

Revelation Bible Study

The book of Revelation fascinates and terrifies those who read it and take it seriously because it is a book about the ultimate victory of good over evil, of Jesus Christ over Satan. It is about end times. But it is also a book about the time of the Roman Empire and how Christians were to persevere persecution in that period. The most popular interpretation of Revelation today is conveyed through the “Left Behind” series of Tim LaHaye. I will argue and teach that this relatively new interpretation (it came into vogue in the 19th century) is a misreading of Revelation. Revelation is about the triumph of good over evil, not just in the final days, but in all days. It concludes with the promise of victory for those who put their faith and their lives in Christ’s hands.

Date	Topic	Text
Sept 8	Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature	Topical
Sept 15	Revelation: Introduction	Topical
Sept 22	The Christ of Revelation	1:1-20
Sept 29	Letters to the Churches	2-3
Oct. 6	Lukewarm Christianity	3:14-22
Oct 13	A Vision of Heaven	4-5
Oct 20	<i>Church Business</i>	
Oct 27	The Seven Seals	6-7
Nov 3	Sounding of the Seven Trumpets	8
Nov 10	Demonic Forces	9
Nov 17	<i>Family Meeting: Discuss 2011 Budget</i>	
Nov 24	<i>Thanksgiving Eve Worship Service</i>	
Dec. 1	Final Days	10-11
Dec 8	Satan’s Great Escape	12-13
Dec 15	The Great Judgment	14
Dec. 22	The Just Judgments of God	15-16
Dec 29	No Wednesday service	
Jan. 6	The Fall of Rome	17-18
Jan 13	Songs of Rejoicing	19:1-10
Jan. 20	<i>Church Business Meeting</i>	
Jan. 27	The Second Coming of Jesus Christ	19:11-20:15
Feb. 1	When We All Get to Heaven	21-22

Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature

Story of Childhood

- 5th grader at Brown Elementary School
- Word was out that “the world will end September 16”
- The day of Sep 16 came and we all sort of waited for the big bang
- That night I watched the moon and thought I saw it turn red (Acts 2:20)
- I heard a loud noise and knew the trumpets announcing Christ return were blowing. I knew the end was near. I started to confess every sin I had ever committed and then some I didn’t think were sins...just in case!

After hours of waiting, my heart racing faster than Richard Petty’s stock car, I finally fell asleep. And I woke up and Jesus had not returned. Somewhat relieved, I started my new life over.

What is Apocalyptic Literature?

- 1) The Book of Revelation, the last book of the NT,
 - the first readers didn’t know it was the last book
 - they didn’t know it was a book of the Bible
 - they received it as a letter to be read and heard in the congregation (1:4)
 - it wouldn’t have occurred to them to sit down and read it on their own and parse it verse by verse.
 - it was a certain kind of letter. An Apocalypse.
- is a particular type of literature. There are many kinds of literature in the Bible. If we know what kind of literature it is, the better we can interpret it. Examples:
- i) Parables: an earthly story with a heavenly message. A fictional story with a deep theological truth.
(ex: Parable of the 10 Virgins, a fictional story about being prepared for the *delay* of Christ. Be prepared to go the distance.)
 - ii) Proverbs: general statements used to elicit a particular kind of attitude or action. “*Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.*” (10:4)
 - iii) Historical narrative: “*the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said.”* (Mt 28:5-6)
 - iv) Poetry/Hymns: “*the sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back; the mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs.*” (Ps 114:3-4 re Israel’s escape)
 - v) Epistle: Letters from one Christian to another or to a group of Christians instructing them on doctrine, exhorting them to live ethical lives, or admonishing them for a particular sin. “*Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you.* (1 Cor. 6:4-5)

- 2) Apocalyptic literature is a type of Jewish literature that uses symbolic imagery to communicate hope (in the ultimate triumph of God) to those in the midst of persecution. The events are ordered according to artistic effect rather than chronological patterns.

Apocalyptic Literature is saturated with symbols

Name some symbols surrounding marriage: ring, wedding invitation, pictures of kids, anniversary ring, Bible, flowers, etc.

- Explain how these are more than “just symbols”. They give artistic expression to meaning beyond the power of words.

Power of symbols: example, the Islamic center in Manhattan near Ground Zero

For some it is a powerful symbol of religious liberty in America

For others it is a powerful symbol of Islamic terror and insensitivity toward the victims of 9/11.

The writers of apocalyptic literature know the power of symbols to create a desired perspective on life in the midst of chaos and persecution. Symbols would create terror in the mind of enemies and hope for those who are persecuted.

- angels, trumpets, earthquakes, bottomless pits
- white, red, black, pale horseman
- numbers: 12, 10, 666, 144,000
- 10 horned, 7 headed beast (What’s that about!)
- often the symbols have an immediate historical meaning, but also a future, ongoing meaning.
- there are 7 bowls, letters, churches, seals, trumpets
- there are 7 beatitudes, ascriptions of praise, references to the altar

- the Xtns who received this letter would’ve understood the symbols.
- the symbols were a way to protect themselves
- I knew what that big flag meant when I saw it driving down I-40 to work today
- Others from another era or another country might not understand it
- so, one of the keys to understanding Revelation is understanding the symbols

Apocalyptic Literature is revealing literature

- Comes from the Greek work “apocalypsis” found in Rev. 1:1
- Apocalypsis means “revelation, unveiling”
- But it’s also a “veiling” a partial disclosure and not a clear, unequivocal disclosure
- Apocalyptic literature is usually a narrative, stories disclosing otherwise inaccessible secrets to a human seer. “Seer” means one who sees visions.

- The disclosure is usually through a dream or vision
 - o John had a dream Rev 1:1-2
 - so John had a vision, then wrote it down
 - when he wrote it down he drew upon his knowledge of the OT and the visions in it
 - ex. of the 404 verses that comprise Revelation, 278 verses are allusions to the OT
 - o Daniel had a dream and visions passed through his mind. He wrote down the substance of his dream (Dan 7:1).
 - o Paul had dreams 2 Cor 12:2 *“I knew a man caught up in the 3rd heaven”*
 - 1 Thess 4:16-18 *“the Lord himself will come down...”*
 - 1 Cor 13 *....then I shall see face to face”*
 - o there is one main theme to the vision: the triumph of Jesus Christ
 - this vision is played out again and again
 - therefore Revelation should not be read for chronological understanding
 - ex: 6:12-17 reveals the dissolution of the cosmos. You would think it would be over. It’s not. We have other events which follow

Apocalyptic Literature is born out of crisis

- There are two apocalyptic books in the Bible - Daniel and Revelation.
- Other books have apocalyptic passages – Ezekiel, Zechariah, Matthew, Mark, Paul
- Both Daniel and Revelations are born out of crisis. Apocalyptic literature resolves the crisis by revealing that good will overcome evil.

Crisis in Daniel

- o Babylonian exile – even the return did not free the Jews from Persian control
- o Greek domination, led by Alexander the Great (333 BC) followed Persian control
- o When Alexander the Great was killed in battle at the young age of 33, his vast kingdom was divided among his 4 generals. These generals and their descendants continued to fight over control of Palestine and keep it away from the Romans.
- One of the descendants was Antiochus (175 – 162 BC). He revived the idea of the Olympian gods of Greece. He believed the only way to establish control of his empire was to institute one religion. Make Zeus supreme.
- Antiochus became violent. Sought to abolish the Jews.
- He decreed the daily sacrifices in the temple cease.
- An Greek altar was erected on the Jewish altar of sacrifice
- Swine were sacrificed in the temple
- Copies of the Torah were destroyed.
- Penalties for possessing a copy of the Law or practicing the rite of circumcision were death.
- Sabbath observance declared illegal.

- An aged priest from the town of Lydda organized active resistance. His name was Mattathias. He refused to perform a pagan sacrifice in the temple. A renegade Jew in the company of the king's officer stepped forward to offer the sacrifice, and Mattathias killed him on the altar. He then turned on the king's officer and killed him.
- He summoned his 5 sons and all sympathetic Jews to guerilla warfare against the Syrians. 167 BC. Mattathias was killed, and his son Judas took over. After several successful skirmishes with the Syrians, the Maccabees reclaimed Jerusalem,
- and On Dec 25 he entered the temple and destroyed the altar that had been dedicated to Zeus. He renewed sacrifices to Yahweh. Afterwards, the day was observed as an annual festival and continues to be observed each year by the Jews as the Festival of Hanukkah. Now you know the rest of the story!!!
- It was during these chaotic times that the book of Daniel was given its final form. It was deemed sacred Scripture b/c it addressed the crisis, the anxiety of the Jews, and promised them ultimate vindication by a righteous God.
- Crisis is resolved by a promise of resurrection. Daniel is the only OT book to clearly speak of the Resurrection. It was also the last to be written (ca 165 BC)
- **Crisis in Revelation**
 - Rev. 1:9 "I, John, your companion in suffering..." He is at Patmos, penal island
 - persecution of the Christians by the Romans
 - Rev 2:3 "you have endured hardships for my name..."
 - Rev 13-20 suffering is attributed to the beast (Rome)
 - o The second coming of Christ has not come
 - o The crisis is resolved in Rev by the second coming of Christ and Christians enjoyed a new heaven and a new earth.

Apocalyptic Literature persuades through shared experiences of divine revelation

- Doesn't try to convince by appealing to Scripture. Ex: Romans 3:10 is a quotation from Ps. 14: 1-3 "There is no one who is righteous, not even one."
- Doesn't persuade through rational logic. Ex: Rom 3:27ff. Paul tries to persuade Romans that man is saved by faith, not by observing the Law.
 - "Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles too? Since there is only one God who will justify the circumcized by faith and the uncircumcised by the same faith."*

- Authority of John and Daniel comes from their direct encounter with an angel or heavenly being which revealed secrets to them.
- Apoc. Lit is compelling and authoritative b/c we are actually carried through the process and see things in detail as described by the seer. For example:
 - o We experience Daniel's terror as he sees mysterious beasts arising from the sea and a powerful angel descending from heaven
 - o We experience John's wonder as he sees the great harlot dressed in crimson and purple and riding on the 7 headed, 10 horned beast.
- This allows us to see the supernatural and coming events of God's judgment on the world. We see that we are a part of some great historical movement in which God will ultimately vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked.
- So as we read Revelation we need to:
 - o Feel it, rather than simply understand it
 - o Let our emotions be involved
 - o Use our imaginations to experience the terror and tragedy, the triumph and the timeless power of God
 - o Allow it to build our confidence up in a God that will come to our defense, if not in this life, most certainly in the life to come.
- As we read it, we are encouraged (I believe) to allow our historical circumstances to be viewed in light of the Apocalypse. That is to say, we should let our perception of our world include a view from heaven.
- In Revelation we have a glimpse from heaven on how God views our history. **He is letting us in on the secret!** We are a part of the divine plan to bring all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The final and ultimate victory is assured. Therefore we can be confident that our faith will be rewarded, our enemies will be defeated, and we shall overcome death, hell and Satan simply by being obedient to Christ. The world may not recognize such a supernatural perspective for living, but we believe that this incredible vision that John had on the island of Patmos was not only authentic, but is an ongoing authoritative word for the entire world, for believers and non-believers, for the good and evil.

Apocalyptic Literature is usually about the eschaton

- eschaton = end
- not end of personal human existence, but the end of the cosmos as we know it
- end of Israel/Christian faith
- when it crisis, this question emerges
- we have seen judgment on Israel when Israel was disobedient
- but what about when Israel is faithful
- Daniel: mothers were having their babies killed b/c they were circumcised
- John: children were seeing their parents killed b/c they said "Jesus is Lord"

- so what will happen/
- Is God being faithful to those Christians? Is God keeping his promises
- Revelation acknowledges evil
- Revelation acknowledges that evil is in the driver's seat
- God has allowed this. Demonic forces are on the loose.
- the escape is not through earthly power or political power
- the escape is through the mighty hand of God
- it will come through resurrection and judgment
- God will act, even after death.

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Other Apocalyptic Literature

- Daniel	165 BC
- First Enoch	164 BC
- Jubilees	150 BC
- Psalms of Solomon	48 BC
- Testament of Abraham	70-100 AD
Second Baruch (Jewish)	90 AD
Sibyline Oracles,	2 nd Century
Dead Sea Scrolls	200 BC – 100 AD

Revelation: Introduction

I. Introduction

- The most widely disputed, interpreted book in the Bible
- Barclay says “It is the most notoriously difficult book in the NT.”
- Martin Luther denied a place in the NT for Revelation, along with James, Jude, 2 Peter, Hebrews. Included it and the others on a separate list following the other 22 books. Luther said “the writer had the boldness to add threats and promises for those who kept or disobeyed his works, while no one knows what he means.”
- John Calvin, the Swiss Reformer, wrote a commentary on every book of the Bible but Rev.
- Eusebius (d 340) , Bishop of Caesarea, classified all Xtn literature of his time
 - Accepted
 - Rejected
 - Disputed. Revelation was still disputed in his day.
- Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386) omitted from his list of canonical books and forbid its use publicly or privately
- to this day Catholic and Protestant lectionaries have minimal use for Revelation and the Greek Orthodox lectionary never mentions it

Why? Not just the bad grammar and the grotesque images

- theology is troublesome in some parts
- in Revelation the evil city of Babylon receives not forgiveness, but double for all her sins
- those who receive the mark of the beast “shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the lamb” (14:10)
- what did Jesus say to those who nailed him to the cross? (Lk 23:34)
- in Revelation violent scene after violent scene is perpetrated by God (chp 6,8,9,16)
- in contrast Jesus taught his disciples to turn the other cheek, love their enemies, pray for those who persecute you (Mt 5:38-44)
- he embodied the teaching in his own life and death
- in Revelation salvation seems to be based on deeds. The word “grace” is not found anywhere in the book of Revelation
- Our study will be the most difficult we will have.
- Like riding one of those wild broncos on the Rodeo channel. Even the pros only hope to stay on about 8 or 9 seconds. The goal is not to be killed or injured seriously. But if they hold on, they have a great sense of accomplishment. If we hang in there, we will receive a few blessings, even if we don’t know when Jesus will return, or understand completely the meaning of all the symbols of Revelation.

II. Why Read It?

A. It's in our Bible

- we have a Bible of 66 books, and all have been deemed sacred
- we aren't given the option to pick and choose which ones we will and will not accept
- part of the problem of our culture is dismissing parts of the Bible we don't like, understand, or disagree with.
- we have made ourselves judge of Scripture, rather than letting it judge us
- just b/c a book is difficult doesn't mean we should avoid it

B. God can speak to us through this book

- this is part of God's Word to us
- just b/c it's difficult doesn't mean that God is silent in it
- Revelation was meant to encourage the 7 churches
- It continues to encourage persecuted Xtns around the country
- It continues to be a call to faithfulness in times of persecution and crisis
- Rev 1:3 "Blessed are those who read it"

C. Defending the Faith

- there are many people who abuse the Bible, and particularly have abused the reading of Revelation
- if the only people who are interpreting Revelation are the abusers, manipulators for material gain, then that's the impression the world receives
- if responsible interpreters w/in the mainstream of Xty and tradition fail to interpret Revelation, the task will go, by default to others

D. Politics

- Revelation is a political book
- it is written to confront a political empire
- key words: power, kingdom, throne
- it wasn't written for personal Bible study, so we can get our heart right with God
- Revelation makes the audacious political claim that all powers will bow down before Jesus and his kingdom
- the final image is not individuals having a picnic, but a redeemed city coming from heaven to earth
- It's something that the church must constantly proclaim
- our times are not all that different
- John lived in pre-Christian times. We live in post-Christian times.

