

The Book of Revelation

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Introduction

The Book of Revelation is the capstone of God's revelation to man. But it is also in many ways the least understood book of the Bible because of the many symbols and figures. Its form—apocalyptic genre—can be intimidating to the reader. It seems mystical or surreal. And in some ways it is surreal, because it predicts things that we have never seen or experienced before. But in other ways, the book is integrated so well with the rest of the Bible that it forms a marvelous testimony to the coherence of the whole Bible and of God's plan for the world.

The book of Revelation has two authors. The human author was the apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20). He was probably one of the youngest of the disciples and lived perhaps until 95 A.D. He also wrote the gospel of John and the three short letters that bear his name toward the end of the New Testament.

The other author is God, through the Holy Spirit. As with every other book of the Bible, what happened was that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). God miraculously moved them so that what they wrote was exactly what God wanted to be written—no more and no less, no errors and no embellishments. As a result, the Bible as originally given can be said to be a divine-human book. It is “God breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and thus without error and totally trustworthy.

We will refer several times to the Old Testament book of Daniel to show how it connects with Revelation. We really cannot hope to understand either Daniel or Revelation without understanding and referring to the other. This is because Daniel is the “Revelation of the Old Testament.”

Perhaps it is with some “fear and trepidation” that you embark on a study of the book of Revelation. Don't worry! In this study we will untangle some of the symbols and figures to help you understand what you are reading. In this endeavor, let us strive to listen to what God is saying—not what man thinks—and see then what God wants us to learn from his last revelation to mankind—The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Preliminaries

As is the case for any teaching or study notes, there are certain presuppositions that come “behind” the material being studied. Here is a short list of presuppositions that the author of these notes is bringing to the study. Everything in these notes will be in some way affected by these basic truths.

Essential Truths about God

1. **God** exists and is the only God.
Hebrews 11:6, Deuteronomy 6:4
2. **God** exists in three co-equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
John 1:1, Matt. 28:19
3. **God** created all things.
Genesis 1:1
4. **God** has spoken inerrantly and authoritatively in His Word.
2 Timothy 3:16-17

Essential Truths about Jesus Christ

5. **Jesus Christ** was virgin-born and was sinless.
Matthew 1:23, Hebrews 4:15
6. **Jesus Christ** is fully God and fully man.
Romans 1:3-4, Romans 9:5
7. **Jesus Christ** died in our place for our sins.
1 Peter 3:18
8. **Jesus Christ** rose bodily from the dead.
1 Corinthians 15:20
9. **Jesus Christ** is the only way of salvation.
John 14:6, Acts 4:12
10. **Jesus Christ** is coming again.
Revelation 22:20

Essential Truths about Salvation

11. **Salvation** is needed because the penalty of sin is death, and every person is guilty of sin and is subject to death.
Romans 6:23, Romans 3:10, Hebrews 9:27
12. **Salvation** comes by repentant faith alone in Christ and is based on God's grace alone.
Acts 17:30, Ephesians 2:5, Ephesians 2:8-10
13. **Salvation** transforms a person into a new creation.
2 Corinthians 5:17

Importance of these Essential Truths

- If you reject any of these, you *cannot* rightly call yourself a Christian. In this sense, they are properly called “fundamentals” of the faith.
- If you are a Christian, you accept all of these without reservation and as applicable for yourself, even though you may not understand all of them completely.

Study #1 – Outline of Revelation

Chapter 1 verse 19 indicates the high-level outline of the book. It says that John is told to write about three things:

1. The things which you have seen, including chapter 1;
2. The things which are, including the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3;
3. And the things which will take place after this, including chapters 4 through 22.

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| I. Letters to the Seven Churches | 1:1-3:19 | |
| A. Introduction | 1:1-20 | (things seen) |
| B. Ephesus | 2:1-7 | (things which are) |
| C. Smyrna | 2:8-11 | |
| D. Pergamos | 2:12-17 | |
| E. Thyatira | 2:18-29 | |
| F. Sardis | 3:1-6 | |
| G. Philadelphia | 3:7-13 | |
| H. Laodicea | 3:14-19 | |
| II. Heavenly Worship of the Lamb of God | 4:1-5:14 | (things future) |
| III. The Seven-Year Tribulation | 6:1-19:21 | |
| A. The Seven Seal Judgments | 6:1-17 | |
| B. Interlude: Multitudes Saved in Tribulation | 7:1-17 | |
| C. The Seven Trumpet Judgments | 8:1-9:21 | |
| D. Interlude: The Angel and the Book | 10:1-11 | |
| E. Interlude: Two Witnesses | 11:1-14 | |
| F. Conclusion of the Trumpet Judgments | 11:15-19 | |
| G. Interlude: Important Characters | 12:1-13:18 | |
| H. Interlude: Visions of 144,000; Angels; and Final Judgment ... | 14:1-20 | |
| I. The Seven Bowl Judgments | 15:1-16:21 | |
| J. Interlude: Babylon | 17:1-19:5 | |
| K. The Second Coming of Christ Detailed | 19:6-21 | |
| IV. The Millennial Kingdom and Final Judgment | 20:1-10 | |
| V. The New Heaven and New Earth | 21:1-22:21 | |

Interpretive Issues

- Timing of fulfillment of the prophecies in the book.
- The blessing pronounced on the one who reads, hears, and keeps the words of the prophecy.
- 2 Peter 3:11-12 gives us some motivation from another Bible passage as to why we should have at least a rudimentary idea of what is going to happen in the *future*. That which is coming in the future demands us to live holy lives *now*.
- The interpretation of the series of seven letters.
- The significance of the number seven.
- In terms of the chronology of Revelation, several sections are parenthetical but the book's overall outline is sequential; the judgments are numbered and seem to be sequential with one series unfolding into the next one.
- The general chronology of the book and thus of the future is helpful to us, but an absolute understanding of every detail of chronology is not necessary, nor probably realistically achievable for most of us. Some revelation was not given to us—Rev. 10:4, for instance—and so we do not have all information that could be relevant to the whole end-times. That is not to say we are missing things that we need.
- Signs are signs, not to be taken literally.
- Fads in interpretation, e.g. the Soviet Union in Revelation and Daniel.
- The literality and length of the millennial kingdom.
- The reality of “heaven and hell” are plainly taught.
- Notice the phrases “Then I saw” (42 uses) and “Then I heard” as introductory to the various visions.

Study #2 – John’s Vision of Jesus Christ, 1:1–1:20

As we progress through our studies in the book of Revelation, we will generally follow the text in the order it is given. Sometimes it will be necessary to group texts together or take them in a non-sequential order because of their subject matter. Chapter 1’s outline is sequential and follows the text closely:

1. John’s Initial Description of Jesus Christ, v. 1-8

- a. The source of John’s message and its blessing, v. 1-3
- b. John’s greeting from the eternal, Triune God, v. 4-6
God is said to be eternal. The seven Spirits represent the Holy Spirit in all His perfections (Isa. 11:2-5). Jesus is the faithful witness (Heb. 1:2), the first resurrected to a glorified body, and the sovereign Lord of all. He is also the one who **loved** us and **washed** us. This washing is complete in Him. We do not wash ourselves or add to this washing. His blood and only His blood cleanses from sin. His work results in the future in our sharing with him a portion of his rule (kingship) and both now and in the future of sharing in a role of mediation to God (priesthood). Note that all true believers are priests (1 Peter 2:9).
- c. Jesus’ second coming, v. 7
- d. Jesus’ external existence and primary place in all things, v. 8
He is the “first and last,” “Alpha and Omega,” “Beginning and End.” These all say that he is the A to Z of everything. He starts all things and to Him all things come to an end (see Rom. 11:36).

2. John’s Vision of Jesus Christ, v. 9-17a

- a. John was suffering persecution under Emperor Domitian, v. 9
- b. John in the Spirit, v. 10-11
John’s vision was a “hearing and seeing” vision. Actually, as we read on, we find it is a fully tactile “3-D virtual reality” type of experience. See 10:10 for instance. He was told to write what he experienced and send it to the seven churches.
- c. John saw the glorified Lord Jesus, v. 12-16
Note that he saw 7 lampstands; the Son of Man (see Daniel 7:13, Matt 26:64, Mark 14:62, John 5:27); gold, white hair, fiery eyes, refined brass; 7 stars, and a sword.
- d. John responded in utter fear, v. 17a

3. Jesus’ Message to John, v. 17b-20

- a. A message of comfort from the Lord, v. 17b
He is the sovereign Lord of all.
- b. A message of life and dominion, v. 18
The Lord was given authority over His life (John 10:18). He has the *keys* of Hades and Death, which means that He has authority over them and has conquered them.
- c. A message of present and future things, the general outline of the book, v. 19.
- d. A message of defined symbols, v. 20.
The symbol of the stars and lampstands are explained. Many of the symbols in Revelation are explained to us if we just wait for the explanation to unfold as the text progresses. The 7 lampstands represent the seven churches who will receive the letter; The 7 stars represent the “angels” or messengers of those churches. I believe this refers to the human pastors of those churches, who are the responsible leaders in them. This assumes local churches organized with pastors and deacons and members.

Sidebar – Ordered List of Future Events Prophesied in the Bible

1. The next event on the prophetic calendar is that the church will be raptured.
I believe and teach the pre-tribulational rapture, meaning we believe that the rapture happens pre/before the tribulation. This is in contrast to the mid-tribulational (Gleason Archer) and post-tribulational (Douglas Moo) positions. (Those are two well-known evangelical scholars who take those others views.)
2. The tribulation will start almost immediately after the rapture (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).
3. The tribulation will end with the second coming of Christ (Rev. 19:1-21).
I believe and teach the pre-millennial view of the second coming of Christ, meaning that I believe that Jesus will return before the 1000 years spoken of in Revelation 20. This is in contrast to the post-millennial view, which is the belief that Jesus will return after the millennium. My understanding is also contrasted with the amillennial view which states that there is no millennium (see Sam Storms and Mark Dever for this view).
4. The millennial kingdom will be inaugurated and Christ will reign 1000 years with Satan bound (Rev. 20:1-6).
5. Satan will rebel and deceive many people at the end of the 1000 years (Rev. 20:7-9).
6. The rebellion will be crushed by God (Rev. 20:9b-10)
7. The old earth and heavens will be dissolved (Rev. 20:11).
8. The Great White Throne Judgment will occur (Rev. 20:11-15).
9. God will create the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:1).
10. True believers will dwell with God on both the new earth and apparently in heaven as well, serving and reigning with Him (Rev. 22:3, 5).
I have thought of this in terms of "commuting" between the new earth and heaven, so we can live and serve God in both places.

