reason that they should avoid her influence to sin is so that they will not share in her plagues. The voice from heaven explains that her sins reach to heaven and God has remembered her iniquities in verse 5, "for her sins reach up to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities." This explanation serves to emphasize that the sins of Babylon are so numerous and obvious that they are impossible to ignore and she will certainly be judged. They are like as a heap of garbage reaching to heaven that God cannot help but notice and judge. It seems odd that God would be described as remembering, as if he could forget; however, this expression is commonly used in the Old Testament to express that God has not forgotten. Though not specifically stated, the implication is that God will certainly judge her. Therefore, Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allowing themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because they are his people and if they share in her sins they will also share in her plagues.

## **The Voice from Heaven Condemns Babylon the Great**

John relates that the voice from heaven condemns Babylon the Great in verses 6-8. The voice from heaven orders that she be judged in accordance with what she has done in verse 6, "Give back to her even as she has given and double the double according to her deeds. In the cup she has mixed, mix double for her." The voice stresses the extent of the judgment that is commanded. Not only does the voice call for her to be given back as she has given, but also to be given "double the double" and "mix double for her." My literal translation "double the double" is not very clear but emphasizes the extent of the judgment that the voice is demanding. This does not seem to just be a doubling of the punishment, but a quadrupling of the judgment. This seems to stress even more that her deeds are so extreme and far-reaching in their effects that she deserves thoroughgoing judgment. The voice seems to also stress that the judgment is deserved. The voice asserts that this judgment is "according to her deeds" and to be served in the same cup "she has mixed." The "cup she has mixed" probably refers to the wrath that she has inflicted on others.

The voice from heaven orders her judgment in accordance with her pride and sensuality in verse 7, "As much as she has glorified herself and lived sensually, so much give to her torture and grief. For in her heart she says, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will by no means see grief!'" Babylon was notorious for its self-glorification and sensuality. Her self-glorification and pride are illustrated in her own words. The prostitute exalts herself as queen. She denies that she will ever be a widow. Widows in the ancient world were often left destitute without any means of support. She denies that this could ever be the case with her. She emphatically denies that she will ever see grief ("I will by no means see grief!"). Thus this verse again emphasizes the extent of the judgment she deserves. Her judgment must match the excessive glory she gave to herself and the extreme sensuality with which she lived.

The voice from heaven explains that her plagues will come quickly because it is the mighty Lord God who judges her in verse 8, "Therefore in one day her plagues will come: death, grief, and famine and she will be consumed by fire, for mighty [is] the Lord God who judges her." The swiftness and certainty of her doom is stressed with "in one day her plagues will overtake her." This emphasis on her swift ruin is continued and even intensified in verses 10, 17, and 19 with lamentations of her fall "in one hour." She emphatically denies that she will ever see grief, but the voice asserts that "in one day her plagues will come." Her complete destruction is emphasized by the multiplication of calamities: death, grief, famine and consumption by fire. The reason for her swift ruin and complete destruction is that the one who judges her is the mighty Lord God. As Osborne says, "It is not the beast or his allies that are 'mighty' but God alone, and this is proven in the virtually instantaneous destruction of the evil empire" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 14196-14197*). As the voice from heaven condemned Babylon Christians would be encouraged to avoid being seduced by Rome. Therefore, Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allowing themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because she is going to be judged quickly and severely in accordance with what she has done and corresponding to her great pride and sensuality for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

### **The Voice from Heaven Foretells the Mourning that Will Result**

John relates that the voice from heaven foretold the mourning that will result when Babylon falls in verses 9-19. The voice from heaven foretells the mourning of the kings of the earth in verses 9-10, "The kings of the earth who committed prostitution and lived sensuously with her will cry and beat themselves over her whenever they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance on account of fear of her torment saying: 'Woe! Woe, the great city, Babylon, the city of strength! For in one hour your judgment has come!'" As kings they seem to have been especially impressed by her great political power. These kings are described as having committed prostitution with her and living sensuously with her. They have allied themselves with her and join her in her extravagance and wickedness. Their mourning is extreme; they will not only cry but "beat themselves." Self-flagellation was an extreme form of mourning. They cry "Woe! Woe!" because Babylon the Great and powerful city has fallen. But they mourn from afar because they fear that they may share in her torment. The reason is that despite her greatness and power, Babylon the Great has fallen in a single hour. No wonder they stand apart from her in fear of her torment. If this great and politically powerful city can fall so quickly what chance do they have?

The voice from heaven foretells the mourning of the merchants of the earth in verses 11-17. The voice from heaven says that they will mourn for her because of their lost revenue that has

been irretrievably lost in verse 11-14, "The merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargo any more--cargo of gold, silver, precious stone, and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet; every [kind of] citron wood, every article of ivory, and every article from precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, and frankincense; wine, olive oil, fine flour, and grain; cattle and sheep and horses and carriages and bodies and souls of men. Your fruit, the eager desire of the soul, has gone from you and all your bright and shiny things have perished from you and they will by no means be found any longer." They mourn not for her but because they no longer have a market for their goods. This long list illustrates the extravagance of Babylon and the extent of the loss of the merchants when she falls. The voice stresses that the things they eagerly desire, their bright and shiny things, are gone forever ("they will by no means be found any longer"). The voice from heaven says that they will be terrified and mourn for her because of the swift ruin of such great wealth in verse 15-17, "The merchants of these things who became rich from her will stand at a distance on account of the fear of her torment, crying and mourning, saying: 'Woe! Woe, the great city, clothed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls, for in one hour such great wealth has been desolated!'" The merchants seem to have been especially impressed by her great wealth and opulence. They reflect mournfully over her lavish clothing and adornment. Nonetheless, they also stand at a distance and cry out "Woe! Woe!" because despite her great economic wealth and power she has been desolated in a single hour. No wonder they stand apart from her in fear. If this great and economically powerful city can fall in a single hour what chance do they have?

The voice from heaven foretells the mourning of the mariners in verses 17-19, "Every shipmaster, and all who sail to a place, the sailors, and as many as work the sea, stood at a distance and were crying out at seeing the smoke of her burning, saying: 'What [is] like the great city?' They threw dust on their heads, and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying: 'Woe! Woe, the great city, in which all having ships on the sea became rich from her prosperity, for in one hour she has been desolated!'" This comprehensive list of mariners probably includes ship captains, sailors, dock workers, and shipping agents, as well as those who travel the seas on business. They mourn not so much for the destruction of the city as for the destruction of their means of becoming rich from her prosperity. Indeed, their mourning is extreme and even includes throwing dust on their heads. These mariners seem to be most impressed with Babylon as the hub of a prodigiously profitable shipping industry. In fact, they exclaim "What [is] like this city?" This rhetorical question implies an emphatic negative response and is equivalent to the exclamation "Nothing is like this city!" Like the kings and the merchants they stand at a distance as they cry "Woe! Woe!" because despite her prodigious shipping industry she has been made desolate in a single hour. No wonder they stand apart from her in fear. If this great capital of commerce can fall in a single hour what chance do they have? John and the churches of Asia Minor would have identified Babylon the Great as Rome. As the voice from heaven foretells the mourning that will result when Babylon falls Christians would be encouraged to avoid being seduced by Rome. Therefore, Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because she will be destroyed and those who compromise with her will mourn their lost power and revenue and be terrified that they are next.

### **The Voice from Heaven Exhorts Heaven And the Saints to Rejoice**



John relates that the voice from heaven exhorts heaven and the saints to rejoice in verse 20, "Rejoice over her, heaven, saints, apostles, and prophets for God judged the judgment of you from her." The voice from heaven calls for heaven to rejoice as well as the saints, apostles, and prophets. The judgment of Babylon the Great is a reason for rejoicing in heaven as well as among the saints. The term "saints" refers to Christians in general, but emphasizes that they are set apart and holy. Saints include apostles and prophets, but these are singled out as those who have been sent out by God and who proclaim his word. Whereas the judgment of Babylon the Great was the reason for mourning among those had been seduced by her, it is a reason for rejoicing among those who are devoted to God and serve him faithfully. I have translated the reason that is given to them for rejoicing literally, "for God judged the judgment of you from her." My translation is not very clear and even though none of the translations I have looked at are totally satisfying, I prefer the NAS, "God has pronounced judgment for you against her." As Osborne says, "While those who participated in the sins of Babylon mourn her passing, those who were faithful to God rejoice that the name of God has triumphed and his people have been vindicated" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 14405-14406*). John and the churches in Asia Minor would have identified Babylon the Great as Rome. As the voice from heaven exhorts heaven and the saints to rejoice Christians would be encouraged to be faithful to God. Therefore, Christians should be faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because God will vindicate his saints by judging her and give them reason to rejoice.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today are also in danger of being corrupted by the power and wealth of the world. These similarities provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. I have already stated the message of the passage in the original context generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message that follow vary little from the statements of the message in the original context. Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allowing themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because she will certainly fall for her corruption of the world. Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allowing themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because she they are his people and if they share in her sin they will share in here plagues. Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allowing themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because she is going to be judged quickly and severely in accordance with what she has done and corresponding to her great pride and sensuality for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allowing themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because she will be destroyed and those who compromise with her will mourn their lost power and revenue and be terrified that they are next. Christians should remain faithful to God and not allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's worldly ally because God will vindicate his saints by judging her and they will have reason to rejoice.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title: FALLEN! FALLEN IS BABYLON THE GREAT!**

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to remain faithful to God and not allow themselves to be corrupted by the power and wealth of Satan's allies in the world.

**Proposition:** Christians should remain faithful to God and not allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world because Satan's allies will certainly fall for their corruption of the world; they are his people and so they won't share in the plagues coming on Satan's allies; Satan's allies are going to be judged quickly and severely in accordance with what they have done; those who compromise with Satan's allies will mourn their lost power and revenue and be terrified that they are next; and those who are devoted to God and serve him faithfully will be vindicated and have reason to rejoice.

## **Introduction**

Christians are constantly in danger of being seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world. *Illustration of a Christian Being Seduced by Satan's Powerful and Wealthy Allies in the World.* Christians in Asia Minor were also in danger of being seduced by Rome, Satan's powerful and wealthy ally in the world when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes a vision of an angel announcing the fall of Babylon the Great in Revelation 18 and a voice from heaven foretelling the mourning that results from her fall. Through this vision God provides us with encouragement to avoid being seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world. *Read Revelation 18:1-20.*

**I. Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world because Satan's allies will certainly fall.**

**II. Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world because they are his people and so they won't share in the plagues coming on Satan's allies.**

**III. Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world because Satan's allies are going to be judged quickly and severely.**

**IV. Christians should remain faithful to Go rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world because those who compromise with them will mourn their lost power and revenue and be terrified that they are next.**

**V. Christians should remain faithful to God rather than allow themselves to be seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world because those who are devoted to God and serve him faithfully will be vindicated and have reason to rejoice.**

## **Conclusion**

We are constantly in danger of being seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world. Christians in Asia Minor were also in danger of being seduced by Rome, Satan's powerful and wealthy ally in the world when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes a vision of an angel announcing the fall of Babylon the Great and a voice from heaven foretelling the mourning that results from her fall in Revelation 18. Through this vision God provides us with encouragement to avoid being seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world. We should avoid being seduced by Satan's powerful and wealthy allies in the world because Satan's allies will certainly fall for their corruption of the

world; we are his people and so we won't share in the plagues coming on Satan's allies; Satan's allies are going to be judged quickly and severely in accordance with what they have done; those who compromise with Satan's allies will mourn their lost power and revenue and be terrified that they are next; and those who are devoted to God and serve him faithfully will be vindicated and have reason to rejoice.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### **SALVATION POWER AND GLORY BELONG TO OUR GOD Vision of the Overthrow of Babylon and the Victory Celebration Revelation 18:21-19:10**

This passage as I have defined it is very difficult to distinguish from what precedes because this is a continuous visionary narrative that begins in 18:1 and runs through 19:10. Though 18:21-24 is distinct in character from 19:1-10, the announcement of the overthrow of the great city of Babylon in 18:21-24 provides the basis for the praise that characterizes 19:1-10. The praise in 19:1-10 is also linked closely to 18:21-24 by "After these things" in 19:1. However, this division is somewhat arbitrary.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

18:21 Then one strong angel picked up a stone like a great millstone and threw [it] into the sea, saying:

"With such violence Babylon the Great city will be thrown down ,  
and will never be found again.

22 The sound of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters,  
will never be heard in you again.

Every craftsman of every craft will never be found in you again.

The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again.

23 The light of a lamp will never shine in you again.

The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again;  
because your merchants were the great men of the earth;  
because by your magic potion all the nations were led astray.

24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,  
and all who have been killed on the earth."

19:1 After these things I heard something like the great sound of a large multitude in heaven saying:

"Hallelujah! The salvation and glory and power belong to our God

2 because true and just [are] his judgments  
since he judged the Great Prostitute who was corrupting the earth with her immorality  
and avenged the blood of his servants from her hand."

3 A second time they said:

"Hallelujah! The smoke from her is going up unto the ages of the ages."

4 The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who sits on the throne, saying:

"Amen! Hallelujah!"

5 Then a voice came out from the throne saying:

"Praise our God, all his servants,  
the ones who fear him, both small and great!"

6Then I heard something like the sound of a large multitude and like the sound of many waters and like mighty peals of thunder, saying:

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty has begun to reign.

7Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory  
for the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready.

8Fine linen, bright [and] clean, was given so that she could dress herself;  
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

9Then the angel says to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who have been invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" Then he says, "These are the true words of God." 10Then I fell before his feet to worship him and he says to me, "Beware, no! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who have the testimony of Jesus?" Worship God for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

### **Situation and Purpose**

This passage continues to describe the overthrow of Babylon the Great. Babylon is depicted as a prostitute and described as a great center of power and wealth that has led the nations astray with her magic potion, corrupted the earth with her adulteries, and has in her the blood of all who have been killed, especially prophets and saints. John and the churches of Asia Minor would have understood the woman as the city of Rome, the capital of the empire and center of its power, corrupting the world and persecuting Christians. The passage seems to reflect a concern that Christians oppressed by Rome's power might become discouraged and doubt God and perhaps even forsake their commitment to him in order to avoid difficulty and enjoy the pleasures of the world. The purpose of the passage was to encourage Christians to continue to trust in God, live faithfully for him, and give him praise.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage continues the climax of the book. The book climaxes with a description of God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies, the final judgment, and the restoration of the world order and blessed state of the faithful (17:1-22:5). This climax reinforces and supplements what has preceded by providing assurance of God's ultimate triumph over Satan and his allies as a basis for encouraging and warning Christians to be faithful to God rather than compromise with Satan and his allies in the world. This passage encourages faithfulness by continuing to describe God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies in the world. This passage has a close relationship with the five passages in 17:1-20:10 because they all encourage faithfulness by assuring Christians of God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies in the world using similar imagery. This passage has an especially close relationship with the preceding passage. The passage that precedes seems to stand in contrast with this passage because it encourages Christians by describing the fall of Babylon and the lamentation of the world (18:1-20) and this passage describes the overthrow of Babylon and the praise of heaven. .

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be generally classified as an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. The first

visionary image employs the picture of a boulder being thrown into the sea to illustrate the mighty angel's assurance that the great city of Babylon will be overthrown completely and permanently because of its corruption of the nations and persecution of Christians. This visionary image along with the angelic assurance serve to encourage Christians to trust God rather than being discouraged by the persecution of Rome. John then hears the praise of a great multitude in heaven along with the twenty-four elders and four living creatures based on God's salvation and just judgment. John then hears a voice from heaven call the servants of God to praise him and another great multitude rejoice and give glory to God for his sovereignty and salvation, depicted as the wedding of the Lamb. These images serve to encourage Christians to trust God and to join in the praise of God. An angel then blesses those who are invited to the wedding of the Lamb and assures them that these are the true words of God. This serves to further encourage Christians to trust and praise God. However, John starts to worship the angel and is strongly cautioned against doing so based on the role of the angel as a fellow servant and God's revelation of the testimony of Jesus. Though the significance of this visionary experience is uncertain, it probably serves to further encourage Christians to trust and praise God alone.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage begins with an announcement of the overthrow of the great city of Babylon that provides the basis for what follows (18:21-24). Next, the praise of the great multitude in heaven is described (19:1-4). This praise is based on the overthrow of Babylon and serves to inspire faith and praise in beleaguered Christians. Next, a voice from heaven calls God's servants to praise him and a great multitude responds with thunderous praise (19:5-8). This praise is based on God's sovereignty and the coming of the wedding of the Lamb and serves to further inspire faith and praise in beleaguered Christians. Finally, the angel blesses those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb (19:9). This also serves to inspire faith and praise in beleaguered Christians. However, John starts to worship the angel and the angel soundly rebukes and exhorts him to worship God (19:10). This probably serves to inspire praise in beleaguered based on the fact that God alone is worthy of praise.

