

R E V E L A T I O N

STREET OF GOLD

**A Twenty-Six Lesson Bible Study
by Jeff S. Smith**

Foreword

The book of Revelation proves to be mysterious and often confusing, even unapproachable to the average Christian. For this reason, it has been exploited by the devil through human speculators to the disillusionment of millions. Revelation is the unfolding of God's will in prophecy. Revelation 1:3 urges its readers to hear and keep it, and so it was mainly for the immediate use of the Christians who were reading it and being comforted by it in the first century.

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Street of Gold: Introduction

Imagine that it is just a few years short of the turn of the century—the turn from the first to the second that is. Jesus Christ was crucified about sixty years ago and since that time, his body, the church, has grown exponentially wherever the gospel has traveled—and that takes in all the world (Colossians 1:6) in fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecies about the kingdom. Governments have been variously unconcerned and unkind to the church, but that is to be expected of a movement that has changed the world forever. There have been some martyrs for the cause of Christ since Stephen but now the persecution is becoming quite troubling. About twenty-five years ago, a Roman Caesar named Nero troubled the saints, burning the city and blaming the Christians for it. Many of your brethren were abused and some even killed then over that, but still, in the big picture, the gospel has continued to spread and the kingdom of Christ numbers more subjects now than ever.

That period of growth and relative peace now seems unalterably threatened by a new Roman ruler whose name is Domitian; it is the year A.D. 96. Domitian is a horrible, blasphemous ruler who goes so far as to demand that his royal subjects address him as Lord, God Caesar. Most of his subjects acquiesce in this demand because to refuse may very well mean execution, but this demand is far too much for you and your brethren in Christ. To call one on earth God is to deny Christ and seal your eternal condemnation where Nero and Domitian will suffer by your side in hellfire. Domitian has even deputized an emperor worship committee to travel to the various provinces, erecting temples to him and forcing the population to worship him. The committee has arrived in your home of Asia Minor where the church is strong in number and faith. News has preceded the committee of trouble in other cities: some of your brethren have submitted to Domitian’s demands and the churches are in an uproar. The most striking news, though, concerns your brethren that have refused to bow before Caesar and call him God; quite a few of them have been executed.

Then a speaker stands up in the assembly and proclaims that news has come from Patmos where the apostle John is. John has received a revelation from God that will bring comfort to you all and settle your hearts and furnish you with new courage to resist the devilish emperor and hold true to your confession.

It is a message that has been encrypted in a code of numerical and scriptural symbolism. The numbers will denote very general characteristics while the scriptures will describe specific kinds of events. Infidels like the emperor may understand the numbers if they intercept the message but they will never see into the scriptures for they are



naturally untrained. Perhaps most encouraging is God's timetable.

The book of Revelation proves to be mysterious and often confusing, even unapproachable to the average Christian. For this reason, it has been exploited by the devil through human speculators to the disillusionment of millions. Revelation is the unfolding of God's will in prophecy. Revelation 1:3 urges its readers to hear and keep it, and so it was mainly for the immediate use of the Christians who were reading it and being comforted by it in the first century.

Revelation is apocalyptic, rich with symbolism and figures. In fact, it was written in a code revealed in the Old Testament language. Revelation was written as it is so that the persecutors of the era could not understand it while the suffering people of God could.

The theme of the book is stated in Revelation 17:14: "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords and king of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." This statement and this book are intended as a consolation to the suffering Christian in the late first century. Jesus is portrayed throughout the book as the Victor and Conqueror. He overcomes hades, death, the beasts, the dragon and those who worship the beast. Although victory seems uncertain and conditions seem gloomy, the saints will overcome.

Revelation was likely written by John when Domitian ruled Rome between A.D. 81-96, specifically around 95. Persecution was widespread in this era and included Caesar worship. Domitian was a wicked, cold-blooded persecutor who demanded to be addressed as "Lord God." Those who refused to bow to him were persecuted or killed. The Christian had to choose Caesar or Jesus. Revelation sought to show why the choice should be Jesus. There is much evidence from man's history, especially from Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, that leads to this late dating for the Revelation. Some argue it was written during Nero's reign and predicts the fall of Jerusalem.

Although there are some practical points in Revelation, especially in chapters two and three, its value to modern readers is mainly in the encouragement that comes from seeing God gain victory over the Roman persecution of the early church.

The Preterist View makes all symbols related only to the events of the day in which Revelation was written. The Historical View holds that Revelation outlines in symbolic form the entire course of history from Pentecost to the return of Christ. The symbols predict every great event that has occurred. The Futurist View advocates that Revelation is dealing with only future events at the end of the world. The Spiritual View finds no reference to specific events or persons of the past, present or future, but only presents great principles to guide Christians throughout all ages. The Preterist View is probably the closest to accuracy, but has flaws also.

Street of Gold (1): The Time Is Near

It is amazing to see the reaction to the phrase “The time is near” in the book of Revelation. Although those words were inscribed 1900 years, every generation that reads them figures they must apply to the present. The folks in 1784 figured the time was then near, just as the people camped on the hilltop in 1874 did. Words, however, mean things and “the time is near” had its most immediate meaning to the people who read them first in A.D. 96.

The church of Christ had become a burr in Caesar’s saddle and if ever the bride of Christ were to be eliminated, now was the time. Saints were being intimidated into compromising their faith or facing the executioner and some, no doubt, had begun to wonder why God was not acting to stop it. What he delivers in the book of Revelation is a message of comfort and promise to a people more acquainted with persecution than any generation since. Modern commentators are generally a selfish bunch, wanting to pilfer the Revelation all for themselves and leave it practically useless to the ancient brethren who first received it. Understand that when John wrote, “the time is near,” it was. If that time did not come as quickly as God promised, his word becomes unreliable. The chronological context of the prophecies aptly applies to the first and second centuries of the first millennium, not the third.

In the first three verses, you can learn everything you need to know relative to when these predictions were to be fulfilled. For the purposes of an early twenty-first century study, were they intended for the year 100 or some time in the twenty-first century? If words still mean things and the promises of a caring God can still be trusted, these comforting predictions were to find fulfillment long ago, not today. Verse one says that the things we are about to read of “must shortly come to pass.” Must is an impersonal verb that indicates a moral necessity is involved; the nature of the case is such that the things revealed here must take place as and when prophesied.

The book is addressed, not to modern churches or authorities, but to the seven churches of Asia Minor, which no longer even exist. Revelation is sometimes call the “Apocalypse,” not because it describes some great destruction, but because it is given in signs and symbolism. The word “Apocalypse” means the use of signs and symbols and any other meaning has simply been added by speculators. This book is not to be read with an eye toward the literal fulfillment of every prophecy. Revelation is filled with vibrant images, many of them recycled from previous use in the Old Testament, which makes them more understandable to an audience steeped in Mosaic reading. It becomes somewhat more difficult then for modern men to deduce exactly what historical event may have been fulfilling what sign, but that is less than necessary anyway. The book was written to reassure the first Christians that their cause and suffering were honorable.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 1:1-8

1. Describe the condition of the churches of Christ in the late first century, especially as it related to the Roman government.

2. Briefly define these four perspectives on the Revelation:

- a. Preterist Historical:
- b. Continuous Historical:
- c. Futurist:
- d. Historical Background:

3. Identify the chronological clues in the verse three verses that serve to place the Revelation in context.

- a.
- b.

4. To whom is the Revelation addressed? Who wrote it?

5. How is Jesus introduced and described (1:4-7)?

6. Why is Revelation sometimes called “The Apocalypse”?

7. What is the purpose of the book of Revelation?

Street of Gold (2): Alpha and Omega

Although the book we are studying is sometimes called “The Revelation of John,” it by no means originated with or features the apostle of that name. This is a Revelation of and by Jesus the Christ. In verses 9-20 of the first chapter, John describes our Lord as he appeared to the man that day on Patmos. His glorified image is grander than anything movies could produce and is intended to imply confidence into the souls of believing readers.

Until now, John has described himself in the third person, but here he becomes both the narrator and a participant in the Revelation of this apocalyptic message, a message of signs and symbols.

As Ezekiel reported that the Spirit took him up and brought him in the visions of God to Jerusalem and beyond (Ezekiel 8:3), so it seems John is experiencing something much more than just a proper frame of mind for ordinary worship. This is the Bible’s only reference to the Lord’s Day and John does not go further to identify exactly which day of the week it is, perhaps because it should be so obvious as the day of the week on which Christ was raised from the dead and the communion supper was to be observed forever to commemorate it. As his trance takes hold, John is disturbed by a loud voice, not a trumpet, but a voice like a trumpet. The speaker is Christ, the Alpha and Omega, just as his father was described; he is eternal as indicated by the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. John was instructed to write down the things that he would see, thus to render them as scripture that could be transmitted to persecuted saints in Asia Minor and preserved for future generations.

In the midst of seven golden lampstands stands our glorified and mighty Savior, clothed in a priest’s robe with a royal sash. In his gospel, John described our Lord as the Word that had been with God, was God and came to walk among men. Although our feet today are pampered by comfortable shoes, the feet of Christ have been tried as in a furnace and polished by distress into a fine brass, able to march upon his enemies. He stands thus in the midst of seven golden lampstands and holds seven stars in his right hand as a sharp two-edged sword emerges from his mouth. Obviously, the sword is the word of God (see Ephesians 6:17), double-edged for it offers grace to the submissive while also promising punishment to the rebellious.

John is told again to grab his quill and start writing down what he sees. While the Revelation John sees has initial and chief meaning to the first audience of Christians who read it, it continues to possess an element of encouragement to every succeeding generation that reads of God’s promise and protection. The seven stars are identified as the angels, or messengers, of the seven churches of Asia Minor; they were closely united to the sword of his word in verse 16 and seem to be the men who would proclaim the message in each church as they received it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 1:9-20

1. Describe Patmos as it existed in John's time. Why was he there?
2. What is the Lord's day?
3. What does it mean that John was "in the spirit"? How do Christians today show evidence that the Spirit leads them (Ephesians 5:18-21)?
4. Where was one like a son of man standing? Why is that significant?
5. Describe his appearance. Who is he?
6. What are the keys of Death and Hades for (First Corinthians 15:42-57, Hebrews 2:14-18)?
7. What do the seven stars represent? What does the son of man tell John to do?

