

## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

One's first thoughts upon beginning a study of the book of Revelation, is that of being overwhelmed. The book stands before the 20th century Christian like a giant puzzle that not only requires assembling, but also which seems to have some pieces missing! It is clear, however, that our generation is not alone. Scanning the comments of previous centuries reveals that the Revelation of John has held its own in serving as the ultimate "bookend" in God's library given to man, and clearly holds the title as the New Testament book most challenging to fully comprehend.

I would like to say at the outset, however, that I do believe the book of Revelation can be understood. The Bible is the result of our loving God seeking to communicate with man. It is inconceivable that He would then give us one book out of 27 that could not be understood. This is not to say that anyone fully understands all that is in Revelation, any more than such could be said about any of the other 26 books. Our failure to understand the book, however, is due to human factors rather than flaws within the Revelation itself. Vast differences in our culture, literature, and customs, all play a part in casting a veil over our understanding of any ancient writing. With the Revelation this problem is compounded due to the very nature of the type of literature it is and our unfamiliarity with such literature. We might also say that human pride, sin, and preconceived ideas all may play a part in complicating this matter of understanding the basic gist of the Revelation.

One further note that may appear to be a convenient "out" in our study, is the thought that if determined study and diligent prayer does not bring conclusive evidence as to what a highly figurative passage has reference to, it may well be we are looking for meaning where none was intended! As some have dissected the parables of Jesus to the point of absurdity, this has most certainly been the case in many sensationalized commentaries on Revelation. "Drawing the line" as to where or when to move on or to dig yet deeper, is therefore another challenge before us. For many commentators the temptation to "over-interpret" the book may be too great to resist!

In light of these thoughts, we will approach this survey of Revelation with the goal of gaining an "overview" of the entire book, that we may be able to see the forest without getting entirely lost trying to count every ring on the first tree we see. It will also be our method to concentrate upon those points revealed by the Revelation itself, and also those basic principles and points that are clearly made. In this way we will be sure to get out of Revelation some of what our Lord intended. May our efforts result in turning what once may have seemed an unsolvable mystery, into a soul-stirring message from the Master!

In Christ,  
Bruce Gleim 4/25/2000  
Revised 4/22/2009  
bgleim@juno.com

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Some of the works that I have personally referred to during the course of this study are listed below.

Revelation – “An Introduction And Commentary”	Homer Hailey
Revelation – “The Seer, The Savior, And The Saved”	James D. Strauss
Revelation – “Looking Into The Bible Series”	Jim McGuiggan
Revelation – “More Than Conquerors”	William Hendriksen

## **APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE**

It is important that we understand the type of literature that we are about to study. We easily recognize books of history, law, and prophesy. The Revelation is a book of prophecy, yet it falls into a distinct category we may refer to as "apocalyptic." Apocalyptic literature is a form of Jewish religious writing which is found in some of the Old Testament prophecies, and which developed yet further as a style of writing in non-inspired books written during the period between the testaments. The English word "Revelation" is translated from the Greek word "apocalypse" in Revelation 1:1. Here it simply means the "revelation" or "unveiling" of Jesus Christ, given to His servants concerning things which must shortly take place.

Rather than spending a great deal of time and effort trying to trace the origin of such literature, it will be more productive for us to see how that such writings can be distinguished and recognized. With a little practice it becomes fairly easy to pick out such language. In doing so, remember that many examples can be found outside the book of Revelation. Also remember these key elements of apocalyptic writings listed below.

1. Apocalyptic speech appeals to all the senses to convey the message. It is vivid with colors, sounds, tastes, and sights even beyond the imagination.
2. Apocalyptic speech frequently uses numbers to represent an idea. Just as the senses are used to capture the reader's imagination, so the writer often "paints-by-number" to make his point. More often than not it is the symbolism and not the value of the number that is significant.
3. Apocalyptic speech often employs exaggerated and sometimes grotesque images to make its point. Even things or events not found in nature are drafted into this type of writing.
4. Apocalyptic speech is sometimes quite violent and cataclysmic in tone. This too is part of the overall word picture being painted for our viewing.

5. Having said all this, is it necessary to say that apocalyptic speech is highly figurative and symbolic in nature? It is upon this point that the great debate as to the meaning of the book of Revelation has hinged.

## **THE PURPOSE OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE**

1. To convey with the written word concerning events, principles, and ideas which transcend our ordinary human abilities to express. To poetry and word pictures man has often turned to express his innermost feelings, or to describe that which is beyond our normal experiences. Apocalyptic literature takes this use of "word pictures" to the furthest extreme.

2. To convey secret and hidden teachings to only those who are intended to read and receive the message. Perhaps too much has been made of this "code" writing idea, yet it does deserve some merit, especially when dealing with the book of Revelation. A book written to Christians who are enduring persecution, telling them that they will be victorious, needs only be understood by Christians. Hence having a solid background in Old Testament studies and Christian thought would provide the "tools" and the "keys" with which to decipher that which only mystifies the uninitiated.

3. Although the meaning of the Greek word "apocalypse" means "revealing," the very subject matter (especially within the book of Revelation) produces a sense of awe and wonder within the reader. It may seem a contradiction, but I see the Revelation as being written in such a way as to reveal, as well as to challenge us with great mysteries. Like the skillful teacher who not only teaches, but also creates enough wonder within her students to return eagerly the next day, the Revelation mystifies us as we learn. I am proposing that the very nature of the book, (and the type of literature it is), resists the attempts of man to neatly "solve" it and tie it up in a bow. Although group studies and commentaries can be helpful, the greatest benefit of reading the Revelation is to be gained when each God-fearing soul personally reads it, being both inspired and awe-struck by its imagery.

Are you puzzled by the book of Revelation? I would think it safe to say we were meant to be. Don't, however, allow your unanswered questions plunge you into frustration. The thrill of putting together a puzzle is not just seeing the completed picture, but the joy of seeing the pieces fit together at different points in your life. If you study the Revelation to conquer it, you have missed the point. Enjoy your study, and may you learn as you are at the same time mystified by the wonders of God!

## **AUTHOR, DATE, LOCATION**

The author refers to himself as John in four different passages (1:1, 4, 9, 22:8). Although he never refers to himself as the apostle John, internal and external evidences point to the apostle John as the author of Revelation. The internal evidences are the many words and phrases that are found exclusively in the Gospel of John, I John, and

also Revelation. These evidences, along with the support of many early Christians who unquestionably considered the apostle John to be the author of Revelation, in my view settles the question of authorship.

The date of the Revelation has been debated as being either during the time of Nero (A.D. 64-68), or during the time of Domitian (A.D. 91-96). The later date is supported by some strong external and internal evidences. Irenaeus said the Revelation was seen toward the end of Domitian's reign. The internal evidence is that the status of the various churches reflect that some time had elapsed for some of the churches to have "died" or "lost their first love" (Revelation 1 – 3).

The location in which the book was written is answered by the text itself. Revelation 1:9 reveals that John was on the island of Patmos when he received the Revelation. He was then told to write what he saw, sending it to the seven churches (Rev.1:11).

## **TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?**

In listening to much of the preaching on radio and TV, one would think that the book of Revelation was written to our generation exclusively. Past history shows that this tendency toward interpreting the Revelation has repeated itself in many previous generations. To many who suffered through World War II, was not Hitler once considered the beast, with the number 666 neatly "fitting" his name? Yet time marches on, and the list of those who "fit" the prophecies found in the Revelation continues to grow longer.

With these thoughts in mind, it is important for us to remember that the Revelation was written nearly 2,000 years ago, and that it was given to the brethren then living on this earth. Its goal was to show them those "things which must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:1). Granted, "shortly" is a relative term, and may involve 1 or 100 years, (depending upon the time frame in which one is working), but we must ever keep in mind that although ours is the only generation we have known, it is not the only generation the Revelation has known. Surely it was meant to be of value and significance to all generations, particularly to the one to whom it was first given. Do we not study and interpret the letters to the Corinthians in light of the current events taking place within the church at Corinth during the first century?

These thoughts are not offered in an attempt to take away from the Revelation any of its value and significance to those living today, however the modern reader must be objective in his interpretations of a book much older than himself, a book that may end up seeing, (if the Lord tarries in His returning), yet many more generations beyond ours!

## **THE THEME OF THE BOOK**

Contrary to popular thought, I do not see the theme or the purpose of the Revelation as being prophecies designed to help man determine exactly when and what the current events will be when the Lord will return and the world will end (see Matthew 24:36). Such interpretations have been fueled by a never-ending curiosity of man into

such things (Matthew 24:3), and the nature of the language used, which can be abused to the point of being made to convey just about whatever the current "scholar" wants it to say.

By allowing the Revelation to interpret itself, however, rather than ascribing to it countless hidden meanings, one can easily see the overall theme of the Revelation is that of the victory of the Christ over Satan, of good over evil, and of the church over Satan and his hordes of evil assistants. Disappointed? We shouldn't be, for if we are Christians, what more should we want to know, than that in the end we will be victorious? All other future information pales by comparison, and even if we could predict tomorrow's headlines with the Revelation, what good would that information be to one who is not certain of his salvation?

## **COURSE OF STUDY**

With these background thoughts in mind, let us begin our course of study of the Revelation. We will begin by looking at the overall outline of the Revelation. Perhaps one of the greatest contributions to understanding the Revelation has been made by William Hendriksen in his commentary entitled "More Than Conquerors". In his work he has shown how that the Revelation can be outlined in 7 sections, with each section extending from the beginning to the end of the new dispensation. By outlining the Revelation in this way, it becomes easy to see how that each section runs parallel to the others, yet with each section we find a progression of the emphasis shifting toward the final judgment and that which is beyond. Such an outline of the Revelation has also been followed with some variation by a number of other commentators, however I have found Hendriksen's to be quite natural and easy to follow.

## **OUTLINE OF THE REVELATION**

- Section #1. Chapters 1-3. Christ in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.
- Section #2. Chapters 4-7. The book with seven seals.
- Section #3. Chapters 8-11. The seven trumpets of judgment.
- Section #4. Chapters 12-14. The woman and the Man-child persecuted by the dragon and his helpers (the beast and the harlot).
- Section #5. Chapters 15-16. The seven bowls of wrath.
- Section #6. Chapters 17-19. The fall of the great harlot and of the beasts.
- Section #7. Chapters 20-22. The judgment upon the dragon (Satan) followed by the new heaven and earth, new Jerusalem.

In our study we will also note that the first 3 sections (shown above), speaks primarily concerning the church and its struggles here on earth. The final 4 sections (mentioned above) speaks of the background conflict behind the earthly struggle, which is between Christ and Satan. Let us now begin to look at each section as to its basic theme.

### **“Central Points, Time-frames, & Keys”**

As we scan each section, we will attempt to pick out the **central point** of each section. We will also strive to ascertain the overall **time-frame** of that particular section. To help us better understand that section, we will also note any clear **“keys”** for interpretation that are given to the reader. A key would be any figurative language that is clearly identified as to its meaning or identity within the text itself.

## **SECTION #1: CHAPTERS 1 – 3**

The **central point** of this section is to introduce the reader to the Christ, "the firstborn from the dead," and His relationship to seven specific churches in existence at the time of the Revelation. It is clear that these churches were chosen to represent seven different levels of spiritual health or decay, which can be found in various congregations of any generation.

The **time-frame** of this section covers the entire Christian age from Christ's victory over death (1:5) to His second coming (1:7). Chapter 3:21 reaches on into eternity as those who overcome will sit with Christ on His throne.

The **"keys"** given to the reader to unlock the mysteries in this section are:

**7 lampstands = 7 churches (1:20)**

**7 stars = angels of the 7 churches (1:20)**

Key words such as "like," (1:13) and "as," (1:10) clearly indicate that the following is going to be word pictures, thus fitting our definition of "apocalyptic speech" as discussed previously.

The key number seven is found in this section 16 times. All together it is found 53 times in the Revelation! The number unquestionably symbolized "completeness" to the Jewish mind and to the first century church. Even though the seven churches were seven actual churches, it is clear that they also represented seven types (or forms) of the church that could be found in other time periods as well.

