

Journeys through God's Word

An Introductory Course

# REVELATION



Steven P  
Mueller

Study Guide



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3558 South Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63118-3968  
1-800-325-3040 • www.cph.org

Edited by Thomas J. Doyle

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00 99 00

# Contents

Introduction	4
<b>1</b> Christ Revealed to His People	6
<b>2</b> The Letters to the Seven Churches	14
<b>3</b> The Heavenly Vision	23
<b>4</b> The Seven Seals	31
<b>5</b> The Seventh Seal and the First Trumpets	38
<b>6</b> The Final Trumpets	45
<b>7</b> A Woman and a Dragon	52
<b>8</b> The 144,000	59
<b>9</b> The Seven Bowls and the Prostitute	67
<b>10</b> The Fall of Babylon and the Triumph of the Lamb	73
<b>11</b> Victory over Satan	80
<b>12</b> A New Heaven and a New Earth	88

# Introduction

The study of the Bible is nothing less than an exploration into the thoughts and desires of God for ordinary people like you and me. It takes us from this hardened and selfish world into the promise of a world where God's peace, justice, and mercy will be complete.

Delving into the Bible for the first time can be somewhat intimidating. We are taken to a distant past that is full of unfamiliar customs and traditions. We must become acquainted with a nation that viewed the world differently than many people do today. And we must begin to alter some of our current definitions to grasp the full meaning of our Lord's love and compassion.

As foreign as many customs and traditions might seem to us today, we will discover that people's natures remain the same. We are trapped today—as people were centuries ago—in an imperfect world where evil and pain seem all too prevalent. We, too, can view the world as meaningless and without hope. But Jesus Christ came to rescue the world from its quagmire, and His deliverance continues to change our lives. Pray that the Word of God will begin to alter your perspective. May His promises give you rich and lasting hope and joy!

## How to Use This Study

The Study Guide will direct your study of Revelation. The typical session is divided into five parts:

1. Approaching This Study
2. An Overview
3. Working with the Text
4. Applying the Message
5. Taking the Message Home

“Approaching This Study” is intended to whet the reader's appetite for the topics at hand. It leads participants into the world of the New Testament while summarizing the issues to be examined. “An Overview” summarizes the textual material used in each session. Before the text is examined in detail, it is viewed as a whole, allowing participants to “see the forest” before “exploring the trees.” “Working with the Text” draws participants into deeper biblical study, encouraging them to discover the gems of universal truth that lie in the details of God's Word. When ques-

tions appear difficult or unclear, the Leaders Guide provides a doorway to the answers. “Applying the Message” leads participants from the recorded Word of God to its possible application in our present lives. It helps participants more fully realize the implications of God’s Word for their daily experience as a Christian. Finally, “Taking the Message Home” invites participants to continue their scriptural meditation at home. Suggestions are given for personal reflection, for preview of the following session, and for private study of topics raised by the session. The study of God’s Word will be greatly enhanced by those actively pursuing the suggestions offered in this section.

Each session ends with some trivia that is intended to spark interest and generate additional discussion. This can be used to develop inquisitiveness and enthusiasm about related issues ripe for exploration.

## **Session 1**

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# **Christ Revealed to His People**

*(Revelation 1)*

### **Approaching This Study**

What comes to mind when you think about the Book of Revelation? Is it a difficult book? An exciting one? Does it tell about modern events in great detail, or does it refer only to past events? Is the book so confusing that you try not to think about it at all? Many Christians have struggled with these and other questions. Some seem to think that Revelation is the only important book in the Bible, and others act as if it's not in the Bible at all.

Revelation is worth studying. It is part of God's inspired Word to us today. It teaches us much and can help us to know our Lord. While the book may be confusing at first, Revelation becomes clearer to us as we learn about the kind of literature it contains and then read it in context with the rest of Scripture.

This book was written by John (see Revelation 1:1). The early Christian church clearly thought that the author was John, the disciple of Jesus, who also wrote the Gospel and three epistles. While these are different genres of writing, there are a number of themes and characteristics shared by John's Gospel and the Book of Revelation.

### **Type of Literature**

The major difference between John's Gospel, John's epistles, and Revelation is their genre. Whenever we read, we need to understand the type of writing that is before us. We have different expectations when we read a novel than when we read a magazine. We don't expect the same characteristics from a reputable newspaper as we do from a tabloid. If you don't know whether a story is fact or fiction, it can be difficult to understand. We also need to know the genre of literature when

we study biblical books. To understand Revelation, we must recognize that it is apocalyptic literature. “Apocalyptic” means “revealed” (that’s why this book is sometimes titled “The *Apocalypse* of St. John”—it means the same thing as *Revelation*). This type of writing was well-known at the time John wrote his book. It’s found in other biblical books—Joel, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Isaiah 24–27.

1. Apocalyptic literature almost always deals in some way with the end of the world. But it doesn’t do this directly. Instead, it uses symbolic or figurative language. That’s what makes the genre confusing. Not everyone knows the meaning of the symbols. John tells us what some of the symbols mean. Read Revelation 1:20. What are the symbols that John explains?
2. John uses many other symbols in Revelation. He portrays Jesus as a lamb. He uses a dragon to depict the devil. The church is a woman. Numbers have symbolic meaning as well. We will see many of these symbols in the course of our study. Where should we look to find the meaning of these symbols?
3. What do you think is the purpose of using symbols and images in writing? What characteristics does this style give to the book? What are the dangers of this type of writing?

There are other characteristics of apocalyptic literature. For example, the genre views the world in ultimate terms: in the end, everything is either good or evil. Apocalyptic literature is usually presented as a vision (see Revelation 1:10). Also, angels tend to be prominent in this kind of writing. Remember these characteristics, because they are evident in Revelation.

## Types of Interpretation

Knowing that Revelation is apocalyptic literature does not explain all the differences in interpretation among Christians. There are four basic ways that people read Revelation. Read the following descriptions adapted from the *Concordia Self-Study Bible*:

*Preterists* understand the book exclusively in terms of its first-century setting, claiming that most of the events have already taken place.

*Historicists* take it as describing the long chain of events from the time it was first written to the end of history.

*Futurists* place the book primarily in the end times.

*Idealists* view it as symbolic pictures of such truths as the victory of good over evil.

This study prefers the historicist view. Some of the events we read of in Revelation were clearly taking place at the time that John was writing. Some of them have yet to take place.

Consider also the following issue of interpretation: many people read Revelation as if it were written in chronological order. According to this view, events must happen in the order in which they are recorded in the book. However, if we consistently follow this view, we find that the world actually ends several times! Others believe that John writes in a cyclical pattern. He retells parts of the story several times, but in different ways, emphasizing different elements. Through repetition, John raises us to a higher level of understanding.

There are many other issues of interpretation we could discuss before we begin reading Revelation, but these are several of the basic ones. We'll consider these issues throughout our reading as we study God's message to John and to us today.

## **An Overview**

Revelation 1 sets the stage for the rest of the book. John briefly describes the nature of the book, but he focuses most of this chapter on the subject of the book—Jesus Christ. Christ is revealed to him in a vision and commissions him to be a prophet. John also commends this book to us today. The chapter might be outlined as follows:

Prologue (1:1–3)

Greetings (vv. 4–8)

Christ Commissions John (vv. 9–20)

## **Working with the Text**

### **Prologue (Revelation 1:1–3)**

Read Revelation 1:1–3. What claims does John make about this book? What promises are made to the reader?

## **Greetings (Revelation 1:4–8)**

1. Read Revelation 1:4–8. This section is similar to introductions found in letters in the New Testament. In it we hear greetings to the reader from John, but also from our triune God. All three persons of the Trinity are discussed in these verses. How is the Father described in verse 4? See also Exodus 3:14.

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:14)

2. How is the Holy Spirit described? You may find it helpful to consult other translations.

3. How is Jesus described in these verses? How does this help us to understand the primary focus of Revelation?

4. In verse 8 Jesus calls himself “the Alpha and the Omega.” What does this mean? Compare the second half of this verse with verse 4. What does this tell us about Jesus?

5. Verse 7 prophesies about the second coming of Christ. What specifically does John say that the nations will see at Christ’s return? See also Zechariah 12:10b and John 19:34.

They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (Zechariah 12:10b)

One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. (John 19:34)

### **Christ Commissions John (Revelation 1:9–20)**

1. Read Revelation 1:9–20. Now the substance of the book begins. Why is it important that John sees this vision and presents it to us? When does John receive this vision?

2. Verse 13 describes the heart of John's vision. He tells us that he saw someone "like a son of man." What does this mean? See also Daniel 7:13–14 and Mark 8:31.

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13–14)

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31)

3. The vision of Jesus Christ is described in detail in verses 12–16. Reading these words, we obviously encounter rich, symbolic language. How is Jesus described? What do these details communicate about Him? See also Exodus 28:4; Daniel 7:9; Daniel 10:5–6; Ezekiel 1:24; and Ephesians 6:17.

These are the garments they are to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so they may serve Me as priests. (Exodus 28:4)

As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took His seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of His head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. (Daniel 7:9)

I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. (Daniel 10:5–6)

When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. (Ezekiel 1:24)

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:17)

4. Look again at Christ's words in verses 17–18. From these words, what can we assume is an important theme of this book?

## **Applying the Message**

1. John could have presented the material of this chapter in one or two sentences: Jesus controls all things and He protects us. Instead, John gives us detailed descriptions of Jesus. Can we enrich our understanding of God through these verses? What insight have these names and descriptions given to you?

2. This chapter has a great deal to tell us about the significance and importance of God's Word in our lives. What do we learn about the Word? What are its blessings for us? What can we do to ensure that we receive these blessings?

3. This chapter presents the main message of Revelation to us. We discussed that message in question 4 of the last section. What does that message mean to you today? Where and when is it particularly comforting?

## **Taking the Message Home**

### **Review**

1. Read Revelation 1 again. Notice the rich way in which John presents his vision to us. Contemplate the tremendous blessings that God has given us through Christ, and thank Him in prayer and worship.

2. Look up *apocalyptic literature* in a Bible dictionary. Review its description. How does what we have studied fit this description?

### **Looking Ahead**

Next week we will study Revelation 2–3. These chapters focus on Christ’s revelation to seven churches in Asia Minor and to us today.

### **Working Ahead**

1. Read Revelation 2–3. As you read the letters to the seven churches, you will see that the letters are all different. But there is a pattern that links them together. What kind of pattern can you see?

2. Look at a map of Asia Minor at the time when Revelation was written (there may be one in your Bible). See if you can find the island of Patmos and the location of the seven churches that are addressed in these chapters.

3. Do any of these letters sound like they were written to you? Which one(s)? Why?

### **Did You Know?**

#### **What’s in a Name?**

Many people will tell you that the last book of the Bible is *Revelations*. In saying this, they are nearly right. Actually, the last book of the Bible is called *Revelation*. The difference is only one letter—an extra *s*. This may seem like a minor difference. But that single letter can actually change the meaning of the title and the focus of the entire book.