Street of Gold (3): Ephesus church of Christ

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

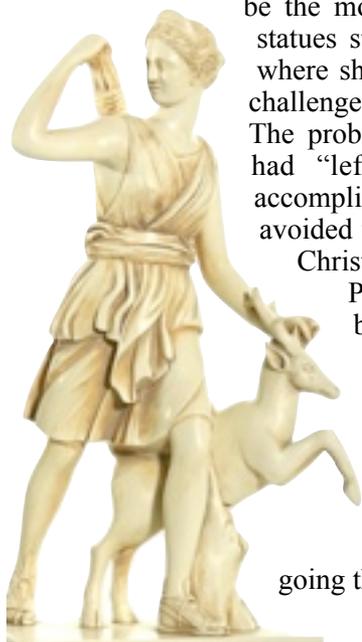
Ephesus was very fortunately located on a natural harbor, which made it the most important seaport of Asia Minor; it was called the “Supreme Metropolis of Asia,” a melting pot where people of every class met, lived and traded. She was also blessed with a limited form of self-government from the Roman Empire; Ephesus was wealthy, prosperous and magnificent and an obvious distraction to the faith of the Christians who lived there.

In about the year A.D. 52, the apostle Paul visited Ephesus on his way from Corinth to Jerusalem as part of his second journey. Later, on his third journey, he spent an extended period there. He confronted some who were continuing to practice John’s defunct baptism (Acts 19:1-7) and preached consistently about the church (Acts 19:8-10).

It was not until he trifled with the beloved temple of Diana, however, that he got into big trouble (Acts 19:21-20:1). The temple of Diana was at once “a treasure house, a museum, and a place of refuge for criminals. It furnished employment for many, including the silversmiths who made miniature shrines of Diana.” The ancients considered Diana to be the mother goddess of the Earth, who tradition says was born in the woods outside Ephesus when her image fell from the sky. Her icons were crafted with a chest completely covered with breasts to signify her claim to be the mother of the Earth. The most renowned of her statues stood at the entrance to her temple in Ephesus, where she was worshiped. Such idolatry formed a great challenge to preaching Christ and a single God.

The problem in the Ephesus congregation was that she had “left her first love.” Despite the good work accomplished when they exposed false teachers and avoided weariness in well doing, somehow the Ephesian Christians had lost the proper motivation for it all. As Paul taught in First Corinthians 13 that love must be the motivating factor for our selfless deeds, so Jesus indicts these saints for falling short in terms of attitude and inspiration.

Ephesus was threatened with the removal of her lampstand, symbolic of her fellowship with Heaven, if she did not repent and return to her first works. Modern churches would do well to heed this warning, if they are simply going through the motions of faith.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 2:1-7

1. Describe the city of Ephesus.
2. What did Paul do in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-20:1)?
3. How did Jesus commend the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)?
4. What did Jesus find to criticize in the Ephesian congregation?
5. What did he demand they do in response to this letter?
6. What is meant by the threat to remove their lamp stand?
7. Who were the Nicolaitans?

Street of Gold (4): Smyrna church of Christ

The church at Smyrna is one of only two in this series of seven that receive only commendation in its letter from the Master.

Smyrna was a hotbed of emperor worship, but the Christians there were resolute in their determination to worship only the God of heaven. This letter is the shortest of the seven, but contains timeless encouragement to the Christian of any age.

Smyrna was located thirty-five miles up the coast of the Aegean Sea from Ephesus and rivaled Ephesus in prosperity and commerce. At the same time, Smyrna fell all over itself to venerate the Roman emperor.

We know nothing at all about the founding of the church at Smyrna concerning who was involved and when the work was done. Quite clearly, however, a good work had been accomplished, for this church was standing strong in the midst of intense pressure to compromise faith in Jehovah with veneration of the empire.

Smyrna was a prosperous society, but Christians were somewhat cut off from this because of societal ostracism when they rocked the boat in refusing to bow before “Lord, God Caesar.” Christ tells the Christians there that he knows their works, tribulation and poverty, and all these are probably closely related. The temptation is always great to rationalize away the difficult decisions and find a way to appease the devil while convincing yourself that God will not mind. For this reason, Jesus pronounced them rich—not financially, but spiritually.

The Jews in Smyrna who did not obey Jesus, but believed in Jehovah, were not as determined as the Christians; they appeased the civil authorities and burned incense to Caesar, while knowing and believing it was false. Moreover, the Jews used this conflict to accuse the Christians to Rome.

Although Jesus knew of their sufferings, he did not promise to remove them, only to lend comfort and strength through them. Ten days of suffering meant a full measure of trial in Revelation numerology and symbolism; their suffering would be long, but not permanent. “Be faithful unto death” must have had an ominous ring to it, knowing that any one of them or all of them could be targeted for just that fate.

What can we learn from the church in Smyrna? Everything. They were faithful when faith was out of season and today it is a dangerous proposition in other ways. The Holy Spirit warned, as Jesus did, that all those who seek to live a godly life will suffer from persecution—perhaps verbal or physical, even psychological. Persecution takes different forms and waxes and wanes as the gospel is found to be in season or out of season. The Christian is required to be faithful even unto death regardless of the gospel’s popularity or general acceptance and those of every age and social strata are susceptible to the pressures of such tribulation.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 2:8-11

1. Can you think of some Bible times when the more intense the persecution got, the more resolute the disciples became? List a few if possible.
2. Describe Smyrna as it might appear in secular history.
3. Can you think of more modern examples of “emperor-worship” or veneration of the nation?
4. How could the saints in Smyrna be both rich and in poverty? Why wouldn’t this kind of reassurance help too many modern Christians (Philippians 4:11-13)?
5. What was the “synagogue of Satan”?
6. What does the history of slandering Christians look like in the Bible?
7. Describe the Lord’s encouraging message to these sufferers?

Street of Gold (5): Pergamos church of Christ

While Revelation chapters two and three are rife with imagery, the instructions to the various churches are also very clear and relatable to modern times. While the rest of the book is consumed with prophecy, these chapters also describe soundness of doctrine and practice in a way that is valuable to us as students today.

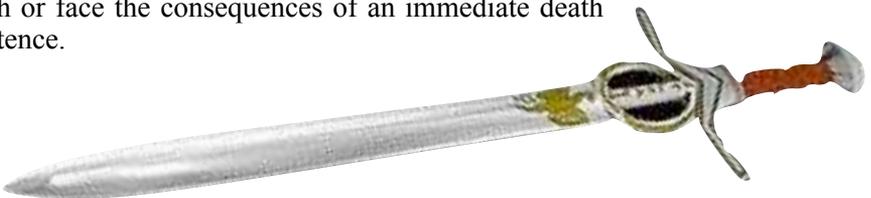
We are introduced to the Pergamos church of Christ in Revelation 2:12 and we discover a congregation that is proving faithful in the midst of great evil, but also somewhat indecisive regarding the false teaching that is trying to infiltrate their holy ranks.

Pergamos was the most northern of the seven cities, the official capital of Asia Minor; Pliny, her governor, said that she was “the most illustrious city of Asia.” Pergamos was a very religious city, the most pagan of the seven cities, all of which were devoted to some false deity. She became known for her sensuous worship and imperial cult, enforcing loyalty to the “Lord Caesar.” As a legal center for the region, tests of loyalty that would challenge the faith of Christians were simple to administer.

Outside of these six verses, we know nothing about the church at Pergamos. What we can learn here is that she was an ancient forbear of the modern tendency toward religious compromise to keep the peace and maintain a big tent.

With his sharp two-edged sword, denoting omniscience, judgment and authority, Jesus informs the church that he knows their works and that they dwell where Satan’s throne is located. In Pergamos, their works were closely related to the condition of their hometown. Satan’s throne is not a literal statement, but a figure of speech meant to identify Pergamos as hotbed of devilish activity; when Christians are threatened with death or ostracism if they choose not to worship “Lord Caesar,” Satan is definitely enthroned. Persecution to bloodshed and faithfulness to death were more than far-off warnings to these Christians; one of their own, Antipas, had been martyred for the same faith to which they clung.

Domitian insisted upon being called *dominus et deus*, roughly equivalent to Thomas’s confession about Jesus in John 20:28—“my Lord and my God.” Legend has it that Antipas was roasted alive in a brazen bull. At Smyrna, Christians were mainly persecuted by fellow citizens, but at Pergamos, they were tried in courts and made to recant their Christian faith or face the consequences of an immediate death sentence.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 2:12-17

1. How does the speaker describe himself in addressing the church at Pergamos?

2. What qualified Pergamos as the place where Satan's throne was?

3. What effect might the martyrdom of Antipas have had on evangelism and faithfulness? What effect do you think it would have if replicated here today?

4. What did Jesus have against the church at Pergamos (Numbers 25:1-2, 31:16)?

5. Jesus tells them to repent—what would be necessary for them to execute repentance (Ephesians 6:17, Second Corinthians 10:1-4)?

6. How should the church handle false teachers today (First Timothy 6:3-10, Second Timothy 2:14-19, Second Peter 2:1-3)?

7. What do the manna, white stone and new name all suggest?

Street of Gold (6): Thyatira church of Christ

The Lord's missive to our ancient brethren in Thyatira takes its place in the imagery-laden, but deeply instructive, second chapter of the Book of Revelation.

It has been said that these seven letters represent the conditions, rises and falls of churches everywhere and in every time; perhaps there are valuable lessons to be gleaned from the words of Christ for this church today as well. Thyatira was a church corrupted by moral error and false teaching. In a day in which the church is under attack by compromisers, the letter to Thyatira just might hit home.

Thyatira was located about forty miles southeast of Pergamos and was probably a military outpost when settled. She was an idolatrous city in which one's livelihood often depended upon a willingness to go along with the course of things and submit to popular opinion. The trade guilds sponsored pagan feasts, serving meat from the idol's altar and conducting immoral fertility rituals.

