



# PT Butler

## Bible Study Notebooks

### Study of John's Revelation

prepared by P. T. Butler Th.D

Chapter	Page	Chapter	Page
Introduction	2	12	52
1	7	13, 14	58
2, 3	13	15, 16	70
4, 5	20	17, 18	75
6, 7	26	19, 20:1-6	88
8, 9	34	20:7 -22	97
10, 11	44	BIO	104

These Bible study notes are provided for your use in the preparation of teaching the holy scriptures. They were meticulously prepared over many years to serve the Kingdom of God and aid in the growth of Christians of any age. Please use them in combination with prayer and diligence to promote the clear and honest declaration of God's word.

Companion student handouts are also available to aid in classroom participation. You have permission to reproduce these materials for your Bible school programming.

© PTButler

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION

#### Introduction

Some preliminary notes on interpretative principles are in order before we ever begin to study the text of Revelation. Of great significance it must be noted first, that the book is REVELATION (SINGULAR), NOT "REVELATIONS" (PLURAL). IT IS TITLED THUS AND SAID TO BE THUS IN THE VERY FIRST VERSE—"A revelation (Gr. Apokalupsis, the definite article absent) of Jesus Christ..." There may be numerous "visions" but it is ONE REVELATION. That it is ONE, whole (not "chopped up revelations plural), sequential, revelation is important to remember for purposes of interpreting the book! The first part of Revelation is a Throne-vision and that includes all of chapters 1 through 5. All of John's vision after the Throne-vision (in chs. 4-5) is one vision, seen from different perspectives, running parallel to one another. The one vision is the Roman empire's (A.D. 90-500) attempt to usurp the Lamb's sovereignty over the world by destroying the Lamb's redemptive kingdom in the world (the church). As the Roman empire attempts to destroy Christianity, the Lamb is seen using the chaos Rome causes in the world (the Lamb adding his own providential control of events to warn Rome to repent) to chasten and save his church, and to finally bring about Rome's downfall. ALL THESE PREDICTED EVENTS RUN PARALLEL TO ONE ANOTHER UNTIL THEY REACH A CLIMAX AT THE DESTRUCTION (DRAMATIZED IN CHS. 6:1—20:6). The fall of the Roman empire severely restricts the powers of Satan (i.e., "binds" him, like a vicious dog tied to a tree whose only sphere of attack is as long as the chain). A victorious era of the church ensues (symbolized by the "1000 years"—the Christian dispensation). So, the fall of Rome, i.e., destruction of the "beast," only typifies and presages the consummation of all history. The time when history ceases to be and eternity ensues is unknown (e.g. Matt. 24:36,42,44,50, etc.) but is described by the Lamb to John in Rev. 20:7—22:5.

There are numerous presupposed interpretative systems imposed upon the book of Revelation. We will not name them or explain them here for lack of space and time. This study of Revelation is posited on the assumption that its initial focus was on the historical struggle coming upon the Christian churches of Asia Minor (and perhaps throughout the ancient Roman empire) beginning with the end of the first century and ending with the fall of the Roman empire.

The book of Revelation is specifically an extension and explanation of Daniel's "fourth beast." Daniel predicted that the kingdom of God would come into existence at the time of the world's fourth great empire (Dan. 2:44-45). He also predicted this fourth empire ("fourth beast"—Dan. 7:1-28) would persecute the "saints" but the saints would be victorious over it. In the decade of the last century (A.D. 90-100), during the persecutions of Domitian's reign, it appeared to the churches of Asia Minor (where most of the Christians lived in that

era) that the “beast” was invincible (Rev. 13:4). John was given a Revelation to proclaim, in symbolic drama the destined destruction of the “fourth beast” and the sure salvation of the saints. That was the book’s message when it was written—that is its message to the saints forevermore—EVIL CANNOT WIN, NO MATTER HOW POWERFUL EVIL BECOMES!

“Blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein” (1:3). The “beast” (Rome) was destroyed; the church survived. History verifies that the fall of Rome was caused by and occurred in exactly the way John predicted, in symbolic figures of speech, in his Revelation. The Lord intends this Revelation to be understood. Having the advantage of knowing its direct linkage to Old Testament prophecy and its fulfillment in the history of the Roman empire, we dare not make the mistake the Jews did with Old Testament prophecy in general and especially the eschatological, apocalyptic, symbolic books of O.T. prophecy (i.e., Ezekiel, Joel, Daniel,, Zechariah). The Jews forced upon these highly symbolic books of the O.T. such a physical, literal and materialistic interpretation they missed their message about the Messiah and his kingdom. When Jesus came claiming to be the fulfillment of these books and a spiritual king, insisting on setting up a spiritual kingdom, they opposed him and killed him.

John, the apostle, wrote this book while he was a prisoner, probably working in the copper mines on the island of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor (which today is the nation of Turkey). He wrote it about A.D. 98-100, during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian, one of the cruelest of all. An important tool to understanding the book of Revelation is to know something about the history of the Western Roman empire from its founding (46-44 B.C.) under Julius Caesar to its fall (ca. A.D. 476) under Romulus Augustulus. This history is readily summarized in my book, *Twenty-six Lessons on Revelation, Part One*, Paul T. Butler, 1982, College Press, p. 1-7, or detailed in *Caesar and Christ*, by Will Durant, 1944, Simon & Schuster, 674 pages.

Revelation is an epistle—just like the other “epistles” of the New Testament, except Revelation is written in apocalyptic symbolic, cryptic, and esoteric literary style. Revelation is a “letter” (or seven copies of the same “letter”) written to the “seven churches of Asia Minor” (Rev. 1:11). It is to be interpreted just like one would interpret any “letter” intended to be understood, except the interpretation must take into account the apocalyptic, symbolic, esoteric style. The Revelation is one drama with many acts. There are four basic rules of interpreting any written form of communication: (a) the true interpretation is what the author intended to say—not what the reader wants the epistle to say; (b) God’s word has one intended meaning, not many conflicting ones; (c) God is able to say what he wants to say and he knew to whom he was speaking—God would not give a revelation to confuse those who needed to know it; (d) the language of the Bible is the language of men and is to be interpreted by the same methods and principles as are appropriate for similar literature. The interpretation (or exegesis) of any written communication is what we read out of it, not what we read into it. Words in the Bible mean what words mean in any other human-language literature. If human language communicates in symbolic, apocalyptic style, human beings must have some criteria by which they understand symbolic, apocalyptic terminology. That is

why it is of utmost importance that the books of Joel, Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah be read and understood before the book of Revelation is read! Most of Revelation's symbolic, apocalyptic terminology is explained in those books.

To say the book of Revelation contains symbolism is an understatement. It is practically all symbolism! A symbol is a sign which stands for some object or idea. All words are symbols. Spoken words are symbols for objects and ideas. The letters of the alphabet are symbols for certain sounds. These letters are combined to form the written words which are the symbols for spoken words. The English dictionaries define symbol as "that which stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental but not intentional resemblance; especially a visible sign of something invisible, as an idea, a quality, or totality." A sign is that which points to something else. There are various synonyms or kinds of symbols: (a) emblem; (b) type; (c) token. A symbol is used, much like a parable, as a representative likeness and comparison which stimulates the mind to grasp the truth presented for those who want the truth for good, but to hide the truth from those who would pervert it.

Symbols arise out of and are related to cultural, traditional, racial, religious and historical circumstances and backgrounds. Some symbols were invented from necessity and are arbitrarily affixed. Some are established by long usage. Some become obsolete and some are universal and have endured since the beginning of time (e.g., "beast"). Characteristics of symbols are: (a) the object used in the symbol always compares to some common, physical object familiar to the audience addressed; (b) the object used in the symbol is not the meaning but suggests something else that resembles it; (c) a symbol is given to teach a lesson or truth in a vivid and memorable way; (d) the symbol will have some resemblance to the meaning that it portrays though it is distinct from that meaning, representing something other than itself.

The book of Revelation is apocalyptic in literary style. In fact, Apokalupsis (or Apocalypse) is the Greek title (meaning, "Revelation") and is the same word from which apocalyptic comes. Apokalupsis means, literally, "to take the cover away from, to uncover, to unveil." Revelation is meant to be understood! Biblical apocalyptic literature is occasioned by certain discernible conditions—mainly that it was created in an hour of desperate need. It is essentially a literature of the oppressed who sees no hope for a civilization or world in terms of politics or on the plane of human history. The battle being fought is on a spiritual level; it is to be understood not in terms of politics and economics, but rather in terms of spiritual powers in heavenly places. And so it compels the reader to look beyond history to the dramatic and miraculous intervention of God who will set right the injustices done to his people. This form of written expression was extremely appropriate to the day-to-day situations of Christians during the Roman empire (A.D. 90-500). One author has said that apocalyptic literature possessed "a very definite Sitz im Leben" (German, for, "one's situation in life"). Joel, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah wrote during, and immediately after, the catastrophic exile of the Jews into Babylonian (and Persian) captivity. They made wide use of symbolism and apocalyptic literary style to promote the survival of Messianic hope and

strengthen the faith of the Messianic people who were forced to endure the oppressions coming even after the captivities—down to the time of the Roman empire. So, Revelation “plugs in apocalyptically,” as it were, at the point where Joel, Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah leave off. The apocalyptic language of symbols of Revelation are essentially the reiteration of the same ideas and interpretations of history from the divine perspective, couched in essentially the same symbols of Joel, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah (and other prophets to lesser degree).

Apocalyptic literature in the Bible is prophecy, but it is also different from other prophecy. Revelation is apocalyptic-prosaic, with only a few passages of the poetic, while non-apocalyptic prophecy is pervasively poetic. Apocalyptic is more sequential in its revelation of history, while other, more poetic, prophecy skips back and forth from past to present to future. The book of Revelation is characteristically: (1) Epistolary: (a) written to 7 specific churches of the 1st and 2nd centuries, A.D.; (b) contains all the redemptive doctrines, in symbolism, contained in other epistles of the N.T.; (c) was intended to be read, understood, and “kept” (i.e., obeyed); (2) Prophetic: (a) predictive; (b) exhortative; (c) revelatory; (d) for a time of great spiritual stress; (3) Eschatological: (a) it continues the history of God’s covenant people from the end of Daniel’s book and fulfills his fourth-world-empire predictions; (b) it relates the struggle of the churches of Asia Minor to the consummation of all history; (c) it has a definite end to the divine redemptive program in view; (d) it promotes the divine perspective of human history; (4) Apocalyptic: (a) its language is cryptic and esoteric (i.e., coded in secret symbols to protect the author and readers from persecution; (b) it is highly figurative; (c) it is dramatic; (d) it is triumphant concerning the church and the faithful; (e) it is pessimistic concerning the world and the worldly-minded; (f) it is renovating in predicting God’s ultimate redemption.

The apocalypsts (Joel, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Revelation) give full reign to their imaginations in extravagant and exotic language and in imagery of a fantastic and bizarre kind. To such an extent is this true that symbolism may be said to be the language of apocalyptic. Often the symbols of apocalyptic literature are purposely unnatural and highly exaggerated. There are beasts with 10 horns and 7 heads; there is a lamb-speaking-like-a-dragon; there is a harlot with a name written on her forehead; there are three frogs coming from the mouth of dragons and beasts. These are the things one does not see in everyday life. These bizarre beings speak and act as if they were human! Time periods symbolized are deliberately varied and esoteric; they are never intended to be literally understood. The reason for this is probably due to the fact that apocalyptic is dealing with the cosmic, the heavenly perspective. The apocalyptic is pulling aside the “curtain” to reveal to human minds that which is beyond the human experience. Apocalyptic intends to show that human history is not separated from heaven’s awareness, involvement and sovereign control. Human history is actually the stage of the cosmic controversy between God the Sovereign Creator and the rebel-prince-of-demons, Satan, who is the “god” of this world only in pretense, not in reality.

In revealing the divine frame-of-reference for human history, therefore, literal style

is utterly inadequate to communicate unseen realities. In light of the brevity of the human attention span, apocalyptic symbolism is purposely dramatic, enigmatic and bizarre. It gets attention and holds it. It piques curiosity. It excites emotions. It demands additional research and contemplation. In many ways apocalyptic literature is like parables. One cannot be blasé about it. Great spiritual realities, invisible to the human eye, are there to be assimilated by the mind and heart and that takes time and effort to understand and believe. The most distinguishing feature of apocalyptic is its eschatological emphasis. It always points to the dramatic and cataclysmic intrusion of divine power into the affairs of earth to vindicate that little flock of God which is so constantly in danger of being swallowed up by a cruel and rapacious world.

That is the message of the Revelation to the seven churches of Asia Minor and all succeeding Christians through the centuries. It dramatizes the word from the Throne of Heaven that God will intervene in human events and actions, catastrophically if necessary, to vindicate the faith and suffering of the righteous. The one certain fact of history, as God knows it and reveals it, is that his church will survive all the devil and his cohorts (“beasts and harlots”) can possibly do to stamp it out.

Any theory of the interpretation of Revelation that places a meaning on figurative language that is contrary to the rest of the teaching of the New Testament must be false. It should be remembered in studying the Revelation that there is very little information in it that may not be learned from the rest of the Bible. The difference is that in the other books of the Bible the doctrine is in prosaic style aimed primarily at the mental processes in man while the doctrine in Revelation is presented to the imagination and aimed primarily at the emotions and is only a highly symbolized expression of the same doctrines taught in the rest of the New Testament.

The Revelation begins with a well-defined, clearly stated historical situation (the apostle John, on the island of Patmos, “sharing” the tribulation and kingdom and patient endurance” of the 7 churches of Asia Minor contemporary with the first and second centuries A.D., Rev. 1:9). References are clearly made to historical circumstances throughout the book and at the end. It cannot, therefore, be reasonably or hermeneutically dissociated from its historical setting of the victory of the church of the Lord Jesus in Asia Minor over the Roman empire of the first three or four centuries A. D. which prefigured a final victorious consummation of all history at some unknown time in the future.

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION

#### DANIEL 7:1-28 & REVELATION 1:1-20

The Bible symbolizes pagan world empires as “beasts” because, being founded on idolatry and heathenism, their nature and character inevitably turns beastly. Actually, all secular (and all are) governments are “beastly” in character to one degree or another—some less than others due to being founded on Biblical principles (e.g. republics, democracies, parliaments). But all human government, while absolutely essential in a “fallen” world, is predatory. No human government could exist without “preying” on its constituents through taxes and military service to defend it (read 1 Sam. 8:4-22). Human governments produce nothing—they only take and re-distribute what they have taken (in taxes or life in military service) to supposedly benefit all the constituents in a manner they could not do without some centralized form of “government.” Only the KINGDOM OF GOD is totally beneficent and non-predatory! It is not insignificant that most “nations” symbolize themselves with some “beast” (e.g., America—the eagle; Russia—the bear; England—the lion or the bull-dog). This same idea (symbolizing one’s nation or empire as a “beast”) was true in ancient times also. Both Paul and Peter characterize depraved, pagan behavior as “beastly” and “foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless”(Rom. 1:18-32). “But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed....(see 2 Peter 2:12). Isaiah characterized the behavior of apostate, unfaithful, wicked, rebellious Jews of his day as “oxen and asses” who did not know nor understand the nature of will of Jehovah-God (Isa. 1:3; see also Jer. 8:7). Isaiah calls pagan empires “Leviathan the fleeing, twisting serpent and dragon” (Isa. 27:1; 51:9). Jeremiah calls Egypt “a heifer, fatted calves; a serpent gliding away and locusts” (Jer. 46:20-23). Ezekiel calls the Egyptian Pharaoh a “great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams” (Ezek. 29:3) and “a lion and a dragon” (Ezek. 32:2). Joel, reversing the symbolism, calls real, literal locusts “God’s army” (Joel 2:11). These are just a few Biblical references. It is not out of character at all for the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation to symbolize four great world empires as “beasts.”

The overall picture of the “fourth beast” (Dan. 7:19ff) in the struggle between it and the “saints” of God is that the fourth beast (which has to be Rome since Dan. 2 is parallel to Dan. 7) will be “different” in its “devouring” of the whole civilized earth and “trample it down and break it into pieces” (i.e. being predatory, depraved and destructive). This fourth “beast” will “think to change the times and the law” (see Rom. 1:18-32)—it will refuse even the most elemental evidence that there is a higher power who has moral laws to which all creation must abide. And, frighteningly, this “fourth beast” will “wear out the saints of the Most High—and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time” (i.e., symbolic for a limited, not eternal, time). However, “the court shall sit in judgment, and his (“fourth beast”) dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given

to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey them.” (Dan. 7:26-27). Daniel summarized in one chapter what the Revelation takes 22 chapters to amplify in detail.

The time element in Revelation is unequivocally stated by John as, “what must soon take place” and was, in fact, taking place as John wrote (Rev. 1:2,3,4,9,11,19) and would take place “hereafter” i.e., after the time of John’s writing it until the “beast” is defeated. The events revealed by Jesus Christ were imminent on John’s horizon of history. The Greek word *tachei* translated “soon” means “shortly, quickly, imminent.” What Jesus revealed to John was not to wait for 2000 years before coming to pass! So, Jesus reiterates! The time for this to come to pass was near or ready (Greek, *engus*) in relation to John’s time, not ours. Christ is about to “come on the clouds” (1:7)—this does not refer to his 2nd Coming. “Coming with the clouds” is an apocalyptic, symbolic phrase used frequently in the Bible to portray God’s “coming” in judgment, sometimes by direct providential intervention and sometimes by using secondary agencies to carry out his purposes (see Ex. 16:10; 19:9; 34:5; Lev. 16:2; 2 Sam. 22:8-16; Psa. 18:6-15; 97:1-5; 104:3-4; Isa. 19:1; Jer. 4:13; Ezek. 1:4; 10:4; 30:18; 32:10-11; 38:9,16; Dan. 7:13; Amos 4:12; Micah 1:3-7; Nahum 1:3; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15; Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; Rev. 14:14,16). That “every eye will see him” does not demand an assumption that John is referring to Christ’s 2nd coming. Jesus used the same figurative idiom when predicting that those Jews who were condemning him to be crucified would see him coming in powerful judgment upon them and their nation in A.D. 66-70. The Roman empire (i.e., those who pierced him and all the tribes of the earth) will see him come in judgment, just as the Jews did!

Christ wishes to make sure (1:4-7), at the beginning of this revelation about the terrible “great tribulation” coming very soon after John wrote it, that the Christians of Asia Minor (where the “tribulation” will be the most severe) remember Christ’s redemption and promises of eternal life are centered in, grounded on, and PROVED AND VERIFIED IN HISTORY! Emphatically, this Revelation comes from the Eternal One, the Lord of history, “who is, who was, and who is to come.” Christ’s Lordship is a proven fact of history. His power over everything and everyone was demonstrated to men who saw it with their own eyes. No power on earth or in the heavens could keep him in the grave. He is Lord now and forevermore; belief in Christ’s Lordship does not have to wait for his 2nd coming! The phrase, “who is to come” applies to his coming in judgment upon the “beast” (Roman empire) graphically dramatized in chapters 15-20. But not only is he Lord of mankind—he is Supreme Lover of mankind. He loves his Church, his Bride, with a zealous love. He gave up his life for her and will make war on any one seeking to harm her (Rev. 19:11ff). These verses reveal the Lamb’s motivation for destroying the beast-false prophet-harlot. The message is that if Christ can free people from the power of sin and the devil, he can sustain them through any power the “beast” may have. He made all believers (from every tribe, tongue, nation and people) into a “kingdom.” That means the “kingdom of Christ” was in existence in A.D. 98 when John wrote Revelation and thus the “church” and the “kingdom” are not eschatologically separated—they are one and the same and have been since the Day of Pentecost. He made all Christians into a “priesthood” then, now, and forever (see 1

Pet. 2:9; Rom. 12:1; 15:16; Heb. 13:15; Rev. 20:6). This enthronement and priesthood for followers of the Messiah was predicted in the O.T. (See Isa. chs. 60-66; Ezek. chs. 40-48; Malachi 3:1-4, et.al.) and Jesus fulfilled it at the establishment of his church. The Lamb, the Bridegroom, is not just passively jealous for his church. He is coming to make all the tribes of the earth wail because they pierced him and now want to “pierce” (put to death) his church. Rome was equally guilty with the Jews of “piercing” him. So, these verses refer to his coming in judgment upon Rome. When the Lamb’s judgment fell upon the Roman empire, people of every tribe on earth wailed (see Rev. 17:14-18; 18:3; 18:7-19; 18:21-24). Whatever is done to the followers of the Lamb is done to the Lamb himself (Acts 9:4-5; Col. 1:24). The Lamb had already “come in judgment” upon the Jews (see Matt. 24:1-35; 26:64) in A.D. 66-70—in Revelation he turned his attention to “coming in judgment” upon the “beast” (the last great universal empire of man, i.e., Dan. 2 & 7, standing in the way of his Gospel forming a kingdom from every tribe, tongue, nation and people). No government since the Roman empire has been universal enough to threaten the very existence of the church and the Gospel (the two witnesses of ch. 11).

YES! IT ALWAYS HELPS WHEN OTHERS “SHARE” OR “PARTICIPATE” IN ONE’S TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS! Peter wrote that Christians suffering persecution could remain “firm in their faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of their brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet. 5:9). Even Jesus wished for the empathy and support of his disciples during his trial of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46). The person recording this “Revelation-letter” was well known to the Christians of Asia Minor. Literally the Greek phrase in 1:9 would read, “I am John, even your brother, even the one who is sharing with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance.” He is Christ’s instrument to communicate with them from the perspective of personal experience. He is “sharing” (Greek, *sugkoinonos*, “participating”) with those to whom he writes everything they are going through. John was on the island called Patmos near the southern end of the Aegean Sea, about 60 miles s.w. of ancient Ephesus. He was there in exile, a prisoner of Rome, on account of the word of God and the witness he was giving about Jesus Christ. Patmos was one of the many isolated places (it was famous for its copper-ore mines) to which the Romans banished their “political” prisoners. The rapid spread of Christianity throughout the empire at this time became an alleged “political” threat to the imperial power of Rome—so Rome was committing every Christian she could find to the gladiatorial-arenas to be killed, or to slave labor at which they would eventually die. John’s strong exhortations to patient endurance had greater impact on the persecuted Christians of Asia Minor than from someone who lived far away, safe and secure from Rome’s reach, because they came from one within a few miles of them, suffering the same “great tribulation.”

A “lamp-stand” (probably seen in the vision as a menorah, Jewish 7-pronged lamp-stand like the one in the Hebrew Tabernacle and Temple) is the most appropriate SYMBOL Christ could use by which to portray his Church. Jesus said his disciples would be “the light of the world” and that his “kingdom” would be a “city set on a hill that could not be hidden” (Matt. 5:14-16; Jn. 12:36; 2 Cor. 4:5-6; 6:14; Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:14; Col. 1:12; 1 Thess. 5:5; 2

Tim. 1:10; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Jn. 2:9-10). The Church is the “pillar and bulwark (i.e., repository) of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). The Church “holds forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:16). The O.T. speaks of God’s Word as his “light” for the world (Psa. 18:28; 27:1; 36:9; 37:6; 43:3; 56:13; 89:15; 97:11; 112:4; 118:27; 119:105; 119:130; 139:11-12; Isa. 2:5; Micah 7:8). The O.T. predicted the Messianic kingdom would be God’s light (Isa. 9:2; 42:6; 60:1-3; Zech. 4:1-14, etc.). Christ wanted the 7 churches of Asia Minor to know and comprehend that they were the only light in the darkened, doomed Roman empire of that day. If they did not “shine” (i.e., “hold forth the word of life”) literally millions of people who had “the mark of the beast” upon them in the Roman empire would die in the “great tribulation” and be doomed forever to the “lake of fire and brimstone.” THAT IS AS TRUE TODAY AS IT WAS 2000 YEARS AGO! THE CHURCH TODAY MUST WAKE UP AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT IS “THE PILLAR AND BULWARK OF THE TRUTH” AND MUST “HOLD FORTH THE WORD OF LIFE” AND “LET ITS LIGHT SHINE AS A CITY ON A HILL THAT CANNOT BE HIDDEN!” THE CHURCH TODAY IS THE ONLY “LAMP-STAND” THE WORLD HAS! There’s no eternal truth to be found anywhere else—not in science, not in politics, not in philosophy, not in entertainment, not in the newspapers—nowhere but in the church!!!

The term “Son of man” is an O.T. Messianic term and symbol (e.g. Dan. 7:9,10,13,22; Ezek. 1:26-28). Jesus used the term “Son of man” almost exclusively when referring to himself (31 times in the Gospel of Matthew alone!). The definite article (the) is absent in the Greek text of Rev. 1:13 and should be translated “a son of man.” Of course, what John saw in his vision was The “Son of man” but the first significant point in the term “son of man” is that what John saw was like a human being not some grotesque monster. When God or Christ chose to appear to the physical eyes of men, they chose the form of a man. After all, God created man in his own Divine image. John’s readers were to get from this a clear impression that this One is God Almighty (i.e., the “Ancient of Days” or the One from Eternity) and his message will be absolutely sovereign and will be in apocalyptic imagery like that of Daniel and Ezekiel. A second significant thing about John’s vision was that he saw this “Son of man” (Messiah) standing in the midst of the seven lamp-stands. This One’s position in the middle of the 7 lamp-stands indicates his immediate presence in the affairs and circumstances of the churches. HE IS THERE! He is never absent from the church; it is his habitation in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22). The point of this vision is to impress the churches of Asia Minor (and all subsequent churches throughout history) that Christ, the Lamb, knows their trials and tribulations and he knows their victories and their failures. Christ knows the church better than the church knows itself. The Lamb sees the churches as they really are, not as the world sees them or even as they see themselves. The Lamb knows that the churches need repentance more than anything else. He knows they must change their thinking to see their circumstances in the light of the divine Throne-perspective. He wants it clearly understood, before the Revelation is given, he abides in their midst. He wants it known that the same Christ who came to earth in a human body and “was tempted in all points” as they were about to be tempted, was without sin, is the loving Sovereign of the church and all the world! He wants them to know that they, human though they are, can be faithful (as he was faithful) and overcome sin and the world because he has provided the way to do so through his gracious incarnation and victory in death and resurrection!

The symbolism of Christ's appearance (1:12-16) is as follows: (1) He was clothed to his feet in a "golden girdle" or sash which were garments similar to those worn by Jewish high priests (Ex. 25:7; 28:2,8,40; 39:5; Isa. 6:1). This represents the Lamb's priestly function. He intercedes for the churches in their needs and trials. The Messiah is prefigured by both the Mosaic priesthood and by Melchizedek (Heb. chs. 5,6,7); (2) His hair was white as white wool, white as snow. This symbolized his eternity, his ageless holiness and purity. The "Ancient of days" (Dan. 7:9) also had white hair. White hair and old age in Hebrew culture (as in many other cultures today) was usually a respected symbol of wisdom; (3) His eyes were like a flame of fire (see Rev. 2:18; 19:12). This symbolizes penetrating omniscience for the purpose of justice and judgment (Deut. 4:24; 2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 4:12-13; 12:29); (4) His feet were like burnished (glowing) bronze refined as in a furnace. Bronze was one of the hardest materials then available to man and this aspect of the vision symbolizes the strength and power of the Lamb or Son of man to tread down his enemies, whether they be Rome or impenitent churches! The Son of man is not an idol, "with feet of clay," like Rome—the fourth part of Nebuchadnezzar's great image (Dan. 2:31-45). The Lamb stands forever in divine strength inexorably and eventually smashing all his enemies under his feet. He is the Ancient of days, the Ruler of new Israel the church, and Sovereign of the universe; (5) The sound of his voice was like the sound of many waters, like the sound of a great waterfall, a river raging in flood stage, or the pounding of the ocean surf during a storm—a roar that drowns out all other voices. The sound of "many waters" exudes power and authority. So the message of Christ in this Revelation rises above the word of Rome (the beast), drowns it out, and in overpowering majesty demands to be heard; (6) In his right hand the Lamb held seven stars. These seven stars symbolize the messengers ("angels") of the 7 churches (1:20). The churches are to be enlightened with a message. Christ does not leave the churches in the dark about the "great tribulation" through which they must suffer. He sends them a divine message, straight from the Throne in heaven; (7) There was a sharp, two edged, sword protruding from his mouth. This symbolized the Word of God—the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12). The Word is one of the "two witnesses." It is to be through the Word (Gospel i.e., "the testimony of Jesus") that Christ will defend the church and defeat the "beast" (Rome)—(Acts 14:3; 22:18; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; 6:7 2 Thess. 1:10; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 1:8; Rev. 1:1,9; 11:7; 12:11,17; 15:5; 19:10). God's Word is a "fire" that devours (Jer. 5:14; a hammer that smashes (Jer. 23:29); a sword that "hews" or "slays" (Hosea 6:5). This sword of the Lord is wielded by the Bridegroom in Rev. 19:11-16 as he rides forth with his army to rescue his Bride and defeat his enemies. The prophetic Word of the Lamb is executed and the "beast" falls! (8) His face was like the sun in full strength. This symbolizes Absolute Truth. Christ dwells in "unapproachable light whom no man has ever seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). This bizarre picture of the Lamb is intended to register this Revelation as an apocalyptic communication. The whole symbolic picture is calculated to impress the readers with the awesome majesty and power of the "voice" (the Lamb, Jesus Christ) speaking this Revelation. It symbolizes the "voice" as that of the Messiah—Prophet, Priest, and King. The churches needed to know that the One giving orders and making promises to them is no less a person than the Son of God. When he was here on earth he was meek and gentle—he was humiliated, persecuted, and slain. **BUT NOW HE IS KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS, IN CHARGE OF HISTORY AND ALL MANKIND!**

Christ, standing in the midst of the churches, is “the first and the last, and the living one; he died, and behold he is alive forevermore, and he has the keys of Death and Hades. He has the “seven stars” in his “right hand.” They belong to him—he is their Master—he has their “key” to eternal existence. He will tell the churches their weaknesses and their strengths. He will give directions on what the churches need to stand against the onslaught of the “beast–false-prophet–harlot”. His sovereignty and dominion must be communicated in the most dramatic way possible in human language so it will be believed, trusted in, and KEPT! AND THAT IS THE MESSAGE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY, IN WHICH CHRIST ABIDES AND HOLDS IN HIS HAND (Matt. 18:20; 28:18-20; Eph. 2:19-22; Col. 1:15-20, etc.). The church today must evaluate itself against the “once-for-all-faith” (i.e., the Scriptures) delivered to the saints (Jude 3). The church today can no more “measure itself by itself” (2 Cor. 10:7-12) than the churches of the 1st century could. If the church today is to see itself as Christ sees it, there is only one criterion of such examination—that is the written word of God in the Bible. A church that slights the actual, literal, constant teaching of Scripture is going to find itself in one of the categories of the seven churches of Asia Minor—SHORT OF THE MARK OF CHRIST!

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION 2:1—3:22

The churches of Asia Minor, where most of the Christians were in the 1st century A.D., were facing “great tribulation” and the “tribulation” was only going to intensify. That tribulation was manifesting itself in the three main arenas of life on this earth—political persecution, false teachings, and sensuality/materialism (i.e., “beast, false-prophet, and harlot”). Christians of Asia Minor were no doubt asking, “Where is God? Where is Christ?” The answer came in the first chapter of this Revelation—“I, Christ, the everlasting One, am here in your midst, and I will be forevermore. I am sovereign and all-knowing.” But the proper question the churches should have been asking was, “Where is the Lord’s church—is it prepared to stand the onslaught of the Roman empire?” God’s process of sanctification and edification for the church has always been; (a) see the sovereignty and love of Christ; (b) see man’s failures and need of Christ’s grace; (c) then relate that to the heathen, antagonistic world around man. This is the approach God uses throughout the Bible—Old and New Testaments (Isa. 6; Ezek 1-3; Dan. 7; Jer. 1, etc.). Most of the seven churches appeared outwardly to be worthy of praise. Judged by the Lamb, there were a few good things in some of them. Judged by themselves and worldly standards some were very successful. Two of them apparently judged themselves unsuccessful while Christ commended them. With all the outward success one would think no negative note should be sounded toward the churches at all. But the letters from the Lamb are to the contrary. This should prove once for all that the world’s evaluation of the church’s success (and even the church’s evaluation of itself) is much different than that of the Lord! The Lord saw these churches in urgent need of repentance, in many areas, if they wished to prepare themselves for the “great tribulation” coming upon them. The church universal in the 21st century faces the same “tribulations”—in a more “scattered” and less universal way—let her take notice that a continuing program of repentance is what she needs!

Clearly, Christ saw the churches of Asia Minor differently than they saw themselves. He had something “against” five of the churches (Rev. 2:3,14,20; 3:2,15). Although Christ was perfectly aware of their accomplishments, he was also aware that there was death-dealing wickedness which had infected each of the five. Two he did not speak to severely (Smyrna and Philadelphia) still, he said, they were not seeing themselves as he saw them. The church at Smyrna saw herself as “poor” but Christ said she was “rich”—the church at Philadelphia saw herself as having “little power” but Christ said he had set before her an “open door” to make her enemies bow before her. While 5 of the churches (Ephesus, Pergamum; Thyatira; Sardis, and Laodicea) had examined themselves by human standards and thought they were faithful, loyal, hard-working, orthodox, and rich, the other two examined themselves also by human standards and thought they were poor and powerless. **THAT’S THE TROUBLE WITH USING HUMAN STANDARDS TO EXAMINE HUMAN BEINGS AND INSTITUTIONS—HUMAN STANDARDS ARE INCAPABLE OF DETERMINING REALITY!** The apostle Paul said that when Christians use human standards

to evaluate human thinking or human behavior they “ARE WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING” (2 Cor. 10:12). “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 17:9-10, see also Num. 15:39). THERE IS ONLY ONE PERSON WHO CAN EXPOSE THE HUMAN HEART AS IT REALLY IS AND THAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD. THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES THAT EXAMINING THROUGH THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF HIS WORD. “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:12-13). There is a damning danger for any congregation of Christians in neglecting serious, constant, intense study of the Bible and not seeing itself as Christ sees it! EVERY DECISION A CONGREGATION MAKES, EVERY BUILDING–PROGRAM, EVERY BUDGET, EVERY EVANGELISTIC, MISSIONS, PREACHING, AND SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM MUST BE EVALUATED BY THE STANDARDS IN THE BIBLE IF IT IS TO SEE ITSELF AS CHRIST SEES IT. There is no other source for this evaluation than the Bible! Even “pooled” (majority-vote) intelligence of the whole congregation, if it does not fit what the Bible says, will bring down the condemnations Christ spoke to the 7 churches of Asia Minor!

The city of Ephesus was the center of the worship of the Greek goddess, Diana, goddess of fertility. A “temple” there was inhabited by hundreds of “priestesses” (actually, harlots) with whom “worshippers” practiced fornication as a part of their “religion.” The “temple to Diana” was also a great center of financial deposit and transaction. Its paganism is documented in the book of Acts (Acts 19). The church at Ephesus had abandoned its first love. It had “fallen” to a level where love no longer existed. They were orthodox, but loveless. They had exposed “false apostles”; they were enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of Christ’s name; they had not grown weary in their struggle for orthodoxy; they hated the wicked works of the Nicolaitans—BUT THEIR MOTIVE FOR BEING ORTHODOX WAS NOT LOVE! What was their motive for being so “straight-and-narrow”? Evidently, their motive was self-righteousness! They were proud of how “good” they were! They had forgotten that they were to be “controlled by the love of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:14). They had decided that love of self and pride in being “right” would be pleasing to Christ! Some congregations may be like that today! They may think that being so “right” with the orthodox truth and so adamantly against wickedness their “self-righteousness” will balance the scales in the judgment of Christ—their “goodness” will make up for any lack of real devotion to Christ! IT WON’T WORK! CHRIST SEES THROUGH THE FACADE OF LOVELESS ORTHODOXY AND THREATENS TO TAKE A CONGREGATION’S “LAMP-STAND” OUT OF ITS PLACE! How does a congregation know if it is truly loving Christ? THE ANSWER IS VERY SIMPLE----“OBEY CHRIST’S COMMANDMENTS” (Jn. 14:23; 15:10; 1 Jn. 5:3)—Let the “love of Christ control the church (2 Cor. 5:14-21)

Smyrna’s church viewed itself as poverty-stricken. It may have been made-up of mostly poor people and slaves. The city of Smyrna had courted the favor of the Roman emperor by building a temple in which the emperor Tiberius (the emperor under whom Christ

was crucified) was worshiped. She was famous for science, medicine, and the majesty of her buildings. Apollonius of Tyana referred to her “crown of porticoes,” a circle of beautiful public buildings. She took pride in her Caesar-cult. When Christians refused to burn incense to the emperor of Rome as god, they were accused of treason and sentenced to die. Polycarp, an elder in the church there and the beloved disciple of John the apostle, was martyred in Smyrna about A.D. 155 for that alleged “crime.” Christ was immediately aware that a “great tribulation” (imprisonment, suffering, slander) was coming upon the Christians there. He was also aware that the congregation saw itself as “poor” (Greek, ptocheian, “destitute, beggarly, poverty-stricken”). Most Christians of the 1st century were what some would have called “the underclass” of civilization. There weren’t many “wise, powerful, or of noble birth”—they were what the world called, “foolish, weak, despised, nothing” (1 Cor. 1:26-31). Some of them were former idolaters, adulterers, sexual perverts, thieves, greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers and immoral persons (1 Cor. 6:9-11). A large majority of 1st century Christians were slaves. But “destitute” compared to what? Compared to a worldly-minded view of being rich. BUT EVALUATED BY CHRIST, THE CONGREGATION AT SMYRNA WAS “RICH.” Just as Paul had reminded the Corinthian congregation, “the world, or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours” (1 Cor. 3:21-23). Some people in Smyrna who had called themselves Jews (and probably were by genetic descent) had evidently slandered the Christians there as “beneath” everyone else. But Christ said these were not true, Biblical Jews (Rom. 2:28-29; Ga. 6:15-16), but were, indeed, a synagogue of Satan. Actually, any Jews who rejected Jesus Christ and continued to do so, belonged to Satan, and were working for Satan (see Matt. 12:22-37; John 8:34-47; Phil. 3:2-3; 1 Thess. 2:14-16). IT IS INCUMBENT ON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TODAY TO SEE THE IMPENITENT JEWS AS CHRIST SAW THEM IN THE N.T.! The so-called “great religions” of the world today slander Christians and Christianity as “second-rate” citizens of the world! The church must not allow itself to evaluate itself lower than Christ evaluates it! THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS “RICH” BY CHRIST’S STANDARDS! Everything in creation is being used by God to save, sanctify, and glorify his Bride, the church—even persecution such as Smyrna’s Christians were going to endure!

