

## Revelation Chapter 1

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

1. What does "The revelation of Jesus Christ" mean to you?
2. Can it have more than one meaning?
3. To whom was this book written?
4. Why is the audience important?
5. Is it important that John is a "servant"?
6. What are "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" in this context?

*Revelation - this is the word apocalypso, which means unveiling, or revealing, making something seen that was unseen*

*Jesus Christ - we begin to see that Jesus is at the center of the story... this will be about him and about his presence, power and work being revealed*

*God gave - this is not a novel, but a revealed word which was given by God and could not, in the midst of these terrifying times been discovered any other way*

*His servants - the word "doulos" is offered to identify the audience. This book is written to those who see themselves as servants and slaves of God and who have already committed themselves to his service. This was not intended for neutral parties.*

*Soon to take place - we are led to believe that God is at work and there are plans afoot to have something happen in and for the servants of God.*

*Made it known - God has indeed revealed the contents of the future*

*John - John is the servant who has been chosen by God for this effort. He is the one who will communicate. But he is a servant just like the rest of the servants. He is not an angelic being.*

*Who bore testimony - to bear witness to what one has seen and heard... the same word used by angels to report what they have been told by God*

3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

1. Why would you get a blessing from hearing the words read aloud?
2. Why would you be blessed by hearing it?
3. What do the words "blessed are those...who keep what is written here imply?"
4. If the end has not come how do we interpret the words "for the time is near"?

*Blessed - means to be given something by God that could not be earned or created or received by any other means. Thus there is something awaiting the servants in these words. This is the first of seven blessings in the book.*

*Who reads aloud - these words are not meant to be taken apart and studied for academic purposes. These words are to be read in the context of worship for proclamation and for encouragement. They were intended to do something with power in public and not in secret. You are blessed in the reading aloud because you are proclaiming God's saving victory. You are a co-worker with God.*

Words of prophecy – prophets are both fore tellers (of the future) and forthtellers (of what God desires of us). This book fits both categories. Who hear them – their content has meaning. There is power in the very hearing even if not fully understanding. Who keep what is written – there will be directions for life in faith. This will be a story meant to be applied to how servants of God live, move and have their being. Just as Old Testament prophets laid out ways of being faithful to God so too will John. The time is near – This can mean near as in immediate or in an eschatological sense near as in intensely impending and important.

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

1. Do you think there were only seven churches in Asia?
2. Why do you think John chose to speak of seven churches?

Seven - This is John's introduction, he is known by all seven churches and therefore he simply calls himself John. There were more than seven churches in Asia. The seven churches in Asia, i.e. present day Turkey, are representative of the whole church. The number seven occurs 52 times in the book and indicates divine completeness, because God finished the work of creation and rested on the seventh day, see Gen 2:2. This letter would probably have been circulated around the churches as some of Paul's letters were circulated (Col 4:16).

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1. What do grace and peace mean to you in your life?
2. What do you make of the “seven spirits”?
3. What do each of the titles (faithful witness, firstborn of the dead, ruler of the kings of the earth, who loves us, freed us from our sins by his blood, made us to be a kingdom, made us to...serve his God and Father) given to Jesus imply?
4. Which of the titles has most meaning for you?
5. What does it mean that Jesus has all glory and dominion?

Grace and peace – this is what God offers his servants. He is always coming toward humanity not with curse and pain but with peace. He offers it to Mary and to the disciples when he greets them at Pentecost. He also offers it in the Old Testament. God is the one who wants to bring shalom to bear upon all the earth. It also means that God is willing to come to us not in judgment but in forgiveness.

From him who is and who was and who is to come – this is the great monotheistic proclamation that God is one, is eternal and will always be able to accomplish what he proposes because he never dies. Also we have a vision of one who is moving toward humanity because he has something for us.

*Seven spirits - Seven refers to completeness, another reading is seven fold spirit. Isaiah gives seven modes (actually six modes) of operation of the Spirit in the life of Christ (Isa 11:2-4). See also John 14:16-27: the Spirit comforts (16), is the Spirit of Truth (17), lives in us (17), manifests Jesus (21), manifests Jesus and the Father (23), teaches us (26), gives us peace (27). The seven spirits are referred to again in the letter to Sardis (3:1), and as seven lamps blazing before the throne of God (4:5), and as the seven eyes of the Lamb, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth (5:6). John is not going against the traditional doctrine of there being one Spirit.*

*The faithful witness - word or witness is martyrion meaning one who says what they have seen. He was faithful even to death on the cross. This lends meaning to witness later in the text.*

*First born of (or from) the dead - in Jesus resurrection there is promise for us all. He is if you will the down payment for all who will be faithful witnesses.*

*Ruler of the kings of the earth - guess who is in charge? Jesus takes a back seat to no one, not Caesar, Satan or anyone else. Jesus has all the power and so one can have hope. This sets the stage for understanding almost all of what will happen. Like an episode of Law and Order where you know the bad guy will get caught. The suspense is in the telling and not in the outcome.*

*Loves us - this is an affirmation of the basic principle of the story. God and Jesus have not quit loving the servants even though they are suffering great affliction.*

*Freed us from our sins - we are no longer captives under God's judgment. We have been set free to make the right choices. We have been set free to be those servants who can follow.*

*Priests - we are here to serve God. We stand before God in a new capacity. The old priests whether at the Temple of YHWH or of Greek gods have nothing on us. In Exo 19:5-6 the Israelites were promised that if they obeyed God then they would be God's treasured possession out of all the nations of the earth and would be for God a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The tribe of Levites became the priests, and at the death of Jesus the veil in the temple was split into two because from then on all the saints, not just the Levites, are priests. 1 Pet 2:9 emphasises that the saints are a chosen people, a people belonging to God, a royal priesthood and a holy nation who will declare the praises of God who called them out of darkness (Satan's kingdom, Acts 26:18) into his wonderful light. In the OT a priest was a mediator between God and the people offering sacrifices and incense on their behalf and for their sins. In the NT the priesthood of believers means declaring to the world the good news of the gospel, that Jesus died for their sins and offering up prayer on their behalf.*

*All glory and dominion - another affirmation of God being in charge.*

7 Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

1. What can we gather from this verse about Jesus' second coming?
2. Who will be able to see it?
3. Will it be a private affair?

4. Why would the tribes of the earth wail?

*Every eye will see - In contrast to the two verses above which refer to our riches in Christ this verse brings mourning to the peoples of the earth who do not know the love of God and who are not cleansed from their sins. The second coming will be public, every eye shall see him (Mat 24:30), he will bring retribution on those who do not know him (2 Thess 1:7-9, Rev 6: 15-17, 11:18, 14:17-20, 19:15) but will be marveled at by the saints 2 Thess 1:10, Rev 19:6-9. This vision of Christ's second coming is a combination of Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10.*

*Wail - The announcement of Christ's second coming is a major theme in the book, this is based on Zec 12:10 see also Mat 24:30, for the church this will bring solace but for the world it will bring judgment. John 19:37 'They will look on the one they have pierced' is also based on Zech 12:10 and uses the same Greek word *ekkenteo* as in Revelation, the only two times it is used in the NT.*

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

1. Why do we hear now from God?
2. What difference does this one verse make in the opening sequence?

*Alpha and Omega - are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. They are here to remind us that God is the author of history. God is the one who can and will make things turn out according to his plan.*

9 I, John, your brother who shares with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

1. What do you gather from John's introduction of himself?
2. Which of the "titles" (brother, who shares with you in Jesus the persecution, who shares with you the kingdom and the patient endurance) carries the most meaning for you?
3. Why was John on the island of Patmos?

*Your brother - John has an intimate connection with these people. This is not merely some stranger writing to people with whom he had no connection. He is sharing life with them and sharing being part of the family.*

*Shares with you in Jesus - Jesus is what binds them together and causes their lives to be difficult. To be in Jesus means to be those whose lives are oriented toward following regardless of the cost.*

*Kingdom - God is already at work bringing his kingdom to be. This verse alone makes it hard to fathom how some can argue that the kingdom is only future, if John and the church are sharing in it at that moment.*

*Patient endurance - this is the key to the entire book. All believers are called to be patient in the face of all that comes that they might collect what it rightfully theirs.*

Patmos – an island where John was in exile because of his work for Jesus.

10 I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

1. What does "in the spirit" seem to imply?
2. What do you think of John's use of language?
3. What do you see in the map below?

Spirit of the Lord's day - This is wrongly translated in most English versions as 'the Lord's Day', a phrase not used until long after the apostles age. Most scholars believe that John was writing in the year 95 AD, towards the end of the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD). This particular Roman emperor conducted a terrible persecution of all Christians who refused to acknowledge his 'divinity'. On a certain day each year all Roman citizens had to go to their local city shrine, toss some incense on the official altar and declare, 'Caesar is Lord!' This became known as the 'lords day'. He was also 'in the Spirit' in 4:2, 17:3, 21:10, which could mark four major divisions in the book. Here at the start of the vision he sees the risen Christ, in 4:2 he sees God on His throne, in 17:3 he sees a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, in 21:10 he sees the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. Also it is the Spirit that allows John to see what he can see.

Seven churches - The order of the seven churches is geographically in a circular route.

12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, 13 and in the midst of the lamp stands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

1. How would you interpret the seven golden lampstands?
2. Where else in scripture do we find the image of the "Son of Man?"
3. Make a list of the color imagery in describing one like the Son of Man.
4. What do you make of all of the sevens?
5. What is the image of the two-edged sword about?
6. What story from the New Testament is alluded to by his face shining?

Seven golden lampstands - The image reminds us of Solomon's temple which had ten lampstands of pure gold (1 King 7:49). This also is an image of light in the darkness. Light was always necessary.

Son of Man - Someone 'like a son of man' is clearly a reference to Christ, it is used of Christ again in 14:14. The expression 'like a son of man' is first used in Dan 7:13. It is also a designation of Christ used in the gospels. 'Son of Man' is used 30 times in Matthew, 14 in Mark, 25 in Luke and 13 in John. Note 'Son of God' is only used 8 times in Matthew, 3 in Mark, 6 in Luke and 6 in John. Christ is among the lampstands, that is, he is among the church, this illustrates Christ's intimacy with His church.

Long robe and golden sash - he is dressed like a priest yet his belt is of the finest material because of his station.

White - the color of purity.

Flame of fire - he is able to penetrate the very nature of human beings, nothing can be hidden.

Burnished bronze - His feet were of bronze which indicates strength and stability, see Dan 10:6 in which his arms and legs are the gleam of burnished bronze. (6 His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude.)

Rushing waters - His voice was like the sound of rushing waters, see Dan 10:6 in which his voice was like the sound of a multitude, also Ezek 1:24, 43:2 in which his voice was like the roar of rushing waters. Powerful images of multitudes.

Seven stars, two edged sword - these will be defined in a moment.

Face shining like the sun - reminds us of the transfiguration

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

1. Why did John fall as if dead?
2. What is the importance of Jesus pointing out that he was once dead and is now alive?
3. What are the keys to Death and Hades?

Fell as dead - you cannot see God and live. Moses was the only one who had done that. John is like a new Moses bringing his people out of captivity.

Right hand - the hand of approval.

Keys - Jesus is the one who has all power. No one can be lost unless Jesus allows it.

19 Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this.

1. Why should John write this all down?

2. What does “what is, and what is to take place after this” appear to imply about the time frame of what John is seeing?

