

***INVITATION TO
CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP***

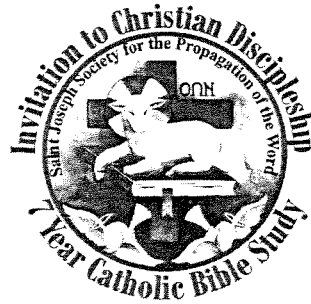


St. Michael Victorious Raphael

***MEDITATIONS ON
THE BOOK OF REVELATION***

INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A Seven Year Catholic bible Study



Meditations on The Book of Revelation or The Apocalypse

James P. O'Bryan, S.T.

St. Joseph Society for the Propagation of the Word
24 Boulder View
Irvine, CA 92603
(949) 387-6816

www.invitetodiscipleship.org

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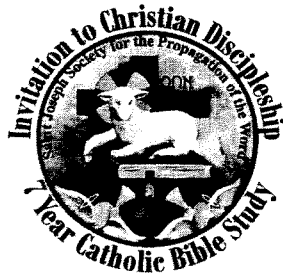
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The St. Joseph Society for the Propagation of The Word Presents:

An Invitation to Christian Discipleship

James P. O'Bryan, S.T., Author and Presenter



It was the early 1970's when a group of laywomen in Orange, CA approached Fr. O'Bryan about the lack of Catholic Bible studies in Orange County. There was, of course, the Protestant group nearby that had signed up over 200 Catholics to their study. Father knew he couldn't do the work without a great deal of assistance. Volunteers stepped up to do the logistical tasks and Father worked with the Holy Spirit to provide the works. This was the beginning of his "seven year sentence". Working 60 – 65 hours per week, he was never more than two weeks ahead and, most of the time he was working with less than a day to presentation time. His work was all hand written and needed to

be typed and copied for distribution. These two hour sessions (1 hour sharing + 1 hour lecture) were attended by approximately 400 people weekly, split between a morning and an evening class. Father claims he never rewrote a word; "I didn't have time", he said.

Father's efforts resulted in a seven year study plus several spin-off works used for educating Catholics around the world. The seven year study includes:

- Invitation to Christian Discipleship (Intro)
- The Gospel of St. Mark
- The Gospel of St. Luke
- Acts of the Apostles
- The Gospel of St. Matthew
- The Gospel of St. John
- Romans
- Hebrews
- 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Revelation



Fr. Jim

Other excellent teaching materials, often used in RCIA and formation classes, are the result of Father's dedication to the laity. These materials include, "Christian with a Capital C", "Rock Foundation Revisited" and "On Eagle's Wings". In 2005, a Group was formed to help publish and distribute Father's work. The **St. Joseph Society for the Propagation of The Word, Inc.** has been instrumental in setting up a web site and taking on the ministry of spreading the Gospel by promoting the instructional works of Fr. O'Bryan. **Materials available include teacher's manuals, student workbooks, CDs of lectures and several inspirational works for RCIA and adult education.**

The seven year study is designed to be presented by the laity or religious. Guidelines are available for starting a study group. Of particular interest is the fact that these studies are

accredited by the Catechetical Institute of Orange County and have the Imprimatur through the Bishop of Orange, California.

Check the web site for a study near you, or start one today.

Be advised, this is an “in depth” study of the scriptures so that the Word of Christ, rich as it is, might dwell in us.

“Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depth of Christ’s love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God Himself” (Eph. 3:18-19).

<http://www.invitetodiscipleship.org>

(949) 842-9789 or (949) 387-6816

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24 Boulder View
Irvine, CA 92603**

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THE BOOK OF REVELATION

CHAPTER 1

THE APOCALYPSE--SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Only with prudent trepidation do we undertake the study of the Apocalypse, the final written message of the New Testament. Of all the writings of the New Testament, it is the most obscure and enigmatic. St. Jerome, the great biblical scholar of the early Church, complained in a letter to Paulinus, bishop of Nola, "*The Apocalypse of John has as many secrets as words.*" There are 913 distinct words in this work. Without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the book remains sealed, and its study an exercise in futility or worse--delusion. The following admonition of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to the students of the Sacred Scriptures will never be more appropriate than in this present study, "*And let them remember that prayer must accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for 'we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine sayings'*" (St. Ambrose and Doc. on Rev. Chap. VI, Sec.25). St. Jerome maintains that to read or to study the Holy Scriptures without the Holy Spirit is like skipping stones across a frozen pond. The mind remains merely on the surface of meaning, while the spirit remains in darkness.

THE LITERARY FORM

The author of our present study used a literary form peculiar to his time, one that was certainly mysterious and perhaps even bizarre to people of today. It is called apocalyptic. The work begins with the Greek word *apocalypse*. It means uncovering or unveiling. The use of the word implies disclosure of a hidden and specific truth, or revelation of events unknown, whether of the past, present, or future. Apocalyptic writings are prophetic in the sense that the writer acts as a messenger from God, revealing that which only the Divine could know. However, it differs from those writings generally accepted as prophetic because of its dualistic view. The apocalyptic writer does not picture merely the perceived empirical reality of the here and now, he beholds the presence and power that stands behind the present reality and transcends it.

He sees beneath the earthly dimension the supernatural struggle of good and evil. Human beings are but willing instruments in an unseen and undreamed reality.

One of the essential elements of apocalyptic writing that distinguishes it from general prophetic works is that the revealed material comes clothed in picturesque, often bizarre images and mysterious symbols. All true mystical experience is ineffable, which means such experiences cannot adequately be expressed in ordinary concrete language. The mystical experience defies definition. Even after the seer has described the mystical message, the hearer only “sees indistinctly, as through a dark glass.” Moreover, in the case of such writers, they resort to images and symbols not only because of the mystical nature of the revelation, but because of the politically volatile nature of the material revealed. The message is deliberately veiled to hide it from the uninitiated.

Apocalyptic writings deal with past and present reality, as well as with the future. The future is divided into the historical future--things to come to be within this present world, and the final cosmic occurrence that would bring into being the new heaven and the new earth. The images and symbols differentiate between the dimensions of time. The past and present reality would be only thinly veiled and easily decoded like a political cartoon. As the seer describes future events, the images become more nebulous and vague and easily misread. When the author speaks of the cosmic events that will shake the foundations of the universe, the images and symbols become wild and fantastic. It is the intention of the author to “blow the minds” of the hearers. Apocalyptic writing is not meant so much to produce knowledge of the mind as to cause illumination within the human spirit.

This form of literature came to be in times of religious crisis. It took the form of a series of visions supposedly received by a patriarch or prophet of old, but hidden until a later time. The real author of the work remained hidden under a pseudonym. The purpose of such writings was to console the people of God in times of earthly affliction. This form of literature appeared in Israel after the Babylonian Exile, during the Maccabean period, and during the Roman conquest of Israel. Apocalyptic passages are found in Isaiah (Chapters 13 through 35), Joel, and Zechariah. They are also found in Ezekiel, which is largely apocalyptic. It was the Book of Daniel, however, that set the form for later apocalyptic writings. Daniel was probably written around 165 B.C., when the Jewish people suffered under Antiochus Epiphanes. Other Jewish

apocalyptic works followed Daniel but none were included in the Sacred Scriptures.

Christians coming out of a Jewish environment would be influenced by the Jewish apocalyptic writings, which were very popular at the time. The writer of the New Testament Apocalypse was certainly influenced by Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. We find apocalyptic characteristics in St. Paul's Second letter to the Thessalonians (2:1-12). A "little Apocalypse" has appeared in the Synoptic Gospels (Mk. 13:24-31).

THE AUTHOR

Unlike the Jewish writings, the Apocalypse of the New Testament was produced under the author's own name. The gift of prophecy was accepted in the Christian Community. The writer is a Christian prophet known and respected by the Churches to whom he writes. His name is John. He writes in exile from the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, southwest of Ephesus. Who was John? Our earliest written testimony comes from St. Irenaeus who was born in Asia, probably in Smyrna, about 140 A.D. He maintained that this John was the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, one of the Twelve Apostles. St. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Origen also accepted John the Apostle to be the author of the Apocalypse and the fourth Gospel.

Historical evidence confirms that John the Apostle resided in Ephesus and was buried there. According to Irenaeus, John lived in the time of Trajan to at least the year 98 A.D. Ancient writers confirm that the Apostle lived to an old age. The fourth Gospel indicates this (see Jn. 21:21-24).

Authorship of the Apocalypse was not questioned until the Third Century, when St. Dionysius of Alexandria held another John to be the author of the Apocalypse. He found support for this in the fact that Ephesus had two monuments claiming to be the tomb of John. According to Papias, a personal friend of St. Polycarp, there were two Johns who were both disciples of the Lord. St. Dionysius ascribed the authorship of the Apocalypse to the other disciple named John, for he could not accept the fact that the same person wrote both the Apocalypse and the fourth Gospel.

It is also difficult for many modern scholars to believe that the same person produced both works. It has been said that the Apocalypse contains the worst Greek in the New Testament, whereas the fourth Gospel is written in worthy

and honorable Greek. Some scholars solve the problem by maintaining that a school of disciples naturally grew up around the famous apostle. The mind and spirit of John stimulated the works of the Johannine School, which later produced and published in John's name. Even St. Dionysius, the first to doubt John's authorship, later wrote, "*We do not know who it is that writes but it is John that speaks.*"

Since St. John's authorship was generally accepted, at least in the Western Church, the divine inspiration of the work was readily accepted. The Apocalypse, along with the Letters of John, was classified as an inspired writing. However, the apostolic authorship would not have been so readily upheld if the contents of the book had not been in harmony with the teachings of the other apostolic writings.

TIME OF COMPOSITION

Early Christian tradition is almost unanimous in assigning the Apocalypse to the last years of Domitian, who reigned from 81 to 96 A.D., which still remains the most probable time of composition. It was written at a time of persecution when the Churches in the East were compelled to choose between Christ and Caesar. As John foresaw the situation, the persecution would spread over the entire Roman Empire and end only with the fall of Rome and paganism.

The Church had not yet recovered from the psychological shock resulting from the terrible persecution initiated by Nero. This persecution had largely been confined to Rome. There, Christians were killed because they were falsely accused of being arsonists and atheists. But the persecution that broke out under Domitian was on a large scale, and was concerned with the Christians' refusal to worship the Roman State and the emperor, who personified the divinity of Rome. Christians were accused of being atheists and haters of humanity. Domitian was serious about being worshipped! Toward the end of his life he demanded that everyone render him divine homage under the title "Our Lord and God." His will would have been enforced even more stringently in the Roman provinces, for they jealously strove to demonstrate their loyalty to Rome and the emperor. The enforcement of Domitian's decree would have initiated a persecution that would spread like wildfire throughout the Empire, devastating the Christian Church. St. John foresaw and forewarned of this possibility. Only the assassination of Domitian on September 18, 96 A.D., prevented this possibility from becoming a terrible reality.

THE LETTER'S DESTINATION

John directs the Apocalypse as a letter to seven churches in the Roman Province of Asia, which is today the western section of Turkey. The seven cities addressed in the letter were located on a great circular road that connected the most populated and wealthy sections of the province. Even though John addressed only the Seven Churches, he probably intended his message to reach the entire province.

John addresses congregations he had known and to whom he had ministered, conveying to them revelations from the Chief Shepherd of the Church, Jesus Christ. These revelations came to John through a succession of visions, which he records and transmits as commanded. Each of the Christian congregations addressed in the letter had problems peculiar to itself. Jesus Christ, the glorified Head of the Church, is presented as having personally visited these Churches. He came, not so much in the role of the Good Shepherd, but more as Inspector General. The searchlight of Divine Truth shone upon them and the Eye of the Lord saw down to their hearts. The spiritual condition of each community was assessed and its particular circumstances noted. The Lord sent a report of these findings through His messenger John. One gets the impression that the Inspector General has reviewed His troops in order to assess their weaknesses and strengths. The report indicates the spiritual work to be done speedily within the Churches. They have lived in a time of relative peace but this period is drawing quickly to an end. A time of tribulation lies ahead.

The letter does not so much turn its attention away from the Seven Churches as it turns the eyes of the Churches away from their own particular problems, to behold a panoramic view of the world. What is revealed is of vital importance to all Christians, and gives reason and purpose for the critical analysis of the individual Christian Communities. What is seen is intended to produce some vital changes with the Christian Church. The visions and revelations are fearsome and are intended to profoundly affect the spirits of those who hear them. The greatest power the world can muster rises to confront the Church. The visions tell of coming persecution involving the entire Church; the time of persecution remains indefinite.

The anticipated and final struggle between the Church and the World--between Christ and the Antichrist--comes in the final visions. The whole world turns in force against the Church. The hour of its greatest peril ushers

in the hour of its final triumph and eternal victory. One author has written that the entire Apocalypse is to the Christian Community a *Sursum Corda*—"Lift up your hearts!"

THE DOCTRINE

The Apocalypse firmly defends the oneness of God. It assumes an immovable stand against idolatry. It beholds in idolatry the mother of all sin and the essential cause for the corruption of all earthly and human life. It was the damning sin of the Empire, reaching its peak with the Roman Emperor's claiming divinity. Idolatry is demonolatry and magic and the manifestation of its powers.

The Apocalypse presents the Christ of the Gospel; a Christ changed through the Resurrection and Ascension. Christ receives the titles of God--the Alpha and the Omega, the Living One, the Holy, the True. At the sight of Christ's glorified humanity the seer swoons. Christ appears as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who relates to the Church, the world, and to God with the greatest fullness. The Ascended Christ demonstrates total love for His Church. From Him flow all spiritual gifts. These gifts aid the members of the Church toward their final reward. The martyrs are His witnesses, and the saints His servants.

The severity of God is depicted in the Apocalypse. Without a doubt this was intended to give a balanced picture to the God of the Gospel. Life on earth is a time of war; one can be lost in a war. The Apocalypse makes clear the meaning of being lost to God. This message was needed when the Christian Community faced both the moral laxity of pagan life on one side, and pressure to acknowledge the divinity of Rome on the other.

The Apocalypse addressed itself to a concrete situation--the Church in tribulation. The permanent value of the Apocalypse is that it offers insight to the Church for the understanding of world history. The history of this world is an arena in which God works out redemption. All life comes within the embracing Will of God. The history of the world is a demonstration of the continuous conflict between the Will of God and forces of evil. This evil uses human instrumentality to accomplish its designs and purposes, but the evil itself is of cosmic and universal scale. The Will of God is to create a new heaven and new earth in which the saints will be vindicated. This final divine purpose will be accomplished!

THE APOCALYPSE
SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“HAPPY IS THE MAN WHO READS THIS PROPHETIC MESSAGE, AND HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO HEAR IT AND HEED WHAT IS WRITTEN IN IT, FOR THE APPOINTED TIME IS NEAR!” (Revelation 1:3)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through the Literary Form.

- 1. What part does prayer play in the study of Sacred Scripture?**
- 2. What can be expected without prayer and serious study?**
- 3. How would you describe the literary form of apocalyptic writings?**
- 4. Why are unusual images and symbols used?**

SECOND DAY: Read Daniel 12:1-13.

- 1. What feeling does reading this chapter of Daniel leave within you?**
- 2. In what way is this reading apocalyptic?**
- 3. What does this reading foretell?**
- 4. How does it comfort God’s People?**

THIRD DAY: Read II Thessalonians 2:1-12.

- 1. What feeling does this reading create within you?**
- 2. To what danger does Paul address himself in this reading?**
- 3. In what way is this reading apocalyptic?**
- 4. Why will many be deceived by the Evil One?**

FOURTH DAY: Read Mark 13:5-37.

1. What feeling does this reading leave within you?
2. Why do you think this reading has been called the “Little Apocalypse?”
3. What is the real danger in the “Last Days?”
4. What does the Lord advise His people to do?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: The Author, and Time of Composition.

1. What is the best evidence for accepting John the Apostle as author of the Apocalypse?
2. Why do many scholars find it difficult to accept the Apostle as the author of this work?
3. Why does the reign of Domitian (81-96 A.D.) appear to be the time of composition of the Apocalypse?
4. Why was it possible that a great persecution would break out during the reign of Domitian?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary through The Doctrine.

1. Who addresses the messages to the Seven Churches? Why?
2. What is the great evil that is demonstrated in the Apocalypse?
3. How do you understand the severity of God presented in the Apocalypse?
4. What lesson does the Apocalypse have for us today?

CHAPTER 2

SIGNS, SYMBOLS, AND SOUNDS--SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

To attempt an analysis of each image of the Apocalypse is like trying to unweave the rainbow. The Apocalypse creates drama more for the ear than for the eye. It seeks to create a dynamic, psychological impression bringing about a mood rather than a visual picture. It is intended to be heard rather than seen. No scene in the Apocalypse could be successfully depicted upon a canvas because the images are symbolic, not pictorial. Many of its images are not meant to be understood; they are intended to add power, drama, and color to the overall impression. The presentation of beauty by the Greek mind differs from that of the Semitic mind. Greek beauty strived for harmonious order and design of form--to create that which delighted the eye. Semitic beauty consisted more of dynamic impressions that touched the ear. Perhaps for religious reasons the Semitic soul found beauty of inspiration in sound rather than in sight.

The presentation of truth through the apocalyptic literary form is not as foreign to us as we might first imagine. It is a method of presenting truth quite analogous to one that we experience nightly. It is the "stuff" of which dreams are made. Truth in the apocalyptic writings comes to us very much as truth does in our dreams. Most dreams are not understood because they come clothed in symbolic images. Why we present truths to ourselves in such a fashion remains a mystery. Dreams may be oriented toward the past, present, or future. Their messages often remain mysterious--they fail to flow in a logical sequence that the mind can appreciate, and they present their messages clothed in symbolic images that need to be deciphered. The dream world is certainly not a logical world; it refuses to be so. And yet it is a world filled with more truth than are many logical minds.

The more the conscious mind resists the truth the more the subconscious mind will present the dream material in complex images, clothing them with material from both the inanimate and animated world of our daily experience. The point we would like to make is this: we treat truth this way because we have a need to do so. However, truth is presented to us because we have a need to know it, if not on an intellectual level then at least on the subconscious level. There it can operate within our lives in mysterious and devious ways. If

we can understand that our dreams are presentations of truths and not fantasies, even though they may represent our self-fantasies and may come clothed in fantastic images, we could say that the Apocalypse could be looked upon as Jesus sharing His dreams with us. Dreams are truths that concern us. If we do not care to think of Jesus as a dreamer, then we may look upon the material as truths dreamed by John that he shares with us, for they are also our dreams. As with our personal dreams, they reveal mysteries that come not fully unveiled.

The Scriptures tell us that *“God gave...to Daniel the understanding of all visions and dreams” (Dn. 1:17)*. It was not always a pleasant ministry being an interpreter of dreams and visions. Daniel’s visions came clothed in the material of which bad dreams are made. He beheld a lion with eagle wings, a bear with three tusks, a leopard possessing four heads and four wings, a great unmentionable beast with great iron teeth and ten horns. One horn possessed eyes and a mouth from which poured surging streams of fire. In milder visions he saw a he-goat, a ram, and stars being trampled underfoot. He beheld objects made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, and clay. Times and dates were expressed in mystical symbols. Apocalyptic visions are indeed made from things of which dreams are made; all that the senses may observe in the created universe are there. However, the created universe is rearranged and presented by a power that defies the logical and natural order and finds a leopard with four heads and four wings a quite adequate expression of truth.

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

In the world that gave birth to apocalyptic writing, numbers had meanings beyond their mathematical significance. They possessed symbolic meanings capable of expressing the intrinsic nature of a person. Both the Greek and the Hebrew alphabets had numerical equivalents. Each letter of the alphabet had a number. In the Hebrew enumeration the Emperor Nero came to 666. In the Greek enumeration the name of Jesus came to 888.

The symbolic use of numbers is not only interesting but indispensable for interpreting apocalyptic writings. As may be expected these symbolic numbers will not always follow the logical pattern of the Western mind. The numeral 2 signified witness--the number of witnesses required for legal testimony. The numeral 3 was a divine number, apparently even before belief in the Trinity. The numeral 4 stood for the visible created universe as designed by God--four seasons, four winds, four corners of the earth. The

numeral 5, as the five fingers of the hand, was considered a natural round number. To understand the numeral 6 we must first understand 7. The numeral 7 was a combination of 3 and 4, and expressed the fullness and completion of divine order; it came to symbolize perfection and fullness. When the Antichrist comes he will appear as a 7. The numeral 6 came to represent the imperfection or disorder that ought not to exist in Creation. It came to symbolize the evil that impedes divine order and divine love in the world. Another bad number is $3\frac{1}{2}$, which is a broken 7, symbolizing an interruption of the divine order by the malice of Satan or by evil men. It signified an age of persecution, regardless of its length of time. It was spoken of as $3\frac{1}{2}$ years or 1260 days or 42 months. It also equals the Antichrist. The numeral 8 (7 plus 1)--became the symbol of a new creation, a new number was given to the resurrected Jesus Christ. For 9 there seems to be no symbolic significance. The numeral 10 is again a whole natural number (ten fingers). It signified indefiniteness and magnitude, or any length of time of the magnitude of the event. The numeral 1000 signified an indefinite time--a very long time. The numeral 12 was a divine number and a great symbol. It was 4 times 3 and signified wholeness, unity in diversity and eschatological perfection.

Outside of these numerical symbols, we have other known symbols as well. For example: the square was considered the perfect figure and the cube even more perfect. A woman could represent a people or a city. An eye represented knowledge and insight. In the animal kingdom beasts represented kingdoms, wings represented speed and mobility, and horns symbolized dynastic power or might. In the inanimate world a trumpet represented a voice, a sword--the Word of God, a crown--dominion and kingship, a palm branch--victory and triumph. The sea was an evil element--a source of insecurity and death. In the world of colors, white symbolized the joy of victory, a white robe signified the world of glory. Purple stood for luxury and kingship, and of course black represented death.

Many of the revelations within the Apocalypse come clothed in symbolism because John conceived them in such a fashion. Symbols themselves will not always remain constant. As in dreams symbols change, expressing one meaning and then another. Most scholars agree that the incidents related cannot be placed in a time sequence corresponding to the unfolding of years and centuries. These revelations resist becoming political commentaries upon world history, yet they may well contain historical references and political observations.

It has been asked, “Did John expect the end of the world?” To answer that question one must first distinguish between the present world order and the physical universe. The prophets of the Old Testament predicted the end of the then present world by using images depicting the end of the physical universe. When they spoke of the sun growing dark and the stars falling from their places, they foretold the destruction of an old order and the coming of a new creation. Who could ever deny that a world truly ended with the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem by the Romans? And in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ the Christian Community beheld the inauguration of a new order that would reach perfection when Jesus returned to universal proclamation.

As to the actual physical end of the universe, Jesus could well reply as He did to Peter, “*How does that concern you? Your business is to follow me*” (Jn. 21:22). “*As to the exact day or hour, no one knows it, neither the angels in heaven nor even the Son, but only the Father*” (Mk.13:32).