- I. A Mighty Angel Illustrates and Announces the Overthrow of Babylon (18:21-24)
  - A. A Mighty Angel Illustrates and Announces the Violent and Permanent Overthrow of Babylon (21)
  - B. The Mighty Angel Illustrates the Permanent Overthrow of Babylon (22-23a)
    1. The permanent cessation of music (22a)
    2. The permanent cessation of craftsmanship (22b)
    3. The permanent cessation of the millstone (22c)
    4. The permanent cessation of light (23a)
    5. The permanent cessation of weddings (23b)
  - C. The Mighty Angel Explains the Reasons for the Overthrown of Babylon (23c-24)
    1. Babylon's corruption of the nations (23c)
    2. Babylon's brutality, especially toward the prophets and saints (24)
- II. The Praise of a Large Multitude in Heaven (19:1-4)
  - A. The Great Sound of Something Like a Large Multitude in Heaven (1a)
  - B. Their Praise for God's Salvation, Glory, Power, and Justice (1b-2)
  - C. Their Praise for God's Judgment of Babylon (3)
  - D. The Affirmation and Their Praise by the Twenty-four Elders and Four Living Creatures (4)

- III. The Joyful Praise of a Large Multitude of God's Servants (19:5-10)
  - A. A Voice from Heaven Calls God's Servants to Praise God (5)
  - B. The Sound of Something Sounding Like a Large Multitude Praising God because He Has Begun to Reign (6)
  - C. Their Call to Rejoice and Be Glad and Glorify God because the Wedding of the Lamb Has Come (7-8)
- IV. The Angel Commands John to Record a Blessing and Worship God Alone (9-10)
  - A. The Angel Commands John to Write Down a Blessing from God (9)
  - B. John Falls Down to Worship and the Angel Sternly Warns him to Worship God Alone (10)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust and praise God because Satan's worldly ally will be violently and permanently overthrown since she has corrupted the world and killed his prophets and saints. Christians should continue to trust and praise God because of his salvation, glory, and power; he is just in his judgments and will vindicate the blood of his servants by condemning Satan's worldly ally; and he is sovereign. Christians should joyfully glorify God and live righteously live for him because they are his servants, the Lord God Almighty reigns, they are prepared by their experience of God's grace and their righteous deeds, and they will enjoy intimacy with Christ. Christians should trust and worship God alone because they are truly blessed to celebrate the intimate union of Christ with his bride, the church, and God alone is worthy of worship since he has revealed the testimony of Jesus.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **A Mighty Angel Illustrates and Announces The Overthrow of Babylon**

John relates that a mighty angel illustrated and announced the overthrow of Babylon in 18:21-24. The mighty angel illustrates and announces the violent and permanent overthrow of Babylon in verse 21, "Then one mighty angel picked up a stone like a great millstone and threw [it] into the sea, saying: 'With such violence Babylon the Great city will be thrown down, and will never be found again.'" Prophetic acts are common in the Old Testament and portray visually a prophetic message. Here a mighty angel, representing the power and might of God, throws down a large, heavy stone to illustrate the violence and permanence of God's judgment of Babylon. As Osborne explains, a millstone "was used to grind large amounts of grain and weighed several tons" (Osborne, Kindle Location 14451). The mighty angel himself interprets the significance of his prophetic act. He interprets the huge splash of the stone as it enters the water as an indication of the violence with which Babylon will be thrown down. He adds that this prophetic act depicts the permanence of God's overthrow of Babylon. He stresses the permanence of Babylon's demise by stating it absolutely. Babylon "will never be found again!" This assertion is reinforced further in the subsequent verses.

The mighty angel illustrate the complete and permanent overthrow of Babylon in verses 22-23, "The sound of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. Every craftsman of every craft will never be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again." Through this catalog of a

different aspects of life the angel illustrates that everyday life in Babylon will be completely and permanently disrupted. The angel stresses that everyday life in Babylon will cease forever by stating absolutely that all these aspects of everyday life will cease forever; they will never be heard or found again. As Osborne says, "the utter desolation is depicted in the complete absence of all that makes life in this world worthwhile--music, work, food, light, and weddings" (Osborne, Kindle Location 14560).

The mighty angel explains the reasons for the overthrow of Babylon in verses 23-24. First, he explains that Babylon will be overthrown because of her corruption of all the nations in verse 23, "because your merchants were the great men of the earth; because by your magic potion all the nations were led astray." He depicts Babylon as a sorcerer using a magic potion to illustrate its evil influence that leads the nations astray. Since this is prefaced by an assertion that Babylon's merchants were the great men of the earth, the magic potion is probably the enticement of financial and material gain. As Beasley-Murray says, "The traders are singled out, not simply because they were successful, but because their activity was part of that corrupting influence whereby the soul of the world was being destroyed through the harlot city" (Beasley-Murray, 269). Second, he explains that Babylon will be overthrown because of her brutality, especially toward the prophets and saints in verse 24, "In her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and all who have been killed on the earth." John and the churches of Asia Minor would have identified Babylon as Rome. As the mighty angel illustrates and announces the overthrow of Babylon, beleaguered Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and praise him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust and praise God because Satan's worldly ally will be violently and permanently overthrown since she has corrupted the world and killed God's prophets and saints.

### **The Praise of a Large Multitude in Heaven**

John describes the praise of a large multitude in heaven in 9:1-4. John relates that he heard something like the great sound of a large multitude in verse 1, "After these things I heard something like the great sound of a large multitude in heaven" The large multitude is not identified apart from the fact that they are in heaven. What I picture is the angelic host along with the saints who have already died; however, the identity of the large multitude in heaven is not as important as the content of their declaration of praise. The large multitude praises God for his salvation, glory, power, and justice in verses 1-2, "saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God because true and just [are] his judgments since he judged the Great Prostitute who was corrupting the earth with her immorality and avenged the blood of his servants from her hand.'" The emphatic declaration of praise, "Hallelujah!" literally means "Praise the LORD!" This is the first of four declarations of "Hallelujah!" in this passage. By declaring "Salvation and glory and power belong to our God" the large multitude is affirming that God deserves to be praised because he saves and is glorious and powerful. By declaring "true and just are his judgments" the large multitude is affirming God deserves to be praised because he is faithful and fair in judging Babylon and vindicating his saints. Indeed, the large multitude explains that God has demonstrated his true and just judgment by judging Babylon for her corruption of the earth. She is again described as "the Great Prostitute" who has enticed the earth to commit immorality with her. As Mounce says, "Her adultery is her seductive and unholy alliances with the entire civilized world" (Mounce, 342). The large multitude also explains that God has demonstrated his true and just judgment since he has "avenged the blood of his servants from her hands." My translation is literal but not very clear. Though far from



literal the CSB gets the idea across more clearly, "that was on her hands." They praise God for his judgment of Babylon in verse 3, "Again they shouted: 'Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.'" The large multitude repeats their emphatic declaration of praise "Hallelujah!" or "Praise the LORD" The picture is a bit gruesome but emphasizes dramatically the thoroughness of God's destruction through the image of an eternally burning garbage heap. The twenty-four elders and four living creatures affirm what has been said and join in praising God in verse 4, "The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who sits on the throne, saying: "Amen! Hallelujah!" The emphatic declaration I have transliterated "Amen!" is frequently used to affirm the truth of what has preceded and could be translated "Truly!" Thus the twenty-four elders and four living creatures affirm all that has been declared by the large multitude. They also add their own emphatic declaration of praise, "Hallelujah!" or "Praise the LORD!" Though their affirmation and declaration of praise adds nothing new to what has already been declared, John's introduction does. He relates that their praise was directed to "God, who sits on the throne." This picture of God on his throne is a common image in the Bible that portrays God's sovereignty. John and the churches of Asia Minor would have understood Babylon as Rome. As John relates the praise of the large multitude in heaven and the affirmation of the twenty-four elders and four living creatures beleaguered Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust and praise God. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust and praise God because of his salvation, glory, and power; he is just in his judgments and will vindicate the blood of his servants by condemning Satan's worldly ally; and he is sovereign.

### **The Joyful Praise of a Large Multitude Of God's Servants**

John relates the joyful praise of a large multitude of God's servants in 19:5-8. John relates that he heard a voice coming from the throne commanding all God's servants to praise God in verse 5, "Then a voice came out from the throne saying: 'Praise our God, all his servants, the ones who fear him, both small and great!'" The voice from heaven is not identified apart from it being described as coming "from the throne. It is not likely that it is God since it says "Praise our God." It is either Jesus or a heavenly being that has been invested with divine authority. This command "Praise our God!" could be a loose translation of what is transliterated elsewhere as "Hallelujah!" The command of the voice stresses the need for all God's people to praise him, "all his servants" and all who fear him "both small and great."

John relates that he heard something like the sound of a large multitude praising God in verse 6, "Then I heard something like the sound of a large multitude and like the sound of many waters and like mighty peals of thunder, saying: 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty has begun to reign.'" He doesn't identify the large multitude; however, I understand their praise as a response to the command of the voice from the throne in the preceding verse. Therefore, I understand the large multitude to be all God's servants. This could include his heavenly servants as well as his earthly servants, both alive and dead. However, the identity of the large multitude is not as important as the content of their declaration of praise. The sound of the large multitude is also described as being "like the sound of many waters and like mighty peals of thunder." This description could underscore how large the multitude is, but probably also stresses their boisterous and exuberant worship. As Summers observes, "Above the wails and lamentation of fallen kings, merchants, and mariners, and above the noise of crashing walls and flaming streets is heard the song of the rejoicing saints that righteousness has triumphed over evil" (Summers,

195). The large multitude emphatically declares "Hallelujah!" or "Praise the LORD!" like the other large multitude in heaven and the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures. The reason that they praise the Lord is "the Lord our God, the Almighty has begun to reign." The title "Lord" emphasizes God's sovereignty as the Lord of lords. The reference to "our God" probably underscores their personal relationship with God. The title "the Almighty" stresses God's power over all." Many English versions translate the past tense verb with the present tense "reigns," probably because they understandably want to avoid the misunderstanding that God has not been in control all along. However, the multitude is probably praising God because he is at this time reigning in a more direct way. As Ashcraft says, "His kingdom, promised and known partially by those in faith, has now come in its fulness" (Ashcraft, 340).

John relates that the great multitude call one another to rejoice, be glad, and give God glory in verses 7-8, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright [and] clean, was given so that she could dress herself; for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints." Those in the large multitude are described as exciting one another to rejoice and be glad and give God glory. One reason for their joyful praise is that the wedding of the Lamb to his bride, the church, has come. Marriage is frequently used in both the Old and New Testaments as a picture of the relationship between God and his people. The customs of marriage at that time varied from those today. There was a period of betrothal before the actual marriage in which the couple was already bound as husband and wife without complete consummation. Marriage was therefore an ideal symbol for the relationship of the church and Christ. The church is already the bride of Christ but will not experience the complete intimacy of that relationship until he returns. The wedding is therefore a picture for the intimate union of Christ with his church when he returns to establish his kingdom. Another reason for their joyful praise is that Christ's bride, the church, "has made herself ready." Her readiness is depicted in both her experience of God's grace and her faithful deeds. She has experienced God's grace, "Fine linen, bright [and] clean, was given so that she could dress herself." This is the characteristic use of the passive voice of *didomi* to indicate God's activity. God has given her the fine linen of purity by his grace. However, this fine linen is also interpreted as being "the righteous deeds of the saints." They must still live righteously for God. As Beasley-Murray says, "The bride 'made herself ready' through repentance and faith and continuance in righteous deeds which are the fruit of faith" (Beasley-Murray, 274). As John relates the joyful praise of the great multitude of God's servants Christians would be encouraged to trust God and joyfully glorify and righteously live for him. Therefore, Christians should joyfully glorify God and live righteously for him because they are his servants, the Lord God Almighty reigns, they are prepared by God's grace and their righteous deeds, and they will enjoy intimate union with Christ.

### **The Angel Commands John to Record a Blessing and Worship God Alone**

John relates that the angel commanded him to record a blessing and worship God alone in 19:9-10. John relates that the angel commanded him to write down a blessing from God in verse 9, "Then the angel says to me, 'Write: Blessed are those who have been invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' Then he says, 'These are the true words of God.'" The angel is not identified but the definite article indicates that it is an angel that has been mentioned before, probably the mighty angel that illustrated and announced the fall of Babylon in 18:21-24. However, the identity of the angel is not as important as what he says. He commands John to

write down a blessing from God. This blessing serves to underscore what was declared by the large multitude of God's servants in the preceding verses using slightly differing imagery. Whereas the large multitude praised God for the arrival of the wedding of the Lamb and bride, the church, the angel commands John to write down a blessing of those who are invited to the wedding banquet, individual Christians. The wedding banquet is a joyful celebration and indicates that Christians will share in the joy and celebration of the union of Christ and the church. The angel underscores the validity of this blessing by adding, "These are the true words of God."

John relates the angel sternly rebuked him and commanded him to worship God alone in verse 10, "Then I fell before his feet to worship him and he says to me, "Beware, no! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who have the testimony of Jesus?" Scholars have speculated and debated why John has included this episode. From my perspective he includes this episode because that is what happened in his visionary experience and he is scrupulously recording everything. John's misunderstanding is understandable to a degree because the angel identifies the words that he has just spoken as "the true words of God." The angel emphatically commands John, "Beware, no!" I have translated his command literally. Most English versions make this more explicit like the CSB, "Don't do that!" The angel goes on to command John to worship God and provides reasons for praising God alone. The angel explains that John should not worship him because he and John and the rest of his brothers are all servants of God who have the testimony of Jesus. The point is that God alone is worthy of worship. The angel also explains that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Though it is often understood otherwise, this explanation probably is intended to identify the testimony of Jesus with God's prophetic revelation. The testimony of Jesus has been revealed by God in the same way that God has revealed himself by his Spirit through the prophets. As John relates that the angel commanded him to record a blessing and worship God alone, Christians would be encouraged to trust and worship God alone. Therefore, Christians should trust and worship God alone because they are truly blessed to celebrate the intimate union of Christ with his bride, the church, and God alone is worthy of worship since he has revealed the testimony of Jesus.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today often experience opposition from Satan's powerful world allies and may become discouraged and doubt God and perhaps even forsake their commitment to him. These similarities provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. I have already stated the message for the original situation generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that the statements of the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern context. Therefore, the statements of the applied message that follow vary little from the statements of the message in the original context. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan's worldly ally will be violently and permanently overthrown since she has corrupted the world and oppressed God's saints and prophets. Christians should continue to trust and praise God because of his salvation, glory, and power; he is just in his judgments and will vindicate the blood of his servants by condemning Satan's worldly ally; and he is sovereign. Christians should joyfully glorify God and righteously live for him because they are his servants, the Lord God Almighty reigns, they are prepared by their experience of God's grace and their righteous deeds, and they will enjoy intimacy with Christ as his bride. Christians should trust and worship God because they are truly

blessed to celebrate the intimate union of Christ with his bride, the church, and God alone is worthy of worship since he has revealed the testimony of Jesus.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** SALVATION POWER AND GLORY BELONG TO OUR GOD

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to trust God, righteously live for him, and praise and glorify him.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust and praise God because he will violently and permanently overthrow Satan's worldly allies; he deserves their praise for his salvation, glory, power, and justice; he sits enthroned as sovereign over all; they will enjoy intimate union with Christ as his bride, the church; they are truly blessed to celebrate the wedding supper of the Lamb; and God alone is worthy of their worship.

### **Introduction**

Christians often encounter opposition from Satan's allies in the world. As a result they may become discouraged and doubt God and even consider forsaking their faith in God. *Illustration of a Christian Who Has Become Discouraged by Satan's Allies in the World.* Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Rome, Satan's powerful ally in the world when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes a vision of an angel announcing the fall of Babylon the Great and the joyful celebration and praise that erupted in Revelation 18:21-19:10. Through this vision God provides us with encouragement to continue to trust and praise God. *Read Revelation 18:21-19:10.*

- I. Christians should continue to trust and praise God because he will violently and permanently overthrow Satan's worldly allies.**
- II. Christians should continue to trust and praise God because he deserves their praise for his salvation, glory, power, and justice.**
- III. Christians should continue to trust and praise God because he sits enthroned as sovereign over all.**
- IV. Christians should continue to trust and praise God because they will enjoy intimate union with Christ as his bride, the church.**
- V. Christians should continue to trust and praise God because they are truly blessed to celebrate the wedding supper of the Lamb.**
- VI. Christians should continue to trust and praise God because he alone is worthy of their worship.**

### **Conclusion**

We often encounter opposition from Satan's allies in the world. As a result we may become discouraged and doubt God and even consider forsaking our faith and commitment. Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Rome, Satan's powerful ally in the world when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes a vision of an angel announcing the fall of Babylon and the joyful celebration and praise that erupted in Revelation 18:21-19:10. Through this vision God provides us with encouragement to continue to trust and praise God. We should continue to trust and praise God because he will violently and

permanently overthrow Satan's worldly allies; he deserves our praise for his salvation, glory, power, and justice; he sits enthroned as sovereign over all; we will enjoy intimate union with Christ as his bride, the church; we are truly blessed to celebrate the wedding supper of the Lamb; and he alone is worthy of our worship.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE**

### **WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS HE JUDGES AND MAKES WAR Vision of the Rider on the White Horse and Victory over the Beast Revelation 19:11-21**

The passage as I have defined it is difficult to separate from its context. I am especially inclined to include 20:1-3 with this passage since it describes the capture and binding of Satan and compliments the description of the defeat and destruction of the beast and its allies in 19:17-21. However, those verses are even more closely related to the subsequent passage. Nonetheless, the division is somewhat arbitrary.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

19:11Then I saw heaven standing open and behold, a white horse and the one sitting on it is called Faithful and True and with righteousness he judges and makes war. 12His eyes [are] like a fiery flame and on his head [are] many crowns, having a name written which no one knows but he himself, 13being wrapped in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. 14The armies in heaven were following him on white horses and clothed in fine linen, white [and] clean. 15Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword so that with it he might strike down the nations, and he himself will shepherd them with an iron scepter, and he himself tramples the winepress of the furious wrath of God Almighty. 16He has written on [his] robe and on his thigh: "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

17Then I saw one angel standing in the sun and he cried out in a loud voice saying to all the birds flying in midair, "Here! Gather together for the great supper of God, 18so that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of commanders, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and the ones sitting on them, and the flesh of everyone, both free and slave, small and great."

19Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the one sitting on the horse and against his armies. 20The beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs before him. With these he led astray those who received the mark of the beast and worship his image. The two were thrown alive into the fiery lake, burning with brimstone. 21The rest were killed with the sword of the one sitting on the horse, the one that came out of his mouth, and all the birds were sated from their flesh.

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage has a futuristic emphasis with little revealed about the situation addressed. However, verse 20 does describe how the false prophet deluded people into receiving the mark of the beast and worshipping his image. In addition, the passage does employ imagery such as the beast and the false prophet that have been employed earlier in the book. The beast is the ally of Satan and he uses the false prophet to corrupt the rulers and people of the earth and together they oppose Christ and the church. The original recipients would have understood the beast and the false prophet to be the Roman Empire and the imperial cult that used its wealth and power to corrupt the world and persecute Christians. The passage seems to reflect a concern that

Christians oppressed by Rome's wealth and power might become discouraged and doubt God and might even forsake their commitment to him. The purpose of the passage was to encourage persecuted Christians to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage continues the climax of the book. The book climaxes with a description of God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies, the final judgment, and the restoration of the world order and blessed state of the faithful (17:1-22:5). This climax reinforces and supplements what has proceeded by providing assurance of God's ultimate triumph over Satan and his allies as a basis for encouraging and warning Christians to be faithful to God rather than compromise with Satan and his allies. This passage encourages faithfulness by continuing to describe God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies in the world. This passage has an especially close relationship with the five passages in 17:1-20:10 because they all encourage faithfulness by assuring Christians of God's ultimate triumph over Satan and his allies in the world using similar imagery. The great supper of God in which the kings and armies of the earth are gorged upon by the birds of the air is probably intended to stand in contrast to the wedding feast of the Lamb that has already been introduced (18:21-19:10).

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be generally classified as an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. Actually, the passage contains a series of three interrelated visions. The first vision describes Christ as a rider on a white horse. The visionary description employs pictures to assure the readers of the holiness, faithfulness, justice, and authority of Christ so that they will trust in him and remain faithful. The second vision describes an angel giving an invitation to the birds of the air for the great supper of God. This visionary image portrays the judgment of God and serves to assure Christians of God's ultimate judgment of their enemies and encourage them to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him. This visionary image is not complete until verse 21 where the grotesque feast is actually described. The final vision describes the gathering together of the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, the capture and destruction of the beast and the false prophet, and the destruction of the kings and their armies. This visionary image again depicts the ultimate triumph of Christ over the enemies of his people and serves to encourage Christians to trust in him and remain faithful.

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage contains has a relatively simple two-part strategy and structure. The passage begins with a visionary image of the rider on a white horse, depicting Christ and his faithfulness, victory, justice, and authority (11-16). This visionary image serves to assure beleaguered Christians that they can trust Christ. The passage concludes with a visionary image of the defeat and destruction of the beast and its allies (17-21). The strategy and structure of this section is a bit more complex. An angel invites all the birds to the great supper of God, the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gather together, the beast and the false prophet are captured and destroyed, and the kings of the earth and their armies are destroyed and devoured by the birds. This series of visionary images serve to assure beleaguered Christians of the defeat of their enemies and their vindication.

#### **I. Vision of a Rider on a White Horse (11-16)**

- A. The Rider on a White Horse and His Name and Just Judgment (11)
  - B. The Rider's Blazing Eyes, Many Crowns, and Unknown Name (12)
  - C. The Rider's Bloody Robe and His Other Name (13)
  - D. The Rider's Heavenly Army, Their Horses, and Their Attire (14)
  - E. The Rider's Authority and Execution of the Wrath of God (15)
  - F. The Name Written on the Rider's Robe and Thigh (16)
- II. Vision of the Rider's Defeat and Destruction of the Beast and His Allies (17-21)
- A. An Angel and His Invitation to All the Birds (17-18)
    - 1. The angel invites all the birds to gather for the great supper of God (17)
    - 2. The angel explains what will be served at the great supper of God (18)
  - B. The Gathering Together of the Beast and the Kings of the Earth and Their Armies (19)
  - C. The Capture and Destruction of the Beast and False Prophet (20)
  - D. The Destruction and Devouring of the Kings of the Earth and Their Armies (21)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Christ has already won the victory, he is faithful and true, and he judges and makes war justly; his judgment is discerning, he has authority over the beast and his allies, and no one has any power over him; he is God's powerful Word, authoritatively executing God's decrees; he commands the armies of heaven; he will strike down and rule over the nations and execute the wrath of God Almighty; and he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he will utterly defeat and eternally punish Satan's worldly allies and their armies, which will become the main entrée for the great supper of God rather than being invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Vision of a Rider on a White Horse**

John describes a vision of a rider on a white horse in verses 11-16. As Mounce says, "Nowhere in Revelation is the victorious Christ portrayed in symbols and language more likely to convince the reader that in spite of Satan's best efforts God and the Lamb will emerge triumphant in the end" (Mounce, 351). John describes a rider on a white horse, his name, and his just judgment in verse 11, "Then I saw heaven standing open and behold, a white horse and the one sitting on it is called Faithful and True and in righteousness he judges and makes war." The interjection translated "behold" stresses the importance of what is revealed. The rider on the white horse can be none other than the exalted Christ. The rider comes from heaven and is riding on a white horse rather than a warhorse. White horses were ridden in the victory parade rather than the battle. That Christ rides on a white horse probably indicates that his victory is a foregone conclusion. His name is "Faithful and True," indicating his reliability and trustworthiness to deliver his people and judge their oppressors. His faithfulness to deliver his people and judge their oppressors is underscored by "he judges and makes war." As we will see in subsequent verses, he is faithful to judge their enemies by making war against and utterly defeating them.

John describes the rider's blazing eyes, many crowns, and unknown name in verse 12, "His eyes [are] like a fiery flame and on his head [are] many crowns, having a name written which no one knows but he himself." His blazing eyes are an established image for his penetrating



judgment and assures beleaguered believers that God has not overlooked any act of oppression against them. As Mounce says, "Nothing can be hidden from the penetrating gaze of the Messiah" (Mounce, 353). There are two words for crown used in Revelation. The rider is described as wearing a *diadem* which is the kind of crown worn by rulers as a symbol of their majesty and sovereignty. His "many crowns" probably stand in contrast to the dragon that only had seven crowns and the beast that only had ten crowns. His many crowns emphasize his sovereign authority even over the dragon and the beast. His unknown name is possibly based on common conception that knowing the true name of someone gave you power over them. In this case that no one knows Christ's name indicates that no one has power of the exalted Christ. Another related possibility is based on the common conception that someone's name revealed their true character. If this is the case then Christ's unknown name may suggest that the nature of Christ is so sublime that it is beyond human comprehension. These two ideas could be combined to indicate that Christ's new name is so sublime that no one can know it and gain power over him.

John describes the rider's bloody robe and his other name in verse 13, "being wrapped in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God." His "robe dipped in blood" could be understood in a variety of ways based on whose blood is on his robes, all of which have significant ramifications. First, the blood on his robe could be his own and would thus be a reference to his sacrifice on the cross. The blood would then indicate that his sacrifice on the cross is the basis for his subsequent victory. Second, the blood on his robe could be that of the martyrs and would probably stress that his subsequent victory vindicates them. Finally, the blood on his robe could be the blood of his enemies and anticipates his inevitable victory. Though I am torn, the latter is more conducive to the context and consistent with similar imagery in Isaiah 63. If so the blood on his robe is probably intended as an assurance of Jesus' righteous judgment of the oppressors of the church. The title "the Word of God" has a number of connotations, perhaps the clearest of which is that Jesus is the effective instrument of God in creation, deliverance, and judgment. What God says is accomplished! This title therefore probably emphasizes Jesus' power and authority, especially for judgment. Later in this passage he is described as having a sword coming from his mouth with which he is able to strike down the nations (15) and kill the allies of the beast (21).

John describes the rider's heavenly army, their horses, and their attire in verse 14, "The armies in heaven were following him on white horses and clothed in fine linen, white [and] clean." The identity of the rider's army is not revealed apart from them being "in heaven." The most likely possibility is that they are his angelic host, but the army could also consist of the saints. Indeed, their garments are described as being made of "fine linen, white [and] clean," which could suggest that they have been purified by Christ's sacrifice. However, the identity of the rider's army is not necessary for understanding the message. Christ's followers are called an army but they are not mounted or dressed for war but for the victory celebration. Again, white horses were ridden in the victory parade rather than the battle. Also, who would wear "fine linen, white [and] clean" into battle? In fact, when the battle is described the army doesn't seem to have any role in the victory. This figure again probably emphasizes the certainty of Christ's victory over his foes and the oppressors of the church.

John describes the rider's authority over the nations and execution of the wrath of God in verse 15, "Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword so that with it he might strike down the nations, and he himself will shepherd them with an iron scepter, and he himself tramples the winepress of

the furious wrath of God Almighty." His word is so powerful that it is depicted as a sharp sword. His word is so powerful that all he needs is a word to defeat the nations. His sovereignty over the nations is portrayed as an iron scepter--a symbol of the king's strength and authority. Indeed, this may be an allusion to Psalm 2 where God's anointed, who is surrounded by the nations, will be able to strike them with an iron rod and smash them to pieces like pottery. The sovereignty of Christ over the nations is stressed by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "he, he will shepherd them" and indicated in translation with a reflexive pronoun "he himself will shepherd them"). The winepress is already established as an image of judgment in Revelation and has its background in Isaiah 63 as well as other Old Testament texts. Christ's role as the instrument of God's wrath is again stressed by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "he, he tramples" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "he himself tramples"). The extent of God's wrath by combining two synonyms *orge* and *thumos*, translated "furious wrath."

John describes yet another name written on the rider's robe and thigh in verse 16, "He has written on [his] robe and on his thigh: 'KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.'" The robe of a king was a symbol of his prestige and authority. It is uncertain why his name should be written on both his robe and his thigh. Some have suggested that the name is written on his robe in a place where it would appear on his thigh when mounted on a horse. This would make the name visible to all as he rode. The name itself stresses his complete sovereignty. The exalted Christ is the King above all other kings and the Lord above all other lords. John and the churches of Asia Minor would have understood the beast as Rome. As John describes his vision of the rider on the white horse beleaguered Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he has already won the victory, he is faithful and true, and he judges and makes war justly; his judgment is discerning, he has authority, and no one has any power over him; he is God's powerful Word, authoritatively executing God's judgment; he commands the armies of heaven; he will strike down and rule over the nations and execute the wrath of God Almighty; and he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

### **Vision of the Rider's Defeat and Destruction Of the Beast and His Allies**

John describes a vision of the Rider's defeat and destruction of the beast and his allies in verses 17-21. John describes a vision of an angel's invitation to all the birds in verses 17-18. The angel invites all the birds to gather for the great supper of God in verse 17, "Then I saw one angel standing in the sun and he cried out in a loud voice saying to all the birds flying in midair, "Here! Gather together for the great supper of God." The adverb I have translated "Here!" is used as an emphatic summons and is usually translated "Come!" The great supper of God stands in contrast to the wedding supper of the Lamb. As Beasley-Murray says, this supper "becomes a terrible counterpart to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Beasley-Murray, 282). Oddly, it is the birds who are summoned to gather together for this feast. The birds are described as flying in midair. What I picture based on what follows are buzzards circling overhead. The angel explains what will be served at the great supper of God in verse 18, "so that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of commanders, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and the ones sitting on them, and the flesh of everyone, both free and slave, small and great." This imagery reveals the fate of all who side with the forces of Satan against Christ and his people. The wording stresses that none will escape this fate, neither kings, commanders, mighty men, or the calvary. Everyone, whether they are free or slave or whether they are small or great,

will share the same fate. They will not share in the wedding banquet of the Lamb but will instead be feasted upon by scavengers. As Beasley-Murray adds, "The triumph of God's kingdom over its adversaries is celebrated by a joyful feast for the righteous and by a nightmare feast for the scavenging birds of prey" (Beasley-Murray, 282). This feast is not described until verse 21, but its placement here anticipates what is to come and stresses its inevitability. As Osborne says, "The message is gruesome and powerful, guaranteeing before the battle has been joined that the end result is certain" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 15144-15145).

John describes the gathering together of the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies in verse 19, "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the one sitting on the horse and against his armies." Though the dragon or Satan is probably the one gathering them together, the use of the passive voice probably implies that God is behind it all. The dragon is gathering his forces to do battle against Christ and his armies, but God is gathering them together for judgment. The beast from the sea is an established image in Revelation for one of Satan's powerful allies in the world. John describes the capture and destruction of the beast and false prophet in verse 20, "The beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs before him. With these he led astray those who received the mark of the beast and worship his image. The two were thrown alive into the fiery lake, burning with brimstone." The beast from the earth is an established image in revelation for the first beast's ally, but is referred to here based on its function. It is the false prophet who is able to deceive the world by its signs and lead people to align themselves with the beast by receiving his mark and worshiping his image. Nonetheless, despite the power and deceptiveness of the beast and his false prophet, they are easily captured and thrown into the fiery lake. As Osborne says, "It seems that when the sword comes from the Lord's mouth (19:15), the battle is over instantly" (Osborne, Kindle Location 15184). The imagery of the fiery lake depicts a place of eternal torment. That description of them being thrown into the fiery lake alive and the fiery lake as "burning with brimstone" probably emphasizes their eternal torment and the extent of their suffering. John describes the destruction and devouring of the kings of the earth and their armies in verse 21, "The rest were killed with the sword of the one sitting on the horse, the one that came out of his mouth, and all the birds were sated from their flesh." The image of the sword coming out of the rider's mouth probably depicts Christ's authoritative word of judgment, again emphasizing how easily Christ is able to overcome Satan's allies in the world. Christ is able to defeat the armies of the beast by simply commanding it. Though the language used is rather gruesome, both in its description of the fate of the beast and false prophet and those who have aligned themselves with the beast, it serves to emphasize God's total vindication of the saints by graphically depicting the fate of those who have sought to destroy them. John and the churches in Asia Minor would have identified the beast as Rome and the false prophet as the imperial cult. As John describes the vision of the defeat and destruction of the beast and his allies, beleaguered Christians would have been encouraged to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he will utterly defeat and eternally punish Satan's worldly allies and their armies, which will become the main entrée for the great supper of God rather than being invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today also encounter opposition from Satan's powerful allies in the world and may become discouraged and doubt Christ and even consider forsaking their commitment to him.

These similarities provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern situation. I have already stated the message in the original context generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Christ has already won the victory, he is faithful and true, and he judges and makes war justly; his judgment is discerning, he has authority, and no one has any power over him; he is God's powerful Word, authoritatively executing God's judgment; he commands the armies of heaven; he will strike down and rule over the nations and execute the wrath of God Almighty; and he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he will easily and utterly defeat and eternally punish Satan's worldly allies and their armies, which will become the main entrée for the great supper of God rather than being invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS HE JUDGES AND MAKES WAR

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he has already won the victory, his name is Faithful and True, he justly judges and makes war, he has authority over Satan and his allies, he is the authoritative Word of God, he commands the armies of heaven and will execute the wrath of God Almighty on their oppressors, and he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

#### **Introduction**

Christians today encounter opposition from Satan's powerful and deceptive allies in the world and may become discouraged and doubt Christ and perhaps even forsake their commitment to him. *Illustration of a Christian Being Intimidated and Deceived by Satan's Powerful and Deceptive Allies.* Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Rome and the imperial cult, Satan's powerful and deceptive allies in the world when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes a vision of a rider on a white horse and his defeat and destruction of the beast and its allies in Revelation 19:11-21. Through this vision God provides us with encouragement to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him. *Read Revelation 19:11-21.*

**I. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he has already won the victory.**

**II. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because his name is Faithful and True.**

**III. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he justly judges and makes war.**

**IV. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he has authority over Satan and his allies.**

**V. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is the authoritative Word of God.**

**VI. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he commands the armies of heaven and will execute the wrath of God Almighty on their oppressors.**

**VII. Christians should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.**

### **Conclusion**

We often encounter opposition from Satan's powerful and deceptive allies in the world. As a result we may become discouraged and doubt God and even consider forsaking our faith and commitment. Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Rome and the imperial cult, Satan's powerful and deceptive allies in the world when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. John describes a vision of a rider on a white horse and his defeat and destruction of the beast and his allies. Through this vision God provides us with encouragement to continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him. We should continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him because he has already won the victory, his name is Faithful and True, he justly judges and makes war, he has authority over Satan and his allies, he is the authoritative Word of God, he commands the armies of heaven and will execute the wrath of God Almighty on their oppressors, and he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX**

### **THEY CAME TO LIFE AND REIGNED WITH CHRIST Vision of the Millennium and Ultimate Doom of Satan Revelation 20:1-10**

The passage as I have identified it is difficult to separate from its context. However, since the passage begins with the binding of Satan for one thousand years, proceeds to describes those who will reign with Christ for one thousand years, and concludes by describing Satan's release and ultimate defeat and doom after the one thousand years the division seems natural. Nonetheless, the division is somewhat arbitrary.

#### **Study of the Passage**

This is an extremely difficult passage to interpret. The reason that it is so difficult is that its teaching on the millennium is hard to reconcile with what is taught in the rest of the New Testament about the end times. As a result this passage has become the crux for all teaching about the end times and interpreters are identified based on how they reconcile the teaching of this passage with what the rest of the New Testament reveals about the end times. Rather than trying to force the teaching of this passage into what is taught about the end times in the rest of the New Testament, I am going to try to understand this passage on its own. Hopefully this will provide insight into the unique message that is revealed in this passage.