*Write - this is insure that what he sees can be passed on appropriately to all churches. It is that important.*

20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

1. What do you make of the idea of churches having angels?

*Seven stars - This begins to make clear that the imagery in Revelation is just that... imagery. Things represent other things. We will see that this plays itself out in the rest of the story*

*Angels - this is the concept that heaven and earth are not far apart.*

Page Break

## Revelation Chapter 2

*The letters to the seven churches are a distinct unit of seven within the book of Revelation. Other sevenfold units are the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of God's wrath. Because the number seven denotes divine completeness as a whole the seven letters form a whole unit which has a message to the church universal; there are more than seven churches in Asia, for example Colossi has been omitted.*

*The promises at the end of each letter follow an historical order. The tree of life refers back to Eden; the second death to the fall; the hidden manna to the manna in the desert; the white stone to the engraved stones on the high priest's shoulder and breastplate; the rod of iron to Moses holding the rod of God for the defeat of Amalek (Ex 17:8); the white raiment to the garments of the priests; the pillar in the temple to those in the temple of Solomon; and the sitting on the throne to Solomon's reign in glory and peace.*

*There are three ways to consider these letters:*

- 1. As a description by the Lord of the state of the seven churches of believers then existing (preterist).*
- 2. As a prophetic foreview of the Christian age then commenced and to conclude at the coming of the Lord (historicist).*
- 3. As a revelation of the moral characteristics of churches found always throughout the age (idealist).*

Ephesus

1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

*Angel: Possibly the angel of the church means to the spirit of the church, that is, symbolising the churches. It could also mean guardian angel or elder. We should note here that it is Jesus himself dictating the letters to the seven churches, John is the*

*amanuensis. As with Revelation itself (see 1:1) the letters claim direct divine authorship rather than divine inspiration of a human writer. It is appropriate that the last letter to the church which would sustain the church through trials and tribulation over the coming centuries should come with the highest authority. It is Christ's own evaluation and description of the condition of the churches together with His remedy for any defects.*

*Ephesus was the leading city in Asia and the first port one would arrive at after leaving Patmos. It had a population of 250,000 and was a thriving sea port. It had the Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world. It was also a center of worship for the goddess Roma and the Emperor. There was a great deal of cult prostitution. All highways coming from Asia to Rome went through the city.*

*The church at Ephesus was founded by Paul where he reasoned with the Jews, he left Priscilla and Aquila there (Acts 18:19). Paul came back to Ephesus and found some disciples who had not received the Holy Spirit, they had only been baptized into John's baptism, when they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 19:1-7). Paul spoke in the synagogue for three months (Acts 19:8) and then in the lecture hall of Tyrannus for 2 years (Acts 19:9-10). Then there was a disturbance because of the fertility goddess Artemis who brought the Ephesians wealth through making silver images of her (Acts 19:23), they were afraid that through Paul's preaching about Christ they would lose business. Paul left Timothy at Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3). He said good-bye to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus before going to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17-38) where he warned them that savage wolves will come in among them (Acts 20:29).*

*He also wrote to the Ephesians a long letter from which it is clear that they were a mature church. It is also thought that the apostle John and Mary, Jesus mother, settled at Ephesus. Some two-and-a-half centuries after Paul preached in Ephesus, the city hall was converted into a church and later used by the Council of Ephesus, which in 431 AD formally accepted the teaching that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine.*

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

*Him who holds: This is a repetition of his self designation from 1:13 and 1:16. A reference to his self designation is repeated for each of the seven churches. He holds the seven stars in his right hand, the seven stars are the seven angels of the church, this probably means that he determines the destiny of the churches. He walks among the seven churches and therefore he knows them intimately.*

2 I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. 3 I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary.

*I know your deeds, a commendation, common to all the churches except Smyrna (I know your affliction and your poverty) and Pergamum (I know where you live - where Satan has his throne). Jesus is one who knows our condition because he walks among the seven lampstands. They had hard work (kopos) and perseverance; Paul commended the Thessalonians because of their work produced by faith, their labor (kopos) prompted by*

*love (agapao) and their endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 1:3). The church in Thyatira is commended for their love and faith, service and perseverance (2:19).*

*Patient Endurance: The church was already under pressure. In a place like Ephesus there would be great pressure to conform to the temple requirements to give worship to one of the gods or goddesses worshipped there.*

*Claim to be apostles: They had taken heed of Paul's warning to them when he left the elders that false prophets would arise out of their midst, Acts 20:28, 2 Cor 11:12. These men would be like savage wolves among a flock of sheep, they will distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them, Paul warned them to be on their guard against such false prophets. The Ephesians had tested the doctrine of these men and their lives and found them to be false. Jesus tells us that we will recognize false prophets by their fruit, that is their lives and the results of their doctrine. In 1 Thess 5:21 we are to test everything and hold on to the good, in 1 Cor 14:29 when two or three prophets speak the others should carefully weigh what is said. 1 John 4:1 warns us to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. 2 Peter 2 and Jude give descriptions of these people: they introduce destructive heresies, they exploit the people with stories they have made up, they will have shameful ways, they follow their own sinful ways and despise authority, they are bold and arrogant. They change the grace of our God into a license for immorality, these men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage. In particular they are greedy for money.*

4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

*I have this against you: There is a strong rebuke coming for those who in this faithful church. Abandoned the love: they had deeds but not their love for each other and Jesus as at first. The word used for love is agape a stronger form of love rather than phileo which is brotherly love. Agape most characterizes the love that Christ has for us which is a deeply committed love and which depends more on the nature of the giver than the attractiveness of the one loved (cf. eros the love between lovers). We are to love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34), agape love and not just brotherly love. It is likely that they had lost their initial love for Christ which resulted in a lack of love for each other. This is the great test for the saints, do they love one another (1 Cor 13:3, John 13:35). Their testing of everyone to see whether they are false apostles or false brethren had created an atmosphere of mutual distrust in which love could not grow (Mounce).*

5 Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

*Jesus now gives three steps to recovery:*

- i. Remember your former condition (stop and recall your love in the past, realise your current position and compare to how you used to be).*
- ii. Repent (change your direction, stop doing the negative)*
- iii. Do the things you did at first (do the positive, repentance is not just turning from wrong but also doing what is right).*

*Repentance does not merely involve us in stopping doing bad things but learning to do good things (Isa 1:16-17). We are to produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Mat 3:8). 'Do the things*

*you did at first' their love was to be practical (1 John 3:16-18, James 2:14-17. The positive thing is to love one another as Christ loved us (John 13:34-35, Rom 13:8, 1 Pet 1:22, 1 John 3:11 ff.). A survey of the term 'one another' in the NT indicates that in practise this means: agreeing with one another, forgiving one another as God forgave us, being patient with one another, encouraging one another, spurring one another on toward love and good deeds, not judging or slandering one another, offering hospitality to one another.*

*Remove your lamp stand: Warning that the church will die if they do not repent. There is no church at Ephesus today. The KJV has 'come unto thee quickly' which emphasizes the suddenness of his judgment and that therefore they should repent quickly (cf 2 Pet 3:9).*

6 Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

*Nicolaitans; not much is known other than in the book itself, though there are references in the works of the early church fathers which refer to a couple of people as founders (the deacon Nicholas of Antioch and Nicholas the Bishop of Samaria. Their beliefs led to lives of unrestrained indulgence. There is a play on words here because the name Nicolaus can be derived from the two Greek words, nikan, to conquer, and laos, the people. Balaam can be derived from the two Hebrew words, bela, to conquer, and ha'am, the people. The two names, then are the same and both can describe an evil teacher, who has won victory over the people and subjugated them to poisonous heresy (Barclay). This has been used as a basis for no ordained clergy other than those who are elders led by the Holy Spirit. This is so because it means that no one should lord their power over another.*

*Which I also hate: Jesus did not like the Pharisees and the wealthy who wanted to lord it over others. "Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren .... Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant," (Matthew 23:8-11).*

7 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

*Listen to the Spirit: meaning that you listen through John's words and through one's heart.*

*Everyone who conquers: Once again this is a personal rather than a corporate challenge. In the letter to each church there is a promise to the one who overcomes, meaning he who conquers, Rom 8:37. From the contents of the letter, the person who overcomes is the one who repents of his lack of love and finds his first love again.*

*I give permission: Rewards are part of God's purposes in motivating his people and in Revelation we see the rewards of the overcomers and the rewards of the cowardly, one leads to eternal life the other leads to the second death. Lang remarks that Ephesus had toiled and endured, and as to the body of their labors, the external efforts, they had not grown weary. But the inner life had felt the strain; in heart affection to Christ they had lapsed and fallen. The inner man needed renewing. He who repented, and found again this inward invigoration of love to Christ, and so overcame personally the general defeat, should be blessed correspondingly in the day of reward -- he should find permanent strength and satisfaction in the fruit of the tree of life (Lang).*

*The tree of life: this is a return to Eden... to the final remaking of the relationship with God, just as it was in the very beginning of time.*

Smyrna

8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:

*Smyrna: Smyrna is today called the city of Izmir, it lies about 35 miles north of Ephesus on the Aegean coast of Turkey. It has an excellent harbor. It had a strong allegiance to Rome and in 195 BC it became the first city in the ancient world to build a temple in honor of Dea Roma. Later in 23 BC, Smyrna won permission to build a temple to the emperor Tiberius. It was known for its games and had a large stadium. The strong allegiance to Rome plus a large Jewish population which was actively hostile to the Christians made it exceptionally difficult to live as a Christian in Smyrna. The most famous martyrdom of the early church fathers was of the elderly Polycarp, the 'twelfth martyr in Smyrna', who, upon his refusal to acknowledge Caesar as Lord, was placed upon a pyre to be burned (Mounce). There is still an active church in the city today.*

*First and Last, dead and alive: This a repetition of his self designation, see Rev 1:17-18. He is the first and the last word in human history and therefore is sovereign over what is in between (xxxx). Through him the world was created and human history will end when he comes again. He died and came to life again and hence conquered death, he is the firstborn of many brothers, this should be of comfort to those in Smyrna who are about to be persecuted and some will die.*

9 I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

*Poverty: Physically the church in Smyrna suffered from persecution from the Jews and they were poor, they had few luxuries and possessions. They were poor often because they had been excluded from the guilds that set employment because they refused to participate in offerings to the appropriate gods and goddesses that were the patrons of the guilds.*

*Rich: yet spiritually they were rich in the sight of Christ. Jesus sees their affliction, he knows about it, this must be of comfort to this persecuted church.*

*Slander: This was the beginning of the real separation of the Jews and the Christians. In some parts of the Middle East the Christians continued to worship in synagogues until around AD 130. However in some places such as Smyrna, there was an early great antagonism. The Jews wanted to maintain their place in the Empire and so were adverse to being seen with Christians who were considered atheists. So the Jews would accuse them as heretics.*

*And are not: the idea here is that if Jews were really the people of God, then they would see the truth of Jesus Christ as the messiah, but since they do not then they are those who work for Satan. John always had a difficult time with the Jews which can be seen in the gospel itself.*

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

*Do not fear: In John 16:33 Jesus tells his disciples that in world they will have tribulation, but to take courage; he has overcome the world, cf. 3:21, 5:5. In Luke 12:4 Jesus warns us not to fear man who can kill the body but do no more, we should fear*

