

## **Revelation. Prophet Jim Smith**

One writer said this – “God gave us 65 books of the bible, full of theology, history and doctrine and then to end it, he gave us the worlds most exciting picture book!” This is a good way to approach the book of Revelation. It is full of colour, movement and people. It is full of sound and light. It is not a book to read if we want a quiet afternoon! But nor is it just a picture book. Like all of the Bible, it has a clear purpose and function, and it is the job of the reader to look beyond the pictures, characters and visions, to see the truth which God is revealing through the words.

The text is too long to include in full. Readers need to have their own copy of the text. I have included some verses, to help readers link what I am writing here to the fuller text.

### **Chapter 1. The beginning**

#### **1. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,**

The first verse gives us the overall setting for the book. It is a “revelation.” (From the Greek word “ apokalupsis”.) This book is “apocalyptic” - a special form of writing, describing events in the end times. The second part of Daniel and parts of Zechariah are in the same form, as is Mark chapter 13 and Matthew 24. Apocalyptic is a traditional and recognised type of literature. It has its own style and “rules.” We will learn about these as we go along. There have been many disputes about the writer, even from early times. Tradition points to John, the beloved disciple. But if it was him, he would be very old by this time. (Revelation dates towards the end of the first century of the Christian era.) Many other authors have been suggested. “John” was, and still is a very common name.

The revelation came from God. All ministry flows from God. We learnt this from Jonah and from Haggai. An angel is involved in giving this revelation, which is not uncommon in the Bible. (See the stories of Gideon and Joseph.) But others will be involved in giving this revelation, as we shall see.

#### **4. John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,**

This revelation is written for the seven churches in Asia. So John had real people in mind when he was writing. This is not a theological work for the chosen few. It was for God’s everyday people in John’s day, and it still is for God’s everyday people today. Many are put off reading this book, because they think it is too complex. But it was written for us to enjoy, and to encourage God’s people everywhere.

The message begins with the words “grace and peace”. We find this address in many of Apostle Paul’s writings. This grace and peace is from him who “was, and is and is to come.” This is the kind of expression which is common in apocalyptic writing. Writers of this material had a grasp of the greatness and enormity of God. He was, he is and he is to come. He is alpha and omega. His greatness is unsurpassed. (See also Isaiah chapter 40.)

**5. and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.**

Some have accused this book of having no Gospel in it, but here, in the opening verses, is the Gospel, the “euaggelion”, the good news of Jesus. We are loved (1 John 4:10); we are freed from sin (1 John 1:8-9) by his blood. (Hebrews 10:19) We are made co-heirs with him of the Kingdom of God.(1 Peter 2:9)

**7/8. Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”**

Here we have a good demonstration of apocalyptic writing. The first two lines are quotes from Daniel 7:13 (clouds of heaven), and Zechariah 12:10 (those who pierced him). To this is added “Almighty.” This expression has a complex history. In Hebrew it is “Yahweh Sabaoth,” which is translated “Lord of Hosts.” But Yahweh Sabaoth has come to us, through the Greek translation, (the Septuagint) as “Almighty.” (We can loosely accept a meaning “Lord of all powers, seen and unseen.”) Added to all these scriptures is the title for Jesus as “Alpha and Omega” ( the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet) and “who was and is and is to come”, giving the Lord his totally sovereign place over all history, especially the end times history, which Revelation is about to reveal.

I have looked at these two verses in some detail, to give readers a glimpse of the joy of Revelation. Every picture and set of verses has lots of other verses and pictures behind it, drawn mostly from the Old Testament. This is what makes revelation such a thrill. No matter how much we look, there is always more to learn. But even if readers don’t know or recognise all the allusions and hints, even as just a plain text, it is very stimulating and encouraging. But the Bible student will find great depths here for further study and research. In this small commentary, I cannot go into such detail for each verse. If readers are stimulated, they can do this for themselves. I hope that this will happen.

**12. I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,**

John hears a voice, but when he turns to see who is speaking, he sees a vision. This is again very typical of this kind of writing. We will meet it again and again. Just as we think we are going to get an answer to a question, something else happens. This is apocalyptic. Let's get used to it, and enjoy it. I notice that I keep writing the word "enjoy." That's because I believe that this book even with all its seriousness, is a source of comfort, encouragement and joy.

John sees someone like "the son of Man" (Jesus) moving among 7 golden lampstands, which represent the 7 Churches to whom he is about to speak. The Lord commands John to write to the angels of each Church. This seems to suggest that each church has an angel assigned to it. What is the message to each Church to be? And why are these letters here at this point. Surely we can get on with the revelation. Yet the 7 churches are existing in an apocalyptic environment. What Jesus has to say to them is of utmost importance. He will reveal the weaknesses and dangers which will test God's people in the end times. The warnings and encouragements to them are also very relevant for us, as we possibly pass into the beginning of the end times in the twenty first century.

## **Chapter 2 -3. Letters to the Churches**

There isn't space to look in full at these letters, so let's concentrate on their weaknesses and blessings.

### **Ephesus**

Good:- "Your hard work and perseverance."  
Weakness:- "Forsaken your first love."  
Action:- "Repent."

### **Smyrna**

Good:- "I know your affliction and your poverty."  
Weakness:- "Don't be afraid." (v 10) So they probably were afraid.  
Action:- "Be faithful."

### **Pergamum**

Good:- "You remain true to my name."  
Weakness:- Tolerate false teaching. ( v 14-15)  
Action:- "Repent!"

### **Thyatira**

Good:- "doing more than you did at first."  
Weakness:- "tolerate Jezebel." ( False teaching)  
Action:- "Hold on to what you have."

## **Sardis**

Good:- Not much!  
Weakness:- “reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”  
Action:- “Wake up!”