III. Author: John

- 1:1 “He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.”
- 1:4 “John, to the churches in the province of Asia“
- 1:9 “I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that is ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”
- 22:8 “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.”

We know from this:

1. John considered himself a servant of Christ
2. That he was writing to seven churches in Asia
3. That he considered himself a brother and fellow sufferer
4. That he saw this vision while on the Island of Patmos.
5. ---But there is much we don't know.

Identity

1. Since there is no other identifying mark, his identity has been extensively debated. Doesn't say for example:
 - a. I, John, the writer of the gospel
 - b. I, John Mark
 - c. I, John the apostle or John the beloved or John who walked with Jesus
 - d. I, John, son of Zebedee
2. There is still a great deal of debate about which John wrote this. Fortunately, the interpretation of the book isn't dependent on a conclusive answer.

Other traditions about John

- He drank poison but did not die
- He raised the dead
- Converted a notorious robber
- Was carried to worship services in his feeble years

John's writing

- His writing is vivid and pictorial and powerful. He writes in Greek and thinks in Hebrew. He quotes or alludes to the OT 245 times, from 20 of the 27 books
- The poorest writing in the NT. Poorest Greek, grammar and syntax. “He can make mistakes in grammar and syntax that no school boy would make.” (Barclay)
- Shouldn't bother us about the authority of the text. To say “Ain't God good” is a wonderfully true theological statement. It's just terrible English.
- This should be expected of a fisherman with little or no education.

IV. Historical Context

- Probably written in the reign of Domitian around 90-95 BC
- Why? We can see a completely new attitude toward Rome in Revelation.

A. Early Attitude Toward Rome

1. Roman magistrates were a refuge for Christians against the Jews and the mobs. Acts 22:30-40 rescued Paul from a lynching. Acts 23:12-31 (esp v23-24) Roman tribune in Jerusalem tried to ensure Paul's safety.
2. Paul was proud of his Roman citizenship (Acts 24:10-11, Acts 16:36-40)
3. Paul exhorted Christians to obey the government (Rom 13:1-7)
4. Peter told Christians to honor the emperor (1Peter 2:12-17)

In Revelation (17:5-6) there is nothing but blazing hatred for Rome, the mother of harlots, drunk with the blood of saints and martyrs.

B. Evolution of Persecution in Rome

- By time of Domitian, Caesar worship was empire-wide
- Universal demand for all people to worship Caesar
- b/c of the refusal to do this, Christians were persecuted
- How? Once a year everyone in Empire had to go to magistrate and burn a pinch of incense and say "Caesar is Lord." It didn't matter what you did after this. You could worship other gods. But this was required.
- Why? The Romans were trying to unify a heterogeneous empire. They were trying to unify a terrifically diverse culture of many languages, ethnicities, and religions. They determined they could unify religion quicker and easier than anything else (language. Race, customs)
- Thus, to refuse to say "Caesar is Lord" was not an act of heresy or irreligion. It was an act of political disloyalty.
- Roman Emperors didn't just decide one day they were going to persecute the Xtns. It evolved from the grass roots.

C. Pax Romana

- Gratitude toward Rome by the people
- Impartial Roman justice replaced capricious oppression
- Security replaced insecurity (pirates, thugs) (Mayor Julianni's victories against crime in NYC)
- Roads spanned the world, trade increased
- E.J. Goodspeed wrote: "This was the pax romana. The provincial under Roman law found himself in a position to conduct his business, provide for his family, send his letters, and make his journeys in security, thanks to the strong hand of Rome."
- Persecution didn't begin w/ deification of Roman emperors. It began with the deification of Rome. Personified in the goddess Roma. First temple built to her in 195 BC in Smyrna.

- It was no great step to move from deification of an Empire to a man, the Emperor.
- Began w/ the worship of Julius Caesar after his death.
- In 29 BC, Augustus granted permission to erect temples for the joint worship of Roma and Caesar.
- Not long after that, Augustus gave permission for the provincials to erect temples to Roma and himself. Citizens were too dignified to worship a living man.
- Bit by bit, this custom grew. Most people worshipped different gods. But the unifying religious impulse was to deify and worship the living emperor. A priesthood developed. Worship was organized. Religious officials were given high honor.
- It was not meant to wipe out other religions. Simply to supersede them.
- Caligula (37-41) demanded worship, even by the Jews. He was a madman, who fortunately died before his programs were carried out.
- Nero (54 -68) didn't take his divinity seriously. Didn't force worship on Xtns, although he hated them. He was famous for persecuting Xtns, not b/c of their worship habits but b/c he needed a scapegoat for blaming the burning of Rome.
- With the coming of Domitian (81-96) things changed. He was a devil. Cold-blooded murderer. Demanded emperor worship. Especially against Jews and Xtns. Enacted law which required all pronouncements to begin "Our Lord and God Domitian commands."

D. Church's Options

What could the Xtn's do?

- They had no many wise and no mighty. No influence, power, or prestige. They were despised by many b/c of the vast propaganda against them.
 - o Were called "atheists." Why? B/c they wouldn't call Domitian God.
 - o Were called "cannibals." Why? B/c they ate Christ's body.
 - o Were called "sexual perverts." Why? B/c they believed in loving everybody.

Nerva (96-98) repealed the savage laws, but the damage was done.

Revelation was the call to persevere, remain faithful, and a crown of glory would await you. It was an inspired vision to dramatically portray the fact that Jesus Christ and all those who believed in him would be exalted and those who opposed him and his followers would be forever doomed.

IV. History of Interpretation

- Revelation has been interpreted in basically 4 different ways throughout history

1. Spiritual

- also called poetic or spiritual
- assumed the author directs his message to no particular historical period
- prophecy is understood as “timeless truths”
- this interpretive method used allegory as its primary tool
 - after the memory of John’s historical situation faded early Xtn interpreters used allegory to interpret Revelation
 - also used of other books in NT
 - in the allegorical method the details aren’t attributed to historical events, but to ideas that are universally human
 - Origen: interpreted the 7 headed beast w/ 10 horns as the 7 deadly sins and the power of evil
 - when this approach faded away there were still theologians who interpreted Revelation in terms of spiritual truths
 - Revelation was a struggle of good vs. evil
- the value of this approach is that it allows every generation to find truth in Revelation
- the weakness of this approach is that it dismisses the historical aspects of the letter and therefore denies the recipients of the letter any real meaning for their crisis

2. Church-historical

- also called continuous-historical method
- prophecy is understood as prediction of the long-range future
- Rev 2-3 are regarded as addressed to the 7 churches of Asia
- Rev 4-22 are interpreted as prediction of all history, from John’s time to the end of the world
- in practice, each interpreter sees Revelation pointing to his own time
- interpreters typically see their generation as the “last generation”
- the author of the oldest extant commentary we have on Revelation, Victorinus, considered his time to coincide with the 6th seal, just before the end
- various seals and trumpets, represent certain eras
- following Martin Luther, many Protestants considered the papacy as the beast
- Roman Catholics, not to be outdone, labeled Martin Luther as the anti-christ
- each word in his name has 6 letters.
- value of this approach is that each generation can see the book as relevant to

their own time

- problem: the book would've meant nothing to its early readers if was all going to be fulfilled centuries later
 - it also misunderstands prophecy as being reduced to predictions
 - each generation that has chosen this method has been wrong so far

3. Dispensational

- also called futurist, church- historical, or pre-millennialist method
- likewise considers Revelation to be a prediction,
- but it differs from the church-historical view in two important ways
 - 1) the 7 churches of Asia represent 7 periods of church history from the apostolic church (Ephesus) to the dead church of the last days (Laodicea)
 - the interpreter usually considers his time to be the time of apostasy
 - this method has flourished outside the mainline of Xty for the last 100 years
 - it's the newest of all 4 methods
 - it's the method behind the "Left Behind" series written by Tim LaHaye

2) remaining chapters (4-22) predict only the events that happen in the last few years of world history.

- this means most of the book predicts events still in the future
- interpreters of this method always see themselves living in the last days
- the "beast" in chp 13, has yet to appear, a confederation of 10 nations which will be the revival of the Roman Empire

- value of this method is that it reveals Revelation as dealing with end times
- it also heightens the readers anticipation with the end times being soon

- problems: it always locates the end in the interpreters lifetime
 - it leads to people dismissing the doomsayers who cry wolf yearly
 - it often advocates the necessity of nuclear war as part of God's plan
 - it can lead to a lack of concern for this world, since God is going to end it.

- **Roots:**

- most recent type of interpretation
- created by a group of British and American ministers in late 19th C
- John Nelson Darby (1800-82) congealed this view into an intricate system
- popularized in America by Charles Ingersoll Scofield.
- Scofield was a lawyer, turned preacher.

- He had no theological training
- he published an edition of the Bible “the Scofield Reference Bible.”
- his interpretative scheme was imbedded in the footnotes
- he started a Correspondence Bible School in Dallas
- it continued after his death as Dallas Theological Seminary

4. Contemporary-Historical Interpretation

- contemporary refers to John and his readers, not modern people
- also called “preterist” (a grammatical term equivalent to past tense)
- it attempts to understand the meaning of Revelation for its original readers
- what was John conveying to the churches of Asia
- then, it moves on to, what does that mean for us
- this treats Revelation like the other books of the NT.
- they were written as letters to particular people or groups
- most critical Bible scholars utilize this method today
- It is the method I use for our reading of the Bible
- Beginning: What did it mean?
- Now: What does this mean for me and the church?
- this method assumes John to the churches which concerned their situation, that they basically understood what he was saying
- modern readers can’t move on w/ interpretations, until we understand what these churches were reading and hearing.

Extras

Traditions about John

1. From mid-second century onward, the book was widely, though not universally ascribed to John the Apostle, son of Zebedee (Metzger)
2. Justin Martyr of Rome (150 AD)
3. Irenaeus of Gaul (80)
4. Tertullian of North Africa (200)
5. Accepted in the West (Rome) before the East (Greece)
6. John was banished to Patmos, a tiny island off the western shore of the Province of Asia (what is now Turkey)
7. This was part of the systemic persecution of the Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD)
8. He saw his visions on Patmos and at Domitian's death he returned to Ephesus to write or send his letter

Victorinus (near end of the 3rd century AD)

“John, when he saw these things, was in the island of Patmos condemned to the mines of Domitian the Emperor. There, therefore he saw the revelation... When he was afterwards set free from the mines, he handed down this revelation which he had received from God.”

Jerome

“In the 14th year after the persecution of Nero, John was banished to the island of Patmos, and there wrote the Revelation... Upon the death of Domitian, and upon the repeal of his acts by the senate, because of their excessive cruelty, he returned to Ephesus, when Nerva was emperor.”

Simple Outline of Revelation

I. Introduction of Author (1:1-8)

II. John in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (1:9-3:22)

- A. John's Call (1:9-20)
- B. Letter to the seven churches (2:1-3:22)

III. John caught up on the Spirit to heaven (4:1-16:21)

- A. John's vision of heaven and the 7-sealed scroll (4:1-5:14)
- B. The seven seals (6:1-16:21)

IV. John taken in the Spirit to the desert (17:1-21:8)

- A. John and the angel (17:1-19:10)
- B. The judgment and the two beasts (19:11-21)
- C. The judgment and the dragon (20:1-10)
- D. The judgment of the dead (21:9-22:20)

V. John taken in the Spirit to a mountain (21:9-22:9)

- A. John and the angel (21:9-14)
- B. Measurement of Jerusalem (21:15-21)
- C. The city's light and life (21:22-22:5)
- D. Conclusion (22:6-9)

VI. Conclusion (22:21)

The Christ of Revelation

Revelation 1:1-20

- the painting on display is by Hans Burgkmair, 1518
- “St. John the Evangelist in Patmos”
- oil on wood
- part of a triptych of paints on wood (Martin Luther on left, Erasmus on the right)
- currently in Munich, Germany

Introduction:

- First chapter introduces us to the writer, his vision and the lead protagonist of this heavenly tale
- John introduces himself as a servant of Christ
- He informs us this vision has been given for the benefit of the seven churches. The entire letter is written to these churches, not just chapter 2 and 3.
- It’s a letter, the longest letter in the NT. It’s an apocalyptic letter, but it’s a letter nonetheless.
- And gives us an opening glimpse of his first vision which reveals some important truths about Jesus Christ.

Thus we are given the preliminary, but essential foundations for everything we’re to understand about Jesus Christ, here in this prelude to the book.

What is John revealing to us about Christ at the beginning?

Who is the Christ of the book of Revelation?

1. He is the revelation of God
2. He has an eternal nature
3. He is divine

I. The Revelation of Jesus Christ (vv 1-3)

- John’s written account of his vision to the 7 churches begins “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him...*”
- The first thing John is dealing with is the authority of these words he is about to pass along.
- His claim is that this revelation (about Christ) has been given by God
- There is an authority here that stands beyond human scrutiny. It is beyond proof. It needs no human sanction. It stands above human rationality or reason. John isn’t going to try to argue his message, but simply tell what he has seen. What he has seen has come from God, and it deals essentially with who Christ is, was, and will be.
- This is not John’s letter. It is God’s letter to these churches, not John’s letter.
- Gal 1:12 Paul didn’t receive the gospel from any man. He received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.
- John 7:8 Jesus made this same claim. “*My teaching is not mine, but His that sent me.*” Jesus received his message, his call, his teachings from God.

- In opening his Apocalypse like this, John is declaring (as Paul did, as Jesus did), that these words/visions are from God

Illustration:

The Southern Baptists found themselves in another controversy when they declared a special emphasis to proclaim the Gospel to the Jews. They adopted a resolution calling on Southern Baptists to follow in the footsteps of the early church to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, to the Jews first, then to the Gentiles. This has caused a stir.

One Raleigh New and Observer editorialist called the Baptist arrogant and insensitive for doing this. They arrogantly believe they are the only ones who know the truth and know God, “insensitive in telling other people how to live their lives.” One prominent Jewish rabbi equated this evangelistic stance with the spiritual substance which gave energy to the Holocaust. In other words, those who are convinced we are in error are those who will seek to destroy us.

In days of “toleration is good” and when toleration means acceptance, the church is tempted to forget the basic message of the Gospel, that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God, and that we (and John, and Paul, and Jesus) are called to share this good news with the world. We are not attempting to evangelize the world because of our intolerance of differing beliefs, but because of our obedience to that which has been revealed to us: Jesus Christ is the resurrected Lord, the Son of God, the salvation for the Jews and the Gentiles.

We can only proclaim that which has been revealed to us.

Application:

This has been the means by which God has revealed Himself and his Truth throughout history. Truth isn’t discovered. It’s revealed. God takes the initiative in making his truth known throughout the world.

I didn’t learn how to be saved. I learned what God had done through Jesus Christ to save me, and I received it. There was a divine transaction initiated by God where he revealed who Jesus was, what Jesus had done, and what I had done (sinned like all my human brothers and sisters). This became more than information or even knowledge. It became an overwhelming burden, like a boulder that had been placed on my body. And I gave in. God made himself known to me, and I sought Him, who had first sought me.

God is still in the revelation business. He reveals to us His Truth. His will for our lives. Our incompleteness without Him. His principles for living in right relationship with him and others. Obviously, we have to receive, give in to this revelation. But it is not something we create, manufacture, or imagine on our own.