*God who, when the body is dead, can cast us into hell. 1 Pet 3:13-18 tells us not to be afraid if we suffer for doing right, we have the example of Jesus who died for doing right but he was raised again (cf. 1 Pet 2:19-25, Isa 51:7-8).*

*Devil is to throw you into prison: Notice that this is not the Romans doing this but Satan. This is one way apocalyptic works in that there is this close association between earthly events and their spiritual causation.*

*So you may be tested: One of the great themes of Revelation is that believers must live up to their faith even in the face of persecution. It is in persecution that our faith is forged. This is part of what Peter is talking about.*

*Ten Days: Ten days is a limited, but complete, period of time known by God, note that Daniel asked to be tested for ten days to see whether he would still look well on a diet of vegetables (Dan 1:12).*

*Faithful unto death: this can mean faithful while you die for Christ, or it can mean you will be out of prison but remain faithful until you die of old age.*

*Crown of life: a nice metaphor that reminds people of the crown of laurel wreaths that are given to victors in the games. The word is victors' crown and not royal crown.*

11 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

*Conquers: John is talking about being faithful. You have conquered temptation, your fears, the desire to be safe rather than to be faithful.*

*Second death: this is spiritual death. This means after the final resurrection and judgment one is condemned to hell.*

Pergamum

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword:

*Pergamum: this was the most impressive of all the cities. It had a 200,000 volume library (the name Pergamum means parchment). It had many temples, with the most impressive being a white marble temple to Zeus, perched on a 1000 ft hill above the city. Again one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The serpent, the symbol of healing of the pagan god Asclepius is everywhere. People came from all over the empire to be healed at this temple. Emperor worship was also part of the city culture*

*Two edged sword: Pergamum had the right to conduct capital punishment.*

13 I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives.

*Satan - In the case of the other church (except Smyrna) Jesus says 'I know your deed' here he says 'I know where you live--where Satan has his throne', he knows that they are living where Satan seemingly reigns, this must bring comfort to the church. Pergamum was a centre of both pagan religion and Caesar worship, Asclepius the serpent God of healing was worshipped there and so the city can truly be described as one where Satan reigns, i.e. has his throne. However this is precisely the place where Christians are to witness, c.f. 'Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified' (11:8).*

*Antipas - The Greek word used here for witness is martyrs, thus by the witness of his life and death Antipas bore witness to Jesus, becoming an example for much of the book later. Jesus*

*knows our circumstances, he knows that the church at Pergamum is where Satan has his throne, he knows about the martyrdom of Antipas this should bring comfort to the saints. Jesus is the faithful witness (1:5), Antipas is one who followed the example of Jesus and remained faithful unto death (2:10, 14:12), just as Christ remained faithful until death, and is called here my faithful witness; being faithful under persecution is one of the key messages of revelation. Antipas means against all.*

14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication. 15 So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

*Balaam – see Numbers 22:1ff and 31:7ff There are two traditions about Balaam. The first is that he was hired to curse Israel and then, led by the Word of God, blessed them instead. There is a second tradition that implies that Balaam was a prophet who infiltrated the people of Israel and caused them to sin...this led to a plague. The idea is that there is an inside job to lure God's people away. Balak was a king of Median who wanted to curse the Israelites who were coming into the land. This was difficult in the time of Revelation because Roman religion had many festivals and sexual immorality.*

16 Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

*Repent – they have to weed out those who are trying to lead them astray. This is in a sense true theology.*

*Sword of my mouth – this is the very word of God which cuts to the heart.*

17 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.

*Hidden manna – (Ex. 16:33-34) it was designed to remind Israel of God's gracious care in the wilderness... the people here are to refuse the banquets of Rome in order to depend on God's provision.*

*White Stone – this was an invitation to a banquet.*

*New Name – This was the name of Jesus Christ, one became a new person and thus had a new name, and no one could know your name meaning that they could not gain power over you. To know another's name was power. Christ shares his name with us.*

18 And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze:

*The city of Thyatira is now Akhisar. The city was on the trade route south east of the capital Pergamum and a period of great prosperity and increase was only beginning when the seven letters were written. More trade guilds were known in Thyatira than any other Asian city. The inscriptions mention the following: wood workers, linen workers, makers of outer garments, dryers, leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers and bronzesmiths. The woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth came from the city of Thyatira, (Acts 16:14). Each guild had its own god and to work then you had to participate in the work of the guild, which meant the work of the gods and the feasts of the gods. After one ate there were sexual antics.*

*Son of God - Apollo was supposed to be the son of god because he was the son of Zeus and there were temples to Zeus there.*

19 I know your works--your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first.

*Works - the believers in Thyatira were living in community as they were supposed to do. They showed forth the love of Jesus Christ one for another.*

20 But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants a to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. 22 Beware, I am throwing her on a bed of suffering, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; 23 and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.

*Jezebel - This was a church that had love and lost its love for the truth, rather than loving truth but having lost love. There was a prophetess in their midst who was preaching heresy. Since sexual immorality and eating sacrificed food to idols are mentioned in Acts 15:20 and in Corinthians 6:18, 8:1, we should take it literally. Eating food offered to idols would be a temptation with respect to the trade guilds which would have feasts involving food offered to idols and possibly sexual immorality. Once again spiritual compromise is warned against, James 4:4 warns that friendship with the world is hatred towards God, it is a form of spiritual adultery. In 18:4 the saints are warned to come out of Babylon so that they will not share in her sins or her punishment.*

*Refuses to repent - the church believed that what mattered was not sin but continuing in sin. There were always opportunities to repent. Both Jesus and Paul remind believers that we are to go to those who sin and try to get them to see the light.*

*Bed of suffering - they suffer because they cause God's people to suffer. To commit adultery is akin to OT ideas in Hosea. There God's people are represented by a prostitute.*

*Strike children dead - this is eternal death. It is that they are moving away from God.*

*Works deserve - this is justice being meted out.*

24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call 'the deep things of Satan,' to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden; 25 only hold fast to what you have until I come.

*Who hold - To those who resist sexual immorality and eating food offered to idols, and do not compromise with the world he does impose any other burden on them, see Acts 15:28. To learn Satan's so called deep secrets one has to plumb the depths of wickedness in order to appreciate God's grace.*

*Do not lay any other burden - there are no more rules to follow, they have love and good doctrine*

26 To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; 27 to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered-- 28 even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. 29 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

*Conquers - this is a battle and they need not only to resist but to overcome*

*Give authority over the nations - Psalm 2 messiahs reign will be shared with his followers, this is what the disciples were looking for*

*Clay pots - this is a dramatic turnaround... the powerful are now as fragile as a clay pots*

*I receive - Jesus will be receiving authority from God, who was the first and the last and the ruler of all things. The time is not yet but is coming*

*Morning star - image of the morning star heralding the onset of the coming new day. Jesus is the one who brings the new future.*

Page Break Revelation Chapter 3

### Sardis

Sardis was about 50 miles east of Smyrna and 30 miles south east of Thyatira. It was a wealthy city and most of the city practiced pagan worship with its mystery cults and secret religious societies. It had a magnificent temple of Artemis. Its people were idolaters and worshipped the mother goddess, Cybele, which included orgies during festivals held in her honor Sardis thought it was secure but twice in the history of Sardis the acropolis had fallen to the enemy due to lack of vigilance of its defenders (Mounce). This was a city where wool dying was prominent. It also had a necropolis (a cemetery of 1000 hills) which in many ways reminded people that this was a city whose glory was past...it had been eclipsed by newer and more prosperous towns.

3 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead

*The words of him - We return to the idea of Jesus being the one who holds all things in his hands. He is also the one who knows all things (seven spirits) and has control of all things (seven stars).*

*There is no commendation because there was nothing to commend. The contrast of the word alive and dead is a stinging rebuke, intended to wake them up. Just as the city was living on its past glory, the church had the outward form of religion (past glory) but had lost the inward reality of Christ in them. The next verse shows them not to be completely dead, but rather asleep.*

. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent.

*Wake up - The situation is not hopeless. They are asleep and so not quite dead. There is a chance to wake up. In a sense they are on life support. They had works but the works were those of show and not of deep and abiding faith. They were going through the motions.*

*Remember - They had forgotten the very basic gospel message of loving God and loving others in Jesus Christ. This was a life transforming call. It called them to be different from the city in which they lived. They were to be counter cultural. They were blending back into the society out of which they had been called.*

*Repent - The command was to turn around and return to moving in the direction in which they had been going as believers.*

If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

*Thief - The image of God's return is one of a sudden arrival when no one is watching. Jesus will come and steal what they thought they had. The city had twice not been vigilant and had lost everything. Now the people of Christ had forgotten to keep watch over their lives and now they are at risk as well.*

4 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. 6 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

*Still a few persons - There is a reminder here that not all is lost. Not everyone has given in to the lures of the society. The image is of clothing that has not been cleaned. White has always represented holiness and purity. Faithfulness becomes the measure of whether our names are in the Lambs Book of Life. Part of this book lifts up the idea of personal accountability. We are called upon to make the choices necessary to remain faithful.*

*Confess your name before my Father - If we act appropriately then Jesus will confess our names before God. The angels are the heavenly court.*

## Philadelphia

*Philadelphia was a strong fortress city. Its industries were wine, leather and textiles. The area however was very earthquake prone. In AD 17 the city was destroyed by an earthquake. Tiberius rebuilt it.*

7" And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:  
These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David,  
who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens:

*Who opens and no one can shut - The major image here is the one of the door. The door here is into and out of the kingdom of God. To be saved means to be in the kingdom... in other words one is saved when one enters the kingdom of God's reign in Christ. So Jesus is the only one who is holy enough (perfect enough) and true enough (followed through on God's commands) to hold the key to the kingdom of David. No one else... individual, church or king has the power to open and shut the door.*

8" I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying--I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

*Yet you have kept my word - This is a church that has been faithful through much. They have managed to maintain their faithfulness and witness even when they have little power (no*

*political or religious power...probably working class people). No one can stop them from gaining access to the kingdom because Christ alone has opened the door for them.*

*Synagogue of Satan - As the church began to grow with more and more Gentiles, and began to proclaim Jesus as both savior and Lord, the synagogues began to push them out and claim that the Christians were not followers of the true God. They slandered the believers and tried to have them condemned by the Romans. What he means by "they say they are Jews but they are not" is that if they were truly Jews, God's people, they would be open to God's new revelation in Jesus Christ.*

*I will make them bow down at your feet - The Jews will bow down because at the end of time every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and since believers will reign with Christ, then those in the synagogue will bow down to them as well. It will be the presence of the believers with Christ that will show the Jews that Jesus loves them. There is also a promise that the members of the church will not have to suffer. This does not refer to physical suffering...the early church saw plenty of that. It refers to being spiritually sealed (we will see this occur in a few chapters) so that Satan cannot tempt the people away from Christ.*

11 I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

*Hold fast - Again there is reference to the second coming and a command to hold fast in order that no one could take away the winners crown of victory.*

12 If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. 13 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

*I will make you a pillar - The importance of the pillar is that pillars are often the only part of buildings left standing after earthquakes. So the people will not be able to be moved and the church of God will stand upon them as the solid pillars of faith.*

*You will never go out of it - They will never go out of it because it is Christ who will give them the strength to stay in.*

*Name - The people will receive three names. They will receive the name of God...meaning they belong to God. They will become the new Jerusalem, they will be the place in which the Holy one will dwell. Philadelphia had been renamed several times, and now the believers would be renamed to become a new people. They will be named for Jesus who is the one who holds the keys to the doors. They will be able to enter in because they have his mark.*

Laodicea

The city had a profitable business from the production of black wool cloth and when it was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60 it was able to rebuild itself without outside help. It had a widely known medical school and produced an eye-salve (Mounce). It got its water from hot springs almost 6 miles away and by the time it got to Laodicea it would have been lukewarm. It was also a center for banking. The people were zealous for nothing, because they had everything. They had learned how to compromise to get along. The church lived within this affluent society and the attitudes of its citizens rubbed off onto the church.