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Study #3 – Letters to the Seven Churches, 2:1–3:22

1. The seven messages here are very important to hear. The Word says in 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22, seven times, “Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Besides showing us that Jesus spoke (1:17) through His Spirit, we see a number of other **applicable** truths. “Hear” is an imperative, a command.
2. By these seven statements, we see that Jesus rewards those who “overcome.” We believe this to refer to their hearing and faithfully obeying what Jesus says (1 John 5:4).
 - a. The reward of access to the tree of life, 2:7.
 - b. The reward of deliverance from the second death, 2:11.
 - c. The reward of spiritual nourishment, a white stone,¹ and a new name,² 2:17.
 - d. The reward of reigning with Christ, and the morning star,³ 2:26-28.
 - e. The reward of white garments,⁴ and one’s name in the book of life, 3:5.
 - f. The reward of preservation from the tribulation, 3:10.
 - g. The reward of dwelling in God’s temple forever⁵ and personal association with Christ,⁶ 3:12.
 - h. The reward of being enthroned with Christ, 3:21.
3. Jesus tells us about Himself.
 - a. He holds the seven messengers of the churches, and is in the midst of the churches, 2:1
 - b. He is the first and last; He was dead and was resurrected, 2:8
 - c. He is a powerful judge, 2:12
 - d. He is a glorious judge with piercing, purifying vision, 2:18
 - e. He has the seven Spirits of God (Isa. 11:2-5), and again has the seven messengers, 3:1
 - f. He is holy and true; He has the keys of the Davidic kingdom and its riches, 3:7 (see Isa 22:22)
 - g. He is faithful, true, the beginning of all things, 3:14
4. Jesus observes and evaluates our church’s conduct and attitude. See the “I know” of 2:2. His evaluation indicates what we should be like.
 - a. He approves good works, hard work, patience, and perseverance, 2:2, 2:9, 2:13, 2:19, 3:10.
 - b. He approves an attitude that abhors evil and tests messengers to the church, 2:2, 6 (see Psalm 139:21-22 about hating God’s enemies).
 - c. He approves of faith in the midst of persecution, 2:13.
 - d. He approves the undefiled life, 3:4.
 - e. He approves keeping His word and not denying His name, 3:8.
 - f. He disapproves abandoning our fervent love for Christ, 2:4-5 (Matt. 22:37-40, John 21:15).
 - g. He disapproves of bad doctrine, particularly of Balaam (idolatry and sexual immorality), 2:14; of the Nicolaitans, 2:6, 15; of Jezebel, 2:20.
 - h. He disapproves of false spiritual life which masks deadness, 3:1
 - i. He disapproves of useless works, 3:15-16
 - j. He disapproves a self-sufficient attitude, 3:17
5. Jesus exhorts certain behavior.
 - a. Repent of things done wrong, 2:5, 2:16, 2:22, 3:3, 3:19
 - b. Be faithful and not fearful in suffering, 2:10.
 - c. Hold fast and watch until Christ returns, 2:25, 3:2-3.
 - d. Become stronger in the faith, 3:2
 - e. Come to Me for spiritual riches, righteousness, and light to see, 3:18

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¹ A gift, signifying Christ’s approving favor and acceptance.

² The gift is personalized. Each one has his own.

³ The morning star refers to Christ, particularly at His second coming (2 Peter 1:19, Rev. 22:16; Num. 24:17).

⁴ White signifies purity or righteousness. These are garments provided by God (cf. Matt. 22:11-12).

⁵ A pillar is immovable and remains standing—a fixture in the house of God.

⁶ This seems to be a visible token of affiliation with Christ.

Study #4 – The Throne⁷ and the Scroll⁸, 4:1–5:14

1. The Throne of God, chapter 4

- a. John’s vision includes him being caught up to heaven, v. 1
- b. We are now in the “after this” section mentioned in the 1:19 outline
- c. John’s vision of God is very difficult for him to communicate, v. 2-3
It is somewhat like the colorful appearance of God in Ezekiel 1:4-28.
- d. The 24 Elders, v. 4-5
These elders probably are representatives the church, though it is hard to be dogmatic. If so, it would be another indication, along with Rev. 3:10 and 1 Thess. 5:9, that the church will not suffer the wrath of God in the tribulation.
The seven Spirits of God represent, as we said before, the Spirit of God in seven different facets (Isa 11:2-5).
- e. The 4 Living Creatures, v. 6-8
These creatures remind us of the seraphim of Isaiah 6:1-3. They are angelic beings that are like guardians of the throne of God and proclaimers of His holiness.
- f. The Worship of God, v. 9-11
God is worthy of our worship today, just like in the heavenly worship scene, because He created everything, and sustains everything (not to mention that He redeemed us, as in 5:9).

2. The Scroll and the Lamb, chapter 5

- a. Lack of someone to take the scroll from the hand of God, v. 1-4
Some things are top secret, or otherwise restricted access. Some suggest that this document is the title deed to the universe; it may be the book of judgments or the sentence for those on the earth after the rapture. Whether or not it is exactly that, it is something which no person or angel was fit to look at, take, open, read, or do anything about. John’s vision indicates that he understood there was an intensive search undertaken to see if someone could handle the scroll. No one was found.
John’s emotional response indicates he *really* wanted to know what was in that scroll.
- b. The Lamb of God, v. 5-7
Notice His descriptions: Lion of the tribe of Judah; Root of David; Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes.
- c. The Worship of the Lamb of God, v. 8-14
Notice that the four creatures and 24 elders worshipped the Lamb. They ascribe worth to the Lamb because of His redemptive work. He accomplished all of this great thing. He owns everything by not only creation but also redemption. He made it, and he bought it again.
Verse 8 provides an instructive example of the symbolism of Revelation. The bowls of incense “are” the prayers of the saints. What is happening here is that John sees bowls of incense used by the elders in their worship of the Lamb. He really saw them. But they, in turn, were symbols which represented the prayers of the saints. This is something like the communion bread which “is” the body of Christ and the cup which “is” the “new testament in his blood.” The bread is an unleavened wafer, and the cup is a cup of grape juice (new wine). But these literal things are themselves representative of something else, so that we can say they “are” the things that they represent.
In verse 11-12, notice that the angels were added to the chorus of worshippers so that there were millions of beings worshipping the Son of God.
Verse 13 shows us that “every creature” then adds their voice to this worship of God.
John sees a future worship scene when all creation will bow the knee to Christ (Phil. 2:10-11). The events seen will happen in the future—as shown by the scroll which as it is opened will result in the pouring out of judgments on the earth (these judgments have not occurred in history).
It should be obvious that the Scriptures portray the Lamb, obviously Jesus Christ, as receiving the exact same worship as God the Father on the throne (see especially v. 13).

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⁷ The word “throne” occurs 17 times in chapters 4 and 5.

⁸ The word “scroll” occurs 8 times in chapter 5.

Study #5 – The Seven Seal Judgments and Interlude, 6:1–8:1

Remember that we said Revelation is broadly sequential in its chronological outline. However, it is not completely so, because there are a number of interludes which describe things that are not restricted to a strict sequence of events. Each of the three series of judgments (seals, trumpets, and bowls) gives six of the judgments, followed by an interlude of some length (a chapter, two chapters, or a handful of verses) and then gives the final, seventh judgment.

Once we determine that the events of Revelation are largely future, there is still the question about the chronological details during the tribulation (Rev. 6-19). The series of seven judgments can be interpreted as *parallel* (each of the seven rehash the same judgments), or *consecutive* (21 separate judgments in order), or *telescoping* (the 7th seal unfolding to a series of seven more trumpet judgments, and the 7th trumpet unfolding to the seven bowls). I take the telescoping view.

1. The First Six Seals, 6:1-17

- a. Verses 1-8. The first four seals are symbolic of God unleashing political, military, and economic disaster on the earth, all of which result in death. Interestingly, they are introduced by the four living creatures before the throne of God. These judgments come from God, ultimately, though he uses the Antichrist and humans as means to carry out His judgments.
- b. Verse 2. In the first seal, the white horse rider is the anti-Christ. The real Christ also comes on a white horse in Rev. 19, but this could well indicate the deceptive character of this pseudo-Christ.
- c. Verse 2, 4. The antichrist will initiate a bunch of activity that will result in death through political and military conquest.
- d. Verse 5-6. The accompanying economic disaster will result in some kind of monetary inflation or limited supply that ends up in famine.
- e. Verse 8. The destruction surrounding these judgments will result in the **deaths of 25% of the world's population**. That is a staggering number of souls.
- f. Verses 9-11. The fifth seal reveals to John the souls of people who died (of the 25% above) who were killed through persecution. These people became believers after the rapture of the church and were killed in the Tribulation. They are praying an imprecatory-like prayer against the earth-dwellers, the unbelievers who took their lives. They were righteous before God, as indicated by the white robes given to them. However, they had to wait until more believers were martyred like they were.
- g. Verses 12-17. The sixth seal unleashes all kinds of natural phenomena and disasters. It is interesting that the leading men of the world understood that these things were happening because of the wrath of God and the lamb! They seem to know they are doomed in the end.

2. The 144,000 and Saved Gentiles, 7:1-17

- a. Verses 1-8. This chapter looks back to the beginning of the Tribulation and shows that God will set apart 144,000 *Jews*, apparently to serve Him through gospel witness. They are sealed with God's name (Rev. 14:1) to show ownership and protection. These are probably they who will not make it through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes (Matt. 10:23), but who will proclaim the gospel right up to the end (Matt. 24:14).
- b. The time fast forwards for John so that he sees the Gentiles from all different nations that are saved as a result of the gospel witness in the Tribulation (I take that to be a result of the 144,000 servants). The results are a multitude of people saved (praise the Lord!). These ones will serve God and have the privilege of living with Him. The privations of the Tribulation will no longer touch them. Psalm 23 will be fulfilled in a tangible sense as verse 17 indicates.

3. The Seventh Seal, 8:1

As the seventh seal comes to view, the reader realizes that it unfolds into another and dreadful series of 7 more judgments called the trumpet judgments. The silence in heaven for a half hour is certainly ominous.

At this point in our study, the details may seem overwhelming to you. **Don't give up yet!** You can go back and read the outline at the beginning of these notes and go back and review sections that have been difficult to understand.

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Study #6 – The Seven Trumpet Judgments, 8:2–9:21, 11:15–19

This is the sixth study in our series on Revelation. It deals with the second series of seven judgments in the telescoping arrangement laid out in Revelation. Remember that the seventh seal (8:1) seems to “unfold” or “telescope” out and open the window to seven more judgments which are described under the figure of trumpet blasts in the text. With this part of the apocalyptic vision, John sees the majority of the remainder of the Tribulation period up to the second coming of Christ.

We should make note of the fact that the last three of the trumpet judgments are also called “woes” (8:13). The first woe is done by 9:12; the second is done by 11:14; and the third woe of 11:15 (the seventh trumpet) unfolds to a violent series of last judgments of the seven bowls which are not described until chapter 15.

1. Preparation for the Trumpets, 8:1-6

- a. We see the vision of the angel with the golden censer, and he sends up incense with the prayers of the saints.
- b. Apparently in response to those prayers of the saints (perhaps like in 6:9-10), God directed the angel to violently throw the golden censer to the earth. It is accompanied by signs of judgment that initiate the trumpet judgments.