THE PROLOGUE

Usually a prologue is written when a work has been completed. It briefly captures the heart and essence of the content of the work--it crowns the work. The Greek text begins with “*Apocalypse of Jesus Christ.*” This implies Jesus makes known things that are hidden--hidden things that are revealed by the Heavenly Father. The Gospel of John emphasizes that Jesus only reflects in this world what the Father willed Him to reveal. Jesus used a messenger, an angelic being, to convey the revelations to John. It is the ministry of the angel to assist John to receive the entire revelation, explain it clearly and record it correctly. The angel, like John, is a servant and minister of Jesus. John’s duty is to impart the revelations to the Churches. In the end it will be the Church who will become the Father’s Angel of Revelation in this world.

The revealed things are events that “*must happen very soon.*” This does not mean immediately by our standards of time. The events will unfold as part of the divine plan, and not happen by fate. The time sequence will be according to God’s time, which properly orders all things in a way befitting God’s nature. It will always be near and close by because this world is rooted in God’s presence and power. When the fullness of time comes, what has always been present will be visibly manifested.

John makes clear that the Apocalypse is not merely a message of consolation, but, as is the entire gospel, it is a prophetic message from God to the human

race. It can certainly be said that John predicted the sufferings of the Church and the glories that would follow. He did this, not for himself, but as a true prophet for all present and future Christians.

John has told us the origin of his revelations and the general content of his work—“*what must happen very soon.*” He goes on to identify the recipients of his letter. The letter is addressed to the seven Churches of Asia. John uses the definite article “the”, and this along with the number seven seems to imply that the letter is not intended only for the seven named churches but for the entire Christian Community. The Apocalypse becomes the completion of God’s revelation to the Church.

It is the intention of God that the Apocalypse will be a grace in the Church, leading to its peace. This blessing flows, John tells us, from the Blessed Trinity. He speaks of the Father as “*who is and who was and who is to come.*” This is God’s standard name in the Apocalypse. It is an extension of God’s own identification in Exodus when He proclaimed Himself as *Yahweh*—meaning “I Am!” (See Ex. 3:14). This title implies that the present and future can be judged in the light of the past. However, “*who is to come*” implies a dynamic not a static God—a God who is ever creating and making all things new. John tells us that grace and peace proceed from the seven spirits before His throne. Seven implies the fullness of the spirit. It is a reference to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, through the operations of His seven gifts flowing from the throne of God, will bring the world to its completion. The divinity of Jesus is implied with grace and peace flowing equally from Jesus as from the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ is presented as the faithful witness; He is the model for the Church. His life demonstrates that persecution comes in this life as a result of being God’s witness in this world. However, the resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees life to those who witness unto death. The Hebrews believed that the first of a series included the whole. Jesus’ resurrection guaranteed that the resurrection of God’s faithful from the dead had been inaugurated and symbolized in Jesus.

Jesus is not only the first-born from the dead but also ruler of the kings of earth. The power of the Risen Christ extends itself into this world. That authority is constantly being exercised upon this earth, but is in keeping with the Will of the Father, for Jesus is the executor of the Father’s Will.

In the one statement, *“Jesus Christ the faithful witness,”* we have the prophet role of Jesus revealed. In the statement, *“the first born from the dead,”* we have an intimation of His priesthood. We have in *“ruler of the kings of earth”* the proclamation of His kingship. The Apocalypse presents Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.

As John begins the Apocalypse he gives us a glimpse--a preview--of the conclusion. He calls our attention to the Parousia. Christ, who departed this earthly life in such a disgraceful manner--a criminal on the Cross, shall return in triumph. *“See,”* cries John, *“He comes amid the clouds!”* This recalls the vision of Daniel, which Jesus applied to himself (see Mk. 14:62). In the prophecy of Daniel the vision symbolized the People of Israel. It was to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ and His Church.

John implies that the sufferings of Jesus have made possible His triumph when he writes, *“Every eye shall see him even of those who pierced him.”* Here he confirms the general resurrection of all the dead. This coming of Jesus will herald the end of the world that rejected Him--*“All the peoples of the earth shall lament him bitterly.”* *“Peoples of the earth”* are those who have rejected Christ and His Church. They belong to the Antichrist and to this world. They *“shall lament him bitterly”* because His coming brings an end to their world for which they gave their souls. They will weep for the salvation they spurned and which is now lost to them.

We read in St. Matthew, *“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the clans of earth will strike their breasts as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Mt. 24:30). Matthew tells us that before the Son appears *“his sign will appear in the sky.”* This sign may well be the sign of the Cross. The Apocalypse of Peter, an early Second Century work, puts these words in the mouth of Christ, *“With my cross going before my face will I come in my glory, shining seven times as bright as the sun.”*

The Prologue ends with the divine testimony, *“The Lord God says, ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty!’”* The first and last words of the Greek alphabet are applied to God. God is the sum of all. He is the first and last Word of that which is decreed to happen. Just as the world began at His Word--it will be His Word that brings it to consummation.

From the Prologue of the Apocalypse we know that the message of its letter is that Jesus Christ will come in the glory of God, and as man all people and kingdoms shall be made subject to Him. *“When, finally, all has been subjected to the Son, He will then subject himself to the One who made all things subject to him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).*

SIGNS, SYMBOLS AND SOUNDS

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“AS TO THE EXACT DAY OR HOUR, NO ONE KNOWS IT, NEITHER THE ANGELS IN HEAVEN NOR EVEN THE SON, BUT ONLY THE FATHER.” (Mk. 13:32)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary through Signs and Symbols.

- 1. In what way is apocalyptic literature like our dreams?**
- 2. Can you give some examples of symbols in your own dreams?**
- 3. What has the symbolic use of numbers taught you about the Scriptures?**
- 4. How would you answer the question: “Did John prophesy the end of the world?”**

SECOND DAY: Read the King’s dream in Daniel 2:31-45.

- 1. What was symbolized in the statue?**
- 2. What did gold, silver, bronze and iron symbolize?**
- 3. What was symbolized in the mixture of iron and clay?**
- 4. “The stone” is a reference to whom?**

THIRD DAY: Read the King’s dream in Daniel 4:7-34.

- 1. What did the tree symbolize?**
- 2. What was symbolized by it being cut down?**
- 3. What was foretold in 4:22?**

4. What was the moral lesson to be gained from this incident?

FOURTH DAY: Read Daniel's dream in Daniel 7:1-28.

1. What did the four beasts historically represent?
2. What is symbolized in 7:13-14?
3. What is symbolized in "*a year, two years, and a half year*"?
4. What did this vision confirm for Daniel?

FIFTH DAY: Read Daniel's vision in Daniel 8:1-27.

1. What was symbolized in the ram with two horns butting North, South, and West?
2. What was symbolized in the one horned he-goat flying out of the West?
3. What was symbolized by the stars being trampled under foot?
4. Can you identify the glorious country?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: The Prologue; Revelation 1:1-8.

1. What is the general picture presented in the Prologue?
2. How would you interpret "*what must happen very soon*"?
3. What does the Prologue tell us about Jesus Christ?
4. What does it reveal about the Christian Community?

CHAPTER 3

CHRIST AMONG US--SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

St. John writes the Apocalypse from the Aegean island of Patmos, a barren, rocky, crescent-shaped island about ten miles long and five miles wide. Patmos lies about forty miles southwest of Ephesus. It has been written that the musical voices of many waters echo on the island. It offers magnificent visages of the Aegean. At the setting of the sun it can become a flaming sea of glass. A cave is still shown from which John reportedly wrote the Apocalypse. It has been said that the sights and sounds of the sea still echo in the Apocalypse as within a conch shell. Twenty-five times John speaks of the *thalassa*, the sea.

St. Jerome teaches that John was banished to Patmos fourteen years after the death of Nero in the year 94 A.D., during the reign of Domitian. The conditions of his life there are uncertain. If he was treated as a political prisoner, he would have had relative freedom upon the island. If he had been sent as a convicted criminal, he would have been subjected to hard labor in the mines or quarries and to brutal treatment. For some Patmos was a penal colony--a concentration camp. John's banishment ended in 96 A.D. with the death of Domitian.

As the Apostle John begins his work, he does not describe himself with a title expressing his authority or ministry within the Christian Church as did Paul. For good reasons he simply identifies himself as "brother"--a title that expressed the relationship all the baptized shared in common. It is a relationship based upon union with Jesus Christ. It is the essential relationship. It makes no difference who one may be within the Community; all are partners who must share first in the sufferings of Christ. The Christian life is essentially expressed in union with Jesus Christ regardless of what may be the particular circumstances of the moment--suffering, reigning, or waiting in Christ. We read in First Peter, "*the brotherhood of believers is undergoing the same sufferings throughout the world*" (1Pt.5:9b), "*rejoice instead, in the measure that you share Christ's sufferings. When his glory is revealed, you will rejoice exultantly*" (1Pt.4:13).

John shares in the sufferings of Christ *“because I proclaimed God’s word and bore witness to Jesus.”* One was legally forbidden to seek converts to a religion outside the native region of that religion. Until the Edict of Milan in the Fourth Century, to be a Christian was to be a civil criminal. To be a Christian and also to evangelize would have been a double crime. The Christian martyrs were put to death as public criminals as was Jesus; they had defied civil law. The Christian Church, indeed in its primitive years, had a long history of civil disobedience.

THE CHRIST OF GLORY

After John identifies himself and his relationship with the Church, he relates his first vision, which is a description of Christ mediator, who dramatically appears and commands John to write: *“Write on a scroll what you now see and send it to the seven churches” (Rv.1:11)*. On Sunday, the Lord’s Day, John received the first vision. John enters into a state of spiritual ecstasy in which earthly reality ceases and all that is heavenly becomes the only reality. The faculties of the spirit, more powerful than those of the body, are absorbed into the spiritual experience in which the eye of the spirit sees with penetrating perceptiveness and the ear of the spirit hears with great clarity. Within the state of ecstasy John receives a vision of Jesus Christ glorified.

The images and symbols used in describing the vision are intended to express the enduring reality of Jesus Christ, not the Jesus who once lived on earth but the Jesus now reigning in the Kingdom of God. It was a vision that at first sight caused the seer to swoon in the spirit, *“When I caught sight of him I fell down at his feet as though dead” (Rv.1:17)*. John saw Jesus standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands. As in the words of the prophet Daniel, Jesus appeared *“One like a Son of Man.”* Jesus wore a long robe reaching to His ankles with a sash of gold about His breast. The form is at once priestly and kingly. Jesus’ hair was as *“white as snow-white wool.”* The description immediately calls to mind Daniel’s vision of *“the Ancient One”* whose *“clothing was snow bright, and the hair on his head as white as wool” (Dn. 7:9)*. The white symbolized eternity and Divine Wisdom, and the vision indicates the eternal pre-existence of the Son. It was the eyes of Jesus that commanded the seer’s attention, and under His gaze the spirit of the seer grew weak and he swooned: *“His eyes blazed like fire” (Rv.1:14)*. Eyes like flames of fire symbolized spiritual insight. His vision burns through the surface of all appearances—*“it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart. Nothing is*

concealed from him; all lies bare and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account” (Heb.4:12b-13).

On Patmos it was the roar of the sea that so often filled the ears of John. To him the voice of Jesus “*sounded like the roar of rushing waters*” (Rv.1:15). The feet of Jesus “*gleamed like polished brass refined in a furnace.*” The brass symbolized the stability of Christ and His destructive power “*to trample out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.*” Jesus will tread upon all that is unholy, which will be consumed by fire. The words of Jesus proceed from His mouth with the power of a Roman sword--a sword short and tongue-like in shape and a powerful weapon to slay an enemy. It could cut right and left. As John expressed it, “*a sharp, two-edged sword came out of his mouth*” (Rv.1:16).

Jesus held seven stars in His right hand. In the ancient world stars--the heavenly bodies--were believed to have been celestial beings, angelic beings or gods. These stars were held in the hands of God, and would fall from the heavens unless supported by God. John’s image suggests that the same hand that conserves the universe in existence holds and sustains the Seven Churches. The stars were identified with the Seven Churches. As long as they remain in His hands they will be held safely--high above the raging flood that threatens to engulf them. When John tells us that the face of Jesus “*shone like the sun at its brightest*” (Rv.1:16), he tells us that he could no more gaze upon the glory of God shining upon the face of Christ than he could gaze directly into the sun at high noon. The entire vision overwhelms John. He relates, “*when I caught sight of him I fell down at his feet as though dead*” (Rv.1:17). The incident recalls the day John along with Peter and James beheld a brief transfiguration of Jesus Christ in which “*His face became as dazzling as the sun*” (Mt.17:2). What was then but a brief moment in time is now a permanent condition. Jesus is forever transfigured with glory.

John writes, “*He touched me with his right hand and said: ‘There is nothing to fear’*” (Rv.1:17). On Mount Tabor we read, “*Jesus came toward them and laying his hand on them, said, ‘Get up! Do not be afraid’*” (Mt. 17:7). In one regard, glorification has not changed Jesus. He is still the One “*who loves us.*” The Lord who upholds the universe can still reach down and touch each individual. The touch of His hand gives strength and courage. He does not want our fear but our love.

THE FIRST AND THE LAST

The visions of Jesus come clothed in the symbolism of the Old Testament. It is symbolism that presents Jesus robed in divine characteristics. It is this Christ of the Apocalypse that the suffering Church must keep before its eyes and in whom it must place its trust. The words spoken by Jesus confirm the message of John's symbolism, "*I am the First and the Last and the One who lives*" (Rv.1:17-18). Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega in whom resides totality of being. The Incarnation of the Son of God is confirmed when Jesus says, "*Once I was dead but now I live--forever and ever*" (Rv.1:18). The Son of God became true human flesh and suffered death and has now risen from the dead, never again to know death. Jesus stands in sharp contrast with the dead emperors of Rome who once claimed divinity with the inanimate gods of paganism. What is spoken of here is the resurrected life of Jesus Christ, not the divine life of the Son. However, from the Resurrection the human life of Jesus has fully shared in divinity. For this reason the humanity of Jesus is a proper object of divine adoration.

Jesus risen from the dead tells us, "*I hold the keys of death and the nether world*" (Rv.1:18b). Another translation for nether world would be Hades. To possess the keys is to be the Master. Jesus proclaims that He is master over the region of death. Satan may inflict physical death but Christ possesses the power to release mankind from physical and spiritual death. Because Jesus possesses the keys of death He could tell His disciples, "*I say to you who are my friends: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and can do no more*" (Lk. 12:4). Christians must not fear physical death because Jesus will release them from the nether world and from the power of Satan.

John beheld Jesus standing among seven lampstands holding seven stars in His right hand. Jesus explains the mysterious symbols to John, "*The seven stars are the presiding spirits of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches*" (Rv.1:20). Jesus, standing among the lampstands, emphasizes the presence of the Risen Lord within His Church. Speaking of the churches as the seven lampstands, He stresses the role of the churches as "*the light of the world.*" The role of the Church is to be a witness of truth in this world.

Jesus speaks of the seven stars being the presiding spirits of the seven churches. The Greek word is *aggelos*, meaning angel or messenger. The Apocalypse uses *aggelos* sixty times, always implying a superhuman used in

the service of God or Satan. Scholars have had much discussion over the meaning of angel in this text. Obviously even Christ's explanation did not remove the mystery. Some interpret the angel as the bishop or the elders that presided over the Church. Others maintain that the angel is a guardian angel assigned by God to protect and guide the individual church. One of the more satisfactory explanations has been to see the angels as spiritual representations of the presiding spirit of each church. The lampstand would be the Church as we see it upon earth, and the angel would be the heart and essence of the Church as seen by Jesus. The lampstand could be called the body of the Church, and the angel could be called the soul of the Church. The presiding spirits of the churches--be they church leaders or heavenly beings--are nevertheless symbols of the congregation itself.

The seven letters follow a stereotypical literary form. Each is addressed to the angel of the Church, and begins with a title of Christ who speaks. Each title used has already been mentioned in the Prologue or within the first vision. The message begins with *oida*, translated "I know," which emphasizes Christ's personal knowledge of the situation in which each Church presently finds itself. Each letter ends with an exhortation: the Lord is coming soon and His coming brings a double consequence--grace to some and anathema to others. From His mouth proceeds a two-edged sword that cuts right and left. The Word of God will judge both His disciples and His enemies. His judgment begins with the Church.

When one looks at the general content of the seven letters it becomes clear that even though the Church faces powerful external enemies its greatest danger remains internal--the enemy within that destroys the Spirit of Christ within the Christian Community. It has been suggested that the pattern of the seven letters may have echoed the style of the imperial edicts of the time.

LETTER TO EPHEBUS

The initial title used by Jesus, "*The One who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven lampstands,*" expresses an essential truth that the Church must always keep within its conscious awareness--Jesus Christ is always present with the Church on earth and He is always present in power and knowledge, "*I know your deeds, your labors, and your patient endurance (Rv.2:2).*" It is the power of Christ that sustains the Church, and he alone can lift it safely above the external evils that surround it. However, concerning the internal evil within the Church that is locked into the wills of its members,

Jesus deals differently. The Spirit of Jesus exhorts, warns, and threatens the Church to repent or suffer the consequences. Internal evil will not destroy the Church although it may well destroy a Christian Community. A section of the Church may be abandoned by Christ, and His presence and power will be transferred to those who will bear greater fruit. The Church at Ephesus ultimately died; it died along with the City of Ephesus. Today only impressive ruins recall its days of former glory.

From its conception, the Church at Ephesus had struggled successfully against its pagan environment. It survived within a sea of heresy and paganism. Under the encouragement of Paul and the leadership of Timothy, the Church of Ephesus nobly survived the attacks of the “wolves in sheep’s clothing” that threatened to pervert genuine Christian doctrine. The Lord congratulated the Church at Ephesus. It demonstrated a virile strength, knowing neither fatigue nor discouragement in its defense of orthodoxy. It tested every spirit present before the Church and unmasked and exposed the false prophets. It particularly recognized the evil in the teachings of the Nicolaitans, whose practices it detested. However, in its fight for orthodoxy and in its defense of truth something had been lost, something essential to Christian life without which it does not exist. The charity of the Community had noticeably decreased. Jesus said, *“I hold this against you, though: you have turned aside from your early love”* (Rv.2:4).

Jesus confirmed that the members of the Church were correct to detest evil, to hate what perverted religious and moral truth, but they were wrong to let hatred enter into their hearts toward other people. They were to love their enemies if they desired to be children of the heavenly Father. Jesus calls the Church to remembrance; they are to remember what they were when Paul was among them. Paul had maintained the balance between truth and love. They were to see what they had become through their zeal for truth at the expense of Charity.

We know from Paul’s account of his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus that Jesus identifies with those Christians that we may hate, despise, or persecute. He considers behavior directed toward them as personally directed towards Him. He asked the persecutor of others *“why do you persecute me?”* This remembrance--an examination of conscience--must awaken repentance--*“return to your former deeds!”* (Rv.2:5). Their faith was solid but it would not save unless infused once again with charity. Jesus speaks of the victor, or the one who conquers. The terminology implies that

Christian life is a battlefield; the greatest battles will always be fought in the souls of individual Christians. Each must achieve his or her own personal victory, and be supported by Christ and the Church. However, that victory must never be at the price of Christian Charity.

If I have the gift of prophecy and, with full knowledge, comprehend all mysteries, if I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give everything I have to feed the poor and hand over my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing (1Cor. 13:2-3).

CHRIST AMONG US

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“REJOICE IN THE MEASURE THAT YOU SHARE CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS. WHEN HIS GLORY IS REVEALED, YOU WILL REJOICE EXULTANTLY.” (1 Pt. 4:13)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; 1 Peter 4:12-19.

- 1. Why was John banished to Patmos?**
- 2. What does being a brother imply in the Christian Church?**
- 3. Why does Peter encourage Christians to rejoice in suffering for Christ?**
- 4. What do you learn about suffering in the reading from 1 Peter?**

SECOND DAY: Read Daniel 10:1-21.

- 1. What impression does Daniel’s vision of the man create in you?**
- 2. What is the effect of the vision upon Daniel?**
- 3. How does the one seen in the vision deal with Daniel?**
- 4. What does this vision teach about angels?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: The Christ of Glory; Revelation 1:9-16.

- 1. What similarities can you find between the first vision of John and that of Daniel in 10:1-21?**
- 2. What impression of Christ does this vision leave with you?**
- 3. How is this different from the Christ of the Gospels?**

4. What do you think is the purpose of this first vision?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: The First and the Last; Revelation 1:17-20.

- 1. What is implied by calling Jesus “the First and the Last”?**
- 2. What truths are being confirmed by the words “Once I was dead but now I live”?**
- 3. What truth is symbolized by Jesus holding the keys to death and to Hades?**
- 4. What does Jesus’ presence among the lampstands signify?**

**FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: The Letters; Acts 19:8-40; 1Tim.1:3-7;
1Tim.1:18-19.**

- 1. What impression does the reading from Acts give you about the general environment of Ephesus?**
- 2. What would be the major problem facing the Church there as you see it?**
- 3. Why did Paul send Timothy to Ephesus?**
- 4. From Paul’s instructions to Timothy what seems to be a problem within the Church?**

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: Letter to Ephesus; Rv.2:1-7; 2Tim. 2:24-26.

- 1. What truth does the title used by Christ express to the Church?**
- 2. What does the Church at Ephesus have to its credit in the eyes of Christ?**
- 3. What does the criticism of Jesus imply?**
- 4. What do you learn from Paul’s advice to Timothy?**

CHAPTER 4

A SEASON FOR REPENTANCE--SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In the first vision, the Apocalypse presented a dramatic portrait of Jesus clothed in divine majesty. It indicated that the Glorified Christ's presence and power remain with the Church on earth. With both presence and power Jesus is always present, and a visible breakthrough upon earth of His power and presence remains imminent. Presently He stands behind the veil, hidden both from earth and from hell. The eye of faith alone detects His presence and beholds His power. It has been said the Apocalypse reveals what will occur before Christ steps from beyond the veil, and what follows after He does so. Presently He tarries; He delays in order to grant a season of repentance.

The seven churches of the Apocalypse represent the Church; the seven messages are for all. The content of the messages is Jesus' analysis of the State of the Church. It is a prelude to its final judgment. As a loving brother Jesus comes and assesses the Church's present condition. It is an analysis that, in essence, will have continuous validity. Through what Jesus praises and encourages within the Church He indicates what will lead to the final and eternal declaration within the Church. He indicates what will lead to a final condemnation on Judgment Day. Beforehand, Jesus will distinguish the weed from the wheat.

As mentioned earlier, Ephesus would have been the ideal recipient of the first letter because of its proximity to Patmos and its cultural prominence, but even more so from the spiritual point of view. Ephesus served as an example for the Lord to emphasize the essentials of the Christian Religion. It is vitally important that the Church manifest the fullness of the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of both Truth and of Love. The members of the Church must not only put on the Mind of Christ but likewise the Heart of Christ.

Let us now continue to follow the messenger from Patmos as he makes his rounds of the six remaining churches. Let us hear what the Spirit says to the Church. Let us pray for the grace to heed what we hear!

LETTER TO SMYRNA

The Church at Smyrna lies along the coast about forty miles north of Ephesus. The city had been destroyed in 600 B.C. After the time of Alexander it rose from oblivion to become the “fairest city of Ionia.” Aristides compared the city to the mythical Phoenix, because Smyrna, like the Phoenix, arose out of its ashes to new vigor, beauty, and life. The name Smyrna means myrrh, which symbolizes suffering. Perhaps its name signified a city of suffering--one that suffered death and arose to newness of life. One is left with the impression that the City of Smyrna represents Christ and His Church. Of all the cities addressed in the seven letters, Christianity survived only within the city of Smyrna.