14“ And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation:

*The words of the Amen - Jesus as described as the Amen (the truth teller), the faithful one (the one who was able to live faithfully even to the cross... something his followers were supposed to be), the one who was the true witness (who was willing to speak the truth even in the face of opposition), and the origin of God’s creation (the one who was there at the beginning of all that there is... based on the first chapter of John’s Gospel)*

15“ I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

*Either cold or hot - The city was known for its warm springs... these were neither hot or cold. They were also brackish and smelled. No one would want to drink the water so it was pretty useless. The water in fact would induce vomiting if consumed. So the people were as useless as the water. They were not hot in order to be faithful and true witnesses. They were not cold so that their hearts might be converted. Like the city they were zealous for nothing.*

17 For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

*I am rich - Again remember that the city was so wealthy that they did not have to depend on anyone or anything. As with many people today, the more money they have the less they think they need to depend on God. Jesus reminds them that they are just the opposite. By not being useful to the kingdom of God they have nothing. Material goods do not make one rich. So each reference is to the city wretched (the city was proud), pitiable (the city was envied), poor (the city was very rich), blind (the city had healing springs and medical school) and naked (the city was known for its clothing).*

18 Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

*Therefore I counsel you - Jesus offers an alternative to each of those conditions. He points out that he and he alone is the way to life that really matters.*

19 I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. 20 Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

*Those whom I love - Jesus has not given up on them. He always desires repentance and new life. He offers them the chance to respond to his and promises to be intimate fellowship with him... eating together.*

21 To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

***To the one who conquers** - Jesus helps them to understand what it means to conquer. Those who conquer are those who remain faithful and true...both living and witnessing to the truth, which is what Jesus did by obeying God and going to the cross. Faithfulness for Revelation means being faithful in all areas of life. It is not merely believing, but living. Those who manage such a feat will get to reign with Christ.*

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 4**

### **The Real Throne Room**

*Intro: The early Christians had begun to understand themselves as belonging to a very different kingdom. This kingdom had a new king (Jesus Christ). This kingdom was eternal (God was alpha and omega). This kingdom possessed power (God is the Almighty). So now in order to help these new kingdom people deepen their faith and confidence in God they are invited to see for themselves the very throne room of God. In this way they gain a perspective on who is it that they worship and on his glory and majesty that are greater than that of Rome.*

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

***Looked up:** this is in reference to the cosmological understanding of heaven and earth. Heaven existed above the earth on the other side of the sky. This was not metaphor, this was their way of viewing the universe.*

***Door stood open:** there was a literal way into heaven. Just as there had been visions of angels ascending and descending ladders into heaven, now a door was opened.*

***First voice like a trumpet:** loud voice which one could not miss that makes pronouncements.*

***Come up:** again a spatial reference of going up into heaven.*

***What must soon take place:** the plans for the great battle and eventual restoration of the world are kept in heaven. They have not been revealed yet.*

1. How do you understand what it means for a door to heaven to be open?
2. How do you understand the idea of “What is to soon take place”?

2 At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne!

3 And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald.

***In the spirit:** heaven was not a place that mortals could go. It was a spiritual (though very real) realm. So in order for John to be there he had to be spiritually transported.*

***Stood a throne:** a vivid and real (not metaphorical) image. This was where God dwelt and God would indeed be on a throne. Those in the First Century would certainly identify with the image.*

One seated on the throne: *God was in his temple and all was well. God is not gone, meaning out of touch. God is present and accounted for. God is ruling and reigning. And the one seated there looks: even for people in the First Century it would be difficult to imagine anything more glorious. There is imagery in the stones: jasper – is a stone of various colors (much like a rainbow); carnelian (bright red, very luminous); emerald (green – again very luminous). The rainbow then would be of a greenish tint and would be glowing – the rainbow representing God's promise not to wipe out humanity. Green often represented faithfulness and mercy... which would correspond with the rainbow.*

1. Since we no longer have kings and queens, how ought we to understand the idea of the throne in heaven?
2. Why all the references to jewels?
3. How would you describe God?

4 Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. 5 Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; 6 and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:

Twenty-four thrones: *in the Roman empire there were smaller kingdoms and kings each of which gave their allegiance to Rome. Herod was just such a king. Here we have an image of those other kings/elders (meaning they have given an oath of allegiance to God) surrounding God.*

Twenty-four elders: *There are at least 13 different interpretations of the elders: who they are or who they represent. By the nature of the title, elder, we can assume they represent wisdom... which was the role of the elder. By the fact there are twenty four... we can assume they represent to some extent the wisdom of both the Old Testament (twelve tribes) and the "New Testament" (twelve apostles).*

White robes: Purity at its deepest level

Golden Crowns: *this is to signify again the idea of kingship which had been given to them by God and now they are giving their allegiance to the Almighty*

Lightening: *this is a reference to a theophony which is what happens when God comes near.*

Seven torches/spirits: *this goes back a chapter to be the very spirit of God the torches representing the seven churches which represent all the other churches.*

Sea of glass: *Glass was common in the first century. It has been estimated that during the 700 years of Roman rule, more than 13 billion pieces of glassware were made. They were usually used by the middle and lower classes. The idea of crystal means that it is reflective; the glory of God is being reflected. Usually the sea represents chaos and evil The Red sea, the sea in which Leviathan lives; but in heaven the sea is tranquil, and is no longer a threat. In heaven God has tamed even chaos itself. Also there was a sea in the Temple in Jerusalem.*

Four living creatures: *these are more of the heavenly entourage. Here you have more of what would normally be frightening creatures who work for God. God employs*

*angels, men and creatures. They do God's work and the eyes represent the ability to see in all directions... to know what is going on.*

1. What feelings are evoked by the description of the throne room?
2. What portion of the description is most meaningful to you?

7 the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside.

Lion: *the lion was power and royal authority... like David who was the lion of Judah.*

Ox: *This was great strength*

Human face: *this is wisdom and spirituality*

Eagle: *this is swiftness of action*

*Together they embody the totality of God's power and ability. They are capable of carrying out whatever God desires of them. Their wings give them the ability go anywhere... move in all six directions. These creatures are at God's beck and call to do his bidding and to give God information.*

1. What images would you use today to describe God's authority, strength, wisdom and action?
2. What symbols are there in our lives which are used in this way...to describe attributes of a person or entity?

Day and night without ceasing they sing,

"Holy, holy, holy,  
the Lord God the Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come."

Day and night...they: *this refers to the four living creatures. In Genesis animals could talk...remember the snake... and so in heaven even the creatures (and thus creation) can sing and praise God. This is right out of the Psalms where all of God's creation praises him.*

Sing: *this is the first of several choruses in Revelation. The first two hymns are to God, the next two to the Lamb and last one to both. Also each chorus grows in size and numbers.*

Holy, holy, holy: *the use of a term three times is the highest form of the term. This means God is absolute holiness. God is god and no one else... including Caesar. God is not even to be compared to anyone else.*

1. How has this image been used by hymn writers over the centuries?
2. What is your favorite hymn and why?

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created."

*Whenever... give glory: if we are to believe the image then that is 24/7. These is not a time when God is not receiving praise, which would be appropriate for the creator of the universe.*

*Fall down: the elders who their allegiance to the king in such a way as they cannot stand in his presence. They fall in reverent praise.*

*Cast their crowns: this means they do not believe themselves worthy to even rule and reign with God. It is God alone who directs their actions.*

*Were created: this again returns to the very Jewish idea of God as creator and disposer of all things. All of creation is his, in heaven and on earth. Surely if God reigns in this way in heaven even more does he have power over the earth. In the end, all that exists only exists because of God's will.*

1. How do you give glory, honor and thanks to God?
2. Why is God the one who is worthy to be praised?
3. What are some other reasons to give God glory, honor and praise?

## Revelation Chapter 5 The Hero

*In literature both ancient and modern, there has always been the image of the hero. The hero is the one who is willing and able to accomplish what appears to be an impossible task. Here the task is to open the scroll in order that God's future might play itself out...that justice and righteousness would triumph over the forces of Satan. As in most hero quest stories there is no one among the ordinary...and not so ordinary who can do this. Yet in the moment of despair there steps forward one who has already proved he is able and now accepts the challenge which only he can fulfill. And as with all conquering heroes the people will praise him. This is the pattern for conquering Roman heroes who return home to great acclamation. Since this is the real throne room then this must be the real hero...as opposed to those counterfeit heroes of the Roman Empire.*

1 Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed a with seven seals; 2 and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" 3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it.

*I saw in the right hand...a scroll - the fact it is in the right hand indicates it is of great importance. There are two different takes on the scroll. 1) God's eternal plan for all creatures for all of time 2) God's plan for the end times only.*

*Seven seals - In the Roman world seven persons witnessed to a will and each person attached his seal to the document. The seals show the secrecy of the document.*

*Who is worthy - the scene is set. This heightens the tension and makes it clear that only the lamb, Jesus himself has the power to work with God to unfold the events which will bring about God's final victory.*

*No one was able - Notice carefully that no angel or demon or human has the power to open the scroll. It sounds as if some have tried, but the real hero has not yet been found... sort of the Gordian knot idea... or in Homer the one who can shoot the arrows and win the hand Odysseus' wife. Also this means we are not able to save ourselves.*

4 And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

*Weep bitterly - to not be able to open the scrolls meant that God's people would continue to suffer because the future could not be unfurled. It would be reason to weep The Lion...Root of David - Genesis 49:8-10 "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. 9 Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness--who dares rouse him up? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his." From this you begin to get the sense that if there is to be a hero in this story it ought to be someone whose lineage is such that they have been declared to be a hero. Judah is the line of kings and David is the greatest king. So the words give the lamb the required heritage to be a hero.*

*Has conquered - Jesus has already demonstrated his hero status. He was willing to do whatever it took to insure that victory of God.*

*Can open - Jesus is the one who inherits and so can open.*

6 Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne.

*Between the throne and the four living creatures - you have the lamb already taking a central place in the "geography" of the throne room. The lamb is not an outsider but one who already has a central place in the salvation story.*

*As if it had been slaughtered - this refers to having its throat cut. This is a familiar image, but one that takes the story to a new place. What does it mean to look as if slain? Obviously if a lamb is slain it does not live...and would certainly not be living in the presence of God. This is a clear reference to Jesus, both John and Peter refer to Jesus being the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36, 1 Pet 1:19), 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29). Paul call Jesus our Passover lamb who has been sacrificed (1 Cor 5:7).*

*Having seven horns and seven eyes - this lamb is different... seven is the number of completion. It has complete power (horns) and complete sight (eyes). This lamb has been given the power and sight beyond all others. This can be seen when the seven eyes are referred to as the seven spirits sent out (the Lamb has the knowledge of all that is taking place. Nothing is hidden from the perfect spirit)*

8 When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 They sing a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,  
for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God  
saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;  
10 you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,  
and they will reign on earth.”