## Chapter 1

The first chapter of Revelation sets the stage, by informing the reader that the contents of the revelation would “shortly” take place, and that the time was “near” for this prophecy to begin to be fulfilled (1:1-3). We then learn that the span of the fulfillment would be from the time of the cross to the time of His return (1:5-7). It is important that we keep these thoughts in mind, for any interpretation of Revelation that leaves out the first 20 centuries and sees only fulfillment in the 21<sup>st</sup> would be incorrect. On the other hand, to interpret the Revelation to have spoken only to the 1<sup>st</sup> century would be equally inconsistent with these opening verses.

The rest of this chapter serves as a beginner’s course in getting acquainted with apocalyptic language, as we find the Messiah described in highly figurative language. Yet, as mentioned above, a few keys are given along the way to help the reader understand these words as symbolic and descriptive.

## Chapter 2

**The Church At Ephesus** This congregation had been established by the apostle Paul (Acts 19). Time had passed, and this congregation that had once loved the Lord was now operating out of habit. The works were there, but the love for God was now non-existent! Surprisingly, the church at Ephesus was able to still be strong against false teachers and teachings, as they operated in this loveless condition.

**The Church At Smyrna** At Smyrna we find a congregation that was not greatly blessed physically, yet the Lord was able to promise them a crown of life if they were to remain faithful until death. Persecution and poverty were their enemies, however at Smyrna we see that physical afflictions do not always translate into spiritual weakness.

**The Church At Pergamos** At this location we find the Lord’s people holding fast to their faith, even during a period of time when at least one of their members had been martyred for his faith. However at Pergamos there was the problem of false doctrines coming from two different camps. The error contained within these doctrines was to the extent that repentance was necessary to prevent the opposition of the Lord to their work.

**The Church At Thyatira** This group of Christians was a mixed lot. There were apparently many in the congregation whose works were very good, and in fact improving in their Christian walk. Yet at the same time there was one woman who was exalting herself and starting to influence others within the congregation to be sexually immoral and idolatrous. The promise is made that she would be Divinely punished, but that those who had not been involved in her movement would be spared any other burdens.

## Chapter 3

**The Church At Sardis** The Sardis church of Christ was the congregation with a great reputation, that was in truth (for the most part) spiritually dead. Here we find no mention of false teaching or specific evil influences, but yet the need for repentance is found at Sardis. As in many congregations there were a few who were still hard at work and truly in love with the Lord. Unfortunately they were in the minority.

**The Church At Philadelphia** This congregation receives the strongest endorsement in this list of seven. While not perfect, Philadelphia will always be known as the little church with a big heart. Perhaps they were small in number, or perhaps a poor congregation, yet their works were good and they had not become unfaithful, even when outside influences had come to bear upon them.

**The Church At Laodicea** Christ's church at Laodicea will be known in infamy as the lukewarm church. There was no identifiable apostasy taking root among this group, they simply had no fire for the Lord! Because they were neither hot nor cold, God warned of their being spewed out of His mouth. Again we find the call to repentance, as we conclude these letters to the seven churches of Asia.

## SECTION #2: CHAPTERS 4 - 7

The **central point** of this section is to bring our focus and reverence upon the throne room of God. It is here that we learn of the worthiness of God's Son to occupy the throne, to receive worship, and to open the seals that the heavenly scroll may be read.

The **time frame** of this section, (like the first section), covers the entire Christian dispensation. For example, the Root of David is here described as being both the Lamb that was slain, (5:5,6) and also the one who is in the midst of the throne (7:17). This section concludes with the thought that God will wipe away every tear of those who have endured the great tribulation (7:14-17).

The "**keys**" given to the reader to unlock the mysteries in this section are:

**7 lamps = 7 Spirits of God** (4:5) (the perfect, complete Spirit of God)

**golden bowls full of incense = prayers of the saints** (5:8)

Key words found in this section are: The "Lamb," a clear reference to Jesus who was slain and now reigns. "Worthy," is a key word used in this section to describe the "Lamb" who earned the right to be the perfect sacrifice. The seven "seals," are that which only the Lamb was worthy to open, revealing the contents of the "book," which contained the record of mankind, including his salvation as provided by God, and made available to man by the Lamb that was slain.

The key number in this section continues to be the number seven, as the opening of the seven seals fills chapters 5 - 7. Other key numbers begin to appear in this section as well. Multiples of 12 appear with the throne of God being surrounded by 24 thrones and 24 elders (12 + 12). The Bible student is reminded of the 12 tribes of Israel, and the 12 apostles as well. As said previously, it is not so much the value of the number as it is the symbolism of the number. Can we see the number 12 as being the symbol of man organized to serve God? With this understanding we look ahead to the 144,000 (12 x 12 x 1,000) who are the "sealed" of God's children throughout history. The number 1,000 has often been used as a round number to describe a great multitude. We even speak today of "thousands" of people gathering for an event when speaking of an unknown large number. As the Holy Spirit "paints-by-numbers," we find this great multitude from before and after the cross is not just 144 people, but 144,000! Then we see the Lamb of

God being found worthy to open the book of man, having been slain to redeem him (5:9). Thus, as He opens the book, He reveals the completeness of all those who have served Him and have been "sealed" as His children. The 144,000 is a way of representing the completeness of those redeemed under the Old Covenant and the New. We know this is not the specific count of those who will be saved, for following this description we learn that those clothed in white robes are a great multitude which no one could number, coming from all nations (7:9), who are being redeemed by the Lamb to this day.

The number 4 is also found in this section. We are introduced to the 4 living creatures (4:6), and also to the 4 horsemen, which are released by the opening of the first 4 seals. Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, (also using apocalyptic speech), often employed the number 4 in their writings. In these books the number 4 seems to most often symbolize *the things of man, the world or creation*. The 4 creatures represent the most noble, the most powerful, the most shrewd, and the most swift of creation, each giving glory to God. The 4 horsemen, however, represent the 4 facets of calamity and suffering man has brought upon that which God has created.

## Chapter 4

As we begin chapter 4, it becomes clear that the "scene" has changed. Although chapters 1-3 contained some symbolic language, the symbols there were still clearly tied to specific places, people, and things. Now as we go deeper into the vision John received, it is as though we are falling into a deeper "sleep" with him! As in a dream, the imagery now becomes more vivid, symbolic, and unearthly, as we turn our attention from the state of the church here on earth, to the heavenly throne room.

In this chapter we find God described in grandeur and color (:3). The precious stones of jasper (green) and sardius (red) reminds us of the stones on the breastplate of High Priest (Exodus 28:20). The throne is also described as being surrounded by a emerald (green) rainbow! The rainbow, of course, has great spiritual significance, as a sign set in the heavens of a promise God made to mankind long ago. This, however, is no ordinary rainbow. Such a rainbow reminds us of all of God's promises, including those promises that extend into His very throne room. What a scene of grandeur!

God is also described with symbolic words expressing His limitless power and might (:5). Lightning and thunder, voices, all are added to create awe and wonder in the presence of God. In this setting we find Him being worshipped by man and by all living creatures. The fact that the elders mentioned are 24 in number may come from the combining of 2 key numbers from the Old and New Testaments. One is made to think of the 12 tribes of Israel, and the 12 apostles (see Rev.21:12). 24 could also simply be taken from the 24 courses or shifts into which the Levites were divided as they were to take care of the temple. Note that the creatures mentioned in these verses are not exactly creatures of this earth, but are merely compared to them. Some see the 4 creatures as a literal description of a higher order of heavenly beings who are in God's service (see seraphim described in Isaiah 6:2-3). However a more symbolic interpretation would lead one to see each of these creatures merely representing the noblest (lion), the strongest(calf or ox), the wisest (face of man), and the swiftest (eagle) of all nature

worshipping God. These creatures, along with the 24 elders all singing and worshipping God as they surround His throne.

It is important to again remind ourselves of the goal to find the main theme of each chapter, rather than getting lost in the details. Ask yourself, "What is the main point of this chapter?" Is it in figuring out exactly what the number 24 means, or exactly why the creatures each have 6 wings, or is it simply the fact that in the throne room of God, everyone and everything will be worshipping Him?

## **Chapter 5**

With God on the throne, we now see that He holds a very special scroll in His right hand. The call goes forth for someone who could remove the seals from the scroll so that it could be opened. Unfortunately no one could be found, bringing John to tears! At this point the proclamation is made that one had been found of the tribe of Judah. Clearly this is Jesus, the Lamb that had been slain, who now lives and can open the scroll. With seven horns, (perfect power), and with seven eyes, (all seeing), and with the seven Spirits of God, (the complete power of God), Jesus came to the throne of God and took the scroll from His hand.

But what is the significance of this scroll? As we will learn in the coming chapters, the scroll is a symbol of the plan of God in relation to man's actions on earth throughout history. The fact that only the Lamb that had been slain was worthy to open it, clearly identifies the contents of the scroll as being the actions, the sins, and the consequences of man. As each of the 7 seals are opened, we will read of the actions and the consequences of man's bad behavior. These are "chapters" of the earth's history that only Jesus the Lamb could open, with a view toward providing healing for all mankind!

At this sacred moment, we find all the living beings in heaven bowing down in reverence before Jesus, each preparing to worship Him. Their song reveals that the opening of the scroll symbolized the redemption of man by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. In the remaining verses this praise builds to a crescendo that can be "heard" both in heaven and on earth!

Again, as in the previous chapter, worship in song and in prayers continues in the presence of God. The 24 elders are also carrying a harp (to accompany their praise) and golden bowls full of incense, which we are clearly told represent the prayers of the saints. It is as though all of creation, and all the combined hopes and prayers of mankind are now being satisfied by the Lamb's ability and willingness to remove the seals from the scroll!

## **Chapter 6**

Although the victory of Christ over sin has already been won upon the cross, it is now time for us to see in detail each of the seals that Jesus had to remove in order to be our Redeemer. Like an instant reply in slow motion, we can now symbolically see, step-by-step, what Jesus accomplished at the cross!

If we view the scroll as being the story of man, we can better understand what comes forth as each of the seals is removed. It is as though all man's works, sealed by time, are now revealed by the only One worthy to do so!

The four horsemen symbolize four ways mankind has brought suffering upon this earth. The white horse represents the desire of man to conquer, the red represents the desire of man to kill, the black horse represents the scarcity brought on by the selfishness of man, and the pale horse represents the death by disease and hunger brought upon mankind by his sin.

(Some immediately conclude that the rider on the white horse must represent Christ. In keeping with the overall symbols, however, it does not seem to follow that Jesus would be one of the 4 horsemen, considering the suffering they collectively bring upon the earth. Also keep in mind that it is the Lamb that is opening the seals. Why would the Lamb be removing the seal to simply release Himself, riding on a white horse? Note that later in this book Jesus *is* clearly identified as riding upon a white horse (19:11-16). Understandably, this has influenced many to conclude that this is the same horse and rider. Note, however, that cross-referencing different sections of the Revelation due to similar symbols may confuse the immediate contextual meaning.)

While the 1<sup>st</sup> four seals symbolize the history of man that cries out for a Redeemer, the last three seals show the Lamb's power over time itself. With the opening of the 5<sup>th</sup> seal, we are reminded that not only must the Lamb overcome sin, but that His power must also overcome time. What about all those who have served Him and have been put to death for their faith? Who can help them? Only the Lamb of God, the One who can comfort them as He brings vengeance upon those who refuse to repent. With the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal we find that very vengeance being carried out.

Is this a literal description of the end of the world? Again, we must be cautious in taking the Revelation literally when we want to, and then taking it figuratively when we wish. While the language clearly implies judgment and the end of life as we know it here on earth, keep in mind that a picture is being painted here, to help us understand the severity of God's judgment, and the importance of being prepared, or "sealed" (counted) as His children. Case in point; while the image of people looking for rocks and hills to fall upon them to hide from God's judgment is a vivid picture, according to another passage of scripture outside of Revelation, (I Cor.15:52), will there really be any time for such things to literally occur when Jesus comes again?

Rather than getting caught up into extended discussions as to how the sun could become dark and yet the moon could still be seen as blood, or as to how people could find their way into caves while the sky is being rolled up and earthquakes are taking place, we need to focus upon the main point of all this! These cataclysmic and cosmic events described at the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal simply helps us to understand that God's judgment upon the world is coming. Fortunately, for those who serve Him, it is the Lamb that is opening the seals!