#### **Text and Translation**

20:1I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3He threw him into the abyss and locked and sealed [it] over him, so that he could not lead astray the nations any longer until the thousand years have been completed. After these things it is necessary to release him for a brief time.

4Then I saw thrones and they sat upon them and judgment was given to them, and the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God and whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not receive the mark on their forehead or on their hand, and they came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years have been completed. This [is] the first resurrection. 6Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years.

7When the thousand years have been completed, Satan will be released from his prison 8and will go out to lead astray the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for war, the number of them [being] like the sand of the seashore. 9They went up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints, the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10The Devil, who deceives them, was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also [are] the beast and the false prophet; and they will be tormented day and night unto the ages of the ages.

#### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage has a futuristic emphasis with little revealed about the situation addressed. However, verse 4 does describe those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God and had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark. In addition, the passage does employ imagery such as the beast and the false prophet that have been employed earlier in the book. The beast is the powerful ally of Satan and he uses the false prophet to corrupt the rulers and people of the earth and together they oppose Christ and the church. John and the churches of Asia Minor would have understood the beast and the false prophet to be the Roman Empire and the imperial cult that corrupted the world and tried to compel Christians to swear allegiance to Caesar as their Lord. The passage seems to reflect a concern that Christians oppressed by Satan and his powerful allies in the world might become discouraged and doubt God and perhaps even forsake their commitment to him so that they could avoid difficulty and death. The purpose of the passage was to encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him, especially when threatened with death.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage continues the climax of the book. The book climaxes with a description of God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies, the final judgment, and the restoration of the world order and blessed state of the faithful (17:1-22:5). This climax reinforces and supplements what has proceeded by encouraging Christians to be faithful to God rather than compromise based on the assurance of God's ultimate triumph over Satan and his allies. This passage encourages faithfulness by continuing to describe God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies and in fact describes the doom of Satan himself. This passage has an especially close relationship with the four passages that precede. The four passages that precede also assure the readers of the destruction of Satan and his allies and encourage them to continue to trust in God and give him praise using related visionary images (17:1-18, 18:1-20, 18:21-19:10, and 19:11-21). This passage may also have a close relationship to 6:9-11 which describes the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. They are described as lying under the altar calling out for vindication and they are told to rest a little time until the full number of their fellow servants had been killed like them. This passage seems to provide the ultimate answer to their prayers for vindication.

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be generally classified as an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. In fact, the passage contains a series of three interrelated visions. The first vision describes the seizure, binding, and imprisonment of Satan for a thousand years. Through this visionary picture beleaguered Christians are encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him based on the assurance that Satan, who exercises so much power against them, will be constrained by God. The second vision describes the resurrection and blessed reign of the faithful martyrs. The identification of those who maintained their testimony for Christ and refused to worship the beast or his image as the ones who would be raised and reign with Christ serves to encourage beleaguered Christians to faithfully maintain their testimony and refuse to compromise even when threatened with death so that they can be among those so blessed. The third vision describes the ultimate defeat and eternal torment of Satan and his allies. Through this visionary image beleaguered Christians are encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him based on the assurance that they will be vindicated and Satan will ultimately be defeated and punished along with his allies.

## Strategy and Structure

The passage contains a series of futuristic images in chronological order that provide encouragement for the readers to continue to trust in God and remain faithful even though they encounter opposition, even death. The first vision describes the seizure, binding and imprisonment of Satan (1-3). The second vision describes the resurrection and blessed reign of the faithful martyrs with Christ (4-6). The third vision describes the ultimate defeat and eternal torment of Satan and his allies (7-10).

- I. Vision of the Seizure, Binding, and Imprisonment of the Dragon (1-3)
  - A. The Appearance of an Angel with the Key to the Abyss and a Great Chain (1)
  - B. The Seizure and Binding of the Dragon and His Identity (2)
  - C. The Imprisonment of the Dragon and Its Purpose (3a)
  - D. The Necessity of the Dragon's Release for a Short Time (3b)
- II. Vision of the Resurrection and Reign of the Faithful Martyrs (4-6)
  - A. The Souls of Faithful Martyrs Come to Life and Reign with Christ for a Thousand Years (4)
    1. Thrones, those who sat on them, and their authority to judge
    2. The souls of those who were killed because of their faithful testimony and refusal to compromise
    3. The souls come to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years
  - B. The Blessedness and Holiness of Those Who Have a Part in the First Resurrection (5-6)
    1. The uniqueness of the first resurrection (5)
    2. The blessedness and holiness of those who have a part in the first resurrection (6a)
    3. The blessings of those who have a part in the first resurrection (6b)
- III. The Ultimate Defeat and Eternal Torment of the Satan (7-10)
  - A. Satan's Release from Prison (7)
  - B. Satan's Deception of the Nations and Gathering of a Great Army (8)
  - C. The Advance of the Army and Its Siege of the Camp of God's People (9a)
  - D. The Devouring of Satan's Army by Fire from Heaven (9b)
  - E. The Casting of Satan into the Lake of Burning Sulfur (10)

## Message or Messages

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him even when they are threatened with death because Satan will be imprisoned for a thousand years so that the millennium will be free from his diabolic influence and he will then be released for a short time, but even this is part of God's plan. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful because those who are killed as a result of their faithful testimony and refusal to compromise will be raised to life and be blessed and holy since the second death will have no power over them, they will serve as priests to God and Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him even when threatened with death because he will order fire from heaven to devour Satan and his army when they attack his people and Satan and his allies will be cast into the lake of burning sulfur where they will be tormented incessantly for all eternity

## Analysis of the Details

### The Seizure, Binding, and Imprisonment



## Of the Dragon

John describes his vision of the seizure, binding, and imprisonment of the dragon in verses 1-3. John describes the appearance of an angel with the key to the abyss and a great chain in verse 1, "I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand." The angel comes down out of heaven, indicating that he comes from God's presence and has been sent on his mission with divine authority. The angel comes prepared to bind the dragon with a chain and imprison him with the key to the abyss. John describes the seizure and binding of the dragon and his identity in verse 2, "He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years." The dragon is an established image in Revelation for the frightening being that is the powerful force behind the beasts and their opposition to the church and Christians. The dragon is identified as "the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan." He is the deceiver and accuser, who has been deceiving humanity since he deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As Beasley-Murray says:

As the ancient serpent he is the deceiver of mankind, who has brought ruin to man from Eden onwards. As the Devil and Satan he is the accuser or slanderer of men, a perpetual reminder to God of the guilt of the race that he has successfully perverted. But the time has come when he can no longer fulfill the functions denoted by his names (Beasley-Murray, 285).

Indeed, he is easily seized and bound by the angel. Satan is no match for God or even an angel acting on his authority. This is the first of six references to the one thousand years or millennium in this passage. This raises the question of whether the thousand years is literal or symbolic. Multiples of ten are frequently used in Jewish numerology to depict completeness. In either case the thousand years is a substantial period of time.

John describes the imprisonment of the dragon and explains its purpose in the first part of verse 3, "He threw him into the abyss and locked and sealed [it] over him, so that he could not lead astray the nations any longer until the thousand years have been completed." As Mounce says, "The Abyss was thought of as a vast subterranean cavern that served as a place of confinement for disobedient spirits awaiting judgment (Jude 6; Jub. 5:6; Luke 8:31)" (Mounce, 360-361). The secure imprisonment of the dragon is stressed by the redundant security measures that are used to restrain him. The angel not only binds the dragon with the chain, but also shuts and seals him in the abyss. Again the angel has no difficulty imprisoning the dragon. Satan is no match for God or even an angel who is operating on his authority. The divine purpose for his imprisonment is "so that he could not lead astray the nations any longer until the thousand years were finished." He is imprisoned so that the millennium would be free from his diabolical influence. Thus this provides an ideal environment for the faithful martyrs to reign with Christ during the millennium. Satan will be bound "until the thousand years have been completed." This is the first of three uses of this verb which subtly indicates God's control of the timing of events ("have been completed").

John explains that the dragon must then be released for a short time in the second part of verse 3, "After these things it is necessary to release him for a brief time." Why must the dragon be released? The answer is revealed later to be so that he can deceive humanity once more and gather them for the final conflict, but here all that is said is that it is necessary. This is probably the use of the verb *dei* to indicate divine necessity. The release of the dragon is all part of God's eternal plan as is his imprisonment for a thousand years. The brevity of the release of

dragon is stressed, especially in contrast to the thousand years of Christ's millennial reign and God's eternal kingdom. John and the churches of Asia Minor would have recognized the dragon, the Devil and Satan, to be the ultimate source of their persecution. As John describes the vision of the binding and imprisonment of Satan, these persecuted Christians would have been encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan will be imprisoned for a thousand years so that the millennium will be free from his diabolic influence and he will then be released for a short time, but even this is part of God's plan.

### **The Resurrection and Reign of the Faithful Martyrs**

John describes his vision of the resurrection and reign of the faithful martyrs in verses 4-6. John describes the souls of faithful martyrs coming to life and reigning with Christ for a thousand years in verse 4, "Then I saw thrones and they sat upon them and judgment was given to them, and the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God and whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not receive the mark on their forehead or on their hand, and they came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years." First, John describes thrones and those given authority to judge. Though some would argue that these are the same group described in the remainder of verse 4 the text seems to make a distinction between them and it is more natural to understand them to be the heavenly court and perhaps even the twenty-four elders since they are the only group that is described as having thrones in Revelation. However, the identity of these judges is not important for understanding the message. What is important is that they judge in favor of the faithful martyrs, in contrast to those who judged and condemned the martyrs to death in the world. They will be vindicated! Second, John describes the souls of those who were killed because of their faithful testimony and refusal to compromise. They maintained their faithful testimony to Jesus and the word of God even when threatened with death. They refused to compromise by worshiping the beast or receiving its mark even when threatened with death. Indeed, they were killed because of their faithful testimony and refusal to compromise. This is what qualifies them for participation in the millennium. Third, John describes the souls of the faithful martyrs coming to life and reigning with Christ for a thousand years. Some have argued that these are all the saints and not just the faithful martyrs. Their arguments are based on what is said about the resurrection in the rest of the New Testament and they may very well be right. However, the natural understanding of a simple reading of Revelation 20 is that this resurrection is exclusively for faithful martyrs. Therefore, I have concluded that the millennium is a special blessing for faithful martyrs. With the opening of the fifth seal in chapter 6 the martyrs cried out for vindication from beneath the altar and are given a white robe and told to wait a little longer. "Here their prayer is answered, and they are raised to reign with Christ in his kingdom" (Beasley-Murray, 293).

John describes the blessedness and holiness of those who have a part in the first resurrection in verses 5-6, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years have been completed. This [is] the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years." John describes the uniqueness of the first resurrection in verse 5. This is the second of three uses of this verb which subtly indicates God's control of the timing of events ("have been completed"). Verse 5 implies that there is a second

resurrection and that resurrection is described in the remainder of the chapter. That resurrection appears to be a general resurrection, including both saints and sinners, since judgment is made based on books, including the Book of Life, and "If anyone's [name] was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." As Mounce says, "The rest of the dead who did not come to life until the close of the thousand years would be all the faithful except the martyrs, plus the entire body of unbelievers" (Mounce, 370). Thus the resurrection of faithful martyrs is distinct from this general resurrection and a special blessing given by God to those who sacrificed their lives for Jesus and the gospel. Indeed, John pronounces a blessing on those who have a part in the first resurrection in verse 6. Not only are they blessed, but they are also holy, probably meaning that they are set apart as special to God. Indeed, he affirms that the second death has no power over them. They may have died physically, the first death, but they will not experience the second death and share the fate of unrepentant sinners whose names are not in the Book of Life--the lake that burns with fire and sulfur (20:14 and 21:8). What is more, they will serve as "priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years." Like the Priests and Levites of Israel, their portion will be the LORD. Those who have been oppressed and killed by wicked rulers will have their circumstances reversed and they will reign with Christ. As John describes his vision of the resurrection and reign of the faithful martyrs persecuted Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. As Fee says, "the martyrs themselves have a special place in the divine economy" and this is "God's way of reassuring the living that those who die because they bear Christ's name are not forgotten" (Fee, 281). Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful because those who are killed as a result of their faithful testimony and refusal to compromise will be raised to life and be blessed and holy since the second death will have no power over them, they will serve as priests to God and Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

### **The Ultimate Defeat and Eternal Torment of Satan**

John describes Satan's ultimate defeat and eternal torment in verses 7-10. John explains that Satan will be released from prison after one thousand years in verse 7, "When the thousand years have been completed, Satan will be released from his prison." This verse does not specify who will release Satan; however, the use of the passive "will be released" probably indicates that God is the ultimate authority behind his release. God is in control working out his eternal plan in accordance with his own time schedule. Satan will not be released until the end of the thousand years. This is the third of three uses of this verb that I have translated "have been completed" and it subtly indicates God's control of the timing of events. Mounce says that this verb "carries the idea of bringing to an appointed end or goal" (Mounce, 372).

John explains that Satan will deceive the nations and gather a great army in verse 8, "and will go out to lead astray the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for war, the number of them [being] like the sand of the seashore." Though Satan deceives the nations and gathers his great army to advance his own plan to overthrow God, this is all part of God's eternal plan. The size of the army that he gathers is emphasized. The army comes from every corner of the earth and is innumerable like the sand on the seashore. Gog and Magog were a wicked prince and nation that became emblematic of evil and opposition to God and his people (Ezekiel 38-39). As Osborne says, "The vision here interprets Gog and Magog as symbols of all the nations gathered together in opposition to Christ and his followers" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 15677-15678*).

John describes the army advancing and laying siege to the camp of God's people in the first part of verse 9, "They went up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints, the beloved city." He stresses their seemingly hopeless situation. The army is so large that it covers the breadth of the earth from horizon to horizon and the camp of God's people is completely surrounded. Nonetheless, John describes fire coming down from heaven to devour them in the second part of verse 9, "and fire came down from heaven and devoured them." This seemingly innumerable and indestructible army is consumed in a moment by fire from heaven. Satan again is no match for God and is easily defeated by fire from God. As Osborne says, "These are not equal forces, and the battle once more (like 19: 17– 21) is virtually a nonevent. God is sovereign and completely triumphant" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 15628-15629*).

John describes the casting of the devil into the lake of burning sulfur in verse 10, "The Devil, who deceives them, was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also [are] the beast and the false prophet; and they will be tormented day and night unto the ages of the ages." Thus Satan and his allies in the world, the beast and false prophet, will be punished incessantly ("day and night") for all eternally ("unto the ages of the ages"). John and the churches of Asia Minor would have recognized Satan as the diabolic force working through Rome and the imperial cult. As John describes his vision of the ultimate defeat and eternal torment of Satan, they would be encouraged to trust God and remain faithful to him even when threatened with death. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he will order fire from heaven to devour Satan and his army when they attack his people and Satan and his allies will be cast into the lake of burning sulfur where they will be tormented incessantly for all eternity.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today are also opposed by Satan and his powerful allies in the world and may begin to doubt God and perhaps consider abandoning their testimony and compromising their commitment. These similarities with the original situation provide a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern context. These message statements are already stated generally and they contain very little of a contextualized nature to require that they be adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, they are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because Satan will be imprisoned for a thousand years so that the millennium will be free from his diabolic influence and he will then be released for a short time, but even this is part of God's plan. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who are killed as a result of their faithful testimony and refusal to compromise will be raised to life and be blessed and holy since the second death will have no power over them, they will serve as priests to God and Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because he will order fire from heaven to devour Satan and his army when they attack his people and Satan and his allies will be cast into the lake of burning sulfur where they will be tormented incessantly for all eternity.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** THEY CAME TO LIFE AND REIGNED WITH CHRIST

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him no matter what the consequences.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what because Satan is no match for God and always loses, God is in total control whatever happens, faithful martyrs will be raised to life and reign with Christ, faithful martyrs will be blessed and holy, faithful martyrs will have no reason to fear the second death, and faithful martyrs will serve as priests to God and Christ, but Satan and his allies will be tormented incessantly for all eternity.

## **Introduction**

Christians are often opposed by Satan and his powerful allies in the world and may begin to doubt God and consider abandoning their testimony and compromising their commitment.

*Illustration of a Christian Being Intimidated and by Satan.* Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Satan and his powerful allies when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. In fact, they were in grave danger of being killed because of their faithful testimony and refusal to compromise. John describes his vision of the binding and imprisonment of Satan, the resurrection and reign of the faithful martyrs, and the ultimate defeat and doom of Satan in Revelation 20:1-10. Through this vision we are encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what the consequences. *Read Revelation 20:1-10.*

**I. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what because Satan is no match for God and always loses.**

**II. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what because God is in complete control whatever happens.**

**III. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what because faithful martyrs will be raised to life and reign with Christ.**

**IV. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what because faithful martyrs will be blessed and holy.**

**V. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what because faithful martyrs will have no reason to fear the second death.**

**VI. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what because faithful martyrs will serve as priest of God and Christ.**

**VII. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful no matter what because Satan and his allies will be tormented incessantly for all eternity.**

## **Conclusion**

We are often opposed by Satan and his powerful allies and may begin to doubt God and consider abandoning our testimony and compromising our commitment. Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Satan and his allies when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. In fact, they were in grave danger of being killed because of their faithful testimony and refusal to compromise. John describes his vision of the binding and imprisonment of Satan, the resurrection and reign of the faithful martyrs, and the ultimate defeat and doom of Satan in Revelation 20:1-10. Through this vision we are encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what the consequences. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him no matter what because Satan is no match for God and always loses, God is in total control no matter what happens, faithful martyrs will be raised to life and reign with Christ, faithful martyrs will be blessed and holy, faithful martyrs will have no

reason to fear the second death, and faithful martyrs will serve as priests to God and Christ, but Satan and his allies will be tormented incessantly for all eternity.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN**

### **THEN I SAW A GREAT WHITE THRONE Vision of the Final Judgment and the New Heaven and Earth Revelation 20:11-21:8**

The passage as I have defined it is difficult to distinguish from its context. However, this division seems justified since the passage begins with the one sitting on the great white throne and concludes with the words of the one sitting on the throne which pull everything together. Nonetheless, the division is somewhat arbitrary.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and the one sitting on it, from before whom the earth and sky fled, and no place was found for them. 12 I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the [Book] of Life. The dead were judged from what had been written in the books according to their deeds. 13 The sea gave up the dead in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and each person was judged according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 If anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 I also saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband. 3 I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he will tabernacle with them and they themselves will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes and there will no longer be death nor mourning nor crying nor pain, [for] the first things have passed away.