God is even now seeking to reveal his will to you and our church.

“what must soon take place”

- this is the fascination of Revelation.

- “soon” makes a big difference
- it’s made many Xtians dismiss it, disregard it b/c Christ has not returned and “if the end is near” means 2000 years, it doesn’t coincide w/ our experience of time
- yet the idea of “what must soon take place” has been proclaimed not only here but also w/ Jesus (Mark 1:15)

- Paul (Rom 13:11-12)
- James 5:8
- 1 Ptr 4:7

What do we do with this? Could it be a way for the Lord to help us recognize the urgency of decision, the depth of possibility each day? Do you know someone who looked death in the face, came very close to death, and b/c of that was able to see richer colors, enjoy the taste of chocolate even more, grasp the preciousness of each moment. Maybe this is what God is doing for us spiritually. He’s not teasing us, saying “I’m coming today, and then not come.” He’s saying I could come each and every day, so live with a sense of expectation and obedience.

“blessed is the one who reads” “blessed are those who hear, take to heart”

- the first of 7 beatitudes in the letter of Revelation
- this is significant, though understated.
- this letter is filled with blessings
- this blessing is for those who read, hear, and obey this letter.
- can you imagine not having a Bible
- most of us have 2 or 3.
- now we can go to the internet and read 20 translations
- what a blessing it was for the early church just to listen to this read, and then take it to heart
- think of it like a grandparent who seldom gets to see a grandchild
- blessed is the one who gets to see, hear, and talk to their grandchild.”

II. The Eternal Nature of Christ (1:4-8)

- A second thing that is revealed about Christ is his eternal nature.
- v 4b ***“grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come”***
- this is reference to the eternal nature of Christ. Is. Was. Is to come.
- you would think it would read: “who was, and is, and shall be.”
- but this is more than an existential statement
- it’s more than just telling us that Christ is.
- it affirms that our Lord is someone who does something. Jesus acts
- Jesus has come. Has lived. Has died. Has lived again. - Jesus will come again.
- ***“from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”***

- these descriptive phrases identifying Jesus build on one another
- Jesus is the “faithful witness”, the Greek term for witness is *martus*, from which we get our word “martyr.” Jesus was the faithful witness to God to the point of death.
 - “firstborn from the dead”, Jesus did not remain dead. He was born again. He was resurrected. He is the model and all his followers will be raised.
- “**ruler of the kings**” : His resurrected vindicated him. Even death could not hold him.
 - he will rule Caesar and all his rivals
 - this is a political statement. This is blasphemy in the Roman Empire.
 - this is the kind of statement can get the Xtns killed. But they need not worry. Jesus is the ruler of all.
- Jesus says, “***I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty!***” (v 8) again in Rev. 21:6.
 - the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the beginning and the end
- Again this is confirmation of earlier writings about Jesus
- He is eternal. He always has been and always will be.
- John also began his Gospel with this same announcement, that Jesus of Nazareth was more than a man who died after 33 years of life on earth. He was present in the beginning (John 1:1)
- Paul also wrote about this (Col 1:17)
 - “*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*”
- The writer of Hebrews succinctly said: Heb 13:8
 - “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

App:

What is the significance of this? Why does this matter? Recall the context. John is writing in a time of severe persecution among the Christians. The Roman Empire is now in a period where Caesar worship is being required, and the Xtns, who are refusing to do this, are being systematically persecuted. In this context, John is encouraging them by saying, the person who has revealed Himself to you as Lord, the one you are worshipping, the one you are dying for, ... is no Johnny come lately. He existed before any of the Caesars. He is present now. And when the Roman Empire collapses, Christ will still be present, alive and sovereign.

Nikita Khrushchev said when the Soviets first sent a rocket beyond the moon: “Our rocket has passed the moon. It is heading toward the sun, and we have not discovered God. We are turning

out the lights in heaven that no man will ever be able to turn on again. We are breaking the yoke of the Gospel, the opiate of the masses. Let us go forth, and Christ shall be relegated to mythology.”

Well, Khrushchev is gone, Breshnev is gone, Cherenko is gone, Andropov is gone, Yeltsin is gone, Putin will be gone one day. The communist wall crumbled from the weight of its own moral atheistic decay. Why? The movement had a focal point that was contrary to Christ.

Jesus Christ is the only one worth following, no matter what the price of following Him, for he is the only one who was, is and shall be. He existed before we ever saw the sun rise and he will still be reigning as King of Kings and Lord of Lords long after the political, social, and economic revolutions have run their course. And thus, we are certain to celebrate if we remain faithful and persevere to our end, or the end, whichever comes first.

III. The Divinity of Christ (v 9-20)

- John speaks as a prophet. He has a vision. But he also speaks as a pastor
- He is one of them. “*companion in suffering.*”
- he suffers with them because of “*the word of the Lord and the testimony of Jesus.*”
- implication: His preaching has gotten him in trouble
 - his Xtn leadership has landed him on Patmos
 - an island 75 miles west of Ephesus
- we don’t have evidence Patmos was a penal colony w/ prison
- we do have evidence it was a fortified island
- it was a place for trouble makers (social, political, religious)
- John was probably banished there, isolated from his churches, but not in prison

- When: *The Lord’s Day*
 - this is the first occurrence of the phrase in Xtn literature
 - refers to Sunday, the day of Christ resurrection
 - the day of worship for Xtns, differentiating them from the Jews.
 - Jews rested on Sabbath. Xtns worshiped on the first day

What happened? He was “*in the Spirit*”

- it was a manifestation of receiving a prophetic vision
- it comes from divine initiative. He didn’t have to fast, pray, to get in the spirit.
- He was told to write his vision on a scroll and send it to the 7 churches in Asia Minor.

What John saw in Revelation 1

- John turned around and “*saw a voice.*” (v 12) How can you see a voice?
 - that’s like saying I added 2+2 and got “blue”
 - or like saying I heard something that sounded “purple”
 - or I had some tacos that tasted like Algebra.
 - Philosophy: Can God create a rock so large he can’t move it?
 - Hint: John saw that which transcends our physical senses.
- **What did John see and what did it mean?**

Saw

7 golden lamp stands
 Son of man
 white robe
 golden sash
 white head and hair
 blazing eyes
 bronze feet
 voice of rushing water
 seven stars in right hand
 double edged sword
 face like sun

Meaning

7 churches (1:20)
 ruler (Dan 7:13)
 priest (Ex 28:4)
 royalty (1 Macc)
 ancient (Dan 7:9)
 all seeing (Dan 10:6)
 strong (Dan 10:6)
 loud (Dan 10:6, Ezk 43:2)
 angels (1:20)
 Word of God (Is 1:20)
 holy (Dan 10:6)

All of these images bring to mind OT images ascribed to God

- Dan 7:9 “the hair of his head was white like wool”
- Ezek 43:2 his voice was like the roar of rushing waters”
- Job 38:31 “can you bind the beautiful Pleiades (stars)”
- Isaiah 11:4 “He shall smite the earth w/ the rod of the mouth”

But the Son of Man was a suffering servant, a weak figure.

- Mark 8:31 “son of man must suffer many things”
- Luke 9:58 “son of man has nowhere to lay his head”
- Mark 13:26, Rev 1:7 “he will come in glory”

So what? The Jesus who suffered and died was, not simply a prophet, a great teacher, a divine spirit...He was God.

Effect:

- when John saw this he nearly fainted
- “I fell at his feet as though dead.” (v 1:17)
- remember how we talked about the 3rd commandment, taking the Lord’s name in vain, which meant we aren’t to be casual, not just in our speech, but in our relationship to God.
- John is not casual
- He recognizes the holiness of being in the presence of God and he falls in reverent fear
- Yet, notice what Jesus does.
- He doesn’t smite him. He touches him. He heals him. “Don’t be afraid.”
- He affirms his divinity. “I am the first and the last.”

Conclusion:

Thus, those who are suffering now can look to the Christ who suffered, and be confident about the future. The weakness portrayed in Jesus, and felt by persecuted Christians, will one day reveal itself and power and glory. And all those who joined in the persecution of Christians will see their error, be judged according to God’s perfect judgment, and never be a threat again.

So here at the beginning of this visionary glimpse of the world from God’s heavenly perspective, we learn some things at the outset about Jesus Christ.

- **He is revealed** to us by God. He is God’s Truth discernable only by the power of God and not the wisdom of men.
-
- **He is eternal** in nature. He was, he is, and he shall be. The Xtn faith is no passing fad b/c it is founded on the one who was from the beginning and shall be in the end.
-
- **He is divine.** Though he suffered, bled, and died, He was truly the same in essence with God though he was revealed in the flesh. Since the fullness of God rests in him, we again can be confident his message is true, his works are true, and these revelations have come from God.

Concluding Song: “Unveiled Hope” by Michael Card

Letter to the Churches in Revelation 2-3

1. The Church at Ephesus

Image of Christ: The one who holds the 7 stars in his right hand and walks among the 7 golden lampstands.

Commendation: Hard work, perseverance, intolerant of wicked men, tested those who claim apostleship

Condemnation: You have forsaken your first love

2. The Church at Smyrna

Image of Christ: The First and the Last

Commendation: Richness in poverty

Condemnation: None

3. The Church at Pergamum

Image of Christ: Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword

Commendation: You remain true

Condemnation: Hold to the teaching of Balaam, hold to the teaching of Nicolaitans

4. The Church at Thyratira

Image of Christ: Eyes are blazing like fire and feet are like burning bronze

Commendation: Deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance and growth

Condemnation: You tolerate Jezebel

5. The Church at Sardis

Image of Christ: Him who holds the 7 spirits of God and the 7 stars

Commendation: Some walk with Christ

Condemnation: Seem alive, but are dead. Need to wake up.

6. The Church at Philadelphia

Image of Christ: Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David

Commendation: Kept my word, not denied me, endured patiently

Condemnation: None

7. The Church at Laodicea

Image of Christ: Words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation

Commendation: None

Condemnation: Neither hot or cold. Lukewarm.

Letter to the Churches

Revelation 2-3

Introduction:

- Setting moves from the heavenly Christ in Chapter 1 to the earthly churches in 2-3.
- Show the 7 churches on the map.
- 7 churches located in the western part of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey)
- there were more than 7 churches in Asia. Colassae for example. the number seven is a symbol for completeness. This is a letter to all the churches of Asia.

- The 7 messages have 4 things in common

1. Given to the angel of the church

- angels are messengers. So it could've been given to the bishop
- more likely symbolizes the transcendent nature of the church
- the church is on earth, but it is a divine institution.
- the church is more than a social service agency. The church is eternal/divine

2. Prefaced with an identification of Christ that was used in Chapter 1

- remember, all those images are OT quotes or allusions
- they are depict some aspect of Christ's divine nature
- Jesus was not just a prophet or moral person. He was the Son of God and the judge of all the world.
- the entire book of Revelation is predicated upon the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the messianic texts and promises of the OT.
- Jesus crucifixion, death, and resurrection are vindication of his divinity
- at Ephesus, Jesus is described as the one who holds the seven stars
- we're told what that means.
- the 7 stars are the 7 angels of the churches of Asia (1:20)
- Jesus is the one who holds the angels in his right hand.
- This is a sign of power and divinity. If you hold something in your right hand you control it. Jesus controls these angels because he is divine.

3. Asserts commendations, condemnation, or both for the churches

- 2 of the letters contain only commendations (Smyrna and Philadelphia).
- The other 5 have condemnations.
- One (Laodicea) has no commendation.

4. Concludes w/ an appeal to hold fast and listen to the Spirit.

- "let him who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"
- this is how Jesus spoke to the crowds
- John doesn't distinguish b/w Jesus and the Spirit. They are saying the same thing.

5. Concludes with blessings to those who "conquer."

- just as each message begins with a flashback to revelation of Christ in chp 1, it concludes with a flashforward to the glory that lies ahead
- Ephesus: “right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (2:7)
 - refers to the Garden of Eden
 - when Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden, the Lord God warned they must not be allowed to eat from the tree of life, and live forever
 - so the promise is for the conquering Xtn, to live forever

Teaching Guide

- 1. Divide into 7 groups.
- 2. Talk about your church in your group. Identify the pluses and minuses of your church.
- 3. Apply this teachings of this revelation to the church of today. How is this revelation about the Asia Minor church relevant to the 21st century church?
- 4. Be prepared to share your observations with the group.

An Example: Letter to the Church in Pergamum

- give this information on Pergamum since it's more difficult

Pergamum: 3rd church

- 50 miles north of Smyrna
- Capital of Roman province of Asia
- renowned for its library, which rivaled the library at Alexandria
- Not on main roads like Ephesus or Smyrna, but it had been a capital for 400 years
- Very visible. A modern traveler wrote, “Beyond all other cities in Asia Minor, it gives the traveler the impression of a royal city, the home of authority; the rocky hill on which it stands is so huge, and dominates the broad plain of the Caicus so proudly and so boldly.”
- “Temples to innumerable pagan gods dotted the city” Metzger
- A city “*where Satan has his throne*” (2:13)
- Satan, we know from Scripture, is as widely spread as the human population. But John implies that Pergamum is an especially evil place. Why?
- Reasons:
 1. Religious shrines:
 - Zeus. Built in 240 BC. Built at peak of city 800 feet high and structure itself was 40 feet.
 - on this throne animal sacrifices were made 24 hours a day
 - the constant smoke reminded people of Zeus's power all day long
 - Asclepius. Was the god of healing. Closest thing to a hospital were sanatoriums attached to the Asclepius temples.. Healing was partly the work of priests, doctors.

- Snakes emblem of Asclepius. It meant healing for Greeks.
- For Xtn-Jews grounded in the OT, the serpent was the symbol of evil.

2. Administrative seat of Caesar worship (in Asia)

- Once a year. People had to go to the temple and say “Caesar is Lord.” They would receive a certificate saying they had done this. No Christian could do this in good conscience.

Commendation: *“I know where you live (stay)” “You remain true to my name”*

- John knew where they lived. In Pergamum, the seat of Satan. Perhaps John considered this to be the hardest place in all Asia Minor to be a Christian.
- They lived in Pergamum and couldn’t leave

App: The Xtn life is not escape. Sometimes we think, I could be a Xtn if:

If I worked in a different place

If I lived in a different town

If my family was more supportive of the church

If my friends believed in prayer more than gossip

if I were younger

If I were older

- I had friends in college whose only friends were Xtns. They ate on the Xtn side of the cafeteria. They went to church, BSU meetings and Xtn retreats. But they never left their fortress of friends. The church is a place of refuge. But more so, it’s a place where we are energized to go into the world to serve, to be witnesses for Christ where there is little or no witness.
- Antipas was a witness/martyr for Christ in Pergamum. He paid with his life. This is a challenge to us. Often we are openly Christian only in our circle. Bur around those who ridicule Christ, or his church is held in contempt, we’re are silent. This letter is a call to be a Christian in all the places Christ puts us, even at “the throne of Satan.”

Story of Adoniram Judson

The Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson arrived in Burma, or Myanmar, in 1812, and died there thirty-eight years later in 1850. During that time, he suffered much for the cause of the

gospel. He was imprisoned, tortured, and kept in shackles. After the death of his first wife, Ann, to whom he was devoted, for several months he was so depressed that he sat daily beside her tomb. Three years later, he wrote: “ God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in him, but I cannot find him.”

But Adoniram's faith sustained him, and he threw himself into the tasks to which he believed God had called him. He worked feverishly on his translation of the Bible. The New Testament had now been printed, and he finished the Old Testament in early 1834.