## **Chapter 7**

Following a pattern we will find repeated later in the Revelation, there is a pause before the seventh event in a series occurs. Chapter 7 is that dramatic pause. Here we

find the angels holding back the 4 winds of the earth. Again, we must remind ourselves that figurative language is the foundational structure of every chapter of this book. Have meteorologists actually found that there are only 4 winds upon the earth? Does the earth really have 4 corners? Of course not! Yet, even we (in our daily language) sometimes speak of going to the "ends of the earth" and other such language that is clearly figurative. Such language is simply a dramatic way of preparing the reader for the opening of the 7th seal. It is setting the stage for an "earth changing" event. God's angels (messengers) have now been dispersed to every part of the earth, as they suspend all normal activities upon it. While these angels have been granted the authority to do great harm to the earth, they are now told that God's people must be "sealed" before the destruction begins! It is at this point that John learns that the "number" of those sealed is 144,000. Remember, we have discussed at the beginning of this study that in this type of literature, numbers are to be understood more for their symbolic meaning than their actual numerical value. The number 12 is found 22 times in this book. Here, as in chapter 4, we find a multiple of 12, or 12 times 12,000 equaling 144,000. With each tribe of the children of Israel numbering exactly 12,000, the total of the 12 tribes comes to 144,000. If this were to be taken literally, it would be hard to imagine, first of all, that the number of each tribe would come to *exactly* 12,000! There is one particular religious group that takes this passage to mean that only the first 144,000 true Christians who have passed on are allowed in heaven, while the rest of the saved now living will have to be content with a (sort of) "heaven on earth." Those who take this path seem to have no problem in interpreting "children of Israel" as figurative, meaning "Christians," but then they quickly take the number 144,000 as being very literal!

That notwithstanding, note that John now sees in his vision yet another great multitude which could not be numbered, consisting of all nations, tribes, and so on, standing before the Lamb in white robes. As he looks upon this scene, one cannot miss the similarities to the actual historical triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem just days before His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. With these details the reader is again reminded of the events leading up to the ultimate sacrifice that was made by our Lord, making it possible for both the 144,000 and now this unnumbered multitude to even be in God's presence. To me these simply represent all the saved, both those who lived before the cross, and those believers who have lived and died since the cross. The use of the specific number 144,000 was just a symbolic way of conveying that all of the children of Israel who were obedient to God will be a part of that great throng. The reason perhaps no specific number is given to symbolize all those believers who have lived and died since the cross, is because we are not just one nation, organized in specific tribes and families. The gospel was for all nations, and went unto all nations! This chapter ends with a brief discussion between John and one of the 24 elders. The elder first asks, and then answers his own question, identifying these people in white robes as being those who had come out of the great tribulation, and who had been washed by the blood of the Lamb. For them, the times of trial were now over. There would be no more suffering as they had endured upon this earth. They would now remain in the presence of the Lamb, and God will wipe away their every tear.

To sum up, in this chapter we find the "144,000" of God's children and a great multitude being sealed for their own protection before the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is opened. For them the times of trial are over. On earth, the final judgment is at hand. The many tribulations

God's people are enduring here upon earth are about to end. The joys of heaven are about to begin!

### **SECTION #3: CHAPTERS 8 - 11**

The **central point** of the section is the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal, which brings about the sounding of the 7 trumpets. The sounding of trumpets is often a signal, in this case one which signals God's punishment and ultimate judgment upon the unrepentant world. The punishments described particularly with the 1<sup>st</sup> three trumpets refer to the self-inflicted physical results of the sins of mankind. The remaining 4 trumpets focus more upon the spiritual punishment of man's sins. Note that before these trumpets begin to sound, that a 1/2 hour of silence is observed, allowing time for the prayers of the saints, (along with the offering of incense), to be offered to God.

With this section it becomes increasingly important to seek out the overall point without being sidetracked. Rather than trying to determine some specific future event in history which we may perceive each trumpet to "fit," let's remember to stay with the spirit of the Revelation. The images of mass destruction, widespread loss of life, fire, smoke, locusts, poisoned water, all lend themselves to thousands of interpretations, yet the point of such speech is to impress the reader with the severity of God's punishment upon unrepentant mankind. I see one of the key verses in this section being 9:20-21, where we find the rest of mankind who survived the holocausts still unrepentant. Is it not true to this day, that despite the misery that sin has brought to mankind, he still (as a whole) refuses to repent? So it will be until the final judgment.

The **time-span** of this section is parallel to the previous sections we have studied. The sounding of the trumpets again reveals the history of man, and the miseries he has brought upon himself, culminating in the judgment of God toward an unrepentant world. In this section we can again see the entire Christian dispensation in which the saints have prayed while the nations rage.

The "**keys**" given to the reader to unlock the mysteries in this section are not as clearly identified as those found in previous sections, however three passages stand out as key verses:

**10:11 "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."**

**11:8 "And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified."**

**11:16-18 [The prayer of the 24 elders serves as a summary of this section.]**

The key words in this section are the numerous descriptions that assault one's senses with sound (8:5 / 11:19), aroma (8:3-4), heat (8:7), taste (8:11 / 10:9-10), pain (8:5-6), and colors (9:17). Once we see the method of the Revelation, it becomes easier to understand the message.

The key number in this section continues to be the number 7, with the sounding of the 7 trumpets. However, of even greater significance in understanding this section is the fraction  $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ . In this section we find the following "thirds" destroyed: trees, green grass, sea creatures, ships, rivers, springs, waters, sun, moon, stars, and also  $1/3^{\text{rd}}$  of mankind! After looking at this section as a whole, it should become obvious to the reader that he need not attempt a refresher course in fractions and basic math, but rather see that with each sounding of the trumpets, only a portion is destroyed. A third is not all, neither is it even half, yet it is a significant part of anything. I do not believe that any of the 7 trumpets refer to any specific time in history exclusively, yet is it not true that man has frequently brought upon himself wars and plagues that have decimated a significant portion of the population and the planet?

Some other numbers appear in this section that seem to have no significance at first glance. We find in 11:2 the number of 42 months. What is the significance of 42 months? If this were referring to automobile payments, car owners would quickly compute that he is speaking of 3 1/2 years. In the following verse you will also find the number 1,260 days. Convert this number into months, (divide by 30), and you will again have 42 months or 3 1/2 years. Note also in 11:11 the mention of 3 1/2 days. It is significant that 3 1/2 is exactly one-half of 7, that is, it does not represent completion or perfection, but rather represents an event of limited duration. Anything given such numbers is not eternal.

It is important to mention at this point that any system of interpreting the numbers found in Revelation will at some point appear to have shortcomings. We cannot "work" the Revelation like algebra; it is both a revelation from God, and also a work of art. Just as the Psalms cannot be broken down into a system, likewise any efforts to systemize the Revelation of John will at some point miss the spirit of the message.

In the first three sections, (chapters 1 - 11), we were primarily concerned with the church and its struggles here on earth. Beginning with this section, and throughout the rest of the Revelation, we will be focusing upon the background conflict behind the earthly struggle, which is between Christ and Satan.

## Chapter 8

In this chapter we find the pause before the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is now concluded with a time of silence in heaven for prayers being offered to God, which is then broken with the sounding of the 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet. It is interesting to note that once the censer is emptied of its incense, it is then filled with fire, which is promptly thrown to the earth. God has now heard the prayers of the saved, and now He is ready to begin His judgments upon mankind!

The 7<sup>th</sup> seal thus opens in seven stages, each part being heralded by the blowing of another trumpet. The 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet brings about hail and fire mixed with blood being thrown to the earth, burning up  $1/3^{\text{rd}}$  of all the trees and grass upon the earth. The 2<sup>nd</sup> trumpet turns  $1/3^{\text{rd}}$  of the sea into blood, killing  $1/3^{\text{rd}}$  of all sea life and destroying  $1/3^{\text{rd}}$  of all the ships man has built. The 3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet sounds bringing about the poisoning of  $1/3^{\text{rd}}$  of all the fresh water, killing many people who drink from these tainted waters.

What does this all mean? Some environmentally minded Christians today may point out that man is quickly reaching these levels of pollution and destruction of our own planet, but isn't this missing the figurative, spiritual nature of this entire book? Keeping with the spirit of symbolism, it is much more consistent to view these catastrophes as being symbolic of the suffering and judgments of God that man has brought upon himself in any generation, not just in our modern times. If even a portion of the events described in this chapter were to actually take place, there would be no unrepentant "rest of mankind" still surviving upon this planet (9:20-21)!

Keep in mind that usually the sounding of a trumpet is for the purpose of providing a warning, or an announcement. The opening of the 7th seal now produces 7 trumpet warnings to mankind. Each trumpet is a progressively violent and terrifying description of the miseries that were to be brought upon the earth. It is not a coincidence that the events that follow the blowing of the trumpets are reminiscent of the plagues that were brought upon Egypt in the days of Moses.

The sounding of the 4<sup>th</sup> trumpet, however, seems to shift our attention from the destruction of the earth as it focuses our gaze upward and beyond. God's judgment upon the inhabitants of earth now even reaches symbolically into space itself, as 1/3rd of the sun is struck, 1/3rd of the moon, and even 1/3rd of the stars! While there is no doubt that other Bible passages indicate that the heavens, the earth, and even the elements of the universe will actually pass away at the end of time, we must remember that in the book of Revelation, word pictures are being painted. God's warnings and God's judgments are being figuratively described in such a way that even the dullest of mind might be both frightened and stirred! Literally any scientifically minded soul would know that the universe, much less life on earth, could not continue if 1/3rd of the sun were to be extinguished. Any alterations to the delicate balance between the earth, the sun, and the moon would render human life impossible to sustain. The events described in this book are not literal descriptions of what will happen before, during, or after the judgment, but they are written to help the reader understand the reality of God's judgment, and to picture the horrific consequences of an unrepentant world. John's vision is now becoming ever more cataclysmic and vivid!

## Chapter 9

With the sounding of the 5<sup>th</sup> trumpet, it is as though hell itself is opened. These locusts from the bottomless pit are sent out with orders not to harm the vegetation, but rather man himself! In addition, they are instructed not to kill, but to *torture* mankind. The pain from their sting would cause men to desire to die if it were possible. While some may consider this a literal description of hell, keep in mind that this plague was not eternal, but rather is limited to a time-frame of "5 months." Actual hell is not being discussed, but rather one might say the influence that hell (actually Satan himself) has brought upon this earth is the key point of this chapter.

The description of the locusts should not be taken apart, piece-by-piece, but rather should be seen as a whole, helping the reader to feel the terror of those who live this life unprepared for the "blowing of each trumpet." The existence of creatures having the combination of human features with animal and insect capabilities could be the subject of

a horrifying movie, but the Lord uses these images to instill within the reader a proper fear of Satan and his forces at work upon this earth. The meaning of the Greek term “Apollyon” (9:11) leaves little doubt who is being discussed here. His name means “Destroyer.”

The sounding of the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet releases four angels who are now sent out to *kill* 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of mankind. The number of the army gathered is enormous, and the riders upon the horses defy description as many colors, animals, and even fire and brimstone are used to describe their appearance.

Much effort has been made by many commentators as to the exact identity of this army, but again it seems that such efforts are missing the point. This is no army in particular, but rather it symbolizes the spiritual suffering that has and will continue to be brought upon those who are unprepared to meet their God. Perhaps the most shocking section of this chapter is that after the destruction of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the earth’s vegetation, sea life, fresh water, and human population, that those remaining would still be unrepentant!

In summary, the Revelation is indeed a lesson both in the power of God’s judgment, and also in the foolish strength of man’s stubborn will. Looking back, we have seen a large portion of the land, sea, and rivers, along with the heavenly bodies, destroyed. As the bottomless pit is opened, even worse destruction is brought upon mankind, yet there is still no real change in the behavior of mankind upon the earth. I interpret this section of John’s vision to simply be describing the ongoing woes of the earth as seen from God’s viewpoint. Throughout history, man’s rebellion to God’s principles has unleashed the power of the bottomless pit upon each generation that has embraced such practices. At the base of every event in which human beings are responsible for the suffering of other human beings, one can find numerous ways in which those responsible have rejected God’s commandments and values. In general, each of the trumpets symbolizes the calamities that have and will occur repeatedly throughout history due to sin. All these atrocities will someday be key evidence brought forth at the judgment.