## **Philadelphia**

Good:- “little strength yet you have kept my word.”  
Weakness:- None!  
Blessing:- “I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming.”

## **Laodicea**

Good:- None!  
Weakness:- “Neither hot nor cold.”  
Action:- “Be earnest and repent.”

These seven end times churches can teach us powerful lessons.

- 1.** Watch out – it is easy to lose your way, tolerate false doctrine, or become too comfortable.
- 2.** Hold on – to the word and the works of God. Times will get more difficult. It’s even more important to hold on.
- 3.** The Lord is watching over his people. He expects certain standards, and will not tolerate unbelief. He will not hesitate to bless those who are trying to hold fast, and he will not hesitate to shake those who are not holding fast. Behind all this activity is God who longs to bless. At the end of each letter there is a promise of blessing. God does not give up hope that all his people will stay close to him. The encouragements in these letters give us the first hint of the true purpose of this book, which is to encourage God’s people in times of difficulty. This will become clearer as we move along.

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## **Chapter 4. The vision of the throne**

**1. After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”**

The introductions are over, and with the sound of the trumpet, (Zech 9:14; Matt 24:31) John passes into the heavenly places. He is immediately confronted with a fantastic sight.

### **1. A throne, with “someone” sitting on it.**

Unlike other Nations, the people of Israel made no image of God, and they often hesitated to describe God by name, because they respected his holiness. So describing God as “someone” is very much in the Old Testament pattern.

### **2. Twenty four elders.**

Traditionally, these have been seen as representatives of the 12 tribes of Israel, and the 12 Apostles – in other words, the old and the new – sitting on thrones.

### **3. Flashes of lightning and thunder from the throne.**

This is a typical way of describing God - look at Ps 77:18:- “our thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked.” See also Ps 93:4 “mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea—the Lord high is mighty.”

### **4. Seven lamps.**

Here is another good example of how this kind of literature works.

One of the roots for this image is found in Zechariah 4:2-6:- “He asked me, “What do you see?” I answered, “I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” I asked the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” He answered, “Do you not know what these are?” “No, my lord,” I replied. So he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.”

By studying Zechariah, we can come to understand that the lamps of Revelation 4 are connected to the Holy Spirit. (When we study Revelation, we need a good grasp of the Bible!)

### **5. Sea of glass.**

This is not an easy image to explain. The Jewish people feared the sea, seeing in it an uncontrolled and dangerous environment. So to have it controlled before the power of God would be a natural expectation. In the Temple the “sea” appeared to be a bowl, supported by bronze bulls. (1 Kings 7: 23-25) Was it conveying the same message? Or is it that, as the earthly Temple is a pattern of the heavenly one, there would naturally be a “sea?”

### **6. The four living creatures.**

These four creatures have their roots in a passage in Ezekiel 1:5-10. They remind us of the power and authority of God in every realm. But in verse 8, they become linked with Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6:2-3, where they are part of heaven, taking part in proclaiming the holiness of God. It is pattern of this kind of writing that images and pictures do change and develop in this way. Let me encourage readers not to worry too much about it, but just let it happen. We have to relax into apocalyptic writing!

When these 4 creatures begin to proclaim "Holy, holy, holy" then all of heaven joins in with them, and a great song of praise rises up to the throne:- "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

What a fantastic vision. Rooted powerfully in the Old testament, it take us behind the curtain to glimpse the very throne of God. It has been written to lift us to the throne of grace, and to confess the name of our God.

## **Chapter 5. The vision of the lamb**

### **1. Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.**

After the great shout of praise has passed, John looks again, and things become clearer. The one sitting on the throne is holding a scroll, with "seven seals." The number "seven" should alert us. Seven is a key number in this book, and in all apocalyptic writing. It is regarded as the perfect number.

A "mighty angel" (v2) appears, challenging someone to open the scroll. Angels appear a lot in this type of writing, and we will meet with them many times. No one was found worthy to open the scroll, and this causes John to cry. Note that even "in the spirit" we still experience our human emotions. This is not a trance state, but a genuine spiritual experience. One person is proclaimed as being worthy to open the scroll, and his titles are very powerful – "the lion of Judah", "the root of David" , the one who has "triumphed." We might expect at this point the entrance of a great triumphant Jesus, but to our astonishment, we meet "a lamb, looking as if it had been slain." Isaiah 53:6 and John 1:29 are the roots of this part of the vision. (We have to keep looking for the Old testament and New testament roots for much of what we are reading.) The lamb stands in the centre of the throne. ( Study Philippians 2: 9-11) The lamb comes and takes the scroll, and this leads to another great shout of praise, and the song of the lamb's triumph - "He is worthy." (v12) Finally, all the created order sings "To him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever." (v13.)

Another fantastic vision! All power and glory belong to God and to his triumphant son. This is another hint at the purpose of this book. No matter how things may look, God is in control.

From this glorious vision, we must move on, and it's going to be a bumpy ride! The book of Revelation is like a fast moving river, rushing us from this great vision to the time beyond the final judgment. We must now jump in and go with the flow. It won't stop until we are washed up on the shore of the new Jerusalem in Chapter 21.

## **Chapter 6. The seven seals**

In this chapter, we enter the first of the "seven" series. As each seal is broken by the lamb, events are set in motion which lead towards the final end of time, the judgment of God and the new creation. Each seal is full of hints to the Old Testament, and to the progress of the end times. Let's look at the seven seals in some detail. This will help us understand the other "seven" series.

### **2. The first seal**

When this seal is broken, a white horse appears holding a bow. He is given a crown, and rides out to conquer. The image of the horse comes from Zechariah 6: 1-8. The rider goes out to begin the judgment.