Pergamum was the original capital of Ionia. Rome made it the chief city of Asia Minor. It was the site of the first temple of emperor worship, erected to worship Caesar Augustus (emperor when Christ was born). Later a temple to deify Trajan was erected there. The worship of Asklepios (a Greek god), symbolized by the serpent; the worship of Zeus (The Savior” (chief god of the Greeks), and the worship of Athena (goddess of wisdom) and Dionysus (god of drunkenness & revelry) was endemic to Pergamum as well. Nicolaitanism flourished there because politics and pagan religion were so closely allied. The term, “Satan’s throne” symbolizes the strength of evil (falsehood and worldliness) in this city. Satan was almost completely enthroned there by the populace—all except for a little “island” of godliness in the few Christians who had not surrendered their faith and love for Christ to the “harlot.” Christ was mindful of the congregation’s refusal to deny “the faith” even in the days when Antipas was martyred there for his faith. This church evaluated itself as loyal! It would be known as Christian even if some of its members were put to death! However, Christ revealed that there were some in the Christian church there who held to the “teaching of Balaam.” We know what that was! What Balaam was to the old Israel, the Nicolaitans

were to the “new Israel”—the church. When Balaam could not curse the Israelites with his words (see Num. chs. 22-24), he suggested to Balak that Moabite girls should seduce the Israelite men, by inviting them to join in their idolatrous and immoral festivities. The devil could not get the Christians of Pergamum to surrender to him by martyrdom so he put a stumbling block of immorality, idolatry and debauchery before them in the teachings of the Nicolaitans. The church at Ephesus had lost its passionate devotion to Christ but hated the works of the Nicolaitans. The church at Pergamum had passionate devotion to the faith, but it tolerated the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Christ admonishes and encourages the Christians at Pergamum that even though they live where Satan is almost completely “enthroned” they can, and must, be sustained by the “Bread from Heaven” (Jn. 6:35-65)...the Word of Christ (Jn. 6:63)...the “hidden manna.” If they do not “eat” the Son of God, he will “come and make war against them with his Word. Any church today that harbors the teaching of the “Nicolaitans” (idolatry and immorality) will find itself at war with Christ and his Word! ANY CHURCH TODAY, SURROUNDED BY THE WORST UNGODLINESS, CAN BE SUSTAINED IF IT WILL FEED ITSELF ON THE “BREAD OF LIFE.”

Jesus was angry with this congregation at Thyatira because it willingly permitted (Greek eas, KJV, “allowed”) the woman “Jezebel,” a self-proclaimed “prophetess” to teach immorality and idol worship within the congregation! Oh, it was growing! To the world it appeared to be loving, faithful, ministering and patient. It was famous for growth, progress and “success”—its latest works were more than its earlier works. That is the picture for which the world around the church applauded it, and the way the church saw itself. This church was enamored of the “deep things of Satan,” i.e., the “cult-worship” of Greek idolatry into which many people became initiated with wicked, depraved rituals. These cults were very attractive to people—including some Christians. But “more” is not always “better”! Religious activity, numerical growth, “success,” is pleasing to the Lord only if there is spiritual maturity and sanctification accompanying it. Holiness is more important than “how many.” The woman causing the church to be condemned by Christ may have actually been named Jezebel, or it may be a symbolic name assigned to the woman causing the trouble by Christ. The congregation did not just tolerate her, they permitted her to claim she had some divine commission as a “prophetess” to speak authoritatively on Christian ethics and Christian doctrine. She had “beguiled” the Christians there. She was deceptive, cunning, shrewd and ingenious like her namesake. Jesus speaking to the church at Thyatira has eyes like a flame of fire. He has “X-ray” vision and sees through the hyper-activeness of the church to the immorality and idolatry taught and practiced within her. The Lord sees us more clearly than we see ourselves. The human heart, unexposed by God’s word, is, as we’ve said earlier, “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). The members of the church do not even know their church as Christ knows it. Jesus threatens to stomp into oblivion any church like this if it does not repent (i.e., “feet of burnished bronze”). Are there any churches in the 21st century working hard, growing, having great “success” but at the same time harboring those leading it into “idolatry” and “immorality”? YES? Our congregation? How shall we know? BY EVALUATING OUR CONGREGATION BY THE PURE, UNADULTERATED WORD OF GOD! Preachers, programs, buildings, budgets, tolerance, “sophistication,” “up-to-datedness” can all become “idols” and lead to immorality! BEWARE, O CHURCH OF CHRIST! ANY IDOLATRY LEADS TO OBLIVION!

Sardis was the congregation that had nothing but a “name.” It had the name of being “alive” but actually it was “at the point of being dead.” The city of Sardis was the ancient capital of the old kingdom of Lydia when king Croesus reigned amid fabulous wealth. A great earthquake (Sardis, along with almost all the 7 churches of Asia Minor sat astride a “fault” probably more severe than the St. Andreas “fault” in California) in A.D. 17 left Sardis in ruins both physically and financially. The emperor Tiberius remitted its taxes for five years and contributed what today would be about \$100,000,000, to rebuild the city but it never regained the glory it had under Croesus. The words of Christ to this church are probably more severe than to any of the others. Outward appearances are notoriously deceptive. The Pharisees were like “whitewashed tombs, which outwardly” appeared beautiful but within were full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness (Matt. 23:27). The Corinthian church seemed to be filled with vitality and activity, but Paul wrote that many of them were spiritually weak, ill, and asleep (spiritually dead) because of their factiousness (1 Cor. 11:30). The church at Sardis appeared to human perception to be alive, and was well satisfied with its reputation. How could Sardis have a reputation of being alive and still be dead?—just like the Pharisees, or the Christian widow who is dead while she lives from self-indulgence (1 Tim. 5:6), or the Prodigal Son who was dead when he took his inheritance and went to the far country away from his father (Lk. 15:24). Christ’s accusation was that the church’s works were not found to be filled up full in the sight of God! The Greek verb *pepleromena* (“perfected”) is perfect tense and depicts a church that started many things but never finished any. It talked a good game, but never played anything out to completion. It may have been a church where the members exuded happiness, clapping of hands, shouting, “praising,” being hyper-active in one activity after another—but never completing anything. The Sardis congregation was a facade, a fake and existing only on reputation. It was like a cathedral without any people in it—it looked like a congregation of Christ but it really wasn’t. It held on to an outward form of religion but denied the power of it (2 Tim. 3:5). No matter what its reputation, it was spiritually dead, separated from God, alienated, unforgiven and condemned. It was like the ancient Israelites of the days of the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, etc.)—very busy with religious activity and ritual (Isa. 1:12ff), but with hearts far from the Lord (Isa. 29:13). **COULD OUR CONGREGATION BE TRYING TO LIVE ON A REPUTATION OF “BEING ALIVE” BECAUSE WE ARE ENTHUSIASTIC AND HYPER-ACTIVE, ALL THE WHILE BEING SPIRITUALLY DEAD (ALIENATED, SEPARATED FROM GOD)? True spirituality is much deeper than enthusiasm and hyper-activity! The church that is truly alive is FEEDING ONLY ON THE “BREAD OF LIFE”!**

The city of Philadelphia (“brother-lover”) was founded by Philadelphus, known for his genuine affection for his brother Eumenes. It was an ancient outpost of Greek culture in Asia, built directly over a seismic fault and susceptible to almost constant earth tremors and quakes! It was a center for vine-growing and wine-making. Its provincial god was Dionysus, god of drunkenness and revelry. Strabo (Greek historian of A.D. 24) writes that because of the constant earth tremors many people lived outside the city walls in a “shanty-town” of temporary “huts” to avoid being hit by falling stone. Many of the Christians of Philadelphia were probably among the poor living in these “huts.” The church was not “rich” like Laodicea; it probably had no reputation of “being alive” like Sardis. It was poor and apparently weak. At least it “had little power.” But God’s power is made complete through man’s

acknowledged weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:8-10). And because this church with little power (Greek mikron dunamin, “micro-dynamite”) kept Christ’s word and did not deny his name he set before them an open door! The Lord gave this church opportunities and advantages to bear fruit not given to others. “Open door” symbolizes evangelistic opportunities (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The “open door” for these Christians in Philadelphia had to do with opportunities to evangelize Jews of the city and “conquer” them with the Gospel. This is the second time John refers to the “synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9 and 3:9)—each in a different city! Clearly, John is calling every synagogue a “synagogue of Satan”! That is because after Jesus, the Messiah, had come, completed and fulfilled the Old Testament, any Jew who rejected the Messiah and his New Covenant, was an apostate (Heb. 6:1-12; 10:26-39; 13:13-16), for whom there no longer remained a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries” (“Adversary” is an alias of Satan) (Heb. 10:26-27). The church at Philadelphia needed to reassess its potential. If Christ was for it, who could be against it? She was “more than a conqueror through Christ who loved her”. Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, would be able to separate her from the love of God in Christ Jesus the Lord (Rom. 8:31-39). **SO EVERY “WEAK” AND SMALL AND POOR CHURCH TODAY NEEDS TO REASSESS IT’S POTENTIAL.** God has set before every congregation many “open doors”—keep the Lord’s word of “patient endurance” and go through these doors! Our God is the God of small things (the widow’s mite, the pinch of leaven, the mustard seed)! “Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts” Zech. 4:6.

The congregation at Laodicea was characterized by a materialistic complacency. These Christians tried to be neutral—a little bit of Christianity and a little bit of worldliness. The church had not been seduced into any horrible immorality. It was not propounding any apostate doctrines. It was not in danger of recanting because of persecution. It was just half-hearted, irresolute and uncommitted. The Greek words describing her condition are especially interesting: psuchros means “icy cold,” and zestos means “boiling hot.” The Lord said, It is my will that you be either boiling hot, or freezing cold. Jesus did not mean, of course, that Laodicea Christians were to be “hot-headed-fanatics” who denigrated Christianity with an unreasoning and unintelligent emotionalism. But he did want total commitment. Christ does expect us to have a faith that is “fervent in spirit” (Acts 18:25; Rom. 12:11; 2 Tim. 1:6). If Christ arose from the dead, we should be totally committed to him, fervent in bringing others to such commitment. If Christ is not who he claimed he is, we are to be pitied for playing at Christianity. We should rather “eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor. 15:12-34). Because the Christians at Laodicea were only “lukewarm” they were of no use to the Lord. Her unconcern and non-commitment was due to her blindness. She chose to remain ignorant of her spiritual condition. She thought of herself as “rich” and would remain that way. What could she possibly need that she did not already have or could not buy for herself. Why should she get excited about spiritual progress or growth—no need! **IF LAODICEA HAD BEEN REALLY “ICY COLD” SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN MORE APPROACHABLE TO REPENT! BUT BEING “LUKEWARM” SHE SAW NO NEED TO REPENT!** The only real cure for “lukewarmness” is to be “reproved and chastened” by the Lord (Rev. 3:19; see Heb. 12:1-11) until Christ is allowed to enter and commune!

So, the churches of Asia Minor were given a revelation of themselves according to the divine perspective. They did not see themselves correctly or even realistically. They perceived the threat to their existence was from without—Rome and persecution. Rome appeared invincible (Rev. 13:4) and the church seemed about to be obliterated. But the real threat to the church's existence was from WITHIN. The threat to the church was wickedness—false teaching, immorality, and complacency. Heathenism cannot stamp out the church; the church cannot fool Christ by its pretenses. The only thing that can defeat the church is its willingness to compromise in its commitment to Christ and become a “worshiper of the beast.” Christ revealed the characteristics he deems necessary for the church to overcome the beast” (1) constant love; (2) willingness to suffer for Christ; (3) truth in doctrine; (4) holiness of life; (5) more than a name of being alive; (6) evangelistic outreach through open doors; (7) boiling-hot fervency to let Christ into our hearts. If the church pleases Christ in the 1st or 21st century, it must repent of any shortcoming in this characterization and turn and do the works he commands. Survival for the church does not depend on its ability to resist political opposition, on its sophistication or on its financial status. The church will survive if it has its mind and heart open to the rule of Christ through his word. The church needs to fear only an impenitent worldliness within itself—it does not need to fear the world outside itself!

At the center of the universe is a Throne. The next chapters of the Book of Revelation (4,5,6,7) leave us in no doubt about the security of the faithful people of God. The Eternal Father sits on his Throne, surrounded by the worshiping host of heaven. The Book of Destiny is in the hand of Christ, and calamity will befall mankind only when Christ breaks the seals of the book. The winds of judgment will not blow upon those who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit. These are the symbols of divine sovereignty. The Church's security is guaranteed by the Holy Trinity. God, the Lamb, and the Holy Spirit reigns omnipotently!

## **TEACHER'S NOTES**

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### **REVELATION 4:1 - 5:14**

There are four explicit Throne-visions (often called theophanies) in the Bible. They are: (a) Isaiah chapter 6; (b) Ezekiel chapters 1,2,3; (c) Daniel chapter 7; (d) Revelation chapters 4 & 5. These were given to the “prophets” as individuals to be written down, preserved, and passed on to others through the written word of God. God never intended to give direct, extra-Biblical “visions” to every believer. God chose specific individuals (“prophets”) as his “spokesmen” for the whole human race. Your faith would be LESS strong if God gave every single individual in the world a “theophany” or “Throne-vision.” If everyone had a miraculous experience, miracles would prove nothing! If everyone had a “vision” there would be no need for the Bible, no need for faith, no need for evangelizing! God expected all the world to whom these four “prophets” addressed their writings (and that includes all the world from the time of their “vision” until today) to know, believe, and obey (or “keep”) the “revelation” of what “Throne-visions” mean! There is one emphatic message in each of the four Theophanies—GOD & CHRIST (“THE SON OF MAN:”) ARE SOVEREIGN, OMNIPOTENT, AND IMMANENT (DIRECTLY INVOLVED) IN THE EVENTS OF HUMAN HISTORY! Nothing is beyond the awareness and purpose of God! Whatever human beings may do, even if it is contrary to the will of God, God-through-Christ will make it ultimately serve divine purposes for the redemption of a “remnant” of mankind (the church of Christ) from sin and this doomed cosmos. God, his Anointed Son (the Lamb) and the “kingdom of God” (the church) cannot, and will not, be defeated! Everything and everyone will ultimately serve the One (God-head) on the Throne. Life (history) is not (as Shakespeare has Macbeth say), “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”—LIFE (HISTORY) HAS A DIVINE GOAL, A HEAVENLY PURPOSE, AND EVERY EVENT IN IT IS INEXORABLY, INEVITABLY, ULTIMATELY MOVING TOWARD AND WILL BE CONSUMMATED IN THE DIVINE GOAL WHICH IS REDEMPTION FOR THOSE WHO TRUST AND OBEY (see Rom. 8:18-39).

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT GOD “LOOKS LIKE” for no one has really seen God at any time (John 1:18). “...the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.” IF WE HAVE “SEEN” JESUS CHRIST, WE HAVE “SEEN” THE FATHER (John 14:5-11). “Knowing” God and “seeing” him (as we think of “seeing” with physical eyes) are two different things! Ask any blind person if they can “know” you without physically “seeing” you! God and Christ are persons who dwell “in light unapproachable whom no man has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:15-16). In John’s Throne-vision, the One who sat upon the Throne appeared as “jasper” (Greek, iaspis, many colored precious stone), and “carnelian” (“sardine” KJV, Greek, sardion, precious transparent red stone, see also Rev. 21:20). The sardius and the jasper, of similar color, were the first and last stones on the breastplate of the High Priest (Ex. 28:17,20). The God-head is not, of course, mineral or stone, or even earthly flesh. Since God is Infinite Divine Spirit, human language is inadequate to describe him (Ex. 20:4). These stones merely symbolize his appearance. God is “precious” (i.e., absolutely rare, desirable, beyond cost). God is “the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (i.e., as on the High Priest’s breastplate). God is “beautiful” to behold and causes amazement and wonder! Isaiah saw God as “awesome, holy and merciful” in his Throne vision (Isa. 6:1-7). Ezekiel saw God as “surrounded by fire, in glory” ready to bring judgment (Ezek. 1:26-28). Daniel saw God as “one like a son of man, to whom dominion, glory and kingdom was given, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him” (Dan. 7:13-14). There a

numerous similarities between John's Throne vision and the other three (especially that of Ezekiel and Daniel). Anyone wishing to get a better understanding of John's Throne vision should read thoroughly the other three! God is never envisioned in the Scriptures as the "great Grandpa in the sky" who indulges his grandchildren here on earth no matter what they think, believe or do—as most human grandfathers do! I am afraid the "Grandpa" image is what most people "see" (comprehend) when they visualize God! GOD IS TO BE "SEEN" (I.E., COMPREHENDED, UNDERSTOOD, KNOWN) AS PEOPLE "KNEW" JESUS CHRIST. If you want to know what God would do in any situation or relationship, read the Gospels!!!!

Encircling the Majestic Throne of Almighty God are 24 thrones upon which are seated the "twenty-four elders, clad in white garments with crowns upon their heads." They are subservient and pay unreserved homage to the Throne of God. They fall down and worship him and cast their crowns before him (4:10). These "24 elders" symbolize the 12 Patriarch-tribal heads of the O.T. and the 12 Apostles of the N.T (God's "church" of covenant-believers in both ages). They were "crowned" with human leadership in the "kingdom of God." However, as famous, favored and endowed with power to serve God as they were, they were merely humble, reverent, obedient servants. No matter that they were given subordinate places of rulership or leadership in God's redemptive kingdom, in the final analysis they remove their crowns and throw them at the feet of the Omnipotent Occupant of The Central Throne of all Existence upon which Almighty God Reigns. And that is the point of the symbolism! No matter how famous or powerful a church leader may appear, he is still a humble servant of God and must be constantly submissive to the Sovereign Christ and the Word of Christ which is enthroned over all that exists. So, all believers, when they have done all that is commanded them, must say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Lk. 17:10). Every Christian has a "crown" to cast at the feet of the Throne of God—his/her "talent" or "pound" (possessions or circumstances or opportunities to serve the Lord). ANYTHING ANY BELIEVER HAS EVER ACCOMPLISHED FOR GOD WILL ULTIMATELY BE OFFERED UP IN SACRIFICE TO THE MAJESTIC GRACE AND GOODNESS OF GOD—EVEN ONE'S OWN BODY (Rom. 12:1-2). These "24-elders" (see also 5:8; 11:16; 19:4) are clad in white garments. They have had their filthy rags (Isa. 64:6) washed white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14). Their "crowns" are (Greek, stephanous), the victor's crown, but not the crown of imperial majesty which is diadema.

Guided by Biblical parallels to the "four living creatures" (i.e., Ezek. 1:4-25; 10:1-22; Isa. 6:1-8) we understand that they symbolize all the living, animate beings (including mankind, "the face of a man") which God has created to fulfill his will and carry out his providential government of the whole creation. Some might wonder about God's use of animals, yet the Scriptures are replete with God's use of the animal kingdom to serve him, least of all as sacrifices prefiguring the death of his Son. Bears executed God's judgments (2 Kings 26:22); locusts are called God's "army" in Joel's prophecies; God sent wild beasts as a plague of punishment (Lev. 26:22). Flies, lice and frogs were used in the plagues in Egypt. See also these references—Isa. 18:6; Ezek. 5:17; 14:15). Beasts and birds are occasionally used by God to rescue people (Elijah and the ravens, etc.). A "special" great fish was directed by God to an exact spot in the ocean to swallow Jonah and deliver him to Nineveh.

A donkey talked to Balaam! While people are limited to human bodies, angels may take many forms. They may, at God's order, take the form of wind or flame (Psa. 104:4; Heb. 1:7); they may be a wasting sickness (Isa. 37:36); they may even take on human form (Gen. 18:1ff; Dan. 10:5; Heb. 13:2). God may send "angels" (his messengers) in a form we call "nature" (whirlwinds, floods, earthquakes, pestilence). The four living creatures symbolize all of God's creation, animate and inanimate as all creation glorifies him (Psa. 19:1:ff), speaks for him (Rom. 1:18ff) and serves him. THE HEATHEN WORLD BELIEVED THE ROMAN EMPEROR WAS "GOD" AND CONTROLLED EVERYTHING THAT EXISTED—EVEN LIFE AND DEATH! WRONG, WRONG, WRONG! GOD ALMIGHTY SITS ON THE THRONE OF THE UNIVERSE AND ALL THAT EXISTS WAS MADE TO SERVE HIM. The lion-looking creature symbolizes wild creatures; the ox-like creature symbolizes domesticated animal-life; the man-like creature represents humanity; the eagle symbolizes angelic creation (this last symbolism determined by Rev. 8:13 where an eagle (Greek aetou, not angelos), is flying in mid heaven, crying with a loud voice the message of angels). The number four symbolizes the "four corners" of creation—all the cosmos. God's "creatures" serve him everywhere. They never overlook any part of any mission upon which they are sent (they are full of eyes). Providence executed through God's living creatures and "nature" goes in any direction God may wish. The living creation and the inanimate creation stands ready to render service to God in any part of God's creation.

No form of evolution (i.e., spontaneous generation and gradual chance-development of kingdom, phylum, class, order) can be harmonized with Revelation 4:11! There have been no changes from one of those classifications to another. While changes may be observed in "family, genus and specie" they must be induced by hybridization or mutation and that does not prove evolution. Practically all the changes in the last three classifications are mostly lethal and definitely less survivable, whether manipulated by hybridization or mutation. Biblically speaking, however, God created all things (Greek, *ektisas*—from *ktizo*, which is as unique a word as *bara* in Hebrew). These two Biblical words are used almost exclusively to mean "to bring into existence something from nothing." And with but one exception *ktizo* (1 Pet. 2:13) is always used of God's creative actions. GOD ALONE HAS THE RIGHT TO DEMAND WORSHIP FOR HE ALONE CREATES. Men may deceive themselves that they have creative power and should therefore have honor and glory and praise, but no mortal ruler, tycoon or scholar deserves worship. John was intent on revealing to the church that Domitian, the Roman emperor, did not deserve to be worshiped. Domitian was a creature, not Creator. Whatever was to come upon the church, as revealed to John, was under Jehovah's control—not Domitian's. God did not abdicate, even though the church had to go through the "great tribulation." Creation was not "on a lark" but by the sincere, earnest and well-planned will of God. The last phrase of Rev. 4:11 states that all things came into existence by the will of God (Greek, *thelema*, "will, wish, desire"). God simply willed all creation into existence from nothing (Psa. 36:6-9; 1 Chron. 29:12; Psa. 148:5; Neh. 9:6; Job. 26:7; Acts 17:24; Heb. 11:3). Revelation 4:11 is one of the Bible's most emphatic contradictions of all man-made theories of the origin of the universe. The universe and all animal life did not simply "happen"—all that exists is a product of the Uncaused, First Cause, God, who willed it into existence. The One who alone is Eternal deserves worship from all he has made—angels, men, animals and "nature" must cast their

crowns before him in reverence and praise.

The “Lamb” is Jesus Christ! Who else could he be? Jesus is designated the “Lamb of God” who atones for the sins of the world in John 1:29; 1:36; 1 Pet. 1:19. He is predicted as God’s atoning “Lamb” in Isa. 53:7 and designated as the fulfillment of that prophecy in Acts 8:32, implied as the fulfillment in 1 Cor. 5:7. There are 28 references to Christ as the “Lamb” in the book of Revelation (one “lamb” reference, 13:11, refers to the “false-prophet”)! THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT FROM THOSE REFERENCES THAT THE “LAMB” IS JESUS CHRIST! “Lamb” symbolizes the redemptive character of the earthly work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The “Lamb” to symbolize Christ was used by ancient Christians in the catacombs of Rome. The Old Testament is replete with inferences about the vicarious symbolism of the sacrificial lamb. Of special interest is the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:3-6). This became a picture of redemption from sin (John 1:29,36; 1 Cor. 5:7). The vicarious use of the unblemished lamb in sacrifice led to the revelation of the Suffering Servant who as a Lamb was to die in the place of sinners (Isa. 53:4-7). The purpose of Revelation chapters four & five is to prepare for the opening of the “scroll” in chapters six & seven. But the Throne-vision is also fundamental to all that follows in the Revelation to its conclusion. It shows that everything in the book is to be seen through the perspective that Almighty God and Christ, the Lamb, are in control! Although it may have appeared to the seven churches of Asia Minor that the “beast” had absolute power over all that lives, that is not the case! All that transpires in the affairs of mankind serves to bring victory to the saints and glory to the Father and Lamb. At every point and step in life, through time into eternity, the saints must understand and believe this. Revelation is “a call for the endurance of the saints” (13:10 & 14:12). As children of God following the Lamb wherever he goes and in whatever he says (14:1-5), they are completely safe under the providential rule of God and the Lamb. John’s vision is a revelation that the “ransom” has been fully paid—redemption has been accomplished. Until the coming of Christ, the Lamb, there had not been found a worthy representative of mankind to master history and control its destiny. But God “visited” man incarnate in Jesus and mastered it—he (the Lamb) is worthy (Heb. 2:5-18; Phil. 2:5-11). So, all creatures willing to accept his mastery praise him and surrender to him. The Lamb ALONE is worthy to tell men what history is all about (i.e., reveal what is on the “scroll”) because he ALONE paid the price that would buy creation back from its curse (see Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 8:18ff; 2 Cor. 5:11-21; Heb. 2:5-18, etc.). Men and creation are redeemed FOR God. Christ’s work of redemption is sufficient for every man and for all creation (2 Cor. 5:15), but it is efficacious only for those who surrender in faith and obedience to the One who accomplished it. Thus the “purchased” are “out of every tribe, and tongue, and people.” People from every race, language and political persuasion, were, and have been, redeemed and made members of the kingdom of God.

What John saw in the right hand of God (5:1-5) was a “scroll” not a “book” as in KJV (Greek, *biblion*, means “scroll”—books with pages were unknown at that time). Usually scrolls had writing on only one side. That this one had writing on both sides indicates there was so very much to be revealed it could not be contained on one side only. This also symbolizes that what is on the scroll is a complete revelation of the future of the “beast”—the

last of the four great empires of Daniel 2 & 7. Completeness and inaccessibility to man without someone to open it are also symbolized by the seven “seals.” “Seals” represent authority and restrictions. Anyone who broke a seal had to have authority to do so and in doing so eliminated restrictions to the contents therein. Under Roman law there were to be seven witnesses to a will. Each person sealed his witness with his own seal. The will could be opened only if each witness, or his legal representative was present to break the seal. The scroll John saw was sealed all the way up the lip with seven seals. No one could get even so much as a “peek” without the breaking of the seals. The symbolism of the scroll is readily seen when one looks at the prototypes in the Old Testament. Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:8—3:27) was given a symbolic “scroll” to “eat.” It contained the destiny of the Jews in relation to their Babylonian captivities and the future of the Messianic remnant. Zechariah saw a “flying scroll” (Zech 5:1-4) which contained the will of God for reformation of the moral standards of the rebuilt Jewish commonwealth after the return from the captivities. Daniel was told to “seal up” (or, confirm) that what he had written on his scroll was for a time to come beyond his own day (Dan. 12:4,9). This scroll which John saw in Revelation contained a full revelation of “things which must be hereafter” (Rev. 4:1) (i.e., things that will take place in the “great tribulation” upon the church during the Roman empire A.D. 100-500). The scroll contained revelations about the destiny of believers who would suffer physical death as they lived through the “great tribulation.” The events depicted as the scroll is opened (ch. 6) are paralleled by the events announced by the trumpets (chs. 8 & 9) and the pouring out of the bowls (chs. 15-16). This scroll symbolizes the will of God for the destiny of a certain segment of history—both for believers and unbelievers. A strong angel with a great voice asked “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” Angels, strong and great, are not worthy to open if God has sealed. Not even the incarnate Son in his state of earthly humiliation would presume to open the sealed future (Mk. 13:32). But after his victory over sin, death and history, “all authority in heaven and on earth” was given to him (Matt. 28:18-20).

The New Testament Scriptures reveal enough about Jesus to make him WORTHY to anyone to surrender their mind and heart to him. WHAT HAS BEEN REVEALED AND RECORDED ABOUT JESUS CHRIST IS SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE AND MOTIVE TO MAKE HIM WORTHY TO BE TRUSTED, BELIEVED IN, AND OBEYED (John 20:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:14-21; 2 Pet. 1:16-21 1 Jn. 1:1-4). Jesus Christ, now in heaven, worthy to take the scroll from the hand of the One who sits on the Throne, was the One who entered history, conquered sin in the flesh, purchased man’s redemption and was exalted as the conquering “Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” and the “Lamb.” He is the One, having shared flesh and blood and conquered (Heb. 2:14-18; 10:5-10) is worthy thereby to take the scroll from the hand of Almighty God and open the seals. He is worthy, by his victory over history, to reveal and control history. John is told, “He has conquered (Gr. nika)” and has done so for the very purpose of being worthy to reveal history’s meaning and goal. That means the redemptive work of Jesus (his sinless life, his teachings, atoning death and bodily resurrection) ARE the explanations of history! It also means JESUS EARNED THE RIGHT TO COMMAND EVERY HUMAN’S THOUGHTS (2 Cor. 10:3-5) ACTIONS (John 14:23; 15:10), AND FEELINGS BECAUSE HE PURCHASED EVERY HUMAN’S REDEMPTION (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). JESUS ALONE IS TO BE TRUSTED TO TELL (REVEAL) TO EVERY HUMAN BEING WHAT LIFE MEANS AND HOW IT SHOULD BE LIVED!

When the Lamb displayed his sovereignty, all of creation in harmony with God's call to redemption (i.e., the "four living creatures" and "24 elders") surrendered in adoring homage before Him (4:4-11). This NEW SONG (5:6-14) is a "flashback" to the time when the Lamb arose from the dead and ascended into heaven, there exalted to the right hand of the Father, for that is when all power and authority was given to the Lamb (Phil. 2:5-11; Acts 2:36; 7:56; Dan. 7:12-14; Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-23). All creation in harmony with God's redemption also had bowls full of incense representing the prayers of the saints (Psa. 141:2; Lk. 1:10; Rev. 8:3-4). The representatives of redeemed creation SANG A NEW SONG! The word in Greek is ode—an ode is a poem suited to be set to music and sung or chanted by a chorus. It was new (Gr. kainen) in the sense that there had never been anything like it before. It was new because up to that time the work of redemption by the Lamb had only been anticipated and prophesied. **ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED, BELIEVED, AND OBEYED THE LAMB'S REDEMPTIVE COVENANT TERMS CAN SING THIS "NEW" SONG.** It may have been sung prophetically, in anticipation of its reality—but whatever was "sung" in the Old Testament (in prophecy and Psalms, etc.) was limited, obscure, and "before the fact." This NEW song was different than the "song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3-4)—which was about judgment. The NEW song is about redemption and salvation!

The Greek verb epoiesas is translated "has made" (5:10) and is in the aorist tense indicating the kingdom had already been made when John received this Revelation. The kingdom of God is not something future. Those believers (and all to come after them) having already been made a kingdom shall reign on earth. The future tense of the word reign (5:10) does not teach a future millennial kingdom. Believers "reign" with Christ even now (Rev. 20:4-5) and judgment is given to them now (Matt. 7:1-20; 1 Cor. 5:9-13; Heb. 11:7), just as the saints are now priests and a kingdom (Rev. 1:6, aorist verb also). All of God's creation belongs to believers now (1 Cor. 3:21-23) to serve their redemption and they are more than conquerors now (Rom. 8:31-39). It pleased God to give (aorist tense verb) his flock the kingdom (Lk. 12:32) after the redemptive work of Christ had been accomplished on earth. "The meek shall inherit the earth" does not mean after the second coming of Christ! **CHRISTIANS SHOULD BELIEVE AND THINK OF THEMSELVES AS REIGNING WITH THE EXALTED CHRIST RIGHT NOW. THAT WAS THE BASIC MESSAGE OF THE "REVELATION" TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR 2000 YEARS AGO!** The Roman emperor and his cohorts do not "reign"—Christ and his church reigns!

## **TEACHER'S NOTES**

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### **REVELATION 6:1 – 7:17**

**YOU SHOULD!** When you read your morning newspaper you should think of the

history of the world under the sovereign purpose of God! David wrote, “Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision.” (Psa. 2:1-4). The Lord spoke to Jeremiah, saying, “It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me.” (Jer. 27:5). Daniel wrote, “Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and mysterious things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.” (Dan. 2:20-22). Even Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged, “For his (the Most High’s) dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing; and he does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What doest thou?’” (Dan. 4:34-35). King Darius said the same (Dan. 6:25-17). The Lamb will NOT open any more “scrolls”! There is no need to reveal any more “history.” THE BIBLE HAS REVEALED 1000 YEARS OF HISTORY BEFORE IT HAPPENED IN DANIEL (i.e., the four great world empires, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome—from 600 B.C. to A.D. 500). IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION THE BIBLE REVEALS IN MINUTE DETAIL WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT “LAST” GREAT WORLD EMPIRE—ROME. That is enough “history-before-it-happened-and-fulfilled” to ASSURE those who believe the Bible that God is in control of history! THE CHURCH HAS BEEN REVEALED AS VICTORIOUS OVER THE WORST THAT HUMAN PRESUMPTION AND INGENUITY COUPLED WITH THE DEVIL’S DECEIT CAN DO TO TRY TO THWART AND STOP GOD’S REDEMPTION OF MANKIND! That’s all God’s saints need to know to remain faithful—the book of Revelation was God’s last “call for the endurance and faith of the saints” (Rev. 13:10; 14:12). All that remains is for “The Spirit and the Bride (to) say, ‘Come.’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires to take the water of life without price.” (Rev. 22:17).

The rider on the white horse had a “bow” and a “crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.” THIS IS NOT CHRIST! Context, not similarity-in-symbolism, must be of first consideration in interpreting the meaning. The Greek syntax of the last phrase of 6:2 would best be translated, “and he went forth conquering in order that he might conquer”—this horse represents conquest as the end in itself. Christ on the “white horse” in Rev. 19:11 is much different, especially in that Christ is not given a crown—he already has many crowns! He does not have a “bow” but a sharp sword issues from his mouth (the Gospel) with which to smite the nations. The rider on the “white horse” in Rev. 6:1-2 symbolizes Rome’s insatiable lust to conquer the world. The constant imperialistic thrusts of Rome eventually reached as far as the British Isles in the west and Parthia (Iran) in the east. It was Julius Caesar who uttered the oft quoted Latin phrase, *veni, vidi, vici* (“I came, I saw, I conquered.”). A white horse was always ridden by conquering generals and emperors in ceremonial processions through the streets of Rome. Gibbon in his masterful, *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, says Trajan (A.D. 98-117) was “ambitious of fame” and tried to emulate Alexander the Great in conquering the world. John is predicting the

imminent history of the Roman empire as that of imperialistic expansion. The “beast” was going to gobble up (“devour and break in pieces”—Dan. 7:7) nation after nation on an international scale as never before. Certainly, God throughout history (both O.T. and N.T.) to this present day has, by his divine providence, turned the insatiable lust of some human political leaders to conquer into good for the church! God turned the lust to conquer of Babylon, Persia, and Greece into chastening and purifying of his Messianic “remnant” to prepare it for the birth of the Messiah. God turned the lust of Rome to conquer into chastening and nurturing (Rev. 12:14) of his “new Israel” (the Church) which, in a few short years after A.D. 500, had sent missionaries with the Gospel to the ends of the known civilized world! JUST LOOK AT HISTORY WITHIN THE LAST 100 YEARS—TERRIBLE WAR-MONGERING, “CONQUERING” NATIONS HAVE BEEN “CONQUERED” BY THOSE WHO STOOD FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, JUSTICE, AND TRUTH—AND THE GOSPEL HAS GONE WHERE SOME THOUGHT IT WOULD NEVER GO!