Statistics are unclear, but there were only somewhere between twelve and twenty-five professing Christians in the country when he died, and there were not churches to speak of.

At the 150th anniversary of the translation of the Bible into the Burmese language, Paul Borthwick was addressing a group that was celebrating Judson's work. Just before he got up to speak, he noticed in small print on the first page the words: "Translated by Rev. A. Judson." So Borthwick turned to his interpreter, a Burmese man named Matthew Hia Win, and asked him, "Matthew, what do you know of this man?" Matthew began to weep as he said,

We know him—we know how he loved the Burmese people, how he suffered for the gospel because of us, out of love for us. He died a pauper, but left the Bible for us. When he died, there were few believers, but today there are over 600,000 of us, and every single one of us traces our spiritual heritage to one man: the Rev. Adoniram Judson.

- Adoniram Judson lived in a place that opposed Christ and his gospel
- he stayed there and worked at great personal costs
- God found him to be true, even while living in the midst of Satan's throne
- God rewarded him, and others found Christ b/c of his faithfulness
- we have the same call to be faithful to Christ in places that are dark and resistant to Christ.

Adapted from Julia Cameron, editor, *Christ Our Reconciler* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), pp. 200-201

Condemnation: Balaam

Context:

- Balaam was a magician whose story is told in Num. 22-25 (esp. 25:1-3)

- he was summoned by Balak, the king of Moab, to place a curse on the Israelites before they entered Canaan.
- Balaam never explicitly cursed Israel. But, if we put two and two together (read Rev 2:14 in light of Num. 25:1-3) we see that the understanding John had, was that Balaam convinced Balak to use his women to seduce the Israelites to worship Baal.
- Apparently, some people within the church were encouraging other church members to eat food offered to idols and engage in *pornei* (sexual immorality). This was strictly forbidden by Acts 15:29 when the great resolution to the problem of the Gentile churches was addressed. They were to abstain from

Food sacrificed to idols

Blood

Meat of strangled animals

Sexual immorality

- Paul taught (1 Cor 8:7-13) that meat should not be eaten at the temples, although there was really nothing wrong with eating meat. The temple gods of the Greeks weren't real gods anyway. Nevertheless, Paul said we did have an obligation to watch how what we did affected our weaker brothers in the faith. Essentially, Paul was saying Xtns could eat the meat at home, but don't make a show of it, b/c of the sensitivities of weaker brothers and sisters.

- The teaching of Balaam, however, was to lead people to compromise to the culture around them
- Just about all meat had been offered to idols. Xtns could eat the meat and still pledge allegiance to Christ.
- The Gentiles, who dominated the city, saw no wrong in cult prostitutes, premarital sex, adultery or any of those things.
- When John condemned those who followed the teaching of Balaam, he was condemning those who were willing to compromise their devotion to Christ to blend in with the culture around them.

Condemnation: Nicolaitans

- a heretical sect w/in the church that had worked out a compromise with pagan society
- they taught a spiritual liberty that tolerated idolatry and immorality
- they were also named in the Ephesian church
- tradition identifies them w/ Nicolas, one of the first 7 deacons named in Acts
- evidently they taught you could eat meat at the temples, no problem
- they believed you could do this and still believe and say "Jesus is Lord."

App: The greatest valid criticism about the church today is that we are no different from anyone else. We have so completely accommodated to the culture, that we are no longer distinguishable from non-Xtns.

We have accommodated ourselves to our world, rather than live differently from the world and thus change the world.

Luke 16:15 Jesus said; *“You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in the eyes of God.”*

Question: What compromises does our world ask of you?

- **Commitment:** Nobody is committed to anything.
 - can pick up and leave jobs, schools, relationships, churches b/c they don't meet our needs. We are committed to something as long as it doesn't inconvenience us. Should we as Xtns, make a commitment to Christ, the church, and one another that would transcend our personal convenience?
- **Love:** We are governed by what's best for me and mine more than we are love for one another:
 - Are we obligated to love and forgive the person who hurt us?
 - When someone sins/falls, are we going to expose and embarrass them or are we going to try to help them
 - Should we love those who hurt us, don't bend to our will ?
- **Materialism:** We are governed by the idea to go for the gusto, get all you can get, splurge on all you can afford and more than you can afford. Why shouldn't I have what they have. Why should I pinch, save, tithe, when 80% of the church members don't, not to mention those outside the church.
 - we try to keep up with the Jones, rather than stay down with the Haitians
- **Sexual Immorality:** We are bombarded with sexual images and messages every day, especially the TV, where your children are sitting for hours a day. Why not have some fun. As long as it is two consenting adults, who cares if they are married or whatever. Only the prudes still believe sex is for a married monogamous couple. Why not explore and have some fun?

As one young mother in a former church said in a testimony to the church said, “One of the reasons we come to Sunday School, PPP, worship, etc. is to remind us that the world is very seductive and we are constantly tempted to compromise our standards to fit the world, rather than allowing Christian teachings to dictate our actions.”

Conclusion

Russian Parable:

A hunter raised his rifle and took careful aim at a large bear. When he was about to pull the trigger, the bear spoke in a soft, soothing voice. “Isn’t it better to talk than to shoot? What do you want? Let’s negotiate the matter.”

Lowering his rifle, the hunter replied, “I want a fur coat.”

“Good,” said the bear, “that is a negotiable question. I only want a full stomach, so let’s negotiate a compromise.”

They sat down to negotiate, and after a time the bear walked away alone. The negotiations had been successful. The bear had a full stomach and the hunter had his fur coat.

When the church tries to compromise with the world, the world wins. Christ did not come into the world to negotiate with it. He came to shine the light of holiness on the world’s darkness. He didn’t compromise with the world, but did give himself completely to the world. And he calls all who would follow him to love him more than love the world.

When it comes to the essential doctrines of the Christian faith and the clear teaching of the ethical life called for by Christ, there is no room for compromise. Compromise on these matters is a dangerous road that is wide and well-traveled. Christ calls us to be different.

To be committed to some things (Christ and his church)

To be pure about some things (Christ and his ethical teachings)

To be loving in all things (how we treat the world and especially one another)

We will be commended when we are devoted to Christ wherever we live.

We will be condemned by Christ when we follow the world’s standards.

It’s probably harder to be a Xtn today than it was 30 years ago,

but that means our commendations will be greater when we are devoted to Christ.

Letters to the Church

Rev 2-3

Church:

Commendations:

Condemnations

Application for Today

Lukewarm Christianity

Revelation 3:14-22

Introduction: Have Holman Hunt's "Light of the World" on the screen
- refer to it, but save a deep exploration for later

I. Origins of Laodicea

- 100 miles east of Ephesus, 40 miles SE of Philadelphia, and 5 miles north of Colossae
- it completes the circle of the 7 churches
- Founded in middle of 3rd century BC by Antiochus II of Syria
- Named it after his wife Loadice
-

II. Origins of Church

- Paul evangelized the area of Asia (Asia Minor) in the 60s (Acts 19:10)
- Paul didn't meet the people of Laodicea personally (Col 2:1)
- Church probably founded by Epaphras (Col 4:12-13)
- May have met at Nympha's house (Col 4:15)
- The letter to the Colossians was also intended for the Laodiceans (Col 4:16)

III. Characteristics of the Church

- Famous for its wealth, earthquake of 61 AD, town refused help from (FEMA (Roman Empire) "Buy from me gold"
- Famous for textiles (especially its black wool) "white clothes to wear"
- Famous for its eye salve "salve to put on your eyes"

IV. Description of Jesus

- *"the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation"* (3:14)
- "Amen" means "so be it."
- therefore Jesus is the "so be it."
- "What he said is right."
- Jesus is the incarnation of all that God has said
- thus John begins, "In the beginning, was the word and the word was with God, and the Word was God. He was God in the beginning." "The Word became flesh" (1:14)

- in Rev 1:18 John described Jesus as "I am the first and the last. I am the Living One."
- Jesus was at the beginning. He will be at the end.
- He is the ruler of the creation

IV. Condemnation

- Strongest condemnation of the 7 churches
- No word whatsoever of commendation

- They are lukewarm, *chliaros*, neither cold nor hot, “tepid” (this word is found nowhere else in the Bible)
- Contra Rom 12:11 “*Never be lacking in zeal.*”
- Where is this coming from? John gives a hint. “You say, “*I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.*”
-
- **The great danger of wealth.** Remember the rich ruler who came to Christ asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. He confessed he had kept these since youth. Jesus said he lacked one thing. “*Sell all you have, give it to the poor, and come and follow me.*” When he heard this he turned away, for he was very rich. And Jesus said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Why? Self-sufficiency! The wealthy have no sense of need, of lostness, of wretchedness and without these, they can see no need for God.
- Remember, the condemnation is going to the church of Laodicea, not the Chamber of Commerce of Laodicea. The threat is real for Christians who are or who become wealthy.
- Why? Again, they begin to lose that sense of need. That sense of deprivation. They become self-sufficient!
- “When a man becomes a Christian, he becomes industrious, trustworthy and prosperous. Now, if that man, when he **gets** all he can, **saves** all he can, does not **give** all he can, I have more hopes for Judas Iscariot than for that man!”

John Wesley

“It is not scientific doubt, not atheism, not pantheism, not agnosticism, that in our day and in this land is likely to quench the light of the gospel. It is a proud, sensuous, selfish, luxurious, church-going, hollow-hearted prosperity.”

Frederick Huntington, Forum Magazine, 1890

Can we ask ourselves some difficult questions?

- Has the appearance of your home received more attention than the condition of your soul?
- Do you spend as much time on your personal dress as you do personal spiritual health?
- Are you as thirsty to worship God in his sanctuary as you are to relax at the beach?
- Do your children know that God comes first in your home?
- Where are you on the spiritual thermometer? 32 degrees.....212 degrees?

From “Crazy Love” by Francis Chan, Pastor of Cornerstone Church in Simi Valley, Calif.

Lukewarm People: attend church fairly regularly. It is what is expected of them, what they believe “good Christians” do, so they go.

“The Lord says: ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men’” (Isa. 29:13)

Lukewarm People: give money to charity and to the church . . . as long as it doesn’t impinge on their standard of living. If they have a little extra and it is easy and safe to give, they do so.

“King David replied to Araunah, ‘No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that cost me nothing’” (1 Chron 21:24).

Lukewarm People: don’t really want to be saved from their sin; they want only to be saved from the penalty of their sin. They don’t genuinely hate sin and aren’t truly sorry for it; they’re merely sorry because God is going to punish them. Lukewarm people don’t really believe that this new life Jesus offers is better than the old sinful one.

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Rom 6:1-2).

Lukewarm People: are moved by stories about people who do radical things for Christ, yet they do not act. They assume such action is for “extreme” Christians, not average ones. Lukewarm people call “radical” what Jesus expected of all his followers.

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22)

Lukewarm people: rarely share their faith with their neighbors, coworkers, or friends. They do not want to be rejected, not do they want to make people uncomfortable by talking about private issues like religion.

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven” (Mat 10:32-33)

Lukewarm people: gauge their morality or “goodness” by comparing themselves to the secular world. They feel satisfied that while they aren’t as hard-core for Jesus as so and so, they are nowhere as horrible as the guy down the street.

“The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get’” (Lk 18:11-12).

Lukewarm people: love others but do not seek to love others as much as they love themselves. Their love of others is typically focused on those who love them in return, like family, friends, and other people they know and connect with. There is little love left over for those who cannot love them back, much less for those who intentionally slight them, whose kids are better athletes than theirs, or with whom conversations are awkward or uncomfortable. Their love is highly conditional and very selective, and generally comes with strings attached.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven.” (Mat 5:43)

Lukewarm People: think about life on earth much more often than eternity in heaven. Daily life is mostly focused on today’s to-do list, this week’s schedule, and next month’s vacation. Rarely, if ever, do they intently consider the life to come. Regarding this, C.S. Lewis writes, “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”

“Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 3:18-20).

Lukewarm People: feel secure because they attend church, made a profession of faith at age twelve, were baptized, come from a Christian family, vote Republican, or live in America. Just as the prophets in the OT warned Israel that they were not safe just because they live in the land of Israel, so we are not safe just because we wear the label Christian or because some people persist in calling us a “Christian nation.”

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven” (Mt 7:21)

Lukewarm People: probably drink and swear less than average, but besides that, they really aren’t very different from your typical unbeliever. They equate their partially sanitized lives with holiness, but they couldn’t be more wrong.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisees! First, clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean” (Mat 23:25).

Jesus Counsel to Laodocia

1. Buy gold from me.

- you are wealthy. Spend what you have on me. My gold lasts
- you will become eternally rich if you give your lives to me
- don't depend on your earthly economic status

2. White clothes to wear

- Laodocia was known for their black wool
- Jesus is calling them for a full turn around, from black to white

3. Salve to your eyes

- Laodocia was a medical center
- it was known for a salve applied to eyes that aided vision
- Jesus wants them to see heaven, not simply see the world more clearly

Jesus is saying all of this out of love. He disciplines those he loves.

The Great Danger of Neutrality

- Another aspect of the lukewarmness of the Laodiceans may have been their ambivalence about the crisis of the day - do we say “Caesar is Lord” or do we say “Jesus is Lord” or do we say both.
- Luke 11:23 *“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.”*
- Following Christ means following Christ exclusively. He seeks no two-timers. Jesus will not tolerate being one of many gods. He demands being our only God. He wants all of us or none of us.
- He expects and demands that we be willing to stand up for him in church and in our business. He expects and demands that we place him first in our lives on Sunday and Fridays. Like marriage, there is no off time. Even when there is space and distance b/t husband and wife there is an understanding of commitment there. With Jesus, being neutral is being lukewarm, and causes him to spit out those who are like this.
-

Lukewarm Xtns can't be effective witnesses.

- The Christian scholar Larry Taunton launched a nationwide campaign to interview college students who belong to atheistic campus groups. After receiving a flood of enquiries,

Larry and his team heard one consistent theme from these young unbelievers: they often expected but didn't find more spiritual depth from their Christian neighbors. Larry writes:

Some [of these young atheists] had gone to church hoping to find answers to [tough questions about faith]. Others hoped to find answers to questions of personal significance, purpose, and ethics. Serious-minded, they often concluded that church services were largely shallow, harmless, and ultimately irrelevant. As Ben, an engineering major at the University of Texas, so bluntly put it: "I really started to get bored with church."

In contrast, these young atheists expressed their respect for those ministers who took the Bible seriously. Larry writes,

Without fail, our former church-attending students expressed [positive] feelings for those Christians who unashamedly embraced biblical teaching. Michael, a political science major at Dartmouth, told us, "I really can't consider a Christian a good, moral person if he isn't trying to convert me Christianity is something that if you really believed it, it would change your life and you would want to change [the lives] of others. I haven't seen too much of that."

The Danger of Indifference

- Just don't care.
 - Jesus would rather us be cold than lukewarm. Why?
 - One who is cold has a greater chance to become hot/zealous for Christ than one who is lukewarm. Example of Saul >>>>> Paul
 - E. Stanley Jones, great missionary to India, describes slightly religious people by saying they had been inoculated with a mild form of Xty and thus rendered immune to the real thing.
 - That's what inoculations do to you. They give you a small, hopefully weak form of a disease, so that your body would rally to kill it, and thus, be ready for a larger, more potent dose of the disease.
 - The church should be wrong before it's indifferent. We should make more mistakes because of our zeal rather than avoiding mistakes because of our apathy and indifference.
-
- I received quite a few criticisms after I told one congregation I served that I would rather us stuff the deacon ballot box rather than be so apathetic that we don't vote for our spiritual leaders. I was attempting to make a point with some humor, but I was taken to task by people who are more concerned about proper procedures than our apathetic attitudes. Here is my text for support. I would rather us stuff ballot boxes than care so little

about our spiritual leadership. We can tame and control zeal. It's more difficult to resuscitate lukewarm Christianity.