### **4. The second seal**

A red horse appears, and its rider is given power to take peace from the earth. (The four horses and riders bring judgment – warfare, famine and death. These three are common images in apocalyptic.)

### **5/6. The third seal**

A black horse appears, and it's rider brings the judgment of famine.

### **7/8. The fourth seal**

A pale horse appears, and its rider is called "death." He kills by sword, famine, plague and wild beasts.

### **9/11. The fifth seal**

Now John sees the altar of sacrifice, and under it the souls of those Christians who have died in the cause of Christ. They cry out for justice, but are told that this cannot come until "the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed."

### **12/16. The sixth seal**

The images used here are found elsewhere in the Bible. Look at Matthew 24:29; Isa 29:6; Zechariah 14:5. They are the signs that all the judgment is filled up, and now God will bring all men to his judgment seat.

### **Study note: The meaning of the first 6 seals**

The seals are a series of events leading to the final judgment and the end of time. This is the function of apocalyptic. It is written to alert us to the final act of history, to help us see where we are in the process, and to prepare our hearts. The first four seals release the judgment, in an increasing sequence of terror. In the middle of the series we are transported to heaven, where the souls of the faithful cry out. This is to remind us that God is in charge of history, and especially of end times history. We need not be afraid of what we are experiencing. Then finally, seal six sets the scene for the end of all things. And yet it does not follow immediately. Again, end times writings are like this. Just as we think we are getting to the end, something intervenes, to attract our attention, and to prepare us better to endure.

### **Chapter 7. A great multitude**

The seventh seal does not follow immediately. Instead, the end times process is stopped so that 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel can be sealed, which will mark them and protect them. This number has been argued over ever since Revelation was published. But we must remember that everything in apocalyptic has more than one meaning, and if we forget this, we will get into endless tangles. The Bible is not telling us that there will only be 144,000 in heaven, although some heretical sects have claimed this. It has been suggested that 144,000 represents the perfect number - 12 times 12 and then 10 times 10 times 10. In other words, God knows exactly which of his creation belong to him. There is perfection underneath the numbers of those he calls to heaven, and from a perfect God, this must be expected.

To underline the perfection of this number, rather than its numeric accuracy, we read immediately:-

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” (v9) They sing a very familiar song. “Salvation.” (Greek “soteria”

swthria.) This same word was used about the unborn Jesus. (Matthew 1:21) “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne,(so the thunders and lightning of chapter 4 v 5 are now clearly stated to be from God) and to the lamb, (so Jesus is now clearly identified with the one sitting on the throne) As is usual in heaven, one song of praise leads to another, and before we know it, the whole of heaven is worshipping.

John asks about the multitude, who were wearing white robes, and is told that they are the ones who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the

lamb. We only get to heaven by one route – putting our trust in Jesus, who shed his blood for us. (See Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:18) Then follows a beautiful description of what it will be like in heaven for them, and us. I have quoted it in full, partly to encourage, and partly to challenge those who tell me that we don't know what it will be like in heaven, or what we will do:-

Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

### **Chapter 8. The seven trumpets**

The seventh seal is broken, and we might have expected the judgment at this point, but instead, after a period of silence, another series begins - the seven trumpets.

#### **7/12. First four trumpets**

The first four trumpets release a limited judgment on the earth – one third of everything is destroyed. But this is not the total judgment we might have expected from the seven seals cycle. The trumpets repeat the process of the seals, while at the same time adding more images and pictures, so that we get a fuller picture. This is very typical apocalyptic – going over the same ground again and again. This is not unusual in the Bible. Prophets often repeated their message over and over again, so that hearers could not miss the point – something we are very good at doing!

### **Chapter 9. Trumpets 5 and 6. The abyss, and the locusts**

The fifth trumpet sounds, and we are introduced to new characters. A star falls from the sky, and opens the Abyss. There are various possibilities here, and I am going to explain them so that readers can get hold of the many different approaches to explaining apocalyptic writing, and can learn to take very great care in drawing conclusions.

At first reading, we might assume that the “star” who falls from heaven is Satan, being kicked out after his rebellion. (2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7) He opens the gates of hell, and releases the locusts. But the Bible teaches that the keys to death and hell belong to Jesus. (Revelation 1:18) So can the star be Satan, or is it Jesus? It is hard for us to believe that Jesus would release such suffering on humanity, but we are not dealing with humanity as we know it, but the hardened unrepentant core of humanity, which will not yield to God, despite all the judgment which is falling on them. We must remember that God judges in order to bring people back to a right relationship with him, but this unrepentant humanity will not yield. If they will not, then they expose themselves to more and more judgment, until God says “That is enough. There will be no more chances to repent.”

It is not so easy to decide who the Star is, and I don't think it matters. The fundamental message is clear – God is judging, and man is not repenting. This has consequences. The details have to be handled with great care. The opening of the Abyss releases a plague of terrifying locusts on humanity, which attack and terrify for five months. They were led by Apollyon, which means “one who destroys.”

The sixth trumpet sounds, and this brings about the release of the four angels who are “bound at the great river Euphrates.” They were released to kill a third of humanity, and like the locusts, they are truly terrifying in appearance.

**Study note:- How can this be?**

Look at this verse:-

“The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.” (19-21)

Despite all this judgment, there was no spark of repentance. Hardened hearts just continued as before. How can this be? This is a question which the writer of Revelation wants us to consider, after we have nearly completed the second cycle of judgment. This is the heart of his challenge, and we must pick it up, and not be carried away by all the images and experiences of this book. Revelation was written not just for our enjoyment and fascination, although it certainly does fascinate and stimulate our imagination. It was written by a brother in Christ, as he saw the pagan world moving powerfully against the things of God. Many of God's people of his day must have been astonished that men did not put their trust in Jesus, and change their sinful lives. They were asking “We know the truth in Jesus, yet the world persecutes us. What we have is obviously better, and we want them to share it as well, yet they ignore, they reject and they persecute us. How can this be?”