The Church in Smyrna is one that knows the experience of suffering for its faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus identifies Himself as “*the First and the Last who once died but now lives*” (Rv.2:8). Through this title Jesus identifies himself with suffering humanity. He had indeed entered into glory, but His entrance was through the door of human suffering.

At times the Church and its members will suffer in this world. By its sufferings it is conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Smyrna becomes the symbol of the suffering Church. It suffers first from tribulations (*thlipsis*). The word implies being crushed beneath a heavy weight; it may denote both internal and external oppression. In the Scriptures the word became synonymous for the oppression suffered by the righteous in this world. Likewise, Smyrna is a Church of poverty. The Christian Community suffered destitution within a city of great wealth. However, this economic poverty had not impoverished its spirit. The Lord acknowledges that this Community possesses moral and spiritual richness, and this makes it rich in the sight of God.

The Church may be poor because many members came from the poor, but this state of destitution implies something more; the poverty appears to be the result of religious persecution. It was customary in those times for mobs to pillage the homes of those convicted of crimes. The letter implies the Jews of the city are at the root of the sufferings, “*I know the slander you endure from self-styled Jews who are nothing other than members of Satan’s assembly*” (Rv.2:9). The word “slander” can imply verbal abuse, but also defamation of character. The Jews probably stirred up the Roman magistrates and populace against the Christians. The Acts of the Apostles confirm that persecution first

came to the Christian Community from Jewish leaders, both in Jerusalem and in foreign cities. We read in the Book of Hebrews, *“you endured a great contest of suffering. At times you were publicly exposed to insult and trial. ...and joyfully assented to the confiscation of your goods, knowing that you had better and more permanent possessions”* (Heb.10:32-34).

Jesus told His disciples they could not be above the Master. If men have done these things to Him, they too will undergo the same sufferings. At the trial of Jesus the Jews said to Pilate, *“if you free this man you are no Friend of Caesar. Anyone who makes himself a king becomes Caesar’s rival.”* ...Pilate exclaimed, *‘Shall I crucify your king?’* The Chief priests replied, *‘We have no king but Caesar’*” (Jn.19:12,15).

The letter said such Jews were only “self-styled” Jews. The word Jew comes from Judah (*Yehudah*) which means “he praises”--implying God praises. The name Jew came to be applied to all the surviving members of the tribes of Israel. The word Jew came to designate a people and the word Israel came to mean a religious community. The word Israel means “God rules.” Outside of Palestine, Jew became the popular title for both the people and the religion. The word Israel was restricted to prayer. When the Lord refers to the Jews of Smyrna as “self-styled” Jews, He implies such men do not receive praise from God but from each other. Yahweh does not rule their lives, but rather their lives are ruled by Satan. They are referred to as the “Synagogue of Satan.” It was the firm belief of the early Church that the Jewish and pagan adversaries were inspired by Satan and acted as his agents.

The letter implies that certain members of the Church will suffer martyrdom. However, they are to *“have no fear of the sufferings to come. The devil will indeed cast some of you into prison to put you to the test”* (Rv.2:10). People were placed in prison prior to their trial and punishment. The test would demand that they decide between Christ and Caesar. This persecution will endure for some time but God has set a limit to it. This is implied in the words, *“you will be tried over a period of ten days”* (Rv.2:10b). Use of the number ten can signify a lengthy time, but a limited time nevertheless. Jesus encourages the Christians in Smyrna to accept martyrdom, *“remain faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rv.2:10b). Regardless of the time of sufferings, it is short compared to the reward received. Jesus assures the martyrs of Smyrna that they surely shall rise out of the ashes like a Phoenix to a glorious eternal life. *“The victor shall never be harmed by the second death”* (Rv.2:11b). Perhaps it was this “second death” that Jesus referred to when He told His

disciples, *“do not be afraid of those who kill the body and can do no more. I will show you whom you ought to fear. Fear him who has the power to cast into Gehenna after he has killed. Yes, I tell you, fear him”* (Lk.12:4-5).

LETTER TO PERGAMUM

The third letter was directed to the city of Pergamum in northeast Asia Minor. It lay about forty-five miles north of Smyrna, and about fifteen miles from the sea. The city was the center of the Roman administration. The power to execute the decrees of Rome proceeded from Pergamum. The Roman Governor of the province possessed the *jus gladii* (the right of sword), which signified the power to administer capital punishment. The Lord speaks of the Church of Pergamum as living *“in the very place where Satan’s throne is erected.”* In Pergamum, Satan is at home.

Even though the Lord acknowledges that the Christian Community of Pergamum resides at the very throne of Satan and within a city that was called his home, there is no exhortation for them to abandon the city. The kingdom of God will not be established by Christians leaving the scene of the crime but by a courageous stand for truth and moral right. They are the light in the night, and that light must shine for all to see. Wherever they may be they must be God’s faithful witnesses. The Lord demands this witness of His disciples even unto death. Christians are *“to bloom where planted.”*

Christians often face the temptation to establish the kingdom of God on earth through human prudence or more often than not, through human imprudence. *“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build”* (Ps. 127:1). Gentiles converted to Christianity faced a real conscience problem when shopping for their groceries--the meat sold at market had previously been sacrificed to some pagan god. Another aspect of the same problem faced them in social life when they attended public affairs or private banquets where such meat would be served. Paul dealt with this problem in First Corinthians. Apparently, the same conditions existed in the Asian churches where practices were being advocated contrary to the Christian Religion. The problem involved more than the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. There was a real question of idolatry and sexual immorality involved. Those advocating these practices were called Nicolaitans.

The teachings of the Nicolaitans are compared to those of Balaam of the Old Testament. In Israel, Balaam became the symbol for those false prophets who

led Israel from true devotion. Early Christian writers maintain that the founder of the Nicolaitans was Nicholas of Antioch, one of the Seven ordained by the Apostles. Hippolytus said that Nicholas departed from correct doctrine and was in the habit of inculcating indifference of food and life. Scholars are quick to point out the similarity between the names of Balaam and Nicholas--both names signify people who conquer others. In the Scriptures, they symbolize false prophets who overcome the true religion, and worship by teaching false doctrines. The real evil of such sects is that they endeavor to alter the Christian Faith through introducing alien ideas and practices that are essentially contrary to the Christian religion.

Jesus calls the Nicolaitans to repent and to return to sound doctrine--the foundation of sound Christian morality. A season of repentance is granted. However, if they persist in their erroneous ways Jesus will fight against them. Jesus will come with the *jus gladii*--the right of sword. He distinguishes between the wheat and the weeds. The weeds He will uproot and destroy. The hidden manna will be received by those who remain faithful to Christ in a world given over to evil and in which the devil makes his home. To receive the hidden manna signifies a share in the joys and glory of the Messiah's reign. Jesus confirmed that He was the "*bread come down from heaven*" (Jn.6:41). With the victor, Jesus will share His very life.

Jesus speaks of a white stone upon which a new name will be inscribed. Speaking of the stone as white signifies it will possess a quality of star-like brilliance. The white stone must signify something that the victor shares with Jesus Christ. Jesus is the stone rejected by the builders that has become the cornerstone of a new edifice. God is building His temple and Jesus is the foundation stone, therefore the victor becomes a stone in God's Temple. This signifies a new relationship with Christ and the Eternal Father. To receive a new name implies a new life--a new creation.

LETTER TO THYATIRA

The city of Thyatira was situated in Lydia on the road from Pergamum to Sardis. Thyatira was not the Church in the political arena as was the Church in Pergamum. Nor was it the Church in a great center of pagan religious culture as in Ephesus and Smyrna. Thyatira was the Church in business and in commerce. Thyatira was a manufacturing center. The Church dealt with Christians working for their daily bread in business. It centered upon what they did to earn their daily bread. In Thyatira, Jesus entered into the business

world, and makes clear the position of Christians in the business world. Christians must not conform to this world. There is a faith Christians must confess in this world: Jesus is Lord! The faith that saves demands action that acknowledges the lordship of Jesus Christ in one's daily walk--within the province of one's daily life. Jesus not only demanded that His disciples die a certain way, but that they live and work a certain way as well.

The opening title "*The Son of God, whose eyes blaze like fire and whose feet gleam like polished brass*" (Rv.2:18b) implies Jesus comes as the judge of deeds and labor--He comes to execute the sentences of judgment. Jesus praises the Church for its state of progress. Jesus places first things first: love, faith and then action. Love and faith produce sustained action. Patient endurance may be translated as loyalty. In fact, Jesus may have taken the ideals fostered by the local guilds for its members (devotion, fidelity, service, and loyalty) and transformed them into expressions of Christian virtues. These are virtues that must be practiced by those who have joined themselves to Christ, those who have joined the Christian Guild. However, the Church is not a club. Its primary concern is the eternal welfare of its membership; the here and now welfare of its members is of secondary importance.

The prominent problem within this Church is a particular woman who appears to be a Christian prophetess but teaches a Nicolaitan Doctrine. The woman undoubtedly commanded attention by the power of her speech and the force of her personality. She plays the "Noon Day Devil" in the Church. Calling her a "Jezebel" implies a resemblance between the woman in Thyatira and the wicked pagan queen of the Old Testament, Jezebel, who was the wife of the Jewish King Ahab. Jezebel of old did not consciously intend to destroy the religion of Israel but wished to combine it with the worship of Baal. Calling the woman Jezebel signifies that she was an evil leaven corrupting the true religious spirit of the Community. Apparently she encouraged her disciples in the knowledge of the deep secrets of Satan. It is conjectured that she encouraged Christians to enter into the dark forest of evil as a test of faith in Christ's power, in order to prove that the grace of Christ was stronger than the evil of Satan. One could plumb the depths of evil and still walk out of the forest spiritually untouched, to the glory of Christ.

Jesus said that a season of repentance had been granted but ignored. Now judgment would be executed against Jezebel, her companions, and her children. "*Thus shall all the churches come to know that I am the searcher of*

hearts and minds, and that I will give each of you what your conduct deserves” (Rv.2:23).

Jesus promised His faithful disciples that they would be victorious over the pagan world--not by joining it, but by opposing it. They were to receive “the morning star.” The morning star appears when the night ends. The name of Satan is *Lucifer* which means “light-bringer” or morning star. However, the morning star is but a reflected light before the dawn. It is the rising sun that is the true morning star. As we read in Revelation 22:16, Jesus Christ is the bright morning star who bestows His light upon the victorious.

A SEASON FOR REPENTANCE

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“THE LORD DOES NOT DELAY IN KEEPING HIS PROMISE--THOUGH SOME CONSIDER IT 'DELAY.' RATHER, HE SHOWS YOU GENEROUS PATIENCE, SINCE HE WANTS NONE TO PERISH BUT ALL TO COME TO REPENTANCE.” (2 Peter 3:9)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; 2 Peter 3:1-18.

- 1. Why does Jesus delay the visible manifestation of His Presence in the world?**
- 2. How can you benefit by a season of repentance?**
- 3. How should we presently live as we await His coming?**
- 4. To you, what is the importance of the messages to the 7 Churches?**

SECOND DAY: Read Acts 13:44-52; Acts 17:1-9; John 8:36-47.

- 1. Why did the Jews persecute the early Christians?**
- 2. What method did they use in Pisidian Antioch?**
- 3. How did they turn the Romans against the Christians?**
- 4. What does Jesus say of the Jews who persecuted Him?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Letter To Smyrna; Revelation 2:8-11.

- 1. What does Jesus' title symbolize in this letter?**
- 2. What does the Church at Smyrna symbolize?**
- 3. Why does Jesus say that the Jews of the City belong to Satan's assembly?**

4. What does Jesus promise to those who remain faithful unto death?

FOURTH DAY: Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-19; 8:1-13; 10:14-22.

1. What real danger faced the Christian religion within the pagan world?

2. What was the argument some Christians gave for sexual promiscuity?

3. How does Paul refute this argument?

4. How does Paul deal with the problem of eating meat offered to idols?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: Letter To Pergamum; Revelation 2:12-17.

1. What does the title of Jesus signify in this letter?

2. Why does Jesus praise the Church in Pergamum?

3. What is the evil of the teachings of the Nicolaitans?

4. What does the "white stone" and the "new name" mean to you?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary Letter To Thyatira; Revelation 2:18-29.

1. What does the title of Jesus signify in this letter?

2. What does the Lord demand of Christians in the business world?

3. What does the presence of the false prophetess teach you?

4. What does Revelation 2:23 teach you?

CHAPTER 5

PRELUDE TO JUDGEMENT--SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Apocalypse clearly declares the divinity of Jesus. He is presented against a divine backdrop formed by the Jewish prophets. The Lord Jesus described Himself as *"I am the searcher of hearts and minds... I will give each of you what your conduct deserves"* (Rv.2:23). This description calls to mind the words of God to Samuel, *"Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart"* (1Sam.16:7b). Of that human heart Jeremiah wrote, *"More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it? I, the Lord, alone probe the mind and test the heart, to reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds"* (Jer.17:9-10). The words of the Apocalypse echoed the thoughts of the Prophet Malachi,

Suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek... But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire, or like the fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold or like silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord ... Return to me, and I will return to you says the Lord of hosts (Mal.3:1-3,7).

Over and over the Lord of the Apocalypse warns, *"I will come to you."* When He does come He says, *"I am the searcher of hearts and minds."* Happy will be the person who can say with Jeremiah 12:3, *"You have found at heart I am with you!"* The messages to the churches make clear what it means to be "at heart" with the Lord.

LETTER TO SARDIS

The City of Sardis lay about thirty miles southeast of Thyatira. Once it was a royal city, the symbol of wealth and power, the capital of the kingdom of Lydia of which King Croesus ruled. The city originally rested upon the top of a sheer cliff 1500 feet in height. It was considered impregnable. However, twice the city fell to its enemies due to its overconfidence and failure to properly guard itself. Sardis traditionally and persistently carried a

reputation as a city of luxury and loose living. It boasted of a glorious past of which only relics remained. Her foliage and blossoms had long since fallen; the years of her dry wood were upon her exposing the ugliness of her soul. Sardis symbolized the Church gone downhill because of spiritual neglect.

Jesus introduced himself as *“The One who holds the seven spirits of God, the seven stars”* (Rv.3:1b). As we have already seen the seven spirits of God are a symbolic representation of the Holy Spirit, and the seven stars represent the seven presiding spirits of the churches. There is a correlation between the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. The glory of the seven stars will depend upon their relationship to the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus holds both within His hands.

We know from the Scriptures that upon His death, Jesus became the dispenser of the Holy Spirit. At His baptism Jesus became, in a unique way, the Receptor of the Holy Spirit. Jesus totally submitted His earthly life to the Holy Spirit. His entire ministry was empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus could rightly be called the *Ikona* of the Holy Spirit. It follows that this Holy Spirit is the source of Christian power. There is nothing truly Christian that is not a product of the Holy Spirit. If the spiritual life be Christian, the motivating and empowering force must be the Holy Spirit. In the eyes of the Heavenly Father, a person only becomes beloved and one *“in whom I am well pleased”* when the Holy Spirit enkindles the flame that consumes human time and energy.

To all appearances the Church at Sardis looks reasonably Christian. However, Jesus looks into the depths and finds no Holy Spirit. He declares, *“I know the reputation you have of being alive, when in fact you are dead!”* Christianity had only become a facade, a veneer in Sardis. Jesus’ words are calculated to produce shock. The fire is extinguished! *“I find that the sum of your deeds is less than complete in the sight of my God”* (See Rv.3:1-2). *“You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting”* (Dn.5:27). Jesus’ subsequent words imply that some embers still glow; unless fanned into flame, death is imminent.

It is not Jesus’ intention to deprive the Church of hope and leave it in despair. Until He comes there is still time to change--to repent. Our Lord gives the Church hope when He commands, *“Wake up, and strengthen what remains before it dies”* (Rv.3:2a). Jesus does not demand the impossible. He prudently advises starting with what still remains. From where they are, they must begin

again. Something still remains from the better days--those greener years. Jesus asks them to recall the days of their conversion and what they have committed to Him. The memory of what they had once been, in the light of what they have become, can lead to repentance. When Jesus comes the season of repentance will have passed.

Jesus confirms that not all the Christians in Sardis are spiritually dead; there are a "*few persons who have not soiled their garments*" (Rv.3:4). Those garments symbolized the new life received at baptism. When Jesus said that these would walk with Him in white, He indicated that they would one day abide with Him in joy and glory. The Lord leaves the Church of Sardis on a note of encouragement and hope; those who repent and become victorious will also be clothed in white. They would enter into a permanent state of joy and glory. He promised, "*I will never erase his name from the book of the living*" (Rv.3:5).

LETTER TO PHILADELPHIA

From Sardis, the messenger of the Apocalypse would have to travel only a little less than thirty miles southeast to deliver his sixth letter to the Church at Philadelphia. Attalus II founded the city around 159 B.C. The city was named after Attalus, who was called *Philadelphos* because of his great personal love for his brother, Eumenes. The intention was to establish a Greek center of culture in the areas of Lydia and Phrygia. It was a missionary city for Hellenistic culture, and it successfully accomplished its mission by peaceful means.

The contents of the letter suggest that a strong Jewish background existed in the Christian Community at Philadelphia. Essentially it is a letter of praise, exhortation, and encouragement. At the time it was written, not a few members of the Church were being upset both by the Jews outside of the Church and the Judaizers inside the Church. The Lord seeks to comfort and strengthen them. Jesus immediately introduced Himself with two obviously divine titles: "*The Holy One, the True.*" The introductory title definitely recalls God's words in Isaiah, "*To whom can you liken me as an equal? says the Holy One*" (Is.40:25). "*I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King*" (Is.43:15).

Jesus says He is "*The True,*" the Greek word used signify real. Jesus is the Real Holy One of Israel. The words of the title go on to imply that Jesus is the

Lord of Israel. He possesses the authority *“who wields David’s key, who opens and no one can close, who closes and no one can open” (Rv.3:7b)*. Jesus has been made master of the palace; he alone has free access into the Lord’s presence. In Him resides the power to admit or exclude whomever He wills from the presence of God. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises made to David by the prophets. Only within Him will the promises find fulfillment. The disciples of Jesus are not barred from the presence of God, as Jews taught and prayed; for them, a door has been opened that no one can close. It has been opened by the Holy One, who opens a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters for those who hold fast to His Word and have not denied His Name.

Presently, the Christians are slandered and ridiculed by the Jews for their faith in Jesus as King and Lord. Jesus foretells the conversion of the Jews. This conversion will be symbolized in the conversion of some of the Jews who now harass the Church. It confirms the teachings of Paul: *“Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery lest you be conceited: blindness has come upon part of Israel until the full number of Gentiles enter in, and then all Israel will be saved” (Rm.11:25-26)*.

The Church at Philadelphia represents the faithful Christian Community that lives in this uncertain world in which nothing is stable. Christians live in a world in which things can quickly be destroyed for them. If they have true supernatural faith in Jesus Christ they have rooted their lives in a foundation unshakable. They will endure. Christians are not super men nor wonder women, *“I know that your strength is limited” (Rv.3:8b)*. Jesus assures His disciples, *“You will not be tested beyond your strength.” “I will keep you safe in the time of trial which is coming on the whole world, to test all men on earth” (Rv.3:10b)*. Our Lord’s words imply that His faithful will not be exempted from the trial, but rather they will be kept safe.

Most scholars agree that the Church at Philadelphia reveals the Church not only standing firm in its commitment to the Lord, but a Church that has been obedient to its commission to go forth and preach the gospel--to be witnesses of Christ in the world. The city was a missionary for Hellenistic culture, and the Church of Philadelphia was a missionary Church for the kingdom of God. Jesus had nothing but praise and promises for its members. They will have a place of permanence in the City of God and not just any place, but one of glory. This permanence was symbolically expressed as *“a pillar in the temple of my God” (Rv.3:12a)*.

As an artist entitles his masterpiece and signs it, so shall the victorious Christians be inscribed as the temple of God and bear the name of their Lord. This will be a new name that fully expresses the glorified Christ in relationship with His glorified Body, the Church. Perhaps the new name will express the identification that shall exist forever between Jesus and His faithful followers. The Father's name shall be inscribed upon the living stone. This will truly identify the Father of this Christian child who shall dwell in the House of the Father forever.

LETTER TO LAODICEA

The Church at Laodicea received the seventh message. The city was located on the Lycus River, about forty miles southeast of Philadelphia. Its prime importance came from being situated on the road over which the traffic to and from Rome and Syria traversed. Laodicea was famous for its products made from raven-like black wool, produced by the sheep of the area. Laodicea was also noted for its medical center and famous doctors. It produced the Phrygian powder used to make healing ointment for eyes and ears. It was a trading city and a banking center. There was a large concentration of Jews within the city. It is estimated that 7,500 adult male Jews lived in Laodicea. Laodicea was wealthy and independent.

When the city was destroyed by earthquake in 60 A.D. it refused any financial help from Rome. At its own expense the city was restored. However, water was a problem in the area. The water supply for the city came by an aqueduct fed from a spring five miles away in Denizli. It arrived in the city warm and tepid. The city of Hieropolis was located six miles south and was noted for its hot waters and baths. Ten miles west was Colossae, which was furnished with water from cold springs.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians he told them to have the letter also read in Laodicea. We know from Paul's own words that he did not personally establish the Christian churches in this area. Eusebius reported that Epaphras founded the Church in Laodicea and that Archippus was its first bishop. Paul sent this message to him, *"To Archippus say, 'Take care to discharge the ministry you have received in the Lord'" (Col.4:17)*. Paul's words seem to be an admonition to Archippus for being a somewhat careless shepherd. This could indicate that the roots of the Church's problem in Laodicea stemmed back to its beginnings with a careless shepherd.

The Church possessed no obviously grave fault that had been noted in the other churches. However, it was the one Church of which Jesus had nothing good to say. This community received the most severe reprimand; it was threatened with total rejection. Jesus speaks of Himself as "*The Amen.*" In Greek *amen* meant "truly." This signified that the very nature and character of the person speaking guaranteed the truth of his testimony. He is the faithful witness. This seems to imply that court is in session and the Church at Laodicea stands before the Divine judgment seat. The Judge is the Son of God whose eyes blaze like fire--they search the hearts and minds and give each what their conduct deserves.

If this Church had examined its conscience, it would not have accused itself of sin. It was a community complacent and content with itself. It had not suffered the misfortunes of other Christian communities. It had indeed been blessed by God. It was a fat and fine Christian community and in its own words, "*I am so rich and secure that I want for nothing*" (Rv.3:17a).

These searing words spoken by Jesus, paraphrased, would have struck like bolts of lightning: "*Wretched people! Destitute! Blind! Your whole spiritual lives are like the water of your city--tepid. Would that you were like the waters of Hieropolis or Colossae--hot or cold. You are nauseous to me. I will spew you out of my mouth!*" (See Rv.3:15-17). Within the Church of Laodicea was a spirit of spiritual inertia, sloth and indifference. It had never been persecuted, so it never had to take a stand for Christ. It was unwilling to pay the cost of discipleship.