Story

Henry David Thoreau, author and rugged New England individualist of the 19th century, once went to jail rather than pay his poll tax to a state that supported slavery. Thoreau's good friend Ralph Waldo Emerson hurried to visit him in jail and, peering through the bars, exclaimed: "Why Henry, what are you doing in there?"

The uncowed Thoreau replied, "Nay, Ralph, the question is, what are you doing out there?"

Isn't that a question for us?

What are we following the world,

ignoring systems of injustice

oblivious to the plight of a lost world

cold to the needs of a hurting humanity

dismissive of a Christ, who wants to come into everyone room of our home and have intimate fellowship with us.

Painting by Holman Hunt, 1853

- the English artist began this painting when he was 21 and finished when he was 29
- it took so long, b/c he wanted to see a perfect dawn before completing
- when he finally took a trip to the Middle East he saw his dawn and completed his painting
- he painted a life-size version of this at the age of 70, forty years later
- now hangs in St. Paul's Cathedral in London
- entitled "Light of the World"

- based on Rev 3:20 "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. In anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

1. Crown

- 2 crowns
- royal crown of gold, symbolizing royalty
- crown of thorns symbolizing his suffering
- Jesus is the suffering Messiah, who is eternal God

2. Knock

- image conveys a mild tapping,
- a hopeful knock
- it's not banging the door or barging in
- Jesus is not going to overwhelm our free will
- there's a sad longing look on his face

3. Door

- no handles
- can only be opened on the inside
- Jesus waits.
- the only access he will take is that offered to him

4. Overgrown weeds

- the door has not been opened in a long time
- weeds are growing up on it
- rotten fruit has dropped to the ground
- the heart has become hardened
- the heart has become cold

- The question that emerges: Will the door be opened?
Will Jesus be welcomed into the home, and have intimate fellowship with the owner?

Sing "Softly and Tenderly" (hymn 474)

- Jesus is calling, softly and tenderly
- not with bombast and vitriol
- not with anger and impatience
- He is calling with love and persistence.
- Will you open the door and let him in so that he becomes your #1 priority?

Conclusion

The question for us is, "How can we, who claim to be followers of Christ, who claim to believe he is the Savior of the world, who believe that he died a terrible death on a cross in our place and for our sins, so that we might have eternal life....be lukewarm towards him?"

How can we think about his great sacrifice and be indifferent about worshipping him?

How can we recall his never-ending love for us and put somebody else in front of him, even our own family?

How can we think about his sojourn on this earth, filled with people's rejection, and met with unflinching compassion and choose golf over him, or camping, or fishing, or reading the paper?

Can we really look him in the eye as he hangs on the cross, broken in body, bleeding to death, struggling to breathe and say to him, "I love you but don't bother with this commitment thing. I have other demands on my life and my time and my possessions. "

The words of condemnation to the Laodiceans fade into one of the most beautiful images in all the Bible. To this group of lukewarm Christians who were making Christ sick on his stomach, Jesus returns. He reminds them that he stands at the door of their hearts and knocks. If anyone hears his voice, and invites him in to eat with them, he will come. That means that anyone who repents and invites Jesus to take control of their life, will receive his power, his love, his guidance. He will eat with them and they with him. He will provide life for them and they will receive life because of him.

Will you do that?

Will you invite Jesus into every room in your home? Will you invite him to take control? Will you let him lead you in your decisions? Will you abandon yourself at his feet, and let him do with you whatever he will?

He will come. He will control And he will bring to you more sweet satisfaction than anything this world has to offer. Abandon your lukewarmness today. And let Jesus burn hot in your soul.

Amen

A Week Schedule for Prayer

Day 1: Pray for your neighbors who live around you. Pray for them by name. Pray for their spiritual well-being and the opportunity to show Christ to them.

Day 2: Pray for your family. Pray for their souls. Pray for them one at a time. Picture them in your mind as you pray for them.

Day 3: Pray for your church. Pray for the leaders by name. Pray for people who are missing. Pray for those who are sick, hospitalized, hurting, depressed, and wandering.

Day 4: Pray for the city of Durham (or whatever town you live-in). Pray for the criminals and victims of criminals. Use the newspaper. Read about your community and pray for those in trouble.

Day 5: Pray for the international community. Use the newspaper. Pray for victims of war, natural disasters, and political turmoil.

Day 6: Pray for missionaries you support with your contributions. Use a magazine, website, or some other publication to pray for those serving Christ in difficult places. Pray for Christians around the world. “The Voice of Martyrs” is a credible website that reveals the persecution of Christians.

Day 7: Pray for yourself. Pray that you will be faithful, obedient, and fully committed to the ways of Christ for the week to come. Name your sins and offer them to Christ (even if you did the same thing last week). Ask God to show you how to live the next week, things to do, people to love. Take some time to be quiet in the presence of God even if you hear nothing.

Revelation 4-5

A Vision of Heaven

Transition

- Ch. 2-3 of Revelation focused on earth and the letters to the 7 churches in Asia Minor.
- Ch. 4 begins a vision John had of heaven
- This vision will run from Rev 4-18
- Ch. 4-5 tell of a vision John had of heaven
- Primitive Jewish thought conceived a 3-fold creation
- Middle: Earth, Land, Sea
- Below: Underworld, Sheol, Land of the Dead
- Above: Heaven. Heaven was literally above the sky.
- John sees the door to heaven open in the sky and is allowed to look inside at the marvelous
- He is invited by the exalted Christ to come in and look. The same voice that spoke with a voice like a trumpet in his opening vision in ch. 1
 - He's invited to see what will take place "after this" (4:1). Meaning after the persecution of the church
 - ch. 2-3 have been about "what is."
 - ch. 4-18 will be about "what is to be."
- He sees the indescribable reign of God and the communion of saints that have been faithful and now worship Him.
- After the vision of God in heaven (ch 4-5), he will begin to see a series of judgments God pours out on the earth (ch. 6-18)
 - there will be a continual move back and forth b/w judgment and glory of the Lamb
- There is so much here to describe and it would be worth our efforts to take each phrase that John has written and which became inspired Scripture and reflect on it.
- Instead I would like to simply give an overview of this awe-inspiring vision John had prior to his vision of the struggle which lies ahead for Xtns.
- His intent is to allow them to witness the ultimate destiny of faithful Xtns in order to encourage them to persevere in the trial soon to come.
- This is helpful isn't it? To see the end of the story, to overcome stress?
- Illustration of UNC National Championship in 1993
 - o UNC vs. Michigan
 - o Phelps, Williams, Reese, Lynch, Montross vs. the Fab Five
 - o Close all the way. Down to the final seconds.
 - o Carolina up by one, Webber calls timeout when his team had none left. Technical foul.
 - o I taped it and watched it with joy the second time.

- The point is that when we know victory comes in the end, we are more equipped to battle through the sufferings of the present

So what do we see in this vision of heaven?

A vision of God (4:2-11)

A vision of the scroll (5:1)

A vision of the Lamb (5:2-14)

I. A vision of God (4:2-11)

- John saw the throne of heaven and someone sitting on it.
- The throne is a symbol of the majesty and grandeur of God, a common picture in OT:
 - “I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him” (1 Kg 19:22)
 - Isaiah saw the Lord “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (Is 6:1)
 - “Throne of God” is mentioned in every chapter of Rev except 2, 8, and 9.

Illustration

- When Handel was asked how he had come to write the magnificent music of the Messiah, his answer was: “I saw the heavens opened and God upon His great white throne.”
- John saw the One seated on the throne but doesn’t attempt to describe him with physical details. He uses earthly materials to convey a sense of brilliance, power, purity, and transcendence. This would be in keeping with Jewish tradition which believed one couldn’t look upon the face of God without dying.
- Notice the description of God:
 - 1. Jasper and Carnelian and Emerald**
 - 3 precious stones, give off a brilliant light of different colors
 - Jasper: not dull like today’s jaspers, translucent and almost unbearable scintillation. Usually multi-colored.
 - Carnelian: blood-red
 - Emerald: green
 - Some have suggested the jasper represented the purity of God, carnelian the wrath of God, and emerald the mercy of God
 - Whatever they might symbolize individually, the overall effect was that John was dazzled by the image of God and used the most precious materials on earth to attempt a description

2. **Lightning, Rumbings, and Thunder**

- These are the voices from the throne. Not speaking in Hebrew, English or Greek. God speaks in lightning, rumbings and thunder. “And God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light. Don’t’ you think there was some noise?”
- Appear elsewhere: 8:5, 11:19, 16:18
- Reminiscent of the Lord’s descent on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:10ff)

“On the morning of the 3rd day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.”

3. **24 Elders**

- who are these elders seated around the throne of God
- some think they are associated with the 24 lictors of Domitian (81-96AD)
- essentially served as the secret service. Body guards. Cleared the way. Punished offenders. Previous emperors had 12. Domitian doubled it.

- the best idea I’ve heard is 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 disciples of Christ
- a perfect blend of old and new, the OT and NT
- they are there to worship God
- they are given thrones, not b/c they are God, but b/c they have been ordained to be God’s representatives, God’s priests

4. **Songs to God** (5 songs in these two chapters)

- First song is by the 4 Living Creatures “Holy, Holy, Holy” that we sang tonight
- Next song is by Creatures and the Elders “You are worthy, our Lord and God
- in chapter 5 the songs become about “The Lamb”
- There’s a constant movement, free, movement b/w language of God and language of the Lamb. It becomes clear, Jesus is divine. The language is interchangeable.
- These songs are an affirmation of his holiness and his creative powers. They affirm that all things are within his powers, no matter what may be happening on earth
- The only thing we can do when we encounter God is praise him.

II. The Scroll of Heaven (5:1)

- John saw in the right hand a scroll
- writing on both sides
- sealed with 7 seals
- See Ezekiel 2:9-10
“Then I looked and saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.”
- Had words on both sides. This meant that there was so much to be told that it took both sides of the scroll to contain it all
- It was sealed with 7 seals. Stands for profound secrecy. 7 means completeness. Therefore, there was complete secrecy in regards to the contents of the scrolls. No one knows about it.
- Mt 27:26 says the stone of Jesus’ tomb was sealed. The Apocryphal Gospel of Peter says it was sealed w/ 7 seals. Thus no unauthorized person could open it.
- None but God could dare open the scroll. As we will see, it contains the plans of God for the ages.
- It is a history book written in advance.
- It contains the destiny of the ages and of every person.
- the scroll will begin to be unsealed and revealed in ch. 6

III. The Lamb of Heaven (5:2-14)

- Immediately after John saw the scroll in the hand of the One seated on the throne, he saw a mighty angel proclaiming *“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”*
- No one could do it
 - in heaven
 - In earth
 - Under the earth
- John wept because of this.
- Why? Because he has been promised a vision of what is to be (4:1)
“Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

Illustration:

- Remember going to DisneyWorld with your kids.
- You plan the trip. You fly or drive down. You have hotel tickets.
- You study ahead of time to determine what you’re going to see, when.
- You’re kids are pumped to see Mickey Mouse, Cinderella, Snow White
- You’re ready to see Cinderella’s castle, ride Space Mountain
- Go on the Jungle Cruise, see the Presidents in Liberty Square
- Then they tell you, you can’t go in !!

- But it goes deeper than this, there was no one God could trust.
- There was not one good enough to receive the decrees of God.
- There was no one close enough to God to hear this great plan.
- Then an elder says, "Don't cry. The Lion of Judah will do it."
- So John eagerly began to look for a Lion.
- Language derived from the memory of Israel

"You are a lion's cub, O Judah;

You return from the prey, my son....

The scepter will not depart from Judah,...

And the obedience of the nations is his." (Gen 49:9-10)

- So John begins looking for a Lion,
- a fierce, powerful creature who can reap those seals apart
- John would know the Lion of Judah would be a powerful, vengeful creature who would destroy God's enemies.

Then we have a major move, an extraordinary twist in the story

- We've read this so many times, we lose the irony
- it's perhaps the most mind-bending "birth of re-images" in all of literature
- instead of a Lion, we get a Lamb, and a slain one at that
- a meek, slain, bloodied lamb
- this is the first occurrence of the Lamb in all Revelation
- John has reserved the language of "The Lamb" until this dramatic moment
- It's John's definitive title for Christ, occurring 29 times in Rev. (once elsewhere)
- the relationship b/w the Lion and the Lamb is crucial to the theology of Rev.
- therefore, it deserves a little more attention

-Slain:

- Here we have a picture of the cross. Pain and torment, suffering and humiliation. Meekness and sacrifice. Jesus was the sacrifice for our sins.
- God's power has been manifest in weakness,
- God absorbs evil to destroy it

Standing in the center:

- He is God, equal to God, honored by God
- There are not 2 gods on the throne. The Lamb is the incarnation of God
- He is encircled by the living creatures and the 24 elders. All creatures now recognize that he is God and they honor him. In a moment they will bow down to worship him.

7 horns and 7 eyes:

- remember that 7 is the number for completeness in Revelation
- Horns represent sheer power.
- 7 horns stand for omnipotence. The slain Lamb is all-powerful
- The Lamb has perfect power earned through sacrifice
- 7 eyes mean he is omniscient. He is all-seeing, all-knowing
- the Lamb has perfect knowledge.

Bad Pun ; “You’re not going to pull the wool over his eyes.”

There is no place on earth, above the earth, or under the earth that God doesn’t know about.

The Expanding Choir

- The Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God are worthy to break the seal
 - John will be able to see the vision of God from heaven
 - John will see the victorious Christ, visibly wounded, but fully recovered reveal God’s plan for the church and for the ages
 - those in heaven breakout in song of praise
1. 4 living creatures and 24 elders sing (5:9)
 2. 100 million angels (5:12)
 3. Every creature on heaven and earth sing (5:13)

The four living Creatures said “Amen.” So shall it be. That’s the way it’s going to be.

Conclude with Handell’s “Worthy is the Lamb” based on Rev. 5:12-13

or “Worthy is the Lamb” by Kari Jobe

The Seven Seals

Revelation 6-7

Context:

- Ch. 5 was a vision of heaven and of the One sitting upon the throne. In the right hand of the One was a scroll. John lamented that no one was worthy to open the scroll b/c it was sealed perfectly, with 7 seals.

- One of the elders told John not to weep, for the Lion of Judah could and would open the scroll. And thus the Lamb of God, slain, came to unseal the scroll and all of earth and heaven worshipped and praised the Lamb, for he alone was worthy to unseal the scrolls, thereby carrying out God's plan for the ages.

- In ch. 6, John is able to watch as the Lamb opens one seal at a time. But instead of being a joyous occasion, the unsealing of the scrolls unleashes a flurry of God's judgment on the earth.

- a series of eschatological woes are set in motion

- seven seals (Chp 6-7)

- seven trumpets (Chp 8:6- chp 11)

- seven bowls (15:5-16:21)

- chp 6 gives us the four horses of the apocalypse, representing the fullness of military conquest, war, famine, and death.