It seems to me that as our world becomes increasingly pagan or follows other religions, it is a question which we must also face and answer. So far, John has not answered it for us, although there are plenty of hints about what he thinks. Let's move on, and see if we can get hold of his answer, because that will also help us.

**Chapter 10. The little scroll.**

A very large angel appears, with a “little scroll” in his hand. He shouted, and seven thunders spoke, “And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.” (v4) Apparently not everything in heaven is available to us. This great angel warns us “There will be no more delay. But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.” So the seventh trumpet will bring

everything to an end? We need to remember that the seventh seal did not do this, even though we had been led to believe that it would. Perhaps the seventh trumpet will lead us in an unexpected direction? Let's move on and see.

John takes the scroll, and eats it. It was sweet to his mouth, but bitter to his stomach. This isn't the first time such a thing has appeared in the Bible. Look at Ezekiel's experience:- "And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth." (Ezek 3:1) In Ezekiel's case, the scroll represented the message of judgment which he would bring to the exiles living in Babylon.. For John it was a message of judgment for his times, and beyond. The scroll he took was open, not sealed. The message was there for all to see. God was announcing his final warning. John was told "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

It's exciting to see that in the middle of all this complex apocalyptic imagery, there is a very plain and simple call to ministry. Revelation is as much a challenge to ministry as it is a revelation of the end times. Sometimes people forget this. They are so keen to know the secrets of the times, that they miss the call to get on with their work of ministry.

## **Chapter 11. 2 Witnesses and 7th trumpet**

Two witnesses appear on the scene. They are described as olive trees and lampstands. When they have testified the beast from the abyss attacks and kills them. They lay in the street of the city. The city is called "Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified." After three and half days, they are raised up, and they are called up into heaven. At this, a great earthquake struck the city, seven thousand were killed, but the survivors, terrified, gave glory to the God of heaven." (Verses 1-15)

### **Study note: How can we make sense of these verses?**

First, we need to see that they come between the sixth and seventh trumpets. We already know, from the seven seals sequence, that this is the time when everything is at an end, and final judgment is about to come. During this gap, testimony is given to Jesus by these two strange characters. Even as the judgment falls, God never stops trying to awaken men to the claims and promises of Jesus.

Who are these two figures? This is very hard to interpret. Some see them as the Church, bearing testimony to Jesus in the terrifying end times. (Lampstands have already been interpreted as the Church in chapter 1) Some see them as Elijah and Moses, and some Elijah and Elisha. The reference to olive trees takes us to Zechariah 4:3, where the olive trees have a plentiful supply of oil, which could be seen as the Holy Spirit. This brings this verse to mind "Not by might, not by power but by my

Spirit says the Lord" (Zech 4:6) – a very relevant verse to God's people, facing the struggle of the end times, with all its persecution.

The enemy seems to have the victory, but just as at Calvary, he has made a massive error. The witnesses are raised up and called to heaven – as the Church of God will be in the end. These events, including the earthquake, wake men up to the reality of what is happening, and to the greatness of God - the first time in this process that we have seen any response of men to God. There is always hope, even until the very end.

Then the seventh trumpet sounds, and this time there is a real change in things.:-

**The great proclamation** – "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

**The great worship** – "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

**The opening of the Temple** – "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm."

We are almost at the end, and yet there are many chapters to go. As we approach the great finale, John has some really important things to teach us. We move now into the chapters of the great conflict.

#### **Study note:- Where are we in our study of this book?**

So where are we up to in our study of Revelation? We have come up into the heavenly places, where we have met the Father, the Son and the angels. We have tasted the worship of heaven. We have worked our way through the seven seals, and seen the increasing intensity of judgment, and the refusal of humanity to respond to the call of God. We reached the end of the seals, only to discover that it wasn't the end, but the next sequence of trumpets took us back over the same ground, but with extra characters and insights added in.

We have met the two strange witnesses, and seen, at last, some response from the people to the works of God. We have heard the seventh trumpet, but still we have not arrived at the scene of the final judgment. Why not? Because we have many more people to meet, the seven bowls of God's wrath and Armageddon to come, before we can finally come to rest in the new Jerusalem. By now, we should be growing familiar with John's style. We know that the characters we see have their

roots in the Old testament somewhere, but through his eyes, they have grown much clearer. We know that when we think we are at the end, we probably are not at the end! But we also know that he is not rambling, but his book is leading us to some stunning climax. We are also learning that this book challenges us now, today, to be more God's people, to work hard in the cause of God, and to be ready for whatever he had for us. Let's carry on.

## **Chapter 12. The woman and the dragon.**

**Study note:** Revelation was written to the Church of God during a difficult time, when persecution was happening, or about to happen. The book is written to encourage God's people to remember that God is in control of all events. The visions we are about to see are all grouped around this understanding.

**1-6.** Here we read of a very strange event. A woman is about to give birth, and a red dragon waits to destroy the child. A boy child is born, who will "rule the nations with an iron sceptre." The child is snatched up into heaven, and the woman escapes into the desert, "to a place prepared for her by God" where she is safe for 1260 days.

The woman is traditionally seen as Israel, the nation chosen to be the instrument of God's revelation to his people. But Israel could not be the fullness of God's revelation. This would come through Jesus Christ. In this vision, we see that Israel is pregnant with the next and final stage of God's revelation. The dragon is of course Satan, who is hostile to Jesus even before his birth. Knowing that in this birth are the seeds of his ultimate destruction, he waits to destroy the child. The child is clearly going to rule in power. Satan makes his move, but the child is taken up into heaven, and the woman is taken to a place of safety.