2. The First Six Trumpets, 8:7-9:21

- a. First trumpet: Vegetation will be destroyed. We should note that these are supernatural kinds of judgments, whatever naturalistic explanation could possibly be made for some of them.
- b. Second trumpet: A comet or something crashes to the earth and destroys one third of sea life and one third of shipping. The economy and the diet of many are totally destroyed.
- c. Third trumpet: Special wormwood turns fresh waters to an undrinkable state (bitter) and causes **many people to die**. Things are pretty desperate when there is no water.
- d. Fourth trumpet: Affects the light reaching the earth, so that it is cut by one third. Probably utter panic and massive climate changes result.
- e. Short parenthesis: an angel flies over the earth and calls out three “Woes” to the earth dwellers. As if things were not bad enough, three more bad things were coming with the sounding of the three remaining trumpets.
- f. Fifth trumpet: An angel opens up the abyss, where many (not all) demons are incarcerated by God at the present time (2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6). The locusts are agents of destruction (see the OT, like in Joel 1-2) and are probably best connected with the demons of the abyss. Their assigned task was to torment unbelievers to the point that they wish to die, but cannot. Their ruler is Abaddon/Apollyon, which are other names for Satan.
- g. 8:12 tells us that one of the three woes is past now, because the fifth trumpet is completed.
- h. Sixth trumpet: Fallen angels again are used as instruments in God’s hands, in the form of a huge army, and they were allowed to **kill a third of mankind** (9:15). Compare this to the 25% killed in 6:8, and we have at least half of the world’s population wiped out—and certainly more since 7:11 mentioned many deaths.
- i. Negative results: the tribulation seems to harden those who survived, 9:20, so that they would not repent of their sinful works. They were idolaters and murderers and sorcerers and fornicators and thieves. For some people, their hearts and minds are made up—they will go to the grave as unbelievers, no matter what God does to show them the error of their ways.

3. The Seventh Trumpet, 11:15-19

- a. Interlude: Chapters 10 and 11 through 11:14 are a prophetic parenthesis. 11:14 tells us that the second woe has past and the third one is coming soon.
- b. Seventh trumpet: This is the third woe. It is the culmination of the tribulation. The pronouncements here indicate that the kingdom is about to begin. This alludes to the prophetic words of Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45. It appears that the judgment of this trumpet is compressed and only the final result is given—but the seventh trumpet itself unfolds to seven more terrible judgments called the seven bowls which are detailed in chapters 15-16 and which conclude the tribulation with a terrible fury.

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Study #7 – The Angel, the Book, and the Two Witnesses, 10:1-11:14

We are studying the second major interlude or parenthesis in the book.

1. The Vision of the Angel and the Book, 10:1-11

- a. What the seven thunders uttered is not necessary for us to know. God has given us everything we do need to know (2 Peter 1:3).
- b. In 10:6, the KJV translates that “there should be time no longer” as if time will stop. But most translations correctly translate χρόνος (chronos) as delay, meaning that time itself will go on but there will be no more delay to the completion of God’s program (verse 7). The prophetic oracles will be finally fulfilled. The question “How long, O Lord” (6:10) which has troubled saints from all ages, will be “right now.” “Are we there yet?” God will reply, “Yes!”
- c. The little book appears to be symbolic of the prophetic information that John will receive and must speak out. This is indicated in verse 11.
- d. John’s job is to announce the completion of God’s program and at the same time he is obligated to announce the severe judgment of God upon sin and unbelief. We can see the dual nature of such work—it is in a sense sweet because God will prevail and God’s people will be victorious; but at the same time, it is very bitter work because of the death and devastation that accompanies the final chapters of history.

2. The Two Witnesses, 11:1-14

- a. John is told to measure the temple, the altar, and (presumably to count) the worshippers. He is to omit the outer court where the Gentiles are allowed to be for 42 months.
- b. This tells us that there is a temple on the earth during the tribulation. It is a real thing—otherwise John would not be able to measure it.
- c. Two special witnesses are commissioned by God to prophesy for 1,260 days (3 and ½ prophetic years of 360 days each, same as the 42 months in 11:2). Their clothing (sackcloth) indicates their office and the negative tone of their message. They are divinely protected for most of the duration of their work.
- d. The text says their ministry is one half of the 7-year tribulation, and probably either the first half or the second half. Because of the timing of the seventh seal, toward the end of the Tribulation, it seems that these witnesses are in the second half of the Tribulation as well.
- e. What is notable is that they have power to call down plagues and other judgments from Heaven. Verse 6 talks about no rain, waters turning to blood, and plagues. These sound a lot like what we have heard will be happening during some of the seal and trumpet judgments (6:5-6 indicates famine and perhaps thus lack of rain; 8:8; 9:18, 20).
- f. The identity of these two witnesses has been debated. Some suggest they are Moses and Elijah since they were the ones to appear with Christ on the Mt. of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3), and they had similar miraculous power in their lifetimes (Exodus 7:9-10, 17-21; 1 Kings 18:37-38). Others suggest Enoch and Elijah, since they were the only two human beings that are recorded not to have died (Gen. 5:24, 2 Kings 2:11) and these two witnesses will die. Either possibility might work, or they may be two “normal” people who happen to be alive at the time. I do not find the “they need to die once” argument convincing, because the whole generation of Christians who are alive at the rapture will go immediately without dying either (1 Cor. 15:51-53, 1 Thess. 4:17), so there are more than just two people in history who will participate in the great exception to the rule that “it is appointed unto men once to die” (Heb. 9:27). It would be nice to take part in the rapture that way!
- g. Satan will finally be allowed to overpower these two witnesses and kill them. Their ministry happens in Jerusalem, in which their bodies will lie for three and a half days in the open—a severe sign of disrespect, one day for each year they served God. The people will be happy about the deaths of these prophets, perhaps assuming that their problems are now over, and as an indication of their lack of repentance before God (9:20-21).
- h. When the two resurrected witnesses are called up to heaven, God sends a terrible earthquake as part of the sixth trumpet judgment. This had a positive effect on some observers (11:13).
- i. Verse 14 forms the closure of the second woe, which is the same as the sixth trumpet.

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Study #8 – Important Characters in the Tribulation, 12:1-13:18

The seventh trumpet as (11:15) brought John's apocalyptic vision to the end of the Tribulation. Chapters 12 and 13 step outside of the general chronological order of Revelation and present some key characters in the tribulation. We look at them in turn along with some key events.

1. The Woman – Israel, 12:1-2
 - a. This woman is Israel. See section (3) below for the identity of the child.
 - b. The woman is NOT Mary. The 12 stars are indicative of Israel's tribes; and she is present during the 1,260 days of the second half of the Tribulation and is persecuted by Satan. Mary does not fit these points. Remember this is symbolic language. John is seeing a large sweep of world history.
2. The Great Red Dragon – Satan, 12:3-4
 - a. Here is Satan again, trying very hard to destroy the Messiah, but God preserves Him. Notice his heads and horns are just like those listed in (6.a) below. Also note the time – past.
 - b. The stars seem to be symbolic of angels and the fact that in Satan's rebellion, he drew one third of the angels along with him to become demons. This also happened long ago.
3. The Man-Child – Christ, 12:5-6
 - a. The identity of the child is obvious from verse 5: Messiah (Psalm 2:9, Rev. 2:26-27, 19:15).
 - b. Notice that in 12:1-6, the focus is on the Child—birth, danger, and being caught up to God.
 - c. Christ's brethren—Israel—are persecuted by Satan because either they believe in Messiah, or just because they are Jewish. This happens in the future. The vision ties the past with the future.
4. The War Between Michael and the Dragon, 12:7-9
 - a. Apparently Satan is now removed from any contact with God. This corresponds to the middle of the Tribulation, because of the 3½ year time period which is mentioned in 12:14.
 - b. Recall from Job 1:6 that Satan was somehow able to present himself before God though he is full of sin. Now, he will no longer be able to falsely accuse the saints.
5. Satan's Wrath, 12:10-17
 - a. The removal of Satan is an important step for God to finish His program for the ages.
 - b. However, Satan sees the handwriting on the wall and knows it is about finished for him so he goes on a crusade against Israel. His motto seems to be, "if you cannot get to God, get to His people instead."
6. The First Beast – the Antichrist, 13:1-10
 - a. This character seems to be almost the same as the dragon of 12:3. But note the differences:

| | | | |
|---------------------|---------|----------|--|
| The dragon has | 7 heads | 10 horns | 7 crowns on his heads |
| The first beast has | 7 heads | 10 horns | 10 crowns on his horns, and a blasphemous name on his heads. |
 - b. This beast corresponds to the symbolism used in Daniel 7:4-6. What John is seeing here is a symbolic representation of a man and his empire. The close connection to Daniel (2:44, for instance, or 7:17, 8:20) demonstrates the governmental implications of this symbolism. John is not teaching that a 7-headed man will be born who will be the Antichrist. It is this man's associations with other kingdoms and growth out of them that make this animal and numeric symbolism significant.
 - c. Satan gives the Antichrist great power, v. 2.
 - d. The Antichrist receives a deadly wound, which represents his (apparent) death (v. 3), but then he is healed/resurrected. This serves to fortify his power over the peoples of the earth (v. 4).
 - e. Verses 4 and 8 show that there is an important element of worship in the beast's kingdom.
 - f. After this episode, he continues 42 months, the second-half of the Tribulation. He along with Satan is worshipped by all who live on the earth who are not believers in Jesus. God allows the beast to persecute believers and to blaspheme God.
 - g. Verse 10 tells us that God will not allow the Antichrist to ultimately get away with his wickedness—he will be punished.
 - h. This Antichrist is described elsewhere in the Bible as little horn of Daniel 7 and the willful king of Daniel 11:36ff and the man of sin in 2 Thess. 2:3.
7. The Second Beast – The False Prophet, 13:11-18
 - c. This character is the third member of the so-called "un-holy false trinity."
 - d. This beast represents a man who is associated with the rule of the Antichrist's kingdom and causes people to worship the Antichrist with miraculous signs and deception.
 - e. This false prophet is so-called because he seems to be supporting the Antichrist and is involved in religious activity: the idolatrous worship with the image to the first beast (v. 15).
 - f. The situation parallels Daniel 3 in that those who do not worship the image will be killed. It is not an overstatement to say that the Inquisition and Holocaust will be, in a sense, repeated.
 - g. There will be no separation of church and state in this age, because one's allegiance/worship will be a test of receiving the special marking(s) necessary for carrying out commerce.

Study #9 – More Parenthetical Visions, 14:1-20

We now move into chapter 14, but we are still in the parenthetical or interlude section between the seven trumpet judgments and seven bowl judgments.

1. The Vision of the Lamb and 144,000, 14:1-5

- a. Review chapter 7 regarding the 144,000 Jewish servants of God. They were sealed on their foreheads (7:3) and here we see that they have their Father's name written on their foreheads. This contrasts with the mark of the beast (13:16-17).
- b. 14:3 teaches that these redeemed ones sang a special song that only they could sing. This is similar to the one sang by all the redeemed in 5:9.
- c. These men were virgins and completely loyal disciples of the Lamb (v. 4).
- d. The idea of first-fruits (v. 4), is clearly an OT allusion. See Deut. 26:1-11, esp. v. 2.
- e. Their speech was pure. They spoke the Word of God truly and did not
- f. The notion of being "without fault" before the throne refers to their good conduct. Ultimately, their sanctification will be complete at the throne of grace. So all believers in Jesus will be purified at our ultimate sanctification.