*Fell – this is the proper worship for one who has all power and glory. This is the same worship that is given to God himself.*

*Four living creatures and twenty-four elders – this is just the beginning of the praise, notice how the praise builds*

*Prayers of the saints – now humanity is brought back into the picture. This event is not separated from the “real” world. The elders who are near the lamb have heard the cries of God’s people and are offering them to the lamb, who has seen their plight.*

*Sing – again the great heritage of praise from Judaism.*

*For you were slaughtered – the hero lamb is now a counterintuitive hero. Most heroes become such because they are the slayers (look at Odysseus). Suddenly here we have John reinterpreting how the power of God has been at work in the world.*

*By your blood ransomed – again a reference to the day of Passover, only on a grander scale. Anyone on the earth can take hold of the power of the blood. This is central theme for John. The work of the lamb is not restricted by race, nationality or language. It has become a universal message.*

*Kingdom and priests – this again returns us to the central theme of God’s plan that God is about creating an alternative kingdom...not through war, but through sacrifice. This kingdom is real because it has a ruler (the lamb) and a set of rules (sacrifice).*

*Priests – all of those who are saved by the blood are called to serve the lamb. There is not elevated priesthood that controls access to God. All are called to act.*

*Reign – this is foreshadowing. God is going to take on the Romans and all else through His power and create a new and wonderful world in which the righteous will lie and reign. Rome may think it will last forever but God has other ideas.*

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 singing with full voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might  
and honor and glory and blessing!”

*The voice of many angels – there is a single voice proclaiming praise for the lamb.*

*Thousands and thousands – this is the expanding nature of the praise. We have the four living creatures in circle one, then the elders in circle two, then the angels in circle three. No Caesar could ever expect this kind of praise.*

Power, wealth... - this is a list of seven attributes. The lamb is worthy to receive all perfection. The lamb is worthy to receive all that God on the throne has to give.

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,

"To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb  
be blessing and honor and glory and might  
forever and ever!"

14 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

*Every creature - suddenly the circles of praise are now complete. The final outer circle is the voice of every creature... not merely all people or even angels... it includes all the animals and even those who are in the darkness of death (under the earth). Caesar might be a mighty man but he cannot call for the praise of all creatures.*

*To the one on the throne and to the Lamb - we have praise now to the co-creators (John 1:1-4 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.") This is in a sense that the sheep know the voice of their shepherd.*

*Amen - the four living creatures agree that this praise is right and good.*

*Elders fell down and worshipped - again this is the only proper praise that is due to the one who will set humanity free because he has done what the one on the throne asked.*

## Revelation Chapter Six The Action Begins

*We begin a new portion of the text. We begin with the first series in a set of series. We will have seven seals, then seven trumpets, and then ultimately seven bowls. Each of these series brings forth a variety of judgments upon the earth. With each series the judgments become more severe. We will watch the action in the story rise with each successive series. In this first series we have the famous four horsemen. These are not new to the Jewish readers. In Zechariah 1:8-11 and 6:1-8 there are four different horse with four colored horses. These horses and their riders are in place to patrol the earth for God. In a sense it is as if these horsemen are being commanded by God to move from patrolling to bringing misery on the earth for the sins of humanity. Notice carefully that God does not send these, but instead allows them to act. It is as if God is allowing humanity to reap the rewards of its own actions. One other note is that we are returning to the earth, to the world in which the readers live.*

1 Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!" 2 I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.

Saw the lamb: it is Jesus and Jesus alone who can open the seals. He alone has been given the power to unveil the present and future judgments because of his willingness to sacrifice himself for the people.

Four living creatures: these are the creatures surrounding the throne that can see and move in any and all directions. They work intimately with God. Set as per four compass points.

Come: this is not to John but acts like a stage direction in the amphitheatre to call out one of the riders.

White horse: there has been much speculation about this horse. Some see it as a Christ figure, yet this is troubling because Jesus is the one sending, he already has a crown and is on the throne. Others see it as an anti-Christ attempting to seem as if he is perfect. The language of the crown is similar to the language for the crown on a Roman general. The bow may refer simply to the ability of warriors to conquer. This may also be a generic image of a conquering nation that overpowers those who are weaker.

1. What images do the ideas of “conquering and to conquer” bring to mind?
2. How do you hold together the image of the Lamb and the destruction of the other rider and horse?

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, “Come!” 4 And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.

Horse, bright red: the image of blood and war. Bright red blood means that there is still oxygen in it, so this is instant death.

Take peace: we have peace beginning to leave through conquest and death. Note that people are to slaughter one another... this is not God doing it. God is allowing.

Sword: he is given the means to bring about death

1. What images does the idea of war bring forth for you?
2. Who is doing the killing here?

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, “Come!” I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand, 6 and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a day’s pay, and three quarts of barley for a day’s pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!”

Black rider: this is death and mourning. Death begins to lead to famine. When there are no people to work the fields then there will be no food and thus famine.

A quart of wheat: the prices mentioned are about 12 times what they normally would be.

***But do not damage:** while the destruction is growing there are some things, some long lived things (vines and olive trees) that remain. This is not total destruction.*

1. Where have you seen pictures of famine?
2. What impact have those pictures had on you?

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, "Come!" 8 I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth.

***Pale green horse:** this is the color of a cadaver, of a person who is infected with plague and hungry.*

***Death:** he is even identified... this is the end for many, death will stalk the earth*

***Hades followed:** this is the place where all souls go after death. It is as if Hades is scooping up the souls of those who have been killed by the first three riders*

***Give authority:** they are allowed to take a large portion of the earth, one quarter, but still not all the earth. Things are bad and death is present, but it is not the end.*

1. Is there anything happening today that would seem to fit this horse and rider?
2. What images does the idea of Hades following bring to mind?

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; 10 they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" 11 They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.

***Under the altar:** we have now returned to heaven. The focus has shifted back to the throne room. The image is of a temple where God dwells.*

***The souls:** these are those whom Christ has rescued and have not given their lives up to Hades which was following death.*

***Slaughtered:** the believers are suffering. Some writers argue that all the suffering in Revelation is done by those who are non-believers, all of the believers have been raptured. This does not hold since it is apparent that believers have been, and are suffering both in Revelation and real life. What this also does is bring these chapters into the past/present/future rather than simply being a promise of future events.*

***For the Word of God:** they are slain not merely for being good people, or for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. They are slain because they proclaimed what they believed. Again, the idea of testimony is that they refused to be silent in the face of threats.*

How long: they ask the eternal question of all righteous and persecuted people, how long must we wait for justice. For they understand that God is about justice. This may not sound all that appealing to our ears, justice in terms of vengeance, yet it is part of Revelation, that judgment means some people will pay a penalty for their rejection of God's grace.

White robes: this is the sign of purity. They have been judged and found to be true.

Rest a little while longer: they can take hope because the end is in sight. There will be justice done for them.

Brothers and sisters: this is a clear proclamation that believing comes with a price. There is no escape from the tribulation. There will be persecution until God decides that enough is enough...and only God knows when that time will be.

1. Have you ever cried out to God asking, "How long?"
2. What do you think God's justice will look like?
3. Why do you think God is waiting so long?
4. Would you be willing to be a martyr?

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Great earthquake: all of these events is typical of the end times. It is as if the very fabric of the universe is beginning to unfold. The idea is that is God's work that keeps the universe together...the power behind creation. However hovering at the edges is chaos...which God dealt with at the beginning of time. Now God is slowly withdrawing his watch care and is allowing chaos once more to enter into the picture.

Stars fell: this can be literal since stars were lights hung in the ceiling of heaven. Or it could be angels who are fallen because of the great battle that it taking place.

Sky vanished: this has to be taken in the context of ancient cosmology. The sky was the ceiling of earth and the floor of heaven. It was what kept the two realms apart. Now that is no longer so. We can begin to see what is taking place in heaven and heaven can see what is happening here. There is a melding of all things back into a single whole.

Mountains and islands: this is the great leveling of all things. A way is being prepared for God to come and the sea, chaos, is also trying to take its place. In a sense all hell is breaking loose.

1. Have you ever felt like "all hell was breaking loose in your life?" Was your faith helpful in those moments? How so?
2. Why should or should not we equate the disasters of today with these mentioned in the preceding verses?

15 Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

***Kings:** all you have to do is read the class of people mentioned and it becomes clear that no one will escape. This will be a cosmic event in which heaven and earth will be moving together. And it is a dangerous thing to fall into the hands of a God bent on judgment. Notice that the saints under the altar are not afraid of being in the presence of God. In fact they call out to God. Here these people are afraid because they do not know the lamb of God.*

***Who is able to stand?:** this is the central question. The saints know the answer. They are able to stand even when they have been killed and tortured for their faith. They will be the ones vindicated.*

1. Why do you suppose it was important to name all the classes of people who would want to hide from God?
2. Are you afraid to face the living God? Why or why not?

### **Revelation Chapter 7 God Chooses His Team by Affixing His Seal**

*The question that ends Chapter 6, "Who is able to stand (before God's wrath)?" is the question that is going to be answered in Chapter 7. As all hell appears to be breaking loose on the earth God decides that he will choose those who will be on his side. There have already been those who have died for the gospel, and we know that more will die as well (6:11) but even so, God will choose some who will be able to remain faithful even in the face of the terrible times that are ahead. People from every race and nation will be marked out by God as part of the faithful remnant. As you read this note the emphasis on the universality of the gospel and the assurance that comes from being one of the elect. This also appears to be a flash forward offered in order that those who are about to undergo the "great ordeal" (7:14) will have the courage to stand fast.*

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree. 2 I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, 3 saying, "Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads."

***Four angels:** we see the universality of this section...four angels each representing the four points of the compass. They are holding the winds at bay for the moment because God has something that he wants to do.*

*Another angel: God is sending his messenger to accomplish something new (rising sun. Jerusalem is also seen as being in the East and so this is coming from the Holy City.*

*The seal of the living God: God wants to prove ownership of something or someone. Being marked with a seal becomes very important in Revelation. We will either belong to God or we will belong to the enemy. We will have one mark or the other.*

*Do not damage: In a sense then, with the winds calm, nothing can happen... ships can't move, no damage can be done (wind in the trees) and all things come to a halt. It is a dead calm.*

*Until we have marked: God is going to take the initiative to mark out those who are his. There will be no question as to who belongs to God.*

1. What hope does this passage give to you?
2. What importance does being sealed hold for you?

4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel:

5 From the tribe of Judah twelve thousand sealed,  
from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand,  
from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,

6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand,  
from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand,  
from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,

7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand,  
from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand,  
from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,

8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand,  
from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand,  
from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand sealed.

*Every tribe: thus begins the marking with those who have belonged to Israel in the beginning. We begin not with Gentiles but with those who are a righteous remnant of Israel. What is interesting is that there is one tribe missing. Dan and Ephraim are missing. Legend had it that the tribe of Dan would produce the anti-Christ (Judges 18:18-19) and Ephraim is an apostate tribe (Hos. 4:17). In scripture there are no less than twenty variant lists of the tribes naming anywhere from 10 - 13 tribes. John here lists Joseph and Manasseh as separate tribes though in most of the Old Testament Manasseh and Ephraim as seen as sons of Joseph and thus not listed. In addition Levi is often omitted because of their priestly role... they did not get land.*

*144,000: this is the perfect holy number of 12 x 12 x 1000. God has the perfect number in mind and not an actual head count of 144,000.*

3. Why does it matter that a portion of those saved come from the people of Israel?
4. Why do you suppose that it was important to leave out the tribes of Dan and Ephraim in this context?