To name this book *Revelations* is to emphasize the details. There are, indeed, many details revealed to us in this book. John sees many different things while experiencing his vision. But his book is not really a series of revelations about the future. Rather, it is one revelation. It reveals to us only one thing—Jesus Christ. That is what St. John claims about his book—it is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Our Savior is the focus of the entire book. If we remember that, we won’t find ourselves so easily distracted by all of the little details. If we know Jesus, we know the main message of Revelation.

## **Session 2**

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# **The Letters to the Seven Churches**

*(Revelation 2–3)*

### **Approaching This Study**

Christianity was in a state of crisis. Nearly 70 years had passed since Christ ascended into heaven. He had promised that He would return, but He took longer than anyone expected. One by one the disciples were killed until there was only one left—John. Now John was an old man, exiled to the island of Patmos because of his faith. On the mainland, Christians were being persecuted. The temptation to give up their faith must have been very strong.

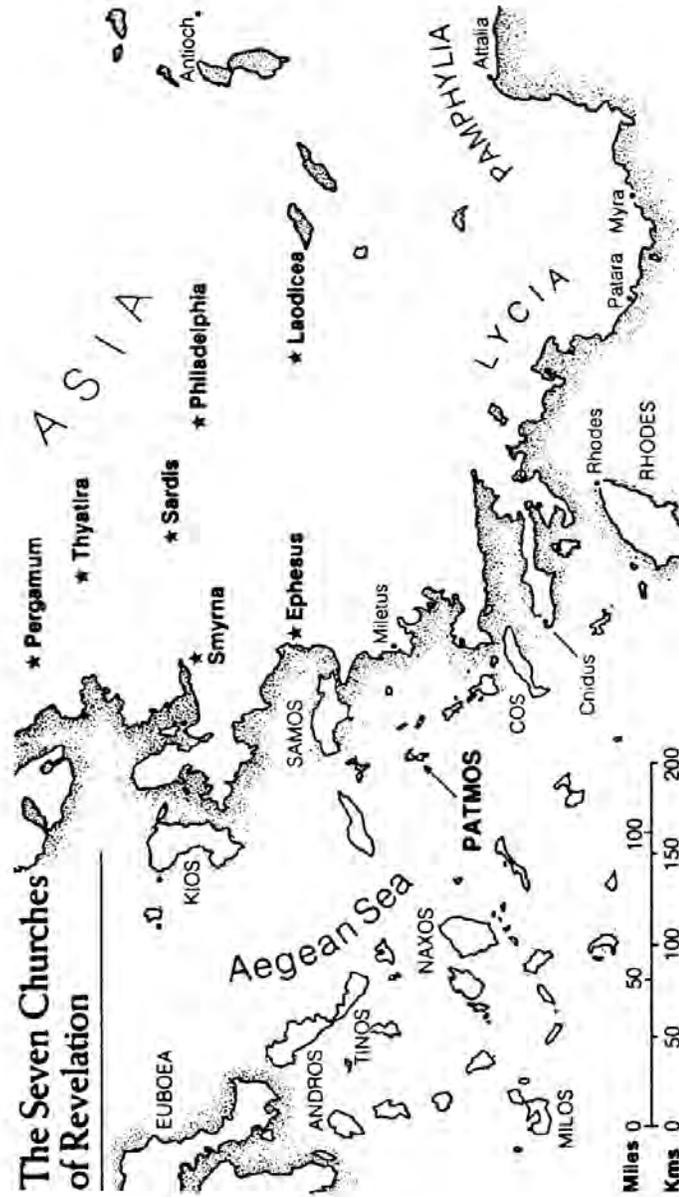
At this time, Jesus revealed Himself to John and gave a message that he was to deliver to Christians. The two chapters that we study in this session hold letters to seven regional churches. Many of the letters commend churches for the good that they do, but their sins and failures are also acknowledged. Each one of the letters encourages the Christians and holds out a promise to them from our God.

John's letters are not what come to mind when many people think of the Book of Revelation; nonetheless, the letters are an important part of the book. They reveal God's guidance to Christians like us who live in the end times and struggle to remain faithful. As we read these letters, we better understand the church of John's time and the church today, and we recognize ourselves. We hear God call us to faithfulness and promise His blessings to us.

### **An Overview**

These two chapters can be simply organized by the addressees of the letters. As you study these sections, you may find it helpful to locate each city on the accompanying map.

Letter to the Church in Ephesus (2:1–7)



Letter to the Church in Smyrna (2:8–11)

Letter to the Church in Pergamum (2:12–17)

Letter to the Church in Thyatira (2:18–29)

Letter to the Church in Sardis (3:1–6)

Letter to the Church in Philadelphia (3:7–13)

Letter to the Church in Laodicea (3:14–22)

## **Working with the Text**

### **Letter to the Church in Ephesus (2:1–7)**

1. Read Revelation 2:1–7. Each of the seven letters is addressed “To the angel of the church in ...” We are familiar with angels in the Bible. Many people don’t realize that the word “angel” simply means “messenger.” Who is the angel or messenger of a church?

2. Christ commends the church in Ephesus for the good things that they are doing. What are these things? Why are they so important? How can God empower us to emulate this church?

3. Despite these successes, there is a serious problem in Ephesus. What is wrong in this church? How might their problem be a problem for us also?

### **Letter to the Church in Smyrna (2:8–11)**

1. Read Revelation 2:8–11. The format of this letter is a little different from the others. It points out the good aspects of this church but does not specifically identify any failures. Nevertheless, the church faces serious problems. What are these problems? What does God see in this church that the world does not?

2. How does Christ respond to the trials faced by the church in Smyrna? What promise does He make to them?

### **Letter to the Church in Pergamum (2:12–17)**

1. Read Revelation 2:12–17. The church at Pergamum also faces persecution. This city was the official center of emperor worship for the region. How do these verses describe emperor worship? How far has persecution gone in this city? For what are the Christians commended?

2. The problem with this church is that they hold to the teachings of Balaam. What had Balaam done? See verse 14 and Numbers 25:1–2; 31:16. The Nicolaitans (who are also mentioned in Revelation 2:6) were a heretical sect that mixed Christianity with pagan practices. They said they were Christians, but they continued to worship idols and to practice sexual immorality. Based on these two examples, what would you say is the problem in Pergamum?

While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. (Numbers 25:1–2)

They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the LORD's people. (Numbers 31:16)

### **Letter to the Church in Thyatira (2:18–29)**

1. Read Revelation 2:18–29. The church in Thyatira is commended for their actions. What are they doing? Has their work increased or decreased?

2. But even this church is chastised for their failures. What is the problem that plagues Thyatira? Who is Jezebel? See 1 Kings 16:31b and 2 Kings 9:22b. Is Jezebel literally in Thyatira, or is this a term used to symbolize the kinds of immorality taking place?

[King Ahab] married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. (1 Kings 16:31b)

“How can there be peace,” Jehu replied, “as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?” (2 Kings 9:22b)

### **Letter to the Church in Sardis (3:1–6)**

Read Revelation 3:1–6. Unlike most of the other letters, the church at Sardis is not commended by God for their good actions (though some people in the church are commended in verse 4). People believe that good things are happening in Sardis, but God disagrees. What is the basic problem? What is God's solution? Why is this warning especially important for us today?

### **Letter to the Church in Philadelphia (3:7–13)**

1. Read Revelation 3:7–13. Like other churches, there are both good and bad things happening in the church in Philadelphia. What is the problem in verse 8? Despite this problem, what is happening there?

2. In response to their problem, Jesus makes a promise to them in verses 8–10. What is this promise? How does this reflect the work of our Messiah as described in Matthew 12:20?

A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out, till He leads justice to victory. (Matthew 12:20)

3. Though Jesus is very gentle with this church, He also challenges them. What is His challenge in verse 11?

### **Letter to the Church in Laodicea (3:14–22)**

1. Read Revelation 3:14–22. What is the problem with this church? How does their evaluation of themselves differ from God's judgment?

2. It may seem that our Lord is being particularly harsh with this church. What is the reason? See Hebrews 12:6.

The Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son. (Hebrews 12:6)

### **Applying the Message**

1. Think about the content of the letters to the seven churches. Almost all of the churches are commended for something they are doing well, and almost all of them are rebuked for some failing. Is this like your church? Is this reflective of your life?

2. These letters are not past history. They are part of God's inspired Word meant for us today. Which of these seven letters do you think best describes the church of today? What are its successes? What are its challenges? How can we by God's grace be part of the solution to these problems?

3. Each letter ends with a promise from God for those who overcome their trials. Review the promises in 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26–28; 3:5; 3:12; and 3:21. Which of these promises do you find most meaningful and comforting today? Why?

## Taking the Message Home

### Review

1. Read Revelation 2–3 again this week. There are many elements in these chapters we did not discuss. What new insights do you gain as you read them again?

2. While we live in a nation that cherishes religious freedom, many Christians today are being persecuted, just as they were in the early church. Research the topic of religious persecution today. Remember persecuted Christians in your prayers.

### Looking Ahead

Next time we will study Revelation 4–5. These chapters use more symbolism than the chapters for this session. They provide a wondrous glimpse of heaven.

### Working Ahead

1. Read Revelation 4–5 to prepare for our study.

2. The more we read Revelation, the more symbols and imagery we will see. What are some common (and not-so-common) symbols that are used in Christianity? Which ones do you see in your church? What do they mean?

3. The next chapters also involve the theme of worship. What will worship be like in heaven? How will it compare to our worship on earth?

## **Did You Know?**

### **The Meaning of Numbers**

Apocalyptic literature often uses numbers in a symbolic manner. Certain numbers suggested a deeper meaning to readers of John's day. Some of the most common numbers used in Revelation follow:

4—The number of the world. There are four winds, four points of the compass, and four corners of the earth.

7—A perfect, complete number. Creation was complete and God rested on the seventh day. The candlestick of the tabernacle had seven lights. Several Old Testament sacrifices required that blood be sprinkled seven times. Some people also consider seven to be a complete number because it is the combination of three (the number of persons in the Trinity) and four (the number of the world).

10—Also a number of completeness. Discerning the meaning of the number may be as simple as counting the fingers on your hands. Ten plagues fell upon Egypt before Israel was freed. God gave His people Ten Commandments.

12—The number of God's people. There were twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament and twelve disciples in the New Testament.

40—A time of testing. Rain fell for forty days and nights in the flood. Israel wandered in the desert for forty years. Christ fasted and was tempted by the devil for forty days.

1000—A very large number. It is usually used in the Bible as we use 1,000,000.

## **Session 3**

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# **The Heavenly Vision**

*(Revelation 4–5)*

### **Approaching This Study**

If you haven't studied Revelation before, you might be wondering why people debate the meaning of the book and why many have a hard time understanding its message. What we have studied so far has been pretty straightforward. There has been some symbolic language, but most of chapters 1–3 is fairly easy to understand.