- The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is set aside as bad news for those who reject God's ways and persecute God's people. (Mt 24:30)

- As each seal is broken Christ the Lamb sets in motion the events of the last day.

- The scroll is not completely broken until the 7th seal is broken in Rev 8:1

Interpretive Principle:

John is revealing a vision of the future based on

- his OT readings and knowledge,

- the teachings of Christ,

- and the historical events of his own time.

- John doesn't know when the end will be

- yet he sees events on his time that give a glimpse of the end

- the judgment of God in his age is glimpse of final judgment of God

Origin of Vision:

- Zech. 6:1-5
- four chariots driven by four horses
- red, black, white, dappled
- Zech. is talking about “the Day of the Lord” Day of Judgment

- Mt 24:3-4, 21-22,30-31
- Jesus speaking about the end of the age

I. Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

- Albrecht Durer, German artist, 1498, woodcutting (Death, War, Famine, Conquest)
- housed in the New York Museum of Art
- 27 year old
- 15 woodcuts of St. John’s Revelation
- he has compressed eight verses (16:1-8) into one scene
- First rider w/ bow = Conquest (white)
- Second rider w/ raised sword = War (red)
- Third Rider w/ empty scales = Famine (Black)
- Front Rider, sweeping citizens and king into the jaws of Hades = Death (Pale)



First Seal: White Horse (6:1-2)

- Symbol of conquest
- White horses in Roman times were symbols of victory. When a general returned from a victory in a foreign land he would ride through the city of Rome on a white horse.
- The bow would bring to mind the Parthians, noted and feared as the most skilled bowmen in the world. They lived on the eastern edge of the Roman Empire.
- they rode white horses
- they were the only mounted archers in the 1st century
- 62 AD an unprecedented event occurred. A Roman army actually had to surrender to Vologeses, the king of the Parthians. It was seldom in history that such shame and ignominy had come to the arms of Rome.
- Military might of the Parthians functions as an announcement of the beginning of the end of Roman sovereignty

Second Seal: Red Horse (6:3-4)

- War and blood
- rider carried a sword
- “Given the power to take peace from earth”
- Jesus: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.” (Mark 13:8)
- John is prophesying the end of the Pax Romana, replaced by anarchy

Third Seal: Black Horse (6:5-6)

- Famine
- Famine naturally follows military conquest, war and blood.
- This is a terrible famine, ¼ of the people will die. But not all the people will die.
- There will be food but it will be sold at a prohibitive price (inflation rampant)
- Lev 26:6 To eat bread by weight indicates the greatest scarcity
- A denarius was a day’s wage.
- prices are 8-16 times higher than normal
- however, the price of oil and wine stay the same (commodities of the wealthy)

- During the reign of Domitian, at the time of John’s writing, there was a serious shortage of grain, and a superabundance of wine.
- Domitian took the drastic step of enacting that no fresh vineyards should be planted, and that half the vineyards be destroyed.
- The people rebelled. They were so persistent that a law was enacted to protect their vineyards from desecration.

Fourth Seal: Pale Horse (6:7-8)

- Death, Hades followed
- The word translated “pale” is the Greek word *cholors*. It means bleached out. There is no life left. It is a terrible time, but it is not the final Day of Judgment. There is still time to repent and follow Christ.

- all 4 of these horsemen are “agents of destruction.”
- God is allowing this destruction to take place as judgment on the arrogance of man
- God is allowing the terrible forces unleashed by evil to have their effect
- yet, in the end, they are a pale comparison to the ultimate power of God/Christ

Fifth Seal: Souls of the Martyrs (6:9-11)

- now the judgment intensifies
- we move from horsemen to the “altar”, evidently the altar of God
- Jesus left no doubt that some Xtns would be persecuted for their faith. Mt 24:9 and John 16:2
- Some had already been killed.
- voices of the martyrs calls out for justice. They don’t ask, “Why me?”
- They ask, “How long?” They are concerned for the others on earth.
- they were told to “Wait.” Others will die before the end comes.

- “*under the altar.*” This is an OT image.
- The altar was where the sacrifices took place.
- When the sacrifices were made the blood ride down and off the altar.
- Thus the blood would be underneath the altar.
- The blood was life, and thus the idea is that the martyrs have spilled their blood for God but they are still alive.
- Indeed they are especially rewarded for their martyrdom and are given white robes as a sign of heavenly honor.
- more martyrdom is coming (cf 6:11)

- notice, the martyrs were “raptured” out of the earth. They are rewarded in heaven not in order to escape suffering, but they go to heaven as Jesus did, via suffering

- Today the “Voices of the Martyrs” is the most prominent, credible source of persecution taking place in the world today. Check out their website.

Sixth Seal: Natural Forces (6:12-17)

- now the earthly, natural catastrophes escalate into cosmic woes
- creation itself is collapsing under the weight of its sin
- Jesus reveals something very similar in his little apocalypse (Mk :13:5-36) esp v 24-25
- we need not read this in a literal way,
- but neither should we spiritualize away the cosmological judgment here. This is not merely about social/political forces being overthrown. Fall of Rome. Fall of America.
- This is about the end of the earth as we know it.

- Old Testament Allusions

- Earthquake Hag 2:6
- Sun and Moon Joel 2:31
- Stars falling Isa 34:4
- Sky rolled up Isa 34.4

Time of Terror (vv 15-17)

- Universal: kings, princes, generals, rich, strong, every slave and free
- They all were looking for a place to hide to avoid “the face of the Lamb.” “Wrath of the Lamb.”
- cry for the rocks to fall on them
- But there will be no place to hide. No one will be spared from the wrath of God, that is no one who has been an enemy of the Church and Christ. No power, prestige, or wealth will save one on that day.
- The whole fabric of human society from top to bottom, from sky to sea, is under the judgment of God. That is the point.
- This didn’t scare the early Xtn’s. It comforted them. B/c they knew that God would ultimately take care of every wrong, every evil deed, every injustice. It would be exposed and punished.

Chapter 7

II. Interlude (7:1-17)

- one would expect the breaking of the 7th seal to happen next.
- surely the 7th seal is the end: judgment (salvation and damnation, a new heaven and earth)
- It doesn’t happen
- between the opening of the 6th and 7th seals there is an interlude
- there are 2 visions here intended to assure God’s people they will be protected from God’s judgment
- the interlude focuses on the church, the bride of Christ
- this is exactly what they early church experienced.

- they were looking for the end, the final coming, and judgment.
- What they got instead was the church, the church would be a dimension of God's activity
- Remember: their idea of church was small, local congregations, helpless, powerless
- they had no colleges, universities, hospitals, children's homes, lobbying forces
- John is giving them a vision of the church as universal, eternal, pure, powerful,

victorious

- First Vision 7:1-8
- Second Vision 7:9-17

First Vision: The 144,000 (7:1-8)

- 4 angels holding back the winds. They are limiting the damage
- another angel comes to announce 144,000 will be protected from persecution by wearing a "seal of the forehead"

- they come from the 12 tribes of Israel. This is the church, the new Israel
- the 144,000 is a complete number. Not one of God's redeemed will be lost.
- this doesn't mean Xtns will avoid persecution. Today there are many places around the world where Xtns are being persecuted. It means that none will be lost. They will ultimately share in Christ victory. Those who are martyred will be exalted, not above Jesus, but above the average Xtns.

- they are sealed on the forehead. The king's signature or seal on his property let everyone know who their own was. His property couldn't be taken away. It was properly sealed.

- our seal as Xtns is baptism

"He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." (2 Cor 1:22)

"Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph 1:13)

- Jehovah Witnesses see this 144,000 as a literal number signifying the 144,000 who will be in heaven. It's why they work so hard

- this is not literal mathematics
- this is symbolic theology
- 1000 is the largest numerical unit found in the Bible. So we are combining the largest number with the 12 tribes of Israel X 12 Apostles of Christ
- the result is the continuation of the church in a number is that vast and completely in accord with the history of God

* Interesting Note: Dan is excluded here. Tribe of Dan had a bad reputation in the OT (Lev 24:11, Jud 5:17). Later Jewish tradition would say the anti-Christ would come from Dan.

Chapter 8-9

Sounding of the Seven Trumpets

Context:

Reminder: Cp. 6, the main action (judgment begins)

- Cp. 6-11 brings to the reader the struggle of the church amid conflict and persecution, but also the judgments of God upon the church's enemies.
- Ch. 6-7 are the opening of the seven seals
- Structure for 7 seals :
 - o 1-4 seals give a unified image of judgment
 - o 5-6 seals give another image of judgment
 - o 7th seal introduces another series of judgments (trumpets)
- Structure for 7 trumpets
 - o 1-4 trumpets give a unified image of judgment
 - o 5-6 trumpets give another image of judgment
 - o 7th trumpet introduces another series of judgments
- Semitic Mind
 - o Not linear like our Western mind, it's circular
 - o These series of judgments are images of the same judgment that John reveals again and again from different perspectives and with varying amounts of development

The Seventh Seal

- the lamb opens the 7th seal, as he has for all the others, b/c he is the only one worthy to carry out this judgment
- we have no right to judge b/c we are not worthy, but Jesus is worthy
- Not more judgment. Not what we would expect. Instead, silence (8:1).
- Silence for half hour. Why?
 - o Perhaps to heighten the sense of horror that is about to unfold. Calm before the storm.
 - o Remember Handel's Messiah, the final Hallelujah? After the rousing intensity of the entire chorus, there is a pause, then the end.
 - this is good psychology
 - it's also good theology
 - Zephaniah 1:7: *"Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand."*
 - o Probably to show the prayers of the saints are being heard even in the midst of suffering and persecution (8:3). Nothing will stop God from hearing the prayers of his saints, even judgment and destruction.
 - o "Even the music of heaven, even the thunder of revelation is stilled, that God's ear may catch the whispered prayer of the humblest of his praying and trusting people." William Barclay

Seven Angels:

- “Who stand before God”
- Not just any 7. A special group.
- According to Jewish tradition these were the seven closest to God. During the Intertestamental period (400 BC – 60 AD) books were written by the Jewish people. Enoch 20 lists the names:
- Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel, and Remiel
- these 7 angels were each given a trumpet to announce more judgments

Prayers of the Saints

- an 8th angel stands before the altar
- John is giving us a glimpse of heaven, a heavenly perspective
- we are going to see how the worship of heaven and earth are connected
- they are connected by the prayers of the saints
- we’re all saints, in the biblical sense
- we’re the “called out ones,” We are the “separated ones.”
- doesn’t mean we’re perfect. Means we’re called to be holy, different, set apart for God
- God hears the prayers of the saints
- the incense represents the prayers of God’s people going up to him

Story of Jimmy Connors

- watching 30 by 30 last night
- story of the 1991 tennis match b/w 39 year old Jimmy Connors and 21 year old Aaron Krickstein.
- Connors wasn’t seeded. Wasn’t expected to advance past the 2nd round.
- He was ranked 174 at the time.
- He had been in a wrist cast for 16 weeks, recovering from long-standing wrist surgery
- Yet here he was in the quarterfinals of the 1991 U.S. Open in NYC
- He lost the first set, and was on the verge of losing the second
- Then he got a bad call from the umpire, and he turned it into his favor
- Connor got the crowd on his side like no one else could:
He said, “You’re a bum. I’m 39 years old and playing my butt off, and your doing that!”
- Connors was down in the final set 5-2, yet he came back to win
- With every point, he pumped up the crowd, and the crowd in turn pumped him up.

- Mike Lupica, star tennis writer for Sports Illustrated, was driving home from the match with his wife, reminiscing about what they had just seen.
- his wife said something Mike would never forget, that full encapsulated everything they had just witnessed
“He made me feel like I was the reason he won.”

- It hit Lupica. That's why so many New Yorkers stood in line for a ticket.
- Wouldn't you buy a ticket, if you believed you, personally, could effect the outcome of the game?

- God wants us to know that prayer is like that.
- We can effect change, effect people, effect God with our prayers.
- God hears and responds to our prayers.
- *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."* James 5:6
- *"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer"*
(1 Ptr 3:12)

- We need to base on praying on good theology, not our emotional mood of the day.
- Often, we don't feel like our prayers are heard or answered.
- John is allowing us to glimpse into heaven to see that they do matter
- their prayers may not result in the deliverance from historical troubles, but their prayers do deliver history itself. History is being directed by God. We are contributing the coming of the kingdom through our prayers
- Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth, as it is, in heaven."

- There's an old Jewish prayer, the Kaddish

"Magnified and sanctified by his great name in the world he had created according to his will. May he establish his kingdom in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time."

Upcoming Judgments

- with the 7 trumpets a flurry of judgments are unleashed
- The upcoming judgments are akin to the plagues that hit Egypt for oppressing God's people (hail, locusts, blood in the river, animals dying)
- By using imagery of the Exodus, John is communicating all of this judgment is ultimately about the liberation of God's people.
- all these plagues, judgments are ultimately good news and expressions of God's justice.

- The last horseman of the Apocalypse had authority to harm $\frac{1}{4}$ of the earth (6:8).
- Now these plagues are intensified to $\frac{1}{3}$.
- If we're asking if this is $\frac{1}{3}$ of the original or $\frac{1}{3}$ of the remaining, we're asking the wrong question. This isn't about mathematics, it's about eschatology.
- It doesn't make sense to read these judgments chronologically
- eg, all the grass is burned up in 8:7, but it's still there in 9:4
- the stars are struck in 8:12, although they have already fallen in 6:13
- remember concentric circles.
- John wants us to have an impression, to feel something
- he wants the church to be comforted by these images.
- he wants them to know God knows them and hears them even in the midst of their persecution

The Natural Forces: Trumpets 1-4

- the 8th angel hurls judgments onto the earth under the sovereignty of God
- Angel hurls the fire from the censer to the earth and suddenly....Catastrophe!!
- Angels announce thunder, lightning, earthquakes, hail and fire mixed with blood
-

First Trumpet:

- first angel
 - hail, fire, blood
- A third of earth burned
- Trees burned
 - Green grass burned

Second Trumpet:

- second angel
- Great mountain burning thrown into the sea,
- a third of the sea turns to blood
- A third of the sea creatures died,
- $\frac{1}{3}$ of ships are destroyed
- Why is the cosmos enduring judgment? B/c the cosmos has been groaning in travail. We are living in a fallen world, which doesn't simply mean people are sinful. It means the cosmos itself has been infected with evil

Third Trumpet:

- Star falls from heaven
- $\frac{1}{3}$ of rivers and springs of water
- "Wormwood" is a noxious plant, not fatal but harmful. Dt 29:17-18 uses it to classify the fruit of idolatry

“And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them; Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood.”

- Wormwood has always stood for the bitterness of God’s judgment b/c of idolatry or disobedience
- Illus: When Andrew Jackson was elected as the 7th President of the U.S. he survived a vicious campaign. His mother, dead for 50 years was called a prostitute. His wife Rachel was labeled a “black wench” and a bigamist, unfit to be the wife of the president. She couldn’t take the vitriolic labels against her character. Lamenting her plight, she wrote to a friend, “The enemies of the General have dipped their arrows in wormwood and gall and sped them at me. Almighty God, was there ever anything equal to it?”
p. 5 “American Lion” by Jon Meacham
- She had a heart attack and died before Jackson took office.