GOD WANTED CHRISTIANS IN JOHN’S DAY TO BE REALISTIC ABOUT THE WORLD’S OPPOSITION TO THE CHURCH! He still does! That’s what a great deal of the exhortations and warnings in the New Testament are about! The opening of the 6 seals (and the 7th seal which introduces the 7 trumpets) depicts in graphic symbolism that the whole world (including the Christians) were going to have to suffer a “great tribulation” because of Rome’s insatiable lust to conquer! The “white-horsed-rider” which went forth “conquering and to conquer” was followed by the “red-horsed-rider” symbolizing civilization-wide-war; followed by the “black-horsed-rider” symbolizing economic disaster for the common people; followed by the “pale-green-horsed-rider” (Greek, chloros, from which English chlorophyll comes) symbolizing death and the departure from this world into “Hades.” The spirit of conquest (greed, ambition) produced war (see James 4:1-3). The consequences of war were bloodshed, famine, pestilence and resurgence of wild beasts preying upon mankind. And this is exactly what happened in the history of the Roman empire. Carnage, disease and starvation swept through the Roman empire time after time, killing people by the tens of thousands. In the years A. D. 157-160 a terrible plague, brought back by Roman soldiers from the Parthian battle fields, decimated the Roman world. A second great plague which lasted some 15 years (A.D. 251-265) killed off half the people of the Roman empire! The Greek word therion is translated “wild beasts.” It is the same Greek word used by Luke in Acts 28:4 to describe the “venomous beast” (viper) which fastened on the apostle Paul’s hand. In ancient times, wild, starved, frightened beasts always migrated to areas devastated and depopulated by warfare (Isa. 13:21; 14:23; 34:11-15; Zeph. 2:14; 2 Kings 17:25ff, etc.) and became a serious threat to human life in those areas. John’s predictions about wild beasts also had special meaning to the hundreds of thousands of people who would have to fight and die in the gladiatorial arenas wrestling ravenous animals—both Christian and non-Christian (see 1 Cor. 15:32)! There would have been many Christians in John’s day (and for 350 more years) who would question, “Why does God allow Christians to suffer with the rest of the world?” IT’S STILL A QUESTION BEING PONDERED BY MANY BELIEVERS TODAY. The book of Revelation (along with the “Wisdom Literature” of the O.T.—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) is a partial answer to that question. The church is in the world but not to be of the world (Jn. 17:13-19). God created human beings “in his own image” with the awesome power of free-will and choice! God wants human beings to choose

his “good, righteous, and holy” will as he has revealed it. If they do, they will live in his “good, righteous, and holy” presence forever. If they do not they will live forever in “torments” banished from his presence to a place that is evil and tormented. LIFE IN THIS WORLD IS A “PROBATIONARY” PERIOD FOR “SOUL-MAKING.” What humans do with life in this world determines their eternal destiny. God is going to give human beings what they really want! Christ’s resume of the history of the Roman empire in the “seals” and “trumpets” and “bowls” is prophetically realistic! Jesus never intended believers should be naive about the world and the effects of sin (greed, war and its consequences), see Jn. 15:18-27; 1 Pet. 4:12ff). When wicked men and women become greedy, and go to “war” (on any scale), everyone in the world suffers “great tribulation”—even Christians! BUT CHRISTIANS ARE “SAFE” BECAUSE THEY GO “OUT OF” THE GREAT TRIBULATION INTO THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST (Rev. 7:1-17).

NO! It is not out of character for Christians to be crying to God for justice and divine vengeance! Asking God to execute divine justice is different than taking matters into one’s own hands and trying to execute God’s justice on anyone. God has appointed civil governments (and their officials) to execute his “justice” while this world exists (see Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17, etc.). THE APOSTLE PAUL APPEALED TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT FOR REDRESS OF WRONGS BEING DONE TO HIM (Acts 25:11-12). Any Christian has the “right,” “invitation” and, actually, obligation, from God to pray for divine “justice and vengeance” to be executed through civil government (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Civil rulers are God’s “servants” mainly for that purpose! The persecuted saints who had been martyred (i.e., the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne” 6:9-11) were not censured, condemned or rebuffed by Christ—they were “told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.” God would eventually take care of “avenging their blood” “on those who dwelt on the earth.” This is not talking about hell and eternity, it is saying God would in a little while pour out his “bowls” of wrath upon those who beheaded the saints! God did not censure and condemn David when he cried out in the Psalms for divine vengeance upon his enemy, Saul. God did not censure Job when he cried out for justice concerning his pseudo-friends. God did not censure Paul when he told the high priest who struck him that God would strike him! In fact, God orders the “saints and apostles” to rejoice (the Greek verb *euphrainou*, Rev. 18:20, “Rejoice” is in the imperative mood) that he has given divine “judgment” against the “beast-false prophet-harlot” or, the “great city” (Rome). CHRISTIANS, TODAY, MUST CULTIVATE A HEALTHY “VINDICATION/JUSTICE” QUOTIENT! They must pray to God that he will use his “servants”—civil rulers—to execute God-revealed and God-ordained judgment and justice upon wrong doers, and reward those who do right.

The sixth seal (6:12-17) is apocalyptic imagery. It is not intended to be understood literally. The O.T. prophets used the same imagery predicting the downfall of ancient empires—even of the destruction of ancient Israel in its captivities (Isa. 13:10; 14:21; 24:23; 34:1-4; Jer. 4:23-28; 15:9; Amos 4:9; Joel 2:10; Micah 3:6; Hab. 3:11). Jesus used this apocalyptic imagery to predict the destruction of the Jewish nation which took place in A.D.

66-70 (Matt. 24:29-31; Mk. 13:24-27; Lk. 21:25-28). Joel used such figures of speech to predict the end of the Old Testament dispensation and the inauguration of the New (Joel 2:30 through 3:21). This apocalyptic imagery depicts the “apocalyptic,” cataclysmic wrath of God upon Rome as a moral consequence of the havoc she loosed upon mankind in her lust for conquest. God was not going to let Rome go on forever. He was going to take direct action through all the forces of creation and bring Rome to judgment. The wrath of God was revealed from heaven against Rome in the “things that were made” (Rom. 1:18ff). Cosmic forces would be used by God to bring judgment crashing down upon those “kings of the earth” and their accomplices who thought they could wrest the control of the world from God and the Lamb by stamping out his church. That is the point of this highly figurative picture in the sixth seal. The sixth seal is climactic—it climaxes the consequences of Rome’s “riding forth on the white horse conquering and to conquer” and prepares for the opening of the SEVENTH SEAL (8:1) which ushers in the 7 trumpets. THERE IS “CLIMACTIC PARALLELISM IN THE “SEALS—TRUMPETS—BOWLS”. They portray, in parallel, what is going to happen to Rome is a result of Rome’s imperialism (seals of history), that leads to (divine warnings of trumpets) cataclysmic disasters, and it all ends in Rome’s obliteration (bowls). Rome’s obliteration is more graphically detailed in chs. 17-18). In between each (i.e., between the seals, trumpets and bowls) there are INTERLUDES (“PAUSES”(chs. 7,10,11,12) to assure the church with highly symbolic language that she shall survive, both on earth and in heaven the holocaust coming upon Rome. A moments reflection on the magnitude of the catastrophic consequences for the whole world at the disintegration of the Roman empire would provide an explanation for the cosmic, apocalyptic terms used in Revelation to describe it. When Rome fell, it seemed like “the end of the world” (see Rev. chs. 17 & 18). This is the way the prophets pictured the fall of the great Mesopotamian empires of Assyria and Babylon. When the Jewish nation was destroyed in A.D. 70, it was the end of their world and Jesus spoke of it that way in figurative language. Any German who lived through the experience of the fall of the Third Reich and the destruction of Germany in 1945 would have seen their “world come to an end,” and poets and historians given to the use of figurative language did describe it in much the same terms as the prophets and John. Those who described the atomic-bomb’s aftermath on Hiroshima and Nagasaki used apocalyptic terminology! Such cataclysmic language to describe epic upheavals in history is not uncommon. When judgment fell on Rome it was impartial. It came to the rich and powerful as well as to the poor and powerless. That is how it came to Judaism in A.D. 70. That is how it always comes when God decides to destroy a nation!

The seventh seal is not opened immediately after the sixth seal. It is opened at the end of chapter seven and ushers in the sounding of the seven “trumpets” of warning-judgments on Rome (8:1ff). “Trumpets” confirm that the sixth-seal judgment on Rome is sure to come and the chaos generated and generalized in the first 5 seals will be more specific and direct in the symbols of the 7 trumpets. But the imperative question on the minds of the saints of Asia Minor is: “What shall become of the church and the believers while all this destructive “history” (i.e., seals) is in progress?” The church must have some assurance that it will survive from the first seal (Rome’s attempted usurpation of the Lamb’s sovereignty) until the seventh seal is “opened” and the judgment Rome brings upon herself ensues. Chapter seven is the Lamb’s symbolic, apocalyptic, revelation of the survival of his

redemptive kingdom on earth and the blessed circumstances of those believers who suffer physical death during the “great tribulation” of Rome’s downfall. Interludes of assurance from the Lamb for the church are repeated in Revelation chs. 10-11 and 14-15. Four “angels” (messengers of God) were given divine orders to “hold back” the impending trumpet-warning-judgments on the earth so that nothing be hurt until God was ready! Judgment falls when and where God is ready to reveal it. Zechariah 6:1-8 uses the same imagery of the four messengers going to the four winds of heaven exercising the controlling forces of God by his orders. It is as if Christ is saying, “Time-out----I want to show you that the church will be safe during the chaos of history that is to come.” The symbolism of sealing to the ancients was (and still today) a sign of (a) authority; (b) ownership; (c) authenticity. Kings and other authorities in Biblical times used seals to authenticate, ratify, deputize, mark ownership, and protect their edicts and properties against fraud. Revelation 7:3ff does not refer to a literal, physical “brand” on the forehead of people—it symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit manifested in the holy lives of the Christians of that day (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Tim. 2:19; Eph. 1:12-14; 4:30). When people believe and obey Christ they are given the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). God’s Spirit living in believers, directing their lives through the Word of the Spirit, recreating the image of God in them, authenticates his genuine ownership of them by right of his having purchased them by the blood of his Son (Rom. 8:16; 1 Jn. 5:13). Sealing by God’s Spirit glorifies believers by the imputation of God’s glory into human nature. God’s seal of the Holy Spirit secures and protects those who have chosen him from being defrauded and deceived by the thief of souls, the devil (Jn. 10:27-28; 1 Jn. 4:4; 1 Jn. 5:18). God’s Spirit ratifies an “earnest” (down-payment) of the believer’s future inheritance by declaring them holy, giving them rest for their souls, and giving them victory and dominion (see Rom. 7:18—8:1; Matt. 11:28; Heb. 4:3; Jn. 6:27; 1 Cor. 3:21; 15:58; Rom. 8:37). God’s Spirit also empowers believers as God’s emissaries, certifying in his Word that believers are his messengers, that his message preached by them is authoritative, and promises his messengers his providential care (Matt. 28:18-20). God ordering his saints to be “sealed” in anticipation of the Roman tribulation includes more than mere numbering. It involves not only their protection but also their witnessing. This is the idea in the O.T. from which this imagery is borrowed. Ezekiel, about to witness in a vision the tribulations attending the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the exile of the Jews, also saw a messenger of God going through the besieged city of Jerusalem who had been told to put a “mark” upon the foreheads of the men who were opposed to all the ungodliness of their countrymen (Ezek. 9:3-11). When God told his angels to go into Jerusalem and smite with judgment, they were to “touch no one upon whom is the mark” (Ezek. 9:6). The Greek participle sphragisomen (“sealed” Rev. 7:3) is an aorist active subjunctive and means that the sealing in Revelation was by a single act at some past point of time. While this “sealing” refers exclusively to the Christians in Asia Minor to whom John addresses this Revelation, it is also a fact that God’s Spirit seals every obedient believer of every age. The plain teaching of the Bible from beginning to end is that all mankind is either “marked” with the seal of God or “marked” by Satan. Those “marked” with the seal of God have the image of God stamped upon their character—they behave like God (like Jesus)—and God’s Spirit then bears witness with their spirits that they are children of God. Those who are unbelievers, disobedient to the will of God, and reject his offer of redemption are “marked” with the image of the devil and behave like the devil (see Eph. 2:2-3). IF YOU ARE “SEALED” BY GOD

YOU BELONG TO HIM AND YOU WILL BEAR WITNESS THAT HE POSSESSES YOU BY BEING “CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON” (see Rom. 8:29).

NO! The “144,000” are not genetic, literal, Jews! (A) the Greek *esphragismenon* (“sealed”) in 7:4 is a passive, perfect tense, participle indicating the sealing of the 144,000 had already been completed when John wrote with the results continued in those sealed—this has no reference to anyone sealed after the “tribulation” of that ancient Roman empire—the Jehovah’s Witnesses could not be among the 144,000 numbered for John here, because these “witnesses” had already been sealed; (B) the number “144,000” is clearly not to be understood as a literally precise number—it is in multiples of 12 to symbolize perfect completeness—the 144,000 is a multiple of 12 times 12 times 1000. The number 1000 is symbolic of vastness, inability to number (Deut. 1:10-11; Psa. 50:10, etc.), as well as completeness. There were 12 patriarchs, 12 tribes and 12 apostles. The number 144,000 clearly symbolizes the complete covenant people of God as John sees them from the perspective of the time of the Roman empire of which he writes; (C) the 144,000 are not exclusively Jewish Christians and the “innumerable host” of Rev. 7:9ff are not exclusively Gentile Christians—no such distinctions are drawn elsewhere in the New Testament, in fact all other epistles of the NT go to great lengths to disavow such distinctions—if the innumerable multitude are exclusively Gentile Christians, why are they not also sealed? The 144,000 in Revelation 14 are clearly all of God’s redeemed on earth about to suffer the great Roman tribulation; (D) the 144,000 cannot be literal Israel (the Jews only) because two tribes, Dan and Ephraim are omitted, while Levi and Joseph who are not given tribal inheritance in the OT are inserted—if this is a prophecy of the “restoration” of the OT covenant people, it is a contradiction of the OT because not all the 12 tribes there were the same size. This 144,000 should be called the new “Israel”, symbolically, for that is what the NT calls the church of Christ (Rom. Chs. 9,10,11; Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:3, etc.). This symbolizing of the church by the 12 tribes of Israel would also correspond to the symbolizing of the church as “the camp of the saints” (Rev. 20:9). The 144,000 in Rev. 7 and 14 are all the redeemed as they are on EARTH, about to suffer the four horsemen, the trumpets and the bowls. But they are sealed, numbered by God, and none will be lost eternally—God knows exactly how many and who belong to him—they have his “seal” upon them. **THEY ARE HIS NEW “ISRAEL”!** God alone knows how many would go through the great tribulation and become a part of the innumerable host who are already there with him in HEAVEN (Rev. 7:9ff). The “144,000” and the “innumerable host” are the SAME saints seen from two different perspectives—on earth and in heaven!

The emphasis on “innumerable” is to show that, looked at from man’s finite perspective, no man can know the complete, precise number of individuals who would go through the great tribulation and go to heaven. The same “message” holds true in all ages—no human being can know who and how many will go to heaven—**ONLY THE LORD KNOWS THAT NUMBER WITH PRECISION!** Everyone could know how to get to heaven by reading the New Testament Scriptures—but **NO ONE HUMAN ON EARTH KNOWS WHO AND HOW MANY WILL BE THERE AT ANY TIME!** No human may even know how many “belong” to God while the church is on the earth. But God knows who belong to him while

they are on earth—he has them precisely numbered—“144,000” or “New Israel” (the church). None will be lost who belong to New Israel—humans can know that! This “innumerable” multitude was composed of individuals from every nation (nationality), tribe (culture), people (race), and tongue (language or dialect) in the world as it was then known to the ancient Roman empire. Of course, there will ultimately be saints in heaven from every people known in the world today or in the future (should there be “people-groups” yet to be discovered). During the “great tribulation” the “innumerable” saints were those who had belonged to the “144,000” (the complete church of Christ) while they were on earth but they were “coming” (Greek *erchomenoi*, present tense participle, meaning they were continuing to come) out of the “great tribulation.” This “innumerable” multitude was being added to, day by day, year by year, from the “great tribulation” but the number “144,000” never increased. It was not a multitude yet to be redeemed for they were already “clothed in white robes (7:13) and the Greek word *peribebemenoi* is a perfect tense participle indicating their “clothing” had been given in the past with a continuing consequence; they were already “washed” (Greek verbs *eplunan* and *eleukanan*, “washed” and “whitened” are aorist verbs and designate the action as having been accomplished at a single point in the past). Furthermore, it is significant that this multitude was not denominated as having been “sealed” as had the “144,000.” That indicates they were already in heaven, safe and secure. They were no longer in the world, therefore, they no longer had to be “sealed.”

One thing is certain—this “innumerable host” are in heaven and not on earth. They cannot belong to any 1000-year-millennial-kingdom situated on this earth. Those who had gone through the “great tribulation” were “before the throne of God, serving him day and night within his temple” 7:15-17. (A) they lived, served, and rejoiced forevermore in the immediate presence of Almighty God and the Lamb—they reached the goal and fulfillment of human life; (B) they suffered no more hardships of nature cursed and unredeemed—they were in Paradise restored; (C) they had constant access to divine sustenance and divine guidance—the Eternal Shepherd of the sheep provided and guided; (D) they knew no sorrow at all—there was nothing to regret, mourn or weep about. WHO WOULD NOT WANT TO BE THERE?

Let's summarize Revelation to this point: (A) The incarnated, victorious, sovereign Lamb, stood in the midst of the seven churches of Asia Minor. He had a revelation for them. He saw them as they were, not as they thought they were. He also saw their need as they were about to face 400 years of "great" tribulation from the beast-false prophet-harlot—Rome. They needed to repent—change from a worldly-mind to the mind of Christ; (B) the sovereign throne of God was revealed. He who sat upon the throne was worshiped by all creation and by all believing creatures. God creates and rules all. He is the sovereign Lord of all history and gives his authority over history to the Lamb (not to the Roman emperor). The destiny of the churches of Asia Minor and the Roman empire is under the dominion of the Lamb; (C) Six "seals" of history are opened. Rome was consumed with the lust to conquer. War, famine, pestilence and death by wild beasts would result. That was a reality which the seven churches must face. Many believers were going to be martyred for their faithfulness to the Lamb and his Word. God in his own good time would vindicate their faithfulness and martyrdom; (D) While they were in the Roman empire there would be great tribulation, but they were numbered, sealed, protected and identified as belonging to God. They were his "new Israel" and he knew precisely how many there were of his. And, because they had been washed in the blood of the Lamb, when they were coming out of the great tribulation they were ushered into the presence of God and the Lamb and became a part of an "innumerable multitude" whose every spiritual ambition was fulfilled, every eternal need was supplied, and every sorrow was healed. THAT SCENARIO HAS CONTINUED FROM THE TIME OF FAITHFUL ABEL (Heb. 11:4) TO THIS VERY DAY. The Lord simply needed to repeat that Revelation of the meaning of history and the destination of believers to the seven churches of Asia Minor for that crucial, catastrophic, "great tribulation" of A.D. 100-500. THE MESSAGE HAS ALWAYS, AND WILL ALWAYS BE THE SAME! The "beast-false prophet-harlot" of ancient Rome was "thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone" where the devil is. But it has repeated itself, to a lesser degree and not as universally, ever since A.D. 500 to today. Just as the church has had its problems similar to those of the Corinthian, Galatian, Ephesian, Colossian, Hebrew, Philippian, and Thessalonian churches had in the 1st century—making the apostolic epistles to them relevant to us today—so Revelation is relevant!

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION 8:1 – 9:21

Chapter 8 will reveal judgments to fall upon the Roman world of A.D. 100-500 in the form of natural disorders and disasters. These judgments would affect the areas of nature which sustain human life. They were symbolized as “trumpets” and we are thus to understand them as warning-judgments. The source of the trumpets is God. However, human perversion of God’s creation might also be a secondary source inasmuch as God has built judgment for such perversion right into the natural order (see Rom. 1:18-27). It is one of the most fundamental teachings of the O.T. that God repeatedly used nature as warning-judgments when he wished to call both Israel and heathen nations to repentance. Such “warning-judgments” recur over and over in the Pentateuch and historical books. But the clearest expression of it is in the prophets. Many passages might be cited, but there are two classic examples: (a) Joel 1:1—2:27 where the locust plague is specifically declared to be a “trumpet” from God calling to repentance; (b) Amos 4:6-13 where God lists a number of natural calamities as judgments to call Israel to repentance. That God would continue to act through natural disaster to call mankind to repentance is documented in the New Testament as well (e.g., Lk. 13:1-5; Rom. 1:27). The Pilgrims and Puritans who immigrated to the “New World” (i.e., America) believed God still acted through natural disaster to call them to repentance. Abraham Lincoln, in his Presidential “call for national prayer” during the Civil War said the same thing. Not only so, but this concept has been built into the conscience of mankind by the Creator. All men, even the most pagan, everywhere practice some form of religious appeasement or atonement for sin as a result of observing the judgments in nature. The “trumpets” of God’s judgments in the natural order blasted ominous warnings to the world of the ancient Roman empire—and similar trumpets still blast the world in our 21st century. This cosmos (world-order) is doomed to destruction (Rom. 8:20-22).

The action (i.e., history of imperial Rome “going forth conquering and to conquer”) set in motion by the six seals is resumed in ch. 8, and when the seventh seal is opened, an expanded view of the action will be revealed. However, there is first a “silence” in heaven for about “half an hour.” The answer to the cry of the martyrs (6:9-11) and the prediction of cataclysmic judgments (6:12-17) coupled with the holding back of judgment until all the redeemed are “sealed” (7:1-8) is designed to leave the reader in excited expectancy. Believers in heaven and on earth “hold their breath.” Expectancy is intensified with a dramatic silence. Think of the momentary silence when a conductor, with his baton held high, is about to bring the crash of an overture with an orchestra—think of this expectancy extended for half an hour. This will help you gain the effect of the heavenly silence. There is, of course, no time in heaven. This is simply a condescension to human concepts and language. Time passes agonizingly slow when there is complete silence. When God wants man to concentrate on divine revelation of judgment and redemption, God calls for silence

(Psa. 46:10; Hab. 2:20). WHEN GOD IS ABOUT TO SAY SOMETHING IMPORTANT, EVERYONE SHOULD SHUT UP AND LISTEN! The New Testament has given all the warning there is going to be about the final judgment of all mankind and the whole cosmos and it begs mankind to “shut up and listen” (or open its eyes and read) (2 Pet. 3:1-18). Jesus said a great deal about expectancy of judgment at any moment in the Gospels.

Seven messengers (angels) of God Almighty were given seven “trumpets” to blow. Trumpets in both OT and NT nearly always symbolize God’s interventions in history as “warning-judgments” (Isa. 27:13; Ezek. 33:3-4; Joel 2:1,15; Zeph. 1:16; Zech. 9:14; Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52-53; 1 Thess. 4:16). Furthermore, even the heathen world was accustomed to hear trumpet blasts precede all the edicts of their kings and potentates. The Jews used the trumpet (Hebrew shophar or rams-horn) to announce solemn assemblies gathering to repent, to warn of approaching enemies, or to precede good tidings. When the seven messengers (angels) blew their trumpets they served at least two purposes: (a) to call the unbelieving world of the ancient Roman empire to repentance; (b) to bring the churches of Asia Minor the good tidings that God was about to judge their enemies. In this context incense is mingled with prayers, thus incense does not symbolize prayer here. “Incense” in this context symbolizes the victorious atonement of Christ (which attests to his authority over history). In the temple of the Jews, incense was burned on the altar-of-incense before the first sacrifice and after the last sacrifice of each day. So the victory of Christ, mingled with the supplications of the saints, prompted God to visit warning judgments (trumpets and coals of fire) upon the earth. “Coals of fire” are symbols of God’s wrath upon sin (Ezek. 10:2). The saints, in patient endurance, pray for vindication (Rev. 6:9-11) and God answer with warnings and judgments (Rev. chs. 8-9). The saint who prays thus may never, in his own lifetime, have his vindication on earth. Daniel prayed (Dan. 9) and God predicted vindication for the remnant. But it was centuries before his prayer was answered in the coming of the Messianic kingdom (9:24-27). On the other hand, Elijah prayed (Jas. 5:17-18) and it did not rain for 3 ½ years. The prayer of a righteous man has great power. As the church is being tempted and persecuted today, she should pray for God’s vindication of her “faith and endurance”. God approves of such prayer and answers. The coals of fire in John’s day clearly had their origin in heaven. God’s messengers threw his judgments upon earth. These judgments were cosmic (world-wide) and by the instrumentality of natural upheavals—thunder, noise, lightning, shakings (Gr. seismos, earthquakes). It is not wrong for the saints to expect God to take care of vengeance upon the enemies of his church (Christ’s Bride), so long as the saints do not take it upon themselves to individually hand out vengeance (Rom. 12:14—13:7; Acts 4:23-31; Rev. 18:20).

“One-third” symbolizes that only a part of the earth is hurt. “One-third” indicates that the “trumpets” were only partial judgments— not final judgments. The final judgments came when the 7 “bowls” were “poured out” (Rev. 15:1—20:6). The “trumpet judgments” were to warn Rome to repent of its determination to destroy the Bride of Christ. They were not universal judgments. Had the “trumpets” been universal, final, judgments, the call for, and an expectation of, “repentance” (Rev. 9:20-21) would have been irrelevant! Nor does “one-third” mean the portions of the earth harmed were worse sinners than other portions

which were unharmed. Jesus dealt plainly with that issue in Luke 13:1-5. Throughout the ancient Roman empire different portions of it were “hurt” with natural disasters, social depravity, and invasions of “barbarians” but it did not mean that in those portions of the ancient world which were “hurt” the people were worse sinners than in those not “hurt.” Most of the Christians were in Asia Minor and most of the hurt from such things as earthquakes, famine, depravity, etc. was in Asia Minor!

The first four “trumpets” symbolize the judgments of God as he used the elemental forces of “nature” to warn the ancient Roman world that the present world-order (cosmos) is headed for destruction. This was God’s edict from the point of man’s rebellion in the Garden of Eden when God “cursed” the earth (Gen. 3:17) “for man’s sake” (i.e., to bring him to repentance). God has announced that fact through the centuries by “trumpet-warnings” in “natural” disorder. God has “subjected” this cosmos to “futility” and “decay” so that it will repent and yearn for the redemption he offers in Christ Jesus (see Rom. 8:18-25). God’s use of nature to warn the world to repent is as old as Eden and as catastrophic as the Flood (Gen. 6-9). John’s imagery in the first four trumpets is clearly taken from the plagues upon the Egyptians (Ex. Chs. 7-12) and from other instances such as locust plagues (Joel chs. 1-2) or famines and droughts (Amos chs. 3-4). God creates both “weal” and “woe” (Isa. 45:7). Jesus plainly taught that natural calamities were signals for the whole world to repent, no matter how localized the natural disasters were (Lk. 13:1-5) and so did Paul (Rom. 1:26-27; see also Ezekiel chs. 7-11 and Haggai 1:1-11). Vegetation is necessary, not only for food, but for photosynthesis upon which human life is absolutely dependent! In addition to starvation, all manner of disease is rampant where malnutrition prevails. The “mixing with blood” probably refers to all the death of human beings and animals which results from the destruction of vegetation. Rain “falling like blood” has occurred more than once on Mediterranean countries as a result of massive amounts of fine red dust from the Sahara Desert caught up into the atmosphere and then precipitated as rain over the humid coasts of Italy. When that rain comes down it seems like a rain of “blood.” Josephus mentions the enormous size of hail in his Antiquities, Book II, ch. 14:4. “Plagues of hail” as divine judgments are mentioned in Ex. 9:23-24; Josh. 10:11; Isa. 28:2; Ezek. 38:22. It is also possible that the “blood” in the first trumpet symbolizes war and its effects on earth’s vegetation in ancient “scorched-earth” warfare strategies. John’s imagery of hail mixed with fire and blood is an appropriation of the highly figurative descriptions of judgments connected with the destruction of Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38:22; see also Psa. 18:12,13; Joel 2:30). The prophecy in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is an apocalyptic, symbolic description of God’s defeat of universal humanism at the death and resurrection of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom, the church. That interpretation is based on the concept that Ezekiel’s “temple” and “new land” (Ezek. 40-48) is the church of the New Testament.

The second messenger (angel) was something like a great mountain, burning with fire, which was thrown into the sea. This symbolizes natural catastrophes of the earth’s crust such as volcanoes and earthquakes. The earth’s crust erupts in many places—not necessarily always on land surfaces. Many eruptions take place deep in the bottom of the oceans. These cause tidal waves (tsunamis) which in turn destroy life both in the sea and

upon the land. John refers to eruptions on land. There were many active volcanoes throughout the Roman empire. The most famous one was Vesuvius which erupted in A.D. 79, destroying and burying alive the populations of three cities—Pompeii, Stabiae, and Herculaneum. Vesuvius has had 8 such serious eruptions. Eighty eruptions have been recorded of the famous volcano Etna, also in Italy, beginning in the days of the ancient Roman empire. The formation of a whole new island in the Aegean Sea by the eruption of an underwater volcano was mentioned by Strabo, a Greek geographer, in the year 196 B.C. Earthquakes were a part of everyday life throughout the Roman empire. Syria (including Asia Minor—the modern nation of Turkey), Palestine, Italy and other countries of the empire are covered with signs of violent earthquakes in ancient times. The NT documents a number of earthquakes of the first century (Matt. 27:51-54; Matt. 28:2; Acts 16:26). Josephus mentions one in the reign of Herod (Antiquities, IV:5:2). Roman historians record numerous earthquakes preceding the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 46, 51, 60, & 62). Seneca and Tacitus both mention earthquakes in places like Asia Minor, Achaia, Syria, Macedonia, Cyprus, Paphos, Crete, Italy, etc. Volcanoes, earthquakes, hurricanes and typhoons caused wide-spread destruction to the ancient Roman world. Gibbon in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, points to such natural disasters as one of the leading causes of the fall of the ancient Roman Empire. The cities of the seven churches of Asia Minor sat squarely on a famous “earthquake-fault” which is active even in the 20th and 21st centuries! God still sounds this trumpet warning upon the world today. Hundreds of millions have been killed in the 20th century from starvation as a result of war especially in places like India, China, Russia, and Africa and more than 2,000,000 people have been killed by earthquakes alone since A.D. 1900! The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against ungodliness and the suppression of the truth (Rom. 2:18ff) in the things that have been made (“nature”). Human beings must acknowledge that this world is doomed. They must answer God’s call to repentance and prepare for the next world.

The third messenger of God blew his “trumpet” and a “great burning star fell from heaven called wormwood.” The Greek word for “wormwood” is *apsinthos*, which in English is, absinthe. In German the word is *wermuth* (pronounced, ver-MOO-th). Absinthe is a green, alcoholic liquor containing oils of wormwood, anise and other aromatics. Its continued use causes nervous derangement and death. It is interesting that the Hebrew word *la’an*, translated wormwood, is from a root-word meaning, “to talk indistinctly and incoherently—to murmur, talk obscurely and unintelligently.” One third (a portion) of fresh water (drinking water) was polluted and many people died from the waters. This symbolizes human pollution of fresh water by alcohol and/or the pollution of fresh water by floods and sewage which would produce great plagues of typhoid, malaria and other diseases. It is no secret that the ancient Roman empire was plagued with drunkenness from its aristocracy down to its middle class and even slaves. One only has to read Tacitus or Suetonius to see that drunkenness was a chief factor in the ruination of the empire. Italy produced 50 famous kinds of wine. The city of Rome alone drank 25 million gallons of wine per year—two quarts per week for each man, woman and child. Every 30 miles on a consular road was a *mansio*, or inn, which was also a store, a saloon, and a brothel. Antioch of Syria, during the feast of *Brumalia* in December, resembled one huge saloon and the streets rang all night long with revelry and debauchery. People by the hundreds, celebrating the opening of a new bridge built by

Caligula, fell into the Tiber River and drowned because they were too drunk to swim. Wine taverns were so numerous in Rome that Martial, the poet, called it “one vast saloon.” Many emperors and senators were unrestrained drunkards e.g., Mark Antony, Tiberius, Claudius, et.al. Custom allowed the diner to empty his stomach with an emetic after a heavy banquet in special rooms called “vomitoriums.” Some gluttons performed this operation during the meal and then returned to appease their hunger; vomunt ut edant, edunt ut vomant, said Seneca—“they vomit to eat, and eat to vomit.” Gauls and Germans brought into the empire by conquest, “drank rivers of beer and wine.” Floods were even more common than earthquakes and the open sewage runoffs of ancient cities of the empire were constant sources of contamination and disease. We must remember that what we often call “natural calamities” are simply the judgments of God built into the moral order of the world as he permits mankind to suffer the due penalty of his own errors and sins (Rom. 1:27). Man’s pollution of the fresh water on the earth may be one of those “natural calamities.” Will Durant in his book, *Caesar and Christ*, says that deforestation, erosion, and the neglect of irrigation canals was the cause of widespread pollution in Rome’s last days. A large portion of the ancient city of Rome was built on a swamp which had not been properly drained. This produced widespread disease from insects and other causes.

When the fourth “trumpet” was blown, 1/3 of the heavenly bodies were darkened and day and night were kept from giving light. The earth’s source of light, heat, and energy which sustained all human, animal and plant life was affected. The sun, moon, and stars (the atmosphere) have some effect on water, growing seasons, and ocean tides. This trumpet was symbolizing droughts, excessive rainfall, cold, heat, and a multitude of other atmospheric conditions. Cyprian, A.D. 250, wrote that the empire’s misfortunes were because, “the world has grown old, and does not remain in its former vigor. It bears witness to its own decline. The rainfall and the sun’s warmth are both diminishing; the metals are nearly exhausted the husbandman (farmer) is failing in the fields.” Cyprian was partially correct! This fourth “trumpet” was depicting some depletion of the solar system which in turn affected man’s circumstances on earth. The second law of thermodynamics (or the law of entropy), called by Albert Einstein “the premier law of science,” shows that the solar energy of our cosmos is gradually, but inexorably, being depleted into an unusable state. Our universe is cooling not “heating.” The natural order is going from complexity to disorder. Creation has been subjected to futility and the bondage of decay (Rom. 8:18ff)! The ancient philosopher and scientists had early understanding of this “law.” The apostles, Peter and Paul, wrote that the ancient Roman world refused to heed the warnings of God in nature by exchanging the truth of God for a lie and deliberately ignoring the evidence God had placed in the natural order by the Flood of Noah’s day (2 Pet. 3:5-7 and Rom. 1:22,25,28). John’s “Revelation” agreed as he wrote, “the rest of mankind...did not repent of the works of their hands” not even after the wrath of God had spent itself in the “bowls” of wrath (Rev. 9:20-21; 16:8-11). The next thing John saw was “an eagle crying ‘Woe, woe, woe.’” The eagle (or vulture) is a bird of prey. Both the OT and NT use the eagle as a symbol of predators which feed on rotten carcasses (Deut. 28:49; Hos. 8:1; Hab. 1:8; Matt. 24:28; Lk. 17:37). A bird of prey flying in mid-heaven was a harbinger of death and woe. It was a solemn warning of the terrible trumpets about to be sounded upon the Roman Empire. The cry according to Greek syntax is “Woe....to the ones presently dwelling on the earth.” The text has a present tense

participle. These trumpets were specifically for the Roman world of John's day, not for some alleged future "tribulation" and "millennium"! The warning of "woe" anticipated the 3 remaining trumpets. Calamities in the natural order were severe, but the next trumpets symbolized even more terrible circumstances; one pictured the hell-on-earth corruption from within the society itself, when people sought release by clamoring for death. Another predicted attacks and invasions by countless terrifying warriors on horses. John wrote that the vulture was circling. Rome was about to die. That was precisely how Jesus pictured the death of Judaism in his "Olivet Discourse" (Matt. 24-25-26).