5 The one sitting on the throne said, "Behold, I am making everything new!" Then he says, "Write, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 He said to me, "They are done! I [am] the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the one who is thirsty I myself will give to him without cost out of the spring of the water of life. 7 The one who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he himself will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all the liars--their portion [will be] in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

##### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage has a futuristic emphasis with little revealed about the situation addressed. However, verses 7-8 do contain some clues for identifying the situation. Verse 7 refers to those who overcome. These are those who remain faithful to God in a hostile world. In the original context the enemy of Christians was Rome and the Imperial Cult which sought to deceive and compel Christians to confess their allegiance to Caesar as their Lord rather than Christ. Verse 8 refers to "the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who

practice magic arts, the idolaters and liars." These words imply the possibility that Christians could succumb to this pressure from Rome because of cowardice and lack of faith and compromise their commitment to Christ through wickedness and idolatry. The purpose of the passage was to encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage continues the climax of the book. The book climaxes with a description of God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies, the final judgment, and the restoration of the world order (17:1-22:5). This climax reinforces and supplements what precedes by encouraging Christians to trust God and remain faithful to him rather than compromise with Satan and his allies based on God's ultimate triumph over Satan and his allies and the restoration of the world order. This passage encourages faithfulness by describing the final judgment, assuring those who remain faithful of vindication, and warning those who compromise of judgment. Therefore, the passage could be considered the central passage of the division that places a clear choice before the readers--Will they compromise with Satan and his allies and share their judgment or remain faithful to Christ and share in the restored world order? The preceding passages in the climax reinforce this passage by depicting the ruin of Satan and his allies in the world (17:1-18; 18:1-20; 18:21-19:10; 19:11-21; and 20:1-10). The final passage in this division reinforces the message of this passage by describing the final blessed state of the faithful (21:9-22:5).

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be generally classified as an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. However, after the first two visionary images, the description becomes more auditory than visual. The first visionary image employs the picture of the great white throne judgment to warn Christians of God's judgment. The second visionary image employs the picture of the new heaven and earth and the Holy City Jerusalem to assure God's people of the blessings that await the faithful. The voice from the throne explains more fully what blessings await the faithful in the new heaven and new earth. The voice of the one sitting on the throne declares that everything is being renewed, assures those who are thirsty that they will drink from the water of life and those who overcome will be regarded as God's sons and be given an inheritance, and warns the cowardly and faithless that their inheritance will be eternal torment. These assurances and warnings provide motivation for Christians to trust God and remain faithful to him. Underlying these images and voices is an implied command, "Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him."

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage begins with a vision of the great white throne, the one sitting on it, and everyone standing before him to be judged (20:11-15). This vision encourages faithfulness based on the warning that everyone will have to stand before God and his judgment. Next, the passage contains a vision of a new heaven and a new earth and the Holy City Jerusalem and assurances of a loud voice from the throne (21:1-4). This vision and voice encourage faith and faithfulness based on this new reality and the blessings that come with it. The passage concludes with an announcement by the one sitting on the throne that everything has been completed, his assurances to those who thirst for him and overcome, and his warning to the cowardly and faithfulness (21:5-8). This announcement, assurances, and warning provide additional reasons for faith and faithfulness.



- I. Vision of the Great White Throne Judgment (20:11-15)
  - A. The Great White Throne and the One Sitting on It (11)
  - B. The Judgment of the Dead (12-13)
  - C. The Casting of Death and Hades into the Lake of Fire (14)
  - D. The Casting of Anyone Whose Name was Not Found in the Book of Life into the Lake of Fire (15)
- II. Visions of Renewal and Assurances from a Loud Voice from the Throne (21:1-4)
  - A. The New Heaven and Earth and Removal of the Sea (1)
  - B. The New Jerusalem Prepared and Adorned as a Bride for Her Husband (2)
  - C. Assurances of a Loud Voice from the Throne (3-4)
    - 1. Assurance that God will live with them and be their God (3)
    - 2. Assurance that God will console and deliver them from pain and sorrow (4)
- III. The Declaration of the One Seated on the Throne (21:5-8)
  - A. Announcement of the Renewal of Everything and Assurance of Its Trustworthiness (5)
  - B. Declaration of the Completion of Everything by the Alpha and the Omega the Beginning and the End (6a)
  - C. Assurance that the Thirsty and Overcomer Will Be Given the Water of Life and an Inheritance (6c-7)
  - D. Warning that the Cowardly and Unbelieving Will Have Their Inheritance in the Lake of Fire (8)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because all the dead will stand before God and his great white throne and be judged by their deeds and those whose names are not found in the Book of Life will be thrown into the lake of fire. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is going to create a new heaven and earth, prepare and adorn them so that they can be united with Christ, establish his dwelling place with them and be their God, and console them and take away all their pain and sorrow. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is going to make everything new, those who thirst for him will drink from the water of life, and those who overcome will receive an inheritance as God's children, but the inheritance of the cowardly and unbelieving will be in the lake of fire with the vile.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **The Great White Throne Judgment**

John describes his vision of the great white throne judgment in 20:11-15. John describes the great white throne and the one who sat on it in verse 11, "Then I saw a great white throne and the one sitting on it, from before whom the earth and sky fled, and no place was found for them." Though John does not identify the one sitting on the throne, it is certainly God. This will be confirmed later when the one sitting on the throne identifies himself as "the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End" (21:6). The greatness of the throne is appropriate because it is the throne of God. The throne is symbolic of God's sovereignty and the throne's white color is a symbol of his holiness and victory. As Osborne says, "It is a throne of purity and triumph and so rightly stands as the throne of judgment" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 15865-15866*). The earth and the sky fleeing from before the one sitting on the white throne probably accentuates God's

awesome majesty and the prospect of his judgment. This is stressed further by the observation that "no place was found for them." However, the earth and the sky fleeing could foreshadow the destruction of the heaven and the earth in preparation for the new heaven and earth.

John describes the judgment of the dead in verses 12-13, "I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the [Book] of Life. The dead were judged from what had been written in the books according to their deeds. The sea gave up the dead in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and each person was judged according to their deeds." The description of the dead standing before the throne emphasizes that everyone will be judged. As Beasley-Murray says, "The description is inclusive, embracing all humanity" (Beasley-Murray, 301). Both the great and the small will be judged. No one will be so important they are exempt and no one will be so insignificant that they will be overlooked. Even those who had been lost at sea will not be left out. As Mounce says, "The sea is specifically mentioned to show that no one--not even those whose bodies had gone unburied because lost at sea--would escape resurrection and judgment" (Mounce, 377). Everyone will be judged! The bases for the judgment are books, probably the record of all the deeds of every person, and the Book of Life, the registry of all of those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

John describes the casting of death and Hades into the lake of fire in verse 14, "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire." Death is the inevitable end of life and Hades was regarded as the abode of the dead. Together they represent all the fears and uncertainties that humans associate with death and corruption. In revelation the lake of fire is the place of eternal torment and is also called the second death. The first death is physical death, but the second death is eternal torment and much more frightening. Satan and his allies have already been thrown into the lake of fire. Now death and Hades join them and these final enemies of humanity are thrown into the lake of fire. Death and Hades are part of the world order that is passing away to make room for the new heaven and earth. As Mounce says, "The last vestige of sin's unlawful hegemony is cast into the lake of fire" (Mounce, 378).

John describes the casting of anyone whose name was not in the Book of Life into the lake of fire in verse 15, "If anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." In Revelation this Book of Life is more specifically the Lamb's Book of Life and lists all those who have been redeemed by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Though two sets of books are used, the key standard of judgment is the Lamb's Book of Life. All are found guilty and deserving of punishment because of their deeds, but only those who have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life avoid the lake of fire and receive eternal life. As John describes his vision of the white throne judgment, Christians would be encouraged to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because all the dead will stand before God and his great white throne and be judged by their deeds and those whose names are not found in the Book of Life will be thrown into the lake of fire.

### **The New Heaven and Earth and a Loud Voice from the Throne**

John describes his vision of a new heaven and earth and a loud voice from the throne in 21:1-4. John describes the new heaven and earth in verse 1, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new

earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea." The background for much of this vision is Isaiah 65 and the prophecy that God would destroy the old corrupt world and create a new pristine world which would be free from the struggles of the old order and characterized by peace and prosperity. Why is there no longer any sea? Many proposals have been made to answer this question, but this is a mystery that will probably never be solved until the end. The most likely alternative is that it represents evil and oppression. The sea is closely associated with evil in Revelation. It is the place from which the dragon and the beast emerged. Thus the absence of any sea could indicate that in the new heaven and earth there will be no evil and oppression.

John describes the coming of the New Jerusalem prepared and adorned as a bride for her husband in verse 2, "I also saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband." The recreation of Jerusalem has its background in the Old Testament and Jewish expectations for the restoration and renewal of Jerusalem. Here the image of the New Jerusalem is intertwined with the image of the bride. The image of the New Jerusalem as the bride is introduced here and will occur again in 21:9-22:5. The emphasis here is on the holiness and origin of the New Jerusalem and God's thorough preparation of the bride for her husband. The New Jerusalem is "the Holy City" and comes "down out of heaven from God." Marriage is an apt image of intimate union and God will prepare and adorn the bride for marriage to Jesus Christ, the Lamb. The image of the New Jerusalem as the bride depicts the congregation of God's faithful people and assures them that God will make them holy and new and prepare and adorn them so that they can be united with Christ.

John relates the assurances of a loud voice from the throne in verses 3-4. The loud voice from the throne assures Christians that God will live with them and be their God in verse 3, "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he will tabernacle with them and they themselves will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.'" Loud voices are used throughout Revelation to make important declarations. This loud voice comes from the throne, emphasizing its authority; however, what the voice says indicates that it is not the voice of God and must be the voice of the exalted Christ or an angel who is speaking with divine authority. The loud voice begins by yelling "Behold" a word that is frequently used in Revelation to point to important images and words. The tabernacle represents God's glorious presence with his people and the loud voice declares "the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he will tabernacle with them." He has pitched the tent of his glory among them. As Mounce observes, "The Greek word for tabernacle (*skēnē*) is closely related to the Hebrew *Shekinah*, which was used to denote the presence and glory of God" (Mounce, 383). The loud voice emphasizes that they are God's people by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "they, they will be his peoples" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun, "they themselves will be his peoples"). Normally the singular is employed in the phrase "God's people," however, here God speaks of "his peoples," probably to indicate the inclusiveness of his people, being constituted by those from every tribe and language and people and nation. The loud voice also emphasizes that God will be with them by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "God, he he will be with them" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun, "God himself will be with them.")

The loud voice from the throne assures Christians that God will console them and deliver them from pain and sorrow in verse 4, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes and there will no

longer be death nor mourning nor crying nor pain, [for] the first things have passed away." God will console them for all the suffering that they have endured. Indeed, when he destroys the old heaven and earth, he will also destroy the pain and death that caused them to mourn and cry. As Fanning says, "Everything that people weep over, whether publicly or alone, will be taken away when God's new creation arrives" (Fanning, 533). Fee summarizes the assurances of this section well:

Thus the future for God's "children" is rich, and beyond anything human beings have experienced to this point in time: a "New Jerusalem" where God dwells with his people, where sorrow is done forever, where the thirsty drink from an eternal spring flowing with the water of life, and where God's people live forever with their heavenly Father as his children (Fee, 294).

As John describes his vision of a new heaven and new earth and the New Jerusalem Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is going to create a new heaven and earth, prepare and adorn them so that they can be united with Christ, establish his dwelling place with them and be their God; and console them and take away all their pain and sorrow.

### **The Declaration of the One Sitting On the Throne**

John relates the declaration of the one seated on the throne in 21:5-8. The one sitting on the throne announces the renewal of everything and assures of its trustworthiness in verse 5, "The one sitting on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making everything new!' Then he says, 'Write, for these words are trustworthy and true.'" The one sitting on the throne introduces his declaration with "Behold" a word that is characteristically used in Revelation to introduce something important that must be heeded. The declaration itself is stated emphatically, "I am making everything new!" The command for John to write these words down probably stresses the importance of his announcement. This announcement must not be left out of the revelation that God has given him. The declaration must be written down because it is not only important but it is trustworthy and true. They can be relied on absolutely.

The one sitting on the throne declares that everything has been completed and identifies himself as the Alpha and Omega and the Beginning and the End in verse 6, "He said to me: 'They are done! I [am] the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.'" Most English versions translate "It is done!" (CSB, ESV, NAS, NIV, NKJ, and NRS). However, the voice of the one sitting on the throne actually declares "They are done!" This is actually only one word in the Greek text and is stated emphatically. The verb translated "They are done!" is in the perfect tense, emphasizing the certainty of this declaration by stating it an established fact. This declaration certainly affirms God's declaration that he is renewing all things, but based on the names by which God refers to himself it probably also affirms God's completion of his eternal plan from beginning to end. As Osborne says, "Finally, God here says 'They are over,' meaning that all the events of world history--including the world's destruction and the inauguration of the final new age--are at an end" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 16229-16230). The certainty of the renewal of all things is also stressed by the identity of the one who has declared "They are done!" He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and the Beginning and the End. Osborne adds, "In keeping with this title, God began history at creation and ends it

at the eschaton. But the title means he controls not only the beginning and the end but also everything in between; in other words, he is sovereign over history" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations* 16236-16237).

The one sitting on the throne assures the one who is thirsty and overcomes will be given the water of life and an inheritance as God's son in verses 6-7, "To the one who is thirsty I myself will give to him without cost out of the spring of the water of life. The one who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he himself will be my son." As Mounce observes, "In the arid climate of Palestine a spring of cool water would be a vivid symbol of refreshment and satisfaction" (Mounce, 385). Those who are thirsty are those whose greatest desire is for God. God's assurance to them is that he will give them the water of life; he will satisfy their thirst for him and they will experience life through him. This assurance is certain because it is God himself that gives it (Literally "I, I will give" and indicated in translation with a reflexive pronoun). That God will give this water without cost probably indicates that God will give the water of life without limits. God will give it freely! Those who overcome are those who have resisted the attempts of the world to compel and allure them to compromise their commitment. The assurance to them is that they will be his sons and receive an inheritance. God does not explain what "these things" are but they probably are at least all the things spoken of in this passage, life in the new heaven and new earth and the New Jerusalem and all this entails. The one sitting on the throne emphasizes their identity as his sons by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "he, he will be my son" and indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun, "he himself will be my son"). As Ashcraft says, "The terminology stresses the intimate family relationship which will be known by faithful Christians" (Ashcraft, 353).

The one sitting on the throne warns the cowardly, unbelieving, and vile that their portion will be in the lake of fire in verse 8, "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all the liars--their portion [will be] in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." God is certainly addressing Christians at this point since the ungodly sinners have already been dispatched. Yet most of the elements in the list of those who will receive their portion in the lake of fire includes sins that wouldn't be expected of Christians. The real dangers that Christians struggled with on this list are being cowardly and unbelieving. They were in danger of not trusting God and renouncing their commitment to him when faced with severe opposition and death. God warns Christians who are cowardly and unbelieving that they will share the same fate as "the vile, the murderers, the sexual immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all the liars." As John relates the declaration of the one sitting on the throne Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is going to make everything new, those who thirst for God will drink from the water of life, and those who overcome will receive an inheritance as God's children, but the inheritance of the cowardly and unbelieving will be in the lake of fire with the vile.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today often encounter opposition from Satan and his allies, who attempt to compel them to compromise their commitment to God. As a result they may become frightened and even consider forsaking their commitment to God in order to avoid difficulty. The statements of the message in the original context are already stated generally and there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that they be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern

situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because all the dead will stand before God and his great white throne and be judged by their deeds and those whose names are not found in the Book of Life will be thrown into the lake of fire. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is going to create a new heaven and earth, prepare and adorn them so that they can be united with Christ, establish his dwelling place with them and be their God, and console them and take away all their pain and sorrow. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is going to make everything new, those who thirst for God will drink from the water of life, and those who overcome will receive an inheritance as God's children, but the inheritance of the cowardly and unbelieving will be in the lake of fire with the vile.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** THEN I SAW A GREAT WHITE THRONE

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christian to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because everyone will stand before God and his great white throne, God is going to destroy the old heaven and earth and make everything new, God is going to prepare them so that they can be united with Christ, God is going to establish his dwelling place with them and be their God, God is going to console them and take away all their pain and sorrow, those who thirst for God will drink from the water of life, and those who overcome will be his children and receive an inheritance, but the inheritance of the cowardly and unbelieving will be in the lake of fire with the vile.

