

Study 26: Revelation Summary

Summary

This summary is intended to provide a “short highlight” version of the studies, and a readable shortened version of the book.

It can be used as an introduction when preparing to study the book, and it also provides somewhat of an outline of the thread.

My intention is to “hit the highlights”, and of course, much material must be omitted. This does not mean that the material is to be ignored – the prophecies should be studied in their fullness (22:19). But it helps if we have an idea of where the storyline goes – and that is the sole purpose of this summary.

Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the notes as a review of the study

Study 1 - The Background to the Letter

The letter is specifically addressed to *The seven churches of Asia*, and we need to keep this in view when interpreting it. Each church has unique characteristics, and similar characteristics can be found in churches everywhere.

Emperor worship flourished in the Roman Empire at the end of the first century, and the church soon found itself in conflict with the government. Persecution of Christians sprang up under Nero, and reached its worst period towards the end of the second century. Christians were put on a collision course with the government, and the situation would get worse before it got better.

Two dates for the letter are usually proposed – either around the time of Nero’s death (AD 67) – or during Domitian’s reign (AD 91-96). The date is significant to our understanding of the book, and the external evidence clearly supports the later date.

There are four “classic” views of Revelation:

1. **The Futurist** view - the book reveals events to unwind before the second coming of the Lord.
2. **The Preterist** (past) view - the book was written specifically for the time of the readers, and the prophecies were fulfilled during and around that time.
3. **The Continuous Historical** view - the book predicts the things that will come to pass over time, beginning from the churches in the time of John, through to the end of time.
4. **The Philosophy of History** view - the book shows symbols representing forces at work, rather than specific historical events.

There is some validity in all four views, and we must not only read the words, but also see the images that John projects for us.

Chapter 1 - The Prologue

Chapter 1 introduces the context of the visions. The first is Jesus in the midst of the churches. The message concerned things *which must soon take place*. It had specific relevance to the readers in the first century. The revelation is complete (not partial) “...*who testifies to everything he saw-- that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ...*” (1:2 NIV). We do not have only *part* of the vision, but we have all of it.

Greetings and Blessing

John formally addresses the seven churches “...*John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia...*” (1:4 NIV). The blessings originate from God the Father “...*from him who is, and who was, and who is to come...*” (1:4 NIV), but the word of praise is addressed to Jesus “...*To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood...*” (1:5 NKJV). As in all of the scriptures (especially Revelation), Christ’s love is central, and is shown in its fullness by His sacrifice for us.

The Spirit and the Lord’s Day

John has a personal association with the brethren, “...*I, John, both your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ...*” (1:9 NKJV). He was fully acquainted with their suffering. Sometime during his exile on Patmos, he received God’s message in a vision “...*I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet...*” (1:10 NKJV). *In the Spirit* demands more than just pondering some spiritual applications, and is akin to being in a trance. The *Lord’s Day* which is something (in this case the

day) pertaining to the Lord. He clearly has in mind some specific day that the readers would understand – (the first day of the week).

The Vision of Christ amongst the Churches

John was told to write down the visions and send them to the seven churches in Asia Minor. “...*What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.*” (1:11 NKJV). The instructions, and the churches are both specific.

“...*And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands...*” (1:12 NKJV). The lampstand (candlestick) is reminiscent of the Temple. The tabernacle was lit by a single stand of seven candles. In Solomon’s Temple, the number increased to 10. John’s vision has *seven* - a complete number. These are the seven churches (1:20), and the lampstand is symbolic of the church – when it fails to provide the light to the world, it will be removed. Christ stands in the middle of the candlesticks, “...*and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band...*” (1:13 NKJV). Christ is in the middle of the churches.

“...*In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword...*” (1:16 NIV). The seven stars are the seven messengers of the churches (1:20), and the right hand is the position of power and authority. The sharp two-edged sword is the word of God (Heb 4:12) which proceeds from His mouth. Whilst many of the visions in revelation are not explained, we have a perfect explanation for this one, which tells us how we are to interpret the rest of the book.

Chapter 2 - The Ephesian Church

They were *working* for the Lord, and were spreading the gospel. They were *patient*, and they had withstood the temptation and *grown* through it. They *could not stand evil people*, and they have *tested* those who were *falsely claiming to be apostles*. They were able to discern the true from the false and the truly good from the facade of good. They had *not become weary*, were *fired up for the Lord*, and were *enthusiastic* about the work for the kingdom. They were not going to give up.

But, they had *left their first love*. They had become caught up in the “mechanics” of what they were doing, and to some extent had forgotten *why* they were doing it. They *love to do things right*, but have *lost their love for Jesus* who made us right!!! They need to *remember*, and *repent*, and *do* the first works. They need to get things back into perspective again.

With the temple of Diana in Ephesus, and the culture, trades, and commerce based around it, a co-existence developed between the Christians and the worshippers of Diana, resulting in the Christians embracing the culture of temple worship. God does not condemn the co-existence, but warns against the interaction and compromise. The Ephesians are called to *Heed* the warnings.

The Smyrna Church

Smyrna is one of the two letters that has only positive comments and no condemnation. In the face of persecution, this was a strong message of encouragement to the brethren. Jesus had faced death, and like Him, we can be assured that there is life on the other side of it. The Christians would have to make a choice for Jesus and choose Him even if it meant death. The Jews were reputedly also condemning the Christians, and claiming to be doing God’s will. Jesus says “...*I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan...*”.

Despite the city’s wealth, the Christians were poor “...*I know your...poverty – yet you are rich...*” (2:9). The important wealth is the spiritual blessings that comes from faithfully serving Him. “...*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life...*” (2:10).

The suffering would happen for *a short time*, and calls for endurance. “...*He who overcomes...*” is John’s favourite term for martyrdom and they will not be hurt by the second death. If they remained faithful – even in the face of being put to death because of their faith – then they will be blessed. As Christians, we can stand confidently before God as His faithful servants.