The fifth trumpet featured a personalized "star" fallen from heaven to earth. "He" was given the key of the shaft of the "bottomless pit" (Greek, abysou, "abyss"). The word abysou is used again in Jude 6; Revelation 11:7 and 20:1,3. It is physically impossible for it to be "bottomless" so this "pit" must exist in the unseen, non-material world. This abyss would be the same place as the lake of fire and brimstone" where "smoke and torment" rises forever upon those with "the mark of the beast" (Rev. 14:9-11; 19:20; 20:10,14; 21:8). This "fallen star" did not have the key until it was given to him and the "star" did not have control over the abyss. All he did was "unlock" it by order of the One who had given him the key. This is significant! The Greek verb *peptokota* is perfect tense and indicates the "star" had fallen in the past and was in a continuing state of fallenness. This "star" was the same person as the "king" over the locusts (9:11) whose name was, in Hebrew, "Abaddon," and in Greek, "Apollyon." Both Abaddon and Apollyon mean "Destroyer." It is correct to understand this "star" was the devil or one of hell's angels who had joined him in the "great rebellion" (see Job. 1:6-12; 2:1-8; Lk. 10:18; Jn. 8:39-47; 12:31; 16:11; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:9-12). The "throwing-down" of the devil in Rev. 12:9-12 was in direct connection with his wrath (through the instrumentality of Roman paganism) upon the churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 12:13—13:1ff). This "star" was allowed to let the torments from hell belch forth upon earth through Rome's complicity with Satan (Rev. 13:1-18). The "star" does not have the key by his own authority. The Lamb has the key to everything—even "Death and Hades" (Rev. 1:19). That which belched forth from this abyss was the demonic powers of hell which took residence in the mentality and actions of Roman politics, religion and culture (i.e., "the beast, the false prophet and the harlot"). Locusts were always associated with judgments from God upon the sins of mankind (Ex. 10:4-19; Deut. 28:38; 2 Chr. 6:28-31; 7:13; Psa. 105:34; Joel chs. 1-2; Amos 4:9; Nahum 3:15, et. al.). These could not have been literal locusts, for locusts do not have stinging tails. What John sees in this vision represents something much more terrible than literal locusts. This plague of "locusts" harmed only that part of mankind which was "without the seal of God upon their foreheads"—in other words it harmed only those with "the mark of the beast" upon them. These locusts tortured but did not kill. Their attack was "like" the poisonous sting of a scorpion. The Greek word *scorpiou* means "scatter." The work of this huge cloud of "scorpions" was to shatter, scatter, and debilitate psychological and mental stability. It tormented mankind "five months" until people "longed to die," but they could not find death (cf. Deut. 28:65-67; Job. 3:21-22; 7:15-16; Jer. 8:1-7; Jonah 4:3). One of the main contributing factors to Rome's downfall was its internal hellishness. Society was bifurcated between extremely rich and an almost total welfare state; emperors and senators were little better than thugs killing and confiscating properties; the government became totally bankrupt in the reign of Marcus Aurelius; the army was a mob

of untrustworthy mercenaries; assassination of political leaders was rampant; invasion and plunder by the “Barbarians” scattered the population; huge tracts of the countryside were devastated; the “middle-class” was squeezed out of existence into serfdom; streets of cities and highways of the empire were unsafe to travel; the first plague brought back to Rome by Marcus Aurelius’ army caused one fourth of the empire to perish; the second plague A.D. 252, lasted 15 years, and at its peak in the city of Rome 5000 people per day died while Alexandria lost two thirds of its population; Roman cities and villages either fortified themselves or were looted and destroyed by roaming bands of marauders (the city of Rome built a wall around itself 12 ft. thick and 20 ft. high for protection); economic inflation and devaluation of currency recurred over and over (laborer’s wages were about 15-18 cents per day while meat sold at 20 cents per pound, eggs 9 cents per dozen, wheat \$1.27 per bushel) —W. G. Hardy says in his book, *The Greek and Roman World*, “mere words can scarcely convey the agony through which the inhabitants of that world passed.” In addition to all this, the populace was “tormented” in soul and conscience by pandemic proportions of sexual depravity. Practically every emperor and most of the citizenry who could afford it indulged in pederasty (Commodus had 300 little boys by which to satisfy his perverted sexual appetites). Great epidemics of syphilis and other venereal diseases swept central Italy in A.D. 65, 75 and 166. Virtue, faithfulness, and cleanness was lost. Incest, abortion and homosexuality were pervasive (Rom. 1:24-32). Most of the non-ruling classes of citizens lived on the constant edge of starvation and fear of murder or slavery, or death in the arena. The decadence of idolatrous religion induced the depression of unbelief followed by injustice, despair and hopelessness. The sheer cruelty and bloodthirstiness of the society drove some to despondency. Seneca, the great philosopher, statesman and poet said after attending the “games” at the Colosseum, “I come home more greedy, more cruel, and inhuman, because I have been among human beings.” The Cynic school of philosophy begun by Socrates found ready disciples in ancient Rome among whom was the famous Zeno. Lucian, the satirist wrote, “A short survey of life had convinced me of the absurdity and meanness that pervade all worldly purposes.” Seneca, the Stoic, said, “the final lesson of the Stoic is contempt for life and choice of death...wherever you look, there is an end to troubles. Do you see that precipice—it is a descent to liberty. Do you see that river, that cistern, that sea—freedom is at their depths.” Marcus Aurelius said: “All that is prized in life is empty, rotten, and petty—and without a change of conviction what is there save a bondage of men who groan and pretend to obey.” Tacitus began his history of Rome with, “I am entering on the history of a period rich in disasters, frightful in wars, torn by civil strife and even in peace full of horrors.” There were philosophical schools of Scepticism and Epicureanism which believed people should “eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (see 1 Cor. 15:32-34). It is evident that the suffering caused by the blackness belching from the abyss is, ultimately, spiritual suffering. One Roman writer, Gallus, said, “Worse than any wound is to wish to die and yet not to be able to do so.” The OT prophets recount over and over the hell-on-earth conditions which kill like a deadly plague any society deceived by Satanic idolatries (Isa. 3:1-26; 24:4-13; 57:1-21; Jer. 5:1-31; Hos. 4:1-19; Amos 8:1-14, etc.). Paul described the Roman society of his day as depraved and bestial and warned the Ephesians that such debauchery emanates from hell!

The later chapters of Revelation agree with this symbolic characterization. In chapter 13 Rome’s political power is pictured as an incarnation of the devil in what appears

to be an invincible “beast.” Rome’s idolatrous religion is pictured as a vicious humanism incarnated in the second “beast” which has two horns but speaks like a lamb. Rome’s carnal materialism and sexual depravity is symbolized as the “great harlot” who seduced the whole world to participate with her in “fornication” (Rev. 13:1-17; 17:1—18:24). As a result of Rome’s opening up the abyss and allowing the tormenting plague of ungodliness to infect the empire, she was given a “like measure of torment and mourning” as her judgment ( Rev. 16:1-21; 18:6-8).

The vision of the fifth trumpet brings to an end the “first woe.” Two more “woes” were to come. The “second” woe was the confrontation between the church and the word of God (the two witnesses and the Roman “beast” (Rev. 11:1-14). The “third woe” was the fall of the great city (the city of Rome itself) which had dominion over the kings of the earth. The sixth trumpet is to reveal a summation of what the seven bowls brought on the empire. The seventh trumpet ushered in the judgments of the seven bowls. This was “announced to his servants the prophets” (Rev. 10:7) which certainly refers to Daniel’s prophecy of the judgment of the “fourth beast” (Dan. 7:1-28). And the seventh bowl (Rev. 16:17-19) ushered in the “third woe” which was the final fall of the “great city” which is elaborated in Revelation chapters 17 and 18.

The sixth trumpet is blown and the four angels who were bound, but held ready at the great river Euphrates, were released. The “spirit of the Euphrates” or “the spirit of Mesopotamia” was released against the Roman world. This goes all the way back to the Tower of Babel. It is the spirit of aggression and rebellion. The OT prophets saw in the plundering warlords of the Euphrates Valley (i.e., Assyria, Babylon, Persia) the agents of God for punishing human pride and arrogance (Isa. 10:5-19; 13:17; 21:2; 44:24—45:13; Jer. 27:5-11; 55:11, etc.). All these Mesopotamian tyrants thought they were acting by their own sovereignty. Indeed, they were acting by their own choice, but they were all being overruled by God and used by him as agents to bring judgment upon those who deserved judgment. The Revelation teaches that same world-view throughout and especially in this sixth trumpet. The sixth trumpet symbolizes invasion from external warring forces which served as an instrument of God to destroy the ancient Roman empire because she was set to destroy his church. God’s destruction of succeeding Mesopotamian empires by one another was for the same reason—they tried to eradicate the OT covenant people. The author of Revelation expects his readers to understand enough of the history of the OT to grasp the clear symbolism in this army from the Euphrates. The point of the hyperbolic number of cavalymen (200 million) is to terrify those against whom they would ride. From about 200 B.C. to A.D. 220 the Euphrates region (Persia, modern Iran) was ruled by a virile dynasty called the Arsacids (Parthians). This was a related Iranian group that developed a formidable military power based on a well-trained cavalry using disconcerting and novel tactics: “the Parthian shot.” It was a swift attack from all directions, the riders shooting from their horses, then retreating, and scattering in order to attack from all sides again. Because they were such fierce fighters and great tacticians, Rome never succeeded in establishing its sovereignty over the Euphrates Valley. Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius all suffered disastrous defeat in their wars with the Parthians. Some of these same Mesopotamian

hordes, along with East Indian and Russian tribes migrated to Germany and became the most terrifying enemies of Rome. From A.D. 200 to 400 the Roman Empire suffered successive invasions by these people called Goths, Huns, Visigoths, Ostrogoths and Vandals. The Visigoths first entered the Roman Empire from southern Russia to escape persecution from the Huns. But the Romans began to persecute them also and the Visigoths began attacking Roman settlements as they moved south toward Italy. In A.D. 378 they defeated a Roman army in battle, and by 395 they had captured Athens and Corinth. About 395-400 the empire was divided with one ruler in Rome and another claiming rule from Constantinople. In A.D. 410 the Visigoths were powerful enough to sack and burn the city of Rome. The empire was stunned by the news. The Visigoths conquered and took Spain from the empire. Next the Vandals conquered North Africa ca. 430 and ruled it until 548. From their North African ports they crossed the sea and attacked the mainland of Italy and plundered the city of Rome. The last of these fierce peoples to invade the empire were the Ostrogoths and the Huns. Soon the western part of the Roman Empire had nearly cannibalized itself (see comments on Rev. 17:15-18) in anarchy. From that time onward the empire began a rapid demise. These foreign hordes were ferocious warriors. When they attacked, people were paralyzed with fear. They burned, plundered and raped. Eventually the empire lay devastated by them. John's symbolism in these verses was for effect. He did not intend a literal application for all the details of his text. The picture of millions of warriors armed to the teeth, mounted on monstrous horses, was intended to frighten and terrify even once brave Rome. The carnage wrought by this great horde in fire, smoke, rapine, suffering and death is like that of hell. They were so fierce there was no defense against their attack, and they were so well armored they seemed invincible. The description in this passage is such as to terrorize any opponent. The scourge upon the Roman world brought by these millions of destructive warriors was much worse than any of the preceding trumpets. These "millions" of horsemen not only hurt, they killed a third of mankind.

"The rest of mankind" (not killed by the "plagues" and Germanic hordes) "did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping the demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot either see or hear or walk; nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their immorality or their thefts." (Rev. 9:20-21). This statement by John proves that these six "trumpet-judgments" were not for the end of the world! In these six "trumpets" is completed the three instruments the Lamb used to bring warning and judgment upon "the beast, the false prophet, and the harlot" (ancient Roman empire). These three agencies (i.e., natural disasters, internal decadence, and foreign invaders) of divine judgment are exactly the three things Rome, through her deification of emperors, arrogantly presumed that she controlled—nature, culture, nations. Flashing like a comet across the pages of Gibbon's, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, streaks the historical documentation that three great things combined to overthrow the Roman Empire (a) natural calamities; (b) national corruption; (c) neighboring conquerors. Having painted one of the most terrible pictures in literature of the judgments of God on sin (the six trumpets), John says that the rest of mankind not killed by them did not repent. Just like Pharaoh and his army, these judgments of God missed the heart and conscience of most of mankind in the ancient Roman empire. Paul describes their stubborn spirit of impenitence in Romans 1:18ff. These judgments were specifically for the world of idolatry and immorality so

they did not eternally “hurt” Christians. Christians did suffer physically (persecution and even martyrdom) in this “great tribulation” but not as judgments from God. The “great tribulation” tried the faith and endurance of the Christians, and should they die suffering, God promised to usher them into their rest in heaven (Rev. 14:12-13). It should be plain that the judgments of the six trumpets are not the instruments of God upon the world at the end of time, for they harm only a portion of earth and mankind. Furthermore, a portion of impenitent mankind remains alive, continuing in the business of wickedness as usual. These are judgments on the “beast,” but the beast pays them no heed. Nothing is left for John to portray but an intensification of the judgments symbolized as being poured out from bowls of God’s wrath picturing Rome’s utter destruction (Rev. 15:1—20:6). In principle, these “trumpets” of “warning- judgment” (nature, decadent culture, and international aggression) are, as they were since man’s fall in Eden, continuing to be used by God to call a world of wicked people to repentance. Men continue to refuse to take God’s lessons from history to heart. Those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it (Santayana). The major portion of the world today continues to pay no heed to these warnings.

We see God’s “trumpets” of “warning-judgments” occurring every day! Earthquakes, droughts, pandemic diseases (e.g. AIDS), whirlwinds, floods, moral decadence (sexual perversion, murder, theft, idolatry, irreverence, irresponsibility), and international aggression are in the headlines of every morning’s newspaper and on every evening’s T.V. news show! So, to what origin does most of the world attribute these “trumpets”? “MOTHER NATURE” and “UNDER-PRIVILEGED OR VICTIMIZED HUMAN NATURE.” The sovereign permission of God for the purpose of calling wicked people to repentance must never, never, never, never be thought or mentioned! CLEARLY, GOD HAS ALLOWED BAD THINGS TO HAPPEN FOR HIS PURPOSE OF DIRECTING THE HUMAN MIND AND HEART TOWARD REDEMPTION (HEAVEN). That concept cannot be escaped in light of scriptures like Luke 13:1-5; Acts 14:15-18; Rom. 1:18-32; 2:4-5; 8:18-25; 2 Cor. 1:8-10; 12:7-10; Heb. 12:1-17; James 4:1-10; 1 Pet. 4:1-19, etc., etc. The O.T. prophets expounded this concept constantly! SO LET US BE UP AND ABOUT, DIRECTING THE MINDS AND HEARTS OF OUR NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS TO THE REAL MEANING OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION (ESPECIALLY ABOUT THE “TRUMPETS” OF “WARNING-JUDGMENTS”). Remember, Revelation is to be read, heard, and kept!

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION 10:1 – 11:19

This great Revelation of the judgment of the Lamb upon the “beastly” Roman empire, and the attendant tribulations for the saints, is punctuated at regular intervals with consoling, strengthening, visions of victory for the redeemed. Even the Throne-visions of chapters 4 and 5 are consolatory in essence. Chapters 7, 10, 11, 14, 15, 19, 21, and 22 are all somewhat parallel to one another, intending to give the beleaguered saints of those centuries (A.D. 100-500) hope in the midst of trial. And if these chapters were to give hope to the saints of A.D. 100-500, that message of hope and encouragement is relevant for the saints of A.D. 2001 until Jesus comes again because “the word of the Lord abides forever” (1 Pet. 1:25). Constant contrast between the terrors of the Lord’s judgment and the glories of his redemptions is characteristic of prophetic, apocalyptic literature. One has only to read the magnificent works of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos, Hosea, Joel and Zechariah to see it in the Old Testament. It was an essential feature of Jesus’ teaching method and is often used in the epistles of the New Testament. It should, therefore, be no surprise to see the double emphasis of judgment—redemption regularly recurring in this last apocalyptic-prophetic book of the Bible. God works both “weal and woe”—good and bad—as he proceeds in the redemption of creation (Isa. 45:7). Both the “goodness” of God and the “judgments” of God are intended to bring the world to repentance. Just as there was a pause after the opening of the sixth seal into which a consolatory vision of the redeemed (ch. 7) was inserted before the seventh seal was opened, so chapters 10-11 are the consolatory pause before the seventh trumpet is sounded. Between the seventh trumpet and the pouring out of the bowls of wrath there is a pause for description and explanation (ch. 12-13) as well as a consolatory vision (ch. 14-15). These consolatory visions do not necessarily impose any historical sequence on the book of Revelation. They are merely repetitions (in differing symbolism) of one theme—i.e., the saints of God come out of the great tribulation victorious and at rest with God and the Lamb forever.

A “mighty” (strong) angel came down from heaven as John waited to see what would happen when the “rest of mankind did not repent.” Will God unleash a rain of fire and brimstone and destroy this “Sodom”? Will God tell John more clearly about that judgment? The answer is in chapters 10 & 11. This angel “comes with a cloud”—in fact surrounded by a cloud (Greek, *periblemenon*). Coming “with, or upon a cloud” symbolizes judgment (Psa. 97:1-5; Isa. 19:1; Jer. 4:13; Ezek. 1:4; Dan. 7:13; Joel 2:1-2; Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Rev. 1:7). This mighty angel also had a “rainbow” over his head. The rainbow is the symbol of faithfulness to redeem the penitent in conjunction with judgment upon the impenitent (Gen. 9:12-16; Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:3). Both the brightness of the sun (the angel’s face) and the feet of fire (the angel’s feet) are also symbolic of judgment (Ezek. 1:26ff; Dan. 7:9-10; Rev. 1:14-15). This mighty messenger appeared to John with a “little scroll” already opened in his mighty hand. This scroll contained the final predictions of the judgments to come upon the ancient Roman empire (see chs. 15-19). It was “little” because it contained only the last part

of the Revelation. It also contained the “sweet” predictions of the victory of the saints (10:8-11) which would be detailed in chs. 11,14,21,22. It was already opened signifying that these judgments and victories (“bitter and sweet”) had already been decided and announced in the scroll taken and opened by the Lamb (chs. 5-9). The strong angel put his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land signifying the contents of the “little scroll” was for the whole ancient Roman world of the Mediterranean; not just for Asia Minor. Then the mighty angel “roared.” When he “roared” the seven thunders sounded! “Seven” is the number of completeness. Thunder in “nature” is the warning that a storm is on the way. The Seven Thunders (complete thunder) symbolized God’s warning that the storm of complete judgment upon the Roman empire was on its way! Thunder is used repeatedly in the Bible to symbolize impending judgment (Ex. 9:23ff; 1 Sam. 7:10; 2 Sam. 22:14; 12:17-18; Job. 26:14; Psa. 18:13; 104:7; Isa. 29:6). But John will not be given the complete description of that judgment to write until after the vision of the church’s protection. SO THE MIGHTY ANGEL’S WARNING TO ANCIENT ROME’S REFUSAL TO REPENT IS—JUDGMENT IS ON ITS WAY!

John started to write down what the “seven thunders” revealed, but was told to wait! The final judgment of ancient Rome would be portrayed by the symbolic pictures of chs. 12—19 when the 7th trumpet ushers in the seven bowls of Rome’s final judgment (until the end of the world). The words, “seal up” simply mean that John’s readers will not understand fully or will not see its fulfillment until after the fact! It is the same symbolic figure of speech used by the angel revealing to Daniel the 600 years of history of the Jewish people and the coming of the Messianic kingdom (Dan. 12:4,9). The mighty angel swore in the name of God (i.e., confirmed) that what God had said by his prophets would be fulfilled when the seventh trumpet was sounded. Rome’s time was up when the 7th trumpet sounded. The “beast” would have plenty of warning. All that symbolized by the seals and the trumpets were warnings, but still the “beast” (and those with the “mark of the beast”) did not repent. At the sounding of the 7th trumpet the “court would sit in judgment” (see Dan. 7:26) and the “kingdom” (i.e., Christianity spread to all the world) would be given to the saints of the Most High (Dan. 7:27). The “beast” was slain and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire (Dan. 7:11; Rev. 19:17-21). “Mystery” in the Bible means something that may be predicted and couched in symbolic language, but cannot be fully known until God decides to allow it to happen amongst human beings. Even the gospel was a “mystery” until happened (Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:6-10; Eph. 1:9; 3:3,4,9; 6:19; Col. 2:2). The “mystery” which was “announced by his servants the prophets” is clearly what is stated in Revelation 11:15 (predicted in Daniel chs. 7 & 9)—i.e., the victorious conquest of the devil by Jesus Christ and establishment of his kingdom (the church) on earth. It all began to take place at Calvary, the Empty Tomb, and the Day of Pentecost, and was culminated in the fall of the ancient Roman empire (ca. A.D. 500) when the gospel was loosed from the claws of “the beast” and went to the uttermost parts of the earth. This very thing was predicted when Ezekiel prophesied in apocalyptic, symbolic terminology the defeat of universal opposition to God in one mighty victory (i.e., “Gog and Magog” Ezek. chs. 38-39) and the building of a glorified temple (the church, see Eph. 2:11-22) wherein the presence of God would dwell forever (Ezek. chs. 40-48). Zechariah predicts victory over universal antagonism to the worship of God (Zech 14:1-15) in apocalyptic, symbolic terminology and a great “ingathering” and “sanctification” of

people from all the nations to serve the Lord (Zech. 14:16-21). These prophecies are general, highly figurative, and apocalyptic, but do predict the first coming of the Messiah and establishment of the church. There are many smaller such prophecies (e.g., Amos 9:11-15; Joel 2:28—3:21; Micah 4:1—5:15, etc.). But the OT prophet who specifically predicts the fall of the “fourth” empire (Rome) is Daniel. Daniel even specifies the time when Rome’s downfall will begin—i.e., at the establishment of God’s NT church (Dan. 2:44-45; 7:7-27; 9:24-27). It was to be 490 years after the restoration of Jerusalem and Judea in the days of Ezra & Nehemiah (see Daniel, 3rd edition, by Paul T. Butler, chs. 7,8,9, pub. College Press). What the OT prophets predicted concerning the defeat of universal opposition to God’s redemptive kingdom, its victory and spread to all the world, was to be accomplished when the strangle-hold of the “fourth beast” (Rome) on the civilized world was broken. The testimony of the Messiah and the defeat of all his enemies fulfilled in Jesus Christ is the very soul and spirit of prophecy (see Rev. 19:10). Such universal opposition to the truth has not existed since Rome nor will it before Jesus returns!

The imagery of “eating” a scroll is unquestionably taken from Ezekiel 2:8—3:11 (see also Jer. 15:16). Ezekiel had been called into his ministry for the Lord at a crucial time for the survival of God’s redemptive program. God’s people had become decadent, idolatrous and rebellious. God was going to send the Babylonians to destroy their city, temple and nation and take them into exile. Ezekiel was to have the burden of preaching this to a people who, for the most part, did not want to hear it. Ezekiel was told to eat the scroll which contained this message. It would be at first “sour” then “sweet.” The “sour” part was the judgment and exile—the “sweet” part was that a remnant of believers would be produced and delivered as a result of this sifting and chastening and they would bring the Messiah to the world. This fits the symbolism of Ezekiel’s vision in chapter one of his book—out of the “storm cloud” of Babylonian captivity comes the dazzling, powerful sovereign throne of God and the rainbow of God’s faithfulness. What John assimilated when he “ate” the scroll given him was that God’s will for the saints in respect to Rome would include some “bitter” times of persecution (behind which the devil played as the instigator, chs. 11-12). But God’s will also included the “sweet” blessedness of rest and glory in the presence of the Lamb in life and death (14:1-13). The “bitter-sweet” will of God is revealed not just for the churches of Asia Minor in the first four centuries A.D. The writers of the NT repeatedly said some tribulation would be the lot of all who choose to follow Jesus (Matt. 5:10-12; Mark 10:30; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12). What Christians must do is eat the words of Christ. His will, both bitter and sweet, must be assimilated until it becomes the Christian’s will, character, and very nature. By faith, the Christian must agree that self was crucified when Christ died, and self no longer lives but Christ lives in and through the Christian (2 Cor. 5:14-21; Ga. 2:20). Whoever follows the Lamb (Rev. 14:4-5) must go the way the Lamb goes which is the way of death to self (Jn. 12:20-26; 1 Pet. 2:18-25; 1 Jn. 2:6). What John “swallowed” and what we must “swallow” is a “call to endurance and keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 13:10; 14:12). Most important, for Christians both in John’s day and the 21st century, is to understand the drama involves more than the earthly events. What was to happen during the ancient Roman empire’s “death-throes” involved cosmic powers (i.e., God and Satan) engaged in a struggle for sovereignty over the souls of mankind. John predicts that God will win! God’s saints will receive the kingdom and dominion!

The imagery of chapter 11 is Jewish, BUT the application is to the church and the ancient Roman empire. The relation of the Gospel to Judaism was settled more than a quarter of a century before Revelation was written when Jerusalem and the Jewish nation was destroyed in A. D. 66-70. Furthermore, the short period when it appeared that the “witness” of God had been slain (11:7-10) could not apply to the church and Judaism from A.D. 30-70 for that is when the Gospel prospered by the conversion of thousands. Finally, what transpires in chapter 11 is apparently the “second woe,” a period before the seventh trumpet which shall be the final “woe” (destruction) on Rome. Therefore, chapter 11 has to fit into the entire context of the revelation about the “beast” versus the churches of Christ in Asia Minor. It would be of little relevance to the church of Asia Minor to give an anachronistic resume of the destruction of Judaism! Neither does chapter 11 predict that Jerusalem will be restored and the Jews returned as God’s chosen people. That issue had also been settled and was thoroughly and plainly stated in the epistles of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit would not contradict himself by giving Paul one revelation in Galatians and Hebrews, and John a different one in Revelation.

The imagery of measuring the temple with a measuring rod is from Ezekiel 40-42. Ezekiel’s temple was figurative and symbolic of the New Testament church. It had to be! It certainly was not a prophecy of the “Second Temple” built by Zerubbabel. Its dimensions are too exaggerated to be predicting anything literal. Ezekiel’s temple, if literal, would measure larger than the entire ancient city of Jerusalem. Ezekiel’s measurements of the city of Jerusalem, if literal, would have it extending out into the Mediterranean Sea! Thus the entire section of Ezekiel chapters 40-48 are figurative of the NT church. Ezekiel’s “priesthood, sacrifices, and division of the land” would be in violation of the Mosaic law! It cannot, therefore, be predicting a return to a Mosaic nation. As a matter of fact, Ezekiel’s predictions, if carried out literally, would have the “city” built squarely at the geographical center of Palestine and the tribal lands divided equally on each side of it. The temple would be in the middle of the city, and it would also be apportioned out, if literal, in violation of the Old Testament.

Thus the “temple” John is told to “measure” was the church of Christ. God does not dwell in temples made with hands—he never did (Isa. 66:1-2; Acts 17:24-25). The fellowship of believers (in both OT and NT) is where the presence of God dwells. The church is God’s temple now (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:20-23). In the OT temple only those who were pure, true sons of Israel, could worship at the altar. Outcasts and excommunicated Israelites could come into the court of the Gentiles (the “outer court”), but not into the courts of Israel. John is told to symbolically measure the temple where the altar is. Only those who had accepted Jesus Christ as Messiah were true Israelites (Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 6:15-16). The saving of “all Israel” in Romans 11:13-36 is the saving of both Jew and Gentile in New Israel by grace through faith. Those who were “measured” were the Christians protected from being eternally lost when the “third woe” (i.e., the 7th trumpet—pouring out of the bowls of judgment) came upon the ancient Roman empire. Only Christians had the new and living access to God through Christ (Heb. 10:19ff). Only Christians came to the “New Zion” (Heb. 12:22ff). Only Christians (and not Jews) had an altar at which they could continually offer up

sacrifices of praise (Heb. 13:10ff). The “outer-court” is not to be “measured” (i.e., protected)—it symbolizes the heathen Gentiles and impenitent Jews. The “outer-court” is to be “given over to the nations” (i.e., to become an abomination before God—destroyed). This is closely parallel to Daniel’s prediction of the judgment of God upon both impenitent Judaism and impenitent Rome, all in the same prophecy (Dan. 7:23-27; 9:24-27; 12:7). The imagery of the “nations” trampling over the holy city for 42 months refers to the time when (symbolically) the Gentiles (i.e., Rome) will be given almost complete (it will seem to some) power over the church. Daniel predicts that the 4th beast (Rome) would “prevail” over the saints and they would be given into the hand of Rome for 3 ½ “times.” “Forty-two months” is 3 ½ years. Seven is the symbolic number of perfection and completion. Three and one half (half of seven) symbolizes a period short of completeness—the period approximately from A.D. 100 to 450 (i.e., 350 years). That is all it reveals. What John is predicting here is that the whole ancient Roman world outside the church (both Jew and Gentile) will make war on the church and seem to “prevail” over it for a period of time less than a complete time. God knows when that time would end. It would end with the “death” of the “beast.” It began its “end” in A. D. 313 when Christianity was declared no longer an illegal religion in the empire and Christians were given a “new life” to go to the ends of the earth with their witness of the gospel—it came to its completion about A.D. 450 when the ancient Roman empire ceased to exist.

The two witnesses are (a) God’s church (it’s “faith and endurance”); and (b) God’s word (“the testimony of Jesus”). The period God gives his 2 witnesses power to carry out their mission of proclamation is “1250 days.” That is the same amount of time (“42 months”) the “nations” (ancient Rome) were given to trample over the “holy city” (New Jerusalem, the church). It is also the same amount of time Daniel (3 ½ times) predicted the “fourth beast” (Rome) would prevail over the saints. The period to be covered, as we shall see in 11:5-13, interestingly enough, covers about 3 ½ centuries (350 years from John in A.D. 100 to the end of the Roman empire in A.D. 450). The two witnesses are symbolized by two olive trees and two lampstands (see Rom. 11:17-24). In Zechariah 4:1-14 the 2 olive trees represent Zerubbabel, the king, who himself represents the theocracy (God’s OT church) and Joshua, the high priest. The lampstand symbolizes the Holy Spirit (Rev. 4:5) by his word convicting the world of sin, righteousness and the judgment and God’s sovereignty (Jn. 16:7-11). God’s word is a lamp and a light (Psa. 19:8; 119:105,130; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Pet. 1:19ff). The two “anointed” of God in Zechariah’s prophecy (Zech. 4:14) were Joshua (Zech. 3:1-10) and Zerubbabel (Zech 4:1-13), and his “rediscovered” law of Moses, two witnesses of God to rebuild the Messianic nation in the OT. The church and the gospel are God’s two witnesses in the NT. These are the two the ancient Roman empire determined it would slay (from Domitian in John’s day, to Commodus ca. A.D. 450).

The symbolic picture of the history of the two witnesses for 1260 days (3 ½ times) is a remarkable prediction of the history of gospel proclamation during the apostolic age—through the “great tribulation” of the ancient Roman persecution—and eventual missionary flood over the earth after the death of the “beast.”

Phase One: Revelation 11:5-6 predicts the apostolic age, or from the Gospels to

the Book of Revelation. During the first century A.D. (34-100) the gospel was preached with great power. Its proclamation was confirmed by “signs and wonders and various miracles” (Heb. 2:4). One has only to read the book of Acts to see that God ruled over much of the opposition to the gospel by providential signs and wonders. His “prophets” (apostles and evangelists) were delivered from prisons, death, false brethren and many other obstacles by miracles (2 Cor. 11). These early messengers of the gospel were virtual “Elijahs” with great powers given to aid them and protect them. But when these passed from the scene, the church and the Word were attacked with a ferocity that seemed as if it “would devour them.”

Phase Two: Revelation 11:7-10 pictures Roman ungodliness and paganism to which the devil from the “bottomless pit” has given his authority and power (Rev. 13:2) making war on the two witnesses and conquering them and killing them (please be reminded again of Daniel’s prophecy 7:21ff of the fourth “beast’s” war upon the saints). The slain witnesses will lie in the street of the “great city” which is called allegorically “Sodom and Egypt.” The “great city” is unquestionably ancient Rome (see Rev. 16:19; 17:18; 18:10,16,17,19,21). “Egypt and Sodom” are appropriate metaphors by which to distinguish Rome’s arrogance, idolatry, cruelty, decadence, wickedness and enslavement of God’s people. Of course, the Lord Jesus was not literally crucified in the city of Rome, but then neither was he crucified in Egypt or Sodom. But Jesus was crucified by order of “Rome.” “Rome” crucified Jesus else he could not have been put to death in such a manner and for such a “crime” as was alleged against him. For 3 ½ “days (or “time, times and half a time”, Dan. 7:25) the ancient Roman empire (tribes, tongues and nations) will “see” (think it sees) the two witnesses as “dead.” Many Christians did die and many copies of the Scriptures were burned, but not all! The “beast” (the Roman empire) is pictured as rejoicing and congratulating itself that it has “killed” Christianity. It was glad it had gotten rid (it thought) of two godly witnesses (the church & the Bible) which had tormented its conscience with guilt and shame. In A.D. 303 Emperor Diocletian decreed that every Bible and Christian church building in the world should be destroyed. After a few years of the severest persecutions the church of Christ ever experienced, Diocletian is said to have erected a sign, in Latin, over one burned Bible which read, *extincto nomine Christianorum* (i.e., “The name Christian is extinguished”). But that was braggadocio—the name Christian was not extinguished! The court sat in judgment and Rome was extinguished!

Phase Three: Revelation 11:11-13 predicts God would raise the two witnesses up to a new life. Approximately 3 ½ centuries (A.D. 100-450) after the “beast” began to “slay” the two witnesses, God raised them up to new life. The war of the “beast” against God’s church was incomplete and inconclusive! The two witnesses stand! They are not dead. They are resurrected with power! This last phase symbolizes the great missionary success of Christianity in the thousand years following the fall of Rome (A.D. 500 to A.D. 1500). After Rome fell the gospel was carried to Ireland and Scotland by Patrick; to Switzerland and Iceland by Columban and Callich; to all of Germany by Wilfrid, Willibroard and Winfrid; to Scandinavia, Iceland and Greenland by Anakar and Tryggvason; to Russia and the Balkans; to Bohemia and Poland; Nestorian Christianity in India and Coptic Christianity in Egypt and Ethiopia. All this evangelism took place without any discoverable organized mission effort!

God rewarded the endurance of the saints who went through the “great tribulation” with a resurrection and ascension, symbolically speaking, to glory for the two witnesses. “The kingdom of the world became the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah.”

Figuratively speaking, “the kingdom of the world became the kingdom of our Lord” when the ancient Roman empire fell. That’s what Daniel predicted (Dan. 2:44-45; 7:1-27; 9:24-27) and that’s what John is predicting here in Revelation ch. 11. The first woe was Rome’s internal decadence (9:1-11); the second woe was Rome’s conquering neighbors (9:13-21); the third woe was Rome’s complicity with the devil to devour the saints of God—the great “tribulation” of the church—which brought God’s wrath in the final destroying “plagues” called the “bowls of wrath.” This is dramatized beginning with ch. 12:1 and continues through ch. 20:6. Chapter 11:14 warned that the third woe was soon to come. The ancient Roman world had been warned through “seals” and “trumpets” but it did not repent. It only intensified its idolatries and immoralities and tried to stamp out God’s redemptive “kingdom” (the church). It is significant that the world kingdom (Greek, *basileia*) “of the world” is singular. This clearly indicates that the Roman empire is meant and it is not speaking of the end of the world. Indeed, the second English word “kingdom” in 11:15 is not in the Greek text. Literally, the Greek phrase would read, “The kingdom of the world became (Greek, *egeneto*, aorist deponent verb, meaning something that had happened, not something that would happen) our Lord’s and his Anointed’s.” John is predicting the fall of Rome and the world-wide evangelistic thrust of the gospel, as if it were already a fact—and with God, it was! The fall of the Roman empire and the missionary success of the church proved conclusively that the world belongs to God and the Lamb. This is what the vision of the Throne (ch. 4-5) revealed. It was not Domitian nor Diocletian who reigned, but God and the Lamb. God and the Lamb rule forever and ever. This text (11:15-18) is not speaking of the second coming of Christ. The Greek verb *eilephas*, translated in RSV “has taken” is a perfect tense verb indicating that the Messiah had taken his great power in the past and had begun to reign, and continued to reign. If this verse had intended to portray Christ’s 2nd coming John would have used the future tense verb, Greek, *lepsomai*. The “nations (i.e., Gentiles) raged” (and the Greek verb *orgisthesan* is aorist—past—tense) but they did not embrace the Son (Psa. 1:1-12) and so their “kingdom” perished and its universal stranglehold upon the church was broken. The “time for the dead to be judged” does not necessarily imply the physically dead. It probably means the spiritually dead (cf. Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 2:13-15; Rev. 20:4-6) of pagan Rome who hatefully opposed God’s church. The Bible certainly teaches that God judges sinners even on this side of heaven. In fact the Greek word *krithenai* in this sentence (11:18) is aorist indicating the judgment is being predicted as having taken place in the past (it is not a future tense verb). God’s judgment upon the spiritually-dead Roman empire became also the time for God to reward his servants. The judgment of “Babylon—the great city” was the signal God gave for his saints to rejoice (Rev. 18:20; 19:1-2). It was the when God “destroyed the destroyers of the earth”—a phrase just like the one in Daniel 9:27 predicting the destruction of the “fourth beast” (Rome).