But as we move farther into the book, it gets more complicated. John has prepared us for the message. First, he showed us Christ. Then he wrote some direct words to Christians. But now his vision takes off. The language becomes more symbolic and, at times, more difficult to understand. It is rich with meaning. As we study this book, we are truly blessed—just as Jesus promised!

But the book won't make much sense unless we remember a few basic things. We must remember that Christ is the heart and the focus of this book. He is the center of Scripture. If we forget that, we'll miss the whole point. We also need to remember that while this book uses many symbols that are obscure to us, the imagery held definite meaning for the first readers. They were Christians who knew Scripture. So it is in Scripture that we will first look for help to understand the symbols.

When we do this, we discover the richness and beauty of the writing, which directs us to our God and moves us to respond in worship.

### **An Overview**

These two chapters are part of an extended vision from our God who reveals Himself and His Word to us. These chapters suggest the following pattern:

### **The Throne in Heaven**

The Throne Described (4:1–6a)

The Four Living Creatures (4:6b–8)

The Twenty-Four Elders (4:9–11)

### **The Scroll and the Lamb**

The Scroll Described (5:1–5)

The Lamb (5:6–8)

Worship of the Lamb (5:9–14)

## **Working with the Text**

### **The Throne in Heaven—The Throne Described (4:1–6a)**

Read Revelation 4:1–6a. John’s vision begins with a description of a throne in heaven. How is the throne described? What does this description communicate? See also Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:22, 26–28; Exodus 19:16–17; and Exodus 24:10. What is missing from this description? Why do you think this omission is made?

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. (Isaiah 6:1)

Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome. Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be His waist up He looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down He looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded Him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around Him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking. (Ezekiel 1:22, 26–28)

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. (Exodus 19:16–17)

[They] saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. (Exodus 24:10)

## **The Throne in Heaven—The Four Living Creatures (4:6b–8)**

1. Read Revelation 4:6b–8. The description widens from the throne itself to those around the throne. How does John describe these creatures? Who are they? What do these descriptions communicate to us? See also Ezekiel 1:6, 10; and Isaiah 6:2.

Each of them had four faces and four wings. Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. (Ezekiel 1:6, 10)

Above [the Lord] were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. (Isaiah 6:2)

2. Many people have speculated on the role and function of the four living creatures. However, John records the most significant aspect of these creatures in verse 8. What do these creatures do? What meaning do you find in their words? See also Isaiah 6:3.

And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.” (Isaiah 6:3)

## **The Throne in Heaven—The Twenty-Four Elders (4:9–11)**

1. Read Revelation 4:9–11. These verses show us the actions of the twenty-four elders. Also look at the description of the twenty-four elders in verses 4–5. How does John describe them? Who do you think they are?

2. Like the four living creatures, these elders are the subject of speculation; but people often miss the role that John gives to the elders in this chapter. What do the twenty-four elders do? What do their words and actions tell you about them and all people?

### **The Scroll and the Lamb—The Scroll Described (5:1–5)**

1. Read Revelation 5:1–5. John sees God holding a scroll in His right hand. How does he describe the scroll? What is it? See also Ezekiel 2:9–10.

Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which He unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. (Ezekiel 2:9–10)

2. John tells us that the scroll is “sealed with seven seals.” Why would a scroll be sealed? Why is it sealed seven times? See also Isaiah 29:11.

For you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll. And if you give the scroll to someone who can read, and say to him, “Read this, please,” he will answer, “I can’t; it is sealed.” (Isaiah 29:11)

3. In verse 2 an angel calls out for someone to open the scroll. Who is unworthy to open the scroll? How does John respond? Who is worthy?

## **The Scroll and the Lamb—The Lamb (5:6–8)**

How is the Lamb described? See also verse 5. What does this verse mean? See also Genesis 49:9–10; John 1:29; and Deuteronomy 33:17.

You are a lion’s cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. (Genesis 49:9–10)

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

In majesty he is like a firstborn bull; his horns are the horns of a wild ox. With them he will gore the nations, even those at the ends of the earth. (Deuteronomy 33:17a)

## **The Scroll and the Lamb—Worship of the Lamb (5:9–14)**

1. Read Revelation 5:9–14. Only the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll. What has He done that makes Him alone worthy?

2. Though he writes with symbolic language, John makes it perfectly clear that he writes about Christ Jesus, our Savior. Remembering all that He has done for us and who He is, how do His creatures respond? Who joins together to worship the Lamb?

## Applying the Message

1. John's heavenly vision is revealed after he is instructed to write the letters to the seven churches. These letters confront Christians with their failure and call them to repent. Only after this do we see the glorious vision of heaven and of our God. What can we infer about this vision? What parallels can we see in our lives and church?

2. The angel is unable to find any creature who is worthy to open the scroll. Only Christ, the Son of God, is worthy. What about us? Might we become worthy to open the scroll? Are we ever worthy of God's revelation or His blessings?

3. These two chapters remind us of the many reasons we have to praise God. Look through them again and see what those reasons are. How do they move us to worship?

4. These two chapters include five different songs with which God is praised. Look through these songs again. How might we use them to enrich our worship?

## Taking the Message Home

### Review

Review Revelation 4–5. Do these chapters make more sense now that you have studied them in greater depth? What insights do you see that you missed before?

Read Isaiah 6. In this chapter, Isaiah sees a vision of heaven that has many similarities to the one that John saw. What is similar? What is different?

As you worship this week, and as you think about worship, reflect on our study. Are there parts of your worship that relate to these chapters in Revelation? Does Revelation give you a new motivation to worship? Take time to share your insights with others.

### Looking Ahead

Next week we will continue studying the vision of the Lamb and the Scroll. The Lamb will begin opening the seals.

### Working Ahead

1. Read Revelation 6:1–7:8. As you read these chapters, make note of any questions or ideas you have. If possible, read these chapters several times during the week. You might be surprised how much you see the second time through.

2. Do any of the images from these chapters sound familiar? What stories or illustrations have you seen before?

3. What section of this reading is most meaningful to you personally? Why?

### **Did You Know?**

Speculation concerning the four living creatures in Revelation 4 is nothing new. Since the time Revelation was written, people have tried to apply the symbols of this book to contemporary situations. One of the more enduring interpretations of the four living creatures was written by an early church father named Irenaeus. Around the year A.D. 170, Irenaeus wrote a book called *Against the Heretics*, in which he identified the four living creatures as the four Evangelists (Gospel writers). According to Irenaeus, the Lion represents John, the Ox represents Luke, Man is Matthew, and the Eagle is a symbol for Mark. While few people hold to his interpretation, these symbols have remained connected to the Gospels.

## **Session 4**

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# **The Seven Seals**

*(Revelation 6:1–7:8)*

### **Approaching This Study**

In our last session, we saw a vision of heaven. Christ, the Lamb who was slain, took a scroll from His Father's hand. The scroll was sealed with seven seals—completely sealed. Only the Lamb was worthy to break the seals and reveal the contents of the scroll. In the chapters we study in this session, the Lamb opens the seals. Each time a seal is opened, significant events take place. As in the rest of the book, we see that these chapters use symbolic and figurative language.

The breaking of the seven seals is paralleled later in Revelation. In chapters 8–9, we read about seven trumpets. Chapter 16 will reveal seven bowls. Like a good teacher, Revelation imparts knowledge to us in several different ways to increase our understanding.

The events depicted in these chapters may seem grim. But always remember what lies at the end—salvation for the people of God. What's more, we never face these events alone but always have the guidance of Christ Jesus, who has saved us!

### **An Overview**

In this session the Lamb opens six seals. We will deal with the opening of the seventh seal in the next session. The following divisions provide an outline:

Seals 1–4: The Four Horsemen (6:1–8)

The Fifth Seal: Martyrdom (6:9–11)

The Sixth Seal: Destruction (6:12–17)

The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1–8)

## Working with the Text

### Seals 1–4: The Four Horsemen (6:1–8)

1. Read Revelation 6:1–8. These verses describe the coming of four horses and their riders. Each horse is a different color, and each rider brings a judgment upon the earth. The first is a white horse. What does its rider do? Have events like this already happened?

2. What is the color of the second horse? What does its rider do? Has this ever happened in our world? How does the second horseman logically follow the first horseman?

3. What is the color of the third horse? What does its rider proclaim? It may help to know that a quart of wheat provides barely enough food for one person to survive. Three quarts of barley are just enough for a small family. Have events like this ever taken place? Why do these events follow the first two horsemen?

4. What color is the fourth horse? Who follows this horse? What is their power? How has this seal been seen on earth?

### The Fifth Seal: Martyrdom (6:9–11)

1. Read Revelation 6:9–11. What happens when this seal is opened? Has this occurred on earth? What is the request of God's people? What is God's response?

2. Verse 9 tells us that these people are “under the altar.” Why are they there? What does this tell us about them? See also Exodus 29:12.

Take some of the bull’s blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest of it at the base of the altar. (Exodus 29:12)

### **The Sixth Seal: Destruction (6:12–17)**

1. Read Revelation 6:12–17. What is described in these verses? Have these things happened yet? See also Mark 13:24–27 and Isaiah 34:4.

But in those days, following that distress, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And He will send His angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. (Mark 13:24–27)

All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. (Isaiah 34:4)

2. What is the human reaction to these events? Why do humans react this way?

## **The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1–8)**

1. Read Revelation 7:1–8. This section also deals with the sixth seal. While those who reject Christ try to hide in fear, we see God preserving His people. How many people does God mark as His own? What does He do to identify them? When might this happen? See also Ezekiel 9:4.

Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it. (Ezekiel 9:4)

2. Some people who read the Book of Revelation ignore the fact that it is written with symbolic language. If we are going to take the number 144,000 literally, we must take the entire vision literally. What can we tell about the 144,000 from verses 4–8? Whom does this exclude if taken literally?

3. Look ahead to Revelation 14:1–5. How are the 144,000 described in these verses? Whom does this exclude if taken literally?

4. Should we take the 144,000 literally, as the number of people who will be saved? Why or why not? If not, what might this number mean?

5. Some people spend so much time thinking about the meaning of the 144,000 that they miss the larger importance of this chapter. John shows us that there will indeed be more than 144,000 saved, that the

number will not be limited. Look at Revelation 7:9. What does he tell us about God's people in heaven?

### **Applying the Message**

1. In Revelation 6:15–17, we see the reaction of many people to the end of the world. Are Christians also afraid of Judgment Day? Why or why not?

2. We have examined the sealing of the 144,000. There are some who insist on a literal interpretation of these numbers and so ignore the broader context of Revelation. How can we minister to people who interpret Scripture this way?

3. These chapters of Revelation show us that life on this earth will not always be easy. In fact, the people of God may face hardships and even persecution because of their faith. What are some of the things that we face? How can the people of God deal with such suffering and persecution?