There is much more detail here, and all of it interesting, but the main thrust of the vision is clear – Satan is at war with Christ and therefore with his church. Having failed to destroy Christ he turns his attention to the Church. But God is sovereign, and will watch over his people. He will provide a place of safety for them. Ultimately, the plans of the dragon will come to nothing.

**7-9.** The dragon made war in heaven, but Michael and his angels defeat the dragon, and throw him out.

The Church is being encouraged to look further than its persecution. We are involved in a cosmic struggle. The enemy could not destroy the birth of God's people, nor could he destroy God. Ultimate defeat is his experience. We only lose heart when we lose sight of the wider conflict, and the wider consequences.

**10-12.** A "loud voice in heaven" sings another great victory song. The heart of it is verse 11: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." Yet again, God's people are being encouraged. If we suffer, and even if we die, we are winning! The Apostle Paul calls God's people "more than conquerors." (Romans 8:37)

**13 – Chapter 13:1:** The dragon just never gives up. Having failed in his rebellion, he pursues the woman again. If he cannot be God, he will take his revenge on the Church. But the woman was miraculously protected, and the dragon failed in his task. But the chapter ends with an ominous warning:- “Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” The struggle is not over yet.

**Study note:** As I said at the beginning of this section, these chapters are meant to be seen as encouragements to God’s people. This theme is going to repeat itself many times, until we come to Armageddon. Readers will be helped to understand this material if they keep this thought in mind.

### **Chapter 13. The beasts.**

The dragon is now in full cry. Having failed to be God, or to destroy the Church, now he turns his attention to creation. To help him, he calls up reinforcements - the beast from the sea and the beast from the land.

#### **The beast from the sea takes on some of the characteristics of Jesus:-**

The dragon gave the beast his power and his *throne and great authority*. (v2)

One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, *but the fatal wound had been healed*. (v3)

The whole world was *astonished and followed* the beast. (v3)

Men *worshipped the dragon* because he had given authority to the beast. (v4)

#### **In this deceit, the beast begins his spiritual warfare:-**

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words *and blasphemies*. (v5)

He opened his mouth to *blaspheme God, and to slander his name* and his dwelling-place and those who live in heaven. (v6)

He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer the saints. (v7)

All inhabitants of the earth *will worship the beast*—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. (v8)

What a dangerous enemy. But we have seen him many times on the world stage, since this book was written. Notice that he is a forgery - he is pretending to be Jesus. The truth is that he is a killer, with one intention – to destroy God’s people and put creation back into chains. The dragon is pinning his hope on this strategy, knowing that his time is short. As our writer says, “This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.”

As if this is not enough, the dragon calls up a second beast “out of the earth.” This beast is a deceiver, but also an enforcer. His aim is to put all creation in chains, and

to force worship of the first beast. He sets up an image, and those who refuse to worship it were killed. (The Christians of John's day were probably very familiar with this process. During the persecutions, those who would not confess the Roman emperor as God were killed.) This beast introduced the "mark." Those without the mark could not buy or sell. The beast has a name and a number – 666.

I have avoided discussion of quite a lot of imagery in this chapter, and also any discussion about numbers. I am aware of all the theology around these things, but I want to encourage readers to see the bigger picture. Those who want to study more can go back and fill in many details.

What we have in this chapter is the enemy now making his determined attempt to destroy God's people, as a means of destroying God. He has immense power. He is totally committed to lying and deceiving. He wants to kill. The seventh trumpet has truly unleashed the final end times scenario. The final judgment cannot be far away.

#### **Chapter 14.**

**1/5.** Now we see that just as the beast is getting ready for the final battle, so are the forces in heaven. The lamb appears, surrounded by glory and worship. The number 144,000 appears again, and as we have learnt before, this number probably represents completeness. Jesus appears with all those who have fought the good fight, and they are marked on their foreheads.

**6/13.** Three angels appear. The first is carrying "the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth." This is the great weapon of the kingdom of God, and the sign of the ultimate defeat of the dragon. The second angel announces the fall of Babylon, which is the very heart of the kingdom of the dragon. The third angel announces the punishment for those who worship the beast.

Taken together, these three angels are announcing the utter emptiness and folly of the dragon. However much he struts his power, he is finished. As John says, "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." (v12)

**14/20.** Angels appear, and begin the process of harvesting the earth. The final judgment begins.

**Study note:** Again in this chapter, we have the command to the saints to be patient. As we have already seen, this theme keeps occurring in this part of the book. Revelation maybe a spectacular book, and very different to anything else in the Bible, but it is included because it gives instruction and direction to the people of God. Among all the excitement of the visions, let's not lose sight of the practical application of this material.

Is it still relevant today? Our world is in turmoil, and many of God's people are facing times of suffering and struggle. The same God who gave the book of Revelation

reigns today. The same principles apply - history, and the end times are in his hands. The enemy may strut, but he is defeated, and the day of his final judgment and destruction is close. "This calls" as John would say to us today, "for patient endurance" on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

### **Chapter 15. The seven plagues**

Another series of seven begins, and this time it is the seven plagues. A plague is a misfortune, a blow, a disaster. We are going to cover similar ground again, but this time in less detail. But before we experience this, there is another verse for God's people:-

"And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God..." (v2)

We are unclear about the nature of the sea. In ancient cosmology, it was believed that there was a sea in the heavenly places. In biblical experience, there was a very large bowl or "laver" outside Solomon's Temple. There is also the link with the Red Sea – the last great barrier to God's people at the Exodus. This seems relevant, as we are about to deal with plagues, with references to the Egyptian captivity. But we have learnt to look beyond detail, to what John is saying. Again, we are encouraged to believe that the beast will not win. Those who had been victorious were standing there, ready to witness the fruits of their victory. The message which has been coming to us again and again is with us again! In all the turmoil of the world, as it moves towards Armageddon, there is already a victor. Jesus has triumphed, and those who have trusted him have triumphed as well.