Our Lord identifies himself as the Son of God with eyes like fire and feet as of fine brass; his vision is not impaired by the pretenses of men and his might is not threatened by the burning of temptation on idol's altars.

Sadly, though, the Thyatira church was drifting into moral compromise because the social pressure was so great and a voice within the body was leading the call for lowered standards of behavior. Like Balaam before, the name of Jezebel is resurrected from the Old Testament and recycled here so that Bible students of any era might understand. In the present context, some influential woman perhaps taught the persecuted and wavering Christian that he could join the guild and participate in its immoral feasts without forfeiting the faith in his heart of hearts. What a relief this doctrine was to a church that had always figured they had to go the hard road and refuse such things, risking their jobs and social standing as well as their lives; unfortunately, it was a lie. What made things worse was that Thyatira tolerated Jezebel to teach her error; faithful elders and saints will fight against error, but this church allowed it.

This Jezebel was afforded time to repent, but she used God's patience as an opportunity to feel vindicated and emboldened in her proclamations. Many in Thyatira were the silent majority who knew the doctrines of Jezebel were false, but felt afraid or indifferent toward opposing it openly. They were chastened for that error in verse twenty and are now told simply to hold fast to the truth until the end.

Those who overcome until the end are promised power over the nations. As faithful Christians, we reign with Christ in his kingdom (Romans 5:17). As rewarded Christians in that last day, we rise in victory even as unbelievers are afflicted with the second death (Psalm 2:7-9).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 2:18-29

1. What is significant about the Lord's eyes and feet?
2. What good things did he know about Thyatira?
3. What is the temptation when you observe so many positive things in a church?
4. Where did Jesus get the name Jezebel?
5. What is the best use of time to repent (Romans 2:1-11)?
6. Who are her children (Matthew 18:1-7)?
7. What does Jesus promise to one who overcomes the pressures of idolatry and sin in this world (Second Peter 1:19)?

Street of Gold (7): Sardis church of Christ

The fifth letter of Christ to the churches of Asia Minor is directed specifically to the saints at Sardis. In a book filled with vibrant symbolism, these seven letters use theirs in a manner practical for churches of every age.

The church at Sardis will forever be known as one that had ceased to merit its reputation. Let her be a warning to any eldership or membership that has settled into complacency by past laurels.

Sardis was located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira where five important roads joined to form an important trading center. Yet as one might guess this level of prosperity led many into a state of luxury and decadence. In addition, Sardis was a militarily secure city, founded, like Edom, in the insurmountable mountains. Still confidence like this can become overconfidence and Sardis had found herself invaded and defeated before. Perhaps this overconfident attitude had infected the Christians as well.

Like all the other letters, Jesus reminds his immediate audience that he knows them and their works. How soothing it is to think that the evil deeds we commit in secret are unseen by man or God and yet such is merely self-delusion and spiritual poison. Jesus knows that the reputation of this church had long ago ceased to reflect its current direction. Unlike the other churches, neither persecution nor heresy are mentioned as troubling this congregation. Instead, she is afflicted with complacency—a sense that her past works merit a period of rest on Earth. Sardis has a name that she is alive, but in fact, she is dead.

The three R's in education are readin', 'ritin' and 'rithmetic; in the letter to Sardis, they are reviving, restoring and repenting. The very first thing Sardis is instructed to do to this end is to become watchful. That fortified city, thus far free from persecution, heresy and emperor worship enforcement and blessed with material wealth was vulnerable, if only because history teaches that complacency and overconfidence are signs of pride that go before a fall.

When we, as members, see the congregation drifting, we may be tempted to jump ship immediately, but that is too quick a response and not the correct one. Sardis contained a few members that had not fallen into the sin of complacency, but were still worthy of honor. Instead of giving up on Sardis, they were attempting to keep their own faithfulness and inspire the rest as well. There comes a point at which such an effort is proven fruitless and the faithful may be forced to worship with a church that is still sound elsewhere.

The promise Jesus makes to the faithful sounds twofold, but it merely refers to the same perfect, inestimable blessing pronounced before. He who overcomes will be clothed in white garments. Second, their names will remain in the book of life as a confession by Christ of their faithfulness.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 3:1-6

1. What is represented by the seven spirits and seven stars?
2. What was the city of Sardis like?
3. How does a church get a reputation for being alive? How does that reputation *become* false?
4. How was Jesus planning to come and judge Sardis?
5. What proportion of the Sardis congregation was not lost along with the complacent (Matthew 7:13-14, First Peter 3:18-22)? Is it possible for a faithful person to worship with such an imperfect church? For how long?
6. What is the Book of Life (Revelation 20:15)? Can a name be removed from it (Exodus 32:32, Hebrews 10:24-31)?

Street of Gold (8): Philadelphia church of Christ

The sixth letter of Revelation is addressed to the Philadelphia church of Christ and is distinguished as one of just two that are full of commendation without a word of rebuke.

Let us remember once more that these letters were written a little more than 1900 years ago and were delivered to Christians suffering daily from the specter of persecution. When Jesus speaks of great tribulation, he has in mind theirs in that age, not some future period that would befall us or a successive generation. Philadelphia is a church of brotherly love and proven perseverance.

Philadelphia was a missionary city in the sense that it was built to proselytize the world in the Greek language and culture. Philadelphia, of course, means “brotherly love” in Greek and the city was named for the loyalty that Attalus II showed to his own brother.

Outside of this letter, the church at Philadelphia is not mentioned anywhere in scripture.

Jesus identifies himself in this sixth letter as holy and true, the doorkeeper of David. The holy and true doorkeeper is empowered to determine the fates of mankind, both his brethren and his enemies.

Jesus reminds his readers that he knows them. What a relief and reward it must be to learn that Jesus knows your works and approves of them; that is what makes a church sound. This cultural missionary city was presented with an open door of opportunity to spread the gospel message and she was taking advantage of it, even though the church had but little strength.

The holy and true one turns his attention back to the hypocrites, the synagogue of Satan who claim to be Jews but are not. These men and women were Jews by birth, but not by faith, for they rejected the Messiah and therefore Jehovah. Persecuting those who did believe made them servants of Satan and rejecting the message of the Holy Spirit made them blasphemers, but they would not prevail.

A period of trial was to engulf the entire world, as is apparent from the whole series of letters, not in the distant future, but the near term to these readers. The promise of Jesus is to keep them strong through its darkest moments as the Roman Caesars increase their pressure on Christians to honor them as deities. That hour of trial has now long since passed as we read today; this prophecy was fulfilled long ago.

The crown of life they were set to wear in eternity was at stake when Rome pressed the saints to worship two gods; apostasy was possible for those willing to deny Christ and compromise with Caesar. Those who overcame the threats to their bodies, families and livelihoods would be amply rewarded beyond the grave.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 3:7-13

1. What is the significance of the key of David (Isaiah 22:22, Matthew 16:19, Acts 2:29-33)?
2. What kinds of churches today have little strength, or power?
3. Why aren't they just doomed then?
4. How does God go about determining "Jewishness" these days (Romans 2:28-29)?
5. What does Jesus say to them about the virtue of perseverance?
6. What does it mean to be a pillar in God's temple (see also 21:22-23)?
7. How did Philadelphia get its name?
8. How does brotherly love affect a person's salvation prospects?

Street of Gold (9): Laodicea church of Christ

Seven is the number symbolic of completeness. Even the ninth chapter of Proverbs speaks of the seven pillars of wisdom to illustrate the firm foundation and not the finite number. Perhaps these seven churches among those in Asia Minor were chosen because in concert they well illustrated the conditions of all churches at one time or another. Certainly, in these seven letters, we can find promise and warning somewhere for this local church.

The final letter of Christ is addressed to the church at Laodicea and she is without doubt the sorriest of the five who received rebuke from Jesus. Unlike the others, she receives absolutely no commendation whatsoever. Laodicea is forever recalled as the nauseatingly lukewarm congregation and yet even she was being given time to repent and be restored.

Continuing our circuit around Asia Minor, we travel 40 miles southeast from Philadelphia and arrive at the Lycus Valley and the intersection of two major trade routes, the city of Laodicea. Under the Roman Empire, Laodicea became the richest of the cities of Phrygia, so well off that even a devastating earthquake in A.D. 60 did not require federal assistance to rebuild. Laodicea was the banking center of Asia Minor with its vaults filled with gold. She was also a center of the ancient garment industry, famous for the dark wool woven from black sheep grazing in her countryside. Laodicea had a notable medical school in her borders where medicines such as the Phrygian eye powder were produced and exported to the rest of the world. The city did have one glaring weakness: the lack of an adequate source of fresh, potable water; one archaeologist reasons that her water was delivered via aqueduct from the hot springs to the south and thus was not naturally cool and refreshing, but lukewarm and somewhat bitter.

The elements then of prosperity and self-sufficiency defined the pride of Laodicea and apparently infected the saints in town as well. Decades earlier, she was mentioned in the Colossian letter of the apostle Paul (Colossians 4:13, 16), but other than the fact that a church then existed there, nothing more is revealed. This letter in Revelation chapter three, however, reveals enough to paint a sad picture of the church in Laodicea; a tepid attitude toward spiritual things had been allowed to take over and no fire remained to sustain the church against hard times.

Jesus completes the pattern of telling each of seven churches that he knows their works, reminding them and us of his omniscience, even into things that we consider concealed from every other human. Jesus calls himself “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” What Jesus knows about their works is that they reflect a lukewarm attitude toward matters of the faith.

Jesus closes the letter by showing himself standing at the door and knocking, desiring to enjoy rich association again with the church.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 3:14-22

1. How is Jesus “the beginning of God’s creation” (John 1:1-14, Colossians 1:15-17)?
2. What specifically was it about Laodicea that was nauseatingly lukewarm? What does lukewarmness look like?
3. List a few synonyms for lukewarmness. List a few antonyms. Diagram this sentence and then summarize the etymology of each word (just kidding about this part!).
4. Compare the Lord’s wish that they were either cold or hot to Peter’s treatment of false teachers in Second Peter 2:20-22.
5. What did the Laodiceans say about themselves? What was the reality of their condition?
6. What was the Lord’s threefold prescription (Matthew 6:19-24, Revelation 19:8, Second Corinthians 4:14-18)?
7. What does Jesus want from his lukewarm people?