This “temple” certainly has no reference to the Jewish temple! It is symbolizing the heavenly, unseen, spiritual residence of God. John saw God’s heavenly abode opened and

there was the ark of the covenant. The original ark of the covenant, manufactured by the people of Moses' day, was never recovered from the time it was carried off to Babylon in the Babylonian exile of the 6th century B.C. Jeremiah had predicted the time was coming when the ark of the covenant would "not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; or made again" (Jer. 3:15-16). Jeremiah was predicting the eventual abrogation of the Old dispensation because it would have served its purpose and be fulfilled in the New Jerusalem (the church). What John saw was not an ark made of wood and gold. He saw a symbol, a vision. The ark of the covenant symbolized God's faithfulness to keep his word. The pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the Decalogue were in the earthly ark. All this symbolized God's covenant promises and evidence that he kept his promises! Over the earthly ark was the place known as "the mercy seat" where the blood of animals was sprinkled and atonement was accepted by Jehovah-God. What John saw, therefore, symbolized all this as having reached its fulfillment, its reality, in heaven. God will keep his promises about Rome and the saints. The flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, an earthquake and heavy hail all symbolize power and judgment (cf. Rev. 4:5; 8:5). God warned the world of ancient Rome which opposed his redemptive kingdom. But the world did not repent. Judgment could be delayed no longer. Thunder sounded—the storm of judgment was approaching. It would be bitter and sweet. God's dwelling place (the church) was staked out and set apart of protection. The beastly world thought it had slain the two witnesses to God's sovereignty—the church and the Word—and reveled in its assumed victory. But God gave new life and victory to his two witnesses. The "great city" (Rome) fell; the spiritually dead were judged and the saints were vindicated and rewarded. God is always faithful!

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION 12:1-17

With chapter 12 John began the second main division of the Revelation. The first primary division, chapters 1 through 11, revealed the Lamb as sovereign in the historical frame of reference. This second part revealed the Lamb as sovereign in the heavenly, spiritual, realms. This second division of Revelation explained, in dramatic symbolism, that the earthly struggle of the church against its enemies was inseparably united to the unseen confrontation that Satan, the invisible rebel of heaven, made against God to destroy the work of redemption. God carried out his redemptive program through human agents, i.e., Christians (the church). Satan carried out his war against redemption through human agents, i.e., heathen, imperial Rome. More than once Christians of the first century were told that their warfare was "not against flesh and blood...but against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12; 2:2; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). Jesus referred to his great life and death struggle as "the crisis of the cosmos" (a transliteration of two Greek words, John 12:31; 16:11). An angel of God revealed the same idea---that there was a physically-unseen, spiritual confrontation which was coincident with the visible, earthly struggle between righteousness and wickedness (Dan. 10:1-21). History's direct tie to heaven's battle for man's soul was dramatically portrayed by Zechariah as well (Zech. 1-12; esp. 3:1-10). In Revelation 12 John summarized and condensed the concept of the unseen spiritual warfare between God and Satan. From chapter 13 through 19 the picture moves to the struggle between the secondary "agents" of God and Satan which were the church versus the beast-false prophet-harlot conglomerate. These latter are the ones in whom the forces of Satan were organized and motivated to "make war upon the saints." The essential concept is: the involvement of earthly history in heavenly, spiritual matters. This section of the Revelation is a window opened to heaven for the mental and spiritual eye to behold. It gives reality to the promise, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). It is as real as the vision of horses and chariots of fire given the prophet's servant and the promise, "Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kgs. 6:15-19). Revelation 12:1--20:6 was not written to be fulfilled at some time future to A.D. 1999. It was a message for the seven churches of Asia Minor. Their struggle was tied to heaven's plans. They were wrestling with cosmic powers who were using Rome as their agent. Those Christians needed to know the Lamb would win the struggle for all he had invited all and for all who came to his "marriage supper." Of course, the message is as relevant for the church today as it was then, just as Romans 8, Ephesians 6, 1 Corinthians 15, and 1 Thessalonians 4 & 5 are.

The "woman" symbolized God's wife, his church, in both OT and NT (See Isa. 54:1f; 62:4-5; Jer. 3:14-20; Ezek. 16:1-14; Hosea 1:1--3:5; Eph. 5:21-33; Rev. 19:6-10; 21:2-4). As John saw God's wife, she had been clothed and was continuing to be clothed (periblemen, Greek perfect tense, "clothed in the past with a continuing result") with the glory of the sun and with the moon under her feet. The investiture of God's people with glory

and light, symbolized by the sun and moon, is prophetic imagery from the OT (Isa. 9:1f; 31:35-36; 24:21-23; 30:26; 31:35-36; 42:6; 49:5; 60:1-22; Dan. 12:3; Zech. 14:6; Mal. 4:2). The crown of twelve stars symbolized the fact that all the glory of human religious leadership (12 patriarchs, 12 tribes and 12 apostles) in the earth was meant by God to adorn, protect and equip God's bride. This bride (mother), gloriously clothed, was a great portent. Her glory portended her invincibility. She was glorified and exalted to join with God in redeeming the world That is the signal John was to relay to the seven churches. God's Bride, the church, was exalted and glorified so that she might give birth to the "man-child" (the Messiah).

Another portent was revealed to John. It was a signal that Satan was the main villain in the "great tribulation." Enemies of God's people were symbolized in the OT as dragons, serpents, and beasts (Isa. 27:1; 51:9; Jer. 53:34; Ezek. 29:3). John borrows from that imagery to symbolize the devil as a "great red dragon" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). The heads, horns and crowns symbolized the emperors of Rome pictured in Revelation 17:1-18 as the "scarlet beast" upon whom the "harlot" rode. The red dragon invested the scarlet beast with some hellish power and authority (Rev. 13:2). John revealed the dragon's power and authority was only pseudo, pretended, and restricted by God. That is the point of the entire book of Revelation. Although some considered the beast to be invincible, John assured the churches that the "beast" was human, not divine, and bound by God (Rev. 13:4,17,18; 20:2-3). Some of the "stars" of heaven (angels) allowed themselves to be caught in Satan's rebellion and were cast out of heaven (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). They were swept away by the devil's tail and cast down to the earth as they assisted him in his attempt to destroy God's redemptive work. This "rebellion" began after creation. Satan and his angels were all created by God. The rebellion focused on man, first, in the Garden of Eden. The rebellion reached it's ultimate capacity at Calvary and the Roman empire.

The male-child is the Messiah—it could be none other! The cry of travail for the birth of this man-child fills all the OT (Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7; 26:17f; 66:7-11; Micah 4:10; 5:2). Abraham looked for it (John 8:56); Isaiah looked for it (John 12:41); all the prophets looked for it (1 Pet. 1:10-12). The distress and trouble the OT woman would have awaiting the birth is predicted by Daniel as "490 years of trouble" (Dan. 9:24-27). Daniel, chapters 7 through 12, is a detailed prediction of those 490 years of trouble preceding the birth of the Messiah, who would be born and "cut off" in the midst of the last seven years of that "time of trouble." This time of trouble would include the rise and fall of the Roman empire, i.e., Daniel's "fourth beast." See our comments earlier on the book of Daniel. (Eph. 1:3; 2:6; Rev. 20:4). Of the Bride it was written: "For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all you yours..." (1 Cor. 3:21-23). The OT church brought forth the man-child. The Messiah ("male-child") had a rod of iron symbolizing that he was the ruler of creation, of history, of all that exists. Everything and everyone ultimately submits to the rule of God's Messiah—willingly or unwillingly.

Satan attempted to "devour" the man-child but God "caught up" the man-child to heaven (resurrection of Jesus Christ and his ascension). The "woman" became the NT

church and “fled into the wilderness” to a place prepared by God where she was to be nourished for 1260 days. This was apocalyptic phraseology to symbolize that the NT church was dispersed into the hostile environment (“wilderness”) of the heathen Roman empire in order that she might be nourished. God had prepared that heathen, hostile environment to nourish the church by dispersing the Jews, by Pax Romana, by exposing it to the Koine Greek dialect, and by a hundred other providential details. It was no accident that the gospel began to be nourished among the Gentiles when it was evident that the majority of the Jews had rejected it (Acts 13:44-49). It is extremely significant that the church was to be nourished in hostile surroundings. “Suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character” (Rom. 5:3-5; Heb. 10:35-39; 12:1-17). The devil used those who “worshiped” him (Rome) as his tools to persecute the ancient church (Rev. 13:1-4). The church fled into the “wilderness” (Greek, *eremion*, “desert, uninhabited place, wilderness, wasteland, barren place.”). God deliberately led the OT church (Israel) through a “wilderness” for forty years to “nourish” them (Deut. 9:1-20). God allowed Jesus to be led into the “wilderness” of Judea to be tested by the devil (Matt. 4:4; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1). The NT church was “tested” and “nourished” in the very inhospitable “wasteland” of Roman paganism. The Greek word for “nourished” is often translated, “fed” (*trophetai*, “to rear, to feed, to nourish”). It was spiritual nourishing the church was to receive from its testing by the “great tribulation” of Rome. The seven churches of Asia Minor clearly needed spiritual nourishment. Spiritual growth does not preclude the possibility of persecution, suffering, and pain (Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:18-39; Heb. 10:36-39; 12:1-17; 1 Pet. 4:1-10, et al.).

Now war arose in heaven. The time sequence of this “war” must fit this context. Contextually it has to do with the devil having been thwarted in his attempt to devour the “man-child” and the flight of the church into the wilderness. The place of this war cannot be where the Father and the Son dwell in eternal omnipotence and holiness. It cannot be the throne-room of God for no wickedness is able to abide in his immediate presence. The battleground for this war cannot be where God reigns as absolute Sovereign for there his will is done perfectly. The throne-visions of the Revelation show complete subservience and peace in heaven. But, the church is a “heavenly place;” the church is called “the kingdom of heaven” in numerous places; we, as Christians now are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. The church is “Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem watched over by “innumerable angels in festal gathering,” and is “the assembly of the first born, enrolled in heaven.” We, as Christians, are exhorted now to “enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus:” the OT was a copy and shadow of the “heavenly sanctuary” which is the church; Christians are called now to a “heavenly calling” and have a “heavenly rest” (Eph. 1:3; 2:6; Heb. 3:1; 4:1-12; 8:1-13; 10:19-22; 12:22-24; Matt. 13:11; 16:19; 18:1,4; 23:13). Jesus warned that “men of violence sought to take the kingdom for violent purposes” (Matt. 11:12). This war was the attempt of the devil to subvert the church through Judaizers and the Jewish persecution (see the entire book of Acts, Phi. 3:2-3; Gal. 1:6-9; 2:1-2; 3:1; 5:1; Col. 2:8-23; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; the entire book of Hebrews, esp. Heb. 10:32f). The Revelation refers to those who said they were Jews but were actually of the synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). Jesus predicted a war-like struggle from the Jews against his new kingdom of heaven involving the forces of hell (Matt. 10:16-33; 24:4-14; Luke 10:17f). Satan attempted to get Christians to fight one another over the matter of

Jewishness, and even tried to get the apostles to fight one another and made every kind of war he could against the apostle Paul (Gal. 2:11f; 2 Cor. 2:11; 4:4; 11:3,12-15; 12:7). There was “no more any place” for the devil in the church through Judaism after A.D. 70. God finished that war! The great dragon was thrown (out). The verb in 12:9 is aorist and there is no preposition indicating which direction Satan was “thrown.” Satan’s defeat in this “war” had already taken place when John wrote the Revelation. This war was not a reference to Satan’s original fall, nor to some future war. It was apocalyptic imagery to describe that great cosmic struggle which took place after the ascension of the Messiah and before the church fled into the wilderness.

When the devil was thrown out (there is no preposition for “down” in the Greek text here) John heard a loud voice in heaven announce that the salvation, power and kingdom of God and the authority of Christ had come. The Greek verb *egeneto*, is aorist tense, meaning the kingdom had come in the past. And the word, “Now,” in Greek signifies coincidence, or “just now,” i.e., coincidentally with the end of the war in the church by the Judaizers. At that point it was clearly manifested that Jesus Christ’s church was the repository of salvation, and the power and authority of Christ was shown to be that of God. The Greek word *enikesan*, translated, “conquered” is aorist tense and means the Christians had conquered. There is nothing future about this text. Once Judaism was completely defeated in A.D. 70 it became evident that the church of Christ was indeed the kingdom of God predicted in the OT. Satan could indict many through the Law, but once the authority and salvation of Christ was established it was evident the accuser could not accuse those who had conquered by the blood of Jesus. Heaven and the saints could rejoice over the end of the war with Judaism, but woe to the “world” because the devil came away from this defeat with great wrath. Satan was about to intensify his attack upon God’s church by using the “world” (Rome) as his tool. Nearly every verb in Revelation 12:12 is present tense in the Greek text. Literally translated it would read: “Be rejoicing, then, O heaven and you that are dwelling there. But woe to you who are inhabiting the earth, because the devil came (“came” is aorist) to you having great wrath because the devil is knowing that he has only a little time.” Again, the preposition for “down” is not in the Greek text here at all! The devil was not really the ally of Rome. He seduced that world, used, it exploited it, turned it upon itself, and devastated it (Rev. 17:15-18). The devil infected that world with every despicable and depraved evil possible to the unbelieving human mind (Rom. 1:18-31).

Again the present tense should translate, “the devil was knowing that he had just a little time” to use Rome! No one, not the angels of heaven, nor the Son, knows when the end of all time is to be. See Matthew 24:36 and Jesus’ parables following. But the devil could know times and seasons which God had revealed in the Bible, just as any human may know what God has revealed. The devil’s short time with Rome is revealed in Daniel 2:1-45; 7:1-27; 9:24-27! The devil’s time allotted to use the “fourth beast” (i.e., Roman pagan power) to halt and eradicate the spread of Christianity was “short” (approximately 350 years). Whatever God chooses to keep secretly to himself, no one can know; but what God has revealed all higher created beings (i.e., angels and humans) can know, whether they believe it or not (Deut. 29:29). The devil knows the Scriptures and quotes them! (Psa. 91:11-12;

Matt. 4:6). Defeated in his attempt to stamp out the church with a persecuting Judaism, the devil “pursued the woman who had borne the male child” (the NT church). The RSV translates the Greek text “pursued” but the KJV and ASV translate “persecuted.” The Greek word for pursued and persecuted is the same word and is aorist tense (edioxen). This action of the devil was transpiring when John wrote Revelation. John did not intend to predict a “tribulation” that was to be at A.D. 2000.

The Lord gave the church the “wings of an eagle” that she might “fly to the place prepared for her to be nourished. See the OT “church” borne by God on “eagle’s wings” in its wilderness trek, Exod. 19:4; Deuteronomy 32:11. The Greek phrase in Revelation 12:14 is, hina petetai eis ten eremon eis ton topon autos, literally, “in order that she might fly to the desert, to the place of her.” Christ intended the pagan, inhospitable world of Rome as her place for nourishing and survival! The church’s “time” in the Roman “wasteland” was to be “a time, and times, and half a time” (i.e., three and one half times). This is a symbolically “rounded” number to indicate approximately 350 years. It is the same time allotted to the two witnesses in chapter eleven. It is the same time allotted to the fourth beast (Rome) in Daniel 7:25. This represented the time from approximately A.D. 100 to A.D. 450. It is, approximately, the time from John’s delivery of the Revelation to the end of the Roman empire. The number “three and one half” is symbolic of incompleteness. Seven is the symbolic number of completeness. The church was not to be persecuted in the Roman wasteland forever. Her “wilderness” journey would come to an end. But while she was in the “wilderness” the devil loosed a “river” from his mouth. It became a “flood.” This “flood” symbolized the world-wide inundation of false teaching, persecution, and degeneracy associated with ancient Rome’s culture. See these OT passages for symbolism; Psalms 18:4; 32:6; 42:7; Isaiah 43:2; Jeremiah 46:7-8; 47:2; Daniel 9:26; 11:22; Nahum 1:8, etc. The “earth” came to the help of the woman and swallowed the flooding river of the devil. Symbolized here is the fact that there were periods of comparative peace and easing of the persecution of the church “in the wilderness” of Rome. From Domitian through Septimius Servus (A.D. 81 to 211) there was a “flood” of satanic persecution of the church; from Caracalla to Phillipus (A.D. 211 to 244) there was a period of toleration of Christianity; from Phillipus through Diocletian (A.D. 245 to 305) another flood of tribulation; in 313 A.D. Constantine ushered in another period of toleration for the church. Finally, the “fourth beast” (Rome) was “swallowed” up completely and the church began its missionary endeavors to the ends of the earth. The devil devised an orgiastic flood of wickedness and cruelty which he manipulated through Rome’s depravity. The Greek word translated “angry” in Revelation 12:17 orgisthe, from which we get the English word, “orgy,” or, “orgasm.” In Greek it means “cold, calculated, vengeful, long-lasting anger.” With his scheme of anger and hate the devil went to use Rome (again the Greek verb for “went” is aorist---past tense) to make war on “the rest” of the woman’s “offspring.”

Satan’s war against the collective church (“the woman”) was thwarted from time to time. But he did not relent. He went off to do battle with those who were keeping and were having (when John was writing) the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus. Both Greek participles, terounton, and echonton, are present tense. These were Christians

presently keeping the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus when John was writing the Revelation. These were individual Christians on “every seashore” where the gospel went after the fall of the Roman empire. Jack Cottrell, *What The Bible Says About God The Creator*, Joplin, MO: 1983, College Press, pp. 65-66 tells us that in the Christian faith we need to be careful not to think of the relationship between God and Satan in dualistic terms. Satan is an enemy of God, but he is not an eternal, independent entity which has forever co-existed with God. He himself is a creature who depends upon God for his very existence. His opposition to God is an ethical choice, not a metaphysical necessity. The struggle between God and Satan is not a fight between equals or even near-equals. This struggle exists in the first place not because Satan is so strong in relation to God, but in relation to man. It is man that they are fighting for, and the battle must be waged on the level of man. Thus God’s conquest of Satan is not an exercise of sheer divine omnipotence, but is the result of redemptive power wielded by God Incarnate as the man Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ of Nazareth conquered sin in the flesh—as man and for man. Jesus did for man what man could not do for himself (Rom. 8:3-4). Victory over the condemnation of sin and eternal death has been won. While the devil still “roams” like a roaring lion, he has been bound and will never again have the “universal” power he had with the Roman empire. And because God is the Sovereign Creator, we know concerning the creature Satan that his final doom is sure and that he will not be an eternal threat. This is the assurance which dualism does not permit.

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION 13:1 - 14:20

Everyone who wishes to understand the book of Revelation, especially concerning the “beasts,” must read and understand that Daniel chapter 7 is the place where the book of Revelation “plugs into” the OT revelation of what is to happen to the saints of God after the Messiah has come, completed his work, and ascended back to heaven. Daniel 7 (and all the following chapters) form an unmistakable KEY to understanding the apocalyptic symbolism of Revelation 13-20. SO READ DANIEL, ESPECIALLY, CHAPTER 7 BEFORE YOU ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND REVELATION 13-20.

Why did Christ picture a “beast” to John? Because “beastliness” is an apocalyptic symbol of brute-force; sensual, lawless and God-opposing human governments are beastly. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah, and Habakkuk symbolize human governments as “beasts” (Isa. 27:1; 51:9; Jer. 45:15; 46:22; 50:11; Ezek. 32:2; 29:3; Dan. 7:1-8; Obadiah. 4; Hab. 1:8). Human governments see themselves as fierce, powerful animals (e.g. the American eagle, the Russian bear, the English lion or bull-dog, etc.). A better way to symbolize human government in its cruelty, fleshly instincts, predatory nature, and cunning, could not be found. All human governments are predatory, more or less. All human governments exist at the expense of their citizens, are absorbed with that which is physical, and all sustain themselves by force. Daniel represents the Roman empire (the “fourth beast”) as “terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong; with great iron teeth it devoured and broke into pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet; it was different from all the beasts that were before it” (Dan. 7:7). The first “beast” John saw (Rev. 13:1) arose “from the sea.” “Sea” symbolizes a mass of pagan humanity in constant commotion, casting up wreckage (Dan. 7:3; Isa. 8:7f; 17:2f; 47:20-21; Jer. 46:7-9; 47:2; Rev. 17:1,15). The “ten horns” represent the collective beastly power of ten successive Roman emperors; Tiberius (Caesar when Christ preached, died and rose again), Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian (Domitian was Caesar when John wrote the Revelation). The “seven heads” represent the ten emperors in unanimity of mind and action in relation to Christianity. The emperors listed were pleased to be deified as gods. Domitian eventually made an imperial edict that he should be addressed as “Lord God and Savior” and that all persons under the dominion of Rome (except Jews) must burn incense at least once a year as worship to his deity. The “beast” that arose from the sea was a composite (Rev. 13:2) of a leopard, bear and lion. That was exactly the reverse order from the vision of the four empires related by Daniel of his dream (Dan. 7:1-12). In Daniel 7:12 the fourth beast was destined to be slain and burned. But Daniel revealed that before being slain the first three beasts “had their lives prolonged for a season in the fourth beast.” The Roman empire did incorporate, both consciously and unconsciously, numerous aspects of Babylonian, Persian and Greek, refinements into its culture. This is the point at which Revelation chapter 13 “plugged” right into Daniel chapter 7, and thus Revelation continued and concluded the destiny of all the “beasts” in the “fourth” one. The connection is unmistakable! The book of

Revelation is a prediction of the history of the Roman empire from the first century A.D., as it relates to the church of Jesus Christ during that time period, until Rome's demise (ca. A.D. 450-500).

The "dragon" gave its power and authority to the "beast." (Greek, edoken, aorist tense, "gave" not "will give"). John is writing about something that had happened when he wrote, not about something 2000 years future to Rome. The beast became the tool of Satan. Satan's throne is only pretended. He creates nothing, owns nothing, and any deception he accomplishes is within the sovereign limitations imposed upon him by God (Job. 1:6-22; 2:1-13; Zech. 3:1-10; Matt. 4:1-11; 12:22-31; John 12:31; 16:11; 2 Cor. 2:11; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8; Rev. 20:1-3). Whatever promises of power the devil may make are empty and vain. God alone reigns over all kingdoms (Isa. 10:5-19; 45:1-7; Jer. 27:5-11; Dan. 2:20-23; 3:26-30; 4:34-37; 5:24-28). The devil rules by deception and seduction. His basis of power is all falsehood and can never endure against the truth. Rome allowed itself to be seduced (Rom. 1:18-32). John notes that one of the heads of the beast seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed. At some point within the time-frame of this beastly Roman empire it appeared that it received a wound that might make it die. This is an apparent reference to the Nero redivivus (Nero "renewed") legend. Nero (A.D. 54-68) was a monster of lasciviousness and cruelty. When he killed himself in A.D. 68 many people actually danced in the streets of Rome. A few mourned his death because their positions and fortunes depended on his patronage. And these friends of Nero perpetrated a legend that Nero had not really died but had gone to Parthia in the far east and he would return, incarnate in another ruler, leading the dreaded hordes of Parthia, and take up the Roman throne again. Suetonius mentions this legend. See Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, translated by Robert Graves, pp. 238-241. Some believed Domitian (A.D. 81-96) was the reincarnated Nero. See our comments on Revelation 17:3-14 for more symbolic use of the Nero redivivus legend. John the apostle did not believe in reincarnation, but he used this myth about Nero to identify in cryptic and esoteric language who the beast was. John suggested that in Domitian Christians were faced with a "clone" of Nero. Nero's friends propagated the idea that Nero had the powers of the devil and was somehow immortal in his wickedness. Suetonius notes that the Romans could not rid themselves of this idea and even as late as A.D. 88, a pretender had arisen in Parthia claiming that he was Nero. Satan worship or demon worship was widespread in the all the provinces of the Roman empire (1 Cor. 10:20f). The gods of the underworld were believed by the Romans to have powers to make those who worshiped them immortal. Men worshiped the "beast" for it appeared to men that the ruler of demons had given his power and authority for immortality to the Roman emperor. It was even rumored that Nero had come back to Rome in the person of Domitian and his successors. The "beast" seemed invincible (Rev. 13:4). The power of Rome seemed unassailable, unconquerable and more powerful than the gods of mythology. That kind of power clamors to be worshiped. So men began to press for deification of their emperors. Most of the Roman emperors gloried in such flattery. Popular adoration for, and self-acclamation of, the deification of political tyrants was nothing new to the world. It had been practiced as far back as ancient Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. Both John and Daniel characterized the "beast" (Rome) as a haughty blasphemer (Rev. 13:5,6; Dan. 7:8,11,20,25). John's reference was to Domitian's edictum domini deique nostri, i.e.,

“Our Lord and God decrees.” Domitian commanded that he be addressed as deity; he decreed that anyone who approached him should bow and embrace his feet. Caligula (A.D. 37-41) had earlier ordered that an image of himself be set up in the Holy of Holies in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Caligula believed he was the god, Jupiter, and once struck the English Channel with a rod believing he could whip it into submission to his deity. Diocletian declared himself to be a god in the flesh and required all visitors to kneel and kiss the hem of his royal robe. Roman emperors made blasphemous utterances against Christians and their Christ. They accused Christians of sexual depravity, cannibalism, sedition, cowardice and scoffed at their God and Christ as powerless. The beast was "allowed" to exercise its blasphemous power and authority over all who dwell on earth and to make war on the saints for forty-two months (Rev. 13:5-8). Again in Revelation we have exactly the same apocalyptic language Daniel used of Rome (the fourth beast, Dan. 7:21,25). The time limit of 42 months is the same as 3 and ½ years or 1260 days (see comments on Rev. 12:6). Rome would not have had the power to “make war on the saints” if God had not “allowed” it. Permission from God for severe testing of his people is not strange to biblical history. Israel was put into the "furnace of affliction" from its founding in Egypt, through its exile in Babylonia, and its “time of trouble” in the days of Antiochus IV. Christ could not abide an untested, un-purged, uncommitted church! He allowed his saints to be attacked, to struggle, and to fight because they needed endurance so they could do the will of God and receive what he promised them (Heb. 10:32-39; 12:1-11; 1 Pet. 4:12-19; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). Authority over the whole civilized world was given to this beast, Rome. It was apocalyptic hyperbole and symbolism. John did not mean that Rome had authority over every single individual alive on the face of the earth in the first five centuries A.D. Nor did John intend to predict some time near A.D. 2000 that one “beast” would be given authority over every single human being on the face of the earth. John was describing the power and authority of the ancient Roman empire over what people then understood to be the civilized world of Rome's dominion (Rev. 17:1-18). All who dwelled in the civilized world under Rome's authority did obeisance to Rome and worshiped the emperor by compulsion. Only those who took their redemption in Christ seriously did not do so. These were distinguished as those “who had their names written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.” When the imperial edict forced Christians to decide about emperor-worship it was not enough to have merely embraced Christianity. Some who failed to count the cost when they became Christians capitulated to idolatry rather than suffer persecution. When this great war and tribulation came, the saints had to trust Christ enough to remain and not seek to avoid the tribulation, renouncing Christ by burning incense to the emperor. If they must go to prison or death, they must go (Rev. 13:9-10). John issued a “call for the endurance and faith of the saints.” This is imagery taken from the OT prophets as they called the saints of their day to “endurance and faith” (Jer. 14:12; 15:2; 24:10; 43:11; Ezek. 5:2,12). Jeremiah told his people to surrender to God's chastening at the hands of the Babylonians, and make the most of it so that God could deliver them after 70 years of exile (Jer. 29:1-9; 27:1-15; 29:10f). Jeremiah expected those who trusted God to believe his prediction and obey it no matter what they had to suffer. That is exactly what John told the Christians of Asia Minor.

John saw a “second beast.” It arose out of the earth, i.e., out of the empire itself. The first beast was warlike and arose out of the mass of humanity. It represented Roman

military and political power in opposition to God's saints. The second beast was lamb-like, but it spoke like the dragon. This second beast represented the powers delegated to the Roman concilia to propagate and enforce emperor worship throughout the empire. Concilia (councils), sometimes called communes, were organized from politicians and heathen priests nominated from the provinces of the empire. They were charged with administering Roman law, judging in local civil disputes, and enforcing loyalty to the emperor by requiring an annual burning of incense to the emperor as god. Many of the members of these concilia were priests of the pagan religions and temples. The president of the concilia was usually called archiereus (chief priest) or asiarches, in Asia Minor. Asiarch meant, "Chief officer of Asia," and referred to the high priests of the temples of the imperial worship in the various cities of Asia Minor. Pliny the Younger (A.D. 62-113), governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, wrote a letter to the Roman emperor Trajan (A.D. 98-117) concerning the prosecution of people for the crime of following Christ. Will Durant, in *Caesar and Christ*, p. 648, quotes a letter from Pliny to the emperor Trajan "...the method I have observed toward those who have been denounced to me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it, I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed..." The second beast exercised all the authority of the first beast in the presence of the image of the emperor. The second beast, the concilia, got its power to enforce idolatry from the emperor himself. It was after the death of Octavian (i.e., Caesar Augustus) that the Senate decreed his genius, or soul, was to be worshiped as one of the official divinities of Rome. But it was not until Domitian that an official edict was issued for all the subjects of the empire to annually worship the image of the emperor. Each concilia appointed inquisitores (secret investigators) throughout the empire to ferret out the identity of all persons refusing to burn incense to the emperor and bring them to trial. Many Christians were tortured and slain because they would not burn incense to the emperor. Many declared publicly their allegiance to Christ and became martyrs for their faith. Others denied their faith and saved their lives by worshiping the image of the emperor and cursing Christ.

Great "signs and wonders" were allegedly "worked" by the second beast. Notice in the first place, that it is allowed to work these signs and by them it "deceives those who dwell on earth into making an image of the first beast" (the one what was wounded but survived). These priests were magicians who worked amazing feats of sleight of hand and ventriloquism or deception through hypnosis or drugs. Their magic was in no way supernatural or miraculous. What they did was similar to what the priests of Pharaoh did. In Exodus 7:11 the Hebrew word, keshaphim, is translated "sorcerers" who "performed their secret arts" to try to discredit the real miracles God worked through Moses. It is clear from Acts 8:5-13 that the "signs" done by priests and sorcerers were pseudo-signs, for even the sorcerer Simon recognized the true miracles when he saw them. Acts 8:9 depicts the work of Simon the Sorcerer with the Greek words mageuon and mageiais, are translated "magic" in RSV and "sorcery" in the KJV. These words may also be translated, "conjure." These Greek words are the words from which we get the English word "magic." The KJV translates the Greek word existon, "bewitch" to describe the results of Simon's magic. These were not actual miracles; they were pseudo-signs. See 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 where Greek words pseudous and apate ("false" and "cheating") are used to describe the alleged signs and

wonders of the “lawless one.” These false miracles deceived those who wanted to be deceived because they had no love for the truth. The Roman world of the first four centuries was a polyglot of pagan cultism and occultism. Every religion of the world found its way to Rome and her provinces. Priests and priestesses, prophets and prophetesses of every cult imaginable were allowed to practice their religion so long as they did obeisance to the emperor. Sorcery, magic, witchcraft, augury, mystery-cultism, occultism of every kind was popular. Rome had long believed in and proclaimed a “sacred flame” which had fallen from heaven and had instituted an order of Vestal Virgins who were keepers of this flame. Priests were magicians skilled in sleight-of-hand which amazed and deceived worshipers into believing their tricks were supernatural. Pagan priests often claimed natural phenomena such as falling meteorites as their own magic (Acts. 19:35). This alleged ability of the second beast to make fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men is in no way genuinely miraculous. If God allowed Satan and his cohorts to deceive by genuine miracles he would thereby nullify his own witness to truth. The Bible denominates signs done by sorcerers and cult-priests as pseudo-miracles. If modern magicians work illusions on television which mystify the modern mind, how much more might sorcerers do so with those thoroughly superstitious and those who feared for their lives if they did not acknowledge the beast as a miracle-worker. Ancient pagan priests had, for centuries, practiced deceiving superstitious worshipers into believing images made of stone, metal and wood could talk. Many of them used drugs or self-hypnosis to induce in themselves a trance in which they claimed to be speaking oracles from the gods or from idols. One such was the “oracle,” a prophetess, who inhabited a temple at Delphi in ancient Greece. Alexander demanded from her a revelation. She predicted (of course) he would conquer the world! Ventriloquism was a highly skilled and widely practiced art in heathen idolatry. Eurycles of Athens was the most celebrated Greek ventriloquist. They were called engastrimanteis, or “belly prophets” because the ancients believed the voices of these “gods” came from the bellies of these oracles. Priests of ancient pagan religions were masters of this art and to ventriloquism may be ascribed the miracles of the “speaking statues” of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Alexander of Abonoteichus trained a serpent to hide its head under his arm and allow a half-human mask to be affixed to its tail; he announced that the serpent was the god Asclepius come to earth to serve as an oracle; and he amassed a fortune by interpreting the sounds made by reeds inserted in the false “head” attached to this serpent (Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, pp. 522-527.). Modern archaeologists have found devices in ancient Roman ruins used for secretly piping the human voice beneath the altars bearing the statues of pagan gods. Caligula had a contrivance made by which he could produce a fiery reply to Jove's thunder and lightning stroke for stroke. He claimed that the moon-goddess had come down and embraced him Durant, *ibid.*, pp. 265-268; 388-389. Vespasian was alleged to have healed blind men with his spittle and lame people with the touch of his foot (Durant, *ibid.*, pp. 311-313; 467). The Greek word translated “sorcerer/sorceries” in the NT is (pharmakeion), and we get the English words, “pharmacology, pharmacist, pharmaceutical” from it. (Acts 8:9,11; 13:6,8; Galatians 5:20; Revelation 9:21; 18:23; 21:8; 22:15. The Hebrew word keshep is translated “sorcery” in Exodus 7:11; Isaiah 47:9,12; Jeremiah 27:9; Daniel 2:2; Malachi 3:5). The ancient sorcerers practiced the use of drugs, chemicals, minerals, and other elements to produce effects that appeared to be magical or supernatural (i.e., powders that could be cast down on a floor which would produce a flash of fire and puff of smoke,

etc. Durant, *Ibid.*, pp. 58-67). A recent program on television, *Ancient Mysteries*, revealed an ancient battery by which magicians produced an electric charge, as well as an analog computer, both 2000 years old! The empire's concilia (the second beast) had the skill to deceive millions of gullible and superstitious people into believing the statues of Rome's emperor could speak. Worshipers were amazed and awed by the pomp, power and magic displayed. Thus they worshiped the emperor as a god. Whatever the concilia of Rome wished to be carried out by its subjects would be obeyed with fear. The concilia also had delegated power to execute all who would not worship the emperor (the beast). Pagan priests and priestesses (the second beast) "caused" all segments of Roman society to be "marked" so that no one could buy or sell unless they had the mark--the number of the beast's name. The Greek word translated "mark" is the word from which we get the English word character (Greek, charagma). Some think this was a literal, physical mark placed on the hand (or forehead) of those who had, at the designated time of the year, burned incense to the emperor as a god. Emperor Gaius Messius Quintus Trajanus Decius (A.D. 249-251) issued his edict in A.D. 250 that demanded an annual offering of sacrifice at the Roman altars to the gods and the genius of the emperor. Those who offered such sacrifices were given a certificate called a libellus. A copy of such a document from that era is extant today. Cyprian (A.D. 200-258), a Christian, writes that the imperial edict to worship the emperor or be arrested as an atheotes ("atheist") struck terror to the hearts of all whose faith was weak. Many weak Christians went to great lengths to show that their sacrifice to idols was done willingly so anxious were they to escape arrest. Cyprian pictures many half-hearted Christians running to the marketplace to burn incense to the emperor. Many were so impatient to deny their faith that they could hardly wait their turn. Many others who would neither flee nor sacrifice suffered the most terrible tortures and died in prison, or were sent to labor in Roman mines until they died or were cruelly executed without delay. Some, by bribing the officials, procured certificates of having sacrificed without committing the overt act. Some allowed others to say that they had sacrificed or to procure certificates for them by proxy. Holders of these fraudulent certificates were called libellatici and were despised as much as those who openly denied their faith. Some weak Christians who possessed precious copies of the Scriptures gave, under threat, these scrolls to be burned and destroyed. They were called traditores ("traitors").