## **Chapter 10**

Before the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet is sounded, we again find a “break in the action,” as we found prior to the opening of 7<sup>th</sup> seal. During this break a mighty angel comes from heaven with a little book, stands astride land and sea, and speaks with the voice of seven thunders. It is here that John is not permitted to write what he has heard. Perhaps the greatest significance of the 7 thunders is that although much is being revealed in this great book, there are some revelations that are not for man to know! Someday we just might be told what was uttered by the 7 thunders, but while we are here upon this earth, it was not God’s will for them to be revealed. One may ask, “Why was John given a revelation that he could not reveal?” It would seem the answer is simply this; the one thing we learn from the 7 thunders is that there are some things that God *will not reveal* to those living upon the earth! We therefore can conclude that, since God loves us, those things that he has not revealed to us are things that we *don’t need to know* right now. In

fact, it may be that there will be yet other things that we will not need to know in heaven as well! If that should be the case, who will we be to complain?

This passage may remind us of Paul's experience recorded in II Corinthians 12:1-6. In this passage Paul speaks of himself in the third person, referring to "a man" who was caught up to the third heaven which he also calls "Paradise." It was there he heard things which were not only inexpressible, but which he was also forbidden to utter! Whatever those words were, we may also conclude that the content of the seven thunders was equally forbidden to be revealed to all.

But what are we to make of the "little book" described in verses 8-10? In the vision, John was told to actually eat a book! Not unlike some heavily spiced meals we all have eaten, the little book tasted good in his mouth, but was bitter in his stomach! Here the key verse (10:11) helps us to understand this to refer to the ongoing dilemma of those who preach and teach God's word. His Word is sweet to those who love God and His word, but often to proclaim God's word, one must also proclaim the bitter judgments that are about to come upon those who refuse to hear. For many godly men and women throughout history, preaching the gospel has not only caused actual indigestion, but as seen in the pages of the Bible, some paid for it with their lives!

I believe the "little book" John speaks of was in reality just a reference to the entire series of revelations that he was at that time being given. The "little book" that he had to "eat and then digest" was and is the very "book of Revelation" we are now studying.

## Chapter 11

This sidebar before the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet continues with John being given a measuring rod and being told to measure the temple. In giving this order, God is showing His desire to again define the boundaries of His reign, and to identify His people. The "temple" in this case represents the church and the sanctuary of God's people as they seek shelter in Him, and those "outside the temple" are obviously the world. But what about the 2 witnesses? Perhaps it would be best to say that they simply represent God's people throughout the ages who have borne witness to His name. Some consider the 2 witnesses to conveniently represent the godly Jews who lived under the Old Covenant, and all loyal Christians who have lived and will live under the New Covenant. Others just see the 2 witnesses as referring back to the common practice of the apostles and the early disciples, as they were often sent out two by two. Notice that in verse 10 they are also described as "prophets." In keeping with the figurative nature of each revelation, one does not have to conclude that these 2 witnesses must be identified as 2 literal prophets named elsewhere in scripture. These 2 prophets are simply symbols of all of God's servants throughout the generations who have been given the challenging task of measuring God's sanctuary, keeping God's people together, and helping them to avoid the consequences that are to come upon those outside His temple!

As discussed earlier, the work of these 2 witnesses was for 1,260 days, which would also be 3 ½ years. The significance is that their work, (and ours), is for a limited duration, and is not for an eternity. The time of their ministry is described in days, perhaps to emphasize the fact that their ministry was a *daily* ministry.

Although God supplied and protected these 2 witnesses, we also learn that for each minister of God there comes an end to his physical opportunity to serve. With the death of each servant of God, the world rejoices in being freed from the torment of his message. The surprise is that the death of Christian martyrs does not end their work, and that the message of God cannot be stopped. Note that it is the "beast from the bottomless pit" that makes war against the 2 witnesses. Satan knows his enemy, and as with our Lord Himself, Satan will make every effort to silence and to stifle God's Word. Here both the infamously evil city of Sodom and the wickedness of the ancient nation of Egypt are summoned to serve as the location of the martyrdom of the 2 witnesses. Immediately we learn that these are just figurative names, and that they actually symbolize the city better known as Jerusalem, in which our Lord was crucified.

Amazingly, however, in verse 11 we find the 2 witnesses are only "down for the count" of 3 1/2 days, after which they are resurrected and summoned to heaven! I do not believe that this passage is referring to the resurrection of Jesus, or to any other specific individuals found in the Bible, but rather symbolizes the spiritual resurrection upon which all of God's servants base their faith.

The message found in chapter 11 is not a new one; it has now been restated in numerous ways in this book. The church has and will continue to go through hard times, but each phase of persecution will produce great "prophets" or "witnesses" that will not be afraid to speak, even unto death. God, however, is faithful and He will bring about justice. As each wave of ungodliness gains a perceived victory, they will soon suffer a tremendous defeat. The earthquake that follows and kills 1/10th of the entire city is just a graphic way of making that point. Evil always eventually brings about its own destruction. Interestingly, however, in some cases throughout history some do come to their senses during these times of self-created tribulations. In verse 13 we find some giving glory to God as the result of their fear! (Note this in contrast to those unrepentant souls who survived the plagues that came about in chapter 9:21.)

With the reading of verse 17, finally the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet is sounded. These final verses in chapter 11 are the words of victory following the judgment of God! God's people have been measured and translated into His heavenly abode. Praise now will be offered for eternity in His kingdom.

Note that as we come to the end of what we are calling "section 3," we have again returned to the throne room of God, where, we again find the 24 elders worshipping God and singing praises to His Name. Just as we found at the end of sections 1 & 2 (see 3:21 & 7:17), victory has been won, the war between good and evil is now over. Keep in mind, however, that with each new section, we will go back and re-cover basically the same ground, only with different symbols and more details being given to various aspects of the trials and tribulations of Christians, the judgment of evil, and the final victory for those who love the Lord!

## **SECTION #4: CHAPTERS 12 - 14**

The **central point** of this section is the spiritual war that has raged between Christ and the Devil. To the first century saint as well as today, it is tremendously important for us to know that whatever battles we may be fighting here on earth, the ultimate battle has

already been fought (and won) in unseen realms! Although the great victory has been won by the blood of the Lamb, this section helps us see that the defeated army of Satan is still claiming casualties through those on earth who seek to fight on the side of a "losing team." This process continues with each generation, like a defeated army that continues to enlist new recruits, destined to die for a dying cause. In this section we also see the great images of human strength and power that Satan has harnessed in his doomed struggle. Yet despite of all his powers of persuasion, there still remains that complete number of 144,000 souls carrying the name of the Father, written on their foreheads! God's people can and will survive as His people!

The **time-span** of this section, like previous sections, again covers the entire Christian dispensation. In 12:5 we see a clear reference to the birth of Christ, and Satan's intense war campaign against Him. In 14:14-20 an obvious reference to the final judgment brings to a close the Christian age as the earth is harvested.

The **"keys"** given to the reader to unlock the mysteries in this section are:

**12:9 "The great dragon" = the Devil (Satan)**

**12:10-11 "male Child / Lamb" = Christ**

**12:17 "the rest of her offspring" = Christians**

**14:3 "the 144,000" = those redeemed from the earth**

The key words of this section besides those mentioned above include the "beast," both from the land and the sea, (13:1,11). It becomes clear that the beasts symbolize Satan's evil representatives here on earth (13:2). I also find "forehead" to be a key word, for not only do we see the 144,000 carrying their Father's name on their forehead, but we also learn that those who worship the image of the beast have his number on their right hand or forehead. The forehead is obviously here used as the "outward billboard" of the beliefs and convictions of the mind and soul of man.

The key numbers in this section are again several. It shouldn't be difficult to see the pregnant woman with 12 stars on her head as God's people. Yes, it is true that Mary gave birth to Jesus, but she was of the Jewish nation from which sprang the Messiah. Again in this section we find the number 1,260. One may be tempted to call this the 3 1/2 years of Jesus' ministry, however I see it as simply speaking of the protection God gave, (and continues to give to His people). Notice it is the same amount of time given to the 2 witnesses (11:3).

The dragon is described as having 7 heads, indicating that he possesses no lack of intelligence with which to operate. We also find him having 10 horns, symbolizing the fullness of worldly power.

Unquestionably the number "666" holds the title of being the most infamous number in the Revelation. The wording of 13:18 urges the reader to calculate it and to understand it, but with the many pre-conceived theories pervading today's interpretation of the Revelation, it is no wonder that so many explanations of the number have surfaced.

I personally have either read or heard of the following men or things being identified (and calculated) as having the number "666" in their name: Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, various Popes, Nero, the Social Security System, labor unions, and the Mormon church, just to name a few. A more complete list of popular interpretations throughout the years would most certainly include representatives of extremes of various religions and politics for the past 20 centuries. I mention these as a deterrent to "over-interpreting" the Revelation. There is no doubt that there has, (and will be), men, women, and organizations that Christians may see as filling the role of "the beast" in our day. We may even find ways in which the name of that individual may "fit" the number of 666. Keep in mind, however, that the Revelation was written for more generations than our own.

Staying within the spirit of the Revelation, is it not more appropriate for the reader to see that the idea of the number "666" is that the principle of the beast is one who's allegiance is to the dragon, and who's number falls short of the perfect 7 not once, but three times? If 666 is a specific individual now living, then all other generations who would have read the Revelation would have been needlessly confused. If, on the other hand, we see 666 as being exactly what he is described to be in this passage, then we come away with a message that speaks to any generation. We would not be in error to say that all of the evil people who have oppressed mankind and demanded worship in their day could carry the number of 666. We cannot limit the beast numbered "666" to our generation alone. We again must see that the calculations involved here are not mathematical, but rather symbolic.

In 14:20 we also find the blood that came out of the winepress being up to the horses' bridles, and extending 1,600 furlongs. This would translate to about 200 miles! It is clear that such a "river of blood" is not to be taken literally, however the symbolism of the wrath of God being poured out upon unrepentant man is made quite clear. Why, 1,600 furlongs? I see no specific reason other than a round number arrived at by multiplying  $4 \times 4 \times 100$ . Remember "4" is the number that often represents creation. A "river" of blood very clearly symbolizes the totality of all human life having faced the wrath of God for their unrepentance.

## **Chapter 12**

The picture of a woman giving birth and an ugly red dragon waiting to devour her Child is one we will not soon forget. More importantly, however, we must remember the actual struggle that ensued upon the birth of Christ, to which this passage clearly refers. To be more specific, I do not take this to be referring to any labor pains that Mary may have experienced in giving birth to Jesus, but rather to the trauma that the Jewish nation began to suffer as they struggled to accept His entry into their midst. Following His birth, the flight of Jesus' family into Egypt to escape Herod's wicked plan fits perfectly with the symbolism of this passage. We may also include, however, the many later efforts that were made to silence or to kill Jesus before His ministry had been completed. These were all efforts of Satan to "devour" the Child. This passage also states that as the great red dragon was waiting to eat the baby upon His birth, that the dragon's tail reached out into the heavens and swept 1/3 of all the stars to the earth! Keep in mind that back in chapter 8:12 we see an angel striking 1/3 of the stars already, so if

you are keeping track, (or wish to try to interpret these revelations mathematically), we are now down to only 1/3 of all the stars remaining! From a purely astronomical point of view, the laws of gravity and physics would seem to indicate that such a loss of mass in the universe would not be sustainable, yet life on earth somehow goes on! I mention this again to simply reinforce the point that we should not take such statements literally. The red dragon's "tail swipe at the heavens" merely symbolizes his hatred for the earth, while this entire passage contrasts the great threat that just a newborn Baby posed to this powerful beast!

Unseen by earthly eyes, however, there raged the broader battle in heaven, between the forces of Satan and the forces of God. It was a war like none other. The angel known as "Michael" is here pictured as commanded his legions of angels as they went up against the forces of the dragon and his unholy angels. We should mention that Michael is one of the few angels actually mentioned by name in the scriptures, and that he also has the distinction of being the only angel referred to as an "arch-angel" in the Bible (see Daniel 10:13 / Jude 9). This would indicate that he is a ranking angel, perhaps actually commanding other angels in their duties. Having said this, should we conclude that since Michael is mentioned in these terms elsewhere, that this passage (Revelation 12:7-12) should be taken entirely literal? To interpret this passage entirely literal would be, again, to miss the point. However this is not to say that Michael, and all of his fellow angels, have not been involved in the battle of good versus evil. Simply put, even in the most symbolic passages a few familiar terms are used to help the reader to put together the entire puzzle!