2. The Messages of the Angels, 14:6-13

- a. It looks like the scene changes now to a vision of an angel flying through the sky during the Tribulation, proclaiming a message to the inhabitants of the earth.
- b. This type of angelic vision is not new to John—consider 8:13, 10:1, 18:1, 14:8 and 14:9.
- c. The angel is preaching "the everlasting gospel." This is not a job normally done by angels (Acts 10:3-7). It is easy to mix up the different gospels that are proclaimed in the Bible as if they are identically the same. However, some differ in respect to some of their content. For instance, the gospel of the kingdom refers to the news that the kingdom was at hand when Christ started His public ministry.
- d. The content of the everlasting gospel is given in the following verses. It consists of a message of admonition to align oneself with God, and a message of imminent judgment.
- e. Verse 7: The basic points of the admonition are: fear God, give glory to God, worship God. He is worthy because He made all things, and the inhabitants must turn to God because the hour of judgment has come—meaning the end is right around the corner. The people of the world are told to turn from following the beast.
- f. Verse 8: The second angel continues by telling that Babylon is fallen. Babylon is discussed more fully in Rev. 17-18, but represents at various times the literal city, an apostate religious system, and an apostate political/economic system. Here I take it to refer generally to the Antichrist and his world system. Babylon may well be the literal capital of that idolatrous, wicked regime.
- g. Verse 9 makes it clear, by the message of a third angel, that those who follow the beast are doomed. In the end, God wins, God's followers win, and God's enemies lose. That is a small summary of the "everlasting gospel."
- h. The wrath of God is the righteous and just response of God in punishment against sin. The punishment is forever, as verses 9-11 make clear.
- i. Verse 12 can be somewhat confusing. Patience should be translated as perseverance. In face of huge pressure to succumb and become followers of the beast, the saints never depart from God and Christ. They do not get the mark of the beast. The incentive for them to persevere is that God will come out victorious in the end.
- j. Certainly those who die in the Lord today are blessed, but a special blessing is pronounced in v. 13 for the Tribulation martyrs. They will receive rest and reward. For going through such persecution, I wouldn't begrudge them that! Note the contrast: v. 11: "no rest day nor night" vs. v. 12: "rest from their labors."

3. The Vision of Final Judgment, 14:14-20

- a. The person on the cloud in 14:14 is none other than Jesus Christ. This terminology comes from Dan. 7:13-14 and implies the second coming.
- b. There are two harvests in this passage: one is general, and the second is of grapes. One is done by Jesus; the other by an angel. Both have sharp sickles, they thrust in the sickle, and the harvest is ripe.
- c. It is attractive to make these distinct, namely the first as the harvest of saints and the second of the wicked. But they are so similar it is hard to do that, for there is no clear distinction. Also, a passage like Matt. 24:40-44 indicates that at the end of the Tribulation, some will be taken away in judgment (not in blessing). I take it that these two judgments are parallel visions of similar events.
- d. The means of judgment apparently include a very bloody battle or other blood-filled judgments as pictured by the winepress. This would correspond to Armageddon at the end of the Tribulation. The blood spatters up or is flowing at four feet deep over a region 184 miles (1600 furlongs)—all up and down Israel. See Revelation 19:15 for a parallel, and Ezekiel 39:11-16 for probable cleanup.

Study #10 – The Seven Bowl Judgments, 15:1-16:21

After the interlude section which followed the seven trumpet judgments, we now read about the bowl judgments.

1. Introduction to the Bowls, 15:1-8

- a. The Bible calls these the last plagues because the wrath of God is brought to completion in it.
- b. This requires us to ask what in what sense the wrath of God is complete, because there is apparently a further expression of Divine wrath after the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:9), as well as on those who are cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15), and even beyond that into eternity where the wrath of God against sin is evident in Hell. We can most simply answer the question by understanding that this “wrath of God” is limited to the Tribulation, the time especially characterized by God’s wrath. These bowls of wrath will bring that judgment to a close. There are further judgments beyond this point of history, but none are characterized as such lengthy periods of unmitigated wrath.
- c. We must also note that God does exercise wrath. His wrath is against sin and rebellion. It comes from God’s holiness. God is not just a “loving” God like so many present Him today. In the gospel is revealed not only the righteousness of God, but the wrath of God as well (Romans 1:16-18).
- d. In verses 2-4, John records a vision of saints who were victorious over the beast. It is fitting that as the Tribulation draws to a close, the saints rejoice in song regarding God’s holiness and judgments. Note the characteristics of the song they sing: it extols the attributes of God and gives proper responses to those attributes (try listing out the attributes yourself).
- e. Verses 5-8 record John’s vision of the heavenly temple, out of which comes the seven angels that are given bowls symbolic of the soon-to-be-poured out wrath of God.

2. The Seven Bowls of Wrath, 16:1-12, 16:17-21

- a. The first bowl was miraculously selective and devastating. It was selective in that it affected those who had the mark of the beast and were his worshippers. It was devastating in that it produced terrible physical sores on the people.
- b. The second bowl affected the sea so that all sea creatures died. Not even during the great flood of Noah did all sea creatures die, but here they do.
- c. The third bowl of wrath affected the rivers and springs so that they also became blood. Presumably all the creatures in them died as well. There went the living of all who depended on the sea for the food or work.
- d. In verses 5-7, another little intermission is inserted. Here, the angel of the waters which have just been affected by the third bowl speaks out and praises God for his judgments and retribution on those who deserve punishment. This verse does not teach that there is an “angel of everything” but in this case, there was an angel in charge of watching over the waters of the earth. This may be similar to the role that the archangel Michael has, who is specially assigned to the protection of Israel (Daniel 12:1). Note on Acts 12:15—the believers were probably thinking that Peter was dead and it was his “ghost” or spirit which had come to talk to them. There is no specific Bible teaching that each believer has a guardian angel assigned, even though that is a very common thought (see Acts 12:7, Matthew 18:10, Luke 16:22).
- e. The fourth bowl affects the sun so that it becomes very hot on the earth. We see here some God-made global warming of a miraculous sort.
- f. The fifth bowl represents judgment on the kingdom of the Antichrist. Great pain resulted from whatever the mechanism was, but this did not lead to repentance.
- g. The sixth bowl pictures a step in the preparation for the “kings from the east.” The Euphrates is dried up so that the path is clear for an apparent military invasion described in the next verses (see #3 below).
- h. The seventh bowl culminates the judgment of God on the kingdom of the beast and his followers. A humongous earthquake destroys Jerusalem, and Babylon is destroyed. Chapters 17 and 18 deal with Babylon in more detail. Then there was a hailstorm with hailstones of enormous size—75 pounds if it refers to the “common talent” or 150 pounds if it refers to the “royal talent.”

3. Interlude on Armageddon, 16:13-16

- a. John sees the demonic forces in the dragon, beast, and false prophet. These demons are the animating forces behind these personages. (Of course, Satan is the dragon.)
- b. These demons work miracles to perhaps deceive but surely to gather the kings of the earth against the Jews and against the Lord. This is not just a battle, but a whole campaign/war that culminates in a massive battle and ultimately a victory for God and His people. Armageddon comes from Har Meggido = Mt. Meggido.
- c. Jesus re-iterates that He will be coming as a thief to end pre-kingdom history. The unbelievers will not realize that He is coming. Believers are not “in the dark” on this one, because we know something of the end-time order of events (see 1 Thess. 5:4).

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Study #11 – The Doom of Babylon—Part 1, 17:1-17:18

The seven bowls of wrath have brought the Tribulation to a conclusion. John turns now to a particularly troublesome entity whose doom is predicted at the end of the Tribulation.

1. What is the Doomed Entity?

- a. The subject of these two chapters is Babylon. She is introduced first as “the great harlot who sits on many waters” (17:1). What is this talking about? A city? A person? Following are a couple of general points of identification.
- b. She is at the center of immorality (17:2, 4, 5), somehow feeds off the blood of the saints (17:6, 18:24), is related to the beast and kings (17:7-8, 10), is opposed to the Lamb (17:14), and is the focal point of material gain (18:3, 11-14, 19) and riches (18:17). She was involved in sorcery and deception (18:23).
- c. The woman and the beast which carries her are symbolic representations of something in the world—not an actual woman and actual beast, but symbols that represent something that can be characterized as a harlot and beast. John actually saw a woman and beast—literally, but he understands these to be representations of a mystery that was revealed to him by the angel (17:7, 15-16, 18).

2. John’s Vision, 17:1-6

- a. John is taken by the angel to see a **harlot** who sits on many **waters**. She sat on a **scarlet beast** full of blasphemy. She was **dressed luxuriously**, and had a cup in her hand full of evil.
- b. She has a special name—Babylon, and the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. The idea of a “mother” is one who is the source or origin of these things. Evidently, she is somehow a representation of sin in the world. We might read “the mother of harlots” like “the mother of all battles”—a big battle, so the worst harlot, but I believe we are talking about a representation of the worldly source of these sins.
- c. She was drunk. When we think of drunkenness, we think of someone inebriated so that their faculties are impaired. But another definition is to be “stupefied or excited by a chemical substance.” The great harlot was excited by the blood of martyrs. She delighted in their demise and thrived on all that is opposed to God.
- d. John was amazed at the vision. Apparently it was a sight to behold but it was not clear what it was about.

3. The Identification of the Various Parts of the Vision, 17:7-18

- a. A very common interpretation is that **Babylon** in these chapters represents both religious and political entities. The religious part comes from her identification as a harlot—and the assumption is that she is a spiritual harlot, that is, seeming to be religious on the outside, but not at all behind the scenes. The political part is clear as the city “reigns” over the kings of the earth. So, the religious-political interpretation identification is at least partly true, as there are religious overtones throughout the antichrist’s kingdom (worship, 13:12). Believers alive during that time will recognize the worship as false, but it will be deceptive and the antichrist will masquerade as God in the temple (2 Thess. 2:4).
- b. We should also note that there are economic themes given here, particularly in verse 18. I would suggest that Babylon represents the **world system** in terms of its political, economic, and religious facets. The actual Babylon is a city that exists in the future that is the center of this world activity.
- c. The **beast**, 17:8-14, 16-17. Verse 17:8 corresponds to 13:3 where the beast had a deadly wound (died) and was resurrected. The seven heads and ten horns are clearly correlated to the same features of the beast in chapter 13. The number seven represents seven mountains and kings that reign, evidently on those mountains, which probably represent their kingdoms. The beast grows out of those seven. Then there are ten kings that arise out of the beast’s power. Within the world system, there will be conflict because the ten kings will end up fighting against the great harlot and will defeat her miserably. Babylon, which derived her power from the beast, will be destroyed by the beast’s ten kings and then his rule will be solidified over the whole earth—at least until the Lamb comes and destroys them (v. 14).
- d. The **waters**, 17:15. The waters upon which the woman sits (rules) are the peoples of the world. We have a clear definition here that allows us to see that the waters of the vision are a symbolic representation of something other than water.
- e. The **woman**, 17:18. She is identified as the pinnacle of the world system, the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth. She is commonly but incorrectly identified as Rome of the first century. She is a reference to a future capital of a kingdom ruling over the people of the world (the waters, see above) and so does not refer directly to a *historical* kingdom. She may well be related to Rome in terms of power and extent of kingdom or style of rule, but this is Babylon. Her political power is emphasized here.