Fourth Trumpet

- 1/3 of sun, moon and stars are smitten

The Eagle (8:13)

- As if all of this isn’t enough, an eagle comes announcing more doom
- Historical Parallel – Had John seen anything like this? Possibly.
- Eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD, engulfed the city of Pompeii w/ molten lava and destroyed ships in the gulf of Naples

Important Interpretive Reminders:

1. This is symbolic language, not literal depiction

- Like Ezek. 37, the valley of the dry bones or like Acts 10, Peter’s vision of the great sheet let down from heaven and filled w/ all kinds of unclean animals
- John is trying to convey a message, not a literal future

2. Purpose of the message is to bring people to repentance (9:20)

- All the earth is not destroyed
- All humankind is not killed
- Only a fraction, this is symbolic of God’s mercy

3. The sin is idolatry (9:20)

- In John's day the idolatry was emperor worship
- Emperor worship was the easy thing to do. Kept you out of trouble. Got you the good jobs. Was culturally popular.
- Emperor was made the ultimate power. Absolutely necessary.
- 10 Commandment series has been teaching us, we can make idols of anything
- What is idolatry?
- When you look to anything to give you only what God can give you !!
- Idols
- Family
- Money
- Romantic relationship
- achievement
- social standing
- competence and skill
- moral record
- religiosity
- children

When we love one of those things so that it becomes an ultimate thing, it has become an idol. We can't live without it.

- Not that we won't be sad if we lose a child, job, money, job.

- God is calling us to put him first, above everything else, even the good and religious things. That is where our salvation is. Not our money. Not our family. Not our church giving record. Not our standing.

Demonic Forces: Fifth and Sixth Trumpets (chp 9)

- Now punishment will fall directly on humanity
-

5th Trumpet: Demonic Forces

- The descriptions are more detailed for 5th and 6th trumpets, just like the 5th and 6th seals
- The “star” is some kind of angel. John considered stars not as things but as living beings. To the Jewish mind stars were divine beings who could become good or evil.
- Key to the bottomless pit is given to this angel. “The abyss”.

What is the abyss?

- It is the intermediate place for punishment for fallen angels, the demons, the beast, the false prophet and of Satan. (9:1,2,11; 11:7, 20:1,30. Their final place of punishment will be the lake of burning fire and brimstone (20:10,14,15)
- Out of this abyss will come the demonic locusts
- This should not be read as a literal army of locusts, but as an awesome source of evil let loose on the world. Though knowing something about the prophetic symbolism of locusts can help us understand this. John is borrowing from Joel 1-2.

Read Joel 1:4-6 and 2:3-9

- Leader is Abaddon or Apollyon (“destroyer”). John gives both Hebrew and Greek to make sure everyone understands.
- But notice. They don’t destroy vegetation. Forbidden from doing that. “Their attack is to be launched against the oppressors of the Xtns for a period of five months.””
- 5 months is the average lifespan of a locust.

God’s children are protected

- God’s children sealed on the forehead will be protected from this. Just as the Israelites were protected by the lamb’s blood on the doorpost, the Xtns will be protected from the wrath of Apollyon.
- We don’t need to fear this judgment. It is not for us. Again, we don’t need to interpret this literally and try to determine how to get some particular mark on our foreheads. God knows who belongs to him. He won’t make a mistake.
- So great the suffering caused by Apollyon that people will prefer death. (man who went on a cruise got so seasick that he was afraid he was going to die. Then he got worse and was afraid he wouldn’t die.)
- **6th Trumpet:**

- Voice comes from the altar of God. Symbolic of coming from the mouth of God Himself.
- The 4 angels represent the four angels from East, West, North and South. In other words, the entire world is going to be involved in this judgment, not just Jerusalem.
- 200 million horsemen cross the Euphrates (Euphrates is significant as the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire, beyond it lies the Parthians)
- The locusts were not allowed to kill, only torment. Now these horsemen of vengeance are allowed to kill by fire, smoke, and sulfur from their mouths. 1/3 of humanity is destroyed.

No repentance

- Despite this horrible display of devastation, God's purposes are still disavowed. The people refuse to repent. They continue to:
 - o Worship demons
 - o Worship idols of gold, silver and brass
 - o Murder
 - o Sorceries
 - o Immorality
 - o Thefts

App: Don't we still avoid repentance?

- Bad things happen and we:
 - o Ask why God would allow this to happen to us? We believe we are so innocent.
 - o We try to blame other people.
 - Hitler tried to blame the Jews.
 - We blame the government, schools, society, parents.
 - o We try to start a theological argument.
 - How can a good God allow this to happen?
 - When will it happen?
 - Isn't this just some ancient apocalyptic hype?

We do anything to avoid repentance. Repentance means change, and giving up control of our lives. And we loathe that.

Conclusion

These 6 chapters are about God's judgment on the world opposed to God's reign on earth. The judgment is real and horrible, but it is not meant to frighten Christians. It is meant to inform Christians that God is in control of the world and the persecution is part of the divine plan that will be short-lived but eternally rewarded. It is meant to assure Christians that the enemies of God will be defeated.

But is it fair? Should a loving God punish and destroy those who oppose him? Don't let the gods of this age, the gods of tolerating anything, muddy your thinking about the God revealed in Scripture and through the people of Israel, and through the body of Christ. God will not be mocked.

I heard on the radio about a little 5 year- old girl who went over to her 4 year- old cousin's home. The two girls began to fight over a game which they were trying to share. Making her case, one of the little girls said, "This is my game and I can do anything I want to do with it." And the other little girl responded with the wisdom of the ages when she said, "If you can do anything you want to do, then you don't have good parents."

We can not do anything we want to do and get away with it. Just as God has created a world governed by natural laws such as gravity, he has created a spiritual world order. If we dare attempt to defy the laws of gravity, we will soon learn we do this at our own peril. Likewise, God has made his name and Word accessible to the world, and to disregard it, and line ourselves up in opposition to God is eternally dangerous. God is a jealous God who promises to ultimately redeem his people and punish those who mock Him and attempt to persecute us. Therefore, let us remain faithful and true to God, and walk in confidence in the midst of a world which casually dismisses God as irrelevant, tolerant of any old whim we might have, or weak. God will one day judge the quick and the dead. This chapter is one dramatic illustration of that spiritual reality.

Important Interpretive Reminders:

1. This is symbolic language, not literal depiction

- Like Ezek. 37, the valley of the dry bones or like Acts 10, Peter's vision of the great sheet let down from heaven and filled w/ all kinds of unclean animals
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- All the earth is not destroyed
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3. The sin is idolatry

- In John's day the idolatry was emperor worship
- Today, it is no doubt our great wealth
- Emperor worship was the easy thing to do. Kept you out of trouble. Got you the good jobs. Was culturally popular.
- Today our wealth (and pursuit of wealth) seductively promises us peace, prosperity and pleasure. Worship of God happens only if there is nothing better to do. Beach homes

provide an escape for us. Games of pleasure win out over the discipline involved in Bible study, worship and prayers.

God has no right to demand anything from us. If he infringes on our freedom and demands a tithe, or daily obedience or weekly worship he has overstepped his bounds. Who does he think he is? God? We are offended by those who would attempt to portray God as such a demanding deity. And yet God claims to be a jealous God, a God who, according to the first commandment commands, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

The warning of the trumpets is not some distant catastrophic event, but in the contemporary catastrophe of placing pleasure, prosperity and personal convenience before the God revealed in the Old and New testaments. The trumpets blow in every age, the Apollyon is on the loose today, and those who are seduced by him are rotting inside from the decay of life that pays no attention to God and his prophets.

Chapter 9
Demonic Forces: Fifth and Sixth Trumpets-
0-+++++0

Context:

Reminder: Cp. 6, the main action (judgment begins)

- Ch. 6-11 brings to the reader the struggle of the church amid conflict and persecution, but also the judgments of God upon the church's enemies.
- Ch. 6-7 are the opening of the seven seals
- Ch. 8-9 are the blowing of the seven trumpets
- These two scenes are very similar, and I believe they should be viewed as different descriptions of the same events rather than linear events (first one and then the other happening)
- In ch. 6-7 judgment was falling on the creation, now it will fall directly on humanity
- In ch. 8 John describes what happens when the angels blow the first 4 trumpets. Those forces were natural forces (hail, fire, stars and moon smitten)

(Read 9:1-12)

I. 5th Trumpet: Demonic Forces

- The descriptions are more detailed for 5th and 6th trumpets, just like the 5th and 6th seals
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 - We blame the government, schools, society, parents.
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Conclusion

These 6 chapters are about God's judgment on the world opposed to God's reign on earth. The judgment is real and horrible, but it is not meant to frighten Christians. It is meant to inform Christians that God is in control of the world and the persecution is part of the divine plan that will be short-lived but eternally rewarded. It is meant to assure Christians that the enemies of God will be defeated.

But is it fair? Should a loving God punish and destroy those who oppose him? Don't let the gods of this age, the gods of tolerating anything, muddy your thinking about the God revealed in Scripture and through the people of Israel, and through the body of Christ. God will not be mocked.

I heard on the radio about a little 5 year- old girl who went over to her 4 year- old cousin's home. The two girls began to fight over a game which they were trying to share. Making her case, one of the little girls said, "This is my game and I can do anything I want to do with it." And the other little girl responded with the wisdom of the ages when she said, "If you can do anything you want to do, then you don't have good parents."

We can not do anything we want to do and get away with it. Just as God has created a world governed by natural laws such as gravity, he has created a spiritual world order. If we dare attempt to defy the laws of gravity, we will soon learn we do this at our own peril. Likewise, God has made his name and Word accessible to the world, and to disregard it, and line ourselves up in opposition to God is eternally dangerous. God is a jealous God who promises to ultimately redeem his people and punish those who mock Him and attempt to persecute us. Therefore, let us remain faithful and true to God, and walk in confidence in the midst of a world which casually dismisses God as irrelevant, tolerant of any old whim we might have, or weak. God will one day judge the quick and the dead. This chapter is one dramatic illustration of that spiritual reality.

Chapters 10 and 11

The Final Days

Introduction:

What will the final days look like?

What will time be like just before there is no more time?

What will take place, when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of our Christ?

What awaits the faithful remnant of Christ on earth?

And what will happen to the enemies?

Chapters 10 and 11 give us an overarching view of these last days.

In fact, chapter 11 is the most important chapter in the entire book of Revelation

At the same time, it's the most complicated, complex chapter in the most complex book of the Bible.

Therefore, if we can understand Rev. 11, we can grasp the truth of the end of the world.

We don't need to understand the details, which are open to many interpretations, in order to understand the broad and immutable truth of the chapter.

Context:

- Recall that chp 8-9 told of the first 6 trumpets blown by 6 angels to announce the coming judgment on God's enemies.
- Great cataclysmic events would occur both in the natural and supernatural world
- The enemies of God's people would be judged, begging to die, but only 1/3 would be able to.
- Now in Chp 10 and 11 there is a break, an interlude, a pause before the 7th trumpet is blown by the 7th angel. It causes us to wait, to sit on the edge of our seat.
- It's similar to the interlude in chp 7 before the opening of the 7th seal
- Chps 10-11 is interlude before the 7th trumpet.
- It's as if the man is going to answer the question for \$1 million. But first, a message to our sponsors. Though this message isn't frivolous information. It's part of the divine scheme of God's final judgment.
- this message will give an important word about what the church will be doing just before the final judgment. The church will be witnessing to the Gospel in the face of persecution.
- The church will not escape the persecution. Persecution will be the context of the church's proclamation of the Gospel.
- That's what chapters 10 and 11 are about
- Read chp 10

Chapter 10

1. Another Angel

- Mighty
- Coming down from heaven
- Robed in a cloud
- Rainbow around his head
- Face like the sun, legs like pillars
- Right foot on the sea and left foot on land

Could it be Jesus Himself? Some people think so.

- there is no doubt the description here combines elements used elsewhere of God and Christ.

Description of Angel

robed in a cloud (10:1)
rainbow above his head (10:1)
face like the sun (10:1)
legs like fiery pillars (10:1)
holding little scroll (10:2)
right foot on sea, left foot on land
roar of a lion

Description of Jesus or God

dark rains clouds of the sky, his canopy (Ps 18:11)
a rainbow encircled the throne (Rev 4:3)
face like the sun (Rev 1:16)
feet like bronze glowing in a furnace (Rev 1:15)
scroll in the right hand (5:1)
two angels standing on two banks (Dan 12:5)
the lion has roared, the sovereign Lord (Amos 3:8)

- this angel appears like God in the mind of many OT prophets
- it appears like Jesus in early parts of Rev.
- what we have here is a collapsing of God, Jesus, and the angel into this apocalyptic image
- the angel's voice is so transparently speaking on behalf of God and Jesus, it is essentially the same thing. The voice speaking is the voice of God
- this angel comes with God's authority
- like God, he is so powerful he can stand on land and sea at the same time

2. Seven Thunders

- the angel's voice spoke with 7 thunders
- you might think we are moving into a another series of 7 messages. But this time it's different.
- What the 7 thunders say, John can't write down. This is the first time this has happened. Until now John has been able to write down everything. But now he is told not to.
- Why is that?
- Perhaps the mysteries are too profound for humanity to see or hear!
- even with this revelation, everything will not be disclosed
- One reason we don't completely understand the endtimes, even with Revelation, is that we are still not told everything.
- Like Paul 2 Cor. 12:4 ??
- Like Paul 1 Cor 13:12 we still see through a veil

3. The Little Scroll

- The angel holds up his right hand and says, *"There will be no more delay."* In other words, the end is now upon us. The time has come.
- All that Christ promised, all the prophets foretold, is about to come true.
- The 7th and last trumpet is about to blow, signaling the end.
- Then he asks John to take the scroll. John is honored b/c it is the word of God. It is good that he receives the message. It is sweet to his mouth.
- But the message is a terrible one, one of judgment, one that speaks of death and indignity and shame.
- Nevertheless, John is told he must prophesy this message of all peoples.

- The plight of preachers. We have to preach messages we don't want to preach. When we are told to "eat the scroll" there is something about eating the Word of God, in order to proclaim it to the world. The message is not always sweet. Most of the time, I'm eager to preach. Sometimes I dread it. I know it will not be pleasant.

Quote

Author and Soviet Union prison camp survivor Alexander Solzhenitsyn died on August 3, 2008, at age 89. Solzhenitsyn, so full of wisdom, has often been quoted. On June 8, 1978, while addressing the 1978 graduating class of Harvard University, he offered one of his more memorable thoughts:

Harvard's motto is "Veritas," [Latin for truth]. Many of you have already found out, and others will find out in the course of their lives, that truth eludes us if we do not concentrate with total attention on its pursuit. And even while it eludes us, the illusion still lingers of knowing it and leads to many misunderstandings. Also, truth is seldom pleasant; it is almost invariably bitter.

- so blessed are the preachers who dare speak the truth
and blessed is the congregation willing to hear it.

Chapter 11

- Most important and difficult of the entire book
- Its difficulty is obvious, a mixture of many OT symbols mixed together
- Its importance is seen in the fact that, here in Rev 11, a summary of the rest of the letter can be found
 - o Overall: John sees people of God bearing faithful witness to Christ, but also suffering pain and persecution and indignity. They are not delivered *from* martyrdom but *through* martyrdom.
 - o What happens?