The Pergamum Church

The letter is addressed to *where Satan has his throne*. Pergamum was the centre of Emperor worship. Despite the problems in the city, the disciples were faithful and “...*remain true to my name...*”. Even when their faith was tested, they “...*did not renounce their faith...*”. One of the brethren named Antipas had already been martyred at the time of the letter “...*in your city – where Satan lives...*”

Despite the praise, there is also condemnation “...*You have people who hold to the teaching of Balaam...*” Whilst the church was strong against the outward attacks, on the inside they were succumbing to sinful practices. They need to repent. “...*Those who overcome will be fed with hidden manna...*” is probably a reference to their poverty (and maybe starvation) in the face of their trials. Jesus says “...*I will give him a white stone...*” which is a vote in our favour. But something is written on the stone “...*a new name written, which is known only to him who receives it...*”

The Thyatira Church

Jesus is the one “...*whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze...*” (2:18). Those familiar with the metal workers in Thyatira would have understood the message exactly. The letter begins with praise “...*I know your deeds, your love, and your faith, your service, and your perseverance...*” (2:19). They were active and at work for the Lord, and had grown in their level of service “...*that you are now doing more than you did at the first...*” But problems had invaded the church – food offered to idols, and sexual immorality. They had compromised what God said, by continuing to worship God but giving lip-service to the worldly things going on around them.

Jesus’ *eyes are like flaming fire* – He can see right through what is going on, and right through our insincerity. We cannot serve God and compromise our faith. Jesus said that He will bring judgement and retribution on the leaders of such error and on those who practice it – unless they repent. Some in the church had remained faithful “...*and have not known the deep secrets of Satan...*”

Chapter 3 - The Sardis Church

The church had a “...*reputation of being alive...*” (with illusions to its past history), “...*but they were dead...*” which shows their inactivity, (with illusions to the visible necropolis outside the city). They had become lethargic, and like the citizens of the city, were laid back and basking in the past.

Whilst the church is not condemned for the external influences of Emperor worship, or the practices of the Nicolaitans, it has died spiritually. The Lord’s call is to wake up and be on the alert “...*Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...*” (3:2 NKJV). The situation was dire, but not totally hopeless. The instruction is to “...*Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent...*” (3:3 NKJV). If not, the Lord’s judgement would come upon them.

The city had twice suffered a surprise attack because they were not awake to the enemy *who came like a thief in the night* and totally overthrew them. This same false sense of security will result in the loss of the church’s place with God. “...*Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you...*” (3:3 NKJV).

Not all of the members of the church had been caught up in the lethargy “...*You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy...*” (3:4 NKJV). Jesus likened their situation to *defiled garments*, and *walking in white* (purity) which would particularly remind them of the wool dyeing industry.

The Philadelphia Church

The church at Philadelphia has no condemnation – only praise. The letter begins “...*These things says He who is holy, He who is true...*” (3:7 NKJV). Holiness and truth are attributes of God, and the faithful brethren at Philadelphia had a strong sense of identity with them.

Jesus is “...*He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens...*” (3:7 NKJV). He (and He alone) opens the door of heaven. In a parallel, Philadelphia had a door of opportunity to spread the gospel “...*I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept my word, and have not denied My name...*” (3:8 NKJV). This “missionary city” had pervaded the community with the Greek culture – and the church has the opportunity to spread the gospel in the same way!

Like the church in Sardis, the Jews were an obvious opposition. “...*Indeed, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie – indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you...*” (3:9 NKJV). The situation would turn around, and the Jews would become subject to the Christians, rather than the Christians being struck down by the Jews.

The Laodicean Church

Jesus is “...*the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation...*” (3:14 NIV). A strong message to the church immediately follows “...*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!* ¹⁶ *So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth...*” (3:15-16 NIV). The church was like the water that flowed through the pipes into their city – it was distasteful! Jesus didn’t want to swallow it, but rather to spit them out! The church felt comfortable and self-sufficient – yet Jesus says that they are distasteful.

Laodicea was a rich city, and the citizens enjoyed their wealth. Whilst they might have had physical (monetary) riches, they were spiritually destitute, and didn’t know how poorly off they were. They prided themselves on self-sufficiency, but neglected their total reliance on God. They are called to recognise their true state “...*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 shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see...*” (3:18 NIV). Rather than the black woollen cloth from the city, Jesus calls them to wear white (indicating purity), and to buy gold from Him, rather than rely on the bankers in the city. Even with eye salve from the area, they were blind to reality.

Chapter 4 - The Throne Room

Chapters 4 and 5 form two parts of an introduction into the visions that follow. John is given a guided tour with a “commentary” on what is happening – he is an observer rather than part of the proceedings. The powerful scene is God’s Throne Room. The scene is described for us. “...*And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne...*” (1:3 NIV). We should not get too hung up on the details (for example the characteristics of the precious stones) – we need to picture the image! It reflects God’s majesty.

“...*Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads...*” (4:4 NKJV). The number 7 has the idea of completeness, the number 12 is a symbol for organised religion – the 12

tribes of Israel, the 12 apostles. So, with 24 *elders*, we have the leaders of the organised religion from both sides of the cross. This theme and image recurs through the book.

This is dynamic picture, in which God is active “...*From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God...*” (4:5 NIV). The scene is of power and might, reminiscent of Moses on Mt Sinai (Ex 19:16), or the visions of Ezekiel (Eze 1:13), and is intensely awesome.

The Four Living Creatures

The living creatures “...*were covered with eyes in the front and the back...*” They saw everything, and nothing was hidden from them. “...*Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come"...*” (4:8 NIV). The first hymn is sung by the four creatures to Almighty God. As the visions progress, the numbers singing praises increases.

The four creatures are accompanied in their continuous praises by the 24 elders. The elders cast down of their crowns, - surrendering their authority to the Almighty, and submitting to Him. The hymn of praise is to the One who created everything: “...*You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honour and power, For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created...*” (4:11 NKJV).