Whatever the "mark" was that distinguished one as loyal to the "beast," it was apparently considered necessary to survive in the economic life of the empire. Anyone not loyal to the emperor and Rome would be banned from the business world and might even be deprived of the fundamental necessities of livelihood such as food, clothing and shelter. This form of persecution may explain in part the scarcity of food symbolized in the third seal in 6:5-6. We know some Christians were persecuted this way by Jewish authorities (Heb. 10:32f). We believe John's "mark of the beast" is symbolic, not literal. It is probably the figurative counterpart of the "seal" of God on Christians (Rev. 3:12; 7:1-3; 14:1; 22:4). God stamped his image (mark) on Christians through the character of the Holy Spirit living in them as he was lived out in their lives. Christians are "made to be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:3-5). The devil and the beast "marked" those who belonged to them in the same manner. Those who had the mark of the beast were those who thought and lived like the beast. The mark of the beast was the stamp of paganism impressed upon the character and

conduct of idolaters. Men became like that which they worshiped (See Hosea 9:10; Psa. 115:8). Christians were “conformed to the image of God's Son” and idolaters were conformed to the image of their father, the devil (See Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; John 8:42-47; Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:8-10; 3:15). The mark of the beast was a human number. John intended his readers of his book to understand what this number meant. He did not intend it to be incomprehensible to them. Had John written out the literal name of the beast it would have meant a death sentence for John and anyone else who had a copy of the scroll. So John identified the beast in apocalyptic numerology---666. All this number signified was the humanness of the beast. It was a contradiction of the popular view of the nature of the beast expressed in 13:4—i.e., that the beast was invincible, that he was a god. There was no mathematical code contained in the number from which readers were to decipher such individuals as Nero, the Roman Catholic pope, Napoleon, the Czar of Russia or Rasputin, Hitler, Stalin, the CIA, the European Common Market, Saddam Hussein, or some obscure, yet to be revealed, Arab. The following is a sample of egregious errors which have been made in the past by those attempting to make 666 mean a specific person of history: Hebrew consonants have numerical value as follows: N=50; R=200; O=6; N=50; K=100; S=60; R=200; total---666; thus NRON KSR, or Nero Caesar. But John did not write Revelation in the Hebrew language. He wrote it in Greek, for Christians. Greek letters have numerical value as follows: L=30; A=1; T=300; E=5; I=10; N=50; O=70; S=200; total---666; thus Lateinos, or pagan Rome (others interpret this formula as predicting the Roman Catholic Church). In the Alexander Campbell--Bishop Purcell Debate in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1837, Campbell was forced into the unenviable position of affirming a series of negative propositions. In the course of the debate as he was showing the Roman Catholic Church to be the "Babylon" of Revelation, Mr. Campbell totaled the letters of “the Latin kingdom” to be 666. Bishop Purcell cleverly showed that even his opponent's name could be made to total 666! (Tom Friskey, Strength For Victory, Verse by Verse study of the book of Revelation, Friskey, 1986 p. 127). Someone in 1941 applied an English numerology to 666 as follows: A=100; B=101; C=102, etc., through Z=126. H would then equal=107; I=108; T=119; L=111; E=104; R=117---total 666. Thus, Adolph Hitler! Roman letters have numerical value (with 0 the value of any letter that has no value in the Roman system): V=5; I=1; C=100; A=0; R=0; L=1; V(U)=5; S=0; I=1; L=50; I=1; D=500; E=0; I=1; total---666; thus the Latin expression, vicarius filii dei, or, "in the place of the Son of God." Thus, the Roman emperor, or the Roman pope. Another suggestion uses the Greek alphabet : T=300; E=5; I=10; T=300; A=1; N=50; ---total 666; thus Teitan. Teitan could refer in Greek mythology to the Titans who were great rebels against God; or it could refer to Titus, the family name of three emperors, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. Students in the author's Bible college course in Revelation, deciphered 666 ("lovingly" they said) as follows: A=52; B=53; C=54, etc., then Butler would add up to 384; and if the days they had left at that time until Christmas (which was 227) were added, one would get 611; and if I drove 55 mph on my way to church Sunday and added that to 611, one would get 666, a prophetic sign! All kinds of modern hypotheses have applied the number 666 to a multitude of persons, nations, things, or ideologies. One suggestion was that by using three six-digital units the entire world could be assigned a working credit card number programmed through a universally-centralized computer by which all mankind could be controlled. Others have appealed to license plates on cars in the Arab countries bearing the number 666 as an indication that the “beast” (or as they name him,

“The Antichrist”) is arising there. Some have shown clothing labels from Red China bearing the number 666 as an indication that Red China is the “beast.” While there may be some credence to the idea that 666 may have symbolized Domitian as the reincarnation of Nero, we believe the idea that was symbolized was more general than specific. Seven is the number of sacred perfection or infinitude. Six is short of seven and denoted incompleteness, imperfection and finitude. A trinity of sixes (666) means fully and absolutely human, evil, and conquerable. It means the beast is not invincible. By pomp, power and sorcery, the beast claimed, and appeared to be, divine and all-powerful. But John had his number! He was not god, he was not divine, he was absolutely human! John was not identifying a specific person so much as he was identifying the Roman emperorship from Domitian (81-96 A.D.) to Romulus Augustulus (A.D. 476) in all of its beastliness until the fall of the Western empire. There can be no credence given to the interpretation that this number (666) refers to “The Antichrist” who is alleged to be some very wicked ruler to appear during the “seven years of tribulation,” after the “rapture,” (the word “rapture” is not found anywhere in the Bible) just prior to the establishment of the “millennial kingdom” in Jerusalem with a reincarnated Christ sitting on his throne there. In the first place, the term The Antichrist does not appear in Revelation and is not even, by itself, a Biblical term. There had been many antichrists already gone out into the world before John wrote Revelation (1 John 2:18,22; 2 John 7). Second, none of the ideas concerning a tribulation, a rapture, or a literal millennium are to be found in Revelation. Third, the idea of a very wicked ruler 2000 years subsequent to the time of John would have no relevance or meaning to the churches of Asia Minor. John could not have more clearly identified the Roman emperorship nor exposed its facetious claims to supernaturalness than by using the number 666. In the cryptic symbol 666, hidden to unbelievers but known to Christians, was his message: “Do not fear any Roman emperor and his subordinates who declares himself a god---he is not, he is human.”

While most of the Roman Empire trembled at the apparent invincibility of the beast and prostituted itself to a lifestyle like that of the beast, Christians could rejoice and sing the song of redemption (the “new song”) for they were secure in the “Zion” (Hebrew word meaning “citadel”) of God. The scenario which John drew in chapter 13 did not give much hope (from an earthly perspective) for those who refused to worship the beast. Would refusal be worth it? Would faithfulness to death be vindicated? The answer is in chapter 14. The theme of chapter 14 is the same as that of chapters 4 and 5—Christians, get the “Throne-of-God perspective.” The great tribulation of the Roman Empire would have to be seen by Christians through the perspective of heaven. Heaven is in control! The Lamb would be the ultimate victor, not Domitian! Persecuted saints were in direct contact with heaven—they were just a breath away from final, complete victory. If they died “in the Lord” they would be ushered immediately into rest and reward, thus they could sing the “new song” of redemption. The 144,000 with the Lamb on Mt. Zion are the same 144,000 as those in 7:1-8. They are the redeemed still on the earth, numbered and sealed by God, with Christ in their midst as he was portrayed walking among the 7 lamp-stands. John pictures earthly “Zion” (the church, the citadel of God) surrounded by the world of Rome, so indisputably joined to heaven it was, as it were, one and the same in time. “Zion” is unquestionably symbolic of the church on earth. It is plainly said to be in the OT prophets the “kingdom” that the Messiah would establish at his first advent (Psa. 2:6; 110:2,6; Isa. 2:2ff; 35:10; 61:3;

66:7-9; Joel 2:32; Micah 4:7—5:2). Jesus and the apostles confirmed that the church was the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Zion (compare Isa. 62:11 and Zech. 9:9 with Matt. 21:5 and John 12:15; compare Isa. 28:16 with Romans 9:33; compare Isa. 59:20 with Rom. 22:26). But the most significant confirmation of this symbolism is in Hebrews 12:22-28. There, Christians were instructed that they should not be tempted to return to Judaism which the writer symbolized by Mt. Sinai (Heb. 12:18-21) because they had, by becoming Christians, arrived at the “Zion” predicted by the OT prophets. Paul used the perfect tense verb *proselelithate* (literally, “you have come in the past and are continuing to come to Mt. Zion”) thus Mt. Zion was not future to A.D. 2000 but was the church of Christ in the first century A.D. The Father’s name written on their foreheads was the same name written on those of the church of Philadelphia—the seal of God upon the foreheads of the “new Israel” which was the church on earth; it was the mark of God’s Holy Spirit contrasted to the mark of the beast (Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 13:16-18; 14:9-11; 19:20-21; 20:4). John’s attention was directed away from the church on earth (Zion) to heaven. From heaven he heard a sound like “many waters and loud thunder.” It was like harpers playing on their harps—like roaring crashing crescendo of musical instruments. He also heard singing—and it was a new song. Angels were not singing this song because angels could not learn this song (1 Pet. 1:12; Heb. 2:16). Only the redeemed could sing this song! The 144,000 singing this song were still on the earth. They alone had learned this song on the earth because they alone were redeemed from the earth (world). No one else on earth could learn that song except the 144,000. The 144,000, safe in the citadel of God (“Zion”) had not defiled themselves with the filthy woman symbolized as “the harlot” (Rome)—they were spiritually pure and chaste, (parthenoi, virginal)—they had not committed spiritual adultery by bowing to emperor worship and idolatry. The 144,000 learned the new song, also called “the song of Moses and the Lamb” (Rev. 15:3) as they went through the great tribulation. If they had been in heaven, they would not have been “learning” the song; they would have known it completely. Moses learned the “new” song of redemption going through a “great tribulation” leading the Israelites out of bondage and through the wilderness and sang it (see Deut. 31:30—32:47). The 21st century “144,000” (redeemed) sing it in words like, “Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it---redeemed by the blood of the Lamb....” The church on earth (the 144,000, or “Zion”) were following (Greek, *akolouthounetes*, present tense verb) the Lamb wherever he went. Jesus warned his disciples that they would have to follow him through tribulation (John 15:18-27; Mark 10:21-34; Acts 14:22; Heb. 12:1-17; 1 Pet. 2:19-25; 4:12-19, etc.). The 144,000 were abiding in the truth. In their mouths no deceit or falsehood was found. They had not renounced Christ as the Son of God, even at the sacrifice of their lives and fortunes. Many Christians recanted their faith in Christ during the persecutions of the ancient Roman “tribulations.”

John saw an angel flying in mid-heaven who had an eternal gospel with which he evangelized those who were dwelling on the earth at the time John was writing the Revelation (John used the present tense Greek verb *kathemenous*, “those presently dwelling on the earth”)—John was not seeing a vision of something to happen 2000 years after he wrote. This is not a different “gospel” than Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—it was eternal (without beginning and end). There is only one gospel to be preached for all times. It was preached to Abraham (and before)—see Galatians 3:8 and Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15ff; Gal.

1:8; Jude 3. This “angel” (i.e., messenger) symbolized human messengers much the same way the angels of the 7 churches symbolized preachers or elders who were “messengers.” It is interesting that reverence for God, obeying God, worshiping God, and preparing for judgment by trusting in Christ’s vicarious atonement is the very essence of the good news! The gospel cannot be preached without a proclamation of judgment to come upon those who disbelieve and disobey (Acts 17:30-31; 24:24-27, et. al.). This “gospel” was to be proclaimed to every nation and tribe and tongue and people (the whole civilized Roman world) as it interfaced with the church of the first four centuries A.D. All who followed the Lamb as he dwelt in “Zion” (the church) would be numbered among the “144,000” and learn the new song of Moses and the Lamb which those already finished with their redemption were singing around the throne (Rev. 15:2-4). The Greek words *epesen*, *epesen*, “Fallen, fallen,” are aorist tense signifying something that has happened. It seems strange that John would not use the future tense and say, “Shall fall, shall fall, Babylon the great if he had meant the fall of some future “Babylon.” But when God declares something shall be, it is as good as done already. There is no question in heaven that the “Babylon” (Rome) of John’s day would fall. That was part of the “good news” to be proclaimed. The “judgment” announced in 17-18 is not the final judgment—it is “Babylon’s” judgment. The question is: Who is “Babylon?” That is settled in chapters 17 and 18. It can be none other than ancient Rome. Rome is symbolized by the first beast (political opposition), the second beast (idolatrous emperor-worship), and “Babylon,” the harlot, (carnal materialism and sensualism). These were the three main pressures (tribulations) brought to bear on Christians and others during the age of the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-450). This “eternal gospel” of judgment does not just apply to Rome, however, because it is “eternal.” It applies to all the “beastly” unbelieving and rebellious world of every age. **THE “GOSPEL” CANNOT BE PREACHED WITHOUT THE MESSAGE OF GOD’S JUDGMENT UPON THIS FALLEN WORLD!**

The destiny of those who worshiped “the beast” and received his mark was, in this particular context, to drink the “wine of God’s wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger” (Rev. 14:9-11). Whether that was to be on earth or in hell is problematic. The context of the whole chapter is concerned with “Zion” (the church) on earth. However, that the torment of Zion’s enemies went up “forever and ever” seems to indicate the worshipers of the beast had already been cast into hell. Again, it is possible that John was writing from a “predictive-present” perspective, predicting what worshipers of the beast would be subjected to during the “great tribulation” of the ancient Roman empire as well what they would be subjected to as their ultimate destiny. The statement, “here is a call for the endurance of the saints” would support the latter view. If this is correct, the “predictive-present” should be applied to John’s vision of the circumstances for those would “die in the Lord” those Christians who would die in the “great tribulation” were to be counted as “Blessed, indeed!” They would rest from their “labors” (trials and tribulations) and their ultimate destiny would be that of the “innumerable multitude” around the throne, serving God, sheltered in his presence, hungering and thirsting no more, shepherded by the Lamb to springs of living water, every tear wiped from their eyes (Rev. 7:9-17). If you have any reservations about the doctrine that God will “torment” unbelievers, unsaved in hell forever, you need to read again the words that fell from the lips of the merciful Lord Jesus Christ in the gospels! Jesus made no “bones” about warning people about eternal torments of hell (Matt. 8:11-12; 13:41-43;

25:29-30; Lk. 16:23-24, etc.). GOD IS NOT ONLY MERCIFUL—HE IS JUST (FAIR). God created human beings with free wills—they may choose to honor him or defy him (Rom. 1:18-32). God will give every human what they choose!

The saints “works” accompany them to heaven. But nothing of this material world will accompany them—not even their “material” bodies! What will accompany them is their character which has been formed by (a) “faith (believing is doing the work of God, you know, John 6:29) and endurance” which is what the book of Revelation “calls” for; (b) every “cup of cold water” given in the name of Jesus (i.e., feeding and clothing the hungry and destitute, visiting the sick and prisoners—Matt. 25:34-37; (c) proclaiming the good news (gospel) by verbalization and/or by giving financial and prayer support for others who evangelize (Phil. 4:17); (d) living the Christian life as a witness to neighbors (i.e., “the mark of God”—the Holy Spirit evidenced in one’s life); (e) just being a good neighbor to anyone who needs a “neighbor” (Lk. 10:29-37, i.e., the “Good Samaritan”). **THOSE ARE THE “WORKS” THAT WILL ACCOMPANY ANY OF THE SAINTS WHO LEAVE THIS EARTH BEFORE AND AFTER JESUS COMES AGAIN!** The Father who sees in secret knows how to reward the “faithful and enduring” saints. They need never fear that their Christian behavior will go unnoticed by the Lord—not one cup of cold water! Their personalities will be the regenerated personalities they have allowed Christ to accomplish in them—they will have new and eternally fit bodies, but they will be in a place where there is no more sin, suffering, and dying. Jesus said a great deal about “rewards” in his parables in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Read them again! They are based on a disciple’s faithfulness—not “success.”

The imagery of a “sickle” associated with God’s judgment is from the OT prophets, and from Jesus’ parables about reapers (Joel 3:13; Matt. 13:24-30; 13:36-43; Mark 4:19). The angel with the sickle was told to gather the clusters of the vine (Greek, *botruas tes ampelou tes ges*, “clusters of the vine of the earth). The “grapes of wrath” were ripe! The Greek word used for “vine” here was to be understood as vintage (a season’s produce of grapes) and not as the whole vine. The earth was the whole vine, but only the clusters of the vine (earth) were to be gathered. In other words, God was not going to reap the whole earth in this judgment—only vintage pagan Rome. The angel gathered pagan Rome and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God. Wine presses were usually sunk into a hole in the ground or excavated in a rock. Clusters of grapes were poured into these round or square excavations and men and women climbed into them barefooted and squeezed the juice from the grapes by “treading” back and forth upon the ripened grapes. This is apocalyptic hyperbole. It is figurative and exaggerated. Julia Ward Howe adapted this apocalyptic language to write her poem about America’s cataclysmic Civil War, *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. The wine press was trodden outside the city. The “city” was undoubtedly the capital city, Rome itself (Rev. 16:19; 17:18; 1:10). Thus, John ensured his readers that, not only shall the “great city” itself suffer the judgments of God, but the rest of the Roman Empire had “stored up for itself the grapes of wrath.” that which was to flow from this winepress was blood, not grape juice. This was a figurative scene. It was not intended to be literally fulfilled—certainly not in Palestine, especially not in the valley of Meggido (“Armageddon”) for there is no place for a river 200 miles long (1600 stadia) there. If the

river of blood was intended by John to be understood literally, so must the sickle and the winepress! Similar apocalyptic imagery was used by the OT prophets (Isa. 34:5-7; Ezek. 38:19-23; 39:17-24, et.al.). John was describing the awful carnage that would attend the destruction of the Roman Empire. Jesus used the same kind of apocalyptic language to describe the fall of Judaism. The essence of chapter 14 is its contrast to chapter 13. The forces of evil were strong. They seemed invincible to some! But the forces of righteousness were stronger. The persecuted saints were reassured of their relationship to the Lamb and their ultimate destiny of blessedness. It was time for the Lamb to unleash his wrath upon "Babylon," the "harlot," the two beasts." And that is what John wrote about next in chapters 17-20.

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION 15:1 – 16:21

John saw the Lamb as he stood in “Zion” receiving the worship of the saints who followed him wherever he went. Let a petty emperor of the earth assert his deity for a decade or two—let an entire dynasty of tyrants pretend to rule the world and that would be infinitesimal compared with the Christ of eternity! Enforced worship of a depraved emperor was a cheap sacrilege viewed against the worship of God; a dictator's required praise was nothing compared with the new song of the redeemed. Men and nations were warned against worshipping an impotent earthly potentate. They were urged to pay obeisance to Almighty God. Those who did not, would suffer judgment—ultimately forever. The “Babylon” (Rome) of John's day had caused the nations to follow after lies and depravity. Rome, the seat of Satan's rebellion, was therefore to be judged by the gospel it had rejected. Jesus Christ brought the gospel to the world to save it. However, that good news became bad news (judgment) upon those who, because their deeds were evil, refused to love the truth (John 3:19-21; 5:22f; 9:39-41; Rom. 1:18-32; 2 Thess. 1:10-12). Rome's judgment built to a crescendo of the seven plagues which were the last (Greek, *tas eschatas*, the word from which the English “eschatological” comes). This judgment of Rome had been in execution since the beginning activity pictured in the seven seals and the seven trumpets. Rome's insatiable lust to conquer, rule and prostitute God's “good” creation, inexorably brought God's judgment upon her (Rom. 1:18-32). This judgment intensified as time passed and Rome did not repent. The time came for God to pour out bowls full of wrath and bring an end to the beastliness. These seven plagues were the last. The Greek word *eschatos*, does not necessarily always mean “the end of all time” in Scripture. It is used frequently in the NT to signify that God has reached some goal, in time, on earth, during his redemptive program (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45; Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 1 John 2:18; 1 Pet. 1:20, et al.). The phrase “last days” in the OT and NT almost always means the end of the Mosaic dispensation and the beginning of the Christian dispensation. These last plagues signified God had reached the goal of judgment he had put into operation with the seals and trumpets. This is clearly evident from the use of the Greek word *etelesthe*, and translated, “ended.” This Greek word would have been better translated, “completed, finished.”

John saw through the same crystal-clear sea which he had seen through earlier in the throne-vision. What these “harps” being used by “those who had conquered the beast” are we cannot dogmatically say. John had to use a word from human language (i.e., human experience) to reveal what he saw. Were they “harps” as we know “harps” and instruments of music on earth now? Or, is John simply using a human-language word to describe some “instrument” of heaven unlike anything on earth? Clearly, the Bible does not prohibit or condemn the use of “instruments” in the worship of God—anywhere. Technically, the vocal chords of the human “voice-box” are instruments. Why would God command David to supply instruments of music for the temple if they were unrighteous and contrary to the will of God? The crystal sea now reveals the fire of God's judgment ready to fall in the form of seven

plagues upon Rome. It was necessary to see God's judgment upon Rome through the throne-perspective. Standing beside this fiery crystal sea were those who were conquering the beast and its image. The Greek participles *nikontas* and *estotas* are present and perfect tense participles, respectively. This indicates the vision is of saints presently in the tribulation on earth as if they had already conquered the beast and were standing with a view toward the throne of God. The Greek preposition *epi*, translated beside does not necessarily mean "upon" but can mean "toward, near, with a view toward." In other words, "those conquering the beast" in John's day, were standing "with a beside-the-throne-perspective" on the judgments that were coming upon Rome.

These saints who were seeing their tribulations through the perspective of God's clear revelation were singing (present tense Greek verb) the song of Moses and the Lamb. The "Song of Moses" is found in Exodus 15:1ff; and Deuteronomy 32:1---33:29. The "Song of Moses and the Lamb" in Revelation (and in the OT) was totally about God. It was not about man's religious emotions. Those who see history and man through the throne-perspective are seeing all of self and self-importance lost in the presence of the greatness and the glory of God. A most interesting phenomenon about music or singing from the viewpoint of the Revelation, or the throne of God, is how much singing is done about God's judgments and justice and wrath upon the world!

The judgments and justice of God as the subject for singing and praise permeates the OT prophets (e.g., Exod. 15:1f; Isa. 5:1f; 26:10). The world will never learn righteousness unless the judgments of God are in the world (present tense). Yet most people, and some Christians, consider any and all judgment or tribulation to be unfair and unjust. God's way (judgment upon sin; redemption upon repentance) is always just and true.

One of the four living creatures gave the seven angels (messengers) their bowls of wrath. God executes his wrath on Rome through secondary agents. The sanctuary of the tent of witness was opened and the order to pour out wrath comes from the sanctuary. Smoke filled the sanctuary and no one could enter until the plagues "reached their goal" (Greek, *telesthosin*, "completed"). The sanctuary is inaccessible! God is unapproachable for any intercessory request on behalf of the beast until judgment is completed. Rome refuses to repent---God refuses to hear any intercession. See Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 15:1; 16:5; 17:1. The mind that is set on the flesh (Rome) is hostile to God and cannot please God, Romans 8:6-8. When the Jews refused to "know the day of their visitation" there was nothing Jesus could do but weep and pronounce their inexorable doom! (Luke 19:41-44; Matt. 23:29-39; 24:1;35; 1 Thess. 2:15-16).

The seven seals reveal, the seven trumpets announce and warn, and the seven bowls execute God's judgments. Bowls symbolize fullness of God's wrath (Isa. 51:17; Jer. 1:13; Zech 9:15; et al.). Seven is the numerical symbol of sacred completeness. The order to pour them out came from the "temple." It was God's edict that judgment upon Rome be executed. We know this referred to Rome because people are left alive, refusing to repent, after the bowls are poured out (Rev. 16:6,9,11). At the end of all time, at the second coming

of Christ, there will be no opportunity to repent! (Matt. 25:1-46; Luke 17:26-37; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-11; Heb. 9:25-28; 2 Pet. 3:8-13, et al.). The context which precedes chapter 16 and the context which succeeds it clearly indicates the “bowls-judgment” is to fall upon Rome, “the great city” and its subordinate “kingdoms.” The “nations” who had listened to Rome, had “drunk the wine of her impure passion,” and had profited by imbibing of her exploitative commerce would first, hate her, then cannibalize her, and then mourn over her destruction (Rev. 14:8; 17:12,15; 18:9,11,16,19, et al.). The bowls were symbols that God used natural or secondary agencies as instruments of judgment upon the Roman world rather than the direct, divine, miraculous interposition he will use at the Second Coming of Christ. See Matthew 24:36--25:46; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 5:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2 Peter 3:8-13, et al., for the direct invasion of creation by God at the end of time. If there be any doubt that the wrath of God could be executed through the agencies of mankind and nature, let the terrible destruction and carnage visited upon Nazi Germany through the Russian winter and the allied armies suffice. This is not to place upon Germany, nor all Germans, the blame for World War II. Nor is it to solve all the mysteries connected with the suffering of the innocent as a result of that conflict. The same principle is true of the terrible judgments which came upon the ancient Roman empire as predicted by John in the Revelation. The first bowl represented painful and mortal diseases of the plagues brought back to Rome from its military sorties among the barbarians. The second bowl symbolized God’s judgments by the use of the sea as an instrument of destruction of life. It is parallel to the second trumpet. Rome shed the blood of the saints and prophets in terrible persecutions, and God poured out her blood in retribution. The assassinations by paranoid emperors and subordinate rulers contributed to the blood-bath of the empire; the wars of aggression, the invasions of barbarian hordes, crime, disease, famine, and natural disasters made humanity a “sea” of blood. The second and third bowls are definitely connected to the statement in 16:5-7 which places the results of the bowls in a situation contemporary to the time of Revelation’s writing. The Greek verbs (16:6) translated “have shed,” and “hast given” are aorist and perfect, respectively. This clearly indicates that the bowls were poured out long before the twentieth or twenty-first century! John was picturing God’s literal use of fresh water sources as instruments of judgment in the third bowl. It is parallel to the third trumpet. The sun “allowed” to scorch men with fire, in the fourth bowl, symbolized a physical use of the elements of the heavens (i.e., droughts, entropy, changes of seasons, etc.). It parallels the fourth trumpet. The fifth bowl poured out darkness until men gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed God because of their pain, but they did not repent of their deeds. This symbolized the same kind of “torment” of the human psyche as is pictured in the fifth trumpet. The “darkness” was the depraved mind-set of that society (Rom. 1:18-32). It was poured out upon the imperial city, Rome, “the throne of the beast” and it “darkened” the whole empire. The sixth bowl is parallel to the sixth trumpet. Both symbolized the invasion of the Roman empire by the barbarian Parthians, Goths, Ostrogoths, Visigoths and Huns. In the sixth trumpet only a third of mankind was hurt, but in the sixth bowl the “whole world” (i.e., the then-known “world”) is assembled to do battle with the kings from the east (i.e., from the direction of the Euphrates River). Out of the mouths of the “dragon” (the devil), the beast, and the false prophet, came three unclean spirits. These had the symbolic appearance of frogs, but they were demonical. Frogs were “unclean” in Jewish mentality (Lev. 11:9). In Egyptian mythology a frog-god Khnum allegedly created human beings out of the dust of

death and his wife, Hekt, a frog-goddess breathed life into them. These were fitting symbols for Roman emperors and their idolatrous priests who claimed to be gods in whose hands men's lives rested.

These "frogs" were said to be performing lying signs and wonders throughout the Roman world to bring together all the kings of that world for battle with God on his great day of judgment on Rome. This unclean, demonic, "issue of frogs from the mouth" of the dragon, beast, and false prophet represented the "river" of lies issuing from the three "tools" of the dragon (i.e., the beast, the false prophet and the harlot). See also Revelation 12:15 for the "flood" and 13:13-17 for the "signs and wonders" to deceive those who dwell on earth. Rome assimilated false religions from all over the world, including Egypt. The false prophets of Rome kept deceiving their world with their "signs" of Rome's invincibility and immortality so that all the subordinate "kings" of Rome aligned themselves with Rome. Then God judged them with Rome. The battle on the great day of God the Almighty is the battle the Lamb had with the Roman empire for sovereignty. It is the same battle described in Daniel 2:44-45 and 7:7-27 between the saints of the Most High and the fourth beast (Rome). It is not predicting or referring to the end of time. Armageddon is not a real, geographical, place! The Greek word in Revelation 16:16 is Harmageddon, and is a transliteration of the Hebrew word (Megiddon). The meaning of the Hebrew word is "place of troops, throngs, or multitudes; or sometimes, Hill of Slaughter." A city and a plain are given the name Meggido in the Old Testament. The prefix "Har" in Hebrew means "hill or mountain." There were some famous battles at, or near, Meggido (Josh. 12:21; 17:11; Judg. 1:27; 5:19; 1 Kgs. 4:12; 9:15,19; 2 Kgs. 9:27; 23:29-30, et al.). But Megiddo is infinitesimally too small to crowd into it "all the nations of the earth" in the twenty-first century! The armies of just the two most populous nations of the world could not fit on the "Hill of Meggido." Most modern eschatological theories that "Armageddon" is a literal battle at a literal place in the future try to make Armageddon the same as the battle of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38-39) and the Valley of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20; Joel 2-3) and Bozrah (Isaiah 34). If "Armageddon" is all of these, it cannot be literal since they are all located in different places! The contexts, immediately preceding and following, deal unquestionably with the Roman empire. "Armageddon" is the final downfall of the Roman empire. The main activity of unclean spirits is to involve all the world of unbelief in a battle of deception, not a fleshly war. If this is a literal place and a physical war, then consistency would demand that the frogs, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet be literal and physical. "Armageddon" is symbolic. It symbolized the decisive conflict between the worship of Caesar and the worship of Christ. Victory at "Armageddon" cleared the way for the kingdom of the saints to break out of the constraints of pagan Rome and go to the farthest corners of the globe. "Armageddon" symbolized the same great battle as was symbolized by the Valley of Jehoshaphat, Gog and Magog, and Bozrah.

Bowl seven---it is done! The Greek verb translated "it is done" is perfect, active, indicative, singular gegone, "it became" That means that what was done had been done, and was not to be done in the future. It is another example of "predictive present." The "great city" (Rome) was split up. The great division of the Roman empire into Western and

Eastern sections precipitated its fall. The “cities of the nations” fell. “Babylon” drained the cup of the fury of God’s wrath. This is none other than Rome and her empire. It was John’s use of apocalyptic, hyperbolic language just as Isaiah 13:10ff, Jeremiah 4:23ff; and Ezekiel 32:1ff used it. It was not a prediction of the end of time and the Second Coming of Christ. Men were still on earth cursing God!

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION 17:1 – 18:24

In the Old Testament Nineveh, Tyre, Jerusalem, and Babylon are all symbolized by the word “harlot” (Nahum 3:1-4; Isa. 1:21; 23:15-17; 45:5-15; Jer. 2:20). God’s judgment on ancient, Mideast, Babylon is effusively pronounced in the Old Testament (See Isa. ch. 13 & 14; Jer. ch. 50 & 52; Dan. ch. 1 through 5; Hab. ch. 1 & 2; Zech. 2:7; 5:5-11). Ancient Rome is portrayed as a “harlot” because of the seductive attractiveness of her appeal to that civilization to consort with her in prostituting God’s creation. Rome prostituted and perverted all the natural order; social, religious, intellectual, physical, moral, and material. Such great importance was attached to the city of Rome as the center of forces opposing God and profaning all of that civilization, three chapters were devoted to portray her doom. The 17th chapter focuses on identifying the great harlot (or “Babylon”). A number of symbols were given in detail for the benefit of the church of the first four centuries. They were expected to understand the “mystery of the woman” (Rev. 17:7). It is appropriate that one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls should explain the judgment on “Babylon.” That tied the seven “last” plagues, or bowls, directly to the “city” identified in chapters 17 and 18. The awful judgment predicted and portrayed to fall upon the “beast” was the same judgment to fall upon the “harlot” because they were one and the same entity. The beast, the false prophet, and the harlot were all the ancient Roman empire, seen from the perspective of Rome's three-sided attack upon Christ’s church then. Notice the following symbolisms which were attributed to the harlot (Rome): (a) she was sitting (present tense) upon many waters, i.e., enthroned over many nations; (b) kings and nations of the earth had committed fornication with her, i.e., joined with Rome in prostituting God's creation; (c) she was sitting on the back of a scarlet beast, i.e., she was a cohort with the beast whom the devil had selected as one of his tools, i.e., carnality supported by political power; (d) she wore gaudy clothing, i.e., enticing and seductive; (e) she became drunk (intoxicated, inebriated) with the feeling of rebellion and power to kill; (f) she has a name written on her forehead, i.e., she advertises; (g) she is a “mother,” i.e., she reproduces children of her character; (h) her drunkenness comes through the shedding of the blood of martyrs for Jesus.

Rome inebriated itself on pride, arrogance and opposition to the kingdom of God. She sated herself on the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus until she was “drunk.” Intoxicated with what she thought was absolute power and eternal perpetuity, she lost all ability to function realistically and became, as the apostle Paul described her: (1) suppressor of the truth; (2) an ungrateful society; (3) senseless and futile in her thinking; (4) filled with idolatry; (5) impure and lustful; (6) dishonorable to the human body; (7) exchanger of the truth of God for a lie; (8) exchanger of natural sexuality for unnatural; (9) obsessed with homosexual lust; (10) a recipient in her own person of the due penalty of her errors; (11) base in mind and improper in conduct; (12) filled with all manner of wickedness; (13) evil; (14) covetousness; (15) malice; (16) envy; (17) murder; (18) strife; (19) deceit; (20) malignity; (21) gossip; (22) slander; (23) hate for God; (24) insolence; (25) haughtiness; (26) boasting;

(27) inventing of evil; (28) disobedience to parents; (29) foolishness; (30) faithlessness; (31) heartlessness; (32) ruthlessness; (33) and of encouraging others to evil (Rom. 1:18-32).

It is no wonder that ancient Rome would be called the “harlot” and the “mother of harlots.” In fact, John was told “not to marvel” because God would tell him the mystery of the woman. He is told the woman (harlot) resided (sat) upon “seven hills,” and she was “the great city that had dominion over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 17:18). That was Rome! Identification of Rome as “the great city” is even more apparent in chapters 18 and 19. The “beast” that carried the woman was the same “beast” introduced in Revelation 13:1---Imperial Rome.

Seven specific emperors are symbolized. The symbolic picture began with Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), the emperor when Christ died, rose from the dead, and established the church. The six following “kings” were: Caligula (A.D. 37-41), Claudius (A.D. 41-54), Nero (A.D. 54-68), Vespasian (A.D. 69-79), Titus (A.D. 79-81) and Domitian (A.D. 81-96) who was ruling when John wrote the Revelation. Five of these had fallen: Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Vespasian and Titus. Nero, although one of the seven, is not one of the five because he is regarded as “coming alive” in the adaptation of the redivivus (reincarnation) myth. Thus, to speak mythologically, Nero had not “fallen.” One is, refers to Domitian who was the only one of the seven then living. The other who has not yet come was the symbolic personality of Nero revived in Domitian. According to Suetonius, Domitian certainly displayed a “Nero” personality in his later years. The “Nero personality” that had been revived in Domitian lasted only a “little while.” The “ten horns” symbolically represent the complete coalition of subordinate rulers of Roman provinces who had been given the title “king” by the Roman emperors (e.g., the Herods, et al.). Millions of heathen people throughout the Roman empire (i.e., those whose names had not been written in the book of life) “marveled to behold the beast.” They marveled because the beast existed in the past, was not presently existing, yet did exist. The Revelation John received here about the beast was enigmatic and esoteric. John was attempting, in cryptic language, to identify Domitian as the “beast” who had existed in the past, was not presently existing, yet was existing! In other words, John was describing Domitian as a reincarnation of Nero. John continued his abstruse identification and described the “beast” as “seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come and when he comes he must remain only a little while.” And again, “the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition.” It works out chart-wise as follows:

1. Tiberius        ---fallen
2. Caligula       ---fallen
3. Claudius       ---fallen
4. Nero            ---one who was, is not, and is to come for a little, who also was an eighth, but was of the seven, making Nero both a seventh and an eighth.

5. Vespasian ---fallen

6. Titus ---fallen

7-8. Domitian ---the one who is, Nero reincarnated, therefore, an eighth--- belonging to the seven, yet symbolically having Nero reincarnated in him, making Domitian both a seventh and an eighth.

In other words, Domitian was the “beast” then existing, but he was Nero who had come back in the person of Domitian. There was no question that Domitian behaved much like Nero in beastliness nor was there any question that he was going to perdition. The Nero redivivus (“resurrection”) myth, already mentioned in our comments on chapter 13, was widely and continually (for more than twenty years) perpetuated (see Graves, Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, p. 240-241). It is used satirically by John here to identify and characterize Domitian. We see no other possibility by which to explain this enigma. Remember, the seven churches of Asia Minor were to understand what was written in this Revelation. Further, John was told by the angel of God, “I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast.” The ten kings of 17:12 were the same subordinate rulers called “ten horns” in 17:3. The number “ten” represented a totality of puppet “kings” throughout the empire who were of “one mind” with the imperial policies, but later cannibalized the empire (17:16ff). These “kings” were united in purpose with the beast (Rome) and surrendered their sovereignty to Rome. Their appointment as “kings” was conditioned upon their complete subservience to Rome’s imperial authority in politics and religion. That, from Rome’s viewpoint, included the church of Christ. Puppet “kings” joined the beast in making war on the Lamb and his followers. Rome allowed absolutely no competition to her sovereignty or glory. She demanded her emperors be worshiped as gods by all peoples. She demanded all her subjects to be ready to die in battle against any self-perceived form of sedition or revolution. The worship of Jesus Christ was considered sedition. Christianity and Rome were at war!