### **Introduction**

Christians today often encounter opposition from Satan and his allies, who attempt to compel to compromise their commitment to God. As a result they may become frightened and even consider forsaking their commitment to him. *Illustration of a Christian Being Intimidated by Satan and His Allies*. Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Satan and his powerful allies when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. In fact, they were in grave danger of being killed because of their faithful refusal to compromise. John describes his vision of the binding the great white throne judgment in Revelation 20:11-2:8. Through this vision God provides us with motivation for continuing to trust and remaining faithful to him. *Read Revelation 20:11-2:8.*

**I. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because everyone will stand before God and his great white throne.**

**II. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is going to destroy the old heaven and earth and make everything new.**

**III. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is going to prepare them so that they can be united with Christ.**

**IV. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is going to establish his dwelling place with them and be their God.**

**V. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because God is going to console them and take away all their pain and sorrow.**

**VI. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who thirst for him will drink from the water of life.**

**VII. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because those who overcome will receive an inheritance as God's children, but the inheritance of the cowardly and unbelieving will be in the lake of fire with the vile.**

### **Conclusion**

We often encounter opposition from Satan and his allies, who attempt to compel to us to compromise our commitment to God. As a result we may become frightened and even consider forsaking our commitment to him. John describes his vision of the binding the great white throne judgment in Revelation 20:11-2:8. Through this vision God provides us with motivation for continuing to trust him and remaining faithful to him. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him because everyone will stand before God and his great white throne; God is going to destroy the old heaven and earth and make everything new; God is going to prepare us so that we can be united with Christ; God is going to establish his dwelling place with us and be our God; God is going to console us and take away all our pain and sorrow; God is going to satisfy those who thirst for him; and God is going to give an inheritance to those who overcome, but the inheritance of the cowardly and unbelieving will be in the lake of fire with the vile.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT**

### **HERE! I WILL SHOW YOU THE BRIDE Vision of the Holy City Jerusalem Revelation 21:9-22:5**

The passage as I have defined it is difficult to separate from its contexts. However, even though it contains a variety of visionary images, they are all united around the Holy City Jerusalem as an illustration of the blessed eternal state of the faithful. Nonetheless, the division is somewhat arbitrary.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

21:9 One of the seven angels having the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me saying, "Here! I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 He carried me away in the Spirit upon a great and high mountain and showed me the Holy City Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God, its brilliance like the most precious stone, like jasper shining like crystal, 12 having a great, high wall, having twelve gates, and twelve angels on the gates and names written, which are [the names] of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel, 13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west, 14 the wall of the city having twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 The one talking with me had a golden measuring rod in order to measure the city and its gates and its wall. 16 The city is laid out foursquare, the length of it the same as the width. He measured the city with the rod, over 12,000 stadia in length; the length and the width and the height of it are equal. 17 He measured its wall, 144 cubits, by man's measurement, which is [also that] of the angel. 18 The material of its wall [was] jasper and the city pure gold, like pure glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every precious stone: The first foundation jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each one of the gates was [made] from a single pearl. The great street of the city [was] pure gold, like clear glass.

22 I did not see a temple in it because the Lord God Almighty is its temple, and the Lamb. 23 The city does not have need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God enlightened it and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it. 25 Its gates will never be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 They will bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. 27 Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does [what is] shameful or deceitful, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

22:1 Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, coming from the throne of God and the Lamb 2 in the middle of its street. On this side and that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree [are] for the healing of the nations. 3 There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God



and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will serve him. 4They will see his face, and his name [will be] on their foreheads. 5There will be no more night. They don't have need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them; and they will reign unto the ages of the ages.

### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage has a futuristic emphasis with little revealed about the situation addressed. However, the broader context of the book reflects a situation in which Christians were undergoing severe persecution and being enticed by the world. As a result Christians were in danger of compromising their commitment in order to escape death and enjoy the pleasures of the world. In the original context, Rome was seeking to compel Christians by force to renounce their faith in Christ and swear allegiance to the emperor and enticing Christians to compromise their commitment and share in the worldly prosperity of the empire. The purpose of the passage was to encourage Christians to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage completes the climax of the book. It is the climax of the climax! The book climaxes with a description of God's ultimate victory over Satan and his allies, the final judgment, and the restoration of the world order and blessed state of the faithful (17:1-22:5). This climax reinforces and supplements what precedes by providing assurance of God's ultimate triumph and judgment of Satan and his allies and the vindication of the faithful and establishment of the blessed place where they will spend eternity in fellowship with God. This serves as the basis for encouraging and warning Christians to trust God and remain faithful to him rather than compromise. This passage encourages faithfulness by describing the blessed place where the faithful will spend eternity in fellowship with God. The first five passages in this division described the defeat and judgment of Satan and his allies in the world (17:1-18; 18:1-20; 18:21-19:10; 19:11-21; and 20:1-10). In fact, the bride and holy city of this passage contrast with the Great Prostitute and unholy city in these earlier passages. This passage reinforces the immediately preceding passage by developing the assurance conveyed through the visionary images of the bride and the Holy City Jerusalem that were introduced in that passage (20:11-21:8).

### **Form and Function**

The passage can be generally classified as an apocalyptic vision report. Like most of the visions in Revelation, this is a visionary narrative rather than just a visionary picture. The primary visionary image developed in this passage is that of the Holy City Jerusalem. Through this visionary image the eternal blessed state of the faithful is described. The Holy City Jerusalem is described using many other visionary images including the bride and wife of the Lamb, the city's wall, the wall's gates and foundations, the city's layout and composition, the city's temple, the city's light, the river of the water of life, and the tree of life. God and the Lamb also have a significant role in the vision. Through these visionary images, various assurances are given with regard to the eternal blessed state of the faithful to encourage faith and faithfulness. For example, the wall of the city is described in such a way as to emphasize the security of the faithful in the future age. These assurances imply the command, "Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him."

### **Strategy and Structure**

The passage begins with an invitation to view the bride, the wife of the Lamb in 21:9-14. However, what is described is actually the Holy City Jerusalem. This general description of the city is expanded in subsequent divisions. Next, the layout and composition of the Holy City Jerusalem is described in 21:15-21. Next, the glory and purity of the Holy City Jerusalem is described in 21:22-27. Finally, the new Eden and intimacy with God in the Holy City Jerusalem is described in 22:1-5. Through these expanding and overlapping visionary images the blessed eternal state of the faithful is revealed and Christians are encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

- I. Invitation to View the Bride, the Holy City Jerusalem (21:9-14)
  - A. Invitation of the Angel to View the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb (9)
  - B. John Is Carried Away and Shown the Holy City Jerusalem (10)
  - C. The Glory and Brilliance of the Holy City Jerusalem (11)
  - D. The Wall and Gates of the Holy City Jerusalem (12-14)
- II. The Layout and Composition of the Holy City Jerusalem (15-21)
  - A. The Angel and His Golden Measuring Rod (15)
  - B. The Layout and Measurements of the Holy City Jerusalem (16-17)
  - C. The Composition of the Holy City Jerusalem (18-21)
    1. The composition of the wall (18)
    2. The composition of the foundation of the wall (19-20)
    3. The composition of the gates (21a)
    4. The composition of the street (21b)
- III. The Glory and Purity of the Holy City Jerusalem (21:22-27)
  - A. The Temple of the Holy City Jerusalem (22)
  - B. The Glory of the Holy City Jerusalem (23-26)
    1. God enlightens the city and the Lamb is its lamp (23)
    2. The kings of the earth will bring their glory into the city (24)
    3. The city's gates will never be shut because there will be no night there (25)
    4. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into the city (26)
  - C. The Purity of the Holy City Jerusalem (27)
- IV. The New Eden and Relationship with God in the Holy City Jerusalem (22:1-5)
  - A. The New Eden in the Holy City Jerusalem (1-3a)
    1. The river of the water of life (1-2a)
    2. The tree of life and healing (2b)
    3. The removal of the curse (3a)
  - B. The New Intimacy with God in the Holy City Jerusalem (22:3b-5)
    1. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him (3b)
    2. They will see God's face and have his name on their foreheads (4)
    3. The Lord God will give them light and they will reign with him forever (5)

### **Message or Messages**

Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can be united with Christ as his bride and dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven from God and radiates with the brilliance of his glory, where they will be completely secure and stable and have unlimited access to God. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to

him so that they can dwell in the majestic Holy City Jerusalem where God resides and there will be room for everyone and they will be absolutely secure within its wall. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so that they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be worshiped directly, God and the Lamb will provide light and dispel the darkness, the rulers and nations will bring glory and honor to God, and no one who is shameful will be able to enter, only those whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life. Christians should continue to trust in God and remain faithful to him so that they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they can drink from the river of the water of life, eat from the tree of life and be healed by its leaves, and there is no longer any curse. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they will have the privilege of serving God and the Lamb and they will see God's face and have his mark of ownership, the Lord God will give them light and dispel the darkness, and they will reign with him forever and ever.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **Invitation to View the Bride, the Holy City Jerusalem**

John relates the angel's invitation to view the bride and describes the Holy City Jerusalem in 21:9-11. John relates that the angel invited him to view the bride, the wife of the Lamb in verse 9, "One of the seven angels having the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me saying, 'Here! I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.'" This angel is introduced with the same words with which the angel in 17:1 is introduced. That angel invited him to view Babylon the Great and the contrast with the bride, the Holy City Jerusalem, is obvious. Thus, Christians are faced with a choice of two cities: they can choose Babylon the Great and its wickedness or the Holy City Jerusalem and its purity. Indeed, the angel is identified as one of the seven angels with the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, perhaps to caution Christians to make the right choice. Here the bride is also called the wife of the Lamb. This seems to indicate that the marriage has already taken place and portrays the intimate relationship of Christ with his faithful people as a marriage.

John describes being carried away by the angel and shown the Holy City Jerusalem in verse 10, "He carried me away in the Spirit upon a great and high mountain and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." Though the invitation was to see the bride of the Lamb, the angel shows John the Holy City Jerusalem. The Holy City Jerusalem depicts the eternal destiny of God's faithful people. The language is similar to chapter 17, when one of the angels having the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues carried John away to the wilderness to show him the Great Prostitute. Thus the desolation of the Great Prostitute is contrasted with the sublime majesty of the Holy City Jerusalem. As Mounce says, "One is of the earth, symbolizing the unbridled passion of evil, and the other descends from heaven, the epitome of all that is pure and beautiful" (Mounce, 389). John describes the glory and brilliance of the Holy City Jerusalem in verse 11, "having the glory of God, its brilliance like the most precious stone, like jasper shining like crystal." The eternal home of God's faithful people will radiate with the brilliance of the glory of God. John illustrates the brilliance of their eternal home by comparing it to Jasper. In fact he uses the superlative form of the adjective to emphasize that "its brilliance is like the most precious stone." He further emphasizes its brilliance and glory by comparing to "jasper shining like crystal."

John describes the wall, gates, and foundations of the Holy City Jerusalem in verses 12-14, "having a great, high wall, having twelve gates, and twelve angels on the gates and names written, which are [the names] of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel, three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west, the wall of the city having twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." The wall defined the boundaries of a city and provided protection to those who dwelt within. Persecuted Christians could not help seeing in the image of "a great, high wall" an assurance of the security of their eternal home. Gates provided access to the city. The twelve gates probably depict that God's faithful people will have easy access to God's presence in their eternal home. However, this easy access is not described in such a way that would nullify the security of the city since the gates are guarded by twelve angels. An intriguing element of this visionary image is that the twelve gates are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel while the twelve foundations are inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The visionary images of gates and foundations are potentially rich in meaning. At the very least the gates continue to assure the faithful of their easy access to God and the foundations assure Christians of the stability of their eternal home. These visionary images and the names inscribed on them may indicate that the basis for (foundations) and access to (gates) their eternal home, the Holy City Jerusalem, is what God has revealed through Israel (the twelve tribes of Israel) and Jesus has revealed through his disciples (the twelve apostles of the Lamb). As John describes the invitation of the angel to view the bride and describes the Holy City Jerusalem Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him based on what is revealed about the eternal destiny of the faithful. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can be united with Christ as his bride and dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven from God and radiates with the brilliance of his glory, where they will be completely secure and stable and have unlimited access to God.

### **The Layout and Composition of the Holy City Jerusalem**

John describes the layout and composition of the Holy City Jerusalem in 21:15-21. John relates that the angel had a golden measuring rod to measure the city in verse 15, "The one talking with me had a golden measuring rod in order to measure the city and its gates and its walls." Measurement is often used in the Prophets as an indication of God's protection and this is probably part of the significance here as it was in 11:1. John describes the layout and measurements of the Holy City Jerusalem in verses 16-17, "The city is laid out foursquare, the length of it the same as the width. He measured the city with the rod, over 12,000 stadia in length; the length and the width and the height of it are equal. He measured its wall, 144 cubits, by man's measurement, which is [also that] of the angel." Though the language used in the description seems precise, it is actually somewhat ambiguous. Though it is difficult to conceptualize, what I picture is a city laid out in a square with walls 12,000 stadia in width, length, and height and 144 cubits thick. Twelve thousand stadia is approximately 1,500 miles, but this number is a multiple of 12 and probably symbolic for completeness. As Ashcraft says, "It is probable, however, that John intends these only to suggest a greatness beyond all measurement and description" (Ashcraft, 355). One hundred and forty-four cubits is approximately 72 yards, but again this number is a multiple of twelve and probably symbolic for completeness. The magnitude of the city probably emphasizes the majesty of the eternal home of the faithful. The large size of the city probably emphasizes that there is room for all the faithful. The incredible height and thickness of the walls of the city probably emphasize its

security. The shape of the city also is significant. It is a cube like the Holy of Holies but on a much grander scale. The Holy of Holies was the focal point of God's presence in the temple (See 1 Kings 6:20). What is more no one was allowed access to the Holy of Holies except the High Priest and even then only once a year. However, the faithful will have perpetual access to God in the city. As Fee says, "Pictured here at last is the dwelling place of God with human beings, as the 'New Jerusalem' itself becomes the holy place, now available to all of God's people and for all time" (Fee, 299).

John describes the composition of the Holy City Jerusalem in verses 18-21, "The material of its wall [was] jasper and the city pure gold, like pure glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every precious stone: The first foundation jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysolite, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each one of the gates was [made] from a single pearl. The great street of the city [was] pure gold, like clear glass." This description of the composition of the Holy City Jerusalem emphasizes its majesty. The quality of the gold with which the city and its great street is made is also stressed. The city is made of "pure gold, like pure glass" and the great street is made of "pure gold, like clear glass." The wall of the city is made of jasper and even the foundations of the wall "are adorned with every precious stone." Each of the gates of the city are made out of a single pearl. As John describes the Holy City Jerusalem Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him based on what is revealed about the eternal destiny of the faithful. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so that they can dwell in the majestic Holy City Jerusalem where God resides and there will be room for everyone and they will be absolutely secure within its wall.

### **The Glory and Purity of the Holy City Jerusalem**

John describes the glory and purity of the Holy City Jerusalem in 21:22-27. John describes the temple of the Holy City Jerusalem in verse 22, "I did not see a temple in it because the Lord God Almighty is its temple, and the Lamb." Surprisingly John does not see a temple in the city. The temple and before it the tabernacle were understood as the focal points of God's presence among his people. But as John explains, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are so clearly manifest in the city that there is no need for a temple. In the city everyone has direct access to God and the Lamb without the need for outward forms like a temple.

John describes the glory of the Holy City Jerusalem in verses 23-26, "The city does not have need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God enlightened it and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut, for there will be no night there. They will bring the glory and honor of the nations into it." Two themes are intertwined in these verses. First, in verses 23 and 25 John asserts that there is no need for external lights like the sun and moon to shine because the glory of God enlightens the city and the Lamb is its lamp. Indeed, in the city the gates will never be shut because there will be no night there, presumably because God and the Lamb perpetually shine within it. Darkness is a common biblical image depicting evil and distress, whereas light is an image depicting goodness and hope. Thus these verses probably depict the goodness and hope that are found in the city because of the light provided by God and the Lamb. Second, in verses 24 and 26 John asserts that the nations will walk in the city's light and the kings and

nations will bring their glory into it. Earlier in Revelation the kings and nations of the earth are described as being arrogant, materialistic, and antagonistic to God and his people. However, in the Holy City Jerusalem they will walk in the light of God and honor and glorify him. Indeed, this is the fulfillment of the words that the victorious multitude sang in 15:4, "all nations will come and worship before you."

John describes the purity of the Holy City Jerusalem in verse 27, "Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does [what is] shameful or deceitful, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." John stresses that nothing unclean or anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful will ever or by asserting this absolutely ("Nothing unclean will ever enter it"). He also stresses that only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be allowed in the city. The presumption is probably that those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will live accordingly. Thus this is probably a warning of the need for faithfulness. As John describes the glory and purity of the Holy City Jerusalem, Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him based on what is revealed about the eternal destiny of the faithful. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so that they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be worshiped directly, God and the Lamb will provide light and dispel the darkness, the rulers and nations will bring glory and honor to God, and no one who is shameful will be able to enter, only those whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life.