## Taking the Message Home

### Review

Read through Revelation 6:1–7:8 again. Reflect on what you’ve learned through your study. What is the most significant thing that you have learned?

We read in these chapters about the four horsemen. For a similar vision, read Zechariah 1:8–17 and 6:1–8. What are the similarities and differences between these verses and the account of the four horsemen in Revelation 6?

Reflect again on the 144,000. What is most significant is what God has done for them. What has God done for these people?

### Looking Ahead

Next time we will study Revelation 7:9–9:12. We will start by reading about the seventh seal and then continue with the next cycle of sevens—the seven trumpets.

### Working Ahead

Read Revelation 7:9–9:12. If you have the time, read it in several different translations. As you read, make a note of any comments, questions, or insights that you have.

These chapters will present us with another vision of heaven. When you think about heaven, what comes to mind? How would you describe heaven to others? Compare your ideas with those in Revelation. How similar are they? Is your depiction of heaven a biblical one?

Many Christians love certain songs and hymns that describe heaven. Can you think of any? Are they in agreement with what the Bible says about heaven? What do you find particularly comforting?

## **Did You Know?**

### **Hail Caesar?**

Revelation 13:4 tells us that men worshiped the beast because of his great power. We might consider worshiping a political leader to be very strange. The first readers of Revelation, however, understood this concept very well. They lived under rulers who expected to be worshiped.

As the Roman emperors increased in power, they gradually achieved divine status. Citizens were expected to pay homage to their divine emperors—something that Christians refused to do. Caesar Augustus received divine honors from some of his subjects and allowed temples to be built to him in some of the outlying Roman provinces. After his death, he was worshiped in Asia and the western reaches of the empire. The emperor Caligula demanded that all of his subjects venerate his statue. By the time Nero came to power, Caesar worship was well established. Roman coins referred to Nero as “the Savior of the World.” Emperor worship reached a new height when the emperor Domitian was addressed as “our Lord and our God.”

The Roman senator Pliny (born in A.D. 82) once wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan describing how he dealt with those accused of being Christians. He had them executed—unless they denied that they were Christians. They could prove their innocence by making an invocation to the gods and offering wine and frankincense to the image of the emperor. By denying Christ and worshiping the emperor, they escaped with their lives.

Since the emperors were worshiped, and since they persecuted God’s people, the earliest readers of Revelation saw the Caesars depicted in the description of the beast.

## Session 5

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# The Seventh Seal and the First Trumpets

*(Revelation 7:9–9:12)*

### Approaching This Study

The prophet Moses brought God's Word to Pharaoh, king of Egypt: "Let My people go so that they might worship Me." We read this story in the Book of Exodus. But Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go. He wanted them to stay in Egypt as his slaves. Moses repeatedly brought God's demands to Pharaoh, but he denied them all. Finally, God sent plagues to Egypt. He turned the Nile into blood. In desperation, Pharaoh said that he would allow the Israelites to go free. But once the Nile had returned to normal, Pharaoh changed his mind. The Israelites would remain slaves.

Ten times God warned Pharaoh, and ten times he rejected God's Word. We might wonder how Pharaoh could be so stubborn, refusing to obey God. We might also wonder how God could be so patient. These are the issues we confront in Revelation 7:9–9:21. God repeatedly sends His messengers to humanity, but people ignore them. God eventually sends plagues to try to turn people back to Him. Each plague is sent as a warning. Each time the people can repent.

Through it all, there are some who remain faithful to God. There is always a faithful remnant—people who know that they are saved by God's grace because of what Christ did for them. These people are marked with God's seal and will take their place around His throne in heaven. As we study, remember this truth: no matter what happens in the world around us today or in the future, we are safe. We are the children of God through faith in Jesus.

## **An Overview**

The chapters of Revelation that we will study in this session come from two different sections of the book. We begin with the conclusion of the seven seals. After that we go on to another group of sevens: the seven trumpets. These chapters might be outlined as follows:

The Great Multitude (7:9–17)

The Seventh Seal (8:1–5)

The First Four Trumpets (8:6–13)

The Fifth Trumpet (9:1–12)

## **Working with the Text**

### **The Great Multitude (7:9–17)**

1. Read Revelation 7:9–17. John has just finished telling us about the 144,000 who were sealed by God. He now expands his discussion to talk about a “great multitude” who are before God’s throne. How do verses 9–12 describe this great multitude? What do these descriptions communicate to us?

2. Who are these people? What had they faced on earth? How did they get through those times? See verses 13–14.

3. Verses 15–17 describe heaven. What does the great multitude experience there? How does this experience contrast with what they knew on earth?

## **The Seventh Seal (8:1–5)**

1. Read Revelation 8:1–5. Why is there silence in heaven when the seventh seal is opened? What might this tell us about what is to come?

2. What do these verses teach us about prayer?

3. What happens to the incense burner (censer) after the prayers have risen to God? What does this signify?

## **The First Four Trumpets (8:6–13)**

1. Read Revelation 8:6–13. We now move to another group of sevens in Revelation—the seven trumpets. Like the seals, the trumpets reveal God’s judgment of the earth but do not describe its total destruction. What happens with the sounding of the first trumpet? See also Exodus 9:23.

When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. (Exodus 9:23)

2. What happens when the second trumpet is sounded (verses 8–9)? See also Exodus 7:20–21.

Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water

of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt. (Exodus 7:20–21)

3. What happens when the third trumpet is sounded (verses 10–11)? See also Jeremiah 23:15.

Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty says concerning the prophets:

“I will make them eat bitter food  
and drink poisoned water,  
because from the prophets of Jerusalem  
ungodliness has spread throughout the land.” (Jeremiah 23:15)

4. What happens when the fourth trumpet is blown (verse 12)? See also Exodus 10:21–23.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. (Exodus 10:21–23)

5. The events that follow the blowing of the trumpets, like the plagues that fell upon Egypt at the time of the exodus (Exodus 7:14–11:10), all seem very difficult and harsh. Where can we see God’s mercy in these events?

## **The Fifth Trumpet (9:1–12)**

1. Read Revelation 9:1–12. Revelation tells us that the last three trumpets will be worse than the first four. What is the plague that follows the fifth trumpet? See also Exodus 10:13–15.

So Moses stretched out his staff over Egypt, and the LORD made an east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning the wind had brought the locusts; they invaded all Egypt and settled down in every area of the country in great numbers. Never before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again. They covered all the ground until it was black. They devoured all that was left after the hail—everything growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees. Nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt. (Exodus 10:13–15)

2. When the plague of locusts fell on Egypt, they covered the land. Is Revelation describing locusts? Why or why not? If not, what are these creatures?

3. As with the first four trumpets, we can see evidence of God's mercy in these events. Not all people fall victim to these creatures. Who escapes their torture? Why? See also Revelation 7:3.

## Applying the Message

1. Once again we have read passages that are very grim and that challenge us. Why does God allow such suffering to fall on a portion of humanity? How can people react? Does He act this way in our lives today?

2. In chapter 8 we read about the opening of the seventh seal. When it was opened, there was silence in heaven and the prayers of the saints rose with the incense before God. Does God still devote such attention to our prayers? How can this image motivate us to pray?

3. Look once again at the image of heaven presented in 7:14–17. Is this a comforting image to you? What is most meaningful to you? How might these words be particularly helpful to someone who grieves the loss of a loved one?

## Taking the Message Home

### Review

Read Revelation 7:9–9:12 again. Did you have any questions while reading these chapters that you are now able to answer? What questions do you still have? What is most meaningful to you in this section of God's Word?

This week we studied about plagues that God sent to an unrepentant earth. Read Exodus 7:14–11:10, which tells about the ten plagues that God sent to Egypt. Compare the Exodus events to Revelation.

## Looking Ahead

Next time we will continue with the vision of the seven trumpets and see the conclusion of this vision. It remains a challenging section, but in it God reveals our mighty Savior.

## Working Ahead

Read Revelation 9:13–11:19. If you aren't already doing so, start keeping a journal that accompanies your reading. What jumps out at you? What is most meaningful? What is confusing? What questions do you have? As you continue to study these chapters, you may find answers to these and other questions.

In the next session we will hear how God tells John to eat a scroll. To see the background of this strange request, read Ezekiel 2:8–3:10. What does it mean for a prophet to eat a scroll? Why does John tell us how it tastes?

Remember this week the gift of prayer!

### Did You Know?

#### The Sevens of Revelation

One of the most significant patterns in the Book of Revelation is the recurring use of groups of sevens. The number seven is found fifty-two times. Seven is a perfect, complete number. Here are just a few of the sevens found in Revelation:

Seven churches (chapter 1)

Seven spirits (1:4)

Seven lampstands (1:12)

Seven stars (1:16)

Seven seals (chapter 5)

Seven trumpets (chapter 8)

Seven bowls (chapter 15)

Seven blessings (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14)

There are many other examples of sevens. See how many you can find in Revelation.

## **Session 6**

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# **The Final Trumpets**

*(Revelation 9:13–11:19)*

### **Approaching This Study**

In our last study, we watched with John as seven angels began to blow their trumpets. As each trumpet was blown, the world moved closer to Judgment Day. The first four trumpets brought events upon all of creation. The first brought hail and fire, which burned up a third of the earth and its vegetation. The second trumpet signaled destruction on the sea. A third of the animals in the sea were destroyed, along with a similar proportion of ships. The third trumpet brought bitter waters and the death of a third of humanity. The fourth trumpet affected the sky. A third of the sun, moon, and stars were darkened. These trumpets brought destruction upon the earth.

The last three trumpets affect humanity directly. When the fifth is blown, affliction falls on unbelievers—all those who had not been sealed by God. They suffer but do not die. The judgments against sin are escalating, and the end of the world draws near.

While these judgments are hard to hear, they are the just consequence of sin. What's more, in each case God continues to provide a chance for people to repent and to come to faith. In this session we will study the final trumpets and witness the ultimate victory of our God. Truly we are blessed to see these things and to know that our salvation through Christ is secure!

### **An Overview**

This section of the Book of Revelation tells us about the final two trumpets and about the events that take place between them. This section may be outlined as follows:

The Sixth Trumpet (9:13–21)

The Angel and the Scroll (10:1–11)

The Two Witnesses (11:1–14)

The Seventh Trumpet (11:15–19)

## Working with the Text

### The Sixth Trumpet (9:13–21)

1. Read Revelation 9:13–21. Who is released when the sixth trumpet is blown? Where had they been bound before their release? See Genesis 15:18. What do they do? For a similar occurrence, see Revelation 6:1–8.

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.” (Genesis 15:18)

2. Accompanying the four angels is an army. How big is this army? How is it described? How would you react to such a sight?

3. Revelation 9:20–21 tells us about those who survive this attack. What did these survivors fail to do? What does this tell us about God’s grace?