The key message from the Throne Room scene is that God is in Control. It is God Almighty who is to be worshipped – not Caesar! Caesar might appear to be all-powerful, but he doesn’t even rate a mention when we look into heaven!

Chapter 5 - The Sealed Scroll

Further details from Throne Room scene are added. “...*Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals...*” (5:1 NIV). This scroll is laden with information, and it was written on both sides, leaving no room for further material to be added - it was *complete*. It was “...*sealed with seven seals...*”, - showing completeness and perfectly sealed and preserved.

The contents of the scroll is not specifically revealed, and are hidden until revealed by the Lamb. but the scroll and the seals are central to the visions as they unfold. This is God’s plan of salvation. God’s original purpose was sealed – not tampered with – and was hidden in mysteries which were not understood by man until they were revealed through Jesus.

The scroll was held in the hand of the Almighty God, and an invitation made for it to be opened, and reveal its contents. “...*And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"...*” (5:2 NIV). The only qualifier was to find someone *worthy*. But, the task was not answered “...*And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it...*” (5:3 NKJV). No-one anywhere was worthy (able) to open the scroll.

The circumstances seemed hopeless! “...*Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."...*” (5:5 NIV). Through Jesus’ sinless life and His redemptive sacrifice He became worthy to open the book. “...*And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain...*” (5:6 NKJV). John expected to see a Lion, but instead saw a Lamb. The image is clearly directed to Jesus the Lamb who was slain.

The Heavenly Beings Worship the Lamb

After taking the scroll, the Lamb is worshipped. “...*Now when He had taken 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...” (5:8 NKJV). Their act of worship shows Jesus’ deity. The previous hymns were directed to the Father, but the third hymn is directed to Jesus. “...*And they sang a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And You have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth...*” (5:9-10 NKJV). Christ’s redemption is all encompassing.

The voices worshipping the Lamb increased “...*And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands...*” (5:11 NKJV). The numbers should not be taken literally, but signify an indefinitely great number.

The message to the suffering Christians in Asia is clear – when we worship Christ and honour Him, the heavenly hosts respond in shouts of accolades. There is no such response, and indeed no place, for worship of Caesar.

Chapter 6 - The Opening of the First Seal

Four different horsemen announce the opening of the first four seals, followed by the cries of the slain martyrs. The scroll is God’s plan of salvation that the angels longed to look into, and was only revealed by Christ in the gospel. Unlocking the seals is the process of revealing the hidden things of the scroll – (the hidden things of the gospel).

“...*I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest...*” (6:2 NIV). White is used as a symbol of purity and triumph. This rider is given a crown, and *he rode out as a conqueror*. The image refers to Jesus, and the bow is the instrument that He uses to pierce the heart of His people with the arrows of the gospel. The first horseman is the beginning of the gospel, which went out in purity, and resulted in triumph and conquest over Satan by Jesus.

The Second Seal

With the second seal, a second horseman appears. “...*Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword...*” (6:4 NIV). The red colour indicates blood, and bloodshed, and its rider was given power to *take away peace and to make war amongst men*. This follows the gospel being proclaimed by Christ (the first seal – the white horse), as the conflict and persecution brought against the early Christians. Jesus said that conflicts would occur – even from our own families (Lk 21:12,16).

The Third Seal

With the third seal, a black horse comes forth “...*I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand...*” (6:5 NIV). Black indicates grief and mourning, and nothing from it shows hope. “...*Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"...*” (6:6 NIV). The message suggests famine with barely sufficient food to survive. This follows the war and the bloodshed. The period is after the persecution of the second seal, and was relevant to the time when John wrote the letters to the churches.

The Fourth Seal

With the fourth seal, a pale horse appears “...*I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him...*” (6:8 NIV). Pale (*chloros*) is an ashen green or blue colour – the colour of sickness or death. As the vision progresses, the

consequences increase. Things are getting worse, and they will continue to get worse for the persecuted Christians in Asia Minor. With the wild beasts, many Christians were dragged into the Roman stadiums to face the lions (literally) as “sport” for the cruel Roman leaders. But, Jesus, who has all authority, limited the persecution and power of those who brought death.

The Fifth Seal

The fifth seal reveals those who had suffered for Jesus. “...When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained...” (6:9 NIV). The altar was a place of sacrifice, and the shed blood of the sacrifice was to be offered at the base of the altar of incense. These people had been slain because of the word of God. “...They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”...” (6:10 NIV). They were calling for judgement and retribution against their oppressors. *How long* is not answered, but the vision gives an assurance that God has not forgotten His people.

The Sixth Seal

As the sixth seal is opened, there is great tumult on the earth “...I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place...” (6:12-14 NIV). Whilst it is tempting to think of this as the end of the world and the final judgement, the events follow the cries of justice from the suffering Christians in the opening of the fifth seal, where God has promised justice *in a little while*. These are earth-shattering events – “the end of the world as we know it” – from the perspective of the suffering Christians at the end of the first century.

In the opening of the six seals, we see a progression in the suffering of God’s people as God’s plan of salvation is revealed. It begins with the message of Christ, and continues through increasing trial and persecution of God’s people. With the sixth seal, the Christians are vindicated and justice is brought about.

Chapter 7 - The Seventh Seal

The seventh seal announces the heralding of the seven trumpets. As with other numbers in Revelation, it should not be taken literally. *Seven* means *complete*. When the seal was opened, things went quiet. “...When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour...” (8:1 NIV). Half an hour is a relatively short period of time, was eagerly awaited, and focused attention on the things that followed.

Before sounding the trumpet more of the scene is revealed. “...Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne...” (8:3 NIV). The vision is about the prayers of the saints! It is a reminder that God answers our prayers. “...The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand...” (8:4 NIV). God’s reaction to those bringing suffering to His people is illustrated in the vision. “...Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake...” (8:5 NIV). He brings judgement and retribution to the enemies of the Christians.