Street of Gold (10): Throne Room of Heaven

The fourth chapter of Romans offers a rare glimpse inside the throne room of heaven and the opportunity to comprehend anew that our King is firmly ensconced upon the seat of David over his kingdom, the church. There, he remains concerned with the affairs of this world and his redeemed are never far from his care.

There is nothing so inviting to curious men as an open door and here it is a rare invitation from God for a man to look inside and see what Goes on beyond the clouds in Heaven. Lest the open door be too foreboding, a voice like a trumpet personally invites John to come up and see what things God had planned for his people in the days to come. Only a few other mortals have come so close to God. John joins their elite company as an aged apostle, but with a mission to share the account of his experiences with all the persecuted saints in his world.

Here again is the moral imperative intrinsic to the word “must,” especially when it is attached to the consolation of the troubled saints of Domitian’s pagan realm. God is about to foretell eventual victory in spite of initial deterioration in conditions and the need for great perseverance. Such persecution as theirs was not a surprise to our Lord; the apostles had been scattered at the crucifixion and the disciples in Jerusalem were scattered by the martyrdom of Stephen. Still the faithful remained faithful (John 16:33).

Like Paul before him, John is transported in the spirit so that he can see into heaven and immediately his eyes are drawn to its throne. The figurative nature of the imagery is clear here, as it should be throughout the book. A green halo shone around the throne, a rainbow set there by God after the flood as a reminder that he would never again destroy the Earth with water. The actual identity of the twenty-four elders seated around the throne is never told, but in a book of figures and symbols, that is hardly surprising. Jesus has not yet reappeared since punctuating the letter to Laodicea, but now the Spirit does, signified by the burning lamps like illuminating power of the truths he had revealed in his mission to teach the apostles all things (John 14:26).

Much later, the sea of glass will be removed, but in these early stages, it is there, clear as crystal and the transcendence of God. Jehovah remains somewhat separated from his children while life and death continue on Earth; only the final judgment can eliminate this division and unite man with Maker for all eternity.

Four living creatures join the scene in the midst of the throne; each has eyes all over him front and back. The first one John sees is like a lion, the second like a calf, the third like a man and the fourth like a flying eagle. Were this literal, the image would be terrifying rather than reassuring.

John writes that the creatures do not rest day or night and when the creatures sing, the elders fall before God and worship him.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 4:1-11

1. Discuss what these other four Bible characters saw when invited to look behind the clouds at Heaven.

a. Moses (Exodus 33:18-23):

b. Elijah (First Kings 19:1-13):

c. Stephen (Acts 7:51-60):

d. Paul (Second Corinthians 12:1-10):

2. According to verse one, what would John see? Were things about to improve instantly (Psalm 46:1-6)? Explain.

3. What are your impressions of the throne and its occupant?

4. Who are represented by the twenty-four elders (12+12)?

5. What does the sea of glass represent?

6. What do the four living creatures resemble (compare to Ezekiel 1:10,18 and Isaiah 6:2-3)?

7. How do the creatures and elders interact?

Street of Gold (11): Worthy Is The Lamb

The astounding scene before John's eyes has moved very quickly since he initially entered the Spirit on the Lord's Day back in chapter one. The fourth chapter found John in the Spirit again and looking through an open door into heaven where the majesty of the Father was magnified by the presence of the elders and cherubim singing "Holy, Holy, Holy."

The fourth chapter ends on a note of glory for the Lord, but the fifth chapter opens with something missing. In this chapter, the prophecies to come in the rest of the book are described as being upon a scroll, which must be opened for John's witness. Chapter five will end on the same kind of note as the one that preceded it, for worthy is the Lamb of God.

The Father sits upon his throne in heaven, from which he had thundered forth about Jesus so long ago, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." From here he had created the world and overseen its development; from here he had nurtured the scheme of salvation and attended to the prayers of the faithful. Now we find him still engaged with mankind by holding in his hand a scroll that promises to reveal the answers to the most pressing questions being debated in Asia Minor. In a scene similar to Excalibur, an angel asks who will open the scroll by loosening the seals.

One of the twenty-four elders disturbs John's painful suspense and identifies the only one worthy in all the universe to break the seals and reveal the contents of the scroll. It is the lion of Judah, the root of David, who has prevailed. Jesus is also called here the root of David, a term that would seem to contradict his claim to descend from Judah and be descended from David at the same time, but it merely shows his eternal nature. Yet when John looks to behold the lion, he instead sees a lamb as if it had been slain with seven horns and seven eyes.

The twenty-eight elders and cherubim see him take the scroll and immediately fall down to worship this conqueror that had prevailed. The new song that the twenty-eight sing reveals that the Lamb was worthy because he had been slain for the redemption of mankind. It was his blood, which purchased the church, the household of faith and home of obedient believers and formed a kingdom composed of souls from under every regime on Earth (First Peter 2:7-10).

The chorus grows beyond the original twenty-eight to an innumerable host of angels and heavenly beings, all singing about the worthiness of the lamb that was slain. Seven treasures are ascribed to Jesus who sacrificed himself upon the Roman cross and overcame death to save mankind from eternal death. The twenty-eight elders and cherubim shout out their approval of this worship scene and continue their own praise of the eternal lamb. A chapter that began with suspense, disappointment and tears ends with shouts of joy and hopefulness for a worthy, prevailing lamb will surely have something to say about a demonic, murderous emperor.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 5:1-14

1. What was the angel's question? What effect did it have on John?
2. Whom did the elder suggest for the job (Genesis 49:8-12, Isaiah 11:1,10; Revelation 22:16, Mark 12:35-37)?
3. What does John see instead, though, when he turns to see the Lion (Isaiah 53:4-7, John 1:29, First Peter 1:19)?
4. What does John tell us the golden bowls of incense represent (Revelation 8:3-5, James 5:16, Philippians 4:1-7)? Explain your answer.
5. What is the theme of their new song?
6. What is the irony of the lamb's slaying (Matthew 16:13-19, First Corinthians 15:51-58)?
7. What two companies do the ransomed people comprise (verse 10; see also First Peter 2:5-9)?
8. List the seven treasures the lamb is worthy to receive.

Street of Gold (12): The Seven Seals

The sixth chapter sees the breaking of first six of the seven seals, with fantastic flourishes of drama and consequence. The images here should not be taken literally, for this apocalyptic message is, by definition, composed of signs and symbols.

The scroll was introduced to John and his readers in chapter five, and all that we know about it is that it contained answers to the questions of the persecuted saints in that age, some of whom were beginning to wonder if the faith was worth it. Only Jesus was deemed worthy to break the seals and open the scroll, for his work of ultimate self-sacrifice and redemption had returned him to the place of high esteem in Heaven upon David's throne (Acts 2:29-33). The scene in heaven, which is rehearsed in chapter five, renews the hope of the troubled saint, for victory is its theme.

The seven seals are only the first of three series of seven signs of judgment; later we will find seven trumpets in chapters eight and nine and seven bowls of wrath in chapters fifteen and sixteen. The three series appear to describe the same effects, only in different terms and with increasing intensity. Each of the series begins with four items that are similar to one another, then a pair of similar things, followed by one final, unique symbol.

The opening of the first seal is seen by John and introduced by one of the four living creatures, speaking with a thunderous voice, "Come and see." The rider on the white horse wore a crown and held a bow as he went out in search of conquest. This image bears a strong similarity to the military prowess of the Parthian cavalryman, which could suggest his place in troubling Rome, but the context of the book and the Bible make it more likely that the first rider is Jesus Christ himself. Conquest is a theme of the book and it is Jesus, his cause and his brethren who consistently do the conquering. In this early sign, we see the redemptive work of Christ.

The second horseman rides upon a red stallion, with blood obviously connected to him. The second beast summons John to look and he finds that this horseman has power to take peace from the Earth and inspire killing.

The third beast alerts John that the third seal has been opened and he then sees a black horse being ridden by a man holding a balance in his hands. An entire day's wages would be required to buy this small amount of grain while the wealthy would be untouched by the peculiar "famine."

The fourth creature shows John a pale horse ridden by Death and Hades, who had power to kill a fourth of the Earth with sword, hunger, death and beasts. This horse is not white—victorious—but pale, sickly and gruesome—almost green. Thus concludes the first four, similar seals.

When the fifth seal is opened, heartbreak takes on a human face. The souls of the martyrs are conscious after death and able to communicate with God.

Street of Gold (13): The 144,000

The interlude continues in chapter seven as the order of the old Roman world prepares for disruption. Chapter seven holds back the events of this temporal judgment while the redeemed are sealed and protected.

Like the eye of a hurricane, the action suddenly abates and four angels are posted at the four corners of the Earth to hold back the winds that would continue the judgment. Another angel ascends from the east bearing the seal of the living God. This lone angel speaks to the other four and instructs them to hold back the winds until the servants of God in the path of destruction have been sealed. John is able to hear the number of souls sealed, not 139,998, but 144,000 exactly, an obviously symbolic number representing all the saved people on Earth at any given moment. With the 144,000, or the “church militant,” now sealed, the vision can continue and the redeemed are recognized on Earth.

While the 144,000 were in the path of God’s fury upon their own persecutors, there is also a great multitude, surrounding the throne of Jehovah. They represent the “church triumphant,” having died in faith and been elevated to reward. They are joined in shouts of praise by the angels, elders, and four creatures. One of the elders turns to John asks him to identify the great multitude and John wisely defers to the elder’s knowledge. This state of glory is made to sound much like the last two chapters of Revelation and for good reason; these saints have passed from life into immortality and no painful thing can touch them now.

Later in this book, the beast will have his famous mark, but for now, it is more important that the saints on Earth receive theirs. The mark is symbolic, but vitally necessary to our place in God’s sanctified throng (Second Timothy 2:7-21). We are sealed with the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and whose presence becomes undeniable from the pattern of life we follow in him (Romans 8:1-11).