### The Angel and the Scroll (10:1–11)

1. Read Revelation 10:1–11. As with the opening of the seven seals, there is a break in the narrative between the sixth and seventh trumpets. What does John see in these verses? What is John told to do in verse 11?

2. The angel brings a little scroll to earth. What does he tell John to do with the scroll? How is it described? What does this mean? See also Ezekiel 3:1–4.

And He said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and He gave me the scroll to eat. Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. He then said to me: “Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak My words to them.” (Ezekiel 3:1–4)

### **The Two Witnesses (11:1–14)**

1. Read Revelation 11:1–14. In the first verse of this section, John is told to measure the temple. What do you think this means? Why is this occurring at this point in the narrative? See also Zechariah 2:1–5 and 1 Corinthians 3:16.

Then I looked up—and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand! I asked, “Where are you going?” He answered me, “To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is.” Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him and said to him: “Run, tell that young man, ‘Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will be its glory within.’” (Zechariah 2:1–5)

Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

2. The section speaks of “two witnesses.” How are the witnesses described? What do these descriptions tell us about the witnesses? See also Zechariah 4:11–14; 2 Kings 1:10; 1 Kings 17:1; Exodus 7:17b; and Matthew 17:1–3.

Then I asked the angel, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” Again I asked him, “What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?” He replied, “Do you not know what these are?” “No, my lord,” I said. So he said, “These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.” (Zechariah 4:11–14)

Elijah answered the captain, “If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men. (2 Kings 1:10)

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.” (1 Kings 17:1)

[Moses said to Pharaoh,] “With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood.” (Exodus 7:17b)

After six days Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. (Matthew 17:1–3)

3. What happens to the two witnesses after they testify? Where does this happen? How does God respond to the world’s actions?

## **The Seventh Trumpet (11:15–19)**

1. Read Revelation 11:15–19. What happens when the seventh trumpet is sounded? Is this positive or negative?

2. How does heaven respond to the events signaled by the seventh trumpet? To what do they draw our attention?

### **Applying the Message**

1. With the blowing of the sixth trumpet, a third of humanity dies, but the rest have the opportunity to repent. Sadly, they do not. How has God given the world today the opportunity to repent? What warning signs has He given? How can we ensure that we will not be unrepentant?

2. When John is commissioned to prophesy, he is told to eat the scroll of God's Word. He finds that the scroll tastes as sweet as honey, but it makes his stomach sour. When is God's Word sweet to us? When might its message "make our stomachs sour"? Can it be both sweet and sour at the same time?

3. This section of Revelation tells us about the two witnesses who testify to the world, as Moses and Elijah did long ago. How might we do the work of the two witnesses? What promise do we have in this work?

## Taking the Message Home

### Review

Reread Revelation 9:13–11:19. Look through your journal to see what you wrote about these chapters when you began your preparations. What new truths have you uncovered?

In Revelation 11:1 we read of John measuring the temple, and we find a parallel in Zechariah 2:1–4. Another parallel is found in Ezekiel 40:1–43:5. This measuring is done in great detail. Read through these chapters of Ezekiel and note the similarities to Revelation 11 and Zechariah 2.

The vision of the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6–11:19) echoes the vision of the seven seals (Revelation 6:1–8:5). Look through these chapters and compare their contents. You may want to make a chart or diagram of what happens with each seal and each trumpet. Allow yourself extra space on the paper—we will examine another parallel later.

### Looking Ahead

In our next session we will study Revelation 12–13. These chapters present a vivid narrative about a woman, a dragon, and the beasts. We will also study the number of the beast—666.

### Working Ahead

Read Revelation 12–13. Record your thoughts in your journal. Focus on what the text says, not on what other people have said about the text. As you read, see if you recognize any themes or images from other parts of Scripture.

To prepare for the next section in Revelation, read another biblical account of a woman and a dragon—Genesis 3. Do you see any similarities between this passage and the chapters from Revelation?

Revelation 12 makes reference to an angel named Michael. What other Bible verses speak of Michael? Look in a concordance and read these passages. What do we know about Michael? Then check a Bible dictionary for information about this servant of God.

## **Did You Know?**

### **Forty-Two Months**

A number of verses in Revelation refer to a particular length of time. Sometimes it is recorded as 1260 days, sometimes as forty-two months, and sometimes as three and one-half years. All of the numbers refer to the same length of time. Revelation 11:2 says that the Gentiles will trample the holy city for forty-two months. Verse 3 of the same chapter says that the two witnesses will testify for 1260 days. Revelation 12:6 shows us that the woman is hunted by the dragon for 1260 days. For the same length of time, God protects the woman (12:14). The “beast” of Revelation 13:5 blasphemes God and persecutes His people for forty-two months.

The repetition of this number shows us that all of these events are related. In the days of the prophet Elijah, a great drought lasted for three and one-half years (Luke 4:25). Daniel foretold the coming of Antiochus Epiphanes, a Syrian who would persecute the Jewish people for forty-two months (Daniel 7:25). Here in Revelation, the 1260 days are the era of the church in which God’s people are subjected to persecution, just like the Jewish people and their prophets had been persecuted. And like their forebears, God’s people would testify to the true God even in the face of persecution. Even though the church faces persecution, there is also a limit to the persecution—it will only last for a little while.

## **Session 7**

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# **A Woman and a Dragon**

*(Revelation 12–13)*

### **Approaching This Study**

As we study the Book of Revelation, we keep coming across groups of seven. We read the letters to seven churches. We saw a vision of a scroll sealed with seven seals. Each time a seal was broken, something happened on earth. We heard angels blow seven trumpets—each of which was followed by events that paralleled the opening of the seven seals. Next week we will see seven angels pour out seven bowls upon the earth.

The two chapters of Revelation we will study this week offer something different. We see a summary of the entire history of the world. But this history is not seen in political or social terms. No, we see a spiritual history of the world from the very beginning of creation until Judgment Day.

Like the rest of Revelation, these chapters continue to utilize pictorial, symbolic language. The message is very serious, but it is told in a way that captures our imagination. When you read these chapters, try at first to picture what is being described. Feel the emotion that is wrapped up in the vision. Then take a step back and try to understand the message of the story in the light of the rest of Scripture. Both aspects are important—Revelation wants to teach us something, but it also wants to move us. We not only want to learn of Christ's ultimate victory, but we also want to be excited about it!

### **An Overview**

These chapters of Revelation form one section together. Each part flows into the next. We might subdivide it as follows:

The Woman and the Dragon (12:1–6)

War in Heaven (12:7–12)

The Dragon's Pursuit (12:13–13:1a)

The Beast Out of the Sea (13:1b–10)

The Beast Out of the Earth (13:11–18)

## Working with the Text

### The Woman and the Dragon (12:1–6)

1. Read Revelation 12:1–6. This symbolic portrayal of history begins with the appearance of a woman. How is the woman described? Do these descriptions help us to identify the woman? Who is her son?

2. How is the dragon described? See also Revelation 12:9 and Genesis 3:1. What does he do with the “stars out of the sky”? What does this mean?

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ ” (Genesis 3:1)

3. How does God respond to the dragon's assault on the woman? See also Matthew 2:13.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and His mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him.” (Matthew 2:13)

## **War in Heaven (12:7–12)**

1. Read Revelation 12:7–12. This section speaks of a war in heaven. Who leads the heavenly army? See also Daniel 12:1. How does the heavenly army overcome Satan and his army?

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. (Daniel 12:1)

2. This war is fought in heaven. What happens to Satan and his angels when they are defeated? What does this mean for us?

## **The Dragon’s Pursuit (12:13–13:1a)**

Read Revelation 12:13–13:1a. What does the dragon do to the woman’s children following the heavenly war? Who are her children? If the dragon has already been defeated in the heavenly war, why do you think he does these things?

## **The Beast Out of the Sea (13:1b–10)**

1. Read Revelation 13:1b–10. Satan now calls on his allies to fight God’s people. The first ally is a “beast who comes out of the sea.” How is this “beast” described? How do we react to this description? See also Daniel 7:3–7 and Revelation 12:3.

Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. “The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched

until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it. And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up and eat your fill of flesh!’ After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.” (Daniel 7:3–7)

2. The beast from the sea rules over an earthly kingdom. What is his source of power? How does he use that power? For how long does he rule?

3. Clearly the actions of this beast are frightening. How are Christians to react to this persecution by worldly authorities?

### **The Beast Out of the Earth (13:11–18)**

1. Read Revelation 13:11–18. John now tells us about a second beast. How does he describe this beast? Who did those descriptions previously apply to in Revelation?

2. The beast who comes from the sea exercises political power. What kind of power does this beast have? How does he use that power? How do the two beasts work together?

3. One of the most famous aspects of the Book of Revelation is found in this section. The beast places a mark on the hand or forehead of people. Their rights are restricted unless they receive this mark. This mark is a number—666. John tells us that this number represents a name. What is more significant, however, is where the mark is placed. What is so significant about this placement? See also Revelation 7:3–4 and Revelation 14:1.

### **Applying the Message**

1. This section, like others we have already studied, contains information that may frighten us. We have seen the plans of Satan laid before us. He fights against God and His angels and loses. He persecutes the Christian church. He works with corrupt governments and apostate Christians. How does a Christian react to Satan?

2. We have seen a prophecy of corrupt government in this section. There is a warning about governments that persecute Christians. There is also the prophecy that a political figure (or figures) will be worshiped by many people. Are either one of these a danger for us today? Give some examples.

3. At the conclusion of the heavenly war, a loud voice in heaven speaks of the victory of God's saints (Revelation 12:10–12). The victory is obtained not by might, but by the blood of Christ. Read through these verses again. Does a Christian ever need to be afraid of death? Why or why not?

## **Taking the Message Home**

### **Review**

Reread Revelation 12–13. Hopefully, the chapters are easier to understand now. What do you see now that you did not see when you first read them?

When we studied about the beast from the sea, we noted a parallel description from Daniel. Read Daniel 7 and compare it with Revelation 13:1–10. What similarities and differences can you find?

We saw the prophecy of corrupt government. For a deeper look at our relationship to governments, read Romans 13:1–7. How does this chapter relate to what we've seen in Revelation?

### **Looking Ahead**

In our next study we will examine Revelation 14–15. In these chapters we will look again at the 144,000 and see the beginning of another cycle of seven—seven final plagues sent upon the earth.

### **Working Ahead**

Read Revelation 14–15. As you read, remember to keep track of your insights and questions.

As we prepare to revisit the 144,000, look back at what we have already seen in Revelation 7. How do these two chapters fit together?

Revelation 14 speaks of judgment as a harvest of grapes and the crushing of the grapes in a winepress. Compare this with Isaiah 63–64. Here Isaiah speaks of a winepress, but also of God's grace to His people.

Revelation 14 will also talk about the fall of Babylon. Read about Babylon in a Bible dictionary.