The First Trumpet

In the trumpet judgments God is trying to bring repentance. It is not total judgement against all of humanity, but is of an earth shattering magnitude – one third of the earth – significant but not

total. As with the seals, the pattern of the first four are similar, then the fifth is different, the sixth is different again, and the seventh brings in the next event (the bowls).

The first trumpet brings devastation on the land “...*The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up...*” (8:7 NIV). With the *hail and fire* – God’s retribution – came bloodshed. Since this was done in response to the prayers of God’s people, then the bloodshed has been brought on the enemies of God’s people by their own deeds – but not total destruction.

The Second Trumpet

The second trumpet brings devastation on the sea “...*The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood,⁹ a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed...*” (8:8-9 NIV). A flaming mountain is cast into the sea. Mountains designate kingdoms, and in this case it is a *huge mountain, all ablaze*. It concerns a kingdom that was fully functioning and consuming all before it. The Christians in first century Asia Minor would have no doubt about which kingdom was in mind.

The Third Trumpet

The third trumpet brings a storm of pollution. “...*The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water...*” (8:10 NIV). Now the inland waters are also affected. Stars and cosmic characters symbolise those in power. The fall of the great power came at the call of God, and brought about further destruction. “...*the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter...*” (8:11 NIV).

The Fourth Trumpet

The fourth trumpet brings a cosmic destruction “...*The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night...*” (8:12 NIV). The image is reminiscent of the ninth plague of Egypt (Ex 10:21) where the sun was darkened. Such imagery was sent as a warning to those who do not obey God.

The next three trumpets are heralded in “...*As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"...*” (8:13 NIV). If the world is not ready, it will soon be the victim. The three “woe’s” mark significant events that are yet to unfold.

Chapter 9 - The Fifth Trumpet

The fifth trumpet sounded, “...*The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss...*” (9:1 NIV). The storms have increased. They have moved from natural events that have made life *uncomfortable*, to those that have hurt men but not killed them. This fallen star was given some power and authority. Stars represent people in powerful positions.

A locust like plague was given limited power “...*They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads...*” (9:4 NIV). These envoys of Satan will not harm God’s people. God is using the period of conflict so that those people who do not belong to Him might repent and turn to Him.

God is trying to bring these people to repentance. The locust plague was the first of the three “woes” announced by the eagle (8:13).

The Sixth Trumpet

The situation worsens as the sixth trumpet sounds, and the powers of torment were to be released. “...It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”...” (9:14 NIV). Most threats to Israel had come from Babylon, Persia, and Assyria. Another powerful threat was to be released, like the previous times when God had brought judgement on Israel to bring them to repentance.

The troops are immense and mobilised on horseback “...The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number...” (9:16 NIV). Such a number is almost inconceivable – about the entire population of the USA. The armies came breathing fire and brimstone, which pronounce God’s judgement. God’s purpose was to bring repentance “...The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood--idols that cannot see or hear or walk. ²¹ Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts...” (9:20-21 NIV).

Things get decidedly worse! The pestilence continues and intensifies. God’s purpose is to bring about repentance from those who do not belong to Him, but His people are preserved.

Chapter 10 – An Interlude

John sees yet another angel with a message. “...He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land...” (10:2 NIV). The message was not sealed up, but was open to view. With a foot on both the land and the sea, he had dominion over all of the earth. But not all of God’s will has been (or is to be) revealed to us, and John was instructed not to write down what he heard. “...And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.”...” (10:4 NIV).

The Little Book

John receives another instruction “...Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take it and eat it...” (10:8-9 NIV). It was a bitter-sweet outcome “...It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.” ¹⁰ I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour...” (10:9-10 NIV). This is an analogy of the bitter-sweetness that God’s word accomplishes in the hearts of men.

Chapter 11 - The Measure of the Temple

John was given a reed, and told to measure the temple “...I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there...” (11:1 NIV). The message is spiritual – it is about measuring up God’s people to see that they conform with the standard. The church (the holy city) would suffer persecution for some time “...They will trample on the holy city for 42 months...” (11:2 NIV). Those in the outer court who were the ones who would do the trampling, and this is consistent with the persecution of the saints arising at the time in the Roman Empire.

The 42 months if taken literally, it is a period of 3 years and six months, and is (approximately) the same time as the 1,260 days.

The Two Witnesses

Two witnesses are called, and they prophesy for the same time that the church is persecuted “...*And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.*”...” (11:3 NIV). The *two witnesses* have power to shut up the sky and stop the rain, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague! It is significant that the period of drought brought by Elijah was the same as the period of persecution – 3 ½ years. Moses and Elijah are the two witnesses – representing the Law and the Prophets!

The witnesses will stand with support from God, and He will bring judgement on those who oppose them. God’s will shall be done. If we ignore the testimony of God’s witnesses, then we are ignoring Him! God’s enemies, led by Satan, thought that they had overcome the Christians by persecuting them over and over. They were helped by the Jews, but had ignored the witness of the Law and the Prophets, but rejoiced in believing they had conquered God.

The Witnesses Respond

Up to this point, all seems like doom and gloom, and that God’s people have been defeated. However, God has other plans. “...*But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them.*” (11:11 NIV). The victory by the ungodly people is short-lived. They were making merry in their mistaken belief that they had overcome God, and silenced His people. Like Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones, God is able to restore life even to the dead. The church is triumphant, and overcomes those who thought they had defeated it. The victory belongs to God’s people, not to the world.

Although this might sound like the end of the world as the Christians overcome Satan and enter heaven, the third woe is yet to happen “...*The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.*” (11:14 NIV).

The Seventh Trumpet

The end of the second woe ushers in the seventh trumpet, and the beginning of the third woe. “...*The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven.*” (11:15 NIV). The scene turns to heaven, where a song of victory and praise is being sung. The battle had been long and terrible, but the victory had been won. The victory belongs to God, and He is to be praised and worshipped because He has delivered His people.

Chapter 12 - The Woman and the Dragon

We see another look at the previous visions from a different perspective. This time, the spiritual battles that are going on behind the scenes. “...*A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.*” (12:1 NIV). The woman was an envoy from God, and she represents God’s people through the ages (the Israelites from the Old Testament, and the church from the New Testament).