Not surprisingly Satan lost this battle in heaven, to be "cast down to the earth." Again we must not see this as an actual military action, but rather a spiritual war between good and evil. Certainly Satan sought to gain a great advantage when Jesus went to the cross. However Satan's power "fell like lightning" with the victory of Jesus over the sins of mankind. This point is made even more vividly by the very first Messianic prophecy found in scripture. After the fall of man, God made this ominous statement to Satan; "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel (Genesis 3:15)." Unfortunately, for those who do not seek the safety of the blood of the Lamb, Satan's hatred and wrath is poured out, for he knows his time is short! He's already received his "head wound," but his final total demise is yet to come. With the dragon (Satan) being cast down to the earth, he now no longer has "access" to God's dwelling place, and must now focus his attention and fury upon the dwelling place of man. His efforts to continually accuse and "run down" ever single soul upon the earth is thwarted by the power of Christ. In any ordinary battle, those who bleed the most, lose. In this battle, it is the blood of the Lamb that has won our struggle against the dragon! Armed with this great security, soldiers of Christ can now confidently go into battle knowing that they cannot lose! Even those persecuted to the point of death by Satan's subordinates do not have to cling desperately to their physical lives, knowing that they will live eternally in heaven with our Lord.

Meanwhile Satan's persecution of God's people continued throughout history, and unto this day. As he failed to destroy the Child that was born to the woman, he then went after her other "offsprings." This would not only include His first disciples, but even those living today who have found protection in His army. His fury against the

woman has now been transferred to all Christians. The dragon even spews enough water out of his mouth to create a flood upon the earth, in an attempt to drown the woman! I do not see this as an allusion to the great flood, for that was ordained by God. Some may see this as a reference to the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, but perhaps the simplest interpretation is that this is just another way of showing the wrath of Satan against God's people and the church. Yet, no matter how great the destruction may be, God's people must not grow faint. As Christians, the war we face is not to determine the overall outcome, but is rather a battle for each of our individual souls. Although the Lamb has won the war for us, if we try to stand without Him, for us the battle will be lost!

## Chapter 13

Although we have been saying all along that the Revelation is for **all** generations, there are some sections that seem to rely heavily upon the historical background of the early Christian era. This view finds support in the very first verse in which the revelations that were being given to John were to show *"things which must shortly take place."* Since many aspects of that time period will always be remembered by mankind, such references could be understood by all future generations. At the same time, however, the power of Rome as manifested through the Roman church that followed, is not only still influencing the religious world today, it is also being copied by other secular and religious powers in each generation. I see this view of interpretation being supported by 1:19 in which John is further told to; *"Write the things which you have seen, and the things which will take place after this."*

The Sea Beast is perfectly illustrated by the rise of the Roman Empire. Her sea power became complete with the total and decisive defeat of Carthage, and her geographic position, (jutting out into the middle of the Mediterranean Sea), gave her easy access by sea to the eventual control of much of the civilized world. The "head wound" (13:3) has been interpreted many ways, but perhaps the best view is to see this as a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which stung the Roman world, bringing about the Christian revolution that changed Rome forever. This was followed by several terrible persecutions, during which Satan was allowed to put many to death, and to reclaim many who had become followers of Jesus.

The eventual rise of the Land Beast is represented quite well by the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, which eventually came up out of the declining power of the secular Roman government. The idea of a dragon looking like a lamb, causing all the earth to worship Rome, performing "great signs," forcing people to worship the beast, all seem to clearly refer to the power of false religion. A study of history shows how the Roman Catholic Church eventually even took on a structure similar to the Roman government, as her spiritual control of the world slowly replaced the Roman military power.

It is important to remember, however, that in every generation one could find examples of the beast disguising himself in the clothing of evil governments, and also in the guise of false religion. Rome, followed by Roman Catholicism, was only the beginning. Every generation has had its version of "Rome," and almost every generation has seen the rise of yet another state sponsored attempt to control the religious beliefs and practices of those who live under its control. In this sense the beast rising up out of the

sea is just a general description of every manifestation of human governments that will continually rise and fall throughout the Christian era. The sea represents the constant unrest and upheaval of human efforts to change and to control the earth. In this part of the vision, John saw a cross sample of human political history, and it was not an easy sight to behold!

With these thoughts in mind, many have gone so far as to attempt to identify the beast as a specific Roman Emperor. Some have even shown the name of Nero Caesar equaling "666" by turning the Greek letters of his name into their numerical equivalents. Perhaps this was the "coded" message of this number, but I would find it hard to believe that the average Christian living in that time would have made such a connection. Although these are tempting theories, I refer back to earlier statements about the number of the beast being a symbolic number, one that would fit any earthly leader who seeks to gain the worship or admiration of the world in the place of Jesus. That is to say, if the number 7 was a number of perfection, having the number of 666 would be a number falling short of perfection times 3! The number 777 would make one think of the perfection of the Godhead. Conversely, what then does the number 666 bring to mind? From this perspective, I would not see the number 666 as a difficult math problem that must be decoded, but rather an obvious reference to any human leader or organization that attempts to defy the power of God. Certainly Nero fits this description, but then so do a number of others! Using this approach, one does not have to assign numerical values to the letters of the name of every evil ungodly leader to determine if he or she is filling the role of an antichrist. If Nero was the first "666," he has certainly not been the last! As long as this world stands, new "beasts" will continue to rise up from the sea of humanity, and some will truly earn the number of "666."

## Chapter 14

We now turn our attention from Satan's realm to the Kingdom of God. With the Lamb standing on Mt. Zion, we see all of God's people with Him, with His name written on their foreheads. This is the perfect counterpart to those we saw in the previous chapter, belonging to the Beast with his number on their foreheads. For the sake of those who may still be "set" on the literal interpretation of the 144,000, we may also point out that a literal interpretation of these passages would also see heaven filled only with male virgins (14:4). This of course, is not to be taken literally, but is simply a way of referring to the purity of a large number of God's people who will be saved from the deceptions of the beast. In keeping with this same approach to interpreting Revelation, we would also conclude that 14:1 is not speaking of all Christians somehow literally having their Father's Name written on their foreheads.

Note that in 13:15-17 we found that it was also said that the beast was given the power to put a mark on *everyone's* right hand and forehead, and that everyone without his number would not be allowed to buy and sell. Since that passage stated that everyone would receive a mark from the beast, if we were to take this all literally, we would have to conclude that *everyone* will be marked by the beast, and that those who are Christians would also be marked (on the same forehead) with God's Name. This would seem a bit confusing, and on most foreheads, a bit crowded! This passage, however, is one of the

most commonly quoted by pre-millennialists as literally coming to pass in our time. The advent of barcodes a number of years ago had many well-meaning Bible students very concerned about the coming mark of the beast. More recently, many see the technical capability of our government to actually inject an identifying chip in (first) our soldiers, and (eventually) the general population, as again the coming of the day in which the beast will be able to mark us all. While most Christians, (and I would say even most non-Christians), would not want this to come to pass, I don't believe this is the point of this passage. Symbolically, all Christians "wear" the name of Christ in such a way as all can see. The forehead is symbolically the billboard of one's mind. Just centimeters away from the seat of our biological mind and soul, what better way to illustrate the direction of the human soul contained within, than to speak of having His Name written upon it?

The warnings continue to grow stronger in the Revelation. The angels flying in the midst of heaven crying out "fear God," and "Babylon is fallen." The 3<sup>rd</sup> angel speaks even more explicitly of God's wrath and the punishment to come for those who worship the beast. These three proclamations are then followed by the perhaps the best summary of the theme of the Revelation we could find. **"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on,...that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them (4:13)."**

In the second half of chapter 14 we see Jesus pictured as the One ordering the harvest of the earth. With a sickle in his hand, an angel is sent to harvest those of the earth, deserving God's wrath. The "sickle" stands as one of man's oldest tools, and also holds the position as one of the oldest symbols of harvest, only in this case it is mankind that is being "harvested!" In popular mythology the "grim-reaper" always carries the sickle (or its larger cousin the scythe) of death. The winepress was an ancient method used to squeeze the last drops of juice from the grape harvest. Human feet were usually used to "trample out the vintage," followed later in time with the development of a screw type mechanism that would exert a more consistent and complete pressure on the grapes that had been collected. These "grapes of wrath" again symbolize all those unrepentant souls that will eventually suffer these horrific consequences.

Again, as we approach the end of another of the 7 sections of the Revelation, we have a dreadful image of the judgment. The river of blood of those lost, is to the depth of a horse's bridle, and extending to over 200 miles long! This is again a figurative description of the judgment, but in a very vivid way helps the reader to emotionally understand the tremendous loss to humanity the beast has brought about. False religion and ungodly human governments have cost humanity more than could ever be measured.

It is my hope that the reading and understanding of this passage may help yet another soul to become a part of that symbolic 144,000, who will not have to face this destiny!

## SECTION #5: CHAPTERS 15 – 16

The **central point** of this section is the pouring out of the 7 bowls of God's wrath upon unrepentant mankind. It is important that we see the many close similarities between the 7 bowls of this section and the 7 trumpets of section #3. Both the sounding of the trumpets and the pouring out of the bowls bring about various plagues and catastrophes upon an unrepentant world. We can also see some similarities with the opening of the 7 seals in section #2. It is important that we see each of these sections as parallel to one another, rather than connected end to end in a chronological series. If each of these sections were to be placed end to end chronologically, we may be confused into thinking that there will be many final judgments rather than just one. Looking back to section #2, the opening of the 6th seal brought the reader up to the final judgment. In section #3 the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet brought the reader again to the final judgment. In section #4 we read of the Son of Man beginning the harvest of the earth, again clearly referring to the final judgment. Now in this section we find the 7 bowls of wrath poured out upon mankind, all leading the reader to the moment of the final judgment of God. For this reason it is important for us to forsake our "western" mentality that expects everything to be written in chronological order, and to start reading the Revelation in the unique way it was written.

Due to the many similarities between the 7 bowls and the 7 trumpets, we will conclude that the **time-span** of this section is also the entire Christian dispensation. Note again that despite the various plagues, (that are very similar to the plagues brought upon the Egyptians in the days of Moses), that in 16:9,11 we find men blaspheming the name of God and refusing to repent or to give Him glory. I find these verses to be very revealing, for they indicate that every knee has at this point in the Revelation not yet bowed to God, (see Romans 14:10-11 / Philippians~ 2:9-11), and that we are again seeing the suffering man has brought upon himself. Suffering he must endure for not seeking the power of God to remove the plagues, but rather repeating the ancient mistake of the Pharaoh who chose to spend "one more night with the frogs" rather than to repent.

The most obvious **"keys"** given to the reader in this section are:

### **The plagues that occur with the pouring out of each bowl (16:1-21)**

In Exodus 7-11 we find that four of the plagues mentioned in the Revelation have close counterparts in the plagues brought upon Egypt. The final 2 bowls also include some imagery, (frogs and hail) that are clear allusions to the Egyptian plagues. With this key in place we must ask, what is the most important lesson that we may gather from the Egyptian plagues? The answer is that those who refuse to submit to the will of God, will taste the wrath of God.

**Frogs = Unclean spirits**

The key words in this section are "blasphemed," "wrath of God," and "plagues." With these words the reason for the conflict is given, as well as the consequences of that conflict between unrepentant man and his Creator (16:11).

The key number in this section is again the number 7, for in this section we see the final "7" series in the Revelation (7 churches, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 bowls). It is interesting to note that the symbolism of the number 7 is made clear in 15:1, "for in them the wrath of God is complete."

The number "3" also appears in 16:13 with 3 frogs, (unclean spirits). Although the number "3" is often associated with Deity, (the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit), it is obvious that here the number "3" represents the counterfeit "deities" sent throughout the earth to deceive with their sorceries and "signs."