"*Hot or cold,*" Jesus said. The Lord would take a Saul of Tarsus any day. With such material you have a chance to make Paul an Apostle. But what can you do with the indifferent soul who doesn't even have the heart to care? It is a Community without zeal. What could Jesus say of such a Community when it was said of Him in His own lifetime, "*Zeal for your house consumes...*" (Jn. 2:17). Nothing less than, "*You disgust me.*" Jesus had nothing in common with the indifferent. If any Christians continued in this spiritual state, He would abandon them.

These people possessed gold, and they valued nothing more. Jesus says they are poor. He urges them to buy from Him gold refined by fire, which is the faith of discipleship refined through suffering the distress of many trials. Peter said of such faith, "*More precious than the passing splendor of fire-tried gold, may by its genuineness lead to praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ*

appears” (1Pt.1:7). The Christians of Laodicea wore clothes of black wool. Jesus sees them naked for their souls are bare of good works. He urges them to buy white garments from Him--those white garments that express the joy of Christian victory and are purchased through lives of good deeds. These people boast of their great vision; Jesus says they are blind. He urges them to seek the anointing of the Holy Spirit, which removes the spiritual blindness of self-deception, and restores insight and spiritual vision. Jesus makes it clear to the Christians of Laodicea that their lives that are free from trials and tribulations are not signs of God’s favor, but rather His rejection. “Whoever is dear to me I reprove and chastise” (Rv.3:19a).

Even for these Christians of whom Jesus had nothing good to say it is the season of repentance. The door to the Father’s House remains open and Jesus is the Good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep. Many doors remain closed and locked. While there is still time Jesus stands at these doors. He knocks and He calls...

PRELUDE TO JUDGMENT

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“HERE I STAND, KNOCKING AT THE DOOR. IF ANYONE HEARS ME CALLING AND OPENS THE DOOR, I WILL ENTER HIS HOUSE AND HAVE SUPPER WITH HIM, AND HE WITH ME.” (Revelation 3:20)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; 1Sm.16:4-8, Rev.2:23, Jer.17:9-10, Mal3:1-7.

- 1. In what way does Revelation 2:23 proclaim the divinity of Jesus Christ?**
- 2. What does Jeremiah 17:9-10 tell us about the human heart?**
- 3. What do you learn from the reading in Malachi 3:1-3,7?**
- 4. How can you be “at heart” with God?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Letter to Sardis; Revelation 3:1-6.

- 1. What does the title used in this letter signify?**
- 2. What was the spiritual condition of this Church?**
- 3. How does the Lord suggest that renewal begins?**
- 4. What does Revelation 3:5 say to you?**

THIRD DAY: Read Ezekiel 18:1-32.

- 1. What do you learn from Ezekiel 18:4?**
- 2. What do verses 23 and 32 tell you about God’s attitude toward sin?**
- 3. What do you learn about repentance from this reading?**

4. How do you see the spirit of repentance operating in your own life?

**FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: Letter to Philadelphia;
Revelation 3:7-13; Romans 11:22-29.**

1. What is implied by the title used by Jesus in this reading?
2. Why do you think the Lord was so pleased with the Church at Philadelphia?
3. What do we learn about the Jews in these readings?
4. What does Revelation 3:12 say to you?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: Letter to Laodicea; Revelation 3:14-22.

1. What does Jesus' title imply in this letter?
2. How would you describe the spiritual condition of this Church?
3. What does the action of Jesus tell you?
4. What does Revelation 3:20 say to you?

SIXTH DAY: Re-read Revelation 2:1-29.

1. What has impressed you the most in the seven letters to the Churches?
2. What general picture of the Church does this reading leave you with?
3. What would you say is the best and worst in the Church today?
4. Which of the Churches would you say best reflects your own spiritual condition?

CHAPTER 6

EARTH IN PROPER FOCUS-SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The first vision of the Apocalypse is an awesome presentation. Jesus Christ appears in glory clothed with the symbols of divinity. He is the Source of Life. Jesus Christ is not a savior in the world. He is *the* Savior of the world. *“There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved” (Acts 4:12).*

All life on earth is presented to Jesus Christ. He is the Judge and the “judgment” of the world.

“The Father himself judges no one, but has assigned all judgment to the Son...” (Jn.5:22). “The Father has given over to him power to pass judgment because he is the Son of Man” (Jn.5:27). “The judgment of condemnation is this: the light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were wicked” (Jn.3:19).

The Judge is one of our own. He has already experienced what we are coming to experience. He knows what to expect from us, *“I am the searcher of hearts and minds... I will give each of you what your conduct deserves” (Rv.2:23). “Now has judgment come upon this world, now will this world’s prince be driven out” (Jn.12:31).* The earthly life of Jesus has brought judgment, condemnation, and conquest.

Jesus loves the Church. The Church is people. The People of the Church are not a mass conglomeration of humanity. The Church is a holy assembly of individual persons. Jesus loves, rules, and judges individuals. Each He notes, and to each He responds. *“Not a single sparrow falls to the ground without your Father’s consent” (Mt.10:29). “While we live we are responsible to the Lord, and when we die we die as his servants. Both in life and in death we are the Lord’s” (Rm.14:8).* To each the Spirit gives His gifts. Every person will render a personal account.

In order that Jesus will not one day have to say to us, *“I find that the sum of your deeds is less than complete in the sight of my God” (Rv.3:2b),* He has come

as Inspector General and has inventoried the Christian Community. The assets and liabilities have been noted. One can list twelve blessed fruits observed by the Lord to be flourishing within the Christian Community.

These can be condensed into seven deeds or characteristics that, woven together, produce the ideal garment that will assure entrance into the wedding feast of the Lamb. The presence of all these ingredients ensures that the sum of one's deeds will not be less than complete in the eyes of God:

--First, and foremost, a person must be a faithful witness to Christ in this world until death. This first characteristic incorporates the following six, without which the first could not be.

--Second: patient endurance amidst tribulations--in a word, perseverance.

--Third: this perseverance displays a courageous hope manifested by a spiritual joy that rises above the afflictions of body and soul.

--Fourth: faith that confesses the Name, Person, and Power of Christ.

--Fifth: a spirit of truth that guards and preserves Christian Truth in the Church.

--Sixth: a preservation of the spirit of agape love that motivates all deeds and actions.

--Seventh: a Christian life that flowers in constant Christian service, and expels the evil spirits of inertia and sloth.

All such Christians will rate a 7 and a *“Well done! You are an industrious and reliable servant... Come, share your master's Joy! (Mt.25:21).*

Such a Christian is victorious. The Lord lists twelve blessings to be bestowed upon this victor. These twelve, too, can be summarized under seven gifts.

--First and foremost is union with God through Jesus Christ. From this union flows the remaining six blessings.

--Second is eternal life.

--Third: they shall achieve a personal and unique perfection.

--Fourth: they shall experience the fullness of joy.

--Fifth: they shall share in the glory of God.

--Sixth: they shall share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

--Seventh: they shall share in the kingship of the Lord Jesus.

The victor enters into all this when a life of faithful witness ends upon this earth. All these victories are scattered among the symbolic promises made by Jesus to the victorious.

THE WAR FOR THE EARTH

The scene within the Apocalypse dramatically shifts from Christ's presence within the Church on earth to a vision of heaven. The seer beholds mysterious realities that he shares with the Church on earth. From this point on we move into the deeper and more mysterious waters of Revelation.

Unlike other apocalyptic works, John was dealing with the Final Age. With the establishment of the Christian Church on earth The End Times had come. John describes in the Apocalypse the inauguration of the struggle that, once begun, would continue to its consummation. The incidents revealed would become patterns of behavior often to be repeated as the centuries unfolded.

A cosmic struggle has already been inaugurated between two opposing Kingdoms. This world is both the battleground and the prize of victory. The Scriptures confirm the lordship of God over the earth: "*The Lord's are the earth and its fullness*" (Ps.24:1). Nevertheless, the Scriptures acknowledge that Satan is at home on this earth. He erected his throne here: "*The whole world is under the evil one*" (1Jn.5:19.)

When Jesus of Nazareth remained faithful to the Will of God unto death, He achieved a major and decisive victory over Satan. Jesus became the victor. The war goes on even though the decisive battle has been won. Many more battles will be fought. Many more victories will be achieved. Many more

persons will be victorious, and many losses will be suffered before the war ends. It is a heavenly war with the intention of reestablishing the reign of God on earth. Satan vehemently resists the coming of this reign. When the earth is lost to him only the Abyss awaits.

The Kingdom of Heaven came on earth in Jesus Christ, and continues on earth through His Church. The Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is God's means through which the reign of God will be reestablished on earth. Jesus continues the struggle through the members of the Church. Of necessity Satan directs his vehement hatred toward the Church. His most obvious tactic of attack has been to divide and conquer. Satan lives and rules--has his own "incarnation"--through human beings; they are his hold upon the earth. Satan reigns in his subjects, the instruments of his powers. He intends to keep them forever.

The Apocalypse presents the War of the Kingdoms. It demonstrates the nature of the war and its final outcome. What is actually historic has timeless value. The historical incidents are patterns of behavior. The same means and methods used will surface and resurface until the reign of God is eternally established, and the Evil One and his followers are annihilated from the face of the earth.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

When the Scriptures speak of the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, we first need to remember that heaven is synonymous with God. Secondly, the word "kingdom" signified more jurisdiction over people than a territorial place. The extent of one's kingdom was regulated by the extent of one's power to rule others. When Scriptures speak of God's throne being erected or set up, it is a figurative way of expressing God's dominion. Therefore, heaven would be synonymous with the reign of God. Heaven would be wherever God's will was accomplished. "*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" Heaven can be on this earth to the degree that God rules, to the degree that His perfect will is fulfilled. God always rules in the sense that nothing occurs that is not permitted by the permissive will of God. Heaven comes in its fullness when the perfect will of God is accomplished in all things.

The Church is rightly spoken of as the kingdom of heaven. To the degree that God rules in the life of the Church and its individuals, heaven is present. It certainly may not be the heaven of our dreams, but it is the only heaven that

can presently be experienced as long as heaven and hell are locked in lethal struggle. True Christians are heaven at the battlefield. Perhaps we could say that being a member of the Church on earth is living on the rough side of heaven. We are living on God's battlefield, and Christ the Leader encourages heroic action. What is heaven? Heaven is the realm in which God rules. Where is heaven? Heaven is wherever God rules!

CREATION IN GLORY

The seer now presents a vision of the court of heaven. The author first beholds an open door in heaven. All heaven is not opened. A single door of access to God is available. This door has been opened by Jesus Christ. This second vision pertains to matters deeper and more mysterious than the first. John is to behold that which transcends time and that which is earthly. Only by divine intervention can a person enter such a celestial realm. The seer stands before the door; he does not enter, but sees and hears. The presence of the throne of God indicates a vision of heaven. Heaven stands in contrast with earth, where the throne of Satan presently stands.

In keeping with Old Testament custom, God is depicted with gemlike brilliance. *"On the throne was seated One whose appearance had a gemlike sparkle as of jasper and carnelian"* (Rv.4:2-3). The seated Lord immediately invokes the image of King and Judge. It is a vision of the heavenly Court in session. The combination of the colors of the jasper and carnelian would create an image suffused with a warm orange-red light such as displayed by the rising of the sun. The image around the throne would be tempered by the surrounding emerald green rainbow. Since green is a common symbol of eternal life, the emerald rainbow most likely symbolizes that God is the primary source of life. It is the Throne of Yahweh--the God of the Living. Andrew of Caesarea wrote, *"The Divine Nature is evergreen and flowering."*

Around the throne John beholds twenty-four elders, seated and clothed in white with crowns of gold upon their heads. Jesus promised the faithful witnesses that they would receive the crown of eternal life; they would walk in white and they would receive the right to sit with Him upon His throne--the divine throne. In the light of Jesus' messages to the Churches, the most obvious interpretation would be that the twenty-four represent the victorious faithful witnesses. Their gold crowns would symbolize their faith that led to victory--eternal life. Being called elders symbolized their wisdom. Being seated signified they shared in the kingship and judgment as Jesus promised.

The numeral 24 may possibly indicate faithful witnesses of both the Old and the New Testament. Two is the number for witness; both the Old and New Testaments witness to Christ. The number 12 is a round natural number (3x4) capable of signifying an indefinite number. The 24 symbolically represents the future glorification of the People of God.

The seer now relates a most mysterious dimension of his vision,

At the very center, around the throne itself, stood four living creatures covered with eyes front and back. The first creature resembled a lion, the second an ox; the third had the face of a man, while the fourth looked like an eagle in flight. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and eyes allover, inside and out. (Rv.4:6-8)

The simplest and the best explanation of the four creatures is that they represent created nature. The vision signifies the Divine eminence in creation. It reveals the Divine providence that constantly governs and sustains the universe. The four creatures represent what is most splendid in animated life: the lion represents nobility, the bull strength, the man equals intelligence, and the eagle represents freedom of movement. The creatures that are full of eyes in front and back express the total knowledge and vigilance of God (the sparrow does not fall unnoticed from the sky). The total universal consciousness of God is signified. The six wings indicate the swiftness in which the will of God is executed in nature. The Presence of God is unceasingly made visible in the created universe, *“Day and night, without pause, they sing: ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, He who was, and who is, and who is to come!’” (Rv.4:8)*. This teaches that creation constantly glorifies God.

The seer relates that although God is in all and that the saints share in the very eternal life of God, God transcends all. All things have been created for the glory of God. *“They throw down their crowns before the throne and sing: ‘O Lord our God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power! For you have created all things; by your will they came to be and were made!’” (Rv.4:10-11)*. We have seen a vision of creation properly ordered toward God. It is Creation’s hymn of praise to its Creator. Such a meditation cannot but stimulate a greater love of the created universe. It is indeed the Sacrament of the Creator unfortunately desecrated by sin.

VISION OF REDEMPTION

The third vision completes and crowns the heavenly presentation. A sealed scroll appears in the right hand of God. The scroll represents the hidden will of God that still awaits execution. Presently, God's will is impeded upon this earth by Satan's dominion. A mighty angel, representing the powers of creation, asks who is capable of opening the sealed scroll, who can execute the divine plan in the universe? Who is worthy? Who is qualified to put into execution God's plan of universal salvation? In all creation no power could respond.

At this the seer began to weep despairingly, for the earth is doomed under the dominion of the evil one. One of the elders addressed John, "*Do not weep. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has won the right by his victory to open the scroll with the seven seals*" (Rv.5:5). The One found worthy is from the earth. The title implies a king out Judah who fulfills the promises of the Old Testament.

In the next scene the seer beholds the One worthy, and understands why He is so worthy. He identifies Jesus as the Lamb. Twenty-eight times he will confer this title on Jesus. The Lamb is situated between the throne and the elders. This symbolizes His unique position with God, whose knowledge and power He shares, as well as His continuous association with His Church.

The Lamb appears alive, he is standing. However, the Lamb bears the scars of suffering. Like a quick flashback the death of the Lamb is recalled; He had been slain. The sacrificial death of the Lamb is significant. God has decreed that Jesus, because of His sacrificial death, has the power to bring the cause of history to a successful conclusion. This sacrificial death makes Jesus worthy to set in motion the foreordained will of God. When the Lamb receives the scroll, the Heavenly Court has judged Him the conqueror. He has overcome Satan, and therefore is worthy to destroy him and his reign. Jesus' witness on earth and His death won Him a legal victory, entitling Him to open the scroll. The events recorded in the scroll concern the defeat of Satan, the judgment of those on earth, and the salvation of the faithful.

The Lamb before the throne is no longer the sacrificial Lamb. He possesses complete dominion and power, symbolized by the seven horns. The seven spirits of God symbolize that Jesus is filled with divine power. All the redeemed acknowledge the Lamb to be Lord and Savior of the world. A new

song is sung. The term “new song” indicates a special hymn of praise created to celebrate an extraordinary event. The saints of Heaven sing the song of redemption:

Worthy are you to receive the scroll and break open its seals, for you were slain. With your blood you purchased for God men of every race and tongue, of every people and nation. You made of them a kingdom, and priests to serve our God, and they shall reign on the earth (Rv.5:9-10).

Then, all the angelic creation joins with the saints in a symphony of praise to Jesus, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and praise!” (Rv.5:12).

The heavenly scene concludes in silent adoration of God and the Lamb. It is the most dramatic proclamation of the divinity of Jesus Christ to be found in the New Testament. It is a heavenly presentation and production of Paul’s prophecy:

Because of this, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name, so that at Jesus’ name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: JESUS CHRIST IS LORD! (Phil.2:9-11).

EARTH IN PROPER FOCUS
SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“YOU MADE OF THEM A KINGDOM, AND PRIESTS TO SERVE OUR GOD, AND THEY SHALL REIGN ON THE EARTH.” (Revelation 5:10)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction, Mt. 10:29.

1. What are the works that ought to clothe the Christian in order for them to be acceptable to God?
2. Which of these works would you say is most present in your life?
3. Which is most lacking in your life?
4. What does Matthew 10:29 teach you about God?

SECOND DAY: Read Summary through The Kingdom of Heaven.

1. How would you describe the War of the Kingdoms?
2. What part does Jesus play in this War?
3. Why can the Church be called the Kingdom of Heaven on earth?
4. What does it mean for Christians to be in heaven on earth?

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Creation in Glory; Ezekiel 1:22-28; Revelation 4:1-5.

1. What impression of God do these two descriptions leave with you?
2. In what way do the twenty-four elders represent the faithful witnesses?
3. How is the Holy Spirit symbolized in the vision from the Apocalypse?

4. What does the emerald-like rainbow symbolize about God?

FOURTH DAY: Read Ezekiel 1:4-20; Revelation 4:6-11.

1. What is being expressed in the vision from Ezekiel?
2. What do the faces of the creatures symbolize?
3. What do these visions teach us about God's relationship to nature?
4. What should created nature's relationship be to God?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: Vision of Redemption; Isaiah Chapters 11 and 12; Revelation 5:1-5.

1. What is signified by the scroll in God's right hand?
2. What would it mean to open the scroll?
3. What does Revelation 5:5 teach?
4. What is the image that Isaiah creates around the "stump of Jesse" (Root of David)?

SIXTH DAY: Read Revelation 5:6-14.

1. What does Revelation 5:6 teach you about the Lamb?
2. Why is the Lamb found worthy to open the scroll?
3. What is Jesus' relationship to the created world?
4. What does Revelation 5:10 teach you?

CHAPTER 7

A TIME OF WRATH—SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The preceding picture presented within the Apocalypse has endeavored to prepare the Christian Community for the presentation to come. The picture that unfolds is not pleasant. However, these terrible things must precede the glorious *parousia* of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord has revealed that the essence of Christian discipleship is being a faithful witness until death. Tribulation on this earth tests and perfects Christian witness. The gold of discipleship is tested and tried in the fires of persecution. In the midst of earthly tribulation Christians discover where the Lord stands with them. Tribulation shatters the facade and cracks the veneer of Christianity and manifests the inner person. It manifests whether one stands with the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of the earth. The Lord can no more save us from tribulation than He could save Himself: *“No pupil outranks his teacher, no slave his master” (Mt.10:24)*. The Lord says that the disciples rejoice to become like the Master.

“They will harry you as they harried me” (Jn.15:20). “They will hale you into court, they will flog you in their synagogues. You will be brought to trial before rulers and kings, to give witness before them and before the Gentiles on my account... They will hand you over to torture and kill you. Indeed, you will be hated by all nations on my account... The man who holds out to the end, however, is the one who will see salvation” (Mt.10:17b-18;24:9,13). “Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven; they persecuted the prophets before you in the very same way” (Mt.5:12).

Jesus makes it clear that being a disciple is not going to be a cause of peace in this world, nor will it bring a disciple peace in this world. *“Do you suppose that my mission on earth is to spread peace? My mission is to spread, not peace, but division.”* Jesus teaches that the persecution of His disciples and the Church are things that must occur before the end comes. Likewise, false prophets and messiahs must come and seek to counteract the effects of Christ and His Church in this world. Social chaos in the world will be another sign. We read in Matthew, *“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. Do not be*

alarmed. Such things are bound to happen, but that is not yet the end... These are the early stages of the birth pangs" (Mt.24:6,8).

The Evangelists speak of persecutions, wars, and social upheavals. As these things are viewed from here on earth, they appear to be a normal part of human existence. People war with each other as individuals or nations for one reason or another. Such activities appear to be part of the dark side of human nature. The Scriptures likewise speak of natural disasters such as earthquakes, famine, and pestilence. Again, we on earth attribute these things to the natural operations of nature. These are normal occurrences for life upon this planet. The Apocalypse deals with these incidents but presents them all as the direct effect of the divine will. They occur because God wills them to be. These catastrophes that affect and effect the political and social order of life upon earth are of such a magnitude that they cannot be attributed purely to human agents or accidents of nature. They are the beginnings of the Eschatological War in which the godly and the ungodly encounter one another. These are the early stages of the birth pangs of a new creation. Chapter five of Apocalypse takes us behind the scenes of earth's stage.

FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

We need to keep in mind that by the nature of the sealed scroll, nothing could be known until the final seal was broken. Only then could the contents of the scroll be revealed. The reader should not imagine that the breaking of the seven seals and the revealing of certain facts represent the gradual unfolding of future events. The seer presents to his readers and listeners a completed revelation in parts.

The use of the word *erchou*, translated "come forth," indicates a public appearance. Here it signifies a divine epiphany or manifestation. In the present case the Divine Wrath is revealed upon the earth. This Divine Wrath is executed in nature and through nature. In each case, one of the four living creatures calls forth a particular manifestation of God's wrath. What we witness is God withdrawing partial control over nature and permitting nature, perverted, to follow its own destructive course.

The Wrath of God is presented upon this earth in the famous symbolism of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. In the Scriptures, horses are primarily war animals. Throughout the Apocalypse colors are not without significance. As mentioned, white signifies victory or conquest. The word for white, *leukas*, signifies anything from white to gray. Without some qualifying adjective,

such as “dazzlingly,” we are in doubt whether the first horse of the Apocalypse is white or gray. In the text the word for red is *purros*, which signifies red as fire. This color signifies bloodshed, violence, or war. It is the color of the dragon, which appears in chapter twelve. The color black symbolizes famine, mourning, or affliction. The word describing the fourth horse is *chloros*, which can describe anything from the light green of a plant to the color of a corpse. This color indicates decay, plague, or pestilence--death and hell.

The symbolism of the heavenly horsemen is not unique to the Apocalypse. They also appear in the writings of the Prophet Zechariah. The prophet relates, “*I raised my eyes and saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains... The first chariot had red horses, the second chariot black horses, the third chariot white horses, and the fourth chariot spotted horses--all of them strong horses. I asked the angel who spoke with me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel said to me in reply, ‘These are the four winds of the heavens, which are coming forth after being reviewed by the Lord of all the earth’*” (Zec.6:1-5). The author of Second Maccabees sees five angelic horsemen who fight on the side of Israel (see 2Mc.10:29).

When the Scriptures speak of the four charioteers as being the four winds of the heavens, the word used for wind is *pneuma*, the same word used for spirit. The four winds would symbolize angelic beings who executed God’s will upon this earth. The winds in the Old Testament were not considered inanimate forces or powers, but as angelic beings. The author of Sirach speaks of these winds as being instruments of divine chastisement on the earth.