The woman “...*was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.*” (12:2 NIV). God’s people had begun the journey that led to the Christ – the Messiah – from the time of Abraham. They went through the captivity in Egypt, the wanderings in the wilderness, and the establishment of the Law under Moses. Now, Christ was about to be revealed – *she was about to give birth.*

Satan was not prepared to sit idly by and watch these things happen, and so “...*Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.*” (12:3 NIV). The dragon is clearly identified as Satan (12:9).

Satan's power (although limited) was able to do significant damage to God's people "...*His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth...*" (12:4 NIV). The *stars in the sky* are the descendants of Abraham. Although the damage was significant, it was not complete. Satan was waiting for the Christ to arrive "...*The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born...*" (12:4 NIV). Satan knew that Jesus really was the Christ and worked through Herod to have Him killed soon after His birth (Mt 2:3-18).

The Spiritual War

A battle is going on behind the scenes between God and Satan "...*And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back...*" (12:7 NIV). This is a spiritual battle and Satan uses God's people as pawns in the game, and we get caught up in the middle. Satan cannot stand up against God. The battle is over, and was won at Calvary. The heavens rejoice in the victory of Christ over Satan, yet he brings woe to those on earth. However, the time of his trouble making is *but a short time*.

The Persecution of the Woman

The woman is God's faithful from all time. Before the cross, it was the faithful in Israel, and after the cross it is the faithful Christians – the church. The passage is after Satan has been overthrown at Calvary, and so the woman is the church. We are given insight into the persecution of the church, and why it was happening. Despite the persecution, God still looks out for and nurtures His people. "...*The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach...*" (12:14 NIV). The period of "time" (a year), "times" (two years) and "half a time" (six months) is the same 3 ½ years, or 1,260 days that we have seen earlier (12:6), and the same event.

After trying and failing to kill off Christ, Satan turned to the church and failed again. He now turns to individual Christians. "...*Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus...*" (12:17 NIV). We need to remain faithful to Jesus, even in the face of persecution – and we are assured of victory in Christ.

Chapter 13 - The Beast from the Sea

Satan engages two helpers – one from the sea (physical), and the second from land (spiritual). "...*And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name...*" (13:1 NIV). The beast "...*resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority...*" (13:2 NIV). The beast is a combination of the beasts of Daniel's vision. Some of the characteristics of the previous kingdom's passed over into the next – much of the Greek culture continued under Roman rule even though the Romans had overthrown the Greeks.

The Beast's influence was so great that the entire world followed it. The Roman Empire being the world power of the time, offered wealth and prosperity for its citizens, but it was morally corrupt and decadent. Support from the empire meant giving homage to its rulers, including emperor worship. *All of the world* followed down this track "...*Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?"...*" (13:4 NIV). Worship of the emperor (the beast) meant worship of Satan (the dragon) who had put him into power.

God sets boundaries for Satan. Attacking God means attacking His people “...*He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation...*” (13:7 NIV). This occurred through the physical persecution of the saints, and ended with the declaration of peace by Constantine around AD 312.

The Beast from the Land

The land beast is similar to the Sea Beast – he was also the messenger and agent of Satan. “...*Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon...*” (13:11 NIV). He is referred to as the false prophet, and so his spiritual nature is emphasised. He had the appearance of a lamb but he was a wolf in sheep’s clothing, and *he spoke like a dragon*. Like all false religion and false teachers, he was deceptive and set out to deceive others and lead them astray. (Mt 7:15).

The land beast is subservient to the sea beast “...*He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed...*” (13:12 NIV). These two beasts were two arms of the Roman Empire – civil administration and religious administration, with the latter revealed in the emperor worship. The Christians were given a choice – of confessing Christ as Lord and facing immediate death, or Caesar as Lord, and living for a while longer, but facing eternal spiritual death.

The Mark of the Beast

The beast “...*forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead...*” (13:16 NIV). There is a direct contrast between the mark of the beast, and the mark of Christ. We are sealed in our hearts with the Holy Spirit, whilst Satan has sealed his people with *the mark of the beast*. Christians who refused to identify with the beast, (adopt the mark of the beast) would be prevented from earning their living, and would suffer hunger and starvation as a result.

Hailey notes¹:

It is now concluded that the number of the beast, six-six-six, stands for the complete and total failure of all human systems and efforts antagonistic to God and His Christ – all are doomed to ultimate and complete defeat and failure.

Chapter 14 - The Lamb on Mt Zion

The Lamb (5:6), and the 144,000 (7:4) were previously introduced. “...*Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads...*” (14:1 NIV). Those who belong to the Lamb have the Lamb’s name on their foreheads. These 144,000 represent all of God’s people – the faithful Jews of the Old Testament, and the faithful Christians of the New Testament.

A message followed “...*A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."*...” (14:8 NIV). Babylon is specifically addressed, and the reference here is to Rome. The city was full of immorality, and God had pronounced judgement against it. Even though the city had yet to fall, when God pronounces judgement, it is certain and can be spoken of as having already happened. Those engaging in emperor worship will follow a similar fate.

¹ Hailey, p. 299

The Great Harvest

A scene of judgement unfolds. “...*I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand...*” (14:14 NIV). Christ is wearing the crown of victory (*stephanos*), which He acquired when He went out to conquer riding the white horse (6:1-2). At that time His weapon was bow – a weapon of warfare, but now it is a sickle – a tool of harvest.

The Roman Empire was identified as *the beast* and the tools which Satan uses to do his work. The time had come for the judgement to be made against the immorality and corruption of Rome. As the Lord reaps His harvest through preaching the gospel, so God’s judgement also falls on all who reject it.

Chapter 15 - The Last Plagues

The seven bowls of wrath are announced. “...*I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues--last, because with them God's wrath is completed...*” (15:1 NIV). There is a clear move towards the completion of the story, with destruction and judgement becoming inevitable.