## **Chapter 15**

This section opens with John recording yet another great sign he was given, that being the 7 plagues that would soon be poured out by 7 angels. Before the 7 plagues are released, the heavenly scene is set in chapter 15 for the dramatic journey of the 7 angels from heaven to earth. In his vision, John sees what looks like a sea of glass that is somehow either on fire, or that is shimmering and bright like a fire. Standing on this smooth sea of glass are all those who have won the victory over the beast. As they are gathered together, John sees them holding harps of God, singing the "song of Moses and the Lamb." Such a song would indicate that those who are singing represent those saved souls who had lived under the Old and the New Covenants. Here again as in previous chapters, we find victorious souls in heaven, while the final judgment on earth is still yet to come. While this may pose a chronological problem for us, keep in mind that it is not the point of each vision to put everything into an orderly timeline. The main point continues to be one of giving comfort as to the eternal condition of the saved who have overcome the beast, while giving encouragement to persevere those still living upon the earth. Note that those rejoicing in heaven had been victorious over the beast, his image, his mark, and over the number of his name. From studying previous chapters, each of these symbolic terms should now be more clearly understood. Satan seeks to enslave mankind in many different fashions. Those who are to be victorious must see through and overcome each of his methods.

After this wonderful song of praise is heard, we then read of the temple or sanctuary of the tabernacle being opened for all to see. To the Jewish mind, the temple was a very sacred place. The thought of the inner shrine of the tabernacle being opened was a very disconcerting thought. Yet, in this vision, God has determined that it would be revealed as the 7 chosen angels carrying the 7 golden bowls were to be released upon the earth. Each bowl was filled with the wrath of God, as they were given to the angels by one of 4 living creatures. I do not consider these creatures to be the same as those mentioned in chapter 13, seeing that those creatures worshipped the dragon. Such would not be permitted in the tabernacle of God. We may assume that this is a symbolic reference to the cherubim who watched over the Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place in the temple. As the temple now fills with smoke, it becomes clear that the

releasing of the 7 bowls of wrath is imminent. During this time, no one would be permitted to enter the temple. Where there is smoke, there is fire! The wrath of God is ready to be discharged upon a world that truly deserves what is about to happen.

We may also note that regardless of conditions upon earth, there is (and there will be) great joy in heaven! The singing and the praising of His name in heaven continues, even as the 7 bowls of wrath are destined to be delivered upon the earth.

## Chapter 16

Now the order is given, and the 1<sup>st</sup> bowl is emptied upon the earth. The results? Mankind is infected with loathsome sores. This was the nature of the 6th plague that God had brought upon the Egyptians in the days of Moses. It was the first plague that Pharaoh's magicians could not somehow replicate or fake. Even so, Pharaoh did not yet let God's people go.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> bowl turns the sea to blood, killing every living creature of the sea. In Exodus 7:14 we find that the 1st plague brought upon Egypt was the turning of the river Nile into blood. Here in Revelation, the 2nd bowl turns the sea itself into blood, which would effect the entire world.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> bowl turns all the rivers into blood, which is more parallel to the 1st Exodus plague. The irony of this plague is that because of the wickedness on the earth, those who have shed the blood of the saints and prophets will now only have "blood to drink." Of course this is not to be taken literally. I'm not a doctor, but to my knowledge human life could not be sustained if all water were to be turned into blood! As in the days of Pharaoh, however, those who chose to resist God will eventually suffer, as they have caused the citizens of his kingdom to suffer.

The 4<sup>th</sup> bowl is different in that it is poured out upon the sun, causing men to be scorched. Note again, (as in previous sections), mankind is still exhibiting a stubborn heart that refuses to repent, even after such great suffering!

The 5<sup>th</sup> bowl is also different in that it is poured out upon the "throne" of the beast. The mention of darkness and the pain producing a gnawing of tongues easily reminds the reader of descriptions of hell found elsewhere in the Bible (see Matthew 25:30, Luke 16:24). However, again we find no repentance, and even more disturbingly, a continuing blaspheming of the God of heaven!

The 6<sup>th</sup> bowl dries up a specific river, the great river Euphrates, allowing the releasing of three unclean spirits out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. Since the Euphrates is still the name of one of the major rivers in the Middle East, many see the mention of this river as being somehow connected with recent turmoil and wars in that region today. Keep in mind, however, that the Euphrates was a very symbolic river, being one of the 4 rivers that watered Eden. The Tigris and the Euphrates together formed the Fertile Crescent, which many refer to as the "cradle of civilization." As the Nile was the symbol of life to the Egyptians, so was the Euphrates to those in and around Mesopotamia. The 6th bowl is not describing the outcome of a "nuclear war in the Middle East," but rather in keeping with the symbolism of the entire book of Revelation, it is employing such language to figuratively describe the consequences of man's sin, and the beginning of God's punishment for their rebellion. Yet, the temptation

for many commentators is to attempt to literally "peg" this 6th bowl to some earthly event that is soon to occur in that region. The Middle East has been a hot spot for political unrest throughout our lifetimes. If we go back further into history, however, we could find that this is not something new. 1,000 years ago it was even worse! The Crusades were raging, Islam had declared holy war upon the Christian nations of Europe, and had taken over Jerusalem and the holy lands. Going back to the 7th century A.D., we find Muhammad beginning his consolidation of the Arabic tribes, as Islam began to lower the curtain of darkness over Arabia, north Africa, and beyond. To point to the violence and unrest that is now taking place in the Middle East as the fulfillment of prophecy, is to demonstrate a very limited view of history. Having said this, it is my view that the often referred to "Battle of Armageddon" is not referring to a literal battle that will be fought in the Middle East, but rather is a reference to the spiritual figurative battle that has, and will continue to be fought, to the end of time. It is the battle between good and evil, and for those that are not on God's side in this conflict, they will be gathered together as a defeated army, awaiting their punishment.

At last the final 7<sup>th</sup> bowl is poured out, producing the greatest earthquake ever heard by man, splitting the "great city" into 3 parts. This great city that was a symbol of the ungodly world, is referred to as "Babylon." This passage reveals that God has not forgotten the wickedness of the nations that have arisen against Him throughout history. Each and every such evil nation (and their leaders) will be figuratively made to drink of the wine of God's wrath. At this point in John's vision, even the islands flee, the mountains disappear or hide, and hail weighing in at about 100 pounds each, begin to fall from the sky! Again we are surprised to find anyone surviving, if this were to actually happen, there would be no survivors! Yet remember, this is a vision, not a literal foretelling of future events. The really amazing result of all this, however, is that once again, we find those who are still living unrepentant!

This chapter is complex, but the overall view should not be beyond our understanding. As in previous sections, we find God's immediate judgment upon man's sin can be seen in the direct consequences of sin. Many of man's diseases are passed on by sinful behavior. Much of man's suffering is self-inflicted. The wars of aggression for land, power, and greed, continue. Yet we find repeatedly the rebellion of man rather than the change of his heart. Each of these plagues is leading the reader up to the final judgment of God. The similarities to the plagues of Moses upon Egypt are not accidental. Just as each plague devastated Egypt to a greater degree, the heart of Pharaoh grew harder to reach. For some people repentance will not be found.

## SECTION #6: CHAPTERS 17-19

The **central point** of this section is clearly the judgment of God pronounced upon the world, (17:1) however in this section extra emphasis is given to the earthly organizations or governments devoted to Satan and to the oppression of God's people (17:2 / 17:6). These 3 chapters explain the nature of the "Great Harlot," the completeness of her fall, and He who has brought about her fall. Chapter 19 is a chapter of victory and

rejoicing among the saints. We see similar victory scenes at the end of sections #4 (14:1-8), #3 (11:15-19), and #2 (7:9-17). This again shows the parallel nature of each section, for although each section is unique, there are numerous similarities among the 7 sections of the Revelation.

The **time-span** of this section can again be seen as the entire Christian age. The harlot is described as the "great city which reigns over the kings of the earth (17:18)." Although many cities have reigned over other kingdoms throughout history, it becomes clear that the "role model" for this particular city was Rome (17:9). Keep in mind that at the time the Revelation was given to John, the power he saw and heard outside his window was Rome. To those who first received the Revelation, the only power they had known in their lifetimes was that of Rome. It was Rome that was used as the stereotype of a nation drunk with the blood of saints, and thus ripe for judgment. From the first century we are then transported to the very end itself as God's apostles and prophets are told to rejoice at God's vengeance upon the harlot (18:20). We conclude this section when we witness the defeat of the beast and the false prophet as they are cast alive into the lake of fire (19:20).

The **“keys”** given to the reader to unlock the mysteries in this section are:

**7 heads = 7 mountains (17:9)**

**10 horns = 10 future kings (17:12)**

**Lamb = Lord of lords / King of kings (17:14)**

**waters = peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (17:15)**

**woman (harlot) = great city (17:18)**

**fine linen = righteous acts of the saints (19:8)**

**Rider on White horse = Faithful & True (19:11) / Word of God (19:13)**

The key words in this section are: "fallen," "Babylon," and "kings." The most memorable passage in 18:2 chants "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen!" We find in this the theme of the ultimate demise and defeat of Babylon, which so fittingly represents the epitome of evil embodied in human governments. Though Babylon was once used by God to punish His rebellious people, her very name lives on to this day representing that which is evil on earth. In this section we find both kings who have fallen (17:10), and powers that have fallen due to the victory of our "King of Kings" (19:16). Christ, (the Word of God 19:13), is described as "King of kings" for that is indeed what He is! The great harlot is judged, her kings who had reigned over many other kings, have been broken. Even the beast and his false prophet are cast into the lake of fire. "Lord of lords, and King of king" indeed summarizes well the message of the entire Revelation.

The key numbers in this section are already explained for the reader in the text to some extent. We are reminded in 17:12 that the number '10' is often used when referring to kings, horns, crowns, etc (also see 12:3 / 13:1). Thus we may again conclude that here it speaks of having complete power or rule. Many have sought to name these 10 kings through the study of Roman history. Some commentators are quite convincing in their conclusions. However even if one could prove conclusively which 10 Roman kings are being referred to in this verse, is it of any real significance to the 20th century reader? Our priority in this chapter is to see the influence of the dragon through the evil governments of the world.

The 7 heads of the beast upon which the woman sits are explained as 7 mountains upon which the woman sits. We learn in 17:18 that the "woman" or "great harlot" is the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth. Thus the fact that the beast upon which she sits has seven heads, (representing 7 hills) is interesting. Considering the fact that Rome was known as the "city set on 7 hills," it is no coincidence that we find this city (harlot) also sitting on 7 hills.

To be consistent in our approach to the Revelation, however, we must see that the use of "Roman" imagery does not restrict the application of the Revelation to only the days of Roman power. The Revelation was meant to give the reader an overview of the history of man, in essence, his entire history "at a glance." The temptation, however, is to interpret it as a day-by-day account. The reason for this error is obvious, for that is how man sees history being made. It is only God who has seen the entire picture. Thus the Revelation was given to broaden man's perspective of the very events (both on earth and in heavenly realms) that have shaped his world. It should be no surprise to us that a first-century document would employ first-century imagery to convey its message.

Other numbers mentioned in this section are repeats from earlier sections, such as the 24 elders (19:4), and the 4 living creatures (19:4). (See comments on section #2.)

## **Chapter 17**

In this chapter we are introduced to the "Great Harlot." One of the 7 angels who had (in the previous section) assisted in pouring out the 7 bowls now shows John the one who "sits on many waters." Verses 1–6 give the reader the complete, vile description of her nature and her influence upon the world. She is described as the great harlot who had engaged in fornication with the kings of the earth, and essentially all the inhabitants of the earth were made to drink of the "wine" of her fornication. As we have understood throughout the Revelation, we realize this is not a description of a specific woman in history, nor even necessarily a woman! The Great Harlot simply symbolizes the wicked human organizations and governments of the world that have led man into wholesale sin. It seems, however, that the Great Harlot is not just any government, but that rather she represents any human government that gains enormous control over other governments & kings, and thus gains extreme control of her subjects as well as the nations of the world! She is called Babylon, for to the Jews and most Christians living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the memory of the wickedness and power of Babylon was legendary. As we shall see, however, many other nations have lived down to the level of Babylon, and one in particular is clearly referred to in the following verses.