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 singing,

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom  
and thanksgiving and honor  
and power and might  
be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

***Great multitude: this forces us to abandon the idea that there are only 144,000 people to be saved. God has a much greater number in mind... in fact it is such a great number that they cannot be counted. The 144,000 becomes the indication that the Jews are not left out and that even they have been chosen to be saved. God keeps God's promises.***

***From every nation: this is now a universal vision. God is no longer simply saving one people or race, God is about the business of saving people of all races and colors and languages. They have been called out and saved by God.***

***White robes: these are people who have been baptized and purified by God. Their sins have been forgiven and they now stand in the very presence of God.***

***Palm branches: This brings forth images of Jesus and other Kings entering into Jerusalem. It is a way to celebrate royalty.***

***Stood around: again we pick up the image of the throne being at the center of everything and all the heavenly court falling down and worshipping. Thus there is no better place and worse place. Everyone is equal in the circle.***

***Blessing and honor...: the number of praises given is seven, so this is the perfect praise to give to God.***

5. How would you respond to a Jehovah's Witness who said only 144,000 will be in heaven?

6. Where do you see the universal nature of the church?

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" 14 I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. 16 They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; 17 for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

***Who are these: once again we begin with a question which allows John to discover and pass on the answer to those who are reading his revelation.***

*Come out of the great ordeal: this is the promise for which the people have been waiting. They have been waiting to know if their sacrifice will be worth it. Will it be worth it to be the faithful ones in the seven cities? Will it be worth it to only claim Jesus as Lord and Savior? Will it be worth it hold on to their faith?*

*Washed their robes: this allows us to know where their power and salvation comes from...from the blood of Jesus who gave his life as a ransom for the world. It does not come from being brave or from good works... they are made pure by the work of Jesus.*

*Shelter them: this is the promise. God will take care of them in every way possible. They will be full and happy praising God night and day. No longer will they suffer under the broiling sun and find their way by the light of the moon.*

*Lamb... will be their shepherd: Jesus will be with them and will help them find the eternal life they so desire*

*Water of life: this ties in with 22:1 assuring them that regardless of what comes in the rest of the book they are going to make it to the end of the story.*

*Wipe away every tear: this ties in with 21:4 assuring the people that they too will no longer have to weep for their loved ones because God is going to set everything to right.*

7. Do you suppose that only those who go through the end times will get the white robe? Why or why not?

8. Why do you suppose John is given this vision long before it is given again at the end of Revelation? Why do the people need to hear it now?

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 8**  
**Handout**

*Things go from bad to worse. God hears the prayers of those who want to be avenged and responds with devastations upon more of the earth than before. Notice that here we have moved from one quarter of the earth to one third of the earth. Usually this is called the seven trumpets, yet that gives no real indication of what is taking place. What we have is the beginning of the return of chaos. Suddenly those things upon which humanity depends (water, grass for animals, fish from the sea, etc.) are now being destroyed. Life will become very, very hard. Also take note of the reuse of the image of the plagues from Exodus. In a sense it is as if it will take a new series of plagues through which God's people will have to come in order for God's people to finally be set free. Freedom is through suffering.*

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

*Silence: could be used to describe an attitude of pious waiting or simply the awe that followed the ripping open of heaven. Sort of the silence before the storm.*

*Seven angels with seven trumpets: the ante has been upped. We are now in the second set of sevens... and this time the announcement... trumpets... will make people take notice of what God is doing.*

*Incense: the prayers of the saints are wafted up with the incense into the very nostrils of God. God breathes in the prayers of the saints for vengeance and is influenced by them as they remind God of the lack of justice in the world and the need for God to do something about it.*

5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. 6 Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them.

*Fire: this is the burning anger of God against the injustice of the world... against all of those things that hurt and destroy the creation God has made*

*Threw: God's response is to send his wrath upon the world. He will unleash his anger.*

*Thunder: all of the "natural responses" to the throwing down of the censer are also used to describe a theophony; that moment when God comes close to humans and acts in the world.*

7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

*Earth: this first trumpet affects the earth.*

*Hail and fire: see Exodus 9:23-26. We have before us a new set of plagues. The plagues were intended to impress Pharaoh enough to let God's people go. Here they are intended to help folks see that they ought to become the people of God. This is nothing new in terms of the plagues, it is new in the sense of the scope of destruction. Suddenly a third of God's creation becomes useless. It cannot sustain life.*

8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. 9 A third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

*Sea: this second trumpet affects the seas.*

*Became blood: this would make all in the sea die. Also look at Exodus 7:20-21*

*Great mountain: think of Jesus speaking of having faith to move mountains, or of the world coming apart where you have flying mountains. The vision also appears to be like a volcano rising from the sea and plunging down in... Vesuvius?*

*A third of the ships: this would make commerce come to an almost complete halt, raise the price of goods and make other goods scarce.*

10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11 The name of the star is Wormwood.

A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter.

*Great star fell: notice how this follows the fall of all of the stars earlier in the book. In a sense this shows that we are not dealing with a logical sequential series of events. We are instead dealing with theological descriptions of a growing sense of tragedy.*

*Third of the rivers: we have moved from earth, to ocean, to fresh waters. In Turkey (where Patmos is located) rivers are the life blood of the people. They offer drinking water for humans and animals and irrigation for crops. This would deeply affect the people.*

*Wormwood: is a very bitter substance (Jer 9:15, Lam 3:19) and indicates affliction and misery. John may have had in mind the water at Marah, which was bitter but which the Lord made sweet, there the Lord promised not to bring any of the diseases that he brought onto the Egyptians provided they obey the laws of God (Exo 15:22).*

*Many died: this is the first mention of the loss of human life because of the new plagues.*

12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night.

*Third of the sun: Again notice that we have returned to a previous image... the sun having already been blackened... now we have a third of the sun going out and a third of the moon which had already been turned red... a third of the stars which have already fallen... and now their light is out. First the earth and vegetation, then the sea, then the rivers and springs and finally the rest of the universe is affected.*

*Darkness: this is similar to the plague of darkness on the Egyptians (Exo 10:21) So how do you keep a third of a day from shining unless we are speaking metaphorically?*

13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in midheaven, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

*Eagle crying: this is often seen as a vulture and not as the noble eagle that we in the US are used to. Thus we have a sign that death is ahead as the bird waits for the pickings.*

*Woe, woe, woe: we are given a hint that what is ahead is more dire than what has come. It is a wonderful literary device intended to catch and rivet our attention. We can only assume that since only the physical earth has been touched that we are nearing travails for humanity.*

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 9**  
**Handout**

*We continue the seven trumpets. These last trumpets focus on humanity. While earlier trumpets inflicted damage on the earth (1/3 of grass, trees, rivers, etc.) we are now looking at punishments against those who have not given themselves over to God to have their foreheads sealed. There is here, as in much of this book, an ever increasing tide of destruction and death. It never comes all at once but grows through a slow*

*steady progression of images. Again note that believers (those with the seal of God on their forehead) are present during this time of tribulation though they are spared. They have not been raptured off the earth.*

And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit;

*A star that had fallen: this time a star represents something else. It represents a satanic, or anti-God influence. Some people have speculated that it might be an rebellious angel, or even Satan himself.*

*Key: we are not clear who gives him/her the key, but chances are it is God for ultimately it is God and God alone who holds the keys to both life and death.*

2 he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.

*Bottomless pit: a marvelous image for a flat world in which the shaft descends into a netherworld of smoke, flame and evil. This is where Satan's minions live and work. For those familiar with The Lord of the Rings Trilogy recall the images of Saruman creating Uruk-hai as a replacement for men. He does so deep in the earth and there is fire and smoke all around. Tolkien borrowed much of his imagery from Revelation.*

3 Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. 4 They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

*Locusts: there was no more feared enemy of ancient peoples than the locusts. They would devour everything in their path, bringing starvation and misery. See also Joel 1:6 and 2:4-10.*

*Given authority: this was given by God. God removes his protection over a those who will not worship him. They will receive their just punishment.*

5 They were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. 6 And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

*Torture: they bring not death but pain to the people. No one can escape.*

*Five months: this is a limited period of time and is associated with the life span of a locust*

*Scorpion: again a known entity, people understood the pain and discomfort*

7 In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, 8 their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; 9 they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their

wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. 10 They have tails like scorpions, with stingers, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months.

*Horses equipped for battle: these were not your ordinary locusts. They are far more formidable. However much of the description fits the appearance of ordinary locusts. The coloring, teeth, hair (antennae), and sound they make as they advance. Tails like scorpions: this makes these locusts very different... and satanic. In Revelation there is a competition between those things that God makes (real locusts) and those things Satan creates (locusts with scorpion tails). Again very much on the order of Lord of the Rings in which the evil powers attempt to create beasts that resemble, but are far more evil than those created in a more natural fashion.*

11 They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. 12 The first woe has passed. There are still two woes to come.

*King: these are not mindless forces. They are organized and directed by an evil power. The angel of the bottomless pit: this may or may not be the angel who fell with the key.*

*Abaddon: the name in Hebrew means destruction or ruin. Sometimes it even refers to Hades as the place of ruin. This name came to refer to the personification of death in later Jewish literature.*

*Apollyon: refers to exterminator or destroyer*

13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, 14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

*Voice: we are hearing God once again taking command. What lies in store must be dramatic if God himself is going to direct the angel.*

*Four angels: in a sense the Euphrates is the edge of the world. On one side lies the land of milk and honey (Israel) and on the other the land from which all evil had come (Assyria, Babylon, etc.)*

15 So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of humankind.

*Hour, day...: this is the first time that we get a glimpse of a specific sense of timing to what is happening. It is as if God has been planning this and knows the time it will happen. The important point in a way is that this is all happening according to God's time and no one else's.*

*Kill a third of humankind: we have now come to the 1/3 of humanity. The earth has suffered this and now it is time for people to follow suit.*

16 The number of the troops of cavalry was two hundred million; I heard their number.

*Number: there has been great speculation about this number. Some have envisioned a real army moving across the earth. However there have also been some papers done by military planners who state that such an army is an impossibility... impossible to equip or move. Even in WWII all of the combined forces of all combatants only reached 70 million. More likely (as you read what follows) they are a satanic army with satanic powers. This is also an army much larger than anyone in that day or time could possibly imagine.*

17 And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur; the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths.