The Tabernacle in Heaven

The earthly Tabernacle and Temple were only a physical manifestation of the dwelling place of God. John looked (through his visions) into the true dwelling place of God. The way into the holiest place was made open to all through the sacrifice of Jesus. John’s visions give us great insight into what is happening in heaven. Hailey quotes from Lenski, and notes²:

Lenski has well observed that the seven seals reveal, the seven trumpets announce and warn, and the seven bowls execute (p. 461).

God is ready to bring on the judgement of the beast. The smoke has filled the house – it is a sign of war, and is consistent with similar events from the Old Testament. The bowls of wrath bring God’s judgement upon the earth – specifically upon the dragon, the beast, and their associates. Despite the destruction that is to come on the world, God’s people are safe and protected by Him.

Chapter 16 - The First Bowl

Whilst there is great similarity to the trumpet plagues, they were only partial (“1/3”) and called for repentance; the bowl plagues bring about complete destruction.

The angels proceed in their mission without hesitation one at a time, and in rapid succession. “...*The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image...*” (16:2 NIV). The images follow the pattern of the plagues in Egypt, and the seven trumpets. The retribution is specifically brought against *the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image*, which we have seen to be those involved in Emperor worship.

The Second Bowl

“...*The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died...*” (16:3 NIV). The whole of the sea is affected, along with all of the sea creatures. This relates to the moral condition of the society at the time.

² Hailey, p. 324

The Third Bowl

“...The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood...” (16:4 NIV). The pattern follows the previous bowl plagues, and the third trumpet plague. The injustice brought upon God’s people by the Romans demands that God brings His justice to bear upon them. Without punishment for the crimes committed, there is no justice!

The Fourth Bowl

“...The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. ⁹ They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him...” (16:8-9 NIV).

The Fifth Bowl

Like the seals and the trumpets, the first four are similar, then the fifth and sixth are different, and the seventh ushers in something different. “...The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done...” (16:10-11 NIV). The Christians in Asia Minor would have clearly identified the beast. However this is not the final judgement, as the people who had worshipped the beast refused to repent of what they had done.

The Sixth Bowl

“...The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East...” (16:12 NIV). The Euphrates river has previously been mentioned (9:14). At that time it held God’s army (of 200,000,000). This time, the kings from the east are God’s enemies, and they will soon muster towards the battleground.

The Roman Empire was a “world leader” and had great influence and domination over the nations around it. However, the other nations were deceived, and succumbed to the immoral practices of Rome. Any society that claims to be the leader, but does not honour and respect God, who gave it the power and authority will likewise come under judgement.

A clear warning to God’s people originates from Jesus “...Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.”...” (16:15 NIV). The message had been delivered to the seven churches (3:2-4; 18), and the present tense *stays* awake and *keeps* his clothes shows that it requires continued vigilance.

The Battleground is Prepared

The sequence leading up to the battle is prepared in the bowl plagues, although the battle does not take place until chapter 19. “...Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon...” (16:16 NIV). Armageddon literally means “Mount of Megiddo” and is strategically placed between Israel and Judah. It guarded the northern entrance to Israel. It was the scene of many famous battles. Hailey concludes³:

In view of these battles of historical significance we conclude that John used the word symbolically to describe a great decisive spiritual battle between the army of Satan and the forces of God, which would determine the fate of each. This battle was fought and won by the Lord in the complete defeat of the Roman Empire and paganism behind which Rome threw its total power (see 19:11-21).

³ Hailey, p. 336

The Seventh Bowl

The battleground has been prepared, and the time has come to bring Satan and his messengers under control. "...*The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!"...*" (16:17 NIV). With these plagues we have symbolism of the "elements":

First Plague	Earth	16:2
Second / Third Plagues	Water	16:3, 4
Fourth Plague	Sun (fire)	16:8
Seventh Plague	Air	16:17

The statement "It is done" means that the plagues are complete and God has brought about justice for the persecuted saints.

The nations around Babylon (Rome) also disappear "...*Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found...*" (16:20 NIV). There is no place for refuge, and nowhere to run or hide. The magnitude of the destruction is immense "...*From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible...*" (16:21 NIV). Each hailstone is about 50 kg. Of course, the message is figurative, but the destruction from God is total and complete. They would kill people instantly.

Chapter 17 - The Other Woman

A woman (the church) was introduced in chapter 12. In chapter 17, another woman is introduced who stands in direct contrast and opposition to the first. These two women are opposites in their character (God and Satan), in the cities that they represent (Rome and the New Jerusalem), and in their destinies (heaven and hell).

She sits on *many waters*, which are different groups of people (nations and tongues 17:15). She has led astray many in leadership positions "...*With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."*..." (17:2 NIV). Intoxication with the wine of her adulteries flows through these particular visions (14:8, 10; 16:19; 17:2; 18:3).

She is perceived to have respect by men but the decorations were all a sham! By her *nature*, she deserved no respect, and God could see right through the sham. "...*This title was written on her forehead:*

MYSTERY
BABYLON THE GREAT
THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

John's readers would have understood this to be a description of Rome. In itself it is a description of worldliness, corruption, and immorality. It also applies to all worldly powers that embrace the immoral practices and deny the power, authority, and sovereignty of God.

The Woman and the Beast

The woman is inseparable from the beast. Satan was overcome at the cross by Christ's death and resurrection, and He had been sent into the Abyss when his power was thwarted at the cross (9:1-11). The world (but not God's people) will be surprised at what happens, and that Satan really is the one behind what seems to be "the good life", and at his ability to revive and come back to life to continue his destructive work.

The explanation continues "... *The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits...*" (17:9 NIV). The readers would immediately think of Rome – the city which is set on seven hills around

the Tiber River. However the hills also have a symbolic meaning “...*They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while...*” (17:10 NIV). These are messengers and envoys of Satan “...*They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They 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 will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.*...” (17:13-14 NIV). The verse summarises the book of Revelation. Satan is at war with God. Satan uses his powers and envoys to try to destroy God’s people. But the victory belongs to Christ!