Modern Premillennial thought holds that all Israel will be saved despite their continued rejection of Jesus Christ, because his second coming will convince them at last to accept him. Yet the Bible says that the gospel message is the power of God unto salvation for the Jew first and also the Gentile (Romans 1:16). All Christians are Abraham’s seed according to the promise and the church is now the household of God (First Timothy 3:15).

While it is unlikely that any of us would join that precise number of martyred souls, every one of us who strives to live faithfully will suffer some persecution, some pressure to conform to the course of this world and only we who emerge from our own tribulation will be worthy to wear white as comforted worshipers in heaven. Seeking God’s favor in faith and pursuing repentance for every transgression will help ensure that our white robe is reserved (First John 3:1-3).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 7:1-17

1. The question that closed chapter six was “Who can stand” in the day of wrath? What is the resounding answer in chapter seven? Describe the seal (Revelation 14:1, Ephesians 1:13-14).

2. How was a similar group described in Ezekiel 9:4-6?

3. What is the significance of the number 144,000 and the twelve tribes?

4. What other group did John see next?

5. List the seven eternal attributes that the angels, creatures and elders ascribed to God.

- | | |
|----|----|
| a. | e. |
| b. | f. |
| c. | g. |
| d. | |

6. Who were the people clothed in white robes?

7. What is their condition now that the Roman persecution can no longer reach them?

Street of Gold (14): The Seven Trumpets

Some time ago, John had received a gift of hope regarding the persecution of Christians in first century Asia Minor. He had been transported in the Spirit to Heaven where a scroll appeared with the promise of answers. When Jesus began to open systematically and sequentially those seals, John saw a timeline of events that led from the seeds of gospel preaching to his present distress.

Now the time is ripe for the seventh seal to be opened and for the seven trumpets to begin to sound.

By now, John has probably become accustomed to the blissful noise of heaven, a sound often interrupted on Earth by tears and cries of terror. John had listened to voices and thundering, to songs and shouts, but now as the seventh seal is opened, he is struck by silence, for about 30 minutes. A united assembly of angels receives their trumpets as another of their kind approaches the altar with incense to add to the prayers of the saints. With assurance that man's prayers are reaching the only one who can answer them, the angel then casts a censer upon the earth, which causes a great symbolic cacophony to resound again.

With the seven seals opened and completed, the unit of angels then prepared to blow their trumpets one by one; the first sounded his horn and a mixture of hail, fire and blood was thrown to the Earth, causing a third of the Earth and all the green grass to be incinerated. Because of their perseverance and stature, mountains are used throughout scripture as symbolic of great powers and here the second trumpets slays one. The third trumpet sent a star falling from heaven, which turned a third of the waters of the Earth to wormwood. The fourth trumpet smites a third of the sun, moon and stars.

The signs and symbols continue to play out in front of John as an answer to the suffering of the saints of first century Asia Minor because of the excesses of the Roman Empire and her master, Domitian, who demanded to be revered as a deity. The fifth trumpet sounds and John sees a star that has fallen to Earth with the key to the abyss of smoke and fire. Locusts symbolically come out of the fire, for they have long been figures of divine judgment, especially through the prophet Joel (2:4, 1:6). They are led by Satan himself, or perhaps one of his ministers.

The sounding of the sixth trumpet loosens the four angels who were bound at the Euphrates River to kill a third of mankind. An unimaginable army appears to do their bidding, numbering 200 million soldiers, whose formation would occupy a column one mile wide and 85 miles long (Summers, 159). Yet the other two-thirds of mankind that survived was not moved by the sign of this plague any more than Pharaoh was completely moved in the presence of Moses and his plagues.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 8:1-9:21

1. What was the mood after the seventh seal was broken (Revelation 8:1-5)?

2. How should prayer be according to the following passages?
 - a. Philippians 4:4-7:
 - b. Luke 18:1-8:
 - c. Luke 18:9-17:
 - d. James 5:16-18:

3. What happened with each trumpet (Revelation 8:9-13)?
 - a. First:
 - b. Second:
 - c. Third:
 - d. Fourth:

4. How bad were the effects of the fifth trumpet (9:1-12)?

5. Describe the army that was unleashed with the sixth trumpet (9:13-19).

6. What was the effect upon the rest of mankind that escaped (9:20-21)?

7. What causes some people to become insensitive to rebuke and chastening (Ephesians 4:17-19, First Timothy 4:1-5, Hebrews 12:1-17)?

Street of Gold (15): The Little Scroll

The presence of interludes like the one here in chapter 10 makes the Revelation all the more full of tension and anticipation. One can only imagine the emotions of the apostle John and his first readers among the persecuted churches of Asia Minor at the end of the first century. They were the ones who yearned ardently for relief and in this book, God's providential care is promised and the fate of the faithful is explained. Six of seven trumpets have sounded and now an interlude intervenes as John discovers a little scroll in the hand of an angel.

Three woes had been promised in chapter nine, as the effect of the sounding of the last three trumpets. These verses are intended, like the interlude earlier between the sixth and seventh seals, to reassure the saints that the gospel is not destroyed by the revelation of these things. John sees another mighty angel descending from heaven in a cloud with a little book in his hand. The amazing noisiness of Revelation returns as the angel shouts with a sound like a lion's roar, full of power and unmistakable; it is a noise such as God used to announce judgment to the wicked through Jeremiah (25:30) and Amos (3:8) and is answered by the figurative voices of seven thunders. Job asked, "But the thunder of his power, who can understand" (26:14)?

A clap of thunder is enough to frighten a little child and although parents try to mollify them with stories of clouds bumping together, in reality, something marvelous, electric and powerful is occurring and children are right not to ignore it. The thunder here is meant to attract attention and signify justice John is about to write what the seven thunders stated, but he is stopped by a voice beyond the angel in heaven. As a witness rises in the courtroom to take his oath of honesty, so this mighty angel prepares to swear by God's witness.

John is then instructed to retrieve the opened little book from the strong angel, but when he asks for it, the angel tells him to eat the book, as Ezekiel had been told to do himself (Ezekiel 2:8-3:3, 14). This is more recycled imagery, meant to communicate certain information to the saints without detection by opponents among Caesar's forces. John was to fill himself with the book, a figure for mastering the contents of the little book intellectually and spiritually. The message was sweet like honey in his mouth, for he was a servant of God and its principles appealed to him spiritually and supported his hopes religiously. The same message, however, proved to make his stomach bitter because determined infidels would make its proclamation unpleasant and besides, the consequences of not knowing God and not obeying the gospel is heart-rending, even if it is just.

Some who realize the costs and sacrifices involved with submitting to God's will turn their backs on teaching it, or teaching the difficult parts of it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 10:1-11

1. Describe the mighty angel that came down from heaven (Revelation 10:1-3).
 - a. Attire:
 - b. Body:
 - c. Stance:
 - d. Voice:
2. What message was contained in the seven thunders (10:4)?
3. What is the angel prepared to announce and swear to?
4. What does the New Testament describe as the mystery of the gospel (Ephesians 1:9-11, 3:1-11; First Peter 1:10-12)?
5. What did the angel tell John to do with the little scroll (Revelation 10:8-11)? How does the compare to Ezekiel's experience (Ezekiel 2:8-3:14)?
6. How does John's experience describe that of preaching the gospel, especially a message that rebukes and corrects?
7. What is the Christian's obligation to God's word (Joshua 1:8, Second Timothy 2:15, First Timothy 4:13-15, Psalm 19:14)?

Street of Gold (16): The Two Witnesses

The word “then” opens chapter eleven and reminds us that the chapter breaks and even the series breaks in our yearlong examination of the book are of human origin; chapter eleven simply continues the vision of chapter ten that we could not study all at once last time. John’s experience as mere observer fades more distantly into memory as his active participation builds after ingesting the little scroll and now he is told to measure the temple. The significance of this measuring is to communicate the fact that God recognizes these people, can count the very hairs upon their troubled heads and is able to comfort them. Measuring up with God then is about living by faith in sanctification from the world and trust in his word and will. For this same duration, the two witnesses will prophesy in sackcloth.

The beast is introduced here, but will not assume a leading role in the Revelation narrative until chapter thirteen. Once the witnesses have completed the delivery of their message, the beast rises from the bottomless pit to kill them. Their death will be a cause for rejoicing among people who tired of hearing the witnesses’ messages that condemned their acts of worldliness.

Their merriment proved short-lived, however, for in fine apocalyptic fashion, the faithful two are resurrected from the dead like the man whom Elijah restored to life (Second Kings 13:21) and the dry bones of the house of Israel (Ezekiel 37:10). The Master who had commissioned them to proclaim this gospel, even to the point of martyrdom, fulfills his promise and raises them out of the Earth to a place of reward. With righteous indignation, God couples this ascension with an earthquake that renders a partial judgment upon the fleshly world, causing the survivors to reconsider their wickedness, if only insincerely and temporarily. The perseverance of the witnesses while they preached, the reaction of the wicked, the witness’s eventual demise and eternal reward well illustrate to the first century Christians and us the wisdom in holding fast to God’s word in season and out. No particular historical event is being considered in these symbols, but rather, the truth of the matter whenever truth is preached and righteous men are troubled.

The first two woes were revealed in the fifth and sixth trumpets and now the time is approaching for the seventh trumpet to announce the third woe. Despite the persecution of worldly men, the gospel has reached the entire world and the kingdom of Christ is fully established with Jesus upon the throne of David. Satan’s attempts to kill the Messiah and persecute his church to death in the first century have failed and the gospel has taken hold. The center of worship in heaven is then revealed to John, who sees the Ark of the Covenant and natural symbols of power and justice and glory.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 11:1-19

1. What distinguished whether John measured something (Revelation 11:1-2)? What then would the measuring signify?
2. In New Testament times, what is God's temple (Ephesians 2:19-22, First Peter 2:5-9)?
3. What is significant about the two witnesses' sackcloth (Revelation 11:3; see also Isaiah 37:1-2, Jonah 3:5, Matthew 11:21)?
4. To what are the two witnesses compared (Revelation 11:4; see also Zechariah 4:6-14, 3:1-5)?
5. Why did the people on Earth rejoice when the beast killed the witnesses (Revelation 11:5-14)? What similar sentiment was expressed by the Sodomites while Lot lived among them (Genesis 19:9, Second Peter 2:8)?
6. What happened when it seemed the witnesses' cause was lost?
7. What happened when the seventh angel sounded (Revelation 11:15-19)?