*Riders: the riders themselves do not appear to be all that important. Though they are brightly festooned they do not bring about the deaths of the people.*

*Heads of the horses like lions: what we have here again is something that God would not create. God creates horses with horses heads. These are some abominable cross breeding by an evil power. We see this as well in what they breath out...fire, smoke and sulfur.*

18 By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm.

*Plagues: We are back to the imagery of Exodus. God's plagues are released upon this who oppress the faithful*

*A third of humankind: these forces do not care if they kill men, women or children. They are simply sent out to slaughter. This would not be an unusual vision. Often when competing armies clashed all in their way were destroyed. No one was left.*

20 The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk. 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts.

*Did not repent: this is a very important piece of information. We discover that the intent behind these plagues was to make the people repent. Just as the original plagues were meant to have Pharaoh repent and let the people go, these plagues were meant to have the people repent and let go of....*

*Worshipping demons and idols of bronze and stone...: John makes a clear distinction between demons and idols. Demons are alive and have power. Idols are dead and do not. However worshipping either means that people are relying on that which cannot give life, but instead leads to death.*

*Murders, sorceries...: all of these in some way stand against the Ten Commandments. They are fundamental sins that disrupt the intention of God for God's creation. All in all you have seven sins 1) works of hands (cultic items) 2) worship of demons (other gods) 3) worship of idols (graven images) 4) murders (thou shall not murder) 5) sorceries (Exodus 7:11 or 9:11) 6) fornication (shall not commit adultery) 7) thefts (shall not steal).*

*Did not repent II: their refusal to repent stands in the face of heaven being opened... people running for cover... people begging to die and yet they live... yet they learn nothing. They turn a blind eye to what God is trying to tell them. They are a "stiff-necked people" just like Israel in the wilderness. In one sense this is a morality play that reinforces the desire of God's people to do well and of non-believers to believe.*

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 10**  
**Handout**

*We come to another reprieve from the destruction. This is the continuing pattern of Revelation. Just as things are heating up, the reader is given a moment to reflect on God's continuing presence, power and mystery. We also have an interesting move... John is about to write down more information, when he is told not to do so. However the reprieve is only for a moment and John once again has to speak of the future. In the end however the promise is made that God will fulfill God's promises and all will be made clear.*

1. And I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. 2 He held a little scroll open in his hand. Setting his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, 3 he gave a great shout, like a lion roaring. And when he shouted, the seven thunders sounded. 4 And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down."

*Mighty angel: God is sending his best and brightest (literally) to take care of his business. This implies that what the angel carries is of great importance. No one is to miss what God is doing.*

*Little scroll: a nice contrast to the mighty angel. What appears to be insignificant may turn out to be something very important.*

*Right foot... left foot: he is striding like the Colossus of Rhodes across all that God has made (land and sea) so he is as great as one of the wonders of the world.*

*Great shout: this is symbolic of the importance of what is being proclaimed. Everyone is to know that God has something important to offer.*

*Seven thunders: this is the next of the sevens. However this one will remain secret... no one will know what they were to bring.*

*Do not write it down: God is keeping some things under wraps. We will never know all until God brings all things to a conclusion.*

5 Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and the land raised his right hand to heaven 6 and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it: "There will be no more delay, 7 but in the days

when the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God will be fulfilled, as he announced to his servants the prophets.”

**Right hand to heaven and swore:** *this is similar to a Jewish oath swearing ceremony*

**By him who lives forever and ever:** *we are reminded at this point that the one causing the future to unfold is none other than the creator of all that there is... the one who is mightier than any Cesar.*

**There will be no more delay:** *the end is approaching... which means that there is not much more time to wait. So we better gird up our loins because things are going to get worse before they get better.*

**Mystery of God will be fulfilled:** *the prophets have laid out God's plan and now all will be made plain.*

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, “Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” 9 So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, “Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.”

**Take the scroll:** *we return again to that small scroll that seemed to insignificant*

**Take and eat it:** *this carries the idea of ingesting the information that the scroll contains. This is a prophetic act where the metaphor is acted out.*

**Bitter to the stomach... honey in the mouth:** *at first God's judgment on the world will seem sweet... we get revenge...but then it will turn sour because John will see the destruction that comes.*

10 So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. 11 Then they said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”

**You must prophecy:** *the act of eating has warned him, prepared him, to proclaim the coming judgment... he has already tasted its bitterness.*

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 11**  
**Handout**

*Here we once again see God attempting to move the people to repentance. God is very clear about what he wants and what people ought to do. God will protect his people from falling, yet ultimately there will be those who lose their lives. The good news contained here is two-fold. First some will turn and praise God. All is not lost for those who at the moment are not part of God's people. Second God has really begun to move toward the restoration of the world.*

1 Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Come and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, 2 but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months.

Measuring rod - (Ezekiel 40:3 - 48:35) *the measuring is to determine the bounds in which believers would be safe from the coming wrath of God. They may be killed but they might not be seduced. This becomes clear in Chapter 13 when the beast will kill some believers.*

Temple - *this is the church, the people of God. The temple in Jerusalem is gone by this time, and there will be no need for a real temple at the end of Revelation then this leaves John's use of Temple in the Gospel of John where it refers to Jesus' body... or the body of Christ. This is amplified by the fact that those in the temple are those who worship at the altar of God.*

Outer court - *this is the portion of the community who are not faithful followers. This comes from Ezekiel in which the prophet is to exclude those who do not worship the true God (44:5-9).*

Nations - *this is the "ethne" the nations, or gentiles. By this time in the Johannine church those who did not believe were being seen as gentiles, versus the idea of non-Jews being gentiles.*

Trample - *those who oppose God and do not worship him will persecute the church but will not be able to conquer it.*

Forty-two months - *this is the time of the reign of the beast out of Daniel 9:27 and 7:25 and is carried through Revelation. (11:3, 12:6, 12:14) (1260/30 days = 42 months = 3 ½ years = a time, two times and half time) This was also the amount of time Antiochus defiled the Temple. So it appears to be a period of time in which there will be proclamation but not much persecution, followed by an equal period of time in which the church will be persecuted. Another way to see this is if seven is the perfect number, then three and a half means less than a perfect time.*

3 And I will grant my two witnesses authority to prophesy for one thousand two hundred sixty days, wearing sackcloth." 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 And if anyone wants to harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; anyone who wants to harm them must be killed in this manner. 6 They have authority to shut the sky, so that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

Two witnesses - *there is a entire library given over to discussing the identity of these two witnesses. They have been described as historical characters come back to life (Moses, Elijah, Enoch), groups of people (Christians and Jews, martyrs and saints, Jewish believers and gentile believers) or two principles (law and prophets). Likely they represent all who will have the faith to prophecy in the face of danger. The number two is necessary because it takes two witnesses to testify to the truth of any belief.*

Sackcloth - *this is a call to repentance and a hope that people will turn to God*

Two olive trees and lampstands – this refers to Zechariah's vision of Joshua and Zerubbabel ( Zech. 4:1-6a, 10b-14) intended to strengthen the two leaders and to vindicate them in the eyes of the community. So they are present to encourage the church to fulfill its mission

Pours forth fire – the protection of the prophets is described in terms of former prophets (II Kings 1:10; Jer. 5:14) and uses the image of fire as a judgment from God. They will have immunity until they complete their mission. The idea that it comes from the mouth also implies that proclamation keeps people at bay.

No rain may fall – this comes back to Elijah and Moses (I Kings 17:1; Exodus 7:17-21) for the purpose of gaining people's attention so they will turn to God and away from Baal.

Plague – again this returns us to a new Moses who was trying to convince Pharaoh to let God's people go... they are trying to convince people to let go of other gods.

7 When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, 8 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that is prophetically called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9 For three and a half days members of the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb; 10 and the inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and celebrate and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to the inhabitants of the earth.

Beast – this is the first reference to the beast. We will find out more about the beast in chapters 13 and 17 and only in 17:8 do we hear of him coming up from the abyss making sure we know he is of demonic origin.

Kill them – these two will be martyred. There is no escape for those who are willing to stand for God and for his Christ. This will only happen after there has been adequate proclamation.

Bodies will lie – for Jews it was important that the bodies be buried immediately. To be left in the streets was the supreme insult.

Great city – this is figurative for the places in which people have rebelled (Sodom) against God and are in captivity to other gods (Egypt). This could be Rome but we are told that it is figurative and thus it could be all cities in the Roman Empire in which Christians have been persecuted.

Three and half days – again we return to the image of an interim period of time.

Celebrate – the people will have a great time because they no longer are going to be tormented by the language of judgment that comes from the prophets or the plagues that remind them that they need to repent.

11 But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and those who saw them were terrified. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies watched them. 13 At that moment there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

*Breath of life - we harken back to Genesis where God breathes the breath of life into his creatures. Here he offers a new life to those who are dead. He does so publicly. This is intended to be the greatest miracle intended to cause people to turn to God.*

*Terrified - the people now begin to understand that the message of judgment of the two prophets was true and that they need to pay attention.*

*Come up here - God calls them to be among the saints under the altar. They are going home.*

*Earthquake - there are other signs of God's presence and displeasure, again reminding us of Exodus when Moses returns from the mountain and the people have worshipped the golden idol. There a portion of the people die and the others turn back to God.*

14 The second woe has passed. The third woe is coming very soon.

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying,

*Loud voices - recall that the skies have been rolled back and so we can hear and see what is taking place in heaven. What follows is in response to both what God has done and the response of those who give their lives to Christ.*

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever."

*Kingdom of the world - this is the kingdom ruled by men and not by God. It has always been God's but now he is giving it over to Jesus to rule and reign. There is a marked difference... which is interesting considering in the story the beasts still are waiting to come and torture God's people.*

16 Then the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 singing,

"We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty,  
who are and who were,  
for you have taken your great power  
and begun to reign.

*Great power - it is a reminder who in the end has the power to change the world.*

*Begun to reign - God is no longer a neutral observer. God is now fully engaged in the battle. Raising the prophets is the mark that things are no longer going to be as they seem or as they once were.*

18 The nations raged,  
but your wrath has come,  
and the time for judging the dead,  
for rewarding your servants, the prophets

and saints and all who fear your name,  
both small and great,  
and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

*Nations raged - nations believed that they were in charge and everything in the world is for and about them and so they did not want to share the stage and power with God.*

*Time for judging - there will come a moment when all the dead are judged and there will be a separation. Those who serve God will be saved and rewarded... those who destroy the earth... meaning all of God's creation and not merely the church.*

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

*God's temple - we now are able to see into the very inner court. We see the ark which is the symbol of God's covenant promises. What follows are reminders of God's presence in and with the world. God is coming and people ought to be wary.*

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 12**  
**Handout**

*This is a story with three main characters (the woman, the child and the dragon). In three scenes it will play itself out as an ancient story line with which the people would be familiar.*

*It is a plot still used today. A usurper (the dragon) is doomed to be killed by a child who will be born (child) will plot to take the throne which is not his. The prince is miraculously hidden away until he is old enough to defeat the usurper. This is the story of Apollo whose mother, Leto, when ready to give birth is pursued by the dragon Python who sought to kill her. Only on the island of Delos is the mother welcomed where she gives birth to her child. Apollo finally kills Python. In Egyptian myth we have Isis, the pregnant mother of Horus, who is pursued by Set the red dragon. Ultimately Isis kills the dragon.*

*A second image that ties in is that in AD 83, the Emperor Domitian's son dies. Domitian then proclaims the child to be a god and the child's mother a divine mother of a god. Coins of the time show the child with 7 stars in his hand (representing the 7 planets) as well as the child and the moon...showing forth the golden age.*

*A third image comes from the Old Testament where Isaiah (54:1-6); Jeremiah (3:20); Ezekiel (16:8-14) and Hosea (2:19-20) all use the image of a women associated with Israel.*

*A final view of this chapter is that it is a retelling of the Exodus story with the characters being updated to Christ as Moses and the woman as the people of Israel.*

12 A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth.

*A woman - much discussion has been given to the identity of the woman. The Catholic church has wanted to associate her with Mary, however it appears that she is symbolic of a larger community (see note above) and probably represents Israel... the chosen people of God. However she could also represent the people of God, the faithful covenant believing community of God, which includes both Israel and the church. All of those who are prepared to receive the Lord.*

*Clothed with the sun - she shares the brightness of God and of the lamb*

*Moon - this represents permanence, the moon is always there as a creation of God*

*Twelve stars - again a reference to the twelve tribes*

*Birth pangs - the messianic community has been suffering as a prelude to the birth of the messiah (Is. 26:17; 66:7-8)*

3 Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born.