Verses 7–18 of this chapter are very interesting and helpful in understanding the “code” of the Revelation. We are first told that we are going to learn about the “mystery” concerning the woman and the beast. We first learn that the Harlot was seen by John as being “drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” Although the earliest examples of persecution are recording in the New Testament book of Acts, this record ends before the organized persecution of Christians began to be leveled by the Roman Empire in the following generations. It should be obvious that the Harlot, Babylon the Great, clearly implicates the Roman Empire. But in what way does the Great Harlot represent Rome? It would appear that the Great Harlot symbolizes the false religious front that was Rome. Even before Christianity arrived on the scene, Rome had the pretense of being very religious. Paganism in the form of many deities and idols was at the center of the culture of Rome. Later, as Christianity moved into this position of prominence, it didn’t take the pagan culture of Rome very long to dilute and to degenerate what once was the pure gospel into yet another false religion. This ability of Rome, (and virtually any great power that has ever existed upon the earth), to produce and to promote such an entity is perfectly symbolized by the expression “The Great Harlot.”

If the Great Harlot is a representation of the false religious front put forth by Rome, then who is the beast? Note that the beast now being introduced is clearly described in Satanic terms. Ascending out of the bottomless pit, his end will be perdition (destruction.) Discussions about the “beasts” mentioned in Revelation can get a bit confusing, for the term “beast” has been used in various ways in previous chapters (see chapter 13). But just as there are different beasts upon the earth, we find various beasts in this vision. In the final analysis, however, they are not that far removed from one another.

We are told that the 7 heads of this beast are actually 7 *mountains*. Nearly all commentators see a reference here to the city of Rome. This may be confusing, however. If the Great Harlot represents Rome, why would she be riding upon a beast that also represents Rome? Perhaps the answer is found in what we learned in chapter 13. There we learned that the beast that rose from the sea (13:1) was clearly empowered by the dragon, (Satan), but it was the Land Beast that disguised itself as a lamb, while actually exercising the authority of the Sea Beast! Hence we concluded that the Sea Beast was the secular civil Roman government, while the Land Beast was the power of Rome transformed into a quasi-religious power. It was that very organization which later became known as the Roman Catholic Church, gaining almost absolute power over the many peoples and nations of the world. Thus the statement, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (17:15).”

In keeping with previous chapters, therefore, it would seem consistent to conclude that the “Great Harlot” is simply another way to describe false religion riding on the back of ungodly human governments. But, as we have often emphasized, we must see Rome simply as a “type” of ungodly government that seems to always find its way to power in each generation. Thus, the beast was not just Rome, the beast is any ungodly government of which Rome was the clear and present example to John’s 1<sup>st</sup> readers. With this in mind, the 7 kings described in verses 10-11 are not necessarily specific Roman kings, but rather symbolize kings throughout the ages. The 10 horns symbolize the complete power that Satan gives to his kings, but each of them only occupy their position for a limited

time. During their time they will go to war with the Lamb, but the Lamb will be victorious. In verse 16 we are surprised to find the evil powers actually hating the harlot, and seeking to destroy her! While secular governments often support false religion, they also may quickly turn upon any form of religion. There were many waves of persecution and actual pitched battles fought during the decline of secular Rome and the rise of the Papacy. In real life we find that often the best of worldly friends become great enemies as they self-destruct. It is significant, however, that we see God's hand at work even when evil entities turn against one another. God has, and will continue, to even use the ungodly to carry out His justice and judgments!

## **Chapter 18**

John now hears another angel from heaven announcing the fall of Babylon. He announces; "Babylon the great is fallen, and has become a habitation of demons and for every foul spirit." He speaks of how all the nations of the earth had drunk of the "wine of Babylon's fornication," and how that many of the world had become rich because of her. Just as we have read in the previous sections of the Revelation, it is the ungodly that profit from being in league with the world. In section 2 it was one of the 4 horsemen that created scarcity and thus profited due to the control of goods (Rev.6:5-6). In section 4 it was only those who had the mark of the beast who could buy and sell (Rev.13:17). Although the world has found wealth due to its partnership with "Babylon," we again are reminded of their coming plagues. The angel says of her; "In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow." This reminds one of the rich man in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, who's wealth and luxury were replaced by an existence that was turned 180 degrees from his previous life. But first, there must be a separation, a culling out of God's people! It is then that the great invitation is offered; "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins..." God's plan of punishment is clearly revealed. The urgency of separation from the ways of Babylon is proclaimed for God's people to hear.

In verses 9–19 the mourning begins. The mourning of those who had committed sins with Babylon, and also the sorrow of those had done business with her. Unfortunately the mourning is not for their sins or for the sinful state of Babylon, but rather for what has happened to Babylon! The listing of many of the precious goods bought and sold by the world gives one a bit of insight into what was considered of value in the 1st century world, most of which is still sought after today. Yet it is said that the merchants will weep, because there was no one to buy their merchandise. The mourning reaches a crescendo, but is matched by the rejoicing of heaven over her fall. The fall of Babylon at last brings justice to the apostles and the prophets whose blood had been shed by her power.

Verses 21–24 record the epitaph of the wicked city. Then, as though to finalize the death of this symbolic city, a mighty angel throws a stone as large as a millstone into the sea. As he does so, he gives meaning to his actions by stating that "thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore." The city now lies silent. Her violent streets are now gone, her music can no longer be heard, her craftsmen are now absent, her lights are out, and the last wedding has taken place.

## Chapter 19

The celebration of the saved in heaven now begins in earnest in verses 1-10. First, John hears a loud (collective) voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God!" As they praise Him for His righteous (just) judgments, this multitude speaks of His fair judgment of the great harlot who had corrupted the world. By bringing justice to her, God was credited by the multitude for "avenging" those who had been victims of her wickedness. The 24 elders now make another appearance, (Rev. 4:4, 5:14, 11:16), and again add to this song of praise. In this passage some very interesting terms are used. It is here God is described as "Omnipotent" or all-powerful. It is also here that the righteous acts of the saints are described as "fine linen." In these verses we are also reminded of a parable of Jesus with the expression, "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!"

Perhaps the most unexpected verse in this section is verse 10, where we find John so overwhelmed by the visions he has been receiving, that he attempts to worship the messenger! John is quickly rebuked for this attempt, as the exhortation for all ages is given, "Worship God!"

In the middle section of this chapter we find one called "Faithful and True" entering on a white horse. It is quite apparent that the rider of this horse is the Lord Himself, for He is also referred to as the "Word of God." It is important not to confuse this horseman with those described in chapter 6. This horseman was given authority from God to judge and to rule the armies of heaven. He is also described "King of Kings."

The chapter ends by again pronouncing the final judgment upon the unsaved world. As an angel stands in the sun, he cries out, calling all the birds of the air to, "come and gather together for the supper of the great God." Unlike the previous joyous "supper" mentioned earlier in this chapter, however, this is a supper consisting of the flesh of those who had made war against God's "army." As its conclusion, the beast was captured (along with the false prophet), and both were cast into the lake of fire. Certainly these symbols are meant to convey images of the coming judgment of those who have worked against God's kingdom. While it certainly is not possible to fully describe "hell" in human, physical terms, words and phrases such as; "lake of fire" and "brimstone" are symbols that help one visualize it. In keeping with the symbolism of Revelation, even these terms should not be taken as literally existing in hell. What pain would physical fire bring to spiritual beings? To be certain, hell itself will be much worse than these symbols! Note that as we grow closer to the end of the Revelation, we find the descriptions of hell becoming more graphic. We are now ready to begin the final section of the Revelation.

## SECTION #7: CHAPTERS 20 – 22

The **central point** of this final section of the Revelation is to reveal the ultimate defeat of Satan and his forces, and the victory of Christ and His saints. One could scan the previous 6 sections and find that this has been the overall reoccurring theme throughout. Although each section is similar in both message and span, it becomes most obvious with this one that the *emphasis* has shifted to the final judgment. Also notice that much of what we find in this section has already been mentioned in earlier sections, however now greater detail is given.

The **time-span** of this section would appear at first reading to be only the last moments of human history before man is plunged to his eternal destinies. However we must again resist the temptation to allow "modern" sensationalized interpretations to color our understanding of the Revelation. Although the *emphasis* of this final section is being placed upon the final judgment, we must see that a bigger picture is still being painted.

We must also remind ourselves that the Revelation is a book of symbols, and that each word and each phrase must be seen for its possible symbolic meaning. This is especially important in these final chapters, for even many who hold firmly to the belief that the Revelation is a symbolic book, often break away from this path as they reach chapter 20 of the Revelation.

The **keys** given to the reader to unlock the mysteries in this section are:

### **dragon / serpent = Satan / the Devil (20: 2)**

The key words found in this section are the words "bound," "death," "life," "resurrection," and "Jesus." Out of the hundreds of times the name of Jesus is mentioned in the New Testament, one may find it surprising that in the book of Revelation the name of "Jesus" is only mentioned 14 times. Throughout the Revelation He is unquestionably the main "character," however the infrequent usage of the name "Jesus" speaks of the symbolic nature of the book. Four times in this final section the Lamb of God is referred to as "Jesus" (20:4 / 22:16 / 22:20 / 22:21). It is as though, for the sake of those who are still struggling to understand the Revelation, the curtain is pulled back a little extra at the closing scene so that no doubt will remain as to who has won the victory.

Although found only once in this section, the word "bound" figures prominently in these closing chapters, for it is Satan who is bound so that he should deceive the nations no more. Once released, his final defeat occurs, as he is cast into the lake of eternal torment (20:10). Referring back to section 44 (12:7-12), we find that had it not been for the blood of the Lamb, the "binding" of Satan would never have taken place. This indeed is the theme of the entire Revelation. Satan has been cast down! Christ has overcome! Through His blood all Christians have overcome the Deceiver as well. The battle has been won.

With the above thoughts in mind, the words "death" and "life" also clearly play a part in these concluding chapters. Three times the phrase "second death" is found in this section (20:6 / 20:14 / 21:8). In 20:6 it is made clear that the second death will have no

power over those who are priests of God, those who are blessed and holy, having taken part in the first resurrection. We may therefore conclude that the "second death" is another way of referring to the eternal damnation of the wicked.

Note that in Matthew 25:46 eternal "damnation" is placed in contrast to eternal "life." As much as heaven is the "life" to come, hell is most certainly the second "death." In this section "life" is spoken of in connection with the book of life, the tree of life, and the water of life. Having seen such death and chaos described throughout the Revelation, what a thrill it must have been to John to hear and see the life promised to all faithful Christians in such refreshing terms.

"Resurrection" is only mentioned twice in the entire Revelation, but much has been made of these two occurrences. In 20:5-6 we find it is the just and holy that will take part in the 1<sup>st</sup> resurrection. No mention is later made of a "2<sup>nd</sup> resurrection," however many have speculated about its nature. It can be argued that since a 1<sup>st</sup> resurrection is spoken of, there must indeed be a 2<sup>nd</sup>. This does seem to be logical. However, before we develop entire "theories" (such as the rapture theory) around a 2<sup>nd</sup> resurrection, let's attempt to keep this discussion within its context. There can be no doubt that the 1<sup>st</sup> resurrection is for Christians, and that the 2<sup>nd</sup> death is for non-Christians. Christians will never experience the 2<sup>nd</sup> death, that is, eternal spiritual separation from God! Since faithful Christians will never face the 2<sup>nd</sup> death, it would be logical to conclude that Christians need not be concerned about a so-called "2<sup>nd</sup> resurrection." If a 2<sup>nd</sup> resurrection is here implied, it would seem to apply only to those who have died the 2<sup>nd</sup> death. They will, in effect, be "raised to die an eternal death." From other clear Bible teachings, we find that both the resurrection of the saved and the lost will occur at the same time (II Thess.1:7-10 / I Thess.5:2-4). With this thought in mind, we need to remember that the terms "1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>" could refer to types or categories of death or resurrection, rather than chronology.

Lest we become confused by current theories, however, let's remember that any phrases such as "1,000 years" or "first resurrection" are still being used within the context of an apocalyptic book. To begin taking the Revelation literally at this point would be as misguided as trying to prove that Jesus is actually a four-footed lamb! Based upon other clear teachings from the Bible, we know that there will be a resurrection of both the good and the bad, and that both events will occur simultaneously (see I Thessalonians 4:15-18 / II Thessalonians 1:7-10 / I Corinthians 15 / John 5:28-29). It would be inconsistent to now determine from these verses that the resurrection of the good and the resurrection of the bad will be separated by 1,000 years! Surely we can see that this is figurative language. Do we not speak even today of two feuding nations as being 'light-years apart?' I'm convinced that if it were not for the current fascination with "pre-millennial" preaching, understanding the Revelation today would be a much easier task.