### **The New Eden and Intimacy with God In the Holy City Jerusalem**

John describes the new Eden and intimacy with God in the Holy City Jerusalem in 22:1-5. John describes the new Eden in the Holy City Jerusalem in verses 1-3. However, what is described here surpasses what is described about the old Eden. First, he describes the river of the water of life, "Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, coming from the throne of God and the Lamb in the middle of its street." Water is a necessity for life and indeed this river flows with the water of life. This image of the river of the water of life seems to reflect the rivers in the garden of Eden. The image emphasizes the purity of the supply which is described as being "as bright as crystal." As Mounce says, this "describes the river as a sparkling rush of pure water" (Mounce, 399). This image also emphasizes that the river flows "from the throne of God and the Lamb." As Fanning says, "the clear symbolism here is that God and the Lamb are the ever-abundant source of life and health for their people" (Fanning, 554). Furthermore, this image probably emphasizes the availability of this water for everyone in the city. The river of the water of life flows "in the middle of its street." Second, he describes the tree of life, "On this side and that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree [are] for the healing of the nations." Food is also a necessity for life and indeed this is the tree of life. The tree of life reflects the tree in Eden that would enable those who ate it to live forever. The language describing the tree of life is somewhat ambiguous. What I picture is a grove of trees, some on one side of the river of life and some on the other side. In my imagination these trees produce twelve crops of fruit during the year, one crop of fruit every month. This image emphasizes the bountiful provision of life in this garden city. Again, this image probably emphasizes that the fruit of the tree of life is available for everyone since this grove of trees is also in the middle of the street. Indeed, they will also have access to the leaves of the tree of life that are "for the healing of the nations." Third, he asserts that there will no longer be a curse in the first part of verse 3, "There will no

longer be any curse." As result of their sin Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden and experienced pain and death. But this will not be the case in this garden city. They will have access to the river of the water of life and the fruit of the tree of life and its healing leaves in the new Eden. They will by no means experience pain and death! As John describes the new Eden in the Holy City Jerusalem Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him based on what is revealed about the eternal destiny of the faithful. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so that they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they can drink from the river of the water of life, eat from the tree of life and be healed by its leaves, and there is no longer any curse.

John describes the new intimacy with God in the Holy City Jerusalem in verses 3-5. This could also be understood as extension of image of the new Eden since Adam and Eve had a close relationship with God in the old Eden before the fall. However, again what is described about the new Eden surpasses anything that is said about the old Eden. John asserts that the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him in second part of verse 3, "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will serve him." In the ancient world, serving the king was regarded as a great honor. How much greater will be the honor of the faithful to serve before the throne of God and the exalted Christ! John asserts that they will see God's face and have his name written on their foreheads in verse 4, "They will see his face, and his name [will be] on their foreheads." Mounce says that seeing God's face is "The greatest of all eternity's blessings" (Mounce, 400). Even Moses when he asked to see God's glory was not allowed to see his face and was only allowed to look at his back (Exodus 33:18-23). Indeed, God told him "You cannot see My face, for no one can see Me and live." (33:20 CSB). Nonetheless, in the city all the faithful will be able to look on God's face and see the full extent of his glory. They will also have his mark of ownership on their foreheads. They will be identified as his! John asserts that the Lord God will give them light and they will reign with him forever in verse 5, "There will be no more night. They don't have need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them; and they will reign unto the ages of the ages." This verse reinforces that God's presence and glory will give them light (21:23-24). Indeed, John affirms that they "will reign unto the ages of the ages." Those who have suffered at the hands of harsh rulers will themselves share in the regency of God and the exalted Christ. As John describes the new intimacy with God in the Holy City Jerusalem Christians would be encouraged to continue to trust God and remain faithful to him based on what is revealed about the eternal destiny of the faithful. Therefore, Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they will have the privilege of serving God and the Lamb, they will see God's face and have his mark of ownership, the Lord God will give them light and dispel the darkness, and they will reign with him forever and ever.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today often encounter opposition from Satan and his allies, who attempt to compel them to compromise their commitment to God. As a result they may become frightened and even consider forsaking their commitment to God. I have already stated the message of this passage generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that the message be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can be united with Christ as his bride and dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven from

God and radiates with the brilliance of his glory, where they will be completely secure and stable and have unlimited access to God. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so that they can dwell in the majestic Holy City Jerusalem where God resides and there will be room for everyone and they will be absolutely secure within its wall. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so that they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be worshiped directly, God and the Lamb will provide light and dispel the darkness, the rulers and nations will bring glory and honor to God, and no one who is shameful will be able to enter, only those whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so that they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they can drink from the river of the water of life, eat from the tree of life and be healed by its leaves, and there is no longer any curse. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they will have the privilege of serving God and the Lamb, they will see God's face and have his mark of ownership, the Lord God will give them light and dispel the darkness, and they will reign with him forever and ever.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** COME, I WILL SHOW YOU THE BRIDE

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians continue to trust God and remain faithful to him.

**Proposition:** Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven from God, where they will be completely secure within its wall, they will be united with Christ as his bride and enjoy an intimate fellowship with God, God will shine with the brilliance of his glory and dispel the darkness, they will drink from the river of the water of life and eat from the tree of life, they will have the privilege of serving God before his throne, and they will reign with him forever and ever.

### **Introduction**

Christians today often encounter opposition from Satan and his allies, who attempt to compel them to compromise their commitment to God. As a result they may become frightened and even consider forsaking their commitment to him. *Illustration of a Christian Being Intimidated by Satan and His Allies.* Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Satan and his powerful allies when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. In fact, they were in grave danger of being killed because of their refusal to compromise. John describes his vision of the Holy City Jerusalem in Revelation 21:9-22:5. Through this vision God reveals the eternal state of the faithful as motivation for continuing to trust him and remaining faithful to him. *Read Revelation 21:9-22:5.*

**I. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem that is coming out of heaven from God.**

**II. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they will be completely secure within its wall.**



**III. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they will be united with Christ as his bride and enjoy intimate fellowship with God.**

**IV. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where God will shine with the brilliance of his glory and dispel the darkness.**

**V. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they will drink from the river of the water of life and eat from the tree of life.**

**VI. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they will have the privilege of serving before the throne of God and the exalted Christ.**

**VII. Christians should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so they can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem where they will reign with him forever and ever.**

### **Conclusion**

We often encounter opposition from Satan and his allies, who attempt to compel us to compromise our commitment to God. As a result we may become frightened and even consider forsaking our commitment to God. Christians in Asia Minor were also opposed by Satan and his powerful allies when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. In fact, they were in grave danger of being killed because of their refusal to compromise. John describes his vision of the Holy City Jerusalem in Revelation 21:9-22:5. Through this vision God reveals the eternal state of the faithful to encourage us to continue to trust and remain faithful to him. We should continue to trust God and remain faithful to him so we can dwell in the Holy City Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven from God where we will be completely secure within its wall, we will be united with Christ and enjoy intimate fellowship with God, God will shine with the radiance of his glory and dispel the darkness, we will drink from the river of the water of life and eat from the tree of life, we will have the privilege of serving God before the throne of God and the exalted Christ, and we will reign with him forever and ever. Take warning! As John says, "Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does [what is] shameful or deceitful, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE**

### **BEHOLD, I AM COMING SOON!**

#### **Conclusion**

#### **Revelation 22:6-21**

This passage as defined contains a number of diverse elements. However, I have chosen to deal with them as a passage because these elements are united around the concern for the readers to heed the message of Revelation.

#### **Study of the Passage**

##### **Text and Translation**

22:6 Then he said to me, "These words [are] faithful and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.

7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed [is] the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

8 I, John, am the one who hears and sees these things and when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who is showing me these things. 9 But he says to me, "Beware, no! I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers the prophets and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

10 Then he says (present) to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book for the time is near. 11 Let the one who does wrong still do wrong and let the vile still be vile, but let the righteous still do right and let the one who is holy still be holy.

12 Behold, I am coming soon and my wage [is] with me to give back to each one according to what his work is. 13 I [am] the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

14 Blessed are those who wash their robes so that their right will be to the tree of life and they can enter the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 I myself, Jesus, sent my angel to testify about these things to you for the churches. I myself am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star.

17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

18 I myself testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds on to these things, God will add on to him the plagues which have been written in this book; 19 And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away from him his share from the tree of life and from the holy city, which have been written in this book.

20 The one who testifies to these things says, 'Yes! I am coming soon!

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus [be] with all.

### **Situation and Purpose**

The passage has a futuristic emphasis with little directly revealed about the situation addressed. However, the content of the passage does reflect a concern that Christians might not heed the message of Revelation and compromise their commitment to God and compromise with the world. In addition, the broader context of the book reflects a situation in which Christians were undergoing severe persecution and being enticed by the world. As a result Christians were in danger of compromising their commitment to avoid difficulty and enjoy the pleasures of the world. In the original context, Rome was seeking to compel Christians by force to renounce their faith in Christ and swear allegiance to the emperor and enticing Christians to compromise their commitment and share in the worldly prosperity of the empire. The purpose of the passage was to encourage Christians to heed the message of Revelation and continue to trust Christ and remain faithful to him.

### **Literary Context and Role**

This passage is the conclusion of the Book of Revelation. This conclusion commends the book and its message to the readers and encourages them to heed that message without distorting it. Therefore, it is not surprising that the passage refers generally to the book as a whole on several occasions using expressions like "the words of the prophecy of this book" (7, 10, and 18); "these words" (6); and "this testimony for the churches" (16). In addition, specific elements of the content of the book are referred to on occasion. For example, "the tree of life" and "the plagues" described in earlier chapters are referred to specifically here. Indeed, this passage summarizes and reinforces many of the important themes found in Revelation. In addition, this passage has many points of contact with the introduction to Revelation, especially the prologue in 1:1-8 (See Osborne, Kindle Locations 17135-17139).

### **Form and Function**

This passage contains many diverse elements. The angel's assurance that the words of the book are faithful and true in verse 6 encourages Christians to heed the message. Jesus' blessing of those who keep the words of Revelation in verse 7 serves to encourage Christians to heed the message of Revelation. The exchange between John and the angel in verses 8-9 is odd, but through it Christians are probably exhorted along with John to worship God alone. Though the exhortation in verses 10-11 is somewhat complicated, the angel essentially exhorts those doing what is right and holy to continue doing so. Jesus' announcement of his imminent return with his wage in verses 12-13 serves to encourage Christians of the need for faithfulness. Jesus' blessing of those who wash their robes and warning of the exclusion of the wicked in verses 14-15 probably serves to encourage Christians to continue to rely on God's grace and to discourage them from being corrupted by the world. Jesus' identification of himself as the one who sent the angel with this testimony in verse 16 probably authenticates the message of Revelation and encourages Christians to heed it. Though the exhortation in verse 17 is somewhat complicated, Jesus essentially exhorts those who hear the invitation and come to him to invite others. Jesus' warning to anyone who distorts the book in 18-19 discourages those who hear Revelation from distorting its message. Jesus' announcement of his imminent return and John's expression his desire for Jesus to return and for his grace to be with all in verses 20-21 probably serves to encourage Christians to long for Jesus' return and pray for his grace.

## Strategy and Structure

This passage contains a collection of loosely related heavenly declarations by various speakers, predominantly an angel and Jesus. Some of these declarations encourage the readers to read and heed the message of Revelation without distortion (6-7, 16, and 18-19). Others reinforce prominent messages in the book like Jesus' imminent return (7, 12, and 20), worshipping God alone (8-9), living righteously without compromise (10-11, 12-13, 14-15), and testifying faithfully (17). The speakers of these declarations are often difficult to distinguish. Many attempts have been made to provide a broader structure to this passage with little consensus.

- I. The Angel Assures that These Words Are Faithful and True (6)
  - A. The Angel Assures that These Words Are Faithful and True
  - B. The Angel Explains the Origin and Purpose of These Words
- II. Jesus Blesses Those Who Keep the Words of the Prophecy (7)
  - A. Jesus Announces His Imminent Return
  - B. Jesus Blesses Those Who Keep the Words of the Prophecy
- III. The Angel Exhorts John to Worship God Alone (8-9)
  - A. John Attempts to Worship of the Angel (8)
  - B. The Angel's Exhortation to Worship God Alone (9)
- IV. The Angel Exhorts Those Doing What Is Right and Holy to Continue (10-11)
  - A. The Angel Exhorts John not to Seal the Words of the Prophecy (10)
  - B. The Angel Commands Those Doing What Is Right and Holy to Continue (11)
- V. Jesus Announces His Imminent Return with His Wage (12-13)
  - A. Jesus Announces His Imminent Return with His Wage (12)
  - B. Jesus Reveals that He Is the Alpha and Omega (13)
- VI. Jesus Blesses Those Who Wash Their Robes (14-15)
  - A. Jesus Blesses Those Who Wash Their Robes (14)
  - B. Jesus Excludes the Corrupt and Wicked (15)
- VII. Jesus Identifies Himself as the One Who Sent His Angel with This Testimony (16)
- VIII. Jesus Exhorts Those Who Hear the Invitation to Invite Others to Come (17)
  - A. The Spirit and the Bride Invite Others to Come
  - B. Jesus Commands Those Who Hear the Invitation to Invite Others
  - C. Invitation for All Who Are Thirsty to Come and Take the Water of Life
- IX. Jesus Warns Anyone Who Distorts This Book of Prophecies (18-19)
  - A. Jesus Warns of the Consequences of Adding Anything to This Book of Prophecies
  - B. Jesus Warns of the Consequences of Taking Away Anything from This Book of Prophecies
- X. Jesus Announces His Imminent Return and John Expresses His Desire and Prays (20-21)
  - A. Jesus Announces His Imminent Return (20a)
  - B. John Expresses His Desire for Jesus to Return and Prays for His Grace to Be with All (20b-21)

## Message or Messages

Christians should heed the message of Revelation because these words are faithful and true since the Lord who inspired the prophets sent his angel to show his servants what will certainly take place soon. Christians should obey the message of Revelation because Jesus is coming soon and those who keep the words of this prophecy are blessed. Christians should worship God alone because worshipping anyone or anything else is abhorrent and God alone is worthy of worship. Christians should continue to do what is right and holy even though the ungodly are persistently wicked and corrupt because the time is near for the fulfillment of all that has been prophesied. Christians should be righteous and holy because Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, and the First and the Last and he is coming soon with his wage which he will give to each one according to what they have done. Christians should continue to trust Jesus and remain faithful to him because those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb will have the right to enter the gates of the city and eat from the tree of life, but those who are corrupt and wicked will be excluded. Christians should obey the message of Revelation because Jesus himself sent his angel with this testimony and is both the origin as well as offspring of David and the bright and morning star who will usher in the dawn of the messianic age. Christians should join the Spirit and Bride in inviting whoever is thirsty and wants to come and take the free gift of the water of life through committing their lives in faith to Jesus and his sacrificial death. Christians should take the message of Revelation seriously and not distort it because God will add the plagues of these prophecies to anyone who adds anything to the message and God will take away the share in the tree of life and in the Holy City of anyone who takes away anything from the message. Christians should heed the message of Revelation because it is Jesus' testimony, long for his coming, and pray for his grace.

### **Analysis of the Details**

#### **The Angel Assures that These Words Are Faithful and True**

The angel assures that these words are faithful and true verse 6, "Then he said to me, 'These words [are] faithful and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.'" Though "These words" could refer to what has preceded immediately, it probably refers to the entire book. By affirming that these words are "faithful and true" the angel is assuring Christians that they are an accurate depiction of what will actually happen. The angel identifies the Lord who inspired the spirits of the prophets as ultimate origin of these words and affirms that these words have been faithfully transmitted by his angel. As Fanning says, "The description of the Lord as 'the God of the spirits of the prophets' anchors this revelation in the inspiration of the prophets by God's Spirit across the generations" (Fanning, 557). The angel concludes by explaining the purpose for these words, "to show his servants what must soon take place." His servants are almost certainly Christians. The verb translated "must take place" stresses God's control over events and the certainty that they will happen. The adverb translated "soon" is used frequently in the passage to emphasize both the suddenness and imminence of fulfillment and the urgency of heeding what is said. As the angel assures them of the reliability of this revelation Christians would be encouraged to heed its message. Therefore, Christians should heed the message of Revelation because these words are faithful and true since the Lord who inspired the prophets sent his angel to show his servants what will certainly take place soon.

#### **Jesus Blesses the One Who Keeps the**

## **Words of the Prophecy**

Jesus blesses the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book in verse 7, "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed [is] the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." Though the speaker is not identified, the content of this declaration indicates that it must be the exalted Christ. The exalted Christ emphatically declares, "Behold, I am coming soon!" The interjection translated "Behold" is frequently used to introduce important declarations that must be heeded. The adverb translated "soon" again stresses the imminence of Jesus' return. This is the first of three similar declarations of the exalted Christ in this passage stressing his imminent return. Indeed, the imminent return of the exalted Christ is an important emphasis in the entire book. The exalted Christ encourages Christians to keep the words of the prophecy of this book by blessing the one who does so. In this context to keep the words of the prophecy probably means to obey them. The basic message of this book is that Christians must overcome by continuing to trust God and remaining faithful to him. The imminent return of the exalted Christ underscores the urgency of overcoming. As the exalted Christ declares his imminent return and blesses those who keep the words of the prophecy Christians would be encouraged to obey the message of Revelation. Therefore, Christians should obey the message of Revelation because Jesus is coming soon and those who keep the words of this prophecy are blessed.

## **The Angel Exhorts John to Worship God Alone**

John relates that the angel exhorted him to worship God alone in verses 8-9. John confesses that he attempted to worship the angel who showed him the revelation in verse 8, "I, John, am the one who hears and sees these things and when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who is showing me these things." This is somewhat surprising considering he has been rebuked for doing the same thing before (19:10). John's repeated offense perhaps illustrates how prone people are to worship the created rather than the Creator. John relates that the angel exhorted him to worship God alone in verse 9, "But he says to me, "Beware, no! I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers the prophets and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!" The prohibition I have literally translated "Beware, no!" is often amplified in English versions and translated "Don't do that!" (CSB), "You must not do that!" (ESV, NRS), or "Do not do it!" (NIV). This prohibition expresses the angel's shock and abhorrence at what John was doing. The angel's words are a rebuke as well as a prohibition of worshiping him. The reason the angel gives is that he is no different than other servants of God like John and the prophets and others who keep the words of this book. Implicit in this reason is that God is the only one worthy of worship. Thus the angel emphatically commands John to "Worship God!" As the angel rebukes John and commands him to worship God Christians would be encouraged to worship God alone. Therefore, Christians should worship God alone because worshiping anyone or anything else is abhorrent and God alone is worthy of worship.