The Lamb and those with him would win that war. The conquest of the fourth “beast” was predicted by Daniel some 600 years before John wrote the Revelation (Dan. 7:26-27) and it was the fundamental theme of Christ’s revelation to John. In the Old Testament “waters” was used as a symbol for people (Isa. 8:7; Jer. 47:2). John symbolized the entire Roman empire, comprising many ethnic groups, cultures and languages with “waters.” The “harlot” sat upon that world, seduced it, prostituted it and exploited it for her own profit and pleasure. She paid for it with her life at the hands of her puppet-kings. Rome was devoured by her former “lovers.” Her wickedness inevitably led to her self-destruction (See Micah 3:2-3; 7:2; Ezek. 22:27; 34:1-6 for examples of self-cannibalizing). The armies of Rome were no longer Roman armies; they were composed chiefly of provincials, largely of barbarians; they fought not for their altars and their homes, but for their wages, their donatives, and their loot. They attacked and plundered the cities of the Empire with more

relish than they showed in facing the enemy; most of them were sons of peasants who hated the rich and the cities as exploiters of the poor and the countryside; and as civil strife provided opportunity, they sacked such towns with a thoroughness that left little for alien barbarism to destroy...In this awful drama of a great state breaking into pieces, the internal causes where the unseen protagonists; the invading barbarians merely entered where weakness had opened the door, and where the failure of biological, moral, economic, and political statesmanship had left the stage to chaos, despondency, and decay.”(see Will Durant, Caesar and Christ, p. 669).

This picture of self-cannibalization, incredible as it may have seemed in the glory days of Rome was predicted some 350 years before it took place when John wrote the Revelation. Precisely how God “put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose” (Rome’s self-destruction) we are at a loss to know. The Greek text says God gave (the Greek word is *edoken*, aorist tense, meaning “gave”) it into their hearts. It is the same Greek word used by Paul to describe how God “gave them up” to the lusts of their hearts, dishonorable passions, a base mind and improper conduct (Rom. 1:14-32). Rome’s destruction by self-cannibalization brought to fulfillment the words of God. The process took 350 years or more beyond the time John predicted it but it came, inexorably and irrevocably. God built this moral judgment of self-destruction into his moral creation. It is an undeniable doctrine of the Bible and an unimpeachable fact of history. The angel identified the “beast.” It was Rome. Now, in one terse sentence, the angel identified the “woman.” She was Rome. Babylon, the harlot, the woman, was that “great city which had dominion over the kings of the earth.” Babylon cannot, therefore, be Jerusalem or the Roman Catholic Church. In the 35 years between Alexander Severus and Aurelian (A.D. 235-270) 37 men were proclaimed emperor. Decius gave orders (249-251) for Christianity to be destroyed, but later he watched his own sons slain in battle and was himself struck down in one of the worst defeats of the entire history of Rome. Assassination of emperors by their troops became a regular occurrence. Revolts broke out everywhere. The Western Roman Empire ended its days with a boy of 6-7 years of age on the throne (Romulus Augustulus, A.D. 475-476). Cheap imports, high taxes, pestilence among human workers, caused large scale migration of farmers to cities and reduced production in the Empire. The army often joined in attacking the wealthy. Barbarian raids and piracy made trade routes unsafe. People were too poor to buy the goods they could produce. Precious metals ran low. War was almost continuous. Rome repeatedly devalued its currency. The government issued cheap coinage. Prices rose rapidly. In Palestine they increased 100 percent between A.D. 70 and 299. In Egypt inflation ran out of control. A measure of wheat costing eight drachmas in the first century cost 120,000 drachmas at the end of the 3rd century. Trust funds were nullified, business failed, capital funds for trading and loaning disappeared. “The empire had begun with urbanization and civilization; it was ending in re-ruralization and barbarism” (Durant, Caesar and Christ, pp. 620-633). Although the devil was severely bound when Rome fell, and his accomplices (the beast, the false prophet, and the harlot) were destroyed, today he continues to deceive those who refuse to come to the glorious light of the Gospel. And he still uses, though with less power, those three tools. The beastliness of ungodly political power still persecutes; the masquerading of the devil in false religions still leads astray; the attractiveness of worldliness and carnality still seduces millions into spiritual prostitution. Thanks be to God life and

immortality has been brought to light through the Gospel. Christ destroyed the power of the devil, the fear of death, and the devil's power to deceive has been forever truncated (Heb. 2:14-18). Though there may be pressures of persecution, false teaching and carnality, through the Gospel men may now know beyond any reasonable doubt that this slight momentary affliction is preparing them for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Cor. 4:16-18). The hope of a better life in heaven forever is no longer a thing unseen; it has now been demonstrated in time and in history by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. By his precious and very great promises men may now escape the corruption that is in the world and become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Now we know that the things of earth which are seen are transitory; but the things of Christ, by his absolutely faithful word, are eternal. Do not be deceived!

This chapter portrays, in symbolic terms, the devastating prostration of the city of Rome. It was to be many years future to the time John wrote, but it so certain John spoke of it as an accomplished fact! The glory of ancient Rome did disappear from the earth in exactly the manner John predicted. Chapter eighteen presents a vivid picture of the contrast between heaven's attitude and the world's attitude when the judgments of God fall on wicked worldliness. Heaven and the saints rejoice; the worldly-minded mourn. To some people it may seem out of character for heaven to call for rejoicing over the devastation of Rome, but heaven knows that the life of the godly on earth is one of persecution, deprivation and injustice (John 15:18-21; Acts 14:22; Rom. 8:18-25; 2 Tim. 3:12; 2 Cor. 1:8-11; 4:16-18, et al.). Christians are not permitted to carry out any personal vengeance and must trust God to punish wickedness as he sees fit. God has ordained human government to punish the wrong doer and reward the right doer and thus maintain justice and order. (See Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13-17. See also Paul T. Butler, *What The Bible Says About Civil Government*, Joplin, MO: College Press, 1990). But human governments do not always acknowledge that God-ordained mandate and become corrupt and unjust---as Rome did. In such cases it is altogether Biblical for Christians to rejoice at every clear judgment of wickedness in history. It is clearly a distinguishing mark of Christian character to hate evil and love good. Christian character insists on a demand for justice and an uncompromising call for an end to evil. Righteous people will rejoice when wickedness is brought to an end, either by conversion or judgment. But they will let God accomplish this through the faithfulness of his word. Moses and the Israelites sang for joy at the fall of Pharaoh's army. The OT prophets repeatedly exhort the believing "remnant" to rejoice at the promised destruction of their enemies. The Christian is not to love the world or anything in it. He may use it an whatever is good in it as a steward of God, but he must be ready and willing to rejoice at its destruction. Because that is how it is in heaven, forever! "After this" does not mean chronologically. It is a phrase used in the Revelation to distinguish one vision from another, but not necessarily in time. Chapter 18 is merely a continuation or an amplification of the subject matter of chapters 15,16, and 17. The angel coming down from heaven apparently was not one of the seven who had the bowls. This angel was one of great power and authority, directly from the presence of the glory of God; the earth was made bright with his glory. He cried with a mighty voice. What he said thundered; it roared; it was ear-splitting. "Fell, fell, Babylon the great," would be a literal translation of the Greek aorist verbs, epesen, epesen. Rome's fall, though not for 350 years after John, is so certain it may be

said from heaven's perspective to have already taken place! Rome, and her consorts, did not see herself as ever to fall (Rev. 18:7), but from heaven's vantage point her doom was sealed. Rome became (aorist tense verb) a dwelling place of demons. Rome had become a "haunt" (phulake). The once proud, rich and splendid buildings of Rome became haunts of "demons, unclean spirits and unclean, hateful birds." Tertullian wrote concerning the Colosseum, "There are as many unclean spirits as there are men there." (See "The Roman Arena," on television's History Channel, March 4, 1997). It is doubtful that John meant the ruins of Rome would become haunts of actual demons. There is no evidence that evil spirits were then, or are today living in the ruins of the ancient Colosseum. John was symbolizing the devastation of ancient Rome and the contempt with which history would hold it for its arrogance, its injustices done to Christians, and its insane depravity which brought self-destruction. In a figurative way the ruins of ancient Rome speak of the demonic, depraved, foulness of the human spirit in league with Satan. No civilization or culture has ever been able to outdo Rome in depravity. Many have imitated her but none have exceeded her. And why should Rome escape total devastation when the wicked cities which had preceded her suffered it (Isa. 13:19-22; 34:8-15; Jer. 50:39; 51:37; Zeph. 2:13-15, et al.). All the world known to civilized man was seduced by ancient Rome to participate in her ungodliness. She built her empire by military conquest and economic extravagance. Practically all the cultures and races of the world of that time willingly joined in political and military alliance with Rome, and followed her depraved ways to gain powers and favors from her. Puppet kings and influential men, like the Herods, grew rich through political and business advantages granted them by Rome. By fawning to the indulgent whim of the Caesars, even when it meant exploitation and treason against their own people, the politicians and merchants of that world grew rich. By imposing exorbitant taxes upon their subjects, by selling many of their own peoples into slavery, and by exporting to the lascivious and insatiable imperial Rome all their best national products, these provincial kings and traders engaged in intercourse with the "harlot" and became as guilty as she. Wantonness is "insolent, insatiable, luxuriating." The Greek word *strenous* is translated "wanton" in 18:3,9, and means, "to run riot, to indulge voraciously." Kings and merchants sacrificed truth, justice and kindness in their wantonness to grow rich with Rome.

Christians were exhorted by God, through John, to "Come out of her (Roman carnality) my people, lest you take part in her sins..." The Greek verb *Exelthete*, ("Come out!") is aorist imperative. God did not merely suggest Christians should come out of that worldliness, he commanded it. John was not, of course, ordering Christians to make a geographical exodus from the Roman empire. Neither did John mean that Christians then should withdraw from the world into monastic societies. Geographical separation from ungodliness cannot be done (see 1 Cor. 5:9-13), but spiritual separation certainly may! Many of the Christians to whom John wrote had to make great sacrifices to live their lives separated from Rome's idolatry and depravity. Some had pagan family members turn against them. Others were accused of treason against the emperor and were slain. Some were deprived of employment, food and property. But whatever the cost, the separated life would eventually deliver them to glory. God was for them---who could be against them? Nothing Rome could do to them could separate them from the love of God. But those who shared in Rome's sins would also share in her plagues and eventually be cast into the lake of

fire and brimstone. Sin after sin had been “glued” together (Greek, *ekollethesan*, is translated, “heaped” but literally means, “glued, fastened together”) in ancient Rome until a huge mountain of wickedness reached even up to heaven. No nation or people on the face of the earth can long postpone the wrath of God if it continues to pile up sins against him (See 2 Chr. 28:9; Jer. 51:9; Ezra 9:6, et al.). Men may forget some of their sins, but God will not forget any sins not covered by the vicarious death of Jesus Christ. So after calling his people out of “Babylon,” God called those angels who would execute his wrath upon her. They gave her what she had given. The Greek phrase *diplosate aute dipla*, is translated, “double for her deeds,” but literally it would be “double for her double.” God was evenhanded in his justice. Rome did not suffer any more than she had handed out. Rome magnanimously gave out double portions of wickedness to the world, so she was to receive a double portion of God's wrath. The same phrasing is used in “Mix for her what she has mixed-double.” When Rome's crimes against the world had reached a point beyond God's tolerance, he executed his justice, double for double.

Rome did not see herself as a profligate or derelict. She told herself that she was enthroned as the “queen” of the world. Isaiah portrayed ancient Semitic Babylon saying the same thing of herself (Isa. 47:7-15). Ancient Nineveh, and Tyre said the same of themselves (Zeph. 2:15; Ezek. 28:2). Many emperors and nations have boasted they would last forever; Cyrus the Great's Persia; Alexander the Great's Greek empire; the British empire; Hitler's Third Reich. None of these were as powerful and rich as the Roman empire of the first century, but they are all gone, including Rome! The Roman Forum which was the seat of her power is today only ruins visited by tourists. Rome's power and grandeur is only a cadaver of the past upon which historians pronounce post mortems. Rome said she would never mourn. God said, “in one day” her plagues and destruction would come! One, twenty-four-hour day is not meant to be understood literally. It is figurative language, poetic in style, to symbolize the suddenness and unexpectedness of Rome's fall. In A.D. 410 the entire world was stunned when the once proud city of powerful emperors was sacked, looted and burned by the Visigoths. That was just the beginning of the plundering of Rome, but it was sudden and unexpected, and signaled her demise. God showed the world he was equal to the challenge of Rome for eternal sovereignty of the world. She boasted she would never relinquish her hold on the world. But God was mightier than Rome! What a strange paradox! The kings of the earth turned in hate upon the harlot and joined in making her desolate, now they weep and wail at her destruction. But that is the way of the worldly-minded. These kings did not weep out of compassion for the harlot. They mourned their own loss. When the harlot passed away, what they had enjoyed by her power was gone. There is no rhyme or reason for the actions of most unbelievers. The unbelieving mind does not think logically, for it is a mind in rebellion against the very Source of logic and reason--- God. It is a mind in anarchy, a mind gone mad. That is why Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Come to your right mind and sin no more” (1 Cor. 15:34). Lenski commented here, “The lover of a whore strangles her and then weeps like a fool.” But that does not mean the “lover” is not guilty. These allies of Rome stood afar off as she burned. They could not help her and were careful to stay their distance to avoid sharing in her doom. The city of Rome was like a voracious and insatiable wild animal. Roman aristocrats and the nouveau riche spent money in unbelievable quantities. Modern man's most extravagant luxury is poverty

compared with the riotous extravagance of ancient Rome. One of Nero's "freemen" was so rich he regarded a man with a fortune of \$12 million a pauper. Apicius squandered a fortune of \$2 million in refined debauchery, and then committed suicide when he had only \$250,000 left because he could not live on such a pittance. In one day Caligula the emperor squandered the taxes of three provinces amounting to \$250,000, and in a single year boasted of spending \$40 million. There was an insanity of wanton extravagance in first century Rome without parallel in history. Rome raped and plundered the civilized world of its resources and treasures, material and human, to an extent unmatched even by the Nazis of the 20th century (W. G. Hardy, *The Greek and Roman World*, Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1960, pp. 90-111). John's list of goods no longer being sold in Rome is an amazingly detailed inventory of first century merchandise. It shows the indulgent luxury of Rome and how widespread Rome's commercial empire was. Gold and silver came from Spain. Pliny the Elder writes of hydraulic mining for gold in that age which would put recent operations to shame. Roman aristocrats and emperors used gold and silver in building and crafts like we would use steel and marble today. Jewels and pearls and the various spices all suggest the Orient. Silk and cinnamon apparently came from China. Silk was usually purchased to make clothing for the rich. One pound of silk was sold for one pound of gold, or approximately \$10,000 today. Extremely costly wood from a special citrus tree which grew in North Africa, prized for its coloring which was like a peacock's tail or the stripes of a tiger, was imported to make furniture. One table made from this wood would cost anywhere from \$8000 to \$30,000. Ivory was shipped from India and Africa and was very costly. It was used to make furniture and decorative pieces. Fine linen, made of flax, came mainly from Egypt and only the very rich could afford it. Purple and scarlet cloth was dyed in Asia Minor and transported to Rome for making clothing for Roman emperors, senators, and their wives. Wine was a universal table drink in that age. Water was usually unfit to drink. Italy could not supply enough wine for her own people so Rome paid high prices to have wine from other countries imported. Oil, used for lamps, medicine, cooking and a number of other things, was also in short supply and therefore very expensive. Metals and lumber, mined and harvested all over the world, were voraciously consumed by Rome in her worldwide public works programs and in extravagant beautification of the city of Rome. Agricultural products and animals were imported by the ton to be consumed, daily by the hundreds in the games, and sacrificed to the "gods." Horses and chariots were imported by the rich to become part of the stables of the aristocrats as well as resupply for the massive Roman military complex. The Greek words *somaton kai psychas*, are translated, "human souls" (18:13) in the RSV. Literally it would be "bodies and souls" of men. The slave markets of that ancient world were called *somatemporos*, or "body emporiums." Slaves were sold and owned, body and soul. The slave was no more than the livestock on the farm. There were over 60 million slaves in the Roman empire. In the city of Rome alone there were 400,000 slaves, half the population of the city. It was not unusual for an aristocrat to own 500 slaves. One Roman left 4116 slaves in his last will and testament. Emperors often had households of at least 20,000 slaves. People from every nation and culture were sold into slavery---even Hebrews. Those who owned slaves held over them the power of life and death. Slaves might be legally killed by their owners or set free on the slightest whim. Slavery was a world-wide industry and many became rich by trading and selling human beings. The Roman empire of John's day had an astoundingly well-organized passenger, freight, and express system. For the

transport of goods, there were mansiones, which in English means, “waiting-places.” These mansiones maintained riders, drivers, conductors, doctors, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and about forty horses and the appropriate amount of rolling stock. In this way the trade of the empire was kept moving. Where in our world there are scores of obstacles to free trade, in that Roman world there were no such obstacles. From the Great Wall in Britain to the Sudan in Africa, and to Mesopotamia and China there was one huge trading unit. There was such an immense volume of trade and prosperity, credit capitalism and banking were well advanced. Checks were used, letters of credit were common, and Roman currency was valid exchange anywhere. The Roman empire was a paradise for businessmen. Commerce was frenzied. Only a very few ever warned of the dangers of inflation and fiscal irresponsibility. But the crash came! And it was one of the contributing factors to the death of the empire. The merchants (emporoi) all over the Roman empire and those in countries not under Roman rule, i.e., China, Africa and the Orient, mourned and wailed because the luxurious “fruits” of their commercial traffic with Rome were gone when she fell. The sumptuous and luxurious life merchants of the empire were making for themselves by selling to Rome was all over with when Rome fell. Like the subordinate “kings,” the merchants did not try to come to Rome's rescue but stood “afar off” afraid for themselves. They did not care for Rome---only for their own loss. The merchants did not think of Rome as “mighty” like the “kings,” but they thought of her as “wealth,” clothed in fineness and bedecked with precious jewels. Their market collapsed! Suddenly, completely, and disastrously they lost everything. All international, sea-faring traders “stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning.” Throwing dust on the head was a sign of great grief in that civilization. But again, the grief was selfish. There was no pity for Rome. Trade and commerce of themselves are not wicked; they are good when used for the welfare of humanity. However, when used for selfish luxury and the gratifying of fleshly lusts, they become unrighteous, profane and wicked.

The martyred saints in heaven, under the altar, had cried out for God's justice to be done on their murderers (Rev. 6:9-11). Heaven, saints and apostles and prophets, were commanded (Greek, euphrainou, “Rejoice....” is an imperative mood verb which is a command) to be glad about Rome's devastating death. Throwing a millstone into the sea symbolized a punishment of severity for extreme wickedness or perversion (Jer. 51:63-64; Matt. 18:6). It depicted that the one thus punished would never rise again! Rome's death was characterized as passionate, impulsive, violent. John used the double negative, “no, no,” six times in chapter 18 to emphasize total obliteration (Greek, ou me, translated “no more” RSV, Revelation 18:21,22,23, i.e., “not at all”). Never again would the empire of Rome be found. This is exactly what Daniel predicted when he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the “great image” (Dan. 2:36-45; see also Dan. 7:26-27). Daniel predicted the “fourth” empire would be the last universal secular empire. The fifth universal empire was to be God's kingdom, the church. Ancient Rome will never rise again! John's prophecy of Rome's fall parallels the historical reality: first the beast, i.e., political structure of the empire; second, Rome's allies, i.e., the provinces and their merchants; and last, the harlot, i.e., the capital city itself. All the wild orgies, the bloody contests in the arenas, the gluttonous feasts, the indecent and blasphemous theater productions and the pomp and extravagance of the royal processions---all attended with music and trumpets, would not ever be experienced in

Rome again. Industry would cease. No more would there be found craftsmen plying their trades. Rome's great commercial capital was to die. Third, all vestiges of family and home-life was to disappear. No more lighted homes, no more marriages, no more Rome! Some interpreters excising certain verses and words from their contexts and using them to construct a millennial melange envision a resurrected and restored Roman empire prior to what they call "the end of the age." Some are declaring the European Common Market is the "new Rome." During World War II a number of books on prophecy were written announcing that Benito Mussolini was about to resurrect the Roman empire as prophesied in Revelation. Adolph Hitler was supposed to be "The Antichrist" and, together with Mussolini, he would usher in the seven years of tribulation before which Jesus Christ would "rapture" the church and after which Jesus would come to earth and set up his millennial kingdom. Jesus would then rule over all the nations with "a rod of iron" from the city of Jerusalem. Needless to say, those books are now obsolete and out of print! Rome, a universal power of wickedness, is never to be again! Because ancient Rome was destroyed, and Satan was "bound," the church has become a universal kingdom. It is composed of citizens from "all nations, races, tongues and cultures." The next time Christ comes to this world, this existing cosmos will melt with a fervent heat and he will create a new heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:8-13).

In the last two verses we are reminded of the three reasons God judged Rome and obliterated her. First she made dominion, wealth, and worldliness her chief ambition. Second, Rome deceived and exploited the whole world with her "sorceries." Third, Rome is accused of the murder of God's prophets and saints. But Rome's guilt does not stop there. She is also accused of the blood of all who have ever been slain on earth! Rome was in complicity with the Jews by giving the ultimate order to crucify the Son of God. Jesus pronounced the Jewish leaders to be guilty of all the blood shed from creation to their own time (Matt. 23:29-39). The apostle Paul delineates the horrible crimes of that Roman civilization (Rom. 1:18-32). The universal pagan sovereignty Rome enjoyed is gone, never to be revived. But the triad of forces opposing the church of Christ which were so powerful in Rome live on with less concentration and in subdued influence in the present world, i.e., political persecution, humanistic idolatry, and carnal indulgence of the flesh. The subduing of these powers resulted in the missionary thrust of the Gospel into the far reaches of civilization. Truth sets people and nations free from ignorance and falsehood and Satan's powers are bound to a greater degree than they were when Rome controlled the world.

## Epilogue

In late 1990 and early 1991 Saddam Hussein, dictator of Iraq, invaded Kuwait. American president, George H. W. Bush, threatened retaliation and was successful in forming a "United Nations" coalition armed force to drive the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. Saddam Hussein declared that should U.N. forces attack his army it would be "the mother of

all wars.” Any person who watched television, read newspapers, or listened to “talk radio” in those months remembers the eschatological frenzy that swept through America (and perhaps other western countries also). There were predictions that “Armageddon” was imminent. Prophecy preachers were calling Saddam Hussein, “the antichrist.” It was prognosticated with much certainty that Russia (declared to be “Gog and Magog”) would soon invade Israel and the United States would be at war with Russia. As we have documented in Chapter Two, this kind of impetuous, doom’s-day forecasting has been going on for centuries. There were those in the first century Thessalonian church saying that the “day of the Lord” had already come (before Paul wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians ca. 51 A.D---1 Thessalonians 4:13--5:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). Apparently the doom’s-day date-setters have not learned from history and are therefore doomed to obsessive repetition of the errors of their predecessors.

A better epilogue for this brief work could hardly be made than a recent article in the bimonthly Christian periodical, Does God Exist. John N. Clayton, editor and publisher of the magazine wrote an article which we quote, in part, herewith:

“The New Millennial Madness”

“The second coming of Christ will occur in 1997. ---Mary Stewart Relfe

“I predict the absolute fulness of man’s operation on planet Earth by the year 2000 A.D. Then Jesus Christ shall reign from Jerusalem for 1000 years. ---Lester Sumrall

“The confrontation with Iraq---points to fulfillment of Bible prophecies that ‘the nations of the world are going to come against Israel’ in the latter days and the Middle East is ‘going to explode. It’s exactly what the Bible said.’---Pat Robertson

“Four major prophecies in the Bible pinpoint Iraq and the Persian Gulf as the prelude to the Battle of Armageddon, a conflict that will begin at the Euphrates River in Iraq.

---Jack Van Impe

“The Persian Gulf crisis and the West’s need for oil may very well be...what unites the West under one man that the Bible calls the Antichrist.---R. L. Hymers

“There are spiritual forces at work in the Persian Gulf confrontation. History has gone full circle, and we are coming back to these [Bible] lands. This is not another Korea, it is not another Vietnam---it is something far more sinister and far more difficult.

---Billy Graham

The Iraqi crisis may spark the terrible war that will herald the Messiah’s arrival.

---Rabbi Menachem Schneerson

“In the ten years prior to A.D. 1000, the world was exposed to a period of religious panic. Frederick Marten in his book, *The Story of Human Life and Doomsday*, described prisoners being released, debts forgiven, food given away, possessions sold, and people going to mountain tops to observe the second coming of Christ. On December 31, 999, Pope Sylvester II held a midnight mass so the Pope’s followers could witness the end of the world in the presence of the man they considered to be God’s leader on earth. Needless to say, the new century entered without the return of Christ. Now as we approach 1999, the same mentality is approaching. The New Age writers, Ken Carey and David Spangler, attach special significance to the year 2000. Elizabeth Clare Prophet, of the Church Universal and Triumphant, claims a Russian invasion is imminent. Hal Lindsay’s 1970’s book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* has jumped 83% in sales and Zondervan Publishing is releasing a re-write of John Walvoord’s 1974 book *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*. Even the sales of books by Nostradamus (a sixteenth century French astrologer) have jumped dramatically.

“Ron Rhodes recently wrote an article titled “Millennial Madness” in *Christian Research Journal* (Fall 1990, page 39). Rhodes does not get into the major problems theologically of all this activity. What he does do is list eight logical, solid reasons why we need to stay out of the new millennial madness. We think these reasons are important to consider:

“First, over the past 2,000 years, the track record of those who have predicted and/or expected ‘the end’ has been 100 percent wrong. The history of doomsday predictions is little more than a history of dashed expectations. Though it is possible we are living in the last days, it is also possible that Christ’s Second Coming is a long way off.

“Second, those who succumb to millennial madness may end up making harmful decisions for their lives. Selling one’s possessions and heading for the mountains, purchasing bomb shelters, stopping education, leaving family and friends---these are destructive actions that can ruin one’s life.

“Third, Christians who succumb to millennial madness (for example, by expecting the rapture to occur by a specific date) may end up damaging their faith in the Bible (especially prophecy) when their expectations fail.

“Fourth, if one loses confidence in the prophetic portions of Scripture, biblical prophecy ceases to be a motivation to purity and holiness in daily life (see, e.g., Titus 2:12-14).

”Fifth, Christians who succumb to millennial madness may damage the faith of new and/or immature believers when predicted events fail to materialize.

“Sixth, millennial soothsayers tend to be sensationalistic, and sensationalism is unbecoming to a Christian. Christ calls his followers to live, soberly and alertly as they await

his coming (Mark 13:32-37).

“Seventh, Christians who get caught up in millennial madness can do damage to the cause of Christ. Humanists enjoy scorning Christians who have put stock in end-time predictions (especially when specific dates have been attached to specific events). Why give ‘ammo’ to the enemies of Christianity?

“Eighth, the timing of end-time events is in God’s hands, and we haven’t been given the details (Acts 1:7). As far as the Second Coming is concerned, I close with the sound advice of David Lewis: ‘It is better to live as if Jesus were coming today and yet prepare for the future as if He were not coming for a long time. Then you are ready for time and eternity.’” (Does God Exist, March/April, 1991, John N. Clayton, Editor and Publisher, pg. 2-4).

Let all who love Christ say, Amen!

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION 19:1 – 20:6

The apocalyptic drama of the sovereignty of God in the Lamb (Christ) versus the pretended sovereignty of the devil and his allies (the beast, false prophet and harlot—Rome) has come to its grand climax. The opposing characters have all been clearly defined. From the moment of the birth of the “Male-Child” it was apparent that the old dragon, the devil, was raging to devour the Child. But he could not do it—God brought the Child back to life and caught him up to heaven. So the dragon gave his deceptive authority to the “beast, false prophet, and harlot.” They set upon the “Woman” (the church) in the wilderness (the world of ancient pagan sin). But God pronounced his final judgment upon Rome (especially the prostitute-city itself). Rome’s doom was sealed. Her death was inevitable. She was even to be an instrument to bring about her own fall. There were none to help her. But the real reason behind her doom is that God, through the Lamb, was going to defeat ancient Rome and throw her into the lake of fire and brimstone. The Lamb was to become the Warrior-King (Messiah) and completely defeat his enemies. The Lamb would prove his sovereignty by dramatically rescuing his church (His Bride) on earth and by destroying that fourth (and last) world empire whose end Daniel prophesied and which the world believed to be invincible. At the last of the book of Revelation (Rev. 19:1—22:21) John gives an apocalyptic, highly symbolic vision of victory. The vision is in the form of a glorious contrast between the defeat of “the city of the world” (Rome, the harlot) and the revealing of the Perfect City of God (the Bride of Christ, the church) coming down out of heaven from God. Between Rev. 20:6 and 20:7 John skips from Rome’s fall to the end of all time without telling us what is to transpire between. That is a style or method of prophetic literature not at all strange to the Bible called “shortened-perspective.” The OT prophets (e.g., Joel 2:27 and 2:28; Dan. 9:23 and 9:24-27) and even Jesus (Matt. 24:35 and 24:36) uses the same method in apocalyptic and eschatological prophesying. We shall speak more to the issue of “shortened-perspective” later. But first, the climactic battle between the King of kings and the devil and his allies (beast, false prophet, and harlot) in Revelation 19:1 through Revelation 20:6.

All in heaven and earth who acknowledge God’s sovereignty are portrayed as in harmony with God’s vengeance and judgments on the “harlot”—i.e., ancient Rome (19:1-6). All over the world of ancient Rome they shouted “Hallelujah!” at the downfall of the devil’s cohorts. The Greek verb in 19:5, *aineite*, translated, “Praise” is an imperative. It is a command, not merely a statement. God’s providential ways are beyond human comprehension (Isa. 55:8-9). God does not ask human beings to evaluate whether Divine actions are right or wrong (e.g. Job). God does not give us the prerogative or criticizing his methods. God leaves us free to acknowledge his sovereignty, on the basis of his actions, and then to accept them by faith. Habakkuk, the prophet, fretted because he could not understand or agree with the methods of God’s dealing with his own countrymen. But God told Habakkuk that he did not require the prophet to understand or agree—only to believe (Hab. 2:2-4). All those servants of God upon the earth in ancient Rome—unable to see from

heaven's perspective at that point—must trust God's judgments on Rome even though they were unable to understand. Jesus' disciples could not understand what he predicted about the downfall of Jerusalem and Judaism (Matt. 23:37—24:35) when he predicted the holocaust that was to come in A.D. 66-70 upon Jerusalem. Jesus expected them to accept his predictions by faith and thus save themselves from that which was to come.

The next voice John heard from heaven was awesome! It roared and boomed! It demanded attention! It symbolized urgency and importance and power. It meant that all sound of human talk was to be drowned out and imperative attention was to be given to the voice from heaven. "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab. 2:20). God is about to reveal something extremely significant! WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT IS that the harlot (ancient Rome) had brought ultimate pressure upon the Bride of Christ (the church) to seduce her, but the Bride remained faithful. It seemed that the whole world had been deceived and had committed fornication with the harlot, but not Christ's Bride. Christ's Bride (the church) married the Bridegroom and adorned herself in His robes of righteousness in anticipation of the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb." The Greek verbs elthen ("came") and etimasen ("made herself") are aorist tense stating that the "Marriage" had already happened in the past. That agrees with Eph. 5:21-33). In order to understand this passage (19:7-10) one must remember ancient marriage customs. The betrothal (engagement) was considered as binding as marriage (e.g., Joseph and Mary, Matt. 2:20-24). People who were betrothed were considered to be married even before the ceremonies, before the wedding suppers, and before the sexual consummation. The time lapse between the betrothal and the ceremonies (including the feast or "supper") is pictured for us in Jesus' parable of the 10 virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). In other words, marriage was considered to have taken place long before any feast might be given. It is beyond question, from the scriptures, that the church on earth was "married" to Christ from the inception of the church. Even in the OT the relation of Jehovah to his covenant people is portrayed as a marriage (Hosea 2:1ff; Isa. 50:1; 62:4ff; Jer. 2:32; Ezek. 16:1ff, etc.). Actually, Isaiah 62:4-5 is a prophecy that when the Messiah comes in his first advent, those who believe and follow him will be "married." The NT is even more specific that the church in the earth is the Bride of Christ (Jn. 3:29-30; Eph. 5:22ff; Rom. 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2).

So the "marriage of the Lamb" in this text (Rev. 19:7-10) is NOT speaking of some future event. THE "MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB" OF REV. 19:7-10 IS PAST! IT TOOK PLACE AT THE FIRST COMING OF CHRIST WHEN THE CHURCH WAS ESTABLISHED ON EARTH. Today we would call the "supper" the "reception party." The consummation of the marriage (not the "supper") is yet to take place at Christ's Second Coming (Rev. 21:2). In fact, the Greek phrase, hoti elthen is aorist and should be translated to read that because the marriage of the Lamb had already come in the past those Christians in ancient Rome should "rejoice and be glad and give God the glory." Furthermore, the Greek verb edothe translated, "granted" KJV & RSV and "given" NIV (19:8) is aorist indicating that the "fine linen" had already been "given" to the Bride to wear to the "marriage supper." Furthermore, the Greek verb hetoimasen, translated "made herself ready" KJV & RSV & NIV, is also aorist indicating she had already made herself "ready" for the marriage

feast. Furthermore, the Greek verb *keklemenoi*, translated “called” KJV, “invited” RSV & NIV, is a perfect tense verb indicating that those “invited” had been “invited in the past and the invitation was continuing to be made” (see Rev. 22:17). John would surely not have used the perfect tense and aorist tense verbs in this context to predict some future “marriage supper” of the Lamb after the Second Coming—he would have used future tense. The consummation (in heaven) of the marriage comes after the “supper” or “feast.” The whole Christian age is depicted in the NT as a festive gathering. Jesus likened the kingdom of God (the church) unto a “feast” many times (Matt. 22:1f; Lk. 14:15ff; 15:1-32; Rev. 3:20). The NT indicates that the feasts of the Mosaic dispensation were types of the NT experience (1 Cor. 5:8; Heb. 13:10, etc.). The OT prophets pictured the Christian age as a “feast” (Isa. 55:1-3; 65:13, etc.). Isaiah (62:4-5) predicted the re-marriage of God with his Bride (after she had divorced him, Isa. 50:1; 62:1-5; Jer. 3:8; Hosea 3:1-5) when the Messianic kingdom would be established at Christ’s first coming. Both the “marriage” of the Lamb and the “marriage supper” of the Lamb have already begun and are continuing to take place as people are becoming Christians on earth and becoming a part of Christ’s “Bride.” The Spirit and the Bride are still saying: “Come,” and are still inviting, “whosoever will to come” (Rev. 22:17). To say the marriage and the marriage supper have already come does not imply the marriage has already been consummated. The ultimate union of the “Bride” (the church) and the “Bridegroom” (Christ) will take place at Christ’s Second Coming (Rev. 21:2).

The rider on the “white horse” in this context is Christ—not the Roman emperor as in 6:2. The Bridegroom (Christ) appears not to consummate the marriage (consummation is predicted in Rev. 21:2-9), but to rescue his Bride by destroying the “beast, false prophet and harlot.” Heaven is opened and Christ, the Warrior-King (Messiah), rides forth on a white horse (symbolizing conquest). The Warrior-King is called “Faithful and True”! Jesus Christ is called “the faithful witness” in Rev. 1:4-5. Christ’s words and actions are ultimate truth. There is no other truth except that it relates to Jesus Christ. In him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 1:15-20; 2:1-5). His teaching and his life are the ultimate reality (Jn. 14:6). What Christ revealed to John about the conflict between the ancient Roman empire and the early church was absolutely true and faithful. Millions of unbelievers in John’s day called the Roman emperor their “beneficent god—invincible.” But the true and faithful Revelation of Christ declared ancient Rome a “beast, false prophet and harlot” doomed to utter destruction. The Warrior-King (or Bridegroom) made war in righteousness. His judgments were according to facts, not appearances (Jn. 7:24). He was not fooled by hypocrisy. People could not even hide thoughts and intents of the human heart from Christ (Jn. 2:24-25). He made no mistakes in his judgments upon ancient Rome. The Warrior-King rode forth from heaven to make war upon the beast, false prophet and harlot as they were upon the earth (19:17-21). At his Second Coming Christ is coming not just to make war on earth, but to dissolve this universe (2 Pet. 3:10) and to reward and punish for all eternity! The Warrior-King had eyes like a flame of fire (see Rev. 1:12-16) and was crowned with many crowns. The message was that all sovereignty belonged to him. He had a name which no one knew but himself. It was the “Trinity” (the whole God-head—Three in One—Col. 2:9). That is incomprehensible to the human mind—it can only be accepted on faith—a faith based on evidence to substantiate the claim. When Moses wanted to know Who was sending him to Pharaoh, God replied, “I am, That I Am!” or YHWH. The English word “God”

is simply a human symbol to describe the Being who is above and beyond human experience. Full comprehension of the name and nature of God and Christ is impossible for man. The Warrior-King was clad in a robe dipped in blood. He was about to tread the awful wine-press of God's wrath upon Rome (Rev. 14:17-20) and assemble all the world of Rome for the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:14-16). Awesome defeat and judgment upon the world of ancient Rome had been predicted numerous times in Revelation. The Lamb is now the Warrior-King and his robe is seen as spattered with the blood of his enemies. The Warrior-King is called "The Word of God." The use of the Greek word Logos (i.e., "Word") was a favorite title of John for Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:1,14; 1 Jn. 1:1).