The Church is Prepared for the Storm

- Seen in the “measuring of the temple.”
 - measure the temple and altar, count the worshippers
 - like the old signs in the small Baptist churches
 - SS attendance, worship attendance, last week, last year
 - Baptist did this b/c we were very conscious of numbers: baptisms, attendance, giving
 - John was told to measure, b/c it was a symbol of preparation
 - you get measured for a suit.
 - the temple was to be measured to prepare it for the storm to come
 - measuring was like marking, sealing, branding
- in John’s day the temple had been destroyed for 20 years. John is speaking of the temple as the people of God.
- o 1 Cor 3:16
 - o 2 Cor 6:16
 - o Eph 2:21
- the outer courts are not to be measured. Those are for the pagans, the enemies of God
 - they will trample on the Holy City/ the people of God for 42 months
 - 42 months = 1260 days = 3 ½ years
 - this is to signify a brief time.

The Great Tribulation

- 3 ½ years
- There is going to be a great tribulation, a persecution of the church for a period of time prior to the end
 - unlike some other popular endtime theologies, John doesn’t speak about the church escaping this persecution
- Echoes back to the time of the reign of the King Antiochus IV of Syria, the most terrible time in Jewish history, after the 400 years of slavery in Egypt.
- He loved all things Greek. Considered himself a Greek missionary.
- Decided to introduce Greek language and culture everywhere
- He invaded Jerusalem. Almost 80,000 killed.
- Possession of copy of the Law was a capital offense
- Circumcision of a child was punishable by death.
- Temple was desecrated
- An altar was erected, and swine were offered as a sacrifice
- Temple chambers were used as prostitute houses
- 3 ½ years later, the temple was rescued by the gallant and heroic efforts of Judas Maccabaeus. It was restored and cleansed.
- Celebration of Hanukah. Festival of Lights
- John is using the history of the Maccabees, along with Daniel 12, to tell the church there is a period of tribulation to come. The church will face persecution

What will the church do during the tribulation?

- the church should bear witness to its faith
- we are to proclaim the name of Jesus and allegiance to Jesus in the face of persecution
- this witness is symbolized by the two olive trees and two lampstands
- there will be two witnesses. The Greek word is martyr
- not martyrs like suicide bombers who are terrorists
- not martyrs like those people who constantly are complaining of being mistreated
- the idea is "witness", one who proclaims the Xtn message
- the martyrs/witnesses will give voice to their faith even to the point of death

Why two martyrs?

- who are the most well-known prophets of the OT
- Moses and Elijah
- Moses called down plagues on Egypt
- Elijah called down fire on the prophets of Baal
- Elijah was said to have gone straight to heaven
- Deut 34:1 speaks of Moses' death, but it was God who buried him. No one else knew about it.
- Therefore the story rose in Jewish circles that God took Moses to heaven as well
- These two prophets are symbolic of God acting in the face of enemies
- Moses against the Egyptians and Pharaoh
- Elijah against the prophets of Baal and Jezebel
- John uses this history to reveal what will happen at the end times when the prophets of the church will proclaim the gospel in the face of opposition

Emergence of The Beast

- The beast comes out of the abyss.
- This is his first appearance in Revelation.
- He will make other appearances later (chp 12-13)
- He kills the two witnesses
- This symbolizes the best and the brightest of the Xtns dying for their faith in an era of persecution
- He has a temporary triumph
- the world will believe it has triumphed over the church

Resurrection of the Witnesses

- They are left in the streets for 3 ½ days.
- It was a shame and indignity for a Jew not to be buried w/in the next day.
- People from every nation saw this.
- How could that be?
- Because the 2 prophets are symbolic of the prophethood of the entire church
- all nations will see the persecution of the prophets of the church
- the people of earth gloated about this. The prophets had tormented them

- but after 3 ½ days they were resurrected
- God would have the last word!

- Earthquake came and 1/10th of the city was destroyed
- Many repented. God was praised.
- i.e. their witness and the power of God had its affect.

The Heavens Open

- 7th angel blows the 7th trumpet. But this time there is no judgment. Miraculously, the heavens open. John hears the choir of heaven saying
- they are singing the Hallelujah Chorus
*“The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of our Christ
And he will reign forever and ever.”*
- Then the 24 elders fell on their faces and worshipped God
- Remember they represented the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles
- i.e. all of God’s people will praise God and celebrate
-
- God’s temple was opened
- The Ark of the Covenant was seen
- Flashes of lightning and thunder
-
- Can you imagine what this scene would mean to a devoted Jew?
- The Ark of the Covenant was the footstool of God. Promise of protection. The abode of the Almighty.
- The Ark of the Covenant had been lost and not seen since the fall of Jersulaem to the Babylonians in 587 BC.
- Now it was visible. It was a vision of ultimate triumph of good over evil, of love over hate, of the vindication of the people of God against those who terrorized them and oppressed them.
- the prophets had been faithful during the persecution

The Call for Us

- our call is to be faithful during persecution
- we continue to proclaim the gospel story no matter what, even to the point of death
- John is calling us to faithfulness no matter what happens, no matter where we are:

The Apostle

- "The Apostle" starring Robert Duvall as a preacher on the run is a great movie,
- produced 1998
- Duvall grew up in the church
- his father was a Navy hero in WW2, his mother was a woman of deep faith
- like many Hollywood actors he wandered away from his early childhood faith
- but making this movie, immersing himself in the life of a Pentecostal preacher, despite his deep flaws, reawakened his faith
- Duvall, plays the role of Sonny, a Pentecostal preacher with a large church in Texas
- when he finds out his wife has had an affair, he bludgeons the man to death w/ a baseball bat
- he runs away and lands in a small town in Louisiana, where he starts a little church and gives hope to a little town that no one cared about
- at the end of the movie the law finally catches up with Sonny and arrest him
- he's back on the chain gang in the bayous of Louisiana
- still, the name of Jesus is still on his lips, and he continues to bear witness to Jesus, and lead others to do the same, even in their chains

Show film clip.

Modern Story:

Custodian read Bible in the bleachers ever day

A seminary student one day stopped and asked him what he was reading. "Revelation" he said.

The young man was one of the top Greek students of the seminary and thus he was curious about this old man reading this book that was so difficult to read. The young man had studied all the commentaries and knew all the theories: Premillennial Dispensationalism, Post-millennialism, Amillennialism. And so he asked, "Do you understand it?"

"Yep," the custodian said with understated confidence.

The young seminary student pressed him, not believing that this unlettered man could comprehend such a complex array of OT imagery and supernatural visions. So he pressed him further and asked, "Well, what does it mean?"

And the old man looked up with a twinkle in his eye and said very plainly, "It means God wins."

And that's what it means. Whatever persecution or suffering or indignity we might face as Christians now or in the future. This last book in the Bible about the last things on this earth, teaches us without equivocation or confusion "God wins. "

His promises will be fulfilled.

His reign shall be forever.

His followers shall be rewarded.

And his enemies shall be judged.

God wins.

Never let there be any doubt about it.

Satan's Great Escape

Revelation 12-13

Reminder:

We concluded chapter 11 by viewing the heavens opened, the ark of the covenant visible in heaven, and the multitudes in heaven praising God amidst thunder and lightning.

It would've been an appropriate ending. But John had more to reveal.

Again, my interpretation is that we are not about to enter a new chronological stage, but we have a repeat, a retelling of the former stories, a new perspective on an old problem, the problem of evil.

Chapters 12 and 13 tell about the unholy trinity:

The Dragon

The Beast of the Sea

The Beast of the Earth

They All Represent Satan

Is Satan Real?

When I was a substitute teacher in Durham, following my graduation from seminary, I was asked by a teacher, "Do you believe that Satan is real?"

I gave her an answer that I still believe, but I believe it more now than I did then.

Satan is real.

Satan is the personification of evil.

Satan is the archenemy of God.

Satan is the personal name of the Devil. "To obstruct" from Hebrew verb.

I believe in Satan, for similar reasons that I believe in God.

1. I believe in Satan because of my experience and my study of experience.

- I see people do evil things around me both locally and globally
- I witness horrible things which are hard to comprehend. Holocaust.
- I have known the evil in my own life and have been astonished that I could do or say or think something.

2. I believe in Satan because the Bible affirms such a being.

These chapters in Revelation give a cosmic view of Satan. They let us in on some earthly scenes from a heavenly perspective. In other words, we see in Rev. 12 and 13 the cosmic struggle between good and evil, between the forces of Satan and the forces of God. The ordinary scenes in the birth of Jesus, his earthly ministry, his death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and his final ascension to the Father are alluded to in these chapters. But now we get to see behind the scenes, or perhaps I should say, above and beyond the scenes. We see the all-out effort of Satan to work against God and Jesus.

Satan is depicted in these 2 chapters primarily through 3 persons:

Red Dragon

Beast of the Sea

Beast from the Earth

Chapter 12

The Red Dragon: (Vv 1-6)

- The chapter begins with a description of a pregnant woman
- Who is she?
 - o Some say the Virgin Mary
 - o Some say the Christian church
 - o Some say the Jewish people
- I believe the woman represents the community of faith. It was the community of faith that gave birth to Jesus (Jesus wasn't a product of Mary only). Jesus came from the entire nation of Israel, the Jews. The community of faith continues to bear witness to the Gospel, it is now the church which does this.
- **The Red Dragon** is crouched before the pregnant woman ready to devour her child

- 7 heads, 10 horns, 7 crowns. Don't know what they all mean. The overall sense is the completeness of evil being conveyed. This isn't some being who is a little evil. The Dragon is completely evil, Satan himself.
- **His power** is witnessed in the fact that a mere flick of his tail sends 1/3 of the stars to the ground.
- The child is born but he is taken to God on the throne, before he could be devoured. Here we have the life of Christ caught in one cosmic snapshot. It reveals the amazing intensity of the opposition to Christ by Satan his entire earthy existence. Allusions here are to Christ's birth and his ascension into heaven.
- Cf other threats to Christ:
 - Mat 2:13 Herod first wanted to destroy the Christ-child
 - Mat 4:1ff Jesus tempted by Satan to give up his authority
 - Mt 16:23 Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan. You are a stumbling block" (remember that Satan comes from a word meaning "to obstruct")
- The woman flees to the wilderness, symbol of a place of refuge (3 ½ years)

Battle in Heaven (vv 7-13)

- Between the Dragon and Michael
- The Dragon is defeated and thrown out of heaven
- This is the cause for great rejoicing in heaven
- There are allusions to a great battle in heaven between Satan and Michael and the forces of God both in the OT, NT, and extra-biblical sources. There is not much in the Bible about that, but if you take those few biblical references and add them to the extra-biblical stories you get a complicated story about Satan. One thread of the story was that he was the highest of all the angels, and he was so close to God he became jealous, envious and sought to obtain God's power. For this reason he was "kicked out of heaven." That's why he is sometimes called "Prince of the Air," b/c he still lives in the air, but he is essentially homeless. He has made earth his home.
- So there may be rejoicing in heaven, but it does mean a time of evil roaming the earth, for an extended but limited time period.

What does all this mean? It means there was/is a cosmic battle between good and evil. The evil has dominion over this world for a time, but his ultimate defeat is sure.

Why was Satan defeated? Verse 11

1. The blood of the Lamb. Heb 2:14
2. Word of the saints' testimony. Eph 6:12-13 (Truth, testimony of belief in Christ)
3. Disciples did not love their lives (the stoning of Stephen, Acts 7:54ff)

Persecution of the Church

- Having been thrown out of heaven, Satan torments the community of faith on earth

- She is saved/protected by two wings of the great eagle
- Here in the desert she is protected for 3 ½ years. The wilderness is a place of refuge for the people of God throughout the Bible.
- He continued to pursue her but she was protected
- Therefore he pursued her offspring. All those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. Thus ends chapter 12, with the Dragon on the shores of the sea waiting for ways to persecute the church.

The Ongoing Persecution:

- It comes as a surprise to many to learn that the persecution of Christians has not ended. Thousands continue to be killed annually in countries around the world. "Voices of the Martyrs" , a very credible news source cites the following:

1. Iraq: On Oct. 31, 2010 Islamic extremists attacked worshipers at the Syrian Catholic Church of Baghdad, killing 59 Christians and severely injuring more than 80 others, according to VOM sources.

Several gunmen armed with automatic weapons and explosives entered the church during a worship service and opened fire on the worshipers. Two priests were among those killed in the attack. "[This church was attacked] because they are very active, especially among the youth and community," VOM contacts said. "This church works closely with the United Bible Society and VOM by distributing Bibles and Action Packs in Iraq. This is the second time this church has been targeted; in 2004 it was hit with a car bomb."

2. Iran: The Assize Court of the province of Gilan, in Iran, has officially charged Pastor Youcef Nardarkhani with denying that Mohammed was a prophet. The court stated that this resulted in apostasy because Nardarkhani believes in Jesus and has shared his faith with others, according to The Voice of the Martyrs.

The indictment, which was issued by a public prosecutor in the presence of a jury, stated, "He has frequently denied the prophet hood of the great prophet of Islam and the rule of the sacred religion of Islam. ... He has proven his apostasy by organizing evangelistic meetings and inviting others to Christianity, establishing a house church, baptizing people, expressing his faith to others and denying Islamic values."

He is scheduled to be executed in 20 days, although there is no official law that stipulates that punishment.

3. Pakistan On Nov. 8, 2010 Asia Bibi was sentenced to death by a judge in Pakistan, on the charge of blasphemy. She was engaged in a religious discussion on the farm of a Muslim landowner. Her family is one of only three Christian families in a village of more than 1,500 families.

She told her accusers Jesus is alive, "Our Christ is the true prophet of God."

Upon hearing this response, the Muslim women became angry and began to beat Asia. Then some men took her and locked her in a room. They announced from mosque loudspeakers

that she would be punished by having her face blackened and being paraded through the village on a donkey.

4. Algeria: An era of relative liberty to practice Christianity ended in 2006. A new law was passed stating that house churches were not permitted. The law, ordered by the nation's court, is an effort to stop evangelism and church growth in Algeria. Even churches with licenses had to stop meeting. One contact reported their church stopped meeting briefly, seeking God's desire for their church. But they decided to resume meeting and face any consequences. The police came many times to threaten the church, but the believer reported that gathering together melted their fear and renewed their courage.

From Christian Century, November 2013

- Eritrea: earliest Xtn community,
military compound turned into housing for 2000-3000 Xtns
part of small Protestant community not approved by govt.

- The Global War on Xtns: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution
 - greatest story not being told in 21st century
 - 11 Xtns are killed somewhere each hour
 - Pew Forum: 139 countries (3/4 of all nations) discriminate against Xtns
 - 40 of 65 churches in Bagdad have been bombed since 2003
 - 1.5 million Iraqi Xtns. Now reduced to 1/3 of that
 - Egypt: 40 Coptic churches have been burned or looted in August
 - Pakistan: suicide bomber attacked church in NW Pakistan, killing 85
 - strict blasphemy laws. Illegal to evangelize. Illegal to convert
 - Syria: Xtns caught in crossfire of civil war
 - North Korea is the worst
 - Allen: story not being told
 - 1) Xtns in west are taught about Xtn imperialism. Can't believe it.
 - 2) Don't want to stir up anti-Muslim fervor

Don's Summary

There is no doubt that Satan is on the loose, unleashing evil and persecution of Christ's followers and intimidating others to remain quiet and stop witnessing to their faith in Jesus Christ. This can range from churches reluctance to evangelize their communities, to secular forces equating evangelism with hate crimes, to outright persecution and murder in other countries.

John's vision reminds us to be persistent and faithful until the day that Satan is finally and forever overthrown and the kingdom of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and our Christ.

Top Ten Countries Persecuting Christians

North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives, Yemen, Iraq, Uzbekistan and Laos.