These texts from the Old Testament seem to indicate that our riders are angelic spirits that represent God’s dominion over the earth. These angelic beings are powerful spirits that control both the peace and harmony of the earth as well as the chaos and destruction that occurs on the earth. They seem to be powers that hold back and limit the spirits of evil on this earth.

The first horseman seems to signify aggressive imperialism that comes to its victory through a force of arms. In a particular way, it may represent the imperial power of Rome that will be destroyed by barbarian forces. A common interpretation has been that for John, the white horse symbolized the aggression rising from the East, the Parthians that threatened the Roman peace.

Imperialism establishes itself on earth through war. This, the horseman on the red horse symbolizes. We read that its rider was given power to rob the earth of peace by allowing men to slaughter one another. This could imply a barbarian invasion of Rome. It is said that the rider carried a huge sword. The word sword is translated *rhomphia*, which was a large and broad sword used by the barbarian peoples. This power to kill one another has been interpreted to mean civil war, which plagued and weakened Rome. The great sword probably indicates that something more than human is operating in these conflicts.

Famine often comes as the aftermath of war. The rider on the black horse carrying a set of scales symbolizes famine. The price of bread illustrates a famine condition; it is about twelve times the normal price. This famine, however, has been limited by God. This is indicated by the command to preserve such essential commodities as oil and wine. Titus commanded his soldiers, during the conquest of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., to spare the olive trees and vineyards. Some of the olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemene are reported to be over three thousand years old.

Disease, plague, and pestilence come as a consequence of war and famine, and men become like wild animals. Death becomes inevitable. The fourth horseman on the yellowish green horse is identified as *thanatos*, which is Death. Death brings in its train Hades, the second death.

The breaking of the first four seals has manifested the sufferings that must come upon all who live upon the earth. Our Lord told the saints in Philadelphia, "*Because you have kept my plea to stand fast, I will keep you safe in the time of trial which is coming on the whole world, to test all men on earth*" (Rv.3:10). That does not imply that Christians would be spared sufferings during the time of tribulation, but rather they would be kept safe from the evil one. To the Church at Smyrna our Lord spoke of the sufferings to be endured by the saints, "*Have no fear of the suffering to come... Remain faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life*" (Rv.2:10).

THE FIFTH SEAL

The opening of the fifth seal emphasizes the power of the prayers of the saints before heaven. Heaven cannot shut out the prayers of the saints. It is a loud cry that pierces the heavens. God hears the call of his saints. It is not a call for vengeance but vindication. The cry of the martyrs is a prayer that the kingdom of God will quickly come on earth as it is in heaven. What truly calls

so loudly to God is the sacrificial lives of His saints. They are martyrs not for what they suffered, but because of what they held onto (*echein*) because of their profession of faith, *"I know that your strength is limited; yet you have held fast to my word and have not denied my name...because you have kept my plea to stand fast"* (Rv.3:8b,10). The white robes show that the martyrs have already entered into triumph and are walking with Christ.

"How long" is a dramatic inquiry and formula used in the Old Testament. The prayers of the martyrs are heard, but they are not immediately granted. Divine Wisdom delays answering them because of God's own plan of salvation. The opening of the fifth seal reveals that God has set limits to the evil and sufferings that will come to be on earth. Out of this will come the full number of the elect. This must come to be before Christ and His Church will be vindicated on earth. The Church must learn to be patient with God's purposes. *"They were told to be patient a little while longer until the quota was filled of their fellow servants and brothers to be slain, as they had been"* (Rv.6:11).

THE SIXTH SEAL

The scene described in the opening of the sixth seal is one of universal upheaval. Nothing remains unmoved. Seven parts of creation are named, and their order of being named approximates the order of creation in Genesis: earth, sun, moon, stars, sky, mountains, and islands. The upheaval affects seven categories of people: kings, great men, generals, the rich, the strong, slave, and free. All mankind is aghast at the upheaval in nature. The fear experienced by mankind recalls the fear of Adam and Eve, who sought to hide from God because of their sin. This is a description of those who have rejected God and His Christ. On the road to Calvary, Jesus intimated to the women of Jerusalem that this day would come upon all those who have rejected Him.

What will actually occur at this time we cannot say. All scholars agree that the language used here is symbolic and should not be interpreted literally. There are sufficient examples in the Old Testament demonstrating that language expressing cosmic catastrophes was used to express tremendous social and political upheaval. The sixth seal depicts an end of a world or of a social order. We are being told that our world will fall apart; all our earthly security will be totally destroyed. Apparently these occurrences are the *last pains* of labor that will bring forth a New Creation. For the faithful it should not be a time of fear but rejoicing. *"Hold your heads high, for your deliverance is near at hand"* (Lk.21:28).

THE SEALING OF THE ELECT

The seer pauses between the sixth and seventh seal before the Apocalypse presents the final consummation of the world. In the face of the catastrophes revealed and those still to come the seer knows that assurance is needed. The elect will be gathered from the four winds and spared. Instead of the opening of the seventh seal we are told that the elect of God are now sealed. The elect are sealed by an angel coming from the East. This may be a symbol of Christ. In ancient days the seal of the Lord that was placed upon an object implied ownership, concern, and protection. The sealing of the elect recalls the incident in Jeremiah in which the faithful of the city were marked with a *tau*--the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The *tau* was a symbol of Yahweh, and in the time of Jeremiah it was written as a cross (x or +). Those marked with the tau were to be preserved from evil.

It was customary in Christian Baptism to anoint Christians on the forehead with the tau as a symbol of belonging to God through Christ. They were sealed with the cross, which signified dying with Christ. Such a sealing implied the Christian was committed to witnessing Christ in this world. Very early in the Church this sealing of a Christian in baptism was related to the reception of the Holy Spirit, the source of sanctifying grace in the soul.

The seal mentioned in the Apocalypse is more than a physical sign; it has a spiritual reality. This Christian seal would be the Presence of the Holy Spirit within the spirit of a person, which identified the person as a true disciple of Jesus Christ, and child of the Heavenly Father. Such a Presence protected the Christians, not from physical affliction on earth, but delivered them from the power of the evil one.

We are told that the number of the sealed was 144,000. The numeral 12 symbolizes perfection especially in the physical world. The square of 12 would be 144. This would stress and emphasize the perfection being expressed. To multiply this number by one thousand would symbolize an innumerable number of people; one could not number the sealed. It is the New Israel that is symbolized, and it encompasses all the saints of both the Old and New Testaments. Those sealed, and the huge crowd that no one could count, probably refer to the same group. Their being sealed would signify why they were saved.

The saved are identified as those who have come out of the great tribulation. They have been tested and tried like gold. They have gained the white robes of victory because they identified with Jesus Christ and His death. They washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. This does not necessarily imply martyrdom of blood; it also applies to those who died with Christ in baptism and remained faithful to Christ unto death; those who have not soiled their garments.

The heavenly scene that follows evokes an image of the great Feast of Tabernacles, when the laborers have ended the work in the fields and a full harvest has been gathered. Now with joy they enter the House of the Lord singing, *“with joy we draw water from the spring of salvation!”* And again, the carrying of the palms recalls the Feast of Dedication. This feast celebrated the cleansing of the temple from the abominations wrought by Antiochus Epiphanes. At this feast the temple was sanctified and rededicated to God. The heavenly scene celebrates the defeat on earth of the Kingdom of Darkness and the reestablishment of the Kingdom of Heaven. All the redeemed proclaimed, *“Salvation is from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb!”* (Rv.7:10). And the angels and all heaven respond, *“Amen! Praise and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving and honor, power and might, to our God forever and ever. Amen!”* (Rv.7:12).

A TIME OF WRATH

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“THESE ARE THE ONES WHO HAVE SURVIVED THE GREAT PERIOD OF TRIAL; THEY HAVE WASHED THEIR ROBES AND MADE THEM WHITE IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB.” (Rv.7:14)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; Matthew 10:16-39; 24:4-14; John 15:18-20.

- 1. What is the role of a disciple of Jesus in this world?**
- 2. Why can a disciple not expect to escape suffering in this world?**
- 3. Why will Christians be rejected and hated?**
- 4. What things must occur before the End comes?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Four Horsemen; Rv.6:1-8; Zechariah 1:8-11, 6:1-8.

- 1. What is symbolically represented by the four colors of the horses?**
- 2. Who are the four riders of the Revelation?**
- 3. What do we learn about the power of these riders from Zechariah?**
- 4. What do these readings teach you about catastrophes in this world?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: The Fifth Seal; Zechariah 1:12-17; 2 Maccabees 10:26-30.

- 1. What do these readings tell us about the effect of saints' prayers?**
- 2. What does God's delay reveal to you?**

3. What does the reading from Maccabees reveal about angels?
4. How does God vindicate His saints?

**FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: The Sixth Seal; Rv.6:12-17;
Isaiah 2:12-22, 13:12-13.**

1. What does the opening of the sixth seal describe?
2. What is the extent of the upheaval that will occur?
3. What effect will it have upon the people on earth?
4. How should the description of these cosmic upheavals be interpreted?

FIFTH DAY: Read Habakkuk 3:3-15; Sirach 39:26-31.

1. What impression do you get from reading Habakkuk?
2. What elements expressed in Habakkuk are also expressed in chapter six of Revelation?
3. What do you learn from the reading in Sirach?
4. How would you describe the Wrath of God?

**SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: The Sealing of the Elect;
Revelation 7:1-17.**

1. What seems to be the purpose of placing this section between the sixth and seventh seal?
2. How is the sealing of the servants of God interpreted?
3. From other Scriptures, what would you say is the nature of this sealing?
4. What is the symbolism of the 144,000 who were so marked?

CHAPTER 8

GREAT PERIOD OF TRIAL--SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Scriptures warn that in the last days the love of many will grow cold because of increased evil in the world. Christians will live amidst an evil environment. Their tendencies will be to react against evil in a natural way. They will permit hatred to seep into their own spirits. When this occurs the environment has corrupted the Christian. To lose love, regardless of the reason, is to lose one's Christian life. As noted in the message to the Church at Ephesus, the faith of the Christian survived the onslaught of false prophets, teachers, and their doctrines, but these onslaughts took their toll in Christian love. The Lord rebuked the Community for allowing the spirit of love to diminish in their lives. Jesus warned it could lead to their being rejected by God.

Hatred of others is a two-edged sword that cuts both the enemy and the Christian. Because of its deadly results, Jesus commanded His disciples, "*My command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father...*" (Mt.5:44).

Having caught the spirit of Jesus, Paul wrote, "*Bless your persecutors; bless and do not curse them... Never repay injury with injury... Beloved, do not avenge yourselves; leave that to God's wrath, for it is written: 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay says the Lord' ... Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good*" (Rm.12:14f).

When our charity dries up in the face of evil, we have been conquered by evil! The author of Sirach observed and encouraged, "*The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail. Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven*" (Sir.28:1-2).

The prophets of the Old Testament assured their people that God would personally deal with those who afflicted the People of God. Jeremiah wrote, "*But now, thus says the Lord: 'Surely I will defend your cause, I will avenge you'*" (Jer.51:36). We read in Joel, "*I will avenge their blood, and not leave it unpunished*" (Jl.4:21). Isaiah said, "*For the Lord has a day of vengeance*" (Is.34:8).

When the Scriptures encourage us to leave vengeance to the Lord and to love one's enemies, it does not encourage moral indifference to evil or a Christian stoicism in the face of it. In Ezekiel 9:4, the angel was told to mark those for salvation "*who moan and groan over all the abominations that are practiced.*" It was written of Jesus, "*You have loved justice and hated wickedness*" (Heb.1:9).

DIVINE VENGEANCE

In the narrative of the flood, the Old Testament records the account of God's vengeance upon the entire earth for its universal condition of rebellion. In this vengeance all but a seed of life on earth was destroyed. God's vengeance against a segment of mankind is depicted in the account of the ten plagues permitted to fall upon Egypt for its refusal to permit the Hebrew people to go forth from Egyptian slavery. John sees a parallel between what the Roman Empire inflicts upon the Christians and what the Egyptians inflicted upon the Jewish people. He sees in God's afflictions upon the Egyptians symbols of the afflictions now to fall upon the enemies of the Church.

What follows in the Apocalypse dramatically illustrates that the prayers of the saints on earth--for God to judge our cause and avenge our blood among the inhabitants of the earth--are being heard. The earth itself has become an altar upon which the lives of God's People have been sacrificed. Into the earth their life blood has flowed. There, from under the altar, their blood calls for vengeance to be inflicted upon the earth that slaughtered them and drank up their blood. This blood can never be silenced. Until completely avenged and vindicated, it cries out night and day. John continues to manifest the chastisement coming upon the earth because of these prayers of the martyrs. The chastisements are presented in three series of seven: the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. As mentioned before, all three series tell and retell the same story, but with greater intensity and clarification. By way of illustration, we could say the presentations under the seals could be compared to a negative of a picture. The trumpets give us the print of this negative in black and white, and the bowls produce the same print in living color.

THE SEVENTH SEAL

The opening of the seventh seal is followed by a silence in heaven for about half an hour. We read in Zechariah, "*Silence, all mankind, in the presence of the Lord! for he stirs forth from his holy dwelling*" (Zec.2:17). According to Zephaniah, there would be silence in the presence of God when the day of the

Lord arrives. The silence is interpreted as a time for heaven to listen to the prayers of the saints from the earth, and a time to hear their cries. The silence may well be interpreted as the period of patience, that little while longer until the quota was filled of their fellow servants and brothers to be slain. It could also be interpreted as the time needed to fulfill the command of the angel, *“Do no harm to the land or the sea, or the trees until we imprint this seal on the foreheads of the servants of God.”* The scene following the silence reflects the temple worship service; the altar of gold and the previously mentioned blood of the Lamb evoke the memory of the morning and evening service in the temple.

The seer mentions seven angels who minister in God’s Presence, and who were given seven trumpets. These seven are said to stand before the throne. They are the Angels of Presence, ready to execute the will of God. They are the Angels of Theophany because they manifest God in the world. Belief existed among the People of God that they would overcome their enemies because God and His angels would fight with them. Yahweh promised, *“I will send an angel before you to the land flowing with milk and honey”* (Ex.33:3). We read in 2 Chronicles, *“Then the Lord sent an angel, who destroyed every valiant warrior, leader and commander in the camp of the Assyrian king, so that he had to return shamefaced to his own country”* (2Chr.32:21).

We are told in the Apocalypse that an angel, other than one of the seven, took his place before the golden altar of incense that stood before the throne, and there he offered incense to God. The incense symbolized prayer. It’s rising up before the throne of God symbolized God’s acceptance of the prayers. The prayers are answered. *“Then the angel took the censer, filled it with live coals from the altar, and hurled it down to the earth.”* Those live coals represented the Wrath of God falling upon the earth in response to the prayers of the saints. *“Vengeance is mine said the Lord. I will repay!”* (Rm.12:19). The scene recalls the fire and brimstone that rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah. In that incident Lot was saved because of his relationship with Abraham, and the prayers of Abraham.

The angels sound the trumpets that herald the coming disasters upon the earth. It is assumed that God is the agent of these incidents of evil. Zephaniah spoke of the Day of Wrath as *“a day of trumpet blasts and battle alarm”* (Zep.1:16). Amos asked, *“If the trumpet sounds in a city, will the people not be frightened? If evil befalls a city, has not the Lord caused it?”* (Am.3:6).

THE FOUR TRUMPETS

The first four trumpets herald the coming disasters that will affect the land, sea, fresh water, and sky. These evils will be symbolized by natural disasters that afflict nature, not man. When it speaks of one third being destroyed, it merely implies that God has limited the destruction. Thus disasters, that we consider natural are presented as signs from God that serve as a prelude to the end. They come as divine warnings and invitations to repent. Even when God withdraws His mercy and executes chastisement, the punishment can still be medicinal and curative. The plagues that follow fall upon the sources of man's life. These sources have been corrupted by man's idolatrous life.

The first trumpet unleashes hail and fire mixed with blood. This reflects the seventh plague suffered by the Egyptians when God sent hail mixed with peals of thunder and lightning. To the description in Exodus, John adds blood. This may signify that these and the following plagues represent the blood of the martyrs coming down upon the heads of their persecutors. Job speaks of God's storehouse of snow and hail reserved for battle, "*Have you entered the storehouse of the snow, and seen the treasury of the hail which I have reserved for times of stress, for the days of war and of battle?*" (Jb.38:22-23). Natural afflictions will come that will destroy vegetation on the earth.

The second trumpet releases a force causing contamination of the sea, something like a huge mountain being cast into the sea. This reflected the first plague suffered by the Egyptians when the Nile was turned to blood. Many today see this plague being fulfilled as the greed of man pollutes the lakes, streams, rivers, and oceans to a degree that much fresh water and marine life have been destroyed. Factories, like volcanoes, pour forth their polluting streams.

The third trumpet brought down to earth a huge star, called Wormwood, that fell to earth like a burning torch. It fell upon one third of the rivers and streams, polluting them, causing many people to die from the pollution. Wormwood (*Apsinthos*) is a plant of the genus *Artemisia*. The taste of it is bitter. But its name in the Scriptures symbolizes more than bitterness of taste. It denotes the bitter spirit of idolatry. It is a spirit that perverts righteousness, and leaves the bitterness of injustice. The Lord said to Jeremiah that He will feed the idolatrous Jews with "*wormwood to eat and poison to drink*" (Jer.9:14). It is the spirit of idolatry that corrupts the soul, and leads to bitter chastisement and death. Wormwood would represent an aspect of Satan, the

evil spiritual leaven that permeates the spirits of men. It contaminates the living springs of truth, and poisons the life-giving waters of religious truth with deadly heresies such as those symbolized by the Nicolaitans and the Jezebels. Speaking of Wormwood's arrival as a shooting star was probably intended to indicate its evil force.

When the fourth trumpet sounds we are told the world lost a third of its light. The world grows dark. This symbolizes the encroachment of the powers of darkness upon the earth. It recalls the darkness that settled over Egypt. The darkness was a prelude of the plague to come. The darkness signified the impenitence of Pharaoh. The darkening of the heavens is a prelude to the cosmic disturbances yet to come upon the earth. Amos wrote, "*Woe to those who yearn for the day of the Lord! What will this day of the Lord mean for you? Darkness and not light! ... Gloom without any brightness?*" (Am.5:18,20). "*On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun set at midday and cover the earth with darkness in broad daylight*" (Am.8:9).

EAGLE OF WOES

The seer now beholds in vision a solitary bird flying at high noon, at its very zenith. It is an eagle or a vulture. The bird replaces the angelic messenger for symbolic purposes. It is an unclean bird, a bird of prey; it feasts upon the bodies of those who fall in battle. The bird is an ill omen and it flies high for all to see and it calls shrilly for all to hear. In the Old Testament, the bird could symbolize an invading army. The symbol of the eagle went before the Roman Army.

At the sounding of the fifth trumpet an angel opens the door from the Abyss. The opening of the door releases evil spirits upon the earth. They are symbolized as an invading army of locusts. They will inflict only spiritual pain upon the people and only upon those not marked with the sign of the Lord. The torment they bring destroys the joy of life and makes men long for death. These venomous spirits torment their victims but there is no death that can escape them. Death is their kingdom.

The locusts recall the eighth plague upon the Egyptians. This again emphasizes the Divine chastisement. An invading army of locusts and their destructive force upon nature serves as a perfect example for capturing the spiritual devastation caused by evil spirits upon this earth. The intellectual and spiritual quality of these creatures is symbolized by their faces, which are

like men's faces. In the Near East composite pictures of men and horses, men and scorpions, men and ants, etc., were very popular. Such imaginative presentations were common in John's world. Their long hair recalls the Parthians who appear again in the next vision. Jeremiah spoke of the army of locusts as being without a leader. They are led only by the hunger of their appetites. However, this band of locusts is not leaderless. It is led by their King Abaddon or Appollyon. In Hebrew, *Abaddon* means destruction or ruin; in Greek, *Appollyon* means destroyer. Both Nero and Domitian considered themselves to be descendants of Apollos. A pun may be intended to intimate the destructive characters of these two emperors.

THE SECOND WOE

In John's time the hoards beyond the Euphrates would be the Parthians. The reference to a voice coming from between the horns of the altar of gold in God's presence reemphasizes that what now occurs flows from the will of God and as a result of the prayers of the saints. This innumerable army of 200,000,000 comes forth not only with human powers, but with superhuman powers that indicate the evil spiritual forces motivating them.

As one looks at these last two visions, the details have been shooting back and forth. The evil spirits have a Parthian-like appearance. The Parthians assume diabolical characteristics, "*The breastplates they wore were fiery red, deep blue, and pale yellow. The horses' heads were like heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire and sulfur and smoke... by these a third of mankind was slain*" (Rv.9:17-18). The description painted is one of hellish forces that descend upon mankind as Divine chastisement. The last chapters of Ezekiel allude to an inexhaustible reservoir of evil beyond the confines of the civilized world, beyond the Euphrates.

The picture of these Parthians lingers but a moment on John's vast canvas. They symbolize the world forces of evil always at the disposal of Satan, ready to become instruments of Hell upon earth. God presently contains these forces. There will come a day, however, when the bridle will be dropped and evil will be given free rein.

As with the Egyptians, the divine chastisements resulted only in hardness of heart against God. Mankind remained adamant in evil despite the warnings and chastisements for sins. Hardness of heart results in permanent impenitence. "*Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were*

wicked" (Jn.3:19). It is a matter of will. That which is not God, if worshipped, becomes a demonic power. All who fall under such powers, as the last chapters of the Apocalypse indicate, are destined for the lake that burns with fire and brimstone that is the Second Death.

GREAT PERIOD OF TRIAL

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“BELOVED, DO NOT AVENGE YOURSELVES; LEAVE THAT TO GOD’S WRATH FOR IT IS WRITTEN: ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE; I WILL REPAY,’ SAYS THE LORD.” (Romans 12:19)

**FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; Rm.12:14-21; Lk.18:1-8;
Sirach 28:1-7.**

1. What can cause Christian love to grow cold?
2. What effect does evil in your environment have on your Christian spirit?
3. What does “*Vengeance is mine... says the Lord,*” mean to you?
4. What do you learn from the reading from Sirach?

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Divine Vengeance; Gen.6:5-13, 8:15-22.

1. What lesson does the Flood teach us?
2. What lesson do the Ten Plagues of Egypt teach us?
3. What is the connection between the ends in nature and the prayers of the saints?
4. What did the eruption of Mt. St. Helens teach you?

**THIRD DAY: Read Summary: The Seventh Seal; Genesis 19:23-29;
Zephaniah 1:7, 14-18; Revelation 8:1-6.**

1. What is the connection between the heavenly silence and the prayers of the saints?
2. What effect do the prayers of the saints actually have?

3. What is the relationship of angels to God and angels to mankind?
4. What do you learn by the angel offering up the prayers of the saints?

**FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: The Four Trumpets;
Exodus 9:18-24, 7:14-21; Revelation 8:6-13.**

1. What is the symbolism of the trumpet blast?
2. What does the first trumpet signify?
3. What does “Wormwood” symbolize?
4. What does the darkness indicate?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: Eagle of Woes; Revelation 8:13-9:11.

1. What does the eagle symbolize?
2. What is being symbolized in the plague of locusts?
3. What does the name of the king of the locusts teach you?
4. What does the teaching of Jesus on Satan say to you?

SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: The Second Woe; Revelation 9:12-21.