## **Did You Know?**

### **The Antichrist**

Many Christians know that the Book of Revelation warns about the coming of the Antichrist. But many Christians have fallen into error regarding the Scriptural teaching about the Antichrist because they forget the teaching of other Bible passages. Look at other things John says about the Antichrist:

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)

Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. (1 John 2:22)

Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 John 4:3)

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 7)

Many Antichrists have come. The Antichrist denies the Father and the Son. He does not acknowledge that Jesus is from God. He does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. John tells us that there have been many who have taught these things—and they are still with us today.

## **Session 8**

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# **The 144,000**

*(Revelation 14–15)*

### **Approaching This Study**

Satan, the great dragon, refuses to accept his defeat at the hands of God's army. Cast from heaven, he wages war against anyone he can find. He turns his attention to God's people and seeks to destroy us. He fortifies his attack with the assistance of political leaders, represented by the beast out of the sea, and apostate religious leaders, represented by the beast out of the earth. Working together, this unholy trinity persecutes God's people.

But Almighty God will never leave His people alone. He does not forsake us in our time of need. The chapters that we study this week show the mighty opposition to Satan and his minions. Christ Jesus, the Lamb, marshals His troops for battle, and He will attain the final victory.

But we do not see the final battle in this week's chapters. Instead, God shows us the end of the story—the judgment at the end of time. This serves as a warning to all who oppose the Lamb. It also encourages Christ's faithful.

### **An Overview**

These two chapters continue to reveal God's plan to us, as they speak of the following subjects:

The Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1–5)

The Three Angels (14:6–13)

The Final Harvest (14:14–20)

The Seven Angels (15:1–8)

## Working with the Text

### The Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1–5)

1. Read Revelation 14:1–5. This passage again directs our attention to the 144,000 saints who stand with Christ. What distinguishes these people from the other inhabitants of the world?

2. What did these people do to be included among the 144,000?

3. These people are particularly noted for singing. What do they sing? What is the song about? See also Revelation 5:9; Psalm 96:1–2; and Psalm 98:1–3.

Sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.  
Sing to the LORD, praise His name;  
proclaim His salvation day after day. (Psalm 96:1–2)

Sing to the LORD a new song,  
for He has done marvelous things;  
His right hand and His holy arm  
have worked salvation for Him.  
The LORD has made His salvation known  
and revealed His righteousness to the nations.  
He has remembered His love  
and His faithfulness to the house of Israel;  
all the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation of our God. (Psalm 98:1–3)

## **The Three Angels (14:6–13)**

1. Read Revelation 14:6–13. These verses speak of three angels who fly over the earth and proclaim a message from God about His judgment. What message does this angel bring? See also Matthew 24:14.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

2. What is the message of the second angel? Who is Babylon? What does it mean to “drink the maddening wine of her adulteries”? See also Jeremiah 51:6–7.

Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the LORD’s vengeance; He will pay her what she deserves. Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD’s hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad. (Jeremiah 51:6–7)

3. The third angel also brings a message of judgment. On whom does this judgment fall? What had they done? What are the consequences of their choices? See also Jeremiah 25:15–16 and Psalm 11:6.

This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from My hand this cup filled with the wine of My wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them.” (Jeremiah 25:15–16)

On the wicked He will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. (Psalm 11:6)

4. Though the message of the second and third angels speaks of the judgment of the wicked, verse 13 holds out a blessing for God's people. What does this say about believers?

### **The Final Harvest (14:14–20)**

1. Read Revelation 14:14–20. This section speaks of a “harvest” at the end of time. If we look closely, however, we will see that there are really two different harvests. What is harvested in the first harvest (verses 15–16)? Whom do you think this represents? Who brings in this harvest? See also Joel 3:13 and Matthew 13:30b.

Swing the sickle,  
for the harvest is ripe.  
Come, trample the grapes,  
for the winepress is full  
and the vats overflow—  
so great is their wickedness! (Joel 3:13)

At that time I will tell the harvesters: “First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into My barn.” (Matthew 13:30b)

2. What is harvested by the second angel? Whom does this represent?

3. How does John describe the judgment of this second harvest? How is this a particularly vivid picture of judgment?

## **The Seven Angels (15:1–8)**

1. Read Revelation 15:1–8. This chapter introduces yet another set of plagues on the earth. What makes these plagues different from those associated with the seven seals (chapters 6–8) and those associated with the seven trumpets (chapters 8–11)?

2. The song of Moses, which is mentioned in verse 3, was sung by the Israelites on the shore of the Red Sea. God had parted the waters before them, and they walked through the sea on dry ground. But when the Egyptians tried to follow them, the waters returned and Pharaoh's army was destroyed (Exodus 14–15). What similarities do you see between Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea and Revelation 15?

3. Following the song of praise to God, John tells us that the heavenly tabernacle is opened. What was the tabernacle in the Old Testament? See Exodus 40:34–35. Why could no one enter the tabernacle? See 1 Kings 8:10–11.

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. (Exodus 40:34–35)

When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled His temple. (1 Kings 8:10–11)

## Applying the Message

1. In Revelation 14:14–20 we read about the harvest of the earth at the end of time. We see there are two different harvests. Can we be certain what harvest we will face? If we can, how can we be certain? How might our answer to this question affect our attitude toward the end of the world?

2. What can we do to get ready for this harvest? See Luke 10:2 and Matthew 29:19–20.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field. (Luke 10:2)

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20)

3. In the Old Testament, the glory of God appears in the form of a cloud of smoke. Because of His presence, no one can enter the tabernacle. In his Gospel, John writes of another tabernacle where God caused His glory to dwell in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Read John 1:1, 14. The phrase “made His dwelling among us” literally means “tabernacled” or “pitched His tent among us.” Now that God has come to dwell among us in Jesus Christ, do we need to fear His glory? Explain your answer.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 14)

## Taking the Message Home

### Review

Reread Revelation 14–15. What new insights do you see in this reading? What message seems most urgent to you now?

We studied the harvest at Judgment Day in these chapters. For another view of the harvest, read Matthew 13:24–30. What similarities and differences do you see when comparing this account with Revelation 14?

In Revelation 14 we see that those who have been victorious over the beast sing the song of Moses in heaven. Read the song of Moses in Exodus 15:1–20 and compare this with Revelation 15:3–4. Remember that these are not just songs from the past but are songs that we may use in worship today.

### Looking Ahead

Next week we will study Revelation 16–17. These chapters tell us about the last plagues—seven bowls of God’s wrath that are poured out on the earth. We will also learn about “the Great Prostitute” whom God will conquer.

### Working Ahead

Read Revelation 16–17. Remember to continue recording your thoughts and questions. As you read this section, compare it with the previous accounts of plagues in Revelation.

Earlier in this study we compared the plagues of Exodus to the plagues of Revelation. Look again at the account in Exodus 7:1–12:36. What plagues fell upon Egypt? Did the Israelites suffer all the same thing as the Egyptians? Could Egypt have avoided these sufferings?

## Did You Know?

### The Winepress of Judgment

In Revelation 14 John compares God's judgment to the harvest of grapes that are trampled in a winepress. Julia Ward Howe used this image as the basis of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." See how the themes of Revelation 14 are found in this hymn.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage where grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;  
His truth is marching on.

*Refrain:*

Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah!  
Glory, glory, hallelujah! His truth is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His Judgment Seat.  
Oh! Be swift, my soul, to answer Him; be jubilant, my feet!  
Our God is marching on.

In beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me;  
As He died to make men holy, let us live to make men free,  
While God is marching on.

## Session 9

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# The Seven Bowls and the Prostitute

*(Revelation 16–17)*

### Approaching This Study

Beside a glassy sea, the redeemed of the Lord sang the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. They praised God for His salvation and for His victory over the beast. Like Israel of old, they knew that they had seen God's power and would see it again. John saw this vision of heaven in Revelation 15 and then watched as the tabernacle was opened in heaven. From the throne of God came seven angels. They picked up golden bowls filled with the wrath of God.

That brings us to the beginning of this week's study. The seven angels take their bowls and pour them out upon the earth. The pouring of the bowls makes a third set of sevens. As with the opening of the seven seals and the blowing of the seven trumpets, we see a vision of the end of the world. But there is something different here. This is the final cycle, the last of the plagues. The horrible contents of the bowls pour onto the earth with full force. There is no turning back.

Each bowl brings horrible events. But each bowl brings us one step closer to the wondrous climax of Revelation—the final and complete victory of Christ Jesus and our eternal home with Him.

### An Overview

There are a number of ways to divide these two chapters. We will study them in the following order:

The First Five Bowls (16:1–11)

The Sixth and Seventh Bowls (16:12–21)

The Great Prostitute Revealed (17:1–6)

The Prostitute Explained (17:7–18)

## Working with the Text

### The First Five Bowls (16:1–11)

1. Read Revelation 16:1–11. What happens when the first bowl is poured upon the earth? Who is affected? Do you think this is a physical problem or a symbol of something spiritual? See also Exodus 9:9–11.

Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from a furnace and have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt, and festering boils will break out on men and animals throughout the land.” (Exodus 9:9–11)

2. What happens when the second and third bowls are poured out? See also Exodus 7:20–21. Compare these two passages. How long can people survive in this state? Compare with the second and third trumpets in Revelation 8:8–11. What distinguishes this plague from the one in Revelation 8?

Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt. (Exodus 7:20–21)

3. These plagues may seem particularly harsh to us. Look again at verses 5–7. Who is reacting to these plagues? See Revelation 6:9. Why do they think that these plagues are just?

4. What happens when the fourth bowl is poured on the earth? How should humanity respond? How do they respond?

5. Where is the fifth bowl poured? What plague does it bring? See also Exodus 10:21–23. How do people react? Have the other plagues stopped?

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. (Exodus 10:21–23)

### **The Sixth and Seventh Bowls (16:12–21)**

1. Read Revelation 16:12–21. What happens when the sixth bowl is poured? See also Revelation 9:13–15. What is the Euphrates? What could happen when this river is dry? Do you think this is a literal picture or does it signify something deeper?

2. Following the pouring of the sixth bowl, John sees three evil spirits that “look like frogs” (an unclean animal). Where do these spirits come from? What do they do?

3. Where is the final bowl poured? What happens? What do these events describe? What have we already read about these events in Revelation?

### **The Great Prostitute Revealed (17:1–6)**

Read Revelation 17:1–6. How does John describe the woman he sees? What is this passage saying to us?

### **The Prostitute Explained (17:7–18)**

1. Read Revelation 17:7–18. Because this image may be confusing, John immediately begins to explain it. What does John tell us about the beast that the woman rides?

2. This great prostitute is allied with all of the powers that oppose Christ. But she will ultimately be destroyed. How will she finally be destroyed? What does this teach us?

## **Applying the Message**

1. We studied the plagues that came with the seven bowls of God's wrath. The testimony from two witnesses proclaimed that God was just in doing these things. Many people today struggle with suffering in the

world. Some ask, “If God is almighty, why does He cause human suffering?” How would you respond to this question?