Street of Gold (17): The Struggle

The little scroll that John received from an angel and then ate back in chapter ten is now recalled and its contents are described here in Revelation chapter twelve. The work of Satan, especially as it is accomplished by his ungodly cohort among men, is exposed and predicted for failure. The allies of God, the Lamb and his faithful saints, struggle through persecution to victory by being faithful even unto death. More characters are introduced into the plot here in chapter twelve, including a dragon, a woman and a child. As the first century church was begging for answers about their condition, the message of this book must give them hope and comfort.

A great sign is seen from heaven's perspective: a woman arrayed with the illumination of God's three dispensations: the starlit age of the hopeful patriarchs, the moonlit age of Moses and the tutorial Law and the sunlit era of Christ and the New Testament of grace. This great sign includes the pregnancy of this woman. Hope is assaulted, however, by the appearance of another sign in heaven: a great, fiery red dragon with seven crowned heads and ten horns. The Devil, of course, failed, despite an apparent victory at the cross, for the empty tomb defeated his greatest ally, which is death.

The Child took hold of his scepter to rule in his spiritual kingdom, the church, from the throne of David in heaven (see Hebrews 1:8). He was caught up into heaven for his coronation and the Woman, representing God's faithful remnant now fully in the church, also flees into the wilderness where she was promised protection. There she is nourished for a period identical in duration to the assault on the city and the witness's prophesying. As Israel was nourished in the wilderness with manna, so now spiritual Israel will feed upon the true bread that comes down from heaven.

The war that breaks out in heaven between Michael and the Devil and their servants is not to be considered literally any more than the picture of the Devil as a Dragon. With this series of events concluded, God's scheme of redemption is now fully come; Satan, the adversary, is exposed and weakened and grace reigns supreme and supremely attainable. Victory comes to the seer's brethren by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony and their willingness to die rather than recant their convictions.

With her child gone, the woman is left to suffer the persecution of Satan—the remnant people of the early church of Christ were afflicted with terrible persecution by the devil through the hands of the ruling Roman Caesars (see John 15:20). The devil, acting through a willing accomplice in Rome, would attempt to drown the infant church in a flood of lies, idolatry, seductions and fears, for he is the father of lies. The dragon was not content to hold sway over the worldly; he still wanted to destroy the kingdom of grace and wipe it off the face of the earth, but now he begins to attempt it on an individual basis, trying saved souls personally to win them back.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 12:1-17

1. With what is the woman clothed? What was her condition (Revelation 12:1)-2?
2. Describe her nemesis and his plan (Revelation 12:3-4; see also Genesis 3:15).
3. Describe her child (Revelation 12:5-6). What was his destination (see also Acts 2:29-33, Revelation 3:21)?
4. Who is Michael (see Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1)? What became of the dragon and his angels after the war in Heaven with Michael (Revelation 12:7-12)?
5. How did the dragon show that he wasn't surrendering even in defeat (Revelation 12:13-17)?
6. Who are her offspring (Hebrews 2:11)? What interest does the dragon have in them (Romans 6:16-23)?
7. Where is the dragon's power?

Street of Gold (18): 666

The persecution of the early churches has been reported symbolically in this Revelation with images of awful beasts tormenting innocent witnesses and a pure lady and her child. Although the power of the tempter has been curtailed by the ascendancy of Jesus Christ to the throne of David, he continues to entice Christians into sin and apostasy. In spite of this all-out war on the saints, God protects them and enables the truly faithful to persevere.

As chapter twelve becomes chapter thirteen, a new beast appears from the sea to trouble the church. The relentlessness of the Roman persecution is formidable and discouraging, but the church will prevail.

Unlike many of their neighbors, the ancient Hebrews were not a seafaring people; this is reflected in that the parables of Christ focus less upon voyages and storms and more upon farming and husbandry. That this beast arises from the sea adds to his mystique and horror and the clear recycling of symbols from the book of Daniel clarifies his purpose and power (Daniel 7:1-14). This sea beast in Revelation bears a resemblance to Daniel's fourth beast, which equated to the fourth world power to come after Nebuchadnezzar, the Roman empire when considered chronologically (Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, Roman; Daniel 2:31-45). The empire is mortally wounded and then shockingly healed, perhaps as a reference to the death of the persecutor of Peter and Paul, Nero, thirty years before.

Four things are given to the beast, the empire and its sovereign Caesar: a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies (the Caesars demanded to be called God themselves and tormented any who tried to hold true to Jehovah), authority to continue forty-two months (a symbolically indefinite period of persecution), authority to make war with the saints and to overcome them (the persecution), and authority over every tribe, people, tongue and nation (worldwide political dominance). Like the crucifixion of Christ, overcoming the saints is only a temporary victory, for resurrection turns death into life (see Daniel 7:21-27).

Like a poodle with the bark of a German Shepherd, this land beast has the docile and harmless appearance of a lamb, but the growl of a terrible dragon, the voice of wickedness. The land beast acts under the authority of the sea beast; it is the enforcer of emperor worship in Asia Minor. As God sealed his people with his name upon their foreheads, so now the land beast demands visible signs of allegiance to the sea beast, the empire. As time and chapter designations interrupt this stirring and frightening scene, we find the authority of the sea beast—the empire—being executed by the land beast—his priests and enforcers—as the idolatry of a deified Caesar marches forward among the churches.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 13:1-18

1. What is Daniel's fourth beast like (Revelation 13:1-2; see also Daniel 7:1-14)?
2. What happened to the fourth beast (Revelation 13:2-4; see also Psalm 113:5, Romans 9:19)?
3. Describe the function of the sea beast (Revelation 13:5-10).
4. Whose names remain safe in the Lamb's book of life (see also Hebrews 10:35-39)?
5. Describe the next beast that arises (Revelation 13:11).
6. What is the land beast's function (Revelation 13:12-15)?
7. What was the purpose of 666?

Street of Gold (19): Babylon Is Fallen

Our last visit to the Revelation of Jesus Christ permitted us to eavesdrop upon the readers in the first century churches of Asia Minor, who were giving warning to their contemporaries of the evil done by the Roman Empire. The mark of the beast, 666, was identified to give a figurative representation of his utter imperfection and excessive nature in falling well short of God's ideal for him. Although many try to make the number 666 fit upon men and things today, that prophecy was applied 1900 years ago.

While chapter 13 is filled with anguish and fear, the fourteenth chapter opens immediately with hope and the promise of ultimate victory. The persecution emanating from Caesar must not deter their walk by faith.

Verse one drives away the despair of the thirteenth chapter with a new vision of the worthy Lamb and his 144,000 sealed believers standing on Mount Zion. Mount Zion was initially the stronghold of David in the Old Testament (Second Samuel 5:7), but came to represent God's presence and protective relationship with his nation. When we reach the New Testament, Mount Zion is a purely figurative description of the realm of the glorified Messiah (Hebrews 12:22-24). The Mount Zion, then, upon which the Lamb and his 144,000 stand is not heaven itself or a literal mountain in Israel, but security of the church militant upon Earth. Upon seeing the 144,001, John hears a voice from heaven with the qualities of majesty, volume and melody; he compares the voice to the sound made by rushing waters, thunder and harps, but the voice is not literally any of these.

The first angel flies in the mist of heaven with the everlasting gospel to preach to every soul on Earth. The first angel made preparation for dealing with this judgment on a city compared to Babylon of old; the second angel announces its arrival. The third angel adds warning to all those who refused the gospel of the first angel and thought they might avoid the punishment of the second because they were not active parts of the empire. With the voice from heaven, the patience of the saints is their steady perseverance and determination to do the right thing without faltering in the face of persecution; they are rewarded with rest from their labors and reward for their good works (First Corinthians 15:58).

The white cloud is at once a symbol of purity and judgment and the one riding upon it must be Christ, the son of Man, crowned by glory and prepared to harvest. The conditions on Earth signified that it was time to put in the sickle and reap; the persecution by Rome had reached a crescendo at which it was time for God to act as he had so long ago when Egypt had enslaved his people. After Christ thrusts in his sickle, another angel follows suit and then still another comes out from the altar with the power of fire, calling for a gathering of ripe grapes. This harvest of the Earth indicates the removal of the wicked that had participated in Caesar worship.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 14:1-20

1. Where are the Lamb and the 144,000 standing (Revelation 14:1; see also Hebrews 12:22-24)? What is represented by their marks (see Second Timothy 2:19)?
2. What sounds did John hear (Revelation 14:2-3)?
3. What qualities did the 144,000 all share (Revelation 14:4-5)?
4. Where were the 144,000 back in chapter seven?
5. What was the message of the flying angel (Revelation 14:6-7)? What did the second angel announce (Revelation 14:8)?
6. What did the third angel promise to those who compromised their convictions to survive in the idolatrous empire (Revelation 14:9-12)?
7. How do the deeds of the righteous follow them (Revelation 14:13; see also First Corinthians 15:58, Matthew 6:19-21, First Peter 1:3-9)?
8. What time is it (Revelation 14:14-20)?

Street of Gold (20): Seven Bowls of Armageddon

In chapters eight and nine, seven trumpets sounded to signify a judgment upon a third of the earth. Now in chapters 15-16, seven bowls are poured out to symbolize judgment again, but on all of society. Before the bowls of wrath are emptied, however, a scene of rejoicing is reported for this judgment is beneficial to God's children.

This is the third great sign in heaven that John has witnessed and each had preceded a special revelation from God. The sign is of seven angels with seven plagues that will fulfill completely the wrath of God in this local context. The crystal sea introduced back in chapter four is seen again, only now it has obtained a reddish tint because of the saints' fiery trials and God's retribution for them; before, it completely separated man and God, but now the martyrs are able to stand upon it in victory over the emperor's assault on their faith.