1. What does the voice from the altar symbolize?
2. What do the Parthian forces symbolize?
3. What does this say to you?
4. How do you explain mankind’s failure to repent in the face of Divine chastisement?

CHAPTER 9

THE TWO WITNESSES--SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Apocalypse confirms that sin destroys the beauty and harmony of the universe. Mankind fails to acknowledge its personal responsibility for the world's chaos. Like a brute beast it proceeds blindly along a path of cosmic destruction. The Apocalypse presents the bitter fruits of sinful human behavior as divinely willed chastisement of sinful people on earth. This chastisement does not produce repentance but further hardening of the heart against the divine universal purpose. The writer of the Apocalypse sadly laments, "*They do not give up the worship of demons.*" The human heart is therefore given over to the worship of the created rather than the uncreated, resulting in moral chaos made concrete by unrepentant murder, sorcery, fornication, theft; these are filled with every kind of wickedness.

The Apocalypse intimates the harmony of the universe depends upon the harmony of created beings with the uncreated Creator. The author indicates that human immorality opens the world to inhuman forces of evil, forces purely spiritual and fully evil. Their active presence on earth accounts for the magnitude of moral and physical evil that occurs. The Apocalypse agrees with Paul that only an outside heavenly intervention can save the world. It has reached a state of affairs that demands divine deliverance. As one author observed, "*The youth of the world has passed; the strength of creation is already exhausted.*"

THE SMALL SCROLL

The Apocalypse now proceeds to unfold the mystery of salvation. We saw that between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals, there was an interlude in which the seer presented two consoling visions for the Church. The same now follows between the blowing of the sixth and seventh trumpets. These visions also are for the comfort and consolation of the Church.

The seer is back on the island of Patmos with his feet upon the ground. In this vision, heaven is descending to the earth. Salvation does not come by mankind ascending to God, but by God descending to mankind. Salvation comes through the Word being made Flesh! The vision manifests directly, or

through the angelic intermediary, that God the Creator still directs the course of the universe despite the chaos previously revealed.

In the vision, the angel held within his hand a small scroll. This small scroll signifies something that is to be fulfilled upon this earth by someone other than Christ. It contains a fragment of God's great purpose. In truth it is the part the Church must play in the salvation of the world. The position of the angel with one foot upon the sea and the other upon the land symbolizes the universal scope of the revelation. It is ultimately destined for the entire world.

The angel takes a solemn oath in which he acknowledges the supremacy of God in creation, and intimates that He alone brings creation to consummation. Endlessly, mankind continues to produce the causes of its own destruction and torment. The vision confirms that the process of salvation now begins. God mounts a counter offensive on earth that ushers in the complete fulfillment of God's promises.

The open scroll remains in the hand of the angel. The angel does not give it to the seer. The voice of Christ commands the seer to go and take the scroll. The scroll represents the role the Church (Christians) must play in the salvation of the world. It is a role made possible because of the role already fulfilled by Christ. This role will not be forced upon Christians; they are told by Christ to assume the role. He speaks to His disciples, from whom He has a right to expect obedience. Their obedient response will demonstrate the genuineness of their discipleship. Men, not angels have been chosen to carry God's plan to completion.

We are told the little seer goes up to the mighty angel and says, "*Give me the little scroll.*" He would accept his bit part in the drama of salvation and play it with all his heart. When the angel told him to eat it, he implies that God's servants are not merely to listen to God's revelation but that they are to digest and proclaim it as well. That the scroll would be sweet to the taste recalls the words of the psalmists concerning the will of God, "*How sweet to my palate are your promises, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*" (Ps. 119:103). When the angel prophesies that the scroll would be sour to the stomach, he alludes to the world's rejection of God's word. It is so sweet for the spirit to know and perceive the will of God, but so difficult for sinful human beings to truly digest the will of God and to make it part of themselves. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak! The proclamation of the Gospel in the world is destructive to the present social order. Evangelists will be persecuted, and they will suffer

for being disciples. This is the meaning of the scroll being sour in the stomach. As the Lord said to Ezekiel, *“And whether they heed or resist... they shall know that a prophet has been among them”* (Ez.2:5).

THE OUTER COURT

As already noted, the Apocalypse is replete with Old Testament imagery. Our next section is no exception. We must resist the temptation to interpret the next section in what may appear to be the most obvious interpretation. The simplest and best interpretation of the following vision will be in its universal application to the Christian Church.

In this vision the temple of God, its altar and those who worship there are the Christian Church and the Christian people. The measuring of the temple, or holy city, signifies its protection by God. We read in Zechariah, *“But I will be for her an encircling wall of fire, says the Lord, and I will be the glory in her midst”* (2:9). The seer was told not to measure the outer court. The outer court is no less part of the Christian Church; it represents the physical presence of the Church in the world. Our Lord does not offer physical security to the Church. The physical dimension of the Church remains open to the full hostility of its enemies. This makes martyrdom possible. The body of the Church will not be protected from persecution. However, its mission will be protected. The persecutions to be suffered by the Church will last forty-two months, *“for it has been handed over to the Gentiles, who will crush the holy city for forty-two months”* (Rv.11:2).

THE TWO WITNESSES

The seer mentions the commissioning of two witnesses who will prophesy for those twelve hundred and sixty days, dressed in sackcloth. The two witnesses will not be impeded from prophesying during the three and a half year period. The sackcloth signifies that they will call mankind to repentance. The identity of these two witnesses has caused interpreters much concern. John directs our interpretation by his reference to the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand in the presence of the Lord of the earth. This recalls the vision of Zechariah (see Zech.4:14). In this text the two olive trees are Zerubbabel the anointed king, and Joshua the anointed high priest. In the opening greeting to the Christian Communities, John spoke of the Church as a royal nation of priests (see Rv.1:6). The two witnesses symbolize the Christian people, who are commissioned by Jesus to be His witnesses in this world. Calling them two

olive trees refers to their faith in Christ, as oil gives them eternal life. The reference to the two lampstands verifies their role as the light of the world that cannot be hidden. The numeral 2 is the required biblical number for witnessing (see Dt.19:15). Two symbolizes witness. The fire proceeding from the mouths of the witnesses is the spirit-filled words that place before the consciences of sinners their choice of good or evil. *"Behold, I make my words in your mouth, a fire, and this people is the wood that it shall devour!" (Jer.5:14). "I will give you words and a wisdom which none of your adversaries can take exception to or contradict" (Lk.21:15).*

When the seer speaks of the power of the witnesses to close up the sky, turn water to blood, and afflict the earth with plagues, he is symbolizing that these witnesses come with the rod of Moses and the mantle of Elijah. What the Apocalypse confirms is that the ruling power of Moses and the prophetic power of Elijah now reside in the Church. The seer implies the Church possesses the power, if it so desires, to bring greater afflictions upon the world than Moses did upon Egypt and Elijah upon Israel. However the Church is directed by Jesus in its use of power. The Church has come to bless, not curse, her persecutors. She leaves vengeance to the Lord.

THE BEAST FROM THE ABYSS

Jesus taught that the world would hate the Church just as it had hated Him. Precisely because of its commission of witness in the world it would be persecuted. The seer demonstrates that the hatred experienced by the Church may come through human agents such as Imperial Rome, but the primary source and power of the hatred is a spiritual, satanic force arising out of the Abyss. The wild beast, now rising out of the sea, symbolizes the Antichrist who comes upon the earth in the spirit and power of Satan to war with the Church. The life of the Christian Community will follow the pattern of Christ. The wild beast will wage war against them and kill these witnesses of Christ.

In the ancient world nothing signified the hatred and loathing of a person by a society more powerfully than to leave the body of a dead person unburied. John symbolizes the hatred and ridicule of the world for the Church by saying the bodies of the witnesses lay unburied, and were a cause of relief, gift-giving, and merriment for the entire world. Christian presence is seen as harassment and its removal is a cause for congratulations and celebration. Apparently, so was the death of Jesus for His enemies in the city of Jerusalem.

Just as the city of God is not a geographical place but present wherever the People of God may be, so also the places called Sodom or Egypt are not so much geographical places but mythical images that embody the spirit and power of evil on earth. The actual city of Jerusalem would not be intended here except as a symbol. In the eyes of the seer, Jerusalem has now assumed its place in symbolic history alongside Sodom and Egypt. Sodom had become the symbol of the perversion of natural powers and appetites. Egypt had become the symbol of earthly power in rebellion against divine authority. To this list is now added Jerusalem, which has become the symbol of the evil spirit that rejects divine light.

The great city of the Antichrist possessed the spirits of Sodom, Egypt and Jerusalem. In the mind of John, the city of Rome became a corporate symbol on earth of the great city in which lay the unburied bodies of the saints. The great city encompassed the Roman Empire in which Satan had erected his throne. Rome was then the embodiment of spiritual evil that had been present in past history, and will be a recurring presence in human history.

The seer confirms the resurrection of the saints from the dead and their assumption into heaven at the command of God, "*Come up here!*" The resurrection and the assumption of the just have a profound affect upon the people of the earth. Those who see the resurrection are filled with sheer terror. We are told that a violent earthquake follows the assumption of the saints. As a result of the earthquake, an innumerable number die, symbolized by the words, "*a tenth of the city fell in ruins and seven thousand persons were killed.*" However at this time an even greater number turned to the Lord.

Our seer, through his presentation of the two witnesses, offers a cameo picture of Christian life in its role as witness, its effect of good and evil upon mankind, and its ultimate glorification. This vision intimates that the lives and the deaths of the saints will ultimately cause the salvation of innumerable people. From the picture of salvation painted by John, the winnings of Christ and His Church are greater than their losses. If only a remnant is saved through the Redemption then Satan will be the winner.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

Before the sounding of the seventh trumpet the seer writes, "*The second woe is past, but beware! The third is coming very soon*" (Rv.11:14). The first six trumpets sounded the alarm and called mankind to repentance. The seventh

and final trumpet proclaims the victory of God and the Lamb: the kingdom of the world now belongs to our Lord and to his Anointed One.

The seer has transported us from the present moment in time to the eternal present in which the victory of the Lamb upon earth is declared and celebrated. When this has occurred the earth is submissive to the Lamb; then will the moment to judge the dead begin. The third woe has come, the Day of Final Judgment! The Day upon which the Lord will render to each what has been merited by life upon earth. The Day of Judgment will be *“the time to reward your servants the prophets and the holy ones who revere you, the great and small alike; the time to destroy those who lay the earth waste” (Rv.11:18).*

The seer closes this scene with the heavenly temple opening to reveal the presence of the Ark of his Covenant. The appearance of the Ark in the Temple of Heaven could symbolically represent the presence of God. All humanity stands in the presence of God to be judged. The judgment now falling upon the earth is symbolized by *“flashes of lightning and peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a violent hailstorm.”* The judgment of the world has indeed come!

It is interesting that Luke, in his gospel account, goes to some pains in the infancy narrative to present the Virgin Mary as the New Ark of the Covenant. Since her Son Jesus Christ is God among us, it can be said that, in a sense, every true Christian is an Ark of the New Covenant in this world. The Scriptures have confirmed that when God comes in glory to judge the world, He will come with the angels and saints. The saints will share in this judgment. John would not have been interested in a symbolic representation of the Old Covenant but rather of the New. The Ark of the Covenant appearing in the Temple of Heaven may well represent the appearance of Mary in glory. Certainly Mother Mary's presence, as did her earthly life, will precede and herald the coming of God's children in glory. Mary will lead the procession of submission before the Throne of the Lamb! (see 1Cor.15:27).

THE TWO WITNESSES

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

**“I WILL GIVE YOU WORDS AND A WISDOM WHICH NONE OF YOUR ADVERSARIES CAN TAKE EXCEPTION TO OR CONTRADICT.”
(Luke 21:15)**

**FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; Gn.3:17-19; 6:5-11;
Wis.1:12-16; 2:1-24.**

1. According to the Scriptures, what kind of place should the earth be?
2. What has produced the present situation on earth?
3. What is the relationship of harmony between God and man, and between man and earth?
4. What does this tell you about your relationship with the earth?

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: The Small Scroll; Revelation 10:1-7.

1. What is signified by the angel descending to the earth?
2. What does the position of the angel's feet denote?
3. What does Revelation 10:4 say to you?
4. What is the relationship between the promise (*“no more delay”*) and the seventh trumpet?

THIRD DAY: Read Ezekiel 2:1-10; 3:1-4; Revelation 10:8-10.

1. What does the little scroll symbolize?
2. What is symbolized by the eating of it?
3. Why is it both sweet and sour?

4. What do you learn from this about being a witness?

**FOURTH DAY: Read Summary through The Two Witnesses;
Zechariah 2:5-7;3:1-10; Revelation 11:1-6.**

1. What is symbolized by the temple and the measuring of it?
2. What is the significance of the Outer Court and its not being measured?
3. What is symbolized by the olive trees and the lampstands?
4. What do we learn from the powers possessed by the two witnesses?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: The Beast from the Abyss; Revelation 11:1-13.

1. What is the symbolism of the two witnesses?
2. What does the beast symbolize?
3. How would you describe the great city?
4. What results from fulfilling the role of witness?

**SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: The Seventh Trumpet; Psalm 2;
Revelation 11:14-19.**

1. What lesson do you learn from Psalm 2?
2. What does the seventh trumpet herald?
3. What is the third woe?
4. Why is Mary called the Ark of the Covenant?

CHAPTER 10

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON—SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Insightful students of mankind recognize that certain experiences are universal to the human race. Often supernatural revelation is but an external and heavenly confirmation of humanity's internal and spiritual experience. The world itself, along with the human soul, is a seed bed of religious truths. In the histories of men, it is an expected phenomenon to discover religious truths that have reappeared later within the supernaturally inspired religions of both Judaism and Christianity. The fact that some similarity of Judeo-Christian beliefs existed in the pagan religions ought to be expected and certainly not be something to cause amazement and scandal. Mankind is essentially religious. God has always been a communicating God, revealing Himself through one dimension or another.

In the ancient world the belief widely existed that there would come into the world a savior-king of godlike power. Forces of evil would seek to destroy this savior who would be magically protected from evil. In the end the savior would destroy the forces of evil and there would be harmony and happiness upon earth. Myths teaching these beliefs could be found in India, Asia, and the West. Imperial Rome sought to capitalize upon the Greek version of this myth and rewrote it in its own favor. The goddess Roma, who symbolized the spirit of Rome, surfaces as the mother goddess; her son reappears in the form of the Roman emperors who slay the dragon of evil and bring peace and harmony to all mankind. Pax Romana was recognized as a divine marvel.

In the section that follows, John presents the myth in the light of Christian revelation.

THE TWO CONSTELLATIONS

John beholds two signs or constellations in the sky, a woman and a dragon. The woman and the dragon are not isolated tableaux that can be interpreted apart from the entire presentation. In the first sign, a woman clothed in the sun, crowned with twelve stars and with the moon for her pedestal, appears as the Queen of Heaven. She is primarily a symbol of the People of God. The crown of twelve stars symbolizes both the faithful remnant of Israel and the

twelve apostles, who are the foundation stones of the New Israel. The sun enveloping the woman indicates the divine presence with the People of God. The moon as a pedestal signifies the divine exaltation of the Church. The pains of childbirth recall the suffering endured by the People of God in order to bring forth the Messiah into the world.

The Church beheld Jesus entering into the power of His role only after His death upon the Cross. Perhaps we would not be too far amiss to picture the dragon as standing before the dying Christ ready to devour Him in death. Satan brought Jesus to this hour. Instead of the Savior escaping death as in the legend, He found permanent escape from the dragon through death. In the mind of John, the Church has already triumphed over Satan from the moment He "*who was descended from David according to the flesh ... was made Son of God in power ... by his resurrection from the dead*" (Rm.1:3-4).

John's presentation of Satan displays him in the ancient symbol of evil. *Drakon* means serpent. The vision recalls Daniel's description of the ten-horned beast. It is a presentation of great power. The seven diadems indicate the fullness of his earthly reign. When John mentions that his tail swept a third of the stars from the sky and hurled them down to the earth, he calls to mind the scene in Chapter Eight when one-third of the earth was destroyed. Here John indicates the primary cause of the evil that befalls the earth.

We are told that the woman escaped the dragon by fleeing into the desert. This recalled Israel's escape into the desert from "*Set,*" the red dragon of death in Egypt. For the People of God, the desert became a symbol of that place in which God protected the Church from evil.

The scene that follows, describing Michael fighting the dragon, ought to be seen as occurring simultaneously with the first scene. What happened on earth at the crucifixion of Jesus had an effect simultaneously in heaven. Satan is pictured in the Old Testament as the angelic accuser of the People of God before the throne of God. Michael stands there as the defender. Here it is implied that the accuser is likewise the seducer of God's people. The death of Christ atoned for the sins of the people. Satan no longer has a claim before the throne of God. This truth is symbolized by Satan and his angels being driven from heaven. That the struggle takes place in heaven probably indicates that the defeat of the dragon has come through the glorified Christ.

THE OFFSPRING OF THE WOMAN

A hymn to Christ's triumph may already be sung, for the war, although not over, is won. This hymn celebrates not only the victory of Christ but that of the saints. Here it is made clear how the victory of the saints is made possible; all power and grace flows from the death of Christ. "*They defeated him by the blood of the Lamb*" (Rv.12:11a). However, the death of Christ alone will not bring people to victory and salvation. "*They defeated him ... by the word of their testimony; love for life did not deter them from death*" (Rv.12:11).

John makes a distinction between the Church and its individual members. The Church will be divinely preserved from destruction. This is signified by her being carried on the wings of an eagle to a place of safety. The desert is wherever the power of the great city cannot touch her. There the Church will be nourished by the bread of the Eucharist, as Elijah of old with manna from heaven.

Satan's first efforts were directed against the Church newly born at Pentecost. Against her, he releases floods of evil and rivers of lies. The Church survived the persecution of the Jews, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the internal assaults of false prophets and teachers. Enraged at her escape, the dragon went off to make war on the individual members of the Christian Community, those who keep God's commandments and give witness to Jesus. These are the two characteristics that must be possessed by a person in order to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, and are of concern to Satan.

Satan now turns to powerful external means to destroy the Christian Community. We are told, "*He took up his position by the shore of the sea*" (Rv.12:17). He erects his throne in the city by the sea, which is Rome! From the abyss Satan now summons the beast.

BEAST FROM THE ABYSS

The beast from the abyss bears a striking resemblance to the dragon. It, too, possesses seven heads. This similarity signifies that the beast comes with the power of Satan and acts on earth as his personal representative. To this end "*the dragon gave it his power and throne, together with great authority.*" The beast represents earthly power in full rebellion against divine power. Rome landed on the shores of Ephesus, so in the eyes of the Churches of Asia the

beast indeed came from the sea. The beast from the abyss symbolizes Imperial Rome.

Upon the heads of the beast were blasphemous names. The Roman Senate had declared Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian and Titus as divine beings worthy of worship. At the time of the writing of the Apocalypse, Domitian insisted on being addressed as *Dominus et Deus*, Lord and God.

John observed that one of the heads of the beast had received a mortal blow, but the beast recovered and returned to life. This could be seen as a parody on the death and resurrection of Christ. We mentioned previously that a rumor existed that Nero would return from the dead. Christians saw Nero's return in Domitian. Nero indeed returned in spirit. Until the time of Domitian, emperor worship was left to the spontaneous and grateful response of a people who idealized the peace and security provided by the Roman Empire. Domitian demanded worship and insisted it be enforced. That the Christian Faith came directly under attack of the Roman Government may well be indicated in the statement, "*It began to hurl blasphemies against God, reviling him and the members of his heavenly household as well*" (Rv.13:6).

In the mind of John nothing that was not willed by God occurred in the life of a Christian. Every soul filled with the grace of God would discover the will of God in all that occurred within his life. A Christian willingly embraced the end destined by God as Jesus had embraced the Cross and His crucifixion. So John could write to the Communities, "*If one is destined for captivity, into captivity he goes! If one is destined to be slain by the sword, by the sword he will be slain! Such is the faithful endurance that distinguishes God's holy people*" (Rv.13:10).

BEAST FROM THE LAND

The beast from the abyss is a symbol of a political antichrist. The seer notes that he does not lack assistance from false prophets and messiahs; he will find support in pagan religion. John beholds another beast coming upon the earth. He speaks of it more as a force rather than as a person. It appears as a ram, which is a Christ-like figure. Its dragon-like voice betrays its true origin. The beast will be discernible, not from its appearance, for it comes in sheep's clothing, but by its teachings. For John, this beast may well represent the pagan priesthood of Asia or the Asiarchs, who were civil leaders that

sponsored emperor worship. It is the work of the second beast to promote the cult of the first beast.

The seer presents a picture of a society under the power and control of the beast from the abyss that is greatly aided and abetted by the land beast. We have here a scene of tyrannical political power backed by perverted civil and religious leaders. This results in a police state that easily controls travel, communication, and distribution of food supplies. The seer implies that many Christians may starve because of their refusal to worship the beast.

He speaks of the worshippers of the beast as being marked. The word "marked" could mean "artwork," such as an image of the emperor or an impression made by stamp. There is no evidence that ordinary citizens were ever branded at this time. We do know that at a later date, during the persecution of Decian, a certificate was issued to those who worshipped the emperor. Many scholars agree that it is more in the spirit of the Apocalypse to consider being "marked" as a figurative symbolic expression. We know that those sealed with the divine seal did not actually receive a visible seal upon their forehead. The contents of the Apocalypse direct us in identifying the mark of the beast. It is as spiritual as is the seal of the living God. The mark of the beast is permanent impenitence. It is those who *"did not give up the worship of demons... Neither did they repent of their murders, or their sorcery, their fornication or their thefts"* (Rv.9:20b-21). Those marked upon the forehead are those who knowingly reject Jesus Christ, His Church, and Christian principles. Those marked upon their right hands are those who actively attack Christ and His Church: the persecutors, the false prophets, and lying teachers--the Jezebels. The mark of the beast is found in Genesis; it is the mark of Cain.

The beast from the abyss is an antichrist figure. When the vision is reflected against the vision of Daniel, the beast seems more to be the Roman Empire than a solitary person. The only problem with this interpretation is that the seer implies the beast is a particular person knowable to his readers. He named the man through what is known as the *gematria* method. In both Hebrew and Greek the letters of the alphabet were used as numerals. Because of this double function names were converted into numbers and numbers into names. Every sum has a correct number but the same number can be the answer to many sums. Many persons can end up with the same number. In the mind of John, the number 666 signified complete imperfection--evil. He wrote, *"The man's number is six hundred sixty-six"* (Rv.13:18). Within a

century after the writing of the Apocalypse, the precise figure was questioned. Was it 666 or 616?

If the identity of the person was known in the First Century, it was forgotten by the Second Century. Most reputable scholars agree that if it represents a particular person, this person ought to be sought among the candidates of the First Century. The most obvious hypothesis has been that the number can be identified with Nero, not in the Greek however, but in the Hebrew. "*Neron Kaisar*," transliterated into Hebrew produces 666. It is interesting that the only scripture quote in the entire New Testament carrying this enumeration is John 6:66, which refers to those who rejected Christ because of the doctrine of the Eucharist. "*From this time on, many of his disciples broke away and would not remain in his company any longer*" (Jn.6:66).