2. Read Revelation 16:15. Here Jesus reminds us that He is coming quickly. What warning does He give to us? How are you clothed? See also Galatians 3:27. How can we “keep our clothes with us”?

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Galatians 3:27)

3. Our study gives us an image of God’s memory. He remembers all that Babylon has done and is just in His punishment. How well does God remember? Does He remember our sin like He remembers Babylon’s sin? See also Jeremiah 31:34. How does this make you feel?

“No longer will a man teach his neighbor,  
or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’  
because they will all know Me,  
from the least of them to the greatest,”  
declares the LORD.

“For I will forgive their wickedness  
and will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34)

## **Taking the Message Home**

### **Review**

Reread Revelation 16–17. We discussed the main events from these chapters, but not all of them. There remains much to be learned. What do you see now that you didn’t see before?

As we continue to read about the end times in Revelation, do not for-

get that there are other Bible passages that address the same events. Read another account of the end in Matthew 24:3–25:46.

## Looking Ahead

Next week we will study Revelation 18–19. We have finished the repeating cycles of sevens and are rapidly approaching the end of the book. In these chapters Babylon falls, Christ returns in His glory, and His enemies are defeated.

## Working Ahead

Read Revelation 18–19. These chapters contain more dialogue than we have seen in other recent chapters. Keep your eye on the “big picture” as you read. What is John trying to get across to you? What is the most compelling thing you find in these chapters?

These chapters again reveal Jesus Christ to us, using richly symbolic language. Look back at the description of Jesus found in Revelation 1. What similarities do you see between these chapters?

### Did You Know?

#### Armageddon

Revelation 16:16 says that the kings of the whole world will gather together for battle on the great day of God Almighty. They will gather for battle at “Armageddon.” This Hebrew word is often used to describe the end of the world, or a terrible, final battle, but what does it mean? In Hebrew, Armageddon means “the mountain of Megiddo.” But there is no mountain at Megiddo. Megiddo is a city. Next to Megiddo is a large valley that saw many battles. When Israel was attacked by invaders from the north, Megiddo was their last line of defense. If we remember this, Armageddon simply refers to the final battle (as suggested by Revelation 16). But there is something more. Close to Megiddo is Mount Carmel. 1 Kings 18:16–40 tells us that at Mount Carmel, Elijah defeated the false prophets of Baal. Seen in this context, we can understand what John is telling us. The nations of the world, opposed to the true God and His people, gather together to fight. They seek to destroy God’s people in one final battle, but God fights on our side. The outcome of the final battle is certain because the victory has already been won for us on the cross.

## Session 10

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# The Fall of Babylon and the Triumph of the Lamb

(Revelation 18–19)

### Approaching This Study

One of the best-known musical works in the world is the “Hallelujah Chorus,” composed by Georg Friedrich Händel. This majestic piece is the finale to *Messiah*, in which Handel sets the story of Christ to music. The choir sings “Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Hallelujah!” Handel quoted Revelation 19, one of the chapters we study in this session.

What a contrast to the chapters from the last session! We’ve known that the end was coming, but here it is. St. John recorded the final plagues that fell upon the earth. Then he showed us the great prostitute—Babylon. Babylon represents the enemies of God. She is about to fall under judgment, along with all others who fought against God and His people. Babylon, drunk on the blood of the saints and allied with Satan and his minions, thought she was invincible. Boldly she persecuted God’s people. The martyrs cried out to God, “How long? How long until you avenge our blood?” They waited patiently while God fulfilled His Word.

The end has come. No longer will God’s people be persecuted by Babylon. She is destroyed, and Christ returns in power and might. The multitudes of heaven respond to God in praise, and so do we! Why? Because the Lord God omnipotent reigns!

### An Overview

These two chapters each show us a different aspect of the end of the world. They may be divided as follows:

### **The Fall of Babylon**

The Fall of Babylon (18:1–19)

The Saints Rejoice (18:20–24)

### **The Victory Celebration**

The Song of Victory (19:1–4)

The Marriage Feast of the Lamb (19:5–10)

The Triumphant Victor (19:11–21)

## **Working with the Text**

### **The Fall of Babylon (18:1–19)**

1. Read Revelation 18:1–19. This chapter begins with the announcement of Babylon's fall. Her judgment is meticulously recorded. What happens to Babylon? How complete is her judgment?

2. Why do these things happen to Babylon? Is it fair?

### **The Saints Rejoice (18:20–24)**

Read Revelation 18:20–24. These verses call us to rejoice over Babylon. What does this mean? How can we rejoice at such destruction? See also Revelation 6:10–11.

### **The Song of Victory (19:1–4)**

Read Revelation 19:1–4. These verses record a great multitude in heaven praising God. What reason does the multitude give for praising

God? Why do they particularly note that “the smoke from her goes up for ever and ever”?

### **The Marriage Feast of the Lamb (19:5–10)**

1. Read Revelation 19:5–10. Heaven’s praise continues. What do these words proclaim as a reason for praise? Who joins in praising God?

2. One of the reasons given for praising God is that the wedding of the Lamb has come. The angel also tells us that those who are invited to the Lamb’s wedding supper are blessed. Who is the groom? Who is the bride? What does the bride wear to the wedding? How can this be? What does all this tell us of our relationship with God? See also Matthew 22:2 and Ephesians 5:25–27.

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. (Matthew 22:2)

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:25–27)

3. In response to these wonderful things, John falls at the feet of the one who is speaking to him. What is the reaction to John’s attempt at worship? What might this tell us about our worship?

## **The Triumphant Victor (19:11–21)**

1. Read Revelation 19:11–21. Who rides the white horse? How is He described? What do these things mean? See also Revelation 1:14 and John 1:1, 14.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 14)

2. This rider comes with justice to judge and make war. What weapon does He bring to battle? What does this mean? See also Revelation 1:16 and Hebrews 4:12.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

3. This rider comes in triumphant victory. These verses mention several of His enemies specifically. Who are these enemies? What happens to them? Are there any enemies remaining?

## Applying the Message

1. In these chapters we look forward to the final victory of our God and the defeat of His enemies. How do we react to their defeat? Do we have any responsibility toward these people before this prophecy is fulfilled? How can we keep from becoming vengeful?

2. In Revelation 19:10, John foolishly begins to worship one of God's messengers. Are we ever tempted to worship something other than the true God? What can we do to ensure that our worship will always have the proper focus?

3. Several times in these chapters we see the host of heaven rejoicing because the Lord God reigns. These chapters prophesy future events. Does God reign today? If He does, can we also rejoice in His reign?

4. A tremendous divergence exists in the way people in Revelation 18–19 react to events. All of the people we read about see the same events. Why do the people of God and His enemies react so differently? What are some other times when God's people react to events in a different manner from those who do not know Him?

## Taking the Message Home

### Review

Reread Revelation 18–19. Notice the contrast between Babylon and the people of God. As you read the praises of heaven, remember to join them in praise to the Lord God.

Find a copy of Handel's *Messiah*. Listen to the "Hallelujah Chorus" (or the whole *Messiah*). Compare what you hear to Revelation 19. How well do you think this music reflects the contents of Revelation 19?

### Looking Ahead

Next week we will study Revelation 20. This chapter will reveal Christ's final victory over Satan, the resurrection of the dead, and Judgment Day.

### Working Ahead

Read Revelation 20. This chapter, like many others in Revelation, is often misinterpreted by Christians. Remember to read these chapters as we have read all of Revelation—as apocalyptic literature. Watch for symbolic and figurative language, and always interpret it in the context of the rest of Scripture.

Revelation 20 speaks of Christ's kingdom. In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Thy kingdom come." You can read the explanation to the second petition of the Lord's Prayer in Luther's Small Catechism.

## **Did You Know?**

### **Naming the Antichrist**

“This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is a man’s number. His number is 666” (Revelation 13:18).

We know the number, and we know that some people are superstitious about it, but what does it mean? John tells us that 666 is the number of a man and that his identity can be known. He also tells us that understanding the number calls for wisdom. Every letter in Greek has a numeric value. If we were to assign numeric values to the English alphabet, A would equal 1 and Z would equal 26. By adding together the value of the letters, you can reach a numerical equivalent for any name.

So who is 666? One of the best guesses is that it refers to Nero Caesar. But there have also been other guesses. “The Roman” (*lateinos*) in the Greek language adds up to 666. So does Gaius Caesar and Domitian. During World War I, many people believed that Kaiser Wilhelm was the beast. Adolf Hitler was suggested during World War II. Josef Stalin was also suggested. All of these men acted in ways that are contrary to God’s Word, but are they who John meant?

It’s easy to get caught up in trying to identify the name. But it is much more helpful to look at actions. This beast leads people into false worship. He is a religious leader who leads people away from the truth. The world has experienced plenty of false religious leaders.

# Session 11

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## Victory over Satan

*(Revelation 20)*

### Approaching This Study

As we read the Book of Revelation, and indeed the entire New Testament, we come across a warning: the end is near. But not in this chapter. Revelation 20 tells us that the end is here. This chapter shows us the end of the world as we know it. To be sure, we have seen this described before. The repeating cycles in this book have taken us to the end of the world several times, but here we see it in its most dramatic and moving form.

Throughout this prophecy, we have seen Jesus Christ conquer His enemies. He has continually come to the defense and aid of His people. He has redeemed us and upheld us with His strength. His power has kept Satan at bay. But we have cried out for the final resolution. How long will it go on? When will we see the conclusion?

And here it is. Satan is thrown into hell along with death and the grave. They are gone forever. The dead are brought to life again and appear before God's throne. All of creation passes away. It is the end of all that we have known—except for God, who will make a new beginning for us.

### An Overview

As we read this chapter, we see the power and glory of Christ revealed. His final victory is revealed to us in several stages:

#### **The Overthrow of the Dragon:**

Satan's Power Is Restricted (20:1–6)

Satan's Final Destruction (20:7–10)

The Resurrection and Last Judgment (20:11–15)

## Working with the Text

### **The Overthrow of the Dragon: Satan's Power Is Restricted (20:1–6)**

1. Read Revelation 20:1–6. These verses tell us that Satan is bound with a chain and locked in the Abyss for a thousand years. What does it mean for Satan to be bound? See also Matthew 12:28–29. What causes Satan to be bound? See also John 12:31; 1 John 3:8b; and Hebrews 2:14. Has this already occurred?

But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. (Matthew 12:28–29)

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. (John 12:31)

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. (1 John 3:8b)

Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil. (Hebrews 2:14)

2. These verses refer to people who are part of “the first resurrection.” Who are these people? What is “the first resurrection”? See also Colossians 2:12–13 and Ephesians 2:4–6.