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Study #12 – The Doom of Babylon—Part 2, 18:1-19:5

Revelation 18 continues the pronouncement of “woe” to the political-religious-economic system identified as Babylon. Chapter 17 was largely a description of this Babylon, while chapter 18 details its judgment.

1. The Just Judgment of Babylon, 18:1-8

- a. What will happen, v. 1-2. An angel pronounces doom on Babylon. It will end up as a kind of dumping ground for evil spirits, apparently not inhabited by people anymore.
- b. Why it will happen, v. 3. The fornication mentioned here is spiritual in nature—adultery from God. This fornication is combined with materialism (note material things are not bad, but *materialism* is bad).
- c. Any believers there are told to leave, verse 4, like Lot was to leave Sodom (Gen. 19:17) and 2 Cor. 6:17. Sometimes believers are caught in the consequences of a divine judgment even though they are not specifically the target of that judgment.
- d. The law of sowing and reaping applies—like the *lex talionis* (the law of retaliation, an eye for an eye), verses 5-8. God will repay even double for her sin. Her arrogance reminds us of Edom in Obadiah 1:3-4.

2. The Mourning over Babylon’s Judgment, 18:9-19

- a. This Babylon will be a major commercial center. Upon her destruction, the kings and merchants who traded with her and were enriched by her consumption will be depressed. This is because not only is their hope of gain gone, but her judgment came so swiftly (v. 8, 9-10, 17).
- b. Her merchandise included everything you could think of—including slaves and martyrs/forced converts (?) (v. 11-14).
- c. The despair of those who relied on her is extreme (v. 15-19). Note that this is because they trusted in trade and earthly glory and materialism. They did not trust in the living God.

3. The Rejoicing over Babylon’s Judgment, 18:20, 19:1-5

- a. An opposite response is seen in verse 20. God’s judgment calls forth a response of rejoicing by those in heaven and the apostles and prophets. They are to be glad that God has meted out justice.
- b. The theme of rejoicing continues in the first part of chapter 19. The subject matter there is also Babylon—the great harlot. Here we see into heaven that those who were told to rejoice in 18:20 do just that. God is to be praised for doing that which is right and just.

4. The Finality of Babylon’s Judgment, 18:21-24

- a. This section mentions the harshness of judgment but focuses on the completeness of it. Note phrases like “shall not be found anymore,” “shall not be heard anymore,” “shall not be found in you anymore.”
- b. The idea of sorcery is added in v. 23. Sorcery, the occult, and such like are always roundly condemned in the Bible. This includes such things as astrology, horoscopes, palm reading, and the like—all of which are associated with Satan and witchcraft and so on. Our connection with the spiritual world is to be through Jesus Christ and His word—nothing else.

5. Applications

- a. The text contrasts the simultaneous mourning and rejoicing over the same event. Some people were sad that God judged a sinful entity. Others rejoiced that He did so. Note: it is radically out of place to mourn over God’s judgment of a wicked and sinful thing. There is calamity and loss of life which does evoke a response from believers and unbelievers alike—but the kind of mourning here was not for the lost spiritual condition of those involved in Babylon. It was rather for selfish reasons—“for no one buys their merchandise anymore” and “all became rich by her wealth” (verses 11, 19). In short, the mourning was because of the end of the materialistic system that Babylon also represented.
- b. It is OK to rejoice over God’s judgment in that it vindicates His name and brings about true justice.
- c. All those who have complained that the presence of evil in the world makes God either non-existent or a bad God will have to change their tune. No evil has escaped God’s notice. We can rejoice that finally the blood of all the true martyrs will be repaid, God’s name vindicated, and scoffers about the problem of evil silenced.
- d. The materialism of this section seems to be parallel to what we see today in the USA.
- e. Swift judgment like that of Babylon could come upon any nation, even ours, at any time.
- f. Many today trust in wealth; armies; political influence; and other things. This passage and one like Psalm 20:7 should disabuse us of these false sources of hope.

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Study #13 – The Second Coming, Revelation 19:6-21

Revelation 19 is somewhat of an “interior climax” in the book. Obviously the heavenly state is the ultimate climax, but as the story unfolds through the tribulation period, the second coming of Christ is a highlight that brings the tribulation to an end.

1. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb, 19:6-10

- a. The destruction of Babylon brings the Tribulation nearly to a close, and those in Heaven rejoice that God has taken the reigns of the world’s government.
- b. Another major event is the marriage supper of the lamb. The bride is the church (Eph. 5:23-32). Those invited include the saints of all ages—those are greatly blessed. This supper is not described, but simply is said to have “come.” The supper seems to be reflected in other passages about a great feast, such as Matthew 8:11 and 26:29. Because of these parallels, I take it that the marriage supper does not quite happen by this point. Rather, it will happen at the inauguration of the kingdom. The anticipation is like that for a wedding like we’ve experienced—it is about to happen!
- c. The white apparel of the church represents her righteousness. This was more than her imputed righteousness—this is her righteous deeds which grow out of the transformation that God works upon one at the time of salvation.
- d. The one speaking in v. 9 is apparently the angel that was introduced in 17:1. John fell down to worship the angel because he was so overwhelmed by the vision that he had seen—the destruction of Babylon and the climactic introduction of the bride of the Lamb.
- e. The angel correctly responded that John must not worship him. This event points out several truths: 1) Angels are NOT to be worshipped (Col. 2:18); 2) In the book of Revelation, Jesus was worshipped this way, as in 1:17; 3) The angel calls himself a fellow servant and in the ranks of the brothers of John who believe in Jesus Christ; 4) The point of the angel is this: Worship God! Do not worship me! 5) The focus of prophecy and all of Scripture is upon Jesus Christ. All the Scripture is making an effort to point us to God in the person of Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-4).

2. The Second Coming, 19:11-21

- a. John refocuses now on the next part of the vision where he sees a white horse. He saw one of these before—in 6:2—but there it represented the Antichrist.
- b. Here, we know it is the real Christ because of the names Faithful and True, and his characteristic of righteous judgment and war (v. 11). Verse 12 adds to this the eyes like a flame of fire (1:14). The crowns (v. 12), the robe dipped in blood, and His name as “The Word of God” makes the identification absolutely certain.
- c. The armies in heaven are the saints with Jesus. Notice that they are wearing the same white clothing that the bride of Christ is wearing in verse 8. This is a decent demonstration of the truth of the rapture, because that event brings the saints from earth to heaven before the tribulation to reside with the Lord there. Compare with Jude 14-15.
- d. Three final pieces of information are given about Christ. First, in verse 15, He has a sharp sword with which he will rule the nations as with a rod of iron (see Psalm 2:8-9, Rev. 2:27, 12:5). He will execute the wrath of God the Father against sin. And finally, he has the name “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”
- e. Verse 17-21 distill what happens upon the Lord’s return to the earth. It is not a pretty sight at all.
- f. Verses 17-18 record a call from heaven for the scavenging birds to be ready to clean up after the battle. It is called “the supper of the great God” because God sets the table, as it were, for the animals to gorge themselves.
- g. The Antichrist joins the nations together to battle against Christ and his armies. What a futile effort.
- h. Verse 20 records that the beast and the false prophet will be captured. Their armies could not even protect their leaders from capture, much less gain a victory over the Lamb. These two are held responsible for deceiving those who followed them. (Those folks are doomed too, as they are culpable for the mis-directed worship they did.) The beast and the false prophet will be cast alive into the lake of fire, which we call Hell. They will not even die first—a fact which distinguishes them from the future residents of Hell besides Satan. As Revelation shows, these two are the first two that actually reside in Hell (Rev. 20:10). They go there before Satan goes there. Note that Satan is not presently in Hell. Other unbelievers are held in Hades, which will itself be cast into Hell (Rev. 20:14) when those unbelievers are judged.
- i. The Lord Jesus Christ dispatches the rest of the armies that were arrayed against Him.

MAP

Study #14 – The Millennial Kingdom and Final Judgment, Revelation 20:1-15

This chapter has been interpreted in numerous ways, but the easiest and most straightforward way to understand it is as an account of an actual, future period of time that follows the trying times detailed in chapters 6-19. The outline of the passage is simple: four main events are outlined. They are given a chronological order and they are specifically said to follow one another.

1. The Binding of Satan, v. 1-3

- a. This event is yet future because presently, Satan wanders about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).
- b. The angel that John sees takes the devil and locks him in jail for a period of one thousand years.
- c. The purpose of sealing the Devil like this was to prevent him from deceiving the nations anymore. The implication is clearly that one of his big jobs is to do just that—to deceive the nations. He does this through influence on leaders, systems of thought, individuals, and by means of his demonic hordes.
- d. God has ordained that Satan should be released once again after this period is over. Thus the statement “he must be released.” Evidently, it is to show that even with a long-term absence of Satan, the hearts of the unredeemed still resonate with his deceiving plans and schemes against God.

2. The 1000 Years, v. 4-6

- a. This event is yet future, as are the two following events. I say this primarily because the conditions described in these verses are not anything that we have known or are seeing presently.
- b. Verse 4 describes souls who have been martyred by beheading. They did not follow the beast but stayed loyal to Jesus. They “live” and reign with Christ for the thousand year period. This implies they are resurrected. This fits with the future timetable that we see.
- c. Where does this reign occur? Verse 8 answers the question—Satan will go out and deceive the nations *of the earth*. The saints who reign with Christ for a thousand years, by context, would be reigning over those same nations.
- d. In a most explicit statement in verse 5, we see that there is a distinction made between those who were resurrected *before* the thousand years, and those of “the rest of the dead [who] did not live again until the thousand years were finished.” This shoots down any idea of a single “general” resurrection where all are raised, judged, and enter into their reward (or retribution). Many Christians believe and teach this kind of single general resurrection, but the Bible simply does not support such an idea. There are at least TWO separate resurrections. With this agree the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:22-24. And the passages that speak of the resurrection in one “lump statement” can be easily harmonized with this—for instance, Daniel 12:2 and John 5:25-29 are simply summary statements that all will be raised, some to one fate and some to another fate. Unless you are looking for a contradiction, you will not find one here.
- e. Those who take part of the first resurrection are declared to be “blessed” and they will not be subject to the second death (see the last section of the chapter).

3. The Release and Defeat of Satan, v. 7-10

- a. As pre-planned, Satan will be released. He does not “escape.” It is somewhat confusing as to why he should be released, but what he then does fits with what we see as a dispensational pattern of revelation/test/failure/judgment in which mankind is tested with respect to his obedience to some revelation given by God; his failure is then judged by God.
- b. Satan makes one last attempt to overthrow the people of God (the beloved city) and thus God Himself.
- c. In a final stroke against evil, God devours the armies of the world with fire from heaven and takes the Devil and puts him on permanent lockdown in Hell itself. He is thrown in there where the beast and the false prophet were. There the torment is severe—and permanent.
- d. At this point, we could note that the antichrist and false prophet were sent by Satan to deceive the world and dominate it. After their failure, Satan takes on the task himself when he is released.