It has been theorized that John saw Nero as the prototype of the antichrist, and Domitian as the resurrected spirit of Nero. The beast did not die with Nero; he lived on to reappear in Domitian who resumed Nero's policy of persecution and surpassed him in his blasphemies against God and the members of his heavenly household.

THE 144,000

John knew that Christians under pressure from the world are going to be tempted to abandon Christ. He seeks to aid Christians to see life on earth from its spiritual dimension. He unmasks the seductions of this world for what they are--the smoke of Satan. He teaches that life cannot be lived for the moment only. Every moment in time has its eternal consequence. He now seeks to encourage Christian commitment to Christ and warns of the consequences of abandoning the Lord for the beast.

We read, "*The dragon took his stand by the shore of the sea.*" There he established his throne on earth. His kingdom upon earth rests upon sand and cannot stand. In a vision of contrast, the Lamb appeared before the seer standing upon Mt. Zion. Here He erects His throne; it is built upon rock and will endure. The Lamb appears in the vision with 144,000 of the redeemed. From chapter three we know who they are--those who, while on earth, held fast to His word and did not deny His name. They represent all those who had been ransomed from the world by the blood of the Lamb. They represent the saved. They are the first fruits of mankind for God and the Lamb. The first fruits represent the full harvest that is yet to come. Speaking of them as

virgins signifies the purity of their religious spirit. In the Scriptures, fornication or adultery often stood for idolatry. These virgins were those not seduced to lewdness by Jezebel, that self-styled prophetess. They *“have not soiled their garments” (Rv.3:4b), “On their lips no deceit has been found.” (Rv.14:5a)*. They have lived the truth!

TIME OF JUDGMENT

John now presents a series of angels sent forth from heaven heralding the hour of judgment. The first angel appears in the zenith of the heavens declaring the eternal gospel to all mankind. He represents the spirit of God that constantly reveals itself to all mankind within the depths of his spirit and in the surrounding universe. This constant presence of God is an eternal gospel, for it constantly calls all mankind to repentance.

A second angel appears and proclaims the end of the kingdom built upon sand, *“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, which made all the nations drink the poisoned wine of her lewdness!” (Rv.14:8)*. The third angel picks up the theme of the poisoned wine and declares that those who willingly drank from this cup of poison have drunk unto themselves the Wrath of God, a wrath that expresses the eternal justice of God. The seer presents a terrible picture in full apocalyptic horror. It certainly is an effort to impress upon his readers the dreadful consequences of a godless life, and the terrible results of rejecting the redemptive love of God. The thought of hell keeps many out of hell, but it is indeed love that saves the majority. Never to see His face is more than most could bear. The whole world isn't worth that price!

The scene that now follows is the *parousia*--Jesus Christ coming in glory. It is heaven's harvest time on earth. The moment for this is an eternal divine moment decreed by God and executed by Christ. Paul once wrote that love endures forever. We see love still enduring in eternity in the obedience of Christ to the command of the Father. Christ gathers in the harvest only at the command of the Lord of the harvest. First the wheat is gathered into the barn, the Elect are gathered to God by Jesus Christ. *“Those who have died in Christ will rise first. Then we, the living, the survivors, will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thenceforth we shall be with the Lord unceasingly. Console one another with this message” (1Thes.4:16-18)*. This will be the moment when the two witnesses hear, *“Come up here!” So they went up to heaven in a cloud as their enemies looked on” (Rv.11:12)*.

The Lord Himself only gathers the elect. It is the angels that minister the final judgment upon those who rejected God and His Christ. Those who refused to enter the Holy City now perish outside the city. As we read in Matthew, *“The harvest is the end of the world, while the harvesters are the angels... The Son of Man will dispatch his angels to collect from his kingdom all who draw others to apostasy, and all evil-doers. The angels will hurl them into the fiery furnace where they will wail and grind their teeth. Then the saints will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom. Let everyone heed what he hears!”* (Mt.13:39f).

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

SCRIPTURE READING AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

“HAPPY NOW ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD!’ THE SPIRIT ADDED, ‘YES, THEY SHALL FIND REST FROM THEIR LABORS, FOR THEIR GOOD WORKS ACCOMPANY THEM.’” (Revelation 14:13)

**FIRST DAY: Read Summary through The Two Constellations;
Revelation 12:1-11.**

- 1. Why is it possible to discover true revelations in religious myths?**
- 2. What is symbolized by the woman in labor pains?**
- 3. What does the dragon symbolize in relationship to the Church?**
- 4. What does Revelation 12:11 teach you?**

**SECOND DAY: Read Summary: The Offspring of the Woman;
Revelation 12:12-17.**

- 1. What does Revelation 12:12 teach you?**
- 2. What is the distinction being made between the Church and individual members of the Church?**
- 3. What does this tell you about your membership in the Church?**
- 4. What means did Satan first use to destroy the Church?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: Beast from the Abyss; Revelation 13:1-10.

- 1. What means does Satan turn to in order to destroy the Church?**
- 2. What does the beast from the abyss signify?**

3. What will be the end goal of the beast?

4. What does John express in Revelation 13:10?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: Beast from the Land; Revelation 13:11-18.

1. What does the beast from the land signify?

2. How will this beast aid the first beast?

3. What do you think is the mark of the beast?

4. How would you interpret Revelation 13:18?

**FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: The 144,000; Revelation 14:1-8;
Romans 2:12-16.**

1. Who are the 144,000 who stand with the Lamb?

2. What is meant by their being virgins?

3. How would you interpret the everlasting good news?

4. What does this and Romans teach you about salvation?

**SIXTH DAY: Read Summary: Time of Judgment; Revelation 14:9-20;
1Thes.1:3-9, Matthew 13:36-43.**

1. What does Revelation 14:12 say to you?

2. What does Revelation 14:13 teach you about your Christian life?

3. What is the relationship between the reading in 1Thessalonians and Revelation 14:14-16?

4. What do the readings from Matthew 13:39b and Revelation 14:17-20 teach you?

CHAPTER 11

WORLD WITHOUT CHRIST—SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

A certain black lady in Alabama was famous for her ability to teach children. When asked her method she replied, *“Well, I tell them what I’m going to tell them. Then, I tell them. And then, I tell them what I told them.”* Her method has much in common with the author of the Apocalypse. John’s method is similar. For the third time, John begins his message. He pauses before he enumerates the final plagues that will bring the wrath of God to consummation. He presents a scene that will recall Israel’s exodus from Egypt through the Red Sea and their escape from Pharaoh’s army. He seeks to contrast the escape of Israel from Egypt with the escape of the Christian martyrs from the beast. They, too, have passed through the Red Sea of martyrdom that has led them safely into the Promised Land of God’s eternal presence. There with the Song of Moses upon their lips, they attribute their escape and glory to God and the Lamb.

In recalling the Song of Moses, John prepares his listeners for what must follow. The song emphasizes the justice and righteousness of God, particularly in His relationship with unrepentant sinners, *“How faultless are his deeds, how right all his ways!”* (Dt.32:4).

In his vision, John sees the saints standing upon a fiery sea of glass that represents their martyrdom and the wrath of God that falls upon the peoples of the earth precisely because of that martyrdom. John emphasizes that the plagues about to fall upon mankind are decreed by God; no power, either in heaven or earth, can alter what must come to pass.

Within this vision, one of the four living creatures as a representative of nature presents seven bowls of divine wrath to seven angels. Once again we are told of the relationship between moral disorder and cosmic disturbances. God uses natural disasters to remind mankind of its sinfulness and to call them to repentance. He uses disasters to warn, through limited evil, what will be the ultimate eternal disaster to fall upon those who fail to repent. We read in Wisdom, *“You sent upon them swarms of dumb creatures for vengeance; that they might recognize that a man is punished by the very things through which he sins”* (Wis.11:15c-16).

SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH

At the command of God, seven angels go forth to afflict the earth. The purpose of these afflictions is to bring about an end of a world, a world that never existed before or since. All the kingdoms before were but shadows of what now has come to be--Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, Nineveh. By a presentation in miniature, their final destinies foretell the final end of the world created by the beast from the abyss.

The first bowl of wrath afflicts the subjects of the beast. The vision speaks of severe and festering boils. Such a symbol represents internal corruption that rises to the surface in social disorders and evils. The blood stream of the spirit has become poisonous, and it cannot but erupt in corrupt deeds and behavior, affecting the entire communal body.

The second and the third bowls of wrath turn the sea and the waters of the land into blood. Blood symbolizes the source of life, to spill it implies death. We have a symbol that speaks here of death coming by both land and sea. The death of all life in the sea could signify the end of commerce, the lifeline of the empire. At any rate, the death that comes avenges the death of the Christian martyrs. The seer signifies the justice of such vengeance by putting a hymn of praise to divine justice into the mouth of an angel--a hymn to which the voices of the martyrs added their Amen!

The fourth bowl of wrath speaks of scorching heat. The intense heat becomes a symbol that calls to mind the burdensomeness of life itself. One eats one's bread by the sweat of one's brow. Life now produces more pain than pleasure. It recalls the scorpion's sting that causes men to seek death, but not finding it "*they will yearn to die but death will escape them*" (Rv.9:6). Because human life becomes burdensome, men blaspheme God. They blame God for their unhappy situation and for the present state of social affairs. They never reflect upon what is the root cause of these afflictions that God permits: their unrepented sins!

The last three bowls of wrath fall upon the government itself. Darkness falls upon the throne; its power is eclipsed. It is no longer a source of awe and admiration. It offers no security, and becomes a cause of despair and desolation. The sixth bowl of wrath foretells the wars that will completely destroy the empire. The forces coming from the East symbolize the coming barbarians. The great river Euphrates dries up, signifying that the same

divine power that once dried up the path in the Red Sea is operative here.

The Apocalypse presents a picture of the unholy trinity: the dragon is Satan, the evil father that produces his son the Beast, and the False Prophet who gives expression to their mutually unclean spirits. They are three poisonous springs but one source of corruption. The Apocalypse speaks of them as three unclean spirits, like frogs. These lying, deceiving spirits gather the forces of the empire for battle on the great day of God Almighty.

We are told the devil assembles the kings of the earth for battle at Armageddon. The place or name itself became a symbol of where good and evil encounter one another in lethal battle. Armageddon is wherever the forces of good and evil meet for battle. In the mind of the seer, Armageddon may have been before the gates of the great city.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the empty air, signifying the defeat of Satan. The air beneath the firmament was considered Satan's dominion; he has been cast down. A series of cosmic disturbances follow. So great was the violence that it surpassed anything of the past. It signified the end of the great city; the great city, which was split into three parts. Other Gentile cities also fell. The house has been divided and it cannot stand.

SOUL OF BABYLON

The scene changes. The seventh angel, who is a symbol of spiritual discernment, comes to the seer to open his eyes so that he can see the soul of Babylon. The seer beholds a woman upon a scarlet beast that is all covered with blasphemous names. The scarlet beast represents the satanic power of her reign. One is the extension of the other. The woman and the beast are one and the same. Being covered with blasphemous names signifies being totally and completely given over to idolatry. The beast is described as having seven heads and ten horns. A symbol in the Apocalypse can have dual meanings. These seven heads are doubly symbolic in that they represent the seven hills upon which the woman sits enthroned, as well as the kings that rule her.

The surface appearance of the woman is dazzling. She is clothed in the richest of garments and is adorned with the finest of jewels. In her hand she holds a golden cup. However, appearances deceive. Inside the cup, hidden from view, is the wine of her spirit. The woman herself is like her golden cup, for the cup holds evil. When one looks beneath the exterior beauty of the woman, one

discovers the abominable and sordid deeds of her lewdness. "*On her forehead was written a symbolic name, 'Babylon the great, mother of harlots and all the world's abominations' (Rv.17:5).* Her name is a mystery--it is the mystery of lawlessness. Her children are as evil as she who is a curse upon the entire earth. She is a drunken harlot inebriated on the blood of God's holy ones.

John becomes dazzled by the woman. This implies her seductive force. Members of the Christian Community without the spirit of discernment will be deceived by her external beauty. Already many members of the Church have been seduced by the glamour of Jezebel, and the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

THE RIDDLE

The seventh angel explains the vision to the seer. He is told that the beast once existed, but does no longer. However, the beast will return once more from the abyss before going to final ruin. The angel proposes a riddle concerning the seven kings:

Five have already fallen, one lives now, and the last has not yet come; but when he does come he will remain only a short while. The beast which existed once but now exists no longer, even though it is an eighth king, is really one of the seven and is on its way to ruin (Rv.17:10-11).

The riddle remains a riddle if one demands a solution without a doubt. It is generally agreed that John speaks of Domitian as the present incarnation of the beast. It is suggested that the seer wrote from the standpoint of being in the reign of Vespasian, the first ruler to stabilize the government after the death of Nero. This would fix the five emperors who have fallen to be Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. The emperor mentioned as living would be Vespasian. The seventh, the one to come, would be Titus, who reigned only a little more than a year. This brings Domitian to the throne--the reincarnation of Nero.

The angel reveals that the allies of the harlot will turn in hatred against her and become God's means to destroy her. The description of her death describes the death of a harlot as prescribed in Leviticus 21:9. The seer hears that the alliance with the ten kings and their rebellion has been part of God's design to destroy the woman. Evil is destructive of itself, and becomes the

instrument of its own torture and defeat.

The angel of discernment concludes by identifying the woman enthroned upon the seven hills with seven kings. *“The woman you saw is the great city which has sovereignty over the kings of the earth” (Rv.17:18)*. The great city is the Roman Empire!

LAMENTATIONS

John never describes directly the fall of Rome. Much as a writer of a Greek tragedy would use a chorus to relate details of his tale, John uses a series of lamentations to express the world-shaking event of the collapse of a world empire. An angel announces that Babylon has fallen through the power of God. She falls as a result of total spiritual corruption; she had become a home of demons, a cage to catch and house every unclean spirit. None could be her partner without being corrupted by her. She corrupted the nations of the world.

A voice from heaven urges the People of God to dissociate themselves from her or else become caught up in her corruptive web and suffer her plagues. Most scholars agree this is not an admonition to physically depart from the Roman Empire, but to avoid becoming part of her spirit. It is not so much a matter of the spirit and the flesh as it is spirit versus spirit. It is the old business of not being able to serve two masters, especially when one is Christ and the other Satan. You must indeed end by loving one and hating the other. We do not have here a condemnation of God’s creation, but of the works of darkness that pervert the good of this world.

The seer records the laments of Babylon’s lovers, who were the kings of the earth, the merchants of the world, the sailors, and the ship-owners. It is intimated that through the fall and destruction of the Empire many will be brought to repentance and salvation. The reason Babylon must fall is because she has become a stumbling block in the way of Christ and His Church.

The businessmen of the world, the ship-owners, and seamen will bitterly lament her fall because they had catered to her extravagance and desire for luxuries. They stripped the world of its good to glut her appetite for dainties and to increase their own personal wealth. They eagerly bartered their souls to obtain her gold. They massed their wealth upon the backs of slaves. Everything of value upon the face of the earth became grist in the mills of

financial profit. In their priorities of valuable commodities to be bartered and sold, the least of all were slaves and human lives. Human beings fall to the bottom of the list of valuables, although just one of them is more valuable than an entire world. For them, Christ died upon the Cross. Such is the evaluation in a world without Christ.

John writes that those who grew rich from business with Babylon keep their distance for fear of the same punishment that has been inflicted upon her. They weep and mourn for their lost profits and for the way of life to which they had grown accustomed. Captains, navigators, sailors, and ship-owners join in the lament of the merchants, for their own selfish profits have ended. They pour dust on their heads, and weep and mourn aloud. A world has truly come to an end and all who were a vital part of that world suffer their own personal loss. *“Man is punished by the very things through which he sins” (Wis.11:16).*

Did John see the destruction of Rome as the end of the world? It certainly ended a world. The end of Rome, as described by John, certainly symbolizes the End of the World for us who have lived after the fall of Rome. We are left with a symbol far better than that of Egypt and Babylon. John will go on to show that, be it a society or a person, whoever refuses to repent in the face of God’s patience and limited chastisements, opting instead for hardness of heart, will experience the unmitigated justice of God. Unrepentance leaves no other door open for the goodness of God to be expressed on earth. *“Ask and you shall receive!”*

As the world laments, heaven rejoices because God’s justice has been vindicated. The fall of Rome results from God’s avenging the death of his saints. *“Rejoice over her, you heavens, you saints, apostles and prophets! For God has exacted punishment from her on your account” (Rv.18:20).* Babylon has fallen, never to rise again. With her sorcery she had led the world astray. She became a scandal to all human life. *“Her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God keeps count of her crimes” (Rv.18:5).* *“In her was found the blood of prophets and saints and of all who were slain on the earth” (Rv.18:24).* This blood has fallen upon her head. Judgment has come and God pays her double for her deeds! He pours into her cup twice the amount she concocted!

Moses and Joshua had sung: *“Oh, proclaim the greatness of our God! The Rock--how faultless are his deeds, how right all his ways! A faithful God, without deceit, how just and upright he is!” (Dt.32:3-4).* Therefore, it is not

surprising that John now writes, *“After this I heard what sounded like the loud song of a great assembly in heaven. They were singing: ‘Alleluia! Salvation, glory and might belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just’”* (Rv.19:1-2a). Thus was heaven’s judgment on God’s destruction of the new Babylon.

Paul once wrote, *“How inscrutable his judgments, how unsearchable his ways!”* (Rom.11:33). The Apocalypse reveals that by means of it all *“his bride has prepared herself for the wedding”* (Rv.19:7). The wedding day of the Lamb approaches. *“Happy are they who have been invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb!”* (Rv.19:9).

WORLD WITHOUT CHRIST

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

**“OH, PROCLAIM THE GREATNESS OF OUR GOD! THE ROCK--HOW FAULTLESS ARE HIS DEEDS, HOW RIGHT ALL HIS WAYS!”
(Deuteronomy 32:3-4)**

**FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction; Deuteronomy 32:1-43;
Revelation 15:1-8.**

- 1. What lesson do you get from reading the Song of Moses?**
- 2. In what way do the seven bowls of wrath differ from the plagues of the seals and trumpets?**
- 3. What is symbolized by the sea of glass mingled with fire?**
- 4. What is signified by one of the four creatures giving the seven angels the seven bowls?**

SECOND DAY: Read Summary: Seven Bowls of Wrath; Revelation 16:1-21.

- 1. What is symbolized by the first three bowls of wrath?**
- 2. What do you learn from Revelation 16:5-7?**
- 3. What does the unholy trinity have in common?**
- 4. What is symbolized by the seventh bowl of wrath?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary through The Riddle; Revelation 17:1-18.

- 1. What is signified by John's being greatly astonished by the vision of the woman and the beast?**
- 2. What danger facing the Church is being intimated here?**

3. What is symbolized by the woman upon the beast?
4. How would you explain the riddle of Revelation 17:9-11?

FOURTH DAY: Read Summary: Lamentations; Revelation 18:1-8.

1. In what way does John relate the fall of Rome?
2. What was the true spiritual condition of the Roman Empire?
3. What do you understand by Revelation 18:4?
4. What is being implied by the expression, "*I sit enthroned as a queen*"?

FIFTH DAY: Read Revelation 18:9-24.

1. How would you describe the sin of the kings with Babylon?
2. How would you describe the sin of the merchants and seafaring people?
3. In what way does the fall of Babylon aid the salvation of others?
4. What is the example for our own society in this lesson?

SIXTH DAY: Read Revelation 19:1-10.

1. In what way does the destruction of the new Babylon demonstrate the goodness of God?
2. In what way did the new Babylon impede the coming of God's Kingdom?
3. From the point of view of heaven, what have these tragedies made possible?
4. What do you understand about your wedding garment? How is it fashioned?

CHAPTER 12

CITY OF GOD—SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

As we approach the end of our study of the Apocalypse, it would be in order to recall the final warning of its author, "*If anyone adds to these words, God will visit him with all the plagues described herein! If anyone takes from the words of this prophetic book, God will take away his share in the tree of life and the holy city described here!*" (Rv.22:18-19). The author warns interpreters not to tamper with his work. One does so at the risk of one's own spiritual peril. Neither should one encourage a superficial or careless interpretation of the text. In our presentation of the Apocalypse, we have studiously and prayerfully, in keeping with the time and ability allotted to us, adhered to the principles and guidelines laid down by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, which are:

1. The interpreter of sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writer really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.
2. Those who search out the intention of the sacred writers must, among other things, have regard for literary forms. For truth is proposed and expressed in a variety of ways, depending on whether a text is history of one kind or another or whether its form is that of prophecy, poetry, or some other type of speech.
3. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of perceiving, speaking, and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer ...
4. Since holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly brought to light. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of

exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of sacred Scripture so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature.

5. Interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God (Revelations III, 12).

These principles have directed this study. Every written word of it remains humbly submissive to the teaching authority of the Church, as does its author. It has become obvious that many popular interpretations of the Apocalypse have violated all the common sense principles laid down for its proper interpretation. These do violence to the text and the intentions of the author.

Some modern interpreters reduce the Apocalypse to a biblical crystal ball in which seers divine their own fantasies and pass off their apocalyptic daydreams as inspired revelations. It cannot be said too forcefully--he who drinks from every spring will sooner or later be poisoned!

To reject the guidance and authority of the Catholic Church in the interpretation of the sacred Scriptures is to leave the protected sanctuary in order to live in the outer court of the temple, which has been handed over to the Gentiles. Those who through pride of mind reject the teaching authority of the Church expose their souls to false prophets and messiahs, who will indeed appear before their eyes as angels of light. Their pride leads them to discern their own spirit. This leaves them prey to the noonday devil.

Regardless of their external display of Christian morality, many Catholics have become spiritually perverted and corrupted. The perversion of their religious spirit becomes evident in their detestation of the Catholic Church and their blasphemous attacks upon Catholic doctrines. A sure test of this evil spirit is that no one can convict them of sin on this level. (Rarely on any level!) Pride of mind leads to hardness of heart, and herein lies spiritual ruin. Spiritual salvation lies in humility of the heart. *"Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart."* Without that primary grace the light of truth presented for their consideration only succeeds in increasing the hardness of heart. They have ears and they hear not! If one desires to cast out a demon, the demon must first be named!

The Apocalypse, regardless of its apocalyptic style and method, was addressed to the Church of its time. It interpreted the time of persecution and revealed the end results of this persecution, both for the Church and for Imperial Rome. A scholarly and sincere study of the Apocalypse indicates that over nine-tenths of its contents were fulfilled within the history of the early life of the Christian Church. Apparently, the Apocalypse does deal with the distant future, but we need to keep the nine-tenths of the material which "*must happen very soon*" (Rv.1:1) distinct from those things that will happen in the far distant future. To take the material already fulfilled and project its fulfillment into the distant future violates the text and the intention of the author. That distant future is the here and now. Projecting material into our present certainly adds what was not intended by the author.

THE WARRIOR OF HEAVEN

Early on, John wrote of seeing an open door to heaven, but now he beholds the heavens open; gone are the walls and doors. One magnificent solitary figure upon a white horse appears in the open heavens. The vision comes forth as a victor from battle. Justice was the standard under which the Warrior fought. The Rider is living proof that God keeps His Word.