Sometimes I wonder why the dragon keeps up his attacks. In military history, it is not uncommon for a defeated army to make one last attack. The dragon seems to support this view. His efforts are no more than the final agonies of a defeated foe.

After the victory song, the angels with the plagues step out to do their work. The plagues and the bowls of God's wrath appear to be the same thing.

### **Chapter 16. The bowls of God's wrath**

The first bowl produces terrible sores on those who had the mark of the beast.

The second bowl turned the sea to blood, and everything in the sea died.

The third bowl turned all the fresh water into blood.

The fourth bowl caused the sun to burn everyone.

At this point we read "They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him" It is astonishing that creation did not read the signs and repent. But as we have already seen in the seals and the trumpets, the hearts of men are hard and

closed. Has anything changed? Despite all the disasters which are striking our planet today, still men do not repent. The god of this world has blinded their eyes. (2 Cor 4:4)

The fifth bowl was poured onto the throne of the beast, and “his kingdom was plunged into darkness.” But yet again the people refuse to repent. God never stops trying to call people back to himself. Even in judgment there is still time to repent, although it is looking increasingly unlikely that anyone is going to repent.

The sixth bowl is poured out onto the river Euphrates, and “Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.” We already know that the dragon is calling together his forces for the great and final battle. First he called up the beasts from the land and from the sea. Now false and lying spirits come out of the dragon, beast from the sea, the beast from the land, here described as the “false prophet.” They are going to deceive the leaders of the world, and prepare them for Armageddon.

Before the seventh bowl, Jesus speaks, encouraging his people to stay awake, because his return is very near. Then the seventh bowl crashes on creation, and everything is broken, split apart and destroyed. Humanity however survives, to face the great and final judgment of the Great White Throne. Unlike the other “seven series”, this event is very final. It leads on to judgment – first of Babylon, then of the dragon, and then of all humanity.

There is a final moment in history. Beyond this time there will be no further call to repentance, no more offering of the good news of Jesus, no second chances. Much of humanity drifts along, clinging to this philosophy - “It will all turn out OK.” Others, the corrupt and the evil, carry on in their lawless ways, with this philosophy- “I can get away with it, so why should I worry.” Much of humanity, especially in the West dismisses the Church of God as old fashioned, irrelevant and defeated.

They are all wrong. One day the Lord will say “It is done!” Then those who have trusted him will rejoice, and those who have not? I’m not a heartless Christian. I do care very much for those who do not know Jesus, and for those who oppose him. I long that all men shall be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim 2:4) But when the Lord says “It is done”, then I no longer care. It’s their problem, not mine. I know where I am going.

**Study note:** What we are learning from Revelation is that God also cares, and he goes on trying to reach out to those who reject him. But one day he will say “It is done”, and that will be that!

## Chapter 17. The woman on the beast

Part of the final judgment will be the destruction of Babylon. But “Babylon” is not a physical but a spiritual place. It has a physical side. In its earthly form, it has always been seen as the physical representation of all that is evil. From it came the physical destruction of the Nation of Israel in 586BC, and spiritually, it was always seen as a place of evil, darkness, and the home of all that opposed God. This spiritual Babylon will disappear in the final judgment, along with the Dragon, the beasts and all those who have served them.

Babylon is first for destruction and in this complex passage, John spells out both the evil of the place, and its final destruction. This much is clear. The images are, however, quite complex. Let’s take a look at them, but don’t get confused by them. Remember the overall message – all that is evil will fall at the judgment seat of Jesus.

**1/4.** The “great prostitute” is Babylon. Many nations have been involved with her evil schemes. “Sitting on the beast” links her with the beast of Revelation 13. She has not hesitated to get involved with Satan’s schemes for world domination and the destruction of God.

**5/7.** There is no mistaking who she is, for her name is written on her –“Mystery Babylon, the great mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” We will contrast this later with the name written on the rider on the white horse. (Rev 19:16) Babylon has been a destroyer of the people of God. John is astonished, but the angel gives him an explanation of what he is seeing.

**8/14.** The woman has trusted the beast, but he is heading for his final destruction. He has tried and he has failed. Those who have been part of his work will be staggered at this failure. Let’s look closely at verse 9:-

**“This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits.”**

We believe that this is disguised hint at Rome, which claimed to be built on seven hills. John seems to be saying “The Babylon of which I am speaking is not a physical place, but a spiritual one. Babylon rises again and again in history, through different powerful groups, always with the same aim. To dominate and destroy God’s people. In Rome, I see Babylon risen again.” John’s readers would have grasped this quicker than we do.

Now it gets very complex and we can make many interpretations of what we read:-

“They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. “The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one

purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings— and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”

I’m not going to go into detail, except to say that John might be speaking about the various rulers of Rome, or he could be speaking of the seven great Kingdoms which have risen up in the east over the previous centuries. Either way, he is speaking again about the continuing power of the beast.