[You] hav[e] been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins. (Colossians 2:12–13)

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4–6)

3. What do those who are part of the first resurrection do? See also 1 Peter 2:9. How long will this continue?

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:8–9)

4. Some Christians, on the basis of these verses, teach that in the future Christ will return to earth, raise up some (or all) Christians from the dead, and rule over an earthly kingdom. This kingdom will last in peace for a thousand years. This interpretation reads this chapter literally. What does Christ and the rest of Scripture teach about His kingdom? Will it be an earthly one? See also John 18:36; Colossians 1:13–14; and John 3:5. Why should we be reluctant to interpret Revelation 20 so literally?

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews. But now My kingdom is from another place.” (John 18:36)

For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13–14)

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” (John 3:5)

### **Satan’s Final Destruction (20:7–10)**

1. Read Revelation 20:7–10. While the last section told us that Satan was bound for a time, these verses tell us that he will be released one final time. What does he do when he is released? Who are Gog and Magog? See Ezekiel 38:2, 8–9. How big is this army? What does it do? Has Revelation previously told us of something similar?

Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal; prophesy against him: “After many days you will be called to arms. In future years you will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate. They had been brought out from the nations, and now all of them live in safety. You and all your troops and the many nations with you will go up, advancing like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land.” (Ezekiel 38:2, 8–9)

2. How does God respond to this terrifying army? See also Ezekiel 39:4–6. Who wins the battle? What happens to Satan?

On the mountains of Israel you will fall, you and all your troops and the nations with you. I will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals. You will fall in the open field, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in safety in the coastlands, and they will know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 39:4–6)

## **The Resurrection and Last Judgment (20:11–15)**

1. Read Revelation 20:11–15. What does John see after the last battle is complete? Who is sitting on the throne? See also Revelation 4:2–3. What happens to the earth and the sky? See also 2 Peter 3:10 and Matthew 24:35.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. (2 Peter 3:10)

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away. (Matthew 24:35)

2. Who appears for judgment before God's throne? Where do they come from? Is anyone exempt?

3. When the dead stand before God's throne, books are opened and the people are judged. What is the basis for judgment? What role do human actions play in judgment? Are we saved by our works? See also Ephesians 2:8–9.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

4. What happens to death and Hades (the grave)? What can we learn from this? See also 1 Corinthians 15:26.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:26)

## **Applying the Message**

1. Revelation 20 teaches about a thousand-year reign of Christ. Despite what we have seen in this session, many Christians believe that Christ will return to establish an earthly kingdom. Why do you think this is such a popular idea? How can we react to people who hold these ideas?

2. Some Christians believe that we will live in heaven forever, but we will be spirits without bodies. What does this chapter teach us? Does it matter? See 1 Corinthians 15:12–14. What comfort do you take from this teaching?

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. (1 Corinthians 15:12–14)

3. At the end of Judgment Day, death is destroyed. But that day has not yet come. How can a Christian respond to death today?

4. This chapter shows us the final defeat of Satan. How does this fact give us strength today?

## **Taking the Message Home**

### **Review**

Reread Revelation 20. Give thanks to God that He has allowed us to see the final defeat of Satan and Christ's victory, which He shares with us!

John tells us that the final battle against God's people will involve Gog and Magog. Compare what we have read in the last few chapters of Revelation with Ezekiel 38–39. Ezekiel will show you another image of the final battle and God's deliverance of His people.

Studying this chapter, we see again the promise that God will raise the dead to life again. One of the most powerful Scripture passages on the resurrection is 1 Corinthians 15. Read this chapter and rejoice in the marvelous promise God has given us.

## **Looking Ahead**

We have seen the end of the world. But two chapters remain before us. The world may end, but our God does not, and He declares to us, “I am making everything new.” We will see the promised joys of heaven that lie before us.

## **Working Ahead**

Read Revelation 21–22. Remember to keep track of your questions and insights as you read. What do you find most moving in these chapters? How do they tie the entire book together?

Revelation 21 will speak of the New Jerusalem. The more we know about Jerusalem, the more we will understand this chapter. Read about Jerusalem in a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.

These chapters offer us a description of heaven. What mental images of heaven do you have? Compare your mental pictures with John’s description. What is John trying to tell us about heaven?

## **Did You Know?**

### **The Millennium**

Revelation 20 teaches that the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their confession of Christ will come to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years. This thousand years is often called “the millennium.” There are three basic ways of understanding the millennium.

Premillennialism teaches that Christ will return to earth and establish a kingdom here. He will literally raise up the martyred saints to rule with Him for a thousand years. His government will be centered in the city of Jerusalem. After a thousand years of peace and prosperity, Satan will be freed from captivity to wage war against God’s people for a little while. Following this event comes the final judgment. While there are many different variations of premillennialism, these concepts are common.

Postmillennialism teaches that before Christ returns, the world will enter a thousand-year period of peace and prosperity. Christ is still in heaven, but rules through His people on earth. At the end of these thousand years, Satan will torment the people of God for a little while. Then Christ will return to judge the world.

The third major view of the millennium is called amillennialism. Amillennialism teaches that Revelation 20 is as symbolic as the rest of Revelation. The thousand years is a metaphor for the Christian age—the time when Christ rules His church.

A good resource for further study of these issues is *The End Times: A Study of Eschatology and Millennialism*, a report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (Sept. 1989).

## **Session 12**

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# **A New Heaven and a New Earth**

*(Revelation 21–22)*

### **Approaching This Study**

In the past 11 sessions, we have seen the end of the world portrayed to us several times. Our last session showed us the final victory of Christ over all His enemies. The dead are raised to life again. All people are judged. The devil is thrown into hell forever. Everything that we have known in this life is destroyed.

But this is not the end of the story! Destruction does not complete the Book of Revelation; rather, a new creation emerges. We see our salvation and eternal life portrayed vividly before our eyes. The Lord God hasn't just delivered us, He has made everything new and gives it to His children as an inheritance.

Read these chapters and you see a description of heaven itself. But don't get so caught up in the description that you miss the main point. The best thing that lies before us is nothing less than eternity with God Himself. He will live with us forever!

### **An Overview**

Looking through these last two chapters, we see the picture of heaven in the following divisions:

All Things New (21:1–8)

The New Jerusalem (21:9–27)

The River of Life (22:1–5)

Conclusion: Jesus Is Coming! (22:6–21)

## Working with the Text

### All Things New (21:1–8)

1. Read Revelation 21:1–8. What new things does John see? How similar are they to the old? What do their similarities and differences tell us about heaven?

2. To what does John compare the “new Jerusalem” in verse 2? How has this comparison been used before in Revelation? See Revelation 19:7–8. Read Isaiah 54:5–8 and Hosea 2:16, 19–20 for another prophecy of this event. From where does the new Jerusalem come?

For your Maker is your husband—  
the LORD Almighty is His name—  
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;  
He is called the God of all the earth. (Isaiah 54:5)

“In that day,” declares the LORD,  
“you will call Me ‘my husband’;  
you will no longer call Me ‘my master.’  
I will betroth you to Me forever;  
I will betroth you in  
righteousness and justice,  
in love and compassion.  
I will betroth you in faithfulness,  
and you will acknowledge the LORD.” (Hosea 2:16, 19–20)

3. What do these verses tell us about God? What does He do for His beloved people?

## **The New Jerusalem (21:9–27)**

1. Read Revelation 21:9–27. These verses give us a fuller description of the new Jerusalem that is the bride of the Lamb. Describe the new Jerusalem. Do you think this is a literal description? Why or why not?

2. The number twelve figures prominently in this description. Twelve is the number of God's people. There were twelve tribes of Israel and twelve disciples. Look through the description again. How many things are in groups of twelve or multiples of twelve? How does this help provide the meaning of the new Jerusalem? See also Ephesians 2:19–22.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19–22)

3. There is one thing that is missing from the new Jerusalem that was very important in biblical times. What is missing? Why is it no longer needed?

4. Who belongs in this city? What did they do to deserve a place in it?

## **The River of Life (22:1–5)**

1. Read Revelation 22:1–5. These verses show that God has indeed made everything new. Compare these verses with Genesis 2:9–10, 16–17; and Genesis 3:22. What are these verses in Revelation teaching us?

And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” (Genesis 2:9–10, 16–17)

And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” (Genesis 3:22)

2. What do these verses say about “the curse”? What does this mean? See Genesis 3:16–19. What kind of relationship does God have with His people? See Genesis 3:8.

To the woman He said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

To Adam He said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3:16–19)

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8)

## **Conclusion: Jesus Is Coming! (22:6–21)**

1. Read Revelation 22:6–21. The vision of heaven is nearly complete. These verses form a conclusion to the Book of Revelation. We are reminded that what we have seen has not yet been fulfilled for us, but it will be. What does Jesus say about His return in these verses? How many times does He say it?

2. In Revelation 22:7 and 22:14, Jesus calls certain people blessed. Why are they blessed? See also Revelation 7:14b. Can these blessings apply to us?

3. These verses also contain several warnings. What does John warn us against? Why is this so important?

4. Jesus is coming soon. What is the response of His people?

## **Applying the Message**

1. We've seen the final message of the Book of Revelation—the joyful reality of an eternity with God in heaven that is ours through Jesus Christ. But the message of these chapters also helps us understand the rest of Revelation. How do these chapters impact our understanding of Revelation?

2. John warns all who read this book against adding to or taking away from its message. How do people try to change the message of the Bible today? Why do they want to do this? What are the dangers of changing Scripture?

3. We read that the New Jerusalem has no need of a sun because God Himself is the light of that city. Does the world have that light now? See John 8:12. How can we help others to see that light? See Matthew 5:14–16.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14–16)

## **Taking the Message Home**

### **Review**

Reread Revelation 21–22. Rejoice that God reveals these things to us and that He has prepared a place for us with Him for all eternity.

Now that we have finished our study of Revelation, look back through the entire book. If you kept a journal in your preparations, look through it as well. What are the most significant things you learned in this study?

How will they affect your life today? What new insights have you gained?

We've completed this study of Revelation. What will you study next?

## **Did You Know?**

### **The Date of Christ's Return**

When His disciples asked Him when He would return, Jesus told them, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). Despite these clear words, some people think that they can predict the date of Christ's return! They are wrong.

One of the more common approaches is to look at the world in cycles of a thousand years. Revelation 20 says that Christ will reign with His saints for a thousand years. Some interpreters take this number literally. In the year 1000, many people expected the end of the world, but it did not come. In the same way, there are people who see the year 2000 (or 2001) as the end of the world.

There are several problems inherent in this interpretation. The first is that Jesus said we would not know when His return would happen. That should end the debate. Another problem involves inaccuracies in our calendar. Our current calendar system was formulated in the seventh century. Some errors were made in calculating the dates. Most scholars now believe that Jesus was born between 3 and 5 B.C. This means that it has already been 2,000 years since His birth and the world did not end on that day.

We can save a good deal of trouble if we are willing to take Jesus at His word. We cannot know when He will return, but we must be prepared.