The key number in this final section is unquestionably the number "1,000." Six times the phrase "1,000 years" is mentioned. In 20:3 it is Satan who is bound 1,000 years. In 20:4 we find the martyred saints living and reigning for 1,000 years. In 20:5 we learn that the rest of the dead did not live again until the 1,000 years were finished, and in 20:7 we find that at the end of 1,000 years Satan will be released. Having been blasted in the face with these first seven verses of chapter 20, the average American chronological mind immediately begins an attempt to calculate the progression and order

of events being discussed in this chapter. May I remind you that numbers throughout the Revelation have had symbolic rather than numerical meanings? To abandon that approach now and to attempt to ascribe actual numerical meaning to the term 1,000 years is to change course in mid-stream.

Earlier in our study we had found that the number "10" often indicated fullness of power or rule. Multiples of 10, (10 x 10 x 10), therefore indicate fullness to a further degree. "Years" themselves are mere measures of earth-time. In such a spiritual and symbolic context we should not see these "years" as revolutions of the earth around the sun. "1,000 years" here describes the fullness of the event being discussed. Based upon these thoughts it becomes easy to see that the "1,000 years" in which Satan is bound is not a literal 1,000 years, but rather speaks again of his complete defeat at the cross. Those martyrs who will "live and reign with Christ for 1,000 years" speaks of their total victory over death, and their eternal joy of being with Christ. The ungodly dead who remain "dead" for "1,000 years" gives the reader a picture of the spiritually dead who ultimately must face the second death and eternal separation from God. The release of Satan from his prison after the "1,000 years" reveals that although Satan has been bound by the blood of the Lamb, he is bound only in those hearts where the gospel has gone. In the final analysis he will still be able to gather together multitudes that have been foolish enough to follow him and to be deceived by him. His release is indeed for a 'little while,' for in the end that gathering will only result in both the Deceiver and the deceived being cast into the lake of fire.

## **Chapter 20**

The opening scene of this section portrays yet another angel coming down from heaven, carrying a key to the bottomless pit. His 1<sup>st</sup> task is to lay hold of the Devil, to bind him with a great chain, and to throw him into the pit. While this may sound like the final judgment of Satan, we must understand that this binding of Satan is not for eternity. From other clear teachings of the Bible we learn that although Satan received a head wound by the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross, he is still at work. When God provided mankind with a plan of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus, Satan was essentially "bound." Unfortunately, this does not mean that Satan would no longer have any influence over the earth. Although bound, many have chosen to "enter his cage." In the end, many will be found to carry his mark. The release of Satan, (verses 3, 7-10), refers not to a period of earth history, but rather to the fact that the judgment will permit the gathering of his followers to be cast with the Devil and his angels into the eternal fires of hell.

Meanwhile we again are reminded of the souls of the righteous in heaven, living and reigning with Christ. Let us not be confused by the 1,000 years, but rather let us see this as simply a way of contrasting the existence of the righteous souls in heaven and the binding of Satan as occurring at the same time. His "release" will bring an end to the wait for both heaven and hell. Satan will be brought out, to be cast down for eternity with all those he has deceived. Those in heaven will be joined with all the saints to reign with Christ.

The pre-millennial view of chapter 20 is very confusing, as it attempts to take many of these symbolic terms quite literally. First, the pre-tribulation pre-millennial view teaches that the church will be "raptured" or taken from the earth, leaving only the unsaved behind. They also teach that during these literal "7 years of tribulation" the forces of evil will have full-sway upon the earth. However, they also teach that this will also be the last chance for many to be saved before the 2nd coming of Christ, which will immediately follow. This seems hard to imagine, that with the entire church extracted from the earth, and with the devil in full control of it, that somehow evangelism will continue, and that there will be many more souls saved! Following the "tribulation" they also believe that Christ will return, and that He will literally reign 1,000 years. However, after 1,000 years of perfect peace on earth with Christ completely in control, they believe that Satan will once again be released to gather his armies (from a now perfect world) for the final battle, which they call the battle of Armageddon! This is truly an irrational and incompatible theory that certainly does not fit with other clear teachings in the Bible concerning the singular 2nd coming of our Lord, after which all will face the judgment.

In addition, the pre-millennial doctrine also has the habit of taking most of the details of the Revelation literally, except when they do not "fit" the theory, at which point its proponents quickly turns to a figurative interpretation. As noted in our introduction and throughout our study of Revelation, it should be obvious to any Bible student that if any book of the New Testament contains figurative language, the Revelation should be at the top of the list! Certainly not every word in Revelation is figurative, but be it safe to say that the most sensible and logical approach to this book is to **assume it to be figurative** unless the text makes it very clear that it **not** to be taken figuratively! This is the opposite approach we would generally take in understanding the other books of the New Testament, but that is the nature of this book, and it has some ancient "cousins" in the Old Testament that employ this same type of writing (see Ezekiel, the 2nd half of Daniel, and Zechariah).

This again brings the reader to the throne room of God. In verses 12-15 we find the most vivid and detailed description yet of the judgment. These verses, perhaps more than any other, have helped man form a mental picture of what the judgment will be like. Yet even here we must remember that these are again word pictures. Will an Omniscient God actually need a book in which to record the names of those who are saved? For the sake of our understanding, however, we can be thankful that God has given us these pictures.

Note also that there is apparently more than one book being described in this passage. Verse 12 states that "the *books* were opened." If we want to get a fuller picture, it seems to indicate that there is a book of deeds, and also a book of life. In this vision the dead are envisioned as being judged from one book that contains all their works. Fortunately for the saved, however, their names are written in the book of life. Those whose names are not written in the book of life will be judged according to their works that are recorded, we might say, in the "book of death." Seeing that no one can or will be saved by their good works, we must conclude that those whose names are not written in the book of life will most assuredly be cast into the "lake of fire."

## Chapter 21

Much attention has been given to the “new heaven and the new earth” mentioned in verse 1. Many have taken these words literally to mean that in some way the earth is going to be replaced, restored, rebuilt, or refurbished when Jesus returns. Since other more clear passages speak of the earth being burned up in the day of the Lord, (II Peter 3:10), we should reconsider any literal interpretation of Revelation 21:1. If (as some teach) the Lord is going to literally replace the earth with a new one, then we must also ask why the heavenly home of God is going to be replaced with a new heaven? Is there something wrong with God’s dwelling place? Understanding that God’s dwelling place (or heaven) is a spiritual “place” and not a geographic location in the created universe, we must ask why or how it could ever be improved upon! Indeed, “heaven” is what it is because our perfect Creator is there. From this perspective, therefore, we must understand that the only change in God’s “place” of dwelling will be the addition of God’s people. Thus, in keeping with the symbolism of the Revelation, we should be able to see the phrase “new heaven and a new earth” as also a figurative statement. Since heaven and earth are the dwelling places of God and man, a “new heaven and a new earth” speaks of a new state of being for God and man. In a sense, they will be “merged.” Similar terminology was used by Isaiah to describe the old law being replaced by the new (Isaiah 51:4-6). This new order, in essence, will make it possible for God to wipe away every tear and remove every sorrow. All things will be made new!

After yet another brief (yet frightening) look at hell in verse 8, the Revelation returns to a further description of the eternal home of God’s people. One of the 7 angels who had previously poured out the 7 bowls now appears to John, requesting him to come see the “bride of the Lamb.” This is an odd combination of terms, but it is a clear reference to the saved throughout the ages. They are summed up and combined into the symbol of the great city or the holy Jerusalem. As this great city “descends out of heaven, we see this new order, as God’s people are now no longer persecuted, but rather glorified in their new city. The New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven is the description of this new order. The tabernacle of God will be with men. All of the godly will be in God’s presence, and He will be with them. The gates of the city number 12 to symbolize the 12 tribes of Israel, while the walls of the city are built upon 12 foundations, which represent the 12 apostles. This helps the reader to see that the Old Testament and the New Testament are now combined, as all of God’s people are brought together into His great city! As the angel begins to measure the city, the number 12 continues to be the basis for it, all in keeping with the symbolism of that number. The gold, the precious stones, descriptions of “streets of gold like clear glass,” are all given to help the human mind envision the beauty of being in God’s presence. Indeed, the value of earthly metals and stones would be totally insignificant in God’s spiritual realm! Note also that in this city no temple was to be found, certainly such earthly conveyances were no longer needed! God Himself will be in that city, thus there will be no reason for limiting His “presence” to the confines of a building. In addition, the services of the sun (or the moon) will no longer be needed. This should deal a heavy blow to the pre-millennial theory that the earth will not be destroyed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, but that somehow it will be remade. If we are to take this passage literally, the “remade” earth will be revolved around a sunless solar system!

One could spend a great deal of time considering each of the details given, but the most important detail is that there will be no need for a temple or light in His city. His presence eliminates the need for either, for God and Jesus will be the temple, and the glory of God and the Lamb will be its light. While the gates will never be closed, there will be no possibility for anything unclean to enter. God Himself will be in charge of security!

## Chapter 22

The expressions used in this chapter take the reader back about as far as one can go in God's Word, back to Genesis chapter 1 and the Garden of Eden! It seems only fitting that the final abode of the godly would be described in terms similar to the perfect garden in which God placed man in the beginning. With a pure river providing its "water of life" coming from the throne of God, the symbolism should be obvious and comforting to all of God's people. The famous "tree of life" is also found here, and apparently this term is used collectively to refer to 12 "trees of life," each of which bears a different kind of fruit. Not only will the fruit of these trees bless the inhabitants of heaven, but even the leaves of these trees will provide healing to all the people from all the nations who will be gathered together in this blessed environment. The curse brought upon man due to man's sin from the beginning will now be removed forever. The tree of life that Adam and Eve were prevented from accessing after their fall will now always be available to all of God's people! Just as God walked in the garden with man in the beginning, mankind will once again, only more perfectly in a spiritual sense, see the face of God, as His name will be on their foreheads.

As the end of the Revelation grows near, the reader is reminded in 22:6 of the introduction in 1:1, in which the term "shortly" is first used. Seeing that this is a relative term, even now with the passage of 2,000 years, if Jesus were to come today it could be considered a "short period of time" in contrast to all of human history. Also, we must remember that as we look back at our survey of this book, we can see that much of the content of the Revelation was concerned with human events that quickly began to take place in the first century, and have repeatedly taken place throughout human history. Yet, at the end of all the suffering man has self-inflicted, Jesus will come quickly. When Jesus returns, time will be no more. Blessed will be the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of the Revelation, because only those prepared will be rejoicing on that day.

At these words John again errs in worshipping at the feet of the angel, and once again is corrected by the angel (22:9). John is then told **not to seal up** the prophecy that he has been given, because the time was at hand. Again the reader is reminded of Jesus' quick return, and the reward that was to be given to every one according to their works. Those who are obedient will be given the right to eat of the tree of life, the very tree kept from Adam and Eve after their sin in the garden.

Further contrasts are made between conditions inside and outside God's city in these closing verses (22:11-15). One should not take these verses to support a fatalistic outlook upon life. While we are living upon the earth we do not have to surrender to some sort of irresistible force that makes and keeps us unjust and filthy in God's sight. People can change. However once all is said and done, there will be no further room for

repentance. Also in these final verses some further endearing terms for Jesus are to be found (22:13, 16). We are again reminded that He is the “Alpha and Omega,” (the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet), the “Beginning and the End,” and “the First and the Last.”

Perhaps one of the best-known passages in the Revelation is the warning concerning the adding to or taking away from the words of the Revelation (22:18-19). While this passage specifically applies to the Revelation, this principle is far reaching and can be found elsewhere in God’s Word (Deut.4:2). May we never be guilty of attempting to add to or to take away from God’s Word, or even the message and the meaning of it. Those who deceive others by doing so will someday learn that their name has also been removed from the symbolic “book of life” as discussed in chapter 20!

The Revelation ends with yet another reminder of Jesus’ return. Certainly one of the great strengths of the early church was its fervent belief that He could return at any moment. No doubt the images and the warnings of the Revelation helped build that belief. May we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century also allow the Revelation to have this effect upon our lives. With the Spirit of God within, and with the words of this prophecy in our hearts, may we all have the faith to pray, “Lord, come quickly!”

May we conclude with the words of the Revelation itself; "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son." Revelation 21:7

- Bruce Gleim 9/5/90 ~ Revised 4/25/00 ~ 7/29/09