4. The Great White Throne Judgment of Unbelievers, v. 11-15

- a. God sets up a special judgment seat we call the Great White Throne. This old heavens and earth flee from his presence and are not restored (made again) until shortly thereafter. Chapter 21 describes a new heaven and earth.
- b. The people being judged are all unbelievers. Remember, believers have been raptured or taken part in the first resurrection one thousand years earlier. The only people left are unbelievers. They are taken out of the sea, Death, and Hades. It is imperative to *not* be a subject of judgment at this judgment. Get saved out of it!
- c. God’s judgment is made on the basis of works. No one is found in the book of life; all the books of their works are examined and found wanting. They are all thrown into the “lake of fire” or Hell.
- d. Hades and Hell are often confused. Hell sounds just like Hades (Luke 16:24), but Hades is thrown into Hell in v. 14. They are somehow distinguished.

MAP

Study #15 – The New Heaven and New Earth – Part 1, Revelation 21:1-26

The last two chapters of Revelation tell us about the eternal “light at the end of the tunnel.” After the cursed condition of the world that humanity has experienced for the last 6,000 years, and after it gets even worse during the Tribulation, and after it becomes even more fearsome when unbelievers are judged at the Great White Throne Judgment, suddenly the new heaven and earth appear on the scene. Eden was lost in Genesis 3. It is, in a sense, regained in Revelation 21-22.

1. The New Heaven and Earth, 21:1-8

- a. V. 1: The old earth and heaven “fled away” in 20:11. There is debate about whether they are simply “renewed” or totally re-created. Based on the terminology of 2 Peter 3:10-12, I understand that God re-makes the heaven and earth, not just cleanses it with fire. In the end, there is not much of a difference.
- b. V. 2: John next sees an actual city coming from heaven down to the new earth. The city is not said to be the bride (but see 21:9-10). However, it is adorned as a bride, meaning it is very fancy in appearance.
- c. V. 3: This heavenly voice indicates that God is coming down to dwell with men. We can extrapolate from this that God is living in the New Jerusalem, and comes down from heaven with the city! (See 21:22-27.)
- d. This event marks the culmination of prophecy and the desire of God to dwell with His people—from Eden (Gen. 3:8-9) to the OT prophets (Ezek. 43:7) and restated in the NT (2 Cor. 6:16). This has always been a major goal of our God—to dwell with His people.
- e. Since God is present, there can be no more remnants of the curse in His presence—so v. 4 says there will be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain. All the old ways of things are gone by this point.
- f. V. 5-6: The scene flashes back to that of Revelation 4-5, and the One on the throne makes some declarations based on what John has just seen. This is what God will do—make all things new, and provide eternal life to all who thirst. The plan of God for the world will be brought to completion in this.
- g. V. 6: Note carefully that God provides access to the “fountain of the water of life” with but two modifiers. First it is free. Someone else paid for it. Second, it is for those who thirst. Since the Bible is talking about eternal life, it must be talking about the *desire* for that eternal life, in the midst of the drought of sin. “I thirsted in the barren land of sin and shame, and nothing satisfying there I found. But to the blessed cross of Christ one day I came, where springs of living water did abound.” (*Springs of Living Water*, John W. Peterson, Living Hymns #343; or consider *Satisfied*, Clara Teare, #344). This notion of yearning and thirsting for God and His righteousness is reflected throughout Scripture. See Psalm 42:1-2, 63:1, Isaiah 55:1-2, Matthew 5:6, John 7:37-38.
- h. V. 7-8: There are only two types of people. One type is the overcomer, who by faith believes in Christ and will become the heir of all things. The other type is the unbeliever, who by rejection of God and sin will earn for himself eternal death in the lake of fire. Two paths, two outcomes.

2. The New Jerusalem Described, 21:9-27

- a. The messenger was one of the angels of the seven bowls, as in 17:1.
- b. V. 9-10: What can be somewhat confusing here is that the angel shows John the bride, and then shows him the great city, the new Jerusalem from earlier in the chapter. So is the city the bride? No. It is adorned as a bride because those who dwell in it are the bride of the Lamb, along with all the redeemed. There is no distinction made here between the church and saints of all the other ages. Suffice it to say that the city is outfitted to be the dwelling place of God’s people, the saints of all ages. John sees not only the city but the inhabitants of it (v. 24).
- c. The description of the city is amazing (but real).
 - The glory of God shines out of the city like the brilliant light from a diamond (“clear as crystal”).
 - The city has a very high wall and 12 gates, each with an angel guarding the gate. The gates are labeled with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. The 12 apostles each get a foundation under the wall. This shows the connection between the saints of all ages. OT and NT will be brought together in a most blessed estate (Heb. 12:22-24).
 - The dimensions of the city are 1,400 miles on each of three sides. It could be a cube or pyramid.
 - The walls are 72 yards/216 feet thick.
 - The construction materials used are precious stones of all sorts. There is no wood, hay, or stubble!
 - Contrary to popular belief, there are 12 pearly gates, not just one set.
- d. V. 22-23: One key difference between the tribulation/millennial kingdom and the eternal state is that there is no temple in the eternal state. God simply dwells with the believers. As such, the “shekinah glory” of God provides the light for the city, perhaps something like in Genesis 1:3.
- e. V. 24-26: Heaven has a society with nations and kings and so forth!
- f. As with verse 8, verse 27 gives a warning that nothing that defiles will be allowed to enter that city. By implication, the whole society will be pure. No sin will be there whatsoever—only sinless believers.

MAP

Study #16 – The New Heaven and New Earth – Part 2, Revelation 22:1-21

This study continues with the eternal state from chapter 21. Remember that we are studying about a “new Eden,” as it were, a restored place for humans to dwell in perfect communion with God. We already examined saw the new heavens/earth and the new Jerusalem in the previous study.

3. The River and Tree of Life, v. 1-5

- a. V. 1: We have a river of water of life. The river that went out of Eden was not a river of water of life so far as we know (Gen. 2:10-14), but this certainly harks back to that river.
- b. V. 2: An even more striking likeness to the Garden of Eden is the tree of life (Gen. 2:9). It had 12 different types of fruit (that’s a hybrid!), one for each month. Apparently the passing of time will be marked in some fashion in the eternal state. More significantly, the tree has healing (health) in its leaves. It will miraculously sustain life for all the inhabitants of the new heavens and new earth.
- c. V. 3: What is absent from the new heavens and earth is the curse. This was implied in 21:4. Notice the elements of the curse in Genesis 3:14-19, regarding the serpent, the woman, the man, and the earth itself. All of its effects will be reversed/erased. God and the Lamb will be there, and His servants will serve Him.
- d. V. 4: God’s servants will see His face. I understand this to mean that we will see Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. God the Father is spirit and does not have a body. It is true that no man has seen God (John 1:18, 1 John 4:12), but that is in the sense of either a) His complete glory or b) from a sinful vantage point. Without sin, we will be able to interact with God directly. See also Genesis 32:30, Exodus 33:20-23, Judges 6:22, and Judges 13:22.
- e. V. 5: Because the light source is not the sun around which the earth orbits with a day/night cycle, there is no night in the new heavens and earth—God is their permanent light. The saints of God will reign forever and ever, in a kingdom-like arrangement as in Revelation 20. This is an eternal continuation of that kingdom. It fulfills 2 Timothy 2:12, Matthew 19:28 (Luke 22:29), Rom. 8:17, Rev. 1:6, 2:26-27, 5:10.

4. Epilogue: The Urgency of John’s Message, v. 6-21

- a. The closing verses of the book mirror the structure that we found in the prologue of 1:1-20.
- b. V. 6: The words are true because they are from God (see 1:1). The phrase “the things which must shortly take place” is confusing to many readers. It seems initially to say that all of the book’s events will take place within a short span of the writing of the book. Some thus support a preterist view of the book of Revelation (that it has already been fulfilled). We’ve given several reasons why this cannot be the case. For one, Jesus Christ has not returned as described in chapter 19, nor have the devastating trials of the Tribulation in chapters 6-19. The meaning of “shortly” is that once the events begin, they will transpire quickly (literally, “things which it is necessary to do quickly”).
- c. V. 7: Christ is coming quickly in the sense of suddenly, not necessarily soon. From our perspective, though, since we don’t know when it is, we have to be ready as if it were soon. Since the day of John’s writing, the events were impending, next on the prophetic calendar with no other events necessary to intervene. The blessing of 1:3 is reiterated here.
- d. V. 8: This is parallel to 19:10 where John, overwhelmed, tries to worship the angel.
- e. V. 9: The angel demands John to stop, putting himself down on John’s level. He refers to John as a prophet.
- f. V. 10: With the term “seal,” we could contrast this passage to Daniel 12:4 where Daniel was told to seal up the words until the time of the end. One contrast is the timing. Daniel prophesied of things much farther into the future relative to John. In any case, John is to publish the book so people will know it.
- g. V. 11: Anyone who rejects the teaching of the book will be confirmed in their unbelief. Anyone who believes must continue in his righteousness and holiness. This does NOT teach that one who is unholy now has to remain that way. It is those who refuse to be moved by John’s writing, and indeed the entire Bible, that will be confirmed in their unbelief. A time will come when there is no second chance, no turning back.
- h. V. 12-13: Again, Jesus emphasizes that He is coming quickly, that He brings a reward according to a person’s works, and that He is the beginning and end of all things.
- i. As in v. 7, verse 14 emphasizes a blessing on those “who do His commandments.” It is not enough to simply mouth some words. Spiritual “lip syncing” does not count for real salvation. Those who do the will of God show they are truly saved and will have access to the life-sustaining power of the tree of life.
- j. V. 15: Hell is what is “outside.” These types of folks will NOT inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10, Eph. 5:5-6). Do not be deceived into thinking that outside the gates of the city is a place for “halfway believers.” There is no such place. It’s either in or out, saved or not.
- k. V. 16: The Lord wants the churches to know these things. Why should we not study them carefully?
- l. V. 17: In light of the prophetic truth contained in the book, an invitation is extended to have water of life.
- m. V. 18-19: A warning is given against tampering with the book of Revelation and the entire Bible. Verse 19 has a textual issue: “Book of Life” should be “Tree of Life,” based on the majority of manuscripts.
- n. V. 20-21: John wishes for Christ to come quickly. So do we who are believers. Amen!

MAP

Various Questions and Answers on Revelation

There were questions left over from Study #8 concerning the identity of those who are persecuted by the dragon in 12:13-17.

Question 1: What is the identity of the woman?

1. Church? No, because the church did not bring forth Christ. Christ brought forth the church.
2. Mary? No, because this is symbolic (not a literal mom-child birth), Mary does not fit the 12-star symbolism, and furthermore, the woman pictured in Revelation participates in the future Tribulation events. Mary is dead and in heaven now. Mary had other children, but it does not appear that “the rest of her offspring” could even remotely refer to these children. Remember she had several sons and daughters, according to Matt 12:46, 13:55-56.
3. Israel? The nation of Israel is the only entity that really makes sense. With Gen. 37:9-11, the symbolism is clearly referring to Israel. The fact that Christ came from Israel, that salvation comes from the Jews, is pictured in the symbolic terms of Israel bringing forth the Messiah (John 4:22, Romans 9:3-5).

Question 2: How about those who are left in the rapture—can they be saved?