The seer's description leaves no doubt in the mind of his listeners that the vision is "*Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead and ruler of the kings of earth*" (Rv.1:5). Many crowns rest upon the head of Jesus. These are not crowns of victory (*stephanos*) but diadems of princely power and authority. The true nature of the Rider cannot be fathomed by any human being. John intimates the divinity of Jesus by writing, "*Inscribed on his person (not on his cloak) was a name known to no one but himself.*" John does not clarify, but deepens the mystery when he adds, "*His name was the Word of God.*" To know the name of Jesus or to comprehend His nature would be equivalent to knowing the mind of God.

Even though Jesus may appear as a warrior spattered with the blood of battle, we are told that truth was the sword that slew the enemies, "*Out of his mouth came a sharp sword for striking down the nation.*" This may well symbolize the power of the Gospel to convert the nations. The true revelation of Jesus Christ will destroy the enemy.

DEFEAT OF EVIL

To war against Jesus Christ implies certain defeat regardless of what may appear on the surface of temporary success. This our seer teaches in a symbolic scene of birds and beasts feasting upon the enemies of Christ, which some interpreters see as a ghoulish contrast to the wedding feast of the Lamb. It becomes the feast of the birds and beasts upon the enemies of Christ. The final victory is achieved by the very presence of Christ and His saints on earth. Truth refuses to be eclipsed by darkness. Goodness refuses to be overcome by evil!

The seer makes a distinction between the final end of the beast and the false prophet, and that of the other members of Satan's army. The final hour of judgment has not come. The slain await as ghostly beings in Sheol for their final sentencing. However, the beast and the false prophet are hurled alive into the lake of fire. Some interpret the lake of fire to be a symbol of complete annihilation.

The victory is not yet complete. Satan still exists upon earth. John now deals with Satan's immediate destiny and its effect upon the earth. The Apocalypse relates that evil ended on earth with Satan's excommunication from the earth. For some authors the mystery of Satan is deeply related to the mystery of the human will. John speaks of Satan's removal from earth in order to protect the nations from his influence. His removal removes the great obstacle to the acceptance of the Gospel and the establishment of the Church on earth.

THE MILLENNIUM

John beholds a vision of an unnumbered amount of persons seated upon thrones of judgment. The place of the thrones is not specified. John immediately speaks of the resurrection of the saints who shall reign with Christ. The text seems to imply two distinct groups of saints. Of primary importance are those who have been martyred, "*who have been beheaded.*" Secondarily are those later referred to in the Church as confessors--men and women whose lives gave heroic witness to Christ even though they never suffered physical martyrdom. John speaks of these souls as sharing in the first resurrection. There is no other reference in the Sacred Scriptures to a first and second resurrection. Most reputable scholars agree that the first resurrection is to be taken symbolically. It is intended to distinguish the quality of life enjoyed by those who died in Jesus Christ from the other

inhabitants of the earth who have died. It confirms that while still in this purely spiritual state they enjoy the presence of God. They have entered into their eternal reward, which cannot be altered by the resurrection of the body or by the Final Judgment. They presently reign with Christ and serve as priests both before God and before Jesus Christ. This vision certainly negates the belief of those who deny the power of the saints, both in heaven and on earth.

Mentioning that the saints will reign with Christ for a thousand years brings before us for consideration the question of the millennium. The general doctrine of the millennium is that Jesus Christ will return to earth in His glorified flesh, and here He will reign with His saints for a thousand years. Many teach that the rapture spoken of by Paul in Thessalonians will occur first and be followed by the millennium after the tribulations have ended. It should be noted that Paul makes no mention of any thousand years but only that *"we shall be with the Lord unceasingly"* (1Thes.4:17).

The belief in the millennium is of Jewish origin. It originated by combining the seven days of creation mentioned in Genesis 2:2 with the expression in Psalm 90:4 that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years. From this combination, it was deduced that creation would consist of seven thousand years. It was believed that the sixth millennium was subjected to the reign of Satan. This would come to an end with the Sabbath millennium, which would be a time of rest called the Messianic millennium. This was to be followed by the eighth millennium, which would bring into being the timeless new world. It is the seventh millennium that has stirred the imaginations of men and fostered heresy in the Church. Both St. Justin and St. Irenaeus expressed belief in it. Papias, in the second century, taught an exaggerated doctrine that St. Eusebius attributed to Papias' lack of intelligence.

It was St. Augustine who ended belief in the millennium in the Catholic Church. Augustine saw it as the period between the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and the Second Coming. To him the first resurrection was the life of sanctifying grace received at baptism. He beheld the Church on earth as supplanting the Roman Empire. For Augustine, the thrones of judgment were the Sees of the Catholic Bishops who possessed the power of Christ on earth to bind and loose. Augustine's teachings were the death of any belief in a physical millennium. The Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. condemned the doctrine of millenniumism as being a fable and a deviation from true Christian doctrine. History has seen its reoccurrence within the Church. In

1944, the Holy See issued a decree forbidding the teaching of this doctrine in the Catholic Church (Acta Apostolicae Sedis--36--July 21, 1944). Therefore, the Catholic Church does not teach and actually forbids the teaching of any doctrine that claims that Jesus will physically return to this earth and reign with the saints for a limited time before the Final Judgment. It is a doctrine held today by the Mormons, the Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and certain Evangelical Pentecostals.

These Scriptures certainly emphasize that the saints, particularly the martyrs, exercise authority with Christ on earth and they shall serve God and Christ as priests, which implies a role of intercession both before the Father and before Christ. Apparently, John does not see the saints' participation in the reign of Christ and the exercising of their roles as priests as threatening or detracting from the role of Christ as intercessor before the Father. The Scriptures make it clear that God gives power to whomever He wills. Apparently, He wills to grant power on earth and in heaven to the saints. The teaching of Jesus recorded in Matthew implies that those who have been faithful over the little matters on earth will be placed over much in heaven, "*Since you were dependable in a small matter I will put you in charge of larger affairs. Come, share your master's joy!*" (Mt. 25:21). It is strange that the Catholic doctrine of the intercessory power of the saints, and particularly of Mary His Mother who at Calvary became the Queen of Martyrs, causes so many false prophets and teachers to grit their teeth!

THE END OF SATAN

John now relates the release of Satan from the abyss and records his final end. Once freed, Satan assumes his same activity for the same deep hatred still consumes him. Satan's release and return to earth is part of the inscrutable plan of God. God has willed his activity to be. Once again great forces of evil will be released and nations again will be possessed by Satan. The forces of Satan will direct one final attack upon the beloved city, the Church of Christ on earth. The end of these forces of evil indicates God's dramatic intervention in order to save the Church. The end of evil upon earth has come. It is the final end of Satan who goes to join the beast and the false prophet in the lake of fire--not to the abyss. The unholy trinity is forever united there in the lake of fire, which symbolizes eternal death. The final excommunication of Satan from the earth removes the last obstacle to the establishment of God's kingdom upon earth. The prelude to God's reign on earth will be the Final Judgment of mankind.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

The seer beheld the throne of universal judgment upon which was seated the one God. There is a general resurrection from the dead; the sea and Hades give up their dead. All the dead will rise in their bodies. Paul had taught that we will all indeed rise but we will not all be changed. There is mention of the scrolls and the Book of the Living; but there is a distinction between the two. It is implied that the saints do not rise; they have already risen to life with Christ. They are not spoken of as being among the dead.

Apparently, according to John those inscribed in the Book of the Living are not judged. Their names in the Book of the Living testify that they are living citizens of God's kingdom. The judgment of the dead is quite mysterious. Their names are not written in the Book of the Living but there seems to be no automatic condemnation. They are judged on the grounds of their conduct and deeds while on earth. They are being weighed in the balance. There is certainly the possibility that they will be judged worthy to have their names inscribed in the Book of the Living. When the judgment is completed those whose names were not found in the Book of the Living will be hurled into the pool of fire.

When the author speaks of death and of Hades as being thrown into the pool of fire, he signifies the end of mortality--the end of death. After the resurrection all men will be immortal, even the damned. Perhaps it is of these that John wrote, "*Men will seek death but will not find it; they will yearn to die but death will escape them*" (Revelation 9:6).

NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH

John writes that when God comes in judgment the earth and the sky flee from his presence until they can no longer be seen. This flight signifies that nothing impure can remain in the presence of God. It has generally been interpreted that the fleeing of the heavens and earth symbolize their destruction in order to make way for a new heaven on earth.

The highlight of the Apocalypse is the presentation of the new heavens and earth that God has prepared for those who love Him. The old is no longer a suitable environment for God's people; too much blood has been shed upon it and too many tears have fallen on it. It must pass away. To say the sea will be no more signifies an end to chaotic and violent forces within creation. There

will no longer be a cause for pain and death, no reason for tears. The intimacy with God enjoyed in the Garden of Eden, the awareness of God's presence experienced by Israel in its desert sojourn, will be experienced forever by all God's people.

God speaks only once in the Apocalypse. He declares He will make all things new! He gives His word that everything described will come to be. To everyone He holds out the offer of eternal life, "*To anyone who thirsts I will give to drink without cost from the spring of life-giving water*" (Rv.21:6). God now confirms, "*He who wins the victory shall inherit these gifts*" (Rv.21:7).

CITY OF GOD

John goes on to recount a vision which essentially recalls the vision in chapter 17. It is his intention to contrast the city of Babylon, in which the members of the Church must now dwell, with the heavenly Jerusalem to which they are called and which they will enter if they prove faithful. To describe this city John borrows from other apocalyptic literature, particularly the last chapters of Ezekiel. What John impossibly seeks to describe through his imagery is the effect of God's presence within creation. It is as if one sought to describe the difference between a world in darkness and a world radiant with the light of the sun. The presence of God in the City of God is like the presence of the sun--it changes everything without being changed itself and without changing anything into itself. Here there is no temple for the presence of God and the Lamb completely permeates the city.

John describes the City of God as a source of Divine life. Here are the rivers of life-giving waters and trees with fruit to nourish immortal life. Here there is no one tree of life as in the Garden of Eden. The City of God contains many trees for it offers a plentitude of life to all its inhabitants. In my Father's house there are many mansions. I am going to prepare a place for you!

The revelations of the Book of the Apocalypse come to an end. The book is consummated in the vision of the city of God--the heavenly Jerusalem. "*Happy are they who wash their robes so as to have free access to the tree of life and enter the city through its gates!*" (Revelation 22:14).

CITY OF GOD

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

“HAPPY ARE THEY WHO WASH THEIR ROBES SO AS TO HAVE FREE ACCESS TO THE TREE OF LIFE AND ENTER THE CITY THROUGH ITS GATES.” (Revelation 22:14)

FIRST DAY: Read Summary: Introduction.

- 1. What does Revelation 22:18-19 teach you?**
- 2. What do these principles of biblical interpretation teach you about the study of the Scriptures?**
- 3. How do people today violate these principles in their interpretation of Revelation?**
- 4. What danger does a Catholic face when he rejects the teaching authority of the Church?**

**SECOND DAY: Read Summary through Defeat of Evil; Rv. 19:11-21;
Is. 63:1-3.**

- 1. What do you think is signified by the rider in the open heavens?**
- 2. What is implied by the rider having a name known to no one but himself?**
- 3. What do you think is signified by a cloak dipped in blood?**
- 4. How is evil defeated?**

THIRD DAY: Read Summary: The Millennium; Rv. 20:1-10; Ez. 38:1-39:5.

- 1. What should we understand by the first resurrection?**
- 2. What do you understand by the Millennium?**

3. What is the Catholic teaching on the Millennium?

4. What do we learn about the last days from these readings?

**FOURTH DAY: Read Summary through New Heavens and a New Earth;
Rv. 20:11-21:8.**

1. What distinction is made here between the saints and the dead?

2. How will their judgment differ?

3. Who will be admitted and who will be rejected from the new Jerusalem?

4. What does “See, I make all things new!” mean to you?

FIFTH DAY: Read Summary: City of God; Revelation 21:9-27.

1. With what is this vision being contrasted?

2. How do you understand the woman who is the bride of the Lamb?

3. What does the seer seek to teach with this rich imagery?

4. Why is there no temple in the City of God?

SIXTH DAY: Read Revelation 22:1-21.

1. What do many trees of life symbolize for you?

2. What has been the main prophetic message of this book for you?

3. What does Revelation 22:14 mean to you?

4. How has the study of Revelation helped you in your Christian commitment?

INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A Seven Year Catholic Bible Study

Commentary by: James P. O'Bryan, S.T.

This Catholic Bible Study series is entitled INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP. It is an in-depth study of the New Testament for Catholic laity so that the Word of Christ, rich as it is, might dwell in us.

Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself. (Eph. 3: 18-19)

The general motivating force behind this course is the preservation and growth of the Christian faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries.

This course has four immediate goals:

1. To ensure a true spirit of repentance
2. To foster a deeper commitment in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ
3. To create a greater awareness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer
4. To encourage a more vibrant participation in the life and mission of the Church

This Study is now available to all parishes and at-home study groups. It has been accredited by the Catechetical Institute of the Orange Diocese, Orange, California, for CCD re-certification. The study is designed for presentation by either a religious or layperson. Most studies have received NIHIL OBSTAT and IMPRIMATUR through the Bishop of Orange, California. All studies have been submitted for Imprimatur and no work of Father O'Bryan has ever been rejected.

The complete study consists of:

1. A spiral-bound Teacher's Manual containing the printed text for all of the lectures of the study ordered (Mark, Luke, Acts, etc.)
2. A spiral-bound Student Manual (Meditations) containing a corresponding Summary of the Lecture and Worksheet for each week's study. Each student should purchase a copy of the Student Manual to keep a personal record of their responses to the questions, as well as notes that might be taken during the lecture or group sessions.

Note: A few studies are available only in 3-ring binders. One copy each of the Teacher's Manual and Student Manual are purchased, and copies of the student manual must be made for each participant.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY CLASS FORMAT

First Hour - Small Group Sharing:

- Students break into their small groups (10 or fewer participants)
- Prayer said aloud together (Example: Prayer to the Holy Spirit)
- Songs can be sung
- Sharing begins (approximately 45 minutes)
- Stretch / Break for coffee etc. (10-15 minutes)

Second Hour – Lecture:

- Prayer said aloud by lecturer.
- Lecture begins for the following week's study (approximately 45-60 minutes)

Total Class Time - 2 Hours Each Week

The study can be adapted for 10 to 400 people. Committed people needed may vary depending upon the number of students.

Recommended Personnel:

- Lecturer: To present the material
- Small Group Leader: One for every 10 people sharing answers.
- Secretary: Functions might include making copies of materials (not required if participants each have their own spiral bound student book), distributing copies as required; advertising; registration; collecting fees (where applicable for materials, etc.)

Purpose:

The motivating purpose for the formation of the Bible Study is to preserve and impart the Christian Faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries. Since "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ," is there anything more important for a sincere Christian than a study of the Scriptures?

Recommended Work Assignments for Parish Studies

Secretary

Will place announcement of day, time and location in the Sunday bulletin beginning four weeks prior to the Bible Study beginning. A flyer can also be posted on the parish bulletin board.

Accept registrations by mail, phone, through the parish office or personally.

Collect fee, if applicable, at the first session of the Bible Study. The registration fee can be used to defray the cost of the study (workbooks printing, coffee etc.) and is also a form of commitment by persons attending to complete the study. You may choose to have a "love offering" bowl for ongoing costs, i.e., coffee etc.

Be responsible for coffee, treats at break.

Each week reproduce the Summaries/Worksheets for entire group and distribute to each small Group Leader (This may be done by rectory personnel). This is not necessary if each student purchases a personal workbook.

Group Leader

Through years of experience, it has been found that it is best to strictly follow the discipline listed below.

--After community prayer, group shares worksheet answers for the week.

--Working in a clockwise order, the student to left of the leader answers the first question. The leader then asks if anyone has an additional or different answer. Move then to the next student, who answers question number (2) and so on, through all the questions for the week. The leader should help ensure answers are in accordance with the Catholic Church. If in doubt, check it out!

--It is the group leader's responsibility to confine discussion to the subject matter being dealt with in the weekly lesson. (Sharing problems or special prayers can be done after lesson is completed) If extraneous discussion is not regulated, the questions will not be answered in the time allotted.

--If a student has a question on the subject and no agreement can be reached, put that student in charge of finding the answer through a priest or any Catholic resource. The answer is to be brought back to the group the following week. (The leader should research the question as well.)

--ONLY students who have done their written homework may participate in the discussion. Others are encouraged to attend, listen, and write down the answers. There is much to be learned from one another, so incomplete homework is no reason to stay away. On the other hand, sharing off-the-cuff (without prayerful study and written answers) has proven too often to be disruptive and misleading.

--If the student is self-centered and tries to dominate the discussion, the group leader must speak to him privately and gently explain the problem, requesting his cooperation within the study guidelines. If the student persists in unacceptable behavior, that student is asked to remain silent or leave the study. (It is better to lose one destructive student than to lose the entire group.)

- Try to bring out the best in each student.
- Occasionally there is just one correct answer; when that is given, do not allow haggling, just move on to the next question.
- At the end of the discussion period, distribute next week's Summary/Worksheet for the students' home study (not required if participants have purchased individual workbooks).
- If time runs out before ALL questions are answered, BREAK anyway. People need the coffee break in order to move around and relax. This is very important. The student needs to be refreshed and ready to concentrate on the upcoming lecture. This should seldom occur. Manage your time; a student may really need an answer to the last question. Time allowed is 45 minutes for small group sharing.
- The first night of the study is a good time to explain the expectations of the group. We share as a community in love, kindness and consideration. This is not just an intellectual study.

Lecturer

Open with a short prayer.

Prepare (rehearse / edit) and deliver the commentary on Sacred Scriptures for the week. Present the material with personal enthusiasm.

Each lesson contains a great deal of material. The lecturer should read and rehearse ahead of time for a most effective presentation. It need not all be presented. Time allowed is 45-60 minutes per lecture.

You may also elect to play Fr. O'Bryan's recorded tapes or CD's. These are available wherever the studies are sold. They are also excellent for personal review and reflection. (Note: many groups have done years of lessons listening to Father's original recordings...they are great!)

Total Class Time - 2 Hours Each Week!

ESTABLISHING A CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY IN YOUR PARISH

The Catholic Bible Study: INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DICIPLESHIP

By James P. O'Bryan S.T.

This Bible Study is designed to be presented by the laity but it may also be presented by religious. The number of participants will determine whether the study should be presented in the parish hall, class-rooms, or in homes. Some parishes have fifty or more people wanting to attend. (When this study was first presented by Fr. O'Bryan, it drew from the entire diocese, not from just one parish. There were 200 people at both the morning and evening session for the seven years...that's right, 400 people each week attended the study in one place.)

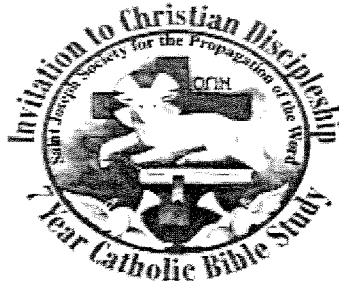
Many groups, large and small, still prefer to use the original (and recommended), method because it provides the fullness of the work. First, the full lecture, or an edited version, is presented by a "lecturer". The lecturer should spend time in prayerful preparation each week before presenting the material, and it should be presented with enthusiasm. Tapes and CDs of Father's original lectures are also available for purchase. They often are used in place of a lecturer. Listening to his recorded lectures at leisure, and being able to pause and replay them provides a wealth of information each week.

The homework portion of the study calls us to obedience and daily prayer as we strive to complete our assignment. Homework is a major factor in our personal spiritual growth. How much time will you give to God? The recommended method requires 2 hours each week as a group and additional study time at home, but the rewards are tremendous. This format may be used in homes or parishes.

A variation on the above, used successfully with High School groups (as large as 50) and adults, is to present the Summaries in place of the full lecture. Homework is assigned, answers are shared in a group, and then the Summary is read for the following week. All students have their printed assignments or workbooks. Homework may be trimmed to one or two questions per day for high schoolers (they already have homework to do). This method can reduce a session to about one hour total rather than 2 hours. This method is useful for severely time-challenged people, but the summaries only include about 20% of the complete lecture. However, the purchase of the recorded lectures which can be listened to during the week may be useful in providing a fuller experience for those who are unable to attend the full sessions.

A more recent method has also been successful for small home groups. Instead of using the Lectures and a lecturer, only the Bible and the Summary/Worksheets or Meditation Workbooks are used. Group members take turns reading aloud the Summary and the Bible references in the workbook--answering the questions as they go along. This eliminates the requirement for homework. A leader is still necessary at each meeting--one leader can be chosen for the whole study, or the attendees can take turns. (Note: Again, listening to parts of the recorded lecture in free time during the week may be helpful in providing more than the 20% of information given in the Summary. Also, the homework portion, though a pain to many, has a place in our lives as we strive to be more obedient to God's call).

All of the above styles have proven to be successful for different people in different situations. Start one in your community today!



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Gospel of: Mk, Lk, Jn, Mt	CD's, complete set of Fr. O'Bryan's lectures	\$25.00	\$1.94	\$9.00	16-23
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Corinthians	Teacher's Manual, spiral bound 8 1/2 x 11	\$40.00	\$3.10	\$9.00	11
Corinthians	Student Manual, spiral bound 7 x 9 1/2	\$14.00	\$1.09	\$5.00	11
Corinthians	CD's, complete set of Fr. O'Bryan's lectures	\$20.00	\$1.55	\$9.00	11
Thessalonians/Galatians *	Teacher's Manual, spiral bound 8 1/2 x 11	\$50.00	\$3.88	\$9.00	16
Thessalonians/Galatians *	Student Manual, spiral bound 7 x 9 1/2	\$20.00	\$1.55	\$5.00	16
Thessalonians/Galatians	CD's lectures--To be announced				
Revelation	Teacher's Manual, spiral bound 8 1/2 x 11	\$40.00	\$3.10	\$9.00	12
Revelation	Student Manual, spiral bound 7 x 9 1/2	\$14.00	\$1.09	\$5.00	12
Revelation	CD's lectures--To be announced				

* Available June 2008; (All are available now in 3-ring binder form @ \$40 + tax + S&H)

<u>Other Catholic Teachings by Fr. O'Bryan</u>					
Rock Foundation Revisited	8 1/2 x 11 workbook, Catholic Teachings	\$20.00	\$1.55	\$9.00	29
Christian with a Capital C	3-ring binder workbook, sequel to Rock Founda	\$15.00	\$1.16	\$9.00	30
The Inner Journey	8 1/2 x 11 workbook, Reflective Teachings	\$15.00	\$1.16	\$9.00	11
The Little Flower	8 1/2 x 11 The Life of St. Therese of Lisieux	\$15.00	\$1.16	\$9.00	N/A
Garden of Eden	8 1/2 x 11 Work on Marriage / Engagement	\$15.00	\$1.16	\$9.00	N/A
Where Eagles Fly	8 1/2 x 11 compilation of saints writings	\$15.00	\$1.16	\$9.00	N/A
Christian Laity in the 21st Century	8 1/2 x 11 reflections on "The Easter People"	\$15.00	\$1.16	\$9.00	N/A

LIBROS EN ESPAÑOL

Most of the scripture studies shown above are available in Spanish. The Spanish versions are student workbooks in 3-ring binders 8 1/2" x 11". These may be ordered at the price of \$14+ \$1.09 tax + \$5 shipping & handling (\$20.09 total).

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