## **The Angel Exhorts the One Doing What Is Right and Holy to Continue**

The angel exhorts the one doing what is right and holy to continue in verses 10-11. The angel exhorts John to leave the prophecy unsealed in verse 10, "Then he says to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book for the time is near.'" In some apocalyptic literature the content is sealed for a later time (See for example Daniel 12:4). However, the angel commands John to leave the prophecy unsealed "for the time is near." The imminence of Christ's return is a

prominent theme in Revelation and is emphasized repeatedly in this passage. The imminence of Christ's return stresses the urgency of heeding the angel's exhortation to do what is right and holy that follows. The angel exhorts the one doing what is right and holy to continue in verse 11, "Let the one who does wrong still do wrong and let the vile still be vile, but let the righteous still do right and let the one who is holy still be holy ." The first half of the verse is problematic and has been understood in a variety of ways. I have understood it as an acknowledgement of the persistent wickedness and corruption of ungodly people. Thus the second half of the verse exhorts Christians to do what is right and holy even though they live in a world where people are stubbornly wicked and corrupt. The adverb translated "still" emphasizes that Christians need to persistently do what is right and be holy. As Osborne says, "in light of the overwhelming presence of evil in this world, the saints are to be known for their righteous deeds and holy living" (Osborne, Kindle Location 17344). Therefore, Christians should continue to do what is right and holy even though the ungodly are persistently wicked and corrupt because the time is near for the fulfillment of all that has been prophesied.

### **Jesus Announces His Imminent Return With His Wage**

Jesus announces his imminent return with his reward in verse 12-13. Jesus announces his imminent return with his reward in verse 12, "Behold, I am coming soon and my wage [is] with me to give back to each one according to what his work is." This is the second of three times Jesus announces his imminent return in this passage. Again, his announcement is introduced by "Behold." This interjection is used to underscore the importance of what is about to be revealed. Again, he indicates that he is coming soon. The adverb translated "soon" is used repeatedly to emphasize the imminence of Jesus' return. This announcement of his imminent return stresses the urgency of heeding what he says subsequently. The word I have translated "wage" is sometimes translated "reward" (CSB, NAS, NIV, NKJ, and NRS). Indeed, this is what it usually means in the New Testament. However, it is clearly used here in the sense of recompense for what is done and need not necessarily be a good thing. This is probably a warning as well as an assurance. Jesus uses an indefinite adjective (Translated "to each one") to stress that everyone will be recompensed. No one will be left out! The basis that Jesus gives for determining what the wage will be is conduct, "what his work is." Those who do what is right will be paid accordingly. Those who do what is wrong will likewise be paid accordingly. This is not salvation by works, but a warning that Christians are still accountable for their actions. Jesus reveals his identity in verse 13, "I [am] the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet. Thus these three descriptive names are synonymous. The piling up of these descriptive names stresses that Jesus is eternal and probably also that he preeminent from beginning to end. As Osborne says, "The titles refer to the sovereignty of God and Christ over history. They control the beginning of creation and its end, and therefore they control every aspect of history in between" (Osborne, Kindle Locations 17388-17389). His identity underscores the need for Christians to be faithful. As Jesus announces his imminent return with his reward Christians would be encouraged to be righteous and holy. Therefore, Christians should be righteous and holy because Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, and the First and the Last and he is coming soon with his wage which he will give to each one according to what they have done.

### **Jesus Blesses Those Who Wash Their Robes**

Jesus blesses those who wash their robes in verses 14-15. Jesus blesses those who wash their robes in verse 14, "Blessed are those who wash their robes so that their right will be to the tree of life and they can enter the gates into the city." Those who wash their robes are those who have trusted in Jesus and his sacrificial death on the cross. The angel identifies the great multitude in 7:14 as those who "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Christians are saved by the grace of God in Christ Jesus! However, Revelation also reveals that Christians must overcome by refusing to compromise with the world. Indeed, the present participle is used, suggesting that those who are blessed continually rely God's grace in Christ to deal with sin. This probably includes grace to overcome sin as well as to forgive sin since Jesus subsequently warns of the consequences of sinfulness. Jesus excludes those who are corrupt and wicked in verse 15, "Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." As Osborne says, "This hardly means that their home for eternity will be in the suburbs of the Holy City" (Osborne, *Kindle Locations 17423-17424*). Instead this means they are excluded from the blessed destiny that is reserved for authentic Christians. Dogs in that day were usually scavengers that were regarded as vile. Jews called ungodly pagans dogs as an expression of their revulsion. There is probably an implicit warning in this verse of the need to avoid conduct that is corrupt and unworthy of authentic Christians. As Beasley-Murray says, "The identity of those excluded is made known as an explicit appeal to the readers not to permit themselves to be numbered with them" (Beasley-Murray, 340). Therefore, Christians should continue to trust Jesus and remain faithful to him because those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb will have the right to enter the gates of the city and eat from the tree of life, but those who are corrupt and wicked will be excluded.

### **Jesus Identifies Himself as the One Who Sent His Angel with This Testimony**

Jesus identifies himself as the one who sent his angel with this testimony in verse 16, "I myself, Jesus, sent my angel to testify about these things to you for the churches. I myself am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star." This testimony is probably another way of referring to the words of the prophecy of this book. Jesus stresses that he is the one who sent the angel with this testimony by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "I, I, Jesus, sent my angel" and Indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "I myself, Jesus, sent my angel") By identifying himself as the one who sent the angel with this testimony he is authenticating again the reliability of what is revealed. Rather than addressing John, Jesus seems to be addressing the Christians in the churches directly since he uses the plural form of the personal pronoun ("to you"). This perhaps emphasizes that these prophecies have direct relevance for them. Jesus further authenticates the reliability of what is revealed by identifying himself as "the root and the offspring of David and the bright and morning star." He again doubles the subject pronoun to emphasize this identification of himself (Literally "I, I am the root and offspring of David" and Indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun "I myself am the root and offspring of David"). Indeed, through this construction Jesus may be identifying himself with the great I AM. The descriptions of Jesus that follow identify him as the Messiah from David's line who would come to deliver his people and perhaps much more. Jesus' description of himself as "the root and offspring of David" indicates that he is both the origin of David as well as his descendant and the Messiah. Jesus' description of himself as "the bright and morning star" indicates that he is the one who will bring in the messianic age of light and hope after a long night of darkness. As Beasley-Murray says, "The sole Lord of history is the



crucified and risen Christ, in whom the dawn of the new age of righteousness and peace has already broken and whose coming is to bring to the world the full glory of the day of God" (Beasley-Murray, 343). As Jesus identifies himself as the one who sent the angel with this testimony Christians would be encouraged to obey the words of the prophecies in this book. Therefore, Christians should obey the message of Revelation because Jesus himself sent his angel with this testimony and is both the origin as well as offspring of David and the bright and morning star who will usher in the dawn of the messianic age.

### **Jesus Exhorts Those Who Hear to Invite Others to Come**

Jesus exhorts those who hear to invite others to come in verse 17. Admittedly this verse is extremely ambiguous and the heading I have chosen already reflects my interpretation. The major issue is who is speaking and who is being spoken to. Many scholars believe that either the angel or John is speaking and he is addressing Jesus. This conclusion is based on Jesus' announcements that he is coming soon in verses 7, 12, and 20. Thus the verse serves to encourage Christians to express their desire for Jesus to return quickly as he has said. However, this approach stands in tension with the final invitation of the verse which is clearly directed to "the one who is thirsty" and "the one who wishes." I have concluded that Jesus is the speaker because he was the previous speaker and no other speaker has been introduced, though it could still be the angel or John. I have also concluded that all the invitations are directed to either those who need to hear or have already heard the invitation to come to Jesus. First, Jesus relates the invitation of the Spirit and the bride to come, "The Spirit and the bride are saying, 'Come!'" I have capitalized "Spirit" because it is the Holy Spirit who touches the hearts of people and invites them to come to Jesus and the gospel. The bride is an established image in Revelation for the church as a whole. Mounce is probably correct when he says that this "is the testimony of the church empowered by the Holy Spirit that constitutes the great evangelizing force of this age" (Mounce, 409). The invitation of the Spirit and the bride serves as the basis for the command to those who hear the invitation to invite others that follows. Second, Jesus commands those who hear the invitation to invite others to come, "Let the one who hears say, 'Come!'" Since they have heard the invitation of the Spirit and the bride to come to Jesus and the gospel, they are now obligated to invite others. Third, Jesus relates the content of the invitation, "Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." The invitation is for all inclusive of "the one who is thirsty" and "the one who wishes." The openness of the invitation is not as clear in my literal translation but it is there nonetheless. The NIV brings this out more clearly by identifying those invited as "Whoever is thirsty" and "whoever wishes." The adverb translated "without cost" also emphasizes that this is the free gift of God's grace. The invitation is to come and take the water of life. The water of life is an established image in Revelation for the eternal life that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. The invitation is to commit their life in faith to Jesus, the Lamb of God, and his sacrificial death on the cross. Therefore, Christians should join the Spirit and Bride in inviting whoever is thirsty and wants to come and take the free gift of the water of life through committing their lives in faith to Jesus and his sacrificial death.

### **Jesus Warns Anyone Who Distorts the Words in This Book**

Jesus warns anyone who distorts the words in this book in verses 18-19, "I myself testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds on to these things,

God will add on to him the plagues which have been written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away from him his share from the tree of life and from the holy city, which have been written in this book." Though the speaker does not identify himself specifically by name, no new speaker has been introduced since Jesus identified himself as the speaker in verse 16 using similar language and these verses are closely related to verse 20 where it is clearly Jesus speaking and announcing his imminent return. Jesus stresses his identity as the one issuing this warning by doubling the subject pronoun (Literally "I, I testify" and Indicated in translation with the reflexive pronoun, "I myself testify"). The ones who are warned are "everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book." This is not just a warning for false teachers not to distort the words of the prophecy, but a warning to everyone who reads it. Indeed, it is human nature to distort what God says when it is not a welcome message. The warning is against adding on to or taking away from the words of the prophecies of this book. These alternatives are probably representative of the broad spectrum of ways that the prophecies of Revelation could be distorted. The consequences are both commensurate with the crime and terrifying. The plagues that are described in Revelation are severe and directed at a wicked ungodly world and its inhabitants. The holy city and the tree of life are the share of those who have committed their lives in faith to God and are faithful. Those who distort the words of the prophecy of Revelation will be judged severely with the wicked rather than enjoy the blessings of eternal life with the faithful. As Jesus warns anyone who distorts the words of this book of prophecy Christians would be encouraged to take its message seriously and not distort it. Therefore, Christians should take the message of Revelation seriously and not distort it because God will add the plagues of these prophecies to anyone who adds anything to the message and God will take away the share in the tree of life and in the holy city of anyone who takes away anything from the message.

### **Jesus Announces His Imminent Return and John Expresses His Desire and Prays**

Jesus announces his imminent return and John expresses his desire and prays in verses 20-21. Jesus announces his imminent return in the first part of verse 20, "The one who testifies to these things says, 'Yes! I am coming soon!'" Again, the speaker does not identify himself by name, but he is definitely Jesus based on the content of his announcement. Jesus identifies himself as the "one who testifies to these things," again affirming the reliability of what is revealed. Jesus stresses the certainty of his imminent return by introducing it with a particle translated "Yes!" which could also be translated "Truly!" or "Surely!" even "Certainly!" Jesus again uses the adverb translated "soon" to stress that his return is imminent. He also stresses the certainty of his imminent return within the passage by repeating it three times. John affirms his desire for Jesus to return and prays that his grace would be with all in the remainder of verse 20 and verse 21, "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus [be] with all." John emphatically confirms his desire for Jesus to return by affirming what God has said ("Amen!") and by expressing his desire for Jesus to return in the form of a command ("Come, Lord Jesus!"). Revelation has been introduced as an epistle and the final line of the book is probably an epistolary benediction expressing his desire for Christians before God. His prayer and desire for all is that "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all." Indeed, in the interim between the present and Jesus' return Christians desperately need the grace of the Lord Jesus. As Osborne says, "Without his grace, belief and strength to persevere are impossible goals" (Osborne, *Kindle Location 17612*). John probably models for Christians in these verses the appropriate response to this interim period. They need to long for Jesus' return and seek his grace. As Jesus announces

his imminent return and John expresses his desire and prays Christians would be encouraged to heed Jesus' testimony, long for his coming, and pray for his grace. Therefore, Christians should heed Revelation because it is Jesus' testimony, long for his coming, and pray for his grace.

### **Applying the Message**

Christians today often encounter opposition from Satan and his allies, who attempt to intimidate or entice them to compromise their commitment to God. As a result they may even consider forsaking their commitment so they can avoid difficulty and compromising with the world to enjoy its pleasures. I have already stated the message of this passage generally so there is very little of a contextualized nature to require that it be limited or adjusted when applied to the modern situation. Therefore, the statements of the applied message are identical to the statements of the message in the original situation. Christians should heed the message of Revelation because these words are faithful and true since the Lord who inspired the prophets sent his angel to show his servants what will certainly take place soon. Christians should obey the message of Revelation because Jesus is coming soon and those who keep the words of this prophecy are blessed. Christians should worship God alone because worshipping anyone or anything else is abhorrent and God alone is worthy of worship. Christians should continue to do what is right and holy even though the ungodly are persistently wicked and corrupt because the time is near for the fulfillment of all that has been prophesied. Christians should be righteous and holy because Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, and the First and the Last and he is coming soon with his wage which he will give to each one according to what they have done. Christians should continue to trust Jesus and remain faithful to him because those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb will have the right to enter the gates of the city and eat from the tree of life, but those who are corrupt and wicked will be excluded. Christians should obey the message of Revelation because Jesus himself sent his angel with this testimony and is both the origin as well as offspring of David and the bright morning star who will usher in the dawn of the messianic age. Christians should join the Spirit and Bride in inviting whoever is thirsty and wants to come and take the free gift of the water of life through committing their lives in faith to Jesus and his sacrificial death. Christians should take the message of Revelation seriously and not distort it because God will add the plagues of these prophecies to anyone who adds anything to the message and God will take away the share in the tree of life and in the holy city from anyone who takes away anything from the message. Christians should heed Revelation because it is Jesus' testimony, long for his coming, and pray for his grace.

### **Communicating the Message**

**Title:** BEHOLD, I AM COMING SOON

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to heed the message of Revelation without distortion, trusting in Jesus and living faithfully for him, inviting others to come to Jesus, and longing for Jesus' coming and praying for his grace.

**Proposition:** Christians should heed the message of Revelation, not distort the message of Revelation, continue to trust Jesus and remain faithful to him, continue to do what is right and holy, invite whoever is thirsty and wants to drink from the water of life, and long for Jesus' coming and pray for his grace.

### **Introduction**

Christians often encounter opposition from Satan and his allies, who attempt to intimidate and entice them to compromise their commitment to God. As a result they may even consider forsaking their commitment to avoid difficulty and compromising with the world to enjoy its pleasures. *Illustration of a Christian Being Intimidated and Enticed by Satan and His Allies.* Christians in Asia Minor were also being intimidated and enticed by Satan and his powerful allies when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. Revelation 22:6-21 concludes the book, challenging us to heed its message and summarizing what has been revealed in the book about how we can overcome. *Read Revelation 22:6-21.*

**I. Christians should heed the message of Revelation because it comes from Jesus and is faithful and true.**

**II. Christians should heed the message of Revelation because Jesus is coming soon and those who keep the words of this prophecy are blessed.**

**III. Christians should not distort the message of Revelation because God will add the plagues of these prophecies to anyone who adds anything and God will take away the share in eternal life from anyone who takes away anything.**

**IV. Christians should continue to trust Jesus and remain faithful to him because those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb will have the right to eternal life, but those who are corrupt and wicked will be excluded.**

**V. Christians should continue to do what is right and holy because Jesus is coming soon with his wages and he will recompense everyone according to what they have done.**

**VI. Christians should invite whoever is thirsty and wants to come and take the free gift of the water of life by committing their life in faith to Jesus and his sacrificial death as the Lamb of God.**

**VII. Christians should long for Jesus' coming and pray for his grace.**

## **Conclusion**

We often encounter opposition from Satan and his allies, who attempt to intimidate and entice us to compromise our commitment to God. As a result we may even consider forsaking our commitment to avoid difficulty and compromise with the world in order to enjoy its pleasures. Christians in Asia Minor were also being intimidated and enticed by Satan and his allies when John recorded the revelation he received from the exalted Christ. Revelation 22:6-21 concludes the book, challenging us to heed its message and summarizing what has been revealed about how we can overcome. We should heed the message of Revelation because it comes from Jesus and is faithful and true. We should heed the message of Revelation because Jesus is coming soon and those who keep the words of this prophecy are blessed. We should not distort the message of Revelation because God will add the plagues of these prophecies to anyone who adds anything and God will take away the share in eternal life from anyone who takes away anything. We should continue to trust Jesus and remain faithful to him because those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb will have the right to eternal life, but those who are corrupt and wicked will be excluded. We should continue to do what is right and holy because Jesus is coming soon with his wages and he will recompense everyone according to what they have done. We should invite whoever is thirsty and wants to come and take the free gift of the water of life by committing their life in faith to Jesus and his sacrificial death. We should long for Jesus' coming and pray for his grace.

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