**15/17.** In the end, all those who deal with the beast will be betrayed by him, for that is his nature. He uses, then abuses and then destroys. Like everybody else, Babylon will find this to be the truth. But here is the irony – the beast, in doing this, is merely serving the purposes of God - “For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose.” (17)

What are we to make of this complex passage? Basically, it is not that complex. It is saying that the great evil world powers will not have their way forever. God is in control. Eventually, he will visit his judgment. But there is a deeper truth, and a deeper encouragement. The Christian faith is not a dualist one. We do not believe in two equal kingdoms, fighting it out to see who will win. We are monotheists. We believe that God rules, and that evil can only function with his permission. So no matter what happens, all is within the will and purposes of God. Even the mighty beasts must serve his will. Think how much this encouraged the Churches of John’s day, as they faced their times of testing. Think how much it can encourage us today. As I have said over and over again, Revelation, as well as being a book of images and mystery, is a very practical and useful book for God’s people, as they walk in his way.

### **Chapter 18. The fall of Babylon**

This chapter speaks for itself. The spiritual Babylon finally receives the full judgment which was always her destiny. God is not mocked. Those who deliberately oppose him can expect nothing less than total devastation. And what a total devastation it is:-

“pay her back double for what she has done.” (v6)

“Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.” ( 7)

“Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.” (8)

“Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: ‘With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.’” (21)

God is love. This message calls to us from the very beginning of the bible to the very end. Yet if people oppose him, deliberately oppose him, and go on opposing him,

rejecting his love, then there is only one end result. The hands which hold the power of creation also hold the power of judgment, He is slow to use it, longing that his children should return. He waits, he warns, and he waits some more. But finally, there comes a moment when every Babylon will be crushed under his judgment. Why should anyone see this as a problem? If we deliberately and persistently oppose God, we cannot be surprised when he finally says "For you it is finished."

For the Christians of John's day, this message must have encouraged them in their struggles. It encourages us today. But it should lead to a much deeper reaction. God doesn't give up until the last moment, and we must have the same attitude. We must continue to warn, to call, and to offer the good news of Jesus right up to the moment the Lord says "no more." We are not to rejoice in judgment, however much it may be deserved. This is what separates Christians from so many other faiths. We love, suffer, love, suffer and then love some more. Judgment may vindicate us, but it should also be a stimulation to evangelism and compassion.

If the dragon, beast and false prophet had any hope, the destruction of their home base have wiped it away. So now they have to fight for their survival.

## **Chapter 19. Armageddon**

If we have been following the story carefully, then this chapter should come as no surprise. For the day has come. The great end time battle is in the following stages:

### **1-10. Victory is guaranteed.**

"Alleluia, for the Lord God almighty reigns."(v6) This is pure celebration. It is the vindication of everything we have been believing and expecting. There are not two kingdoms, who are on equal footing. There is only one kingdom. The dragon and the beast only have room to act because God allows it. Now those days are coming to an end. God is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Apostle Paul says "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom 8:37)

These verses leave us in no doubt about the outcome of Armageddon. Modern films and TV want us to think that this is great crisis moment. It is not! It is a great victory moment, guaranteed before the foundation of the world.

### **11-18. King of Kings and Lord of Lords.**

Who is going to lead the triumph? None other than the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The images of Jesus pile up - "faithful and true," "on his head many crowns," "his name is the word of God," "out of his mouth comes a sharp sword." This is Jesus Christ, no longer despised and rejected, but triumphant and triumphing.

### **19-21. The battle is lost.**

The beast and the kings of the earth prepare to make war. There is one thing we have to acknowledge about Satan – he never gives up. But this time he is fighting his last battle. He is captured, and thrown into the lake of sulphur.

In many ways, Armageddon only comes as a shock to the losers. Those who trust in the Lord have been reading the signs in Revelation for some time. Victory belongs to God. We are secure in our faith. But at the same time we have been learning that these end times will be very turbulent, and our lives will be very unsettled. We have learnt that some, may be many, will be harmed by the thrashing of the beast.

This is the two sided ministry of Revelation to God’s people in unsettled times. On the one hand, God is in control, and he has already triumphed. Alleluia, and let’s be strong. On the other, some, perhaps many of us will suffer, as the enemy, sensing his days are numbered, lashes out at us, the earthly representatives of the God he hates and wants to destroy.

## **Chapter 20. The thousand years**

Let’s be honest from the very start and admit this is very complex chapter, and has caused theological debate which has filled thousands of books! The events are easily described:-

**1/3.** After the victory, the losers must pay. Satan is bound and thrown into the abyss for 10000 years. After that time “he must be set free for a short time.”

**4/6.** Those who had been murdered by the beast are raised, and reign with Christ for 1000 years.

**7/10.** After 1000 years, Satan marches out with Gog and Magog, and “surrounds the camp of God’s people.” But fire comes down to destroy this hoard, and the devil, the beast and the false prophet get thrown into the lake of burning sulphur forever.

**11/15.** The great white throne appears, and God judges all creation. If anyone’s name is not found in the book of life, he is thrown into the lake of fire.

But what does this all mean? Let’s keep in mind the main purpose of this book, which is to encourage faith and endurance in times of difficulty. Some among the original readers had seen their friends murdered, and knew the breath of the beast on their faces. Some were facing difficulties, which could lead to persecution. John writes to encourage them.

**Pre-millennialists** believe that at Christ’s return, the Christian dead will be raised, and those living at that time will be caught up with him in the air. (1 Thess.4:17) They will reign with Christ for 1000 years. Then Satan will be released. This short period will be ended by the universal resurrection. Then will come the judgment of the great white throne. **Post millennialists** believe that the return of Christ will come at the end of the millennium. **A-millennialists** believe that there is no literal 1000 years.

Whichever way we look at it, Christ will reign, the martyrs will be raised, as will all believers. Christ will triumph. I could go further, but the purpose of the Pastor's handbook series is to give an overview. Those interested can read further themselves.