The first angel's bowl is poured out upon the earth and a foul and loathsome sore is produced upon all idolatrous men who bore the mark of the beast; as body sores indicate an accumulation of toxins and impurities, so this plague symbolizes a building up of iniquity from worshiping a false god.

The second angel's bowl is poured out upon the sea and everything in it died; this plague symbolizes the putrid state of humanity in which immorality reigned as a norm.

The third angel's bowl is poured out on rivers and springs, turning them to blood as vindication for the blood of the prophets and saints; this bowl symbolizes simple retribution, eye for an eye, or blood for blood.

The fourth angel's bowl is poured out on the sun, causing men to be scorched, but not to repent of the sins that were being repaid now; back in 13:13, the emperor's illusionists had pretended to harness the sun and now their trickery was to be punished.

The fifth angel's bowl struck the throne of the beast and his kingdom with darkness and pain, symbolizing the separation from God the heathen had chosen.

The sixth angel's bowl is poured out on the Euphrates River to dry it up and make a clear path for invaders; a deterrent to invasion and source of false security are thus removed and vulnerability is multiplied.

The seventh angel's bowl is then poured into the air, accompanied by the voice of God declaring this scene of judgment completed.

Sin always leads to a moral plague upon the sinner, a figurative leprosy that brings the agony of guilt and eats away at the conscience (Matthew 15:10-20). When God's judgment is administered, no earthly refuge will protect you—not your friends or your money or even your home. The only trustworthy refuge is Christ, the solid rock (Hebrews 6:17-19).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 15:1-16:21

1. John sees two contrasting images—one threatening and one promising. What are they (Revelation 15:1-4)?

2. What did John see when the tabernacle opened (Revelation 15:5-8)?

3. Describe the effect of each plague (Revelation 16:1-12, 17-21).

- a. First (2):
- b. Second (3):
- c. Third (4-7):
- d. Fourth (8-9):
- e. Fifth (10-11):
- f. Sixth (12):
- g. Seventh (17-21):

4. What might have been God's merciful intent with these plagues (see verses 9 and 11)?

5. What is the purpose of God's mercy and chastening (see First Timothy 2:1-4, Romans 2:1-11 and Hebrews 12:1-17)?

6. What intervened between the sixth and seventh plagues (Revelation 16:13-16)?

7. Where did they assemble for battle (see also Joshua 12:21, 17:11; Second Kings 9:27, 23:29; Judges 5:19)?

Street of Gold (21): Mother of Harlots

The seven bowls of Armageddon have been poured out upon the world, according to Christ's first century prophecy, and judgment has begun to come upon the persecutors of the saints in Asia Minor, symbolized as awful beasts with evil images. Rome has been characterized symbolically as Babylon, that brutish state of old that afflicted God's people and then was punished herself.

The second of two women appears here in the seventeenth chapter of Revelation. Before, the only woman obvious to the text was the one who gave birth to the man-child—she represented God's faithful remnant people; now a second, a harlot, is introduced in clear opposition to the first. The first woman was identified with Jerusalem, but this woman stands with Babylon, or Rome. Who will prevail—the unrepentant harlot or the persecuted, but faithful, remnant?

The great harlot is seen sitting upon many waters, which symbolize many peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues, according to verse 15. God had described immoral cities before as harlots, including Nineveh (Nahum 3:1-4), Tyre (Isaiah 23:15-17), ancient Babylon (Isaiah 47:5-15) and Jerusalem (Isaiah 1:21). The image of the harlot is suddenly transferred in verse 3 to a place upon a red beast, full of blasphemous names and having seven heads and 10 horns. Her attire in verse 4 is merely the cosmetic mask behind which she hides her seductive intentions and hellish consequences. Upon her forehead is written, "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." Behind her makeup and baubles is her true identity and intention; she is drunk upon the blood of the martyred saints, rejoicing in their brutal deaths.

The angel recognized that John was curious about the harlot and so he offers to talk about the mystery of her and the beast that bore her. John will not be the last to wonder about them, for all whose names are not in the book of life would witness the beast smitten and then temporarily revived. The ten horns are allies of Rome in one way or another against Christianity; they are vassal kings who rule various ethnic provinces by Rome's mandate.

The harlot is simply clarified in these verses; she is an empire, which borders many waters and seas and rules many nations and tongues. The vassal kings mentioned before as allies of Rome are revealed to be doing so only under duress or ambition, not genuine loyalty. God's purpose would be carried out by his using the vassals to inflate Rome to untenable proportions and then remove her forever as an impediment to the gospel.

The enemy is identified and portrayed in such an unlovely image that Christians are rather embarrassed for her. Rome's weakening and punishment are settled, but the question of when remains mysterious.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 17:1-18

1. What was the crime of the great harlot (Revelation 17:1-6)? What identifies the harlot as the evil city (see also verse 18)?
2. With what was the great harlot drunk?
3. What would happen to the beast that carried her (Revelation 17:6-8)?
4. Rome was called the seven-hilled city because of its topography. On what does the harlot sit (Revelation 17:9-11)?
5. What do its ten horns represent (Revelation 17:12-13)?
6. Who is Lord of lords and King of kings (Revelation 17:14; see also First Timothy 6:15)?
7. What is wrong with the horns' loyalty to the harlot (Revelation 17:15-18)?
8. While the harlot is naturally condemned, God also uses and then punishes the nations that compromised and conspired with her, enjoying the indulgent pleasure she brought. How can Christians today become just as guilty as these vassal horns (James 4:1-6, Romans 12:1-2, First John 2:15-17)?

Street of Gold (22): Judgment on Babylon

In the seventeenth chapter, a great city with worldwide appeal was marked for divine judgment. She was figuratively called “Babylon the Great” to compare her to that actual city of ancient times. The Babylon that concerned John and his readers was not yet in the history books, however; it was Rome with her blaspheming Caesar and world empire. Revelation 18 simply continues the description of God’s impending vengeance upon Rome.

Although no time lapse is revealed—whether it be days or months or even years—the sequential chronology of these events remains in tact. The angel announces her fall as if it has already occurred, a prophetic custom that presupposes any prediction of God to be as good as done. The fornication committed with her by the kings on Earth is not only a habitual sexual immorality, but also a whoredom of political alliances and Machiavellian compromise. Just then another voice sounds out and calls the saints of God to flee the embrace of Rome as Abraham had fled Haran and Lot had fled Sodom. As God told Moses that Israel’s complaints from Egyptian bondage had reached his ears, so the angel assures John that the church’s cries from Roman bondage had touched him as well. Rome was about to learn the lesson of sowing and reaping; having sown the wind, she was about to reap a whirlwind. Her arrogance is the same as every great empire; a sense of invulnerability overwhelms and she boasts even against God. The demise of the harlot will come suddenly because it is God who judges her.

The kings of the Earth who had hated Rome’s extortion, but accepted it as the price of safety and luxury will selfishly weep at her fall. The merchants will weep even more selfishly, for Rome’s demise will bring them great economic depression and no market for their goods especially, the luxuries. The market for cattle and slaves will suddenly dry up. The shipmasters and sailors who brought the goods from afar will find nowhere to offload their cargo, for the city will not be able to buy, and there will be no other great market to take her place. It is materialism and worship of the things that has brought them to this kind of destruction.

Back in chapter 11, the wicked on Earth had mocked the deaths of the two witnesses, but now the tables are turned. The people of God are not told to rejoice in death, but to find satisfaction in the defeat of evil by good. While the kings, merchants and sailors mourn and weep, the saints, apostles and prophets celebrate for the persecuted have been avenged. An angel casts a millstone into the sea to illustrate the rippling effects of Rome’s ultimate fall.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 18:1-24

1. What picture did the angel paint of Babylon the great following her punishment (Revelation 18:1-3)?
2. What charge does the angel make against Babylon?
3. What is the problem with luxurious living?
4. What did another voice from heaven command the Christians to do (Revelation 18:4-8)? How does the world influence a disciple (Second Corinthians 6:14-7:1, First Timothy 6:6-10)?
5. How was Rome like Edom (Obadiah 1-4)?
6. List the three groups that mourn Babylon's fall (Revelation 18:9-19). Why are they so despondent?
7. What is the source of the joy in the saints, apostles and prophets (Revelation 18:20; see also Second Thessalonians 1:3-10)?
8. What does the millstone symbolize (Revelation 18:21-24)?

Street of Gold (23): King of Kings

The harlot who is judged in this passage is Rome and her brutal, inhuman, immoral presence; her predicted fall is a cause for great joy among the saints who have suffered indignities and persecution at her hands. While her accomplices in the market, on the sea and in various vassal states bemoan the loss of prosperity that will follow her fall, the people of God answer "Alleluia" for the execution of God's vengeance. "Alleluia" occurs only here in the New Testament and is a transliteration of the Hebrew phrase "Praise Ye Yah." As the nineteenth psalm says, so Revelation 19 agrees: God's judgments are true and righteous altogether.

A third woman joins the radiant one of chapter 12 and the harlot of chapter 17. She is the Lamb's bride, really the radiant woman from before in a new symbol; she is the church to be joined to Christ in heaven. To see the bride standing beside the harlot would make the contrast between Rome and the church very clear. The bride, then is not one person, but represents the entire population of the redeemed. John is overcome and gets confused and falls down to worship the angel, who rejects his adoration.

Although the harlot has been destroyed, the two great enemies of God and man, the beast and false prophet remain in place in ultimate service to Satan. This passage, then is still not a description of the second coming of Christ, for the circumstances in first century Rome have not been concluded yet. Christ appears on a white horse, a conqueror that inspires confidence as God's faithful and true witness. He is not alone, for the armies of heaven are likewise assembled in white robes upon their white stallions.

The sword of his mouth is his word, which saves the faithfully obedient and slays those who do not know God and those who refuse to obey the gospel (Second Thessalonians 1). His rod signifies his authority, the power to break men with a rod of iron and to dash them in pieces like pottery (Psalm 2:9). He is prepared to tread the winepress of wrath, a symbol borrowed from Isaiah 63:1-6.