I was just looking at this text again and wondering how in the world it got to be interpreted that it was those who did not receive the love of the truth BEFORE THE RAPTURE? Those words are not there. So it could just as well be the case that Paul is referring to those who perish (in the future) did not receive the love of the truth (before they perished). They perish BECAUSE they did not receive the love of the truth (before they perished, not before the rapture) that they might be saved. Those who are unsaved are in danger of being hardened by God who will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie that Satan and the Antichrist will propagate. God will do this to seal their condemnation—for those who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

I looked in the commentaries by Hiebert and Green and could not find the “no second chance” view even mentioned.

In Christendom in general, the “no second chance” doctrine is taught by ... Others teach such a “second chance” including ... The “second chance” is not referring to an opportunity after death to repent and believe in Christ. The “second chance” is rejected out of hand by those who reject the rapture—they simply do not see a 7-year period of time after the rapture, so obviously there cannot be any further “chance” for unbelievers to repent. I take the “second chance” view just on exegetical grounds in the passage. It simply means that if you have not been saved before the rapture, you could be saved after. But this is a “risky” business because God will send hardened unbelievers a delusion, allowing their sinfulness to block their ability to discern the truth, so that they will believe as true what is actually false. There is a point of no return, but it is not specifically the rapture.

Question 3: What is the identity of the persecuted people in Rev. 12:17?

If the church was taken out at the rapture, who are the persecuted people?

In this passage, the persecuted ones are particularly saved Jews. We know this because the text speaks about the woman (Israel) and the rest of her offspring. We saw her most well-known offspring in 12:2, 5, the Messiah. But she has many other children—those who come from Israel, Jews. Some of them are pictured collectively as the woman who flies off into a wilderness hideout where she is protected and provided for during the last half of the Tribulation. Apparently there are other Jews who are not part of the group that makes it to the wilderness hideout. These scattered Jews are called “the rest of her offspring.” They are said to “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” so they must be saved Jews. Many Jews will end up being saved by the end of the Tribulation, but many of these will also perish because of the difficult persecution of the Antichrist.

Notice that this interpretation excludes saved Gentiles from 12:13 and 17. However, they have their problems too—13:7 shows that Antichrist was permitted to make war with the saints and to overcome them. 13:15 adds that those who would not worship the image would be killed. This language is not limited to the offspring of the woman like chapter 12’s language is.

If you feel a certain unrest about my speaking of Israel this way, I would encourage you to consider the weight of Biblical evidence that teaches a renewed, saved nation of Israel in a theocratic kingdom. This evidence runs throughout the entire Bible. The weight of it is overwhelming:

Genesis 12 – the Abrahamic covenant has portions that have not yet been fulfilled to Israel

Ezekiel 40-48 – the description of this temple and worship, which we assign to the millennial kingdom, have not yet happened. Obviously there is a Jerusalem-centered notion going on here.

Romans 11:26 says that all Israel will be saved.

Romans 11:1-2 says that God has not rejected his people—Israelites.

Psalms 2:8-9 declare the Lord's rule over the nations. All Messianic texts that refer to the glory of the Messiah refer to the Israel-centered kingdom in the future.

Psalms 110:2, 4: The Lord will rule from Zion and will be seen as the Melchizedekian priest.

The OT prophets tell of a future golden age for Israel in which they will be in the land. Much of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others is given over to this concept.

Isaiah 11:1-5 speaks of the Messiah's reign in the kingdom of Israel.

Isaiah 9:6 predicts that the government will be upon his shoulder. He will rule in a governmental arrangement.

Jeremiah 31:31 tells of the new covenant that will be made with the house of Israel and Judah.

Jeremiah 33:19 tells us that God is serious about his covenant with David. It will be fulfilled so that he will reign on his throne. This refers back to 2 Samuel 7.

With this, we have seen that the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants have yet to reach their fulfillment with the nation of Israel. God is good to His promise, though, and those promises will be fulfilled.

Ezekiel 20:33-38 teaches of a future judgment on the nation of Israel that will purge out the rebels from among them. They will be regathered into the land of Israel.

Amos 9:11-15 teaches very clearly that David's dynasty will be restored and a golden age will come. In Acts 15:15-18, James quotes this, supporting the notion that God is busy calling out a people for His name at that time, and then afterwards would come back and rebuild the David's house. James and all who were there still expected that the Davidic promises will be fulfilled to Israel.

Question 4: About the book of life – when is it written? Can one be blotted out?

See my position statement on this.

Question 5: When are the saved resurrected?

1 Cor. 15:23—first Christ, then those who are Christ's at his coming.

15:24 – then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father.

Correlating this with Revelation 20:5, this seems to correspond to the first resurrection. Church saints are definitely raised at 1 Thess. 4:13-18 and taken up with living saints (1 Cor. 15:51-57). This leaves dead OT believers, and those who will become believers during the Tribulation. OT believers will be resurrected according to Daniel 12:2-3, and it appears that this happens at the inauguration of the millennial kingdom so that the OT saints can participate in that kingdom. Ez. 34:24 and 37:25 indicate that David will be their prince during this era, so David is resurrected, and I take it that the rest of the OT saints will also be resurrected that way.

The only problem then is what about those who become believers during the Tribulation. We know that there are such, because Rev. 7:14 tells us that there are people who came out of the great Tribulation who then were martyred and enter Heaven. Rev. 20:4 tells us that there were souls of those beheaded for their faith during the Tribulation (they did not worship the beast or his image or receive his mark—obviously they were present during the Tribulation).

Backing up for a second, Rev. 20:5 talks about the first resurrection. All saints who died are resurrected by the beginning of the millennial kingdom.

Who populates the kingdom initially—at least in terms of unglorified human beings? The answer is those who survive the Tribulation who are saved. Remember that there are such who survive (see Matt. 24:31, and particularly 24:22 which shows that the terrible persecution is “cut short” so that the elect (in terms of being saved) are saved (from physical death)). Once in the kingdom, they will begin to have children and populate the earth again. Given the excellent conditions of the kingdom, the population will probably rapidly multiply. Even if you only have a couple, then can double the population of adults in 20 years. Then they do that again, and so every 20 years you can double the population (this is not out of the realm of possibility—consider that in our world, population was 2.5 billion in 1950 and by 2008 it had increased to 6.7 billion. In about 60 years, that was an increase of a factor of 2.68. In 1000 years, even if you started out with 1 million people, you would have 16.6 periods of 60 years for doubling, so you would have $1,000,000 * 2^{(16.6)} = 104,031,000,000$ which is 104 billion by the end of the millennium! I suspect the conditions will be much better, no infant mortality, etc. and so the number could be much higher.

Note what this means about the millennial kingdom. There will be regular alive people, and there will be resurrected, glorified saints, co-existing. They will live on THIS EARTH. God will dwell with His people.

Question 6: What does it mean that all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26)?

We can understand at least as much as this: A group of people known as “Israel” will, at some point in the future, be saved. But there are a lot of details we should consider carefully before drawing any conclusions about the meaning of this verse. For instance, in Christendom in general, this verse is often explained in terms of Israel = saved Jews + Gentiles and the completeness of the Gentiles (v. 25) brings to completion the salvation of all of this group of Israel. In this approach, Israel is used as a figurative way of speaking about the church.

We have to consider **the meaning of Israel**. It refers to Jews, not Gentiles. In the context of Romans 9-11, this is clear. Consider the following verses: Romans 9:6, 27, 31; 10:1, 19, 21; 11:2, 7, 25-26. We could add four verses that reflect Paul’s understanding that these folks are “his flesh” (Rom. 9:3, 5, 8; 11:14). Some of these verses refer to an even smaller group of Jews—saved Jews as opposed to all physical Jews. (See Rom. 9:6 which limits the “true Israel” to those who are saved.) In Romans to Revelation, Paul uses the term in 22 verses. Excluding the ten uses in Romans 9-11, these are: 1 Co. 10:18; 2 Co. 3:7,13; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 2:12; Phil. 3:5; Heb. 8:8,10; 11:22; Rev. 2:14; 7:4; 21:12. These verses speak of Israel after the flesh, the children of Israel, Israel as differentiated from Gentiles, ethnic Israel, God’s New Covenant with Israel, historical Old Testament Israel and a future Israel that has twelve tribes like the OT Israel.

The most problematic of these verses is Gal. 6:16, which refers to the Israel of God. Though this can be shoehorned to fit the “Israel = church” theology, I am convinced that with at least 20 other uses of the term in its literal sense (Jews or saved Jews) in the NT, we should not very easily depart from the literal interpretation. Furthermore, there is nothing in the context that *requires* us to use a figurative interpretation. And, we do not have to do so in order to make sense of the verse. Paul is wishing for peace on all who walk in the true Christian faith, and especially on Jewish believers, the Israel of God. He probably gives a special wish here for Jewish converts because they suffer great persecution from their families, Jewish leaders, synagogues, Judaizers, etc., plus the fact that he is a Jew and so desires for them to be saved (Romans 9:3, 10:1).

Our verse in Romans 11:26 can be best interpreted using the same methodology—the vast majority of uses refer to literal ethnic Israel, and there is no compelling reason in the context to take it differently.

Then we have to consider **the meaning of “all Israel.”** Does it refer to the Jews of a specific period of time, or of all time? Clearly it cannot refer to all Jews of all time. Judas will not be saved (Matt. 26:24), nor will many Jews that have not believed since the time of Christ. This indicates that we are speaking about “all” in a limited sense of all the Jews at a particular time. A key question then is at what time does this occur? In the present age or in the end-time? The quote about the Deliverer coming out of Zion sets the answer in an end-time context, and it seems to refer to the second coming of Christ and the inauguration of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34). Furthermore, the context of 11:25 indicates that this happens after the full number of the Gentiles comes in. We can correlate this with the order of God’s program given in Acts 15:13-18.

Pressing on further, we ask does **“all Israel”** mean every individual Jew (all Israelites) regardless of faith/repentance or does it refer to the whole nation of Israel who are believers? In order to answer this more fully, we have to deal carefully with at least two Old Testament passages. They are Ezekiel 20:31-44 and Zechariah 12:10.

In Ezekiel, 20:38 is the key verse for our study here. This event will occur after the second coming of Christ. It says that God will judge the Israelites after regathering them out of the nations. Some of the people so regathered will not make it into Israel, unfortunately, because the rebels will be purged. Evidently, they will be killed and not allowed to enter the kingdom. (See the parallel concept with the Gentiles in Matthew 25:31-46, particularly verse 41 and 46). This would indicate that “all Israel” does not mean every individual Jew alive at the time of the second coming.

However, the Zechariah 12:10 passage has to give us pause on this interpretation because it indicates that there will be a more-than-usual turning of Jews to Christ upon his return. Zech 12:10 indicates that at the sight of the pierced Messiah, the nation will mourn and lament. This sounds like a pouring out of the Spirit in terms of repentant faith. They will finally believe their Messiah. I do not understand this to mean that 100% of living Jews at the time of the second coming will turn to Christ. Some will rebel. But I believe this means that a supernatural outpouring of God’s Spirit in terms of His life-giving ministry will affect many more Jews than we might normally expect to turn to the Messiah. Many interpreters will object at this point and say “but it’s too late by that point—once the Lord returns, there is no second chance.” But I cannot say that on

Scriptural grounds. What the Lord wants to do and the exact timing is up to Him. After all, it is not a solely human response to the gospel anyway—God has to be at work in one’s heart to draw him/her to Christ. The Jews that are alive are still alive and breathing and can repent of their sins. It seems that there will be some who are hardened (the rebels of Ezekiel 20:38) but there are many upon whom God will pour out that spirit of grace and supplication. When is the last opportunity? I don’t know, but I do know that unbelief is a perverse thing, even in the face of certain and utter destruction, and some will persist in rebellion to the bitter end.