At the judgment, books are opened. We don't read which books, but can safely assume they are the records of our lives. Who can stand against such a judgment? Only those who have accepted salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. Their names are in the book of life. Mine is there! I want all men to be saved. I do my best to give testimony to Jesus, so that others can follow him. I want all men to have their name in the book of life. But in the end, all men will not be found there. We have seen the hard hearts of the people who have opposed Christ and his church in this book. Men choose where they want to have their names written. In the end, no matter what others do, my name is there. We have to imagine that those who read this book for the first time felt just the same.

**Study note:** We set out on a stormy sea, when we left the vision of the lamb in chapter 5. I warned us then that it would be a stormy crossing, and it has been. But we are in sight of land at last. And the lighthouse which will guide us to the shore of the new Jerusalem? The knowledge that our names are written in the lamb's book of life. With this message written deeply in our hearts, we come at last to our final resting place, or at least we come as far as John is going to take us

## **Chapters 21/22. The New creation**

There are many images and pictures in this section. They are very attractive, but let's not get trapped by them. John is writing about spiritual realities, using earthly language and biblical images. He is writing about newness – about the perfection which is in heaven, and one day will be restored to all the created order. Above all, he is writing to encourage God's people, and to show us that which is in the spiritual, and one day will be ours through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

### **Chapter 21**

**1/4.** Finally, after all the storms of the previous chapters, God establishes himself with his people, in a newness which is almost beyond our understanding. God is going to “dwell” with us, or a better translation is to “tabernacle” with us. The tabernacle was a sign of God's unfailing commitment to his people in the Old Testament. Now this promise comes to its perfect fulfilment. To seal it, the seven evils are “no more” – the sea, death, mourning, weeping, pain, curse and night are gone forever.

**5/8.** God speaks, and says “It is done!” All things earthly are over, and he has taken his power and reigns. What an encouragement this must have been to the troubled churches of John's day – and to ours today. The promise “he who overcomes will

inherit all this” underlines the precious promises which one day we will inherit. But for those who have not kept the faith there is only the finality of the second death.

**9/27.** John sees a vision of the bride, the wife of the lamb. He sees the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a spiritual picture of great beauty. The final state of God’s people will be beautiful beyond description. Everything will be perfect, and we will live in the middle of it forever. One thing is missing from this vision, and I’m going to quote exactly why:- “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

God dwells in the city, so we no longer need any Temple system, or any religious structure. Access will be total, immediate and forever. Jesus dwells in the city, so there is no need of any physical light. We will see in the spirit by his glory. There is not a lot of use for the gate of the city, because it will never be shut. No one who hasn’t been invited will ever come in. And there will be total brotherhood in the city. Only those who have trusted Jesus will be there. The apostle Paul said “I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.”(Phil 3:14) This is the prize. Fabulous!

## **Chapter 22**

**1/5.** The water of life and the tree of life proclaim that the new created order is full of life. Then comes a series of promises designed to make any of God’s children happy:-

### **“No longer will there be any curse”**

The curse of Genesis is broken forever. The Bible says “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” (Galatians 3:13) In the new creation, this promise has become a reality.

### **“his servants will serve him”**

The highest honour in the kingdom is to be a servant of Jesus. Mary put it this way:- “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” (Luke 1:38) We will be given that honour forever. I have heard many people say “What is there to do in heaven?” Many things, and this is one of them. We will not be disembodied spirits, floating around like a cloud. We will serve the Lord, in our new spiritual bodies. (1 Cor 15:42-43)

### **“They will see his face”**

In the Old Testament, seeing God was a unique privilege, reserved for very few. Moses was one of them:—“The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young assistant Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.” (Ex 33:11) Now we can all speak to him face to face. He intended this from the beginning, but sin spoilt this closeness.(Gen 2:28) Now that closeness is back, for all of us, forever.

### **“his name shall be on their foreheads”**

Those who bowed down to the beast had his name written on them. But God’s people have His name written on their foreheads. There is no mistaking to whom we belong.

### **“The Lord God will give them light”**

In the spiritual realm, we will live all the time in the light. The darkness, and all its evil, will be no more. Jesus prophesied the same thing:—“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” (John 8:12)

### **“And they will reign for ever and ever.”**

This is really the major end of Revelation, and we are going to stop here. There are things to come, and they are important, but no so important as the point to which we have come. From the moment John heard the invitation to “come up”, we have been moving towards this wonderful conclusion. We will reign for ever and ever. And what will we do in this time or reigning? John does not tell us. The Bible gives very faint hints, but leaves most of the picture closed to us. All that matters for now is that we will be with Him, and he will be in his glory. Together, we will reign.

### **7/21 Odds and ends**

John brings his Revelation to an end with a series of encouragements and warnings. They are fairly easy to understand. Underlying all these things is one great hope, which he expresses in verse 20 – “Marana tha. I am coming soon.” We can do no better than say with John “Amen. Come Lord Jesus.”

### **Study note:**

Revelation is a very deep and a very exciting book. But at its heart it has a simple message. God is in control, and is bringing history slowly but surely to its conclusion. The enemy can struggle and attack as much as he wants – he is defeated, broken, and is heading for destruction. Against this background, God’s people must hold

firm, be strong and do the works of God. Apparent short term defeat will give way to eternal victory.

God's people have often got lost in the book of Revelation because they have lost sight of this simple and powerful message. Trapped in the endless controversy over the 144,000, or the millennium, they have, as we say, lost the plot! John did not, and has left us a book of such hope and encouragement. It may be 2000 years old, but it is a message as much needed today as ever it was when it was first written.

My conviction is that it is a message we will need more and more. The enemy is growing strong in our world today. In his arrogance he attacked America, and as a result, the world has become a much more dangerous place. Things are moving in the heavenlies, and we must learn what John learnt – how to be strong to stand firm, and to overcome. Amen. Come Lord Jesus.