The beast was *sitting on many waters* (17:1). “...*The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages...*” (17:15 NIV). The beast exercises his rule over multitudes of peoples, over various nations, and different language groups. John’s readers, this would clearly think of the Roman Empire. The Romans ruled with a rod of iron, but whilst they had beaten the nations into submission, they had difficulty in getting them to accept the authority. The description of the Roman Empire in Daniel 2 was *one with legs of iron, and feet of clay*. Rome’s difficulty, and one of the factors that led to its downfall was its inability to merge all of the different nations they had conquered into one.

Despite all of this, God is in control, and now uses *the beast* to accomplish His purposes. The identity of the great harlot is revealed without doubt “...*The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.*...” (17:18 NIV). She is not the apostate church, but Rome and the immorality that Rome stands for.

Chapter 18 - The Fall of Babylon

The fall of Babylon (Rome) was predicted and announced “...*Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird...*” (18:2 NIV). The message is prophetic (it had not happened when John wrote Revelation). The city (and the Empire that embraced it) had become synonymous with evil, sinful, and detestable practices. “...*For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.*...” (18:3 NIV).

Whilst Babylon (Rome) represented all that was despicable in the sight of God, and she was the antithesis of the church, God’s people should not embrace her immorality. The warnings have been clear and continual right through the book of Revelation, and here they are repeated again. “...*Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues...*” (18:4 NIV). This was not a new message to the Christians, as Paul had instructed the Ephesians to “...*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them...*” (Eph 5:11).

The destruction will come swiftly “...*Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her...*” (18:8 NIV). Rome might think that she is all-powerful, but she is nothing compared to the total and complete power of God. Three groups of people affected by her demise:

The first group who lament Rome’s demise are the kings. They depended on Rome for their trade and their livelihood. The lamentation does not come from the demise of Rome, but because of their own loss!

The second group are the merchants or traders. These people had warehouses full of goods to sell, but no-one was buying any more.

The third group are the seafarers. Much of the merchandise came from the far trade routes by sea. Their reaction was similar to that of the kings and of the merchants.

Babylon is cast into the deep with a millstone around its neck. The destruction is complete, and never more shall this once great city rise to fight against God and to persecute His people.

Chapter 19 - Celebration Over the Fall of Babylon

There is rejoicing in heaven. "...After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: *"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God..."*" (19:1 NIV). This is a direct contrast to the laments of Babylon's supporters.

An announcement concerns the marriage of the Lamb. "...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..." (19:7 NIV). The marriage is introduced, but not fulfilled until chapter 21. The bride (the church – Eph 5:32) is prepared to meet her husband, and has well-prepared wedding garments "...Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (*Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.*)... (19:8 NIV).

The Defeat of the Beast

God's enemies have been introduced as Satan (chapter 12), the two beasts (chapter 13), and the harlot (chapter 17). Now their destruction is described in the reverse order.

John looks into heaven "...I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war..." (19:11 NIV). There is no question that the rider is the Christ, riding a white horse, a sign of victory.

Whilst Satan has seven crowns (*diadems*) – (12:3), or even ten (13:1). The Christ is wearing 'many crowns' which show His complete royal nature. '*his name is the Word of God*' is a specific reference from John's gospel to Jesus. His triumphant victory is proclaimed "...The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean..." (19:14 NIV). If any doubt remains the identity of the rider is revealed: "...On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: *KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS...*" (19:16 NIV). Jesus, the Lamb is the one who is King of Kings (1:5), and is Lord of Lords (17:14).

The Call to the Supper

The call to the great supper of God is announced "...Come, gather together for the great supper of God..." (19:17 NIV). This is not a joyous supper like the marriage feast, but rather "...so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great..." (19:18 NIV). It was the enemies of God who would be gathered. The destruction of the enemies of God would be complete. One group is destined for victory, the other is destined for the lake of fire.

The Defeat of Evil

The battle of Armageddon was forecast in 16:13-16, and we now see the same event from a different perspective. "...Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army..." (19:19 NIV). The battle lines have been drawn. On one side are Christ and His followers, and on the other are Satan and the forces of evil. "...But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf..." (19:20 NIV). The outcome of the battle was always certain and predictable. The two workers of Satan are both captured and overcome. The battle was over, and the victory complete.

Chapter 20 - The Thousand Years

The Abyss had previously been opened, and a scourge of locusts released by a fallen angel (9:1-3). Now an angel has the key and a great chain. Satan is bound and thrown into the Abyss. "...He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years..." (20:2 NIV). Satan is bound – his power is limited. He is restrained and out of the way,

but if you go within reach, he will devour you! He is unable to exercise his control over the nations like he did over the Roman Empire for a full (and “long”) period of time. The intent of the restraint is *to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore*. His punishment comes later (20:10), and before that he will *be set free for a short time*.

Vindication of the Martyrs

The vision returns to the situation with the martyrs. “...*I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years...*” (20:4 NIV). The Christians shared with Christ’s rule and victory for the thousand years – the period Satan was bound.

The binding of Satan will not be permanent, and he will arise again to cause trouble “...*When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth--Gog and Magog--to gather them for battle...*” (20:7-8 NIV). Whilst Satan’s envoys – Rome (Babylon the great) have been destroyed, he will arise with new allies - Gog and Magog.

In this final battle, God’s people (the church), and will be attacked on every side. “...*They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves...*” (20:9 NIV). However, it’s time for the final showdown – Armageddon – when God finally overthrows Satan. “...*And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever...*” (20:10 NIV). His ultimate end has come, and he shares the domain with his helpers (19:20).

The Final Judgement

The vision returns to the Throne room. “...*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them...*” (20:11 NIV). Previously, the islands had vanished away when the seventh bowl of wrath was poured out (16:20), but this time the earth and the heavens disappear – for there is no longer any use for them. Peter wrote “...*the day of the Lord will come as a thief on the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up...*” (2 Pet 3:10 NKJV).