All this allows us to explain the timing of “all Israel being saved.” It is after the second coming and after the purging judgment of Ezekiel. After that point, the whole nation of Israel who remains will be saved—all the individual Jews who remain will be believers. These will shine like stars in the kingdom of their Father along with their OT deceased compatriots (Daniel 12:1-3). Only believers will be allowed to enter into the kingdom (Matt. 7:21, Matt. 21:31).

We also need to think about **the meaning of the term “saved.”** Does it refer to physical deliverance (saved from a horrible situation) or does it refer to spiritual salvation (saved from sin)? I would interpret this section to refer to spiritual salvation because of the references to ungodliness and sins in 11:26-27. However, it is true that God will deliver Israel from the ravages of the war at the end of the Tribulation (Matt. 24:22). So in a sense we could say both types of deliverance are there, but the Romans 11 context is quite clearly focused on the spiritual issue and so the physical deliverance is not Paul’s concern at this point.

The bottom line is that there is national salvation for the group of Jews who are individually saved. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, p. 68 writes, “By this he means, not that every individual will be saved spiritually, but that Israel as a nation will be delivered when the Deliverer comes from Zion, referring to the second coming of Christ (v. 26).”

Question 7: Why do we say that the church is not in the Tribulation?

Isn’t it unfair that some church saints will be saved from the great tribulation? Shouldn’t they have to suffer also? Fair or not is not the question. What is the question is what the Word of God teaches when taken literally. See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 193-218.

I. Texts:

1. Rev. 3:10
2. 1 Thess. 5:9
3. 1 Thess. 1:9-10

II. Arguments, compressed from Pentecost’s *Things to Come*:

1. Imminency of Christ’s coming for the church. Church told not to watch for signs (like Israel was), but to watch for Christ’s coming which could be at any time (Acts 1:11, 1 Cor. 15:51-52, 1 Thess. 1:10, Titus 2:13, Rev. 3:3). Israel was told that she could know that the coming of the Lord was near. See Matt. 24:3, with following text, particularly 24:15 and mentions of the great Tribulation. If this text is correlated with Daniel 9, the believing Jew who is present and understands all this will be able to tell the general time of Christ’s coming—not the day nor hour (Matt. 24:36, 25:13, Mark 13:32, Luke 21:28) but the general time, and the things that have to be fulfilled before Christ’s coming. This seeming contradiction between imminency and mostly-non-imminency is harmonized by distinguishing the rapture from the second coming.

So, if the coming of Christ for the church is imminent, then the church cannot go through the Tribulation, which would give it a general timeline to know when to expect Christ’s coming.

2. Restrainer – 2 Thess. 2:6.
3. Distinction between rapture and second coming – 1 Thess. 4:13-18 with 1 Thess 5.
4. Absence of church in Revelation 6-18.
5. Nothing of major concern for the church on the Tribulation in the epistles. We have to make sure to distinguish “normal” persecution that the epistles covered, and the authors and audience experienced,
6. Distinction between Israel and the church. Consider such texts as Dan. 12:1 (time of trouble for Israel), Jer. 30:7 (Jacob’s trouble).
7. The mystery of the church in the OT indicative that the church was not at all revealed, so the church was not in view in the OT prophecies concerning Israel.
8. Rev. 4-5. The 24 elders may well be symbolic of the church and its presence in Heaven apart from the horrors of the Tribulation.
9. Implication of 1 Thess. 4:13-18. What did the living saints think the dead saints missed? Tribulation? Or the blessing of the pre-Trib rapture? The latter seems to be the case.
10. The object of Satan’s attacks is the woman, Israel, not the church.

Here are some more questions of a more general nature.

Question 8: Is Christ bringing us back to earth with Him to be here during His reign on earth?

Yes. I believe this is the case because 1 Thess. 4:17 says that we will always be with the Lord. The Lord is leaving heaven to come back to earth, so we must be tagging along. The church is the bride of Christ; the bride goes with the groom!

Question 9: Are the raptured believers the priests that reign with Christ and God in Rev 20:6?

To be a little more precise, I would explain it this way. The context (20:4) refers to tribulation saints. They had died as martyrs because they would not worship the beast, etc. These are the ones who lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years according to 20:4.

With that said, I believe that raptured church saints will also take part in this living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years. Though we are not tribulation saints mentioned in 20:4, we are among those who take part in the first resurrection. So, 20:6 "expands the horizons" of 20:4 so that in 20:6, all church saints are included as well. We know that church saints will judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3) and will reign with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12). The church will have some role in reigning with Christ during the millennium. So I answer your question with a qualified yes, "qualified" because there are other non-church saints that take part in the priest-work and reigning as well.

Perhaps at this point it would be helpful to list the various types of believers through the ages in terms of their groupings. I do not believe that all "believers" or "saints" can be glommed together into one homogeneous group, or that they will have the same exact role in eternity. All will be blessed and sinless, but church saints are exclusively the body and bride of Christ, they will reign as co-regents, but OT saints will reign as well, particularly with respect to Israel (resurrected King David, for instance). So there are what we call OT saints, whether Jew or Gentile, there are church saints, there are tribulation saints, and there are saints born again during the millennium. Jews will always be Jews, and Gentiles will be Gentiles, but church-age Jews will be in the church-saints group regardless of the fact that they are ethnically Jews (there is no Jew or Greek "in Christ" as Rom 10:12, Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11 say).

Question 10: Since Satan has been bound in chains, does that mean there will be no sin and it will really be "Heaven on earth" ?"

No. It is true that Satan will be bound as per Rev. 20:1-3 and 6. However, there will still be sin. For example, Isaiah 65:20 indicates that there will be great longevity in the kingdom. But there will still be death as well. Notice the text mentions a "sinner" who dies at the age of 100--he will be considered accursed, and not to have lived out his full days. On the basis of this text, I believe that it will be possible for people who become believers during the millennium to live for up to the full length of the millennium and perhaps not even experience death at all until they are transformed into their glorified bodies (like we will be transformed at the rapture, 1 Cor. 15:51-53). But I digress slightly. In any case, there will be sin on the earth during the millennium. Theologically this has to be the case because all people born during the millennium will be born with the same totally depraved nature that we were born with. They will be under the guilt of Adam's sin and subject to death and all that. However, they will be at a great advantage because Isaiah 11:9 (see also Hab. 2:14) says that the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD (Jer 31:34). There will be no way someone can escape the knowledge of God then. But, back to your question again, there will be sin. Consider Zech. 13:4-6, for instance, which teaches that there will be false prophets that will hide their identity (be ashamed, saying he is not a prophet, lying about the wounds on his arms). But they probably are doing things "under cover." That is a Day of the Lord passage that refers to the millennium.

So, there will be no "heaven on earth" until the news heavens and new earth, AFTER the 1000 years.

Question 11: When the 1,000 reign is over, will we go back to heaven (wherever we were with Christ during the tribulation) or will this earth be heaven? and we will just stay here and God will transform His creation back to its glorious sinless earth, as in the Garden of Eden before the fall?

OK, this is another good question. It seems that between Revelation 20:10 and 21:1, there is a bit of a time-out for the saints. They are kind of "set aside," or are with Christ as observers, while He deals with unbelievers at the Great White Throne judgment, and while He destroys the old heavens and earth and creates new ones. Remember that God will burn up the old heavens and earth according to 2 Peter 3:7, 10-12 and

create new ones (2 Peter 3:13). Here's another debated point. Does this mean God burns out the old earth to purify it, and then starts over, or does he totally destroy it and make a new one? Because of the strong language of the texts I cited, I take the latter position, that God will really create all things new and not just "remodel" the old stuff.

But in the end, the result will be a perfect and sinless earth and heaven, with the lake of fire as the eternal reminder of sin and its punishment...but I don't think we will be seeing into Hell....

The eternal state has an earth and what we call "heaven." I don't think these are precisely the same place, so we cannot say earth is the same place as heaven at that point, but the conditions on earth will be heavenly, no sin, no pain, etc. so the difference is not very significant from our vantage point today. Heaven is not like it is often pictured, with ghostly spirit-saints floating around in eternal bliss. It contains a real city New Jerusalem. It has streets and gates and the tree of life and a river and God is there and the Lamb is there and there will be nations and kings (Rev. 21:24) and servants serving God and worshiping God, etc. We will have glorified real bodies like Jesus' body that was physical and touchable and could do amazing things like go through walls and it could eat and all that stuff. Sometime I'll tell you why people have misunderstood this whole issue--it has to do with the widespread influence of Greek philosophy on our thought processes.

Question 12: We hear that there are Christians that don't believe in the millennium and also some who think we are in the millennium right now. How can that be since there is still so much sin? It makes more sense to believe that we are in the beginning of the Tribulation right now.

It is true that there are Christians who are "amillennial" and who believe that the millennium is just a figure of speech. 1000 years to them just means "a long time."

It is also true that there are some Christians who think we are in the millennium right now. They are called "post mill" because they believe Christ will come after the millennial period they believe we are in now. The 1000 years is also "a long time" to them, perhaps actually 2000 years since Christ came. The primary mark of this group is that they believe that the church will bring peace on earth and bring conditions such that the Lord will return to the earth. They generally believe that things will get better and better until such happens. They may emphasize social action and governmental involvement in order to move along the Christianization of society. While we do not abandon social action and political involvement, these are not our main goals. We understand that those means are not sufficient to improve society--only regeneration can do that.

As I mentioned in our Revelation studies, we are "futurists" who believe Revelation will be fulfilled yet in the future (for the most part--Revelation 2-3 refer to past things now). But these amills and post-mills are often "preterists" who say that Revelation has already been fulfilled almost entirely. The tribulation is past already, perhaps at AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem.

As I said earlier, there will be sin in the millennium, but it will be vastly reduced compared to what it is now, because there will be a perfect government and probably many more saved people than there are now. I agree with your analysis about the mid-tribulational types who think we may be in the beginning of the trib right now. Of course, this should only last for 3.5 years....Anyway, we have not yet seen the antichrist rise to power, so we cannot be in the tribulation!

Question 13: Growing up "born again" I have always believed that when I died I would go to heaven and if Christ came before that I would be raptured. I never gave much thought to the millennium and what was the purpose for that. I do know now that the purpose is for God to fulfill His promises to the nation of Israel, but then started to wonder about the raptured believers and how they fit into the 1,000 years. Is all of this elementary?

I would not say it is "elementary" but it is true that most Christians do not understand these things because they are in churches that don't teach on this stuff. And your point about Israel is very good. Thanks for your confidence in my answers :-). It is a privilege to be of whatever help I can. Feel free to share these things with anyone else that has the same types of questions. In fact, I might use this as a Q&A type thing, or put it on our church website or something. I won't identify you at all or even use your specific wording for the questions, so don't worry!