The "armies of heaven" which followed him do not necessarily have to have come from heaven. This undoubtedly refers to the church on earth and its spiritual victory over the ancient Roman empire. It most certainly does not refer to some battle at the end of time and Christ's second coming. There will be no battle, no resistance to Christ at his Second Advent—only judgment and salvation (Heb. 9:27-28) and every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus to be Lord (Phil. 2:5-11). John did not intend to portray a literal battle of swords, spears, chariots and horses. It is symbolism. Christians of the 1st century were told their war was a spiritual war—not one of flesh and blood (Eph. 6:10-20). Christians of the 1st century were told that even the weapons of their warfare were spiritual (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The "sword" issuing from the mouth of the warrior-King is symbolism and so is the "rod of iron." It is indicating that the weapon by which the church overcomes the world is the Word of God. "Armies, sword, rod-of-iron" are all symbolic of the sovereignty of the Word of God. Jesus is saying to John that the Word of God rules the world—not Caesar and Rome (cf. Psa. 2:9; Isa. 11:4). Whatever God's Word has said about the world will come to pass—not what human rulers have said. This parallels the clear teaching of the book of Daniel (Dan. 2:20-23; 2:46; 3:28-30; 4:34-37; 6:25-28). God allows humans to choose and act in this world as they wish, but God still rules. He may intervene or he may not intervene—but he still rules. God's rule is in the hearts of believers (Col. 3:15) and is established by persuasion, not by force. Whatever the battle and whatever the rule John was describing here, it was not a rule of force with a literal rod of iron. Righteousness, faith, love and salvation cannot be wrought by force. Hell is God's prison for all who will not believe, love and obey by choice. Actually, the word translated "rule" is the Greek word *poimanei* which would be more accurately translated "shepherd." The Warrior-King was going to do the work of fulfilling God's wrath on ancient Rome. The Messiah (whom Rome thought they had disposed of) was about to squash Rome and all her influence like grapes in a winepress. What was a "marriage feast" of REJOICING for the Bride (Christ's church), turned out to be for the unbelieving of ancient Rome (those with the "mark of the beast" on them) a bloody, gory feast for the carrion-eating birds of the earth (19:17-21). AND THE EAST, FALSE PROPHET (AND HARLOT) (I.E., THOSE UNBELIEVERS WHO DIED IN ANCIENT ROME'S 400 YEAR DEMISE) WERE THROWN "ALIVE" (CONSCIOUS) INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE THAT BURNS WITH SULPHUR ("BRIMSTONE"). THE BRIDEGROOM HAD RESCUED HIS BRIDE!

Chapter and verse numbers are not inspired by the Holy Spirit. The original Greek text had no such numbers. In fact, the most ancient Greek manuscripts of the NT have no

paragraphs or punctuation (no periods indicating the end of sentences). Although the English translations of the Greek text begin a new chapter at 20:1, we believe the first six verses of Rev. 20 are an inseparable part of the preceding context 19:1-21, which portrays in symbolic language the rescue of the church and the defeat of the beast, false prophet and harlot. Since these three are specifically and intimately allied with Satan in the last half of the Revelation (from chapter 12 through 20) as his tools to suppress the truth, their total defeat would unquestionably produce a devastating limitation on Satan's sphere of influence. Revelation ch. 20 is the most talked about chapter of the Bible. Many, although they know about the chapter, have never analyzed the actual words of the chapter in its context. Numerous books have been written on eschatology taking Revelation 20 out of its context and casting it into a conglomeration of texts from the OT and NT. This chapter has been used as a basis for various theories of a literal 1000 year reign of Christ on earth. But note carefully the following about this text: (a) there is no mention whatever of the 2nd Coming of Christ; (b) there is no mention of a bodily resurrection. The NT, in other places (e.g., Jn. 5:25-28; Rom. 6:1-4; Eph. 2:1-10, etc.), provides for the possibility of a resurrection other than and prior to the bodily resurrection—a spiritual resurrection; (c) there is no mention in this text of a literal reign of Christ on earth; (d) there is no mention in this text of a literal throne of David; (e) there is no mention in this text of literal Jerusalem or Palestine; (f) there is no mention in this text of the conversion of “all” the Jews; (g) there is no mention in this text of the church being “raptured” prior to a period of 7 years of tribulation. In this text (20:1) it is not Christ coming down, but an angel sent down. This angel holds in his hand the key of the “bottomless pit” (Gr. abyssou) and a great chain. This is symbolic language. Literally, in human experience, there is no such thing as a “bottomless pit.” It could not be a pit if it had no bottom! Furthermore, how does one bind the spiritual, non-physical being, Satan, with a literal chain? If the “thousand years” are literal, so should the bottomless pit and chain be literal. Evidently, the “bottomless pit” is not the final destiny of Satan (see Rev. 20:10). The bottomless pit is Hades (Lk. 16:23), the abyss to which Jesus could send demons (Lk. 8:31), or Tartarus, the nether darkness (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6) where demons reside. Peter says sinning angels are kept until judgment in Tartarus (not hell) in chains in darkness. Jude says the angels who abandoned their proper dwelling-place are kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the great day of judgment. This is the abyss to which the angel had the key—not the lake of fire and brimstone (hell). This “angel” (messenger) of God had been given power to “seize” the dragon (the devil) and bind him for 1000 years (note it is not Christ or God, personally, doing the “seizing” and “binding”—it is merely one of God's “messengers”). Remember, too, Christ controls the keys of Death, Hades and Life (Rev. 1:18).

Both Greek words, ekratese and edesen (“seized” and “bound” respectively) are aorist tense verbs, indicating Satan had been “seized” and “bound” and the action had at least begun to take place when John wrote the Revelation—perhaps prior to his writing. Even when Jesus declared he came to “bind” the “strong man” (the devil) in Mt. 12:29 he does not use the future tense, but the aorist subjunctive. We believe Satan was “seized” and “bound” initially at the onset of Jesus' earthly ministry and finished at the fall of the ancient Roman empire—these are the reasons for our conclusion: (a) God is Almighty. He is the only Almighty Being in existence; (b) Satan, therefore, is always bound to some degree or other; (c) any “binding” or “loosing” Satan has is by God's sovereign permission, and

according to God's purposed limitations; (d) the record of Job's experience (Job 1 & 2) shows God kept Satan in check ("bound") to some degree even in OT times. God allowed certain freedoms with Job that Satan could not have otherwise taken (see also Zech 3:1-5); (e) Revelation ch. 20 is only one of a number of passages in the Bible that deal with the "binding" of Satan and his hosts (Mk. 3:27; Matt. 12:25-29; Lk. 11:17-22; Jn. 12:31; 16:11; Heb. 2:14-15; Lk. 10:18; 1 Jn. 3:8; Col. 2:13-15; Eph. 4:8-9; Acts 2:24; Rev. 12:11). All these scriptures have to do with the result of the Gospel being accomplished and preached throughout the ancient Roman world. According to Daniel, Rome was the last of the four great empires which would exert the greatest humanly possible power at Satan's disposal to erase God's work of redemption from the face of the earth. Daniel predicted that during the days of the "kings" of the fourth great empire, God would establish a fifth universal empire (the church) which would overcome the last universal humanistic empire and God's universal kingdom would last forever (Dan. 2:44-45). The "binding" (or relative restriction) of Satan in Revelation ch. 20 is relative to the needs of God's redemptive work in the NT age which is the last of the ages (1 Cor. 10:11). Satan's final incarceration takes place at the end of the world and the final judgment. To help understand the relative (not complete) "binding" of Satan, think of Satan as a vicious animal on a chain tied to a tree (i.e., always "bound" to some degree or other). In OT times, the chain binding Satan was extended to great lengths and his sphere of influence to deceive and destroy was wide. In NT times, because sin has been atoned for historically, because forgiveness has been wrought, because life and immortality have been brought to light historically, God, through the Gospel of Christ, has shortened the chain binding the devil and has severely restricted the power the devil has to deceive the world. Indeed, the devil is still active! Today he prowls on his "shortened chain" (restricted sphere of influence), like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Although his sphere of influence is less than it was, anyone who steps within that sphere will be deceived and devoured. Contemplate what a widespread area of influence Satan had when the only verbal revelation of God before Christ was to a small nation of Jews surrounded by many nations of paganism. The whole world (except for isolated and exclusivistic Judaism) was held hostage by Satan in ignorance, superstition and fear. Most of ancient civilization was controlled, life and death, by successive (Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, Roman) one-world governments. But the Gospel changed all that with Divine truth historically and miraculously demonstrated in time and space and instituted the "kingdom of God" on earth (the church) which has reached to the remotest corners of civilization.

We believe the "thousand years" during which Satan is "bound" symbolize the Christian age which began with the victory of God for his saints over the ancient Roman empire and lasts until the "little-while" of Satan's being loosed and the end of time (Rev. 20:3,7). The "thousand years" started after the "time, times and half a time" of the "near" death of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3-13), and after the "time, times and half a time" of the "woman's" nourishing in the wilderness (Rev. 12:13-17). The beast, false prophet and harlot, (prompted by the devil) brought great tribulation upon the Woman (the church) and her offspring for three and one half times. That came to an end when the triad of wicked forces were defeated and the devil was "bound." Then began the "thousand year reign of the saints." The Bible often uses the number "one thousand" in a figurative, symbolic sense. More than 1000 cattle "on a thousand hills" belong to God (Psa. 50:10)! The Lord multiplied

Israel figuratively one-thousand times more than they were at the time of the Exodus (Deut 1:10-11)! For other figurative uses of the number 1000 see Job. 9:3; 33:23; Psa. 90:4; Eccl. 6:6; 7:28; 2 Pet. 3:8. John's use of numbers throughout the book of Revelation is altogether figurative and symbolic—why should he suddenly select such a “round number” “one-thousand” to predict something literal? The “1000” years is simply symbolic of a vast, indeterminate, yet complete time known literally only to God. John does not tell us in detail what will transpire during this “1000” years because it is not necessary for the faithfulness of any saint to have that information (Acts 1:7). The OT prophets left centuries of blanks in their eschatology! Many of them (e.g. Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Joel, Hosea) jumped, eschatologically, from their own times (800 B.C. Joel 2 and Acts 2) to the beginning of the Messianic age (the first coming of Christ and establishment of the church) with hardly any details of the intervening centuries being revealed at all! This unique vehicle of prophetic, apocalyptic literature is called “Shortened Perspective.” Joel used it in Joel 2:27 (contemporary times) to predict 800 years later 2:28 the establishment of the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16ff). Jesus used this “vehicle” of apocalyptic prophecy to predict the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 in Matt. 24:1-35 and then in Matt. 24:36 began predicting his Second Coming at the end of time—which would be known by no one—skipping over more than 2000 years now without so much as revealing anything about history between A.D. 70 and the end of time. ONE THOUSAND YEARS IN REV. 20:3,4, & 7, ARE NOT LITERAL—THE TERM IS SYMBOLIC OF THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN AGE WHICH BEGAN WITH THE GOSPEL AND THE FALL OF ROME AND WILL CONTINUE UNTIL THE END OF TIME!

Those seated on thrones and who had been “beheaded” were believers who had been martyred during ancient Rome's attempt to stamp out Christianity. They are those who had not worshiped the beast or its image. The Greek perfect participle pepelekismenon from pelekus, “axe,” means a continual slaughter of Christians had been begun and was continuing. The Greek phrase, kai ezesan in 20:4, literally reads, “and they lived” (aorist tense, past tense). Satan and Rome tried to deceive the world into believing that martyred Christians and Christianity had been “killed” forever (see 11:7-10), but God raised them up (11:11-13)! John revealed that those martyred Christians, faithful unto death, had not died but had really come to life, and the kingdom to which they belonged (and not ancient Rome) reigned and judged the world. The “rest of the dead” (i.e., heathen contemporaries of the Christian martyrs) were those unbelievers who had died during the same “tribulations” of ancient Rome in which the Christians died. The unbelieving dead did not live during the “thousand years”—they remained forever dead. THE SECOND DEATH HAD CLAIMED THEM! The sentence in 20:5 in the Greek text reads, oi loipoi ton nekron ouk ezesan achri telesthe ta chilia etc. The Greek word ezesan is aorist which would make the sentence read, literally, “The other of the dead lived-not during the completion of the thousand years.” The Greek word archi is usually translated “until” but may also be translated “during.” The Greek word telesthe is usually translated ended, but may also be translated completion. The rest of the dead, during the 1000 years, did not come to life. This would emphasize the absolute difference between the martyred Christians and dead heathen who worshiped the beast and had his image stamped on them. If the “rest of the dead” is supposed to refer to Christians, we must assume that John visualizes a “special” resurrection for a favored class, and at the

same time assume that hosts of Christians who did not experience martyrdom by ancient Rome are to be exposed to the possibility of suffering the “second death.” Contrary to the devil’s lie, those faithful to Christ who had been slain came to life and reigned. The “rest of the dead” never did. They came to the “second death.” The Greek word translated “rest” (i.e., remainder) is *loipos* and may also be translated “other” (Lk. 8:11; Acts 17:9; Rom. 1:13; 2 Cor. 12:13; 13:2; Gal. 2:13; Phil. 1:13; 4:3). The “other dead” are the dead of another kind than Christian—they are the dead with the “mark of the beast” upon them. These are the same “rest” or “other” who were “slain” by the Warrior-King and those upon whom all the birds were gorged with their flesh (Rev. 19:21). The “other” or “rest” of the dead at the judgment suffered the “second death” and went with the beast and false prophet to the lake of fire where the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever (Rev. 14:9-11).

That which the Christian martyrs of the ancient Roman empire had experienced when they became Christians is called symbolically “the first resurrection.” It is not the bodily resurrection at the end of time. There will be only ONE bodily resurrection. That is the plain teaching of the NT. The “first resurrection” John speaks of is what these martyrs had experienced at their baptism (immersion) in water in obedience to the Lord’s command (John 5:24-25; Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 2:12). Jesus spoke of a second resurrection in John 5:28-29—it is the final, bodily resurrection of which Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 15 and other passages in his epistles. Everyone will experience the second resurrection, and stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), at which time unbelievers will be sent to continue their torments in the “second death”. The phrase “first resurrection” is being used here symbolically and metaphorically to describe the status of the “souls” (not bodies) of the saints who “came alive” to judge the Roman empire and “reign” with Christ from their martyrdom to the Second Coming of Christ (i.e., during the 1000 years). This interpretation fits because John is making a contrast of perspectives, i.e., the point is to reveal that those saints the Roman “beast” killed were not “dead” after all, but “alive.” The contrast is that the “rest of the other kind of dead, i.e., those with the “mark of the beast,” who had died during the great tribulation, were the ones who were really dead because they had been claimed by the second death. The Christians who “came to life” when they were baptized into Christ also came through the great tribulation to reign with Christ and to judge the Roman empire and to minister before God as “priests.” And that correlates to the teaching of the NT since believers are said to become “a royal priesthood” from the moment they become Christians (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6). The Holy Spirit would not contradict himself. He would not reveal a doctrine of multiple bodily resurrections in Revelation 20:1-6 and then contradict it by declaring in the rest of the NT that there is only ONE bodily resurrection of the saints. The first “death” is to become dead in sin (John 8:23-47; Rom. 5:1-21; Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 2:13, etc.). This life is God’s probationary existence for all mankind—there isn’t any other “probationary” existence. This earthly life is the “soul-making” existence. Blessed are those who become Christian, by taking part in the “first resurrection” for over them the “second death” has no power. Once this earthly life is over the destiny of every human being has been determined by that human’s knowledge of, and response to, the Gospel of Christ (2 Thess. 1:5-10). **THE SECOND DEATH IS THE ULTIMATE SEPARATION OF IMPENITENT SINNERS FROM GOD!** The second death is hell!

John began this book we called Revelation by saying, “Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein” (Rev. 1:3). The Greek word *anaginoskon* means to “read aloud, read publicly” (see Matt. 24:15; Mk. 13:24 and Lk. 4:16 where the same word is used of reading the scriptures publicly, aloud). NOW, JUST HOW OFTEN HAS THE BOOK OF REVELATION BEEN READ IN YOUR CONGREGATIONAL ASSEMBLY???? How often have you heard it read???? And how many times a week do you keep the words written in the book of Revelation???? ARE YOU MISSING OUT ON THIS PROMISED BLESSING????? Reading, studying, this book of Revelation would bless you, at least, with: (a) a clearer understanding of apocalyptic (spiritual-crisis) literature of the Bible (e.g. OT prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Zechariah); (b) understanding the epistolary nature of the book of Revelation; (c) a new appreciation of the relevancy for the 21st century of the book of Revelation; (d) a strengthened faith in God’s sovereign control of history; (e) a strengthened resolve that the church is nurtured by tribulation; (f) a reminder that the church’s number one issue is repentance; (g) a reminder that the church’s greatest enemy is its own impenitence, not some outside entity no matter how powerful outside influences are; (h) a reminder that the secular world, is a beastly, seductive and lying enemy of the church—not the church’s friend! THESE ARE JUST A FEW THINGS THE APOCALYPTIC IMAGERY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION SHOULD HAVE DONE FOR YOUR CHRISTIAN GROWTH IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE.

## TEACHER'S NOTES

prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

### REVELATION 20:7 – 22:21

Some people think the whole book of Revelation is about the Second Coming of Christ because of the dispensational-premillennial eschatological interpretation of the book. Such literalism has been propagated and promoted widely and popularly (i.e., Hal Lindsay, Tim LaHaye, et.al.). The human mind has been bent toward a mystical, futuristic viewpoint of the whole Bible, by the alleged experts on “prophecy”—both secular and religious! Many human beings would rather have their consciousness titillated by the esoteric and cryptic “unknown” than strengthened by the knowable doctrines of the Bible. Isaiah found this true of his generation (Isa. 28:9-13). Paul found this true of the Corinthian saints and quoted Isaiah as he chastened them about their spiritual immaturity (1 Cor. 14:20-25). The Lord IS COMING AGAIN! But not according to any schedule set up by a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6 (plus “x” amount of data from the OT and NT thrown together). Jesus himself said at least 9 times that NO ONE KNOWS when he is coming the Second time, neither the angels nor the Son when he was on earth: Matt. 24:36; 24:37-39; 24:42; Mk. 13:35; Matt. 24:44; 24:51; 25:13; 25:19; 25:31. The rest of the NT emphatically teaches that no one will know when Christ is coming back—it will be like a “thief in the night” (2 Thess. 5:1-4; 2 Thess. 2:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:10). SO, THE BOOK OF REVELATION HAS NOTHING TO SAY ABOUT WHEN JESUS IS COMING BACK! As we have noted before, what John does between verses 20:6 and 20:7 is leap, by the literary (apocalyptic-prophetic) vehicle “shortened perspective,” over almost 2000 years using the symbolic number “thousand years” to delineate this gap between the fall of the ancient Roman empire and the final judgment of mankind and the Second Coming of Christ. With Revelation 20:7 John begins from a whole new reference point in time. John, the “seer,” has “shortened his perspective.” From the vicarious work of Christ and the victory of the church over the “beast” (ancient Roman empire) which began the “thousand years,” he then focuses immediately on the future and the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment. But does the Revelation, or the whole Bible for that matter, tell us any times or signs as to when that will be? NO! The emphasis we look for in the remainder of Revelation is not on times or seasons, but on meaning and application for our lives now.

YES! It is our conclusion that the Second Coming and the final judgment is clearly portrayed (in symbolic, figurative language) from Revelation 20:7 to the end of the book at 22:21. What that will be like has to be written in symbols and figures of speech in the human language because human language is the only way human beings can perceive anything beyond human experience! John uses numerous future tense verbs (quite unlike all the aorist and perfect tense verbs in the earlier portions of Revelation) to state God “will dwell” with saved believers, they “will be” his people, God “will wipe away all tears,” and there “shall be no more death, etc.” for the “former things are passed away” and God is making all things new, etc., etc. (Rev. 21:1-7). Since this whole portrayal of the “passing away of the former things” begins contextually at 20:7, we conclude all from 20:7 through 22:21 is the attempt of

human language to portray the final judgment and eternal heaven and hell. This seems clear from the statement that the devil who had deceived the nations is seen as “thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone” where the beast and false prophet were already residing. Furthermore the “great white throne” and the “books” opened, and the sea and Death and Hades “gave up” the dead in them, and “Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.”  
**THAT SPEAKS OF FINALITY!**

John was told twice that after the “1000 years” were ended, the devil would be “loosed.” Only once does it say “for a little while” (Rev. 20:3). John was not told about any “signs” to look for as to when, precisely, this “loosing” would take place, except that the devil would attempt to “deceive the nations” and “gather them from the four corners of the earth for battle” against the saints. As we have stated previously, the “thousand years” is not intended literally. It represents a long, complete (as long as God’s purposes need) time beginning with the victory of the Lamb over ancient Rome at his resurrection and establishment of the church including the fall of the ancient Roman “beast.” Since the Lamb’s victory over ancient Rome is more than a thousand years old, we should not understand the number to be literal. The main concern of this passage is not time, but the revelation of Satan’s ultimate defeat and the absolute victory of the saints of God. If the Lamb reveals absolute victory, who needs a time schedule? It is as good as done! He is the Faithful and True Word of God. When the purpose of God no longer needs severe restrictions upon Satan (and that will be at the end of the “thousand years” or end of the Christian dispensation), God will “loose” Satan to some extent. We have already seen that Satan is always bound in some relative sense—Satan is never completely free from the sovereignty of God and able to stand as an equal to God. So, whatever “loosing” Satan may enjoy, it is not complete or full. In Rev. 20:3 it was stated Satan would be “loosed for a little while” (Greek, mikron chronon, or “micro-time”). IT IS NOT STATED IN REV. 20:7 THAT SATAN’S “LOOSING” WILL BE A “LITTLE TIME.” In Rev. 12:7-12, after the devil’s defeat in “the heavenly” and his having been cast down upon the “earth,” the devil came in great wrath for he knew his time was “short.” The “short time” in 12:7-12 meant the 400 years (more or less) the devil still had to use the ancient Roman empire against the church of the Lamb. The devil learned about his “short time” from Daniel’s prophecies. It must be frustrating for the devil to know that God holds the “times” of the devil in his sovereign hands so completely. Whatever the devil does and when he does it are all permitted by God. And when God gets ready to imprison the devil forever, he will be imprisoned—no matter how wide his influence in the world and no matter how circumstances may appear to the world. There are numerous important matters to note in connection with Satan being loosed in 20:7: (a) Satan is always bound to some extent; (b) John did not reveal precisely when the “little time” was to begin, nor how long it would be; (c) Satan’s work consists most efficiently in deception (i.e, false teaching and carnality)—not physical persecution and tribulation; (d) it is the “nations” (unbelievers) who are deceived—not the church of Christ; (e) Satan’s deception reaches to the “four corners of the earth”—not just Russia and China—remember, Jesus warned that while many are “called” few are “chosen” and “narrow and difficult” is the way that leads to life; (f) sometime before Christ comes to earth a second, and final time, Satan, and those he has deceived, will make a world-wide push to deceive as many people as possible—he will successfully deceive the vast majority of mankind—the church will be surrounded with a siege of falsehood and carnality in all

manners of expression; (g) but we note the church of Christ is not harmed; (h) the devil has not made a successful prison break, for he is released only by God's permission and for God's purpose; (i) there is no battle, and no great tribulation—there is only a “gathering” for battle; (j) it is not stated in 20:7 that the devil is loosed for a “little while”; (k) at the moment the church is surrounded by deception and worldliness, God delivers her by destroying Satan—the micro-time could be instantaneous; (l) the church is rescued by heavenly power—this is the same kind of action Ezekiel symbolized of God's victory over his enemies, “God and Magog”; (m) the devil and his forces are consumed by fire from heaven and thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and false prophet had already gone. Contrary to popular opinion, Satan does not rule over hell! He will be tormented right along with all others who have been deceived by him. He controls nothing, he rules nothing. He never has—he only deceived the majority of the world into believing he did.

John's vision (20:11-15) includes all the dead from Adam to the end of the world standing before the “great white throne.” We know this is the final judgment because “Death and Hades” were thrown into the lake of fire (see also Jn. 5:28; Acts 24:15; Rom. 2:6,16; 2 Cor. 5:10). Paul predicts that “death” is man's last enemy and will be defeated at Christ's Second Coming and the final judgment (1 Cor. 15:24-26). God does not need “books” to keep a record of men's deeds. He is omniscient and infallible. “Books” is a word of human language to symbolize that every deed, thought and secret longing of every human being is known and recorded by God. If God wishes to, however, he may “blot out” and “forget” or “remember no more” the sins of people who have trusted in the atoning death of Christ on their behalf (Psa. 51:1-9; Micah 7:19; Isa. 43:25; 44:22; Acts 3:19; Heb. 8:12, etc.). Those human beings whose names are written in “the book of life,” also known as “the Lamb's book of life,” will not be judged by what is in the “book of deeds.” The impenitent, those who have not participated in the first (spiritual) “resurrection” (baptism), will be judged according to what they have done, and what they have not done (Acts 10:42; 17:31; 24:25; Rom. 2:12-16; 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; Heb. 10:26-31; James 4:17, etc.). THERE WILL BE NO GRACE FOR THOSE WHOSE NAMES ARE NOT IN THE “BOOK OF LIFE”—ONLY THE “SECOND DEATH.”

In Rev. chapters 21 & 22 John is given an ideal picture of the ideal kingdom of God which in some way unites heaven and earth! As a means of portraying the ideal kingdom of God, John is given a vision of the new Jerusalem “coming down out of heaven from God.” No carnal kingdom can accomplish God's purposes for man. So, God has instituted a heavenly kingdom, even on this present earth, to serve his ultimate purposes for mankind. Therefore, this “heavenly kingdom” (the church) even while on this present earth, is the ideal and should be functioning, as nearly as circumstances will allow, in all respects as God has revealed his ideal (refer to Matt. 6:10). One day in the sovereign time schedule of God this world order will be dissolved and his ideal kingdom (the church) will be taken out of the destruction and placed in a new world order, with all new blessed circumstances. This what the last vision of the Revelation is all about. The two world orders are only the “twinkling of an eye” apart! **THUS, THE CHURCH TODAY, SHOULD BE EXERTING ALL ITS ENERGIES ATTEMPTING TO FUNCTION NOW AS IT WILL FUNCTION IN THE “NEW**

WORLD ORDER.” That is the message of Revelation to the 7 churches of Asia Minor and to the church of Christ in every year, hour, and day! We should be becoming what we shall be!

In the new world order, there will be no falsehood, nothing ugly or defeating or temporary. All is freely given to those who have proved their right to it by faithfulness, love and loyalty to Christ and his word. Heaven is for those who want it and prepare themselves to live in it. This universe (the present earth) is to be subjected to a process of transformation or redemption and all things will be new. In the next life (except in hell) every vestige of human rebellion and wickedness and every trace of God’s curse will be gone (2 Pet. 3:7,11,12). This new universe, whatever its composition, will be fitted to parallel the “glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:18-23). At the present, in this cursed universe, creation cannot attain the full potential for which God created it in the beginning—our present cosmos (universe) was subjected to “futility and decay” by the Creator because of man’s sin (Rom. 8:18-25). It is therefore futile for any human being to think or hope that this cursed universe can ever satisfy its Creator or reach the potential man needs. The liberty to attain its highest possibility is constrained—it has been subjected to arrested development. It is out of harmony with the Perfectly Harmonious God. That is why circumstances must be changed—only such a place would be fit for “changed” human beings! “The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27). Heaven will be home for the child of God. It is interesting to note that our text (Rev. 21:4) does not say God will simply take away all crying, but that he “will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” The tender touch of a Father! How the tender touch from Jesus on earth (God in the flesh) dispelled sorrow and hurt from those seeking mercy! Our heavenly home will be a place of perfect safety and security—the place of perfect rest or satisfaction, of perfect understanding and love, the place of everlasting permanence. JOHN’S DESCRIPTION OF HEAVEN SHOULD INITIATE AND DEVELOP A LONGING IN OUR HEART FOR HEAVEN THAT WILL KEEP US STRONG AND FAITHFUL TO PREPARE OURSELVES TO DWELL THERE FOREVER!

These unpleasant words (Rev. 21:8) in the midst of glory, serve to remind us there is a definite relationship between the life to come and life that now is! We are to conduct our pilgrimage here in this life in the light of this fact—WE ARE BECOMING WHAT WE SHALL BE! And what we are becoming is the result of that to which we consecrate ourselves (cf. Hosea 9:10; Psa. 115:1-8; 1 Pet. 2:21-25). God is going to give every human being what they actually, deep in their hearts, honestly want and are becoming. If we wish to go to “Abraham’s bosom” when we die Lk. 16:22 (i.e., to an intimate fellowship with the “father of the faithful”) we must “share the faith of Abraham” (Rom. 4:16; 9:6-8; Gal. 3:26-29). Those who do not wish to go where Abraham is (heaven) will be given their wish to go where Abraham is not— hell! These are the cowardly, faithless, polluted, murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars. Those who are ashamed about being a Christian, those who are unbelieving, those who are foul, stinking, detestable, abominable, those who murder and have no respect for human life made in the image of God, those who practice illicit sexual intercourse, those who practice false religions, those who serve images and false gods, and those who speak and live contrary to the truth. These unpleasant (frightening)

words are repeated in abbreviated form in Rev. 22:15) with the addition of “dogs.” The metaphor “dog” is used in the OT for homosexuals (Deut. 23:18) and in the NT for Judaizers (Phil. 3:2). Peter refers to false teachers as “irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed” (2 Pet. 2:12). Lying is the very nature of the devil (Jn. 8:44), and those who continue to speak and live what is false are sons of the devil; their destiny is the lake of fire and brimstone, the second death. Heaven is the inheritance of those who are lovers of truth, those who are honest, and those who speak and live what God’s Word says is real as opposed to what it says is false. The eternal kingdom of the Messiah (Christ) cannot abide anyone who wants to deceive God or his fellow man. A kingdom of liars would be a kingdom in rebellion against the King of Truth.

YES! I would shout for joy if Christ came down out of heaven to consummate his “marriage” to the church, and take all the faithful to be immediately with him and others who have gone there ahead. I have nothing in this world I want to hold on to, and nothing left to do that would be better than heaven! The 1st century Christians longed for Jesus to return and take them out of their tribulations and sorrows. They had a word they constantly said—marana-tha translated means, “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor. 16:22). John writes in Revelation 22:17, “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come.’” Then John adds in 22:20, “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen, Come, Lord Jesus!” The Bride (the church) continually prays that Jesus will come and vindicate her (2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13; 2 Pet. 3:15; 1 Cor. 16:22). Everyone hearing and believing the message of the Spirit (the Bible) and the pleading of the Church should make the coming of the Lord Jesus his constant and personal prayer. THE INVITATION TO JOIN IN EXPECTATION OF THE COMING OF CHRIST IS TO THOSE WHO THIRST. Those who really anticipate the coming of the Lord are those who need him as much as the human body needs water (and the Bread of Life, Jn. 6:35-63, and the fruit from the tree of life, Rev. 22:2). The person who realizes a desperate need (thirst and hunger, see Matt. 5:6) will find heaven satisfying—such a person will come for his “hand-out” of divine grace, Isa. 55:1; Jn. 4:14). Such a person will do whatever the Spirit reveals in his Word must be done to receive this free gift of spiritual life. It is up to the church (the Bride), to proclaim the Word of the Spirit and create in all people this desperate need for grace! Most of present-day Christendom has so thoroughly misrepresented life in Christ, the unbelieving world has said, “I don’t need that”! Therefore, most of the world is unwilling to anticipate the coming of the Lord!

Everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book is warned against tampering with it. This warning is made a number of times in God’s Word (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5ff; Matt. 15:6; 2 Cor. 4:2; Gal. 1:6-9). Thus the principle applies to all the Word of God, but here, specifically, to the book of Revelation. Homer Hailey, professor of Bible at Florida College (Church of Christ) says, “The words of the prophecy are the thoughts, principles, judgments and messages of the book (Revelation). The Lord is not speaking of an honest error in judgment and interpretation, even though this is serious. Rather he condemns the presumptuous and all who manifest a careless or flippant attitude toward the Word. As Lenski intimates, this makes writing about the book a serious and sublime matter

to be pursued with the deepest of reverence for God and his truth.” Honest errors in translating from the original language are equally serious. Men must not “peddle” the book of Revelation (see 2 Cor. 2:17). Today, some have commercialized on this book for their own mercenary purposes. Men must not “tamper” with the Word of God in disgraceful, underhanded, cunning ways (2 Cor. 4:2). And yet, many bizarre and impossible eschatological systems have been imposed upon this book in disgraceful and underhanded ways until there is widespread confusion and disunity among believers as to the fundamental message and meaning of Revelation. Anyone deliberately, knowing better, who takes away or adds to this book, will have his right to the book of life and his right to the tree of life and the blessings of the eternal city REMOVED. Sincere mistakes about the book will be forgiven, but indifference and disgraceful mutilation of it result in eternal condemnation. Remember! every letter to every one of the 7 churches of Asia Minor ends with the admonition: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” People who would never literally omit an English or Greek word from the printed text of Revelation will neglect to read the book, and especially refuse to allow the book to be studied in church assemblies. IN OUR OPINION, THIS COMES DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO “TAKING AWAY FROM THE WORDS OF THIS BOOK”! Christian people MUST NOT NEGLECT this book! That is a divine warning! One of the reasons for lukewarm Christian discipleship is that the church has neglected the real message of the book of Revelation which is: THE IMPERATIVE NEED FOR THE CHURCH TO REPENT, TO ENDURE AND TO HAVE FAITH, BECAUSE THE LAMB IS SOVEREIGN IN AND OVER ALL HEAVEN AND EARTH AND IS COMING AGAIN TO JUDGE AND TO SAVE—JUST AS HE DID UPON THAT ANCIENT ROMAN EMPIRE!

After living with this book of Revelation with the intensity of a researcher and teacher for many years in Bible College, and as a writer of a commentary on it, it is nearly impossible to bring these notes to a close. But we must, and so we close (by the gracious permission of Homer Hailey) with these incomparable words:

“As the vision fades from our view and the last word spoken echoes in our souls, our hearts are wrapped in awe at the majestic sight and sounds which we have beheld and to which we have listened. Surely our faith in God and His Christ has been strengthened, our hope for victory and heaven made more precious, our love for the spiritual and eternal made to abound beyond all previous measure, our will given a permanent determination to succeed, and our whole aim and goal of life become more fixed. Now that we have advanced with John from glory to glory in this drama of spiritual history, conflict, and victory, we feel that we are more than excited spectators of a divine cinema—we are a part of the drama! We continue to share with those early Christians the pressures of political power and intrigue, the subtlety of false religious appeal through human wisdom, philosophy and tradition, and the seduction of the world of lust. Also we share with them the strength, power, and help that come from our heavenly Father through faith in the blood of the Lamb. And we shall share with them the eternal reward of victory and an inheritance in God’s celestial city as the bride of the Lamb. And so with the voice of all creation, let us join the song as they sing:

Unto him that sitteth on the throne,  
and unto the Lamb, be the blessing,  
and the honor, and the glory,  
and the dominion, for ever and ever.”

AMEN and AMEN!

### Introduction to Paul T. Butler Th.D

Paul was born in Springfield Missouri and graduated from Conway High School prior to enlistment in the US Navy. He began serious bible study with correspondence courses from San Jose Bible College. He later enrolled in Ozark Bible College and acquired his Bachelor of Theology degree June of 1961. He received a Master of Biblical Literature degree from Ozark in May of 1973. He received a Doctorate of Theology from The Theological University of America in October of 1990.

Paul taught at Ozark Christian College from 1960 to 1997. He also served many years as registrar for the college.

### Introduction to the Sound Bible Study project.

The Sound Bible Study project is a cooperative effort of Christian educators and Jordan Media Enterprises LLC to provide the serious examination of the Scriptures for the conscientious student. All the teachers are experienced educators who have spent countless hours in the classroom on both sides of the lectern. The audio recordings and written notes are made available for those who wish to learn God's Word at a collegiate level but have been unable to matriculate. There is no intention to compete with the many faithful Bible schools, but rather to serve along side and strengthen both the student and the teacher for a stronger and more effective Kingdom of God that knows how to properly divide the Word of God.