The judgement scene unfolds “...*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books...*” (20:12 NIV). The resurrection has occurred, because all of the dead are now standing before the throne. All who ever lived will be there. You and I **WILL** be there. The righteous and unrighteous will be there.

There is no further use for death and Hades “...*Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death...*” (20:14 NIV). Paul wrote “...*for He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet, and the last enemy that will be destroyed is death...*” (1 Cor 15:25-26). Whilst the first death is temporary, the second death is permanent, and it is the lake of fire, where Satan and his allies are cast.

Chapter 21 - All Things are New

Revelation gives us an insight into the things beyond this life. We have seen the war between God and Satan and the ultimate victory belongs to God and His people.

With the total destruction of the earth, we see a “new heavens and new earth”. The present earth (our dwelling place) is replaced with the dwelling place of God “...*I saw the Holy City, the new*

Him surpass the glory of those kingdoms. The gates of the cities were traditionally shut and locked at night to keep the enemies at bay. However, since all the enemies of God have been destroyed, “...*On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there...*” (21:25 NIV). The city will be pure, and will remain pure. “...*Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life...*” (21:26-27 NIV).

Chapter 22 - The River of Life

Revelation 22 takes a full circle from the Garden of Eden. In the garden we see the tree of life, and man separated from God by sin. In Revelation 22, sin has been overcome, and man has been put back into the perfect relationship with God again – fed by the tree of life. The waterway flowed through the middle of the city - it was readily and freely available to all of the inhabitants. The tree of life bears crops every month, and continually supplies and nourishes the inhabitants of the city. God provides for all our needs.

Man's curse has been taken away by Jesus (Gal 3:13), and in the New Jerusalem, all curses have ceased “...*No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him...*” (22:3 NIV). Those who serve the Lord have His name likewise inscribed – written on our hearts! His reign will not cease, and will not be limited.

The Final Message

The Christians faced difficulties that would escalate over the next 220 years, and the message needed to be delivered to the churches immediately. The book gave them assurance in the face of these tribulations and persecutions under the Roman Empire. The Lord gives an assurance to the brethren that they have not been forgotten. “...*Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done...*” (22:12 NIV).

Our behaviour on earth is linked to our reward in heaven. “...*Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city...*” (22:14 NIV). We must be clean and prepared for God, and we are made clean by the blood of the Lamb. By preparing ourselves in this life, and living our lives for Jesus, we are given *the right to the tree of life, and may enter the city.*

But outside the city are found those who are not worthy. “...*Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood...*” (22:15 NIV). None of us are worthy by virtue of our own deeds and actions – we are only made worthy by the blood of Jesus, who became the sacrifice (“propitiation” or “appeasement”) on our behalf. But living for Jesus requires us to *do something*. We cannot claim to belong to Him and continue to live a life of sin.

The book of Revelation was addressed specifically to the seven churches of Asia Minor, but has much wider application to churches everywhere. The letter concludes with an invitation, a warning, and an assurance. The invitation is an expression of the church for the Lord to quickly end the persecution and avenge the saints (22:17). The warning is given – not to tamper with the message (22:18-19). Whilst this specifically applies to what John wrote, the same principle applies to all scripture.

The assurance is the Lord's return (22:20) “*Yes, I am coming soon.*”

Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband...” (21:2 NIV). The city is the bride prepared for her husband, - the church. The marriage ceremony of Christ and the church was forecast in 19:7, and is now fulfilled.

The former pain and suffering has gone, and all has been made new “...*He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!..."*” (21:5 NIV). When the judgement of the world under the seventh bowl of wrath was completed, God announced “It is done”. Here the same proclamation is made regarding the end of the world – in fact they are the same event, viewed from a different perspective.

The promise is assured “...*He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son...*” (21:7 NIV). It is the same message that was given to each of the seven churches. It is also a message for each and every one of us. If we are faithful to Jesus through our life, then the inheritance is ours.

But, many will not receive the inheritance. “...*But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.*...” (21:8 NIV). We have a choice – to be on the side of God and reject the world and its influences, or to go with the world and reject God. It’s our choice, but there are consequences, and we must choose wisely.

The New Jerusalem

The city of God – the new Jerusalem is God’s people from both sides of the cross. “...*It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal...*” (21:11 NIV). John is describing the indescribable, and uses terms related to precious stones and metals. Like the rest of the images from the book of Revelation, the description should not be taken literally – it is designed to impress the reader. “...*It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel...*” (21:12 NIV). The walls were not to keep the enemy out, but provide a symbol of the complete security of God’s people in His city. The gates are identified with the twelve tribes of Israel, and through the gates, they enter the city.

Previously, John was told to measure the temple (11:1) which was to determine whether the church (and its members) measured up to God’s standard. This time, the heavenly city that is measured, and had perfect dimensions. It is a perfect cube about 2,200 km on each side. However the perfect dimensions are lost in the translation of the number. 12 is the number for organised religion, and here we have organised religion in every direction – the perfect combination of organised religion. But it is not just 12 in every direction, but 1,000 times that amount! On a physical level, the dimensions are staggering and difficult to comprehend – but that is the point! We are supposed to be awe-inspired by the description. A wall surrounded the city about 70m thick, which is impregnable. The people inside the city are totally secure.

Whilst the Roman Empire, and its power was awe-inspiring (c/f 13:4), by direct contrast, God’s city totally surpasses it. There is nothing in the universe to compare with it.

The Interior of the City

The emphasis is on life within the city rather than the “physical” aspects of the interior. In the New Jerusalem, all Christians will be in the presence of God, as permanent citizens. Earlier, we saw the thousands of thousands who worshipped God in the throne room (chapters 4&5) and now we see the same picture from a different perspective. “...*The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp...*” (21:23 NIV).

Under the rule of the Beast, the kings of the earth had prospered, but the people had suffered. Now civil and political kingdoms have come to an end and been abolished, and those who had challenged God’s people had been thrown into the lake of fire. The Lamb and those that worship