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

The beastly Roman Empire summons his royal allies and their armies to this decisive battle, the battle of Armageddon that they had prepared for, but not fought, back in chapter 16. Even now a battle is not actually described, for Christ is too powerful! Armageddon has been fought and won by Christ and as a result, paganism emanating from the Roman throne has been eliminated. Daniel's vision from 500 years ago has been realized (7:1-12).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 19:1-21

1. What does Alleluia (or Hallelujah) mean (Revelation 19:1-6)? What care should we take in using the word (Matthew 12:33-37)?
2. What justifies the joy of the multitude in heaven over Rome's collapse (Romans 12:17-21)?
3. Who prepare to wed (Revelation 19:6-9)? Be specific (Ephesians 5:22-33, Second Corinthians 11:1-2). Of what is her gown composed?
4. What do people do with their invitations to the Lamb's marriage supper (Matthew 22:1-14)?
5. Compare John's error to that of Cornelius (Revelation 19:10, Acts 10:25-26).
6. What is the rider on the white horse called (Revelation 19:11-16)? Identify him (see also Revelation 3:7, John 1:1-14, First Timothy 6:15).
7. What is the outcome of the war (Revelation 19:17-21)?

Street of Gold (24): Thousand Years

For many centuries, the twentieth chapter of Revelation has been used as the basis for various theories about a literal thousand year reign of Christ on Earth. What we actually see, though, is a passage with seven parts, each begun with the phrase, “And I saw,” which describes the aftermath of the defeat of the beast and false prophet that embodied the old Roman empire. As Caesar and his allies in the world had been predicted for defeat, the devil was losing his closest allies in the fight against the faith. What becomes of the tempter and the persevering saints is the main subject of this chapter.

The angel who appears in verse one is not Jesus, but another ministering servant, who holds the key to the abyss, or bottomless pit, and a strong chain with which to bind Satan. Satan is caught by the angel and bound for 1000 years, representing a complete, but undetermined period in which he can operate only within the limits of his perimeter, which Christians and infidels enter at their own risk.

During this symbolically long period, Satan is to be held in the abyss, unable to deceive the nations as he had during Caesar's slavery to him. This thousand year moment of victory symbolizes the beginning of the reign of the emperor, Constantine, who ended persecution and legalized Christianity.

After the devil is restrained, John sees the souls of the martyrs and those who had managed to live faithfully on Earth as they sat upon thrones. The rest of the dead are the wicked servants of the devil through their allegiance to Rome; they have no part in the images of victory. The “first resurrection” is not a bodily raising, but a resurrection of the cause of Christ through the saints and martyr's vindication over Rome. Blessed are those who have a part in the renewed cause of Christ.

Unbound later, Satan will come forth without the old Roman empire to use in his objectives. Instead, he will employ his power of deception throughout the Earth and with the assistance of nations from the four corners of the globe. This looming battle is not literal, but spiritual, and fought daily as we see respect for the Bible decline around the world. Finally, the devil, the deceiver of Eve and Elymas, will be cast into the lake of fire with his ancient allies to face torment forever and ever.

This passage marks an important transition in the book of Revelation. We have concerned ourselves with things that were shortly to come to pass when John wrote about them to benefit his beleaguered readers in first century Asia Minor. Now the chapter ends with something still future as Christ is prophesied as sitting upon a great white throne to judge the living and the dead. A literal resurrection of all who ever lived has occurred and each one takes his turn standing before the judgment seat to hear his sentence pronounced (Second Corinthians 5:10).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 20:1-15

1. What was the purpose of binding Satan for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-3)? What is Satan still capable of doing, although bound (First Peter 5:8)?
2. At what point in history did the church find relief from Rome's persecutions?
3. Who would reign with Christ during this thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6)?
4. What is the second death (see also Revelation 20:14, John 8:21)?
5. What happens when this thousand years ends (Revelation 20:7-10)?
6. What happens before the great white throne (Revelation 20:11-15)?
7. What happens to sheep and goats in that day (Matthew 25:31-46, Second Corinthians 5:10)?

Street of Gold (25): The Bride of Christ

This New Jerusalem is new in kind (from the Greek *kainos*), being superior to the earthly Jerusalem, which preceded her. This is the city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God, the city that the patriarchs believed was to come (Hebrews 11:10). The symbolism continues however, for New Jerusalem is compared to a bride, dressed in white and adorned for her wedding.

An unidentified voice sounds from the area of the throne; his is a voice that employs and binds together all the symbols of the church of Christ. The voice emphasizes through repetition that, in this new order, God will again dwell among men and be with them in a way superior to the old order on Earth. This prediction is as faithful and true as was Christ.

God reminds us that all this is yet future, now only prophecy, but then fulfillment. In the interim, he continues to dispense his grace where he wishes and to offer unto all men drink from the fountain of the water of life. The theme of overcoming that appeared in the seven letters of Christ at the onset of this long Revelation returns here again. Not all overcome; some are overcome themselves by sin and are doomed to an eternity in the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

One of the seven plague angels returns to show John the bride of Christ in all her unblemished splendor. This passage opens as the chapter did, and is a recapitulation of the arrival of the bride, which had been interrupted by some words of final judgment. Remember that these descriptions are as symbolic as the dragon and harlot were; they are not literal, but suggest something even better than the signs.

Its foursquare measurements and other proportions confound our imagination, for the city would be literally 1500 miles in length, breadth and height. The wall measures 218 feet high according to the angel, certainly secure although nothing remains in the universe to assault it.

The center of old Jerusalem had been the temple of Solomon, but the center of New Jerusalem is God himself, without anymore need for symbols of his presence or divine manifestations of his power. The promise of Revelation 3:12 has been fulfilled: those who overcame have become pillars in God's temple, permanent worshipers in the sanctuary of the I AM. Even the sun and moon are superfluous where God provides the light from his immediate being. The people and nations in the holy city refer to the fact that men and woman have been redeemed from every corner of the globe and out of every nation, regardless of its overall condition; the kingdoms of men have been eliminated and all their glory has been conceded to Christ. The gates to the kingdom of Christ have always remained open to those who would obey him and become his citizens. John repeats the warning of verse eight that nothing unclean or sinful can enter in.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 21:1-27

1. What happened to the old heaven, earth and sea (Revelation 21:1-2)?

2. How did Isaiah use the phrase, “new heaven and Earth” (65:17-25)? How did Peter use it (Second Peter 3:1-13)?

3. What is the role of New Jerusalem as opposed to the one currently on Earth (Revelation 21:3-4; see also Hebrews 12:22-24)?

4. Who is promised refreshment (Revelation 21:5-7; Matthew 5:6, John 4:11-15, 7:37-39)?

5. List the groups who must be left out of this reward (Revelation 21:8).
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
 - g.
 - h.

6. What is their fate (see also Revelation 20:9-15, Jude 5-7)?

7. What is the purpose of this fantastic physical description of the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-21)?

8. Why is there no temple in it (Revelation 21:22-27, John 4:19-26)?

Street of Gold (26): Tree of Life

The first five verses of this chapter punctuate the description of the church triumphant from the previous chapter—a city with true foundations whose builder and maker is God. Now, John is shown a river and tree of life, which epitomize the existence of the redeemed in heaven forever. What mankind lost in Eden, he regains in Heaven!

The first thing John sees after considering the gates of heaven is its pure river flowing with living water. Because it flows from the throne of Jehovah and his son, it is unpolluted like earthly streams. Ezekiel had seen a similar vision, but in his, the river issued from the temple and flowed to the Dead Sea (47:1-12). Joel (3:18) and Zechariah (14:8) also saw visions of rivers that foresaw the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah in its establishment and militant states.

The tree of life had been planted in Eden so that man could take of its fruit and live beyond his natural mortality. When Adam and Eve sinned, immortality on Earth was instantly turned into a negative thing, for man would be compelled to live among temptation forever. An eternity amidst sin and corruption was prevented by God's tough love in expelling the couple from Eden and cutting off access to that tree of life on Earth. Access to the tree of life is regained in John's vision of Heaven.

The final 16 verses of this great book of symbols and promises remind those persecuted saints that God was coming quickly to comfort them and would eventually conquer their troublers. With the benefit of safe retrospection, the passage promises us that God keeps his vows and will keep the one made to us about eternity.

The sixth of seven Revelation beatitudes promises a blessing on those who keep the words of the prophecy of this book; once again, obedience is shown to be integral to genuine faith. This prophecy demanded loyalty without compromise—the condition upon which blessing is predicated.

John is told not to seal the book, for it was immediately needed; its main thrust was the conflict with imperial Rome, not some imaginary war just prior to the second coming of Christ, at least 1900 years away. The unjust and filthy must follow their character unless they can be converted by grace to the other way. The righteous and holy should avoid compromising with their persecutors to save their lives or promote their own physical welfare.

This book is to be accepted as scripture; it is not to be dismissed or tampered with. One who deletes from it, adds to it, or alters any of it is warned that such a sin will be punished, whether the man be a Christian or not. The plagues described in the trumpets of warning, the bowls of wrath and the lake of fire will be cast upon such a one and his name will be erased from the Book of Life, making his entrance into Heaven impossible.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: REVELATION 22:1-21

1. What was the purpose of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-17)? Why was access to its fruit lost (Genesis 3:1-6, 22-24)?
2. Access to the tree of life is regained in Heaven. What is the purpose of its leaves (Revelation 22:1-5)? Explain.
3. What would have happened to someone who saw God's face on Earth (Exodus 33:20-23, 34:29-35)?
4. John now returns to the reassurance of his original audience. When would this series of events commence (Revelation 22:6-7)?
5. How else are men tempted to worship the creature rather than the creator (Revelation 22:8-9, Acts 10:25-26, Romans 1:18-32)?
6. Daniel was told to seal up his book (12:4-9), but John is told the opposite. Why (Revelation 22:10-13)?
7. What gave some the right to the tree of life and entrance into the city (Revelation 22:14)? What kept others out (Revelation 22:15)?
8. What warning is appended to the Revelation (22:16-21)?

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