*A great red dragon - again note similarity to earlier myths. This is a creature with "great" power, someone who is not to be treated lightly*

*Sven heads and ten horns - this extends the image that while it may be a single entity, it extends its reach to others... heads being kings (diadems) and horns being centers of power*

*His tail swept a third of the stars - this could refer to his ability and power to harm either part of God's creation or to harm the saints who are often referred to as stars. (Daniel 8:10, 24)*

*Dragon stands before the woman - here we have the ultimate threat to the plan of God. If Satan can stop the birth then all is lost... we see images of Herod killing the children and of the crucifixion.*

5 And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.

*Gives birth - the dragon is not able to stop the birth*

*Male child - most commentators have taken this to be Jesus, however there are those who also see in this child a collective image of the church... since we are all in Christ and are the body of Christ this has some merit.*

Who will rule - Christ and the church will rule together according to John  
Snatched away and taken to God - Snatched away is probably the crucifixion  
and taken away to God is probably the ascension.

Woman fled - this could be the flight into Egypt (if woman is Mary) however it  
is more likely that it refers to a time of testing, much as Jesus went through a  
time of testing in his wilderness journey (as did Israel after leaving Egypt)

Nourished - both Jesus and the people of Israel were nourished by God and so  
God's people in this time of testing will be taken care of as well. God has not  
forgotten them

7 And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon  
and his angels fought back, 8 but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for  
them in heaven. 9 The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the  
Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his  
angels were thrown down with him.

War broke out - the timing of the battle is important. It takes place after Jesus  
has returned to heaven. He has accomplished this task of dying for the world to  
defeat sin and all of its power in the world.

Heaven - this tells us that evil is cosmic in scope. It is not limited to just the  
earth or our lives here.

No longer any place in heaven - it is clear now that the tide has turned... no  
longer will Satan wander around like he did in the book of Job. The sides are  
finally set.

He is thrown down - Satan is going to have to take his last stand. Now that he  
is defeated in heaven he will make a stand on the earth... meaning he will try to  
overcome God's people here. Satan will be more focused in his attacks. This  
does not make Satan the ruler of the earth... remember God is still Lord and ruler  
and his people shall reign.

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming,  
"Now have come the salvation and the power  
and the kingdom of our God  
and the authority of his Messiah,  
for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down,  
who accuses them day and night before our God.  
11 But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony,  
for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.

Now have come - this is a proclamation that things are changing. The battle is  
not only engaged but the "allies" have landed at a spiritual Normandy. God's  
kingdom has a beachhead in heaven and it making progress on earth.

Salvation, power and kingdom of our God - all of this is available to the saints  
in their efforts to stand fast. They are not powerless and alone

Who accuses them day and night before God - this was Satan's job, to bring the  
truth of sins to the eyes and ears of God.

*Blood of the Lamb - This victory has been made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus and by the willingness of the angels (and by extension the church) to proclaim the salvation by grace which has come to them in Christ. They are free from the power of sin and so can stand fast in the face of the enemy.*

*Did not cling to life - their salvation is assured even if their bodies die... so there is nothing that can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus*

12 Rejoice then, you heavens  
and those who dwell in them!  
But woe to the earth and the sea,  
for the devil has come down to you  
with great wrath,  
because he knows that his time is short!"

*Rejoice then you heavens - Satan is banished from the place of God and so there is great joy*

*Woe to the earth and the sea - Satan is now marshalling his forces for one last push (The spiritual Battle of the Bulge) in order to maintain his very existence. His time is short - this is a promise to all who believe that the war is over even if the battle is not yet done*

13 So when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.

*He pursued the woman - this again points to the woman being the faithful people of God (Jew and Gentile). So Satan now will chase them in order to conquer them and get revenge. The word for pursue here is also the word for persecute. So Satan is using the Roman's as his agents of persecution.*

*Eagles wings - this is a direct quote from Exodus 19:4 where God tells the Israelites that he had carried them out of Egypt (from the snake Pharaoh) on eagles wings... and they went into the wilderness*

*Time and times - this again is that interim period which precedes the final victory.*

15 Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. 16 But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. 17 Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus. 18 Then the dragon took his stand on the sand of the seashore.

*Poured water like a river - this represents chaos and destruction. Flood reminds us of Noah and the chaos. But this time...*

*The earth came to help the woman – the very creation of God rises up to save God's people. Satan is now on his own. God's good creation stands with those who are faithful.*

*Dragon was angry – the dragon is finding itself in a losing cause but cannot give it up and so anger is the only option.*

*Make war – the dragon is going to find those who are vulnerable and try to exterminate those who are faithful to Jesus... meaning... those who are reading this letter. So the suffering of the people is not from God leaving them, but from Satan attacking them because they are faithful*

*Took his stand on the sand of the seashore – the sea has always depicted chaos for the Israelites. I the end of Revelation there will be the comment that there is no more sea... meaning no more chaos. The sea was where the serpents lived who threatened God's people. So Satan takes his stand at the edge of chaos... the one place where he might be able to find some aid.*

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 13**  
**Handout**

*The war on God's people has begun. The war will be to seduce the entire world in order to have them turn to the dark side. Those on the dark side then will ultimately work with the beast to kill the saints. This will be an epic struggle. The beast has been said be the anti-Christ, Rome, the Papacy and any number of other theological heresies. Each claim has some who defend it and some who argue against it. Some argue that it is a single person who will come and deceive the world and others claim that it is a present reality (always present) that tries to deceive... the present reality of Satan.*

*One other option is to look at the dragon and the two other beasts as an un-holy Trinity. In other words each of the beasts in some ways tries to imitate one person of the Trinity. In this way it makes it very difficult for the faithful and for those in the world to tell the difference between good and evil.*

1 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names. 2 And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. **And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority.**

*Beast – the Greek word is for a wild beast.*

*Rising out the sea – the beast comes out of the chaos that has always threatened God's people. If it is let loose in the world then all is lost. Only God can hold it back. But now the chaos is taking form to try and overcome God's people.*

*Ten horns and seven heads – there have been attempts to identify the seven heads or ten horns with political realities... some including coming into today. However this ought to be resisted because John is focused here on theological deception... who is the real God? Thus any political or religious entity over time could qualify.*

*Were blasphemous names – the beast is challenging God by defying the first commandment. This is an attempt to replace the name of God with other names... names of other gods. So whoever exalts itself over God (such as the Roman emperors) embodies the spirit of the beast.*

*Like a leopard – while some of this may remind people of particular uniforms or nations, depending on the animal, this could also be another way of saying it is unnatural. It is nothing that the good creator God would have made.*

*Dragon gave – here we begin to see the similarities between the Trinity and the un-holy trinity. God gave his throne and his power to Jesus. Jesus also has been given great authority. So here the dragon is trying to create an imitation Jesus.*

3 One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed. In amazement the whole earth followed the beast. 4 They worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”

*Received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed – again we see the movement of John to help us see that the beast is an imitation of the Christ. Just as Jesus has died and been resurrected by God, in the same way the beast has a “fatal” wound that has been healed. He is able to impress the world with this mark.*

*The whole earth followed the beast – this is what should have happened to Jesus but did not.*

*They worshipped the dragon – worship was only for God and the lamb that was slain. Their imitation is working because it seemed so much like the real thing.*

*Who is like the beast? – this is the prime question. This is the give away. Those who are in the know, those to whom God has revealed the plan in this book know the answer. We know that there is a reality in the world which is more than the beast.*

*Who can fight against it? – this is the question. The myth has become that the beast is untouchable. Much as Rome at that time was untouchable.*

5 The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. 6 It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. 7 Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation, 8 and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered.

*Given a mouth – the beast is allowed to speak to the people in such a way that it appears to be impervious to God and to the lamb. It “is allowed” to exercise authority meaning that God is still holding back the beast.*

*Forty two months – this is a limited period of time. This will not go on forever.*

*Allowed to make war on the saints – thus even the people of God are being persecuted. Some will fall to their deaths. This does not mean they will lose their souls but that they will lose their lives.*

*Foundation of the world – there are two ways to take how this is used. The first is that it stands with “whose names have been written.” This implies that there are some who are chosen from the very beginning to believe... the elect of Calvin. The second way ties it to “that was slaughtered.” This means that Jesus is the one from the foundation of the world. The Greek grammar and word order could swing either way. It would be troubling that the former use is in mind since the rest of Revelation seems to imply that our actions and choices are tied in with our salvation.*

9 Let anyone who has an ear listen:

10 If you are to be taken captive,

into captivity you go;

if you kill with the sword,

with the sword you must be killed.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

*Let anyone who has an ear – this is the only time in the book other than in the letters to the seven churches that this language is used.*

*If you are taken captive – this is a real possibility. True believers can indeed go into prison and die. So if you are taken captive then go with your captors.*

*If you kill – followers of Jesus were not to take up the sword in their defense like the Zealots and Essenes who believed in trying to defeat the Roman Empire through violent means. If you kill them then they will surely kill you.*

*Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints – this is the theme of this entire chapter. In the face of great and overwhelming evil, the saints are to remain faithful to their Lord.*

11 Then I saw another beast that rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. 12 It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed.

*Another beast – this is the land beast. We have the dragon, the sea beast and the land beast. This beast will later be called the false prophet. The two horns may remind us of Jesus words to watch out for false prophets that come like wolves in sheep's clothing. It could also be the Holy Spirit which is Christ alive within the world.*

*Exercises authority – The land beast makes people worship the first beast... just as the Holy Spirit makes people worship Jesus Christ. It does not point to itself but to another and yet also exercises authority.*

13 It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all;

14 and by the signs that it is allowed to perform on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived; 15 and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

Performs great signs - again the nature of the Holy Spirit is that it performs great miracles... healings, etc.

Even making fire to come down - fire is the nature of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts.

Make an image - we are moving into violating more and more commandments. This is what people want to do... make images and so the earth beast allows them to do so.

Give breath - again the work of the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God gives life. Here the beast appears to give life to an image.

Cause those who would not worship the beast to be killed - this recalls the prophets of God who could call down fire from heaven on false prophets.

16 Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, 17 so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. 18 This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six.

Also it causes all - no one can escape the tentacles of the beast. It will reach itself into every aspect of society.

Marked - this is mark of ownership. God's people have a mark of ownership and now the beast's people have a mark of ownership. The deception is now about complete.

Right hand or forehead - these were the two places where the Babylonian Talmud does not allow Jews to wear their tephillin (prayer scrolls). So these would be places the beast could use and not find a mark of God.

Cannot buy or sell - life will become very difficult without the mark of the beast. We see this in the seven churches that are struggling to survive poverty imposed not being willing to acknowledge Caesar as Lord.

Six hundred sixty-six - there have been far too many books, articles and commentaries written on this number since John first penned it. If we go with the way that John usually uses numbers (not the Hebraic way of using them to spell words) 666 is almost 777. In other words if the beast and his friends are trying to imitate God, they come up just short.

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 14**  
**Handout**

*Chapter 14 brings us to another set of pronouncements. In the previous chapter the beast and his partners have been moving over the earth tricking people into following them and not God. They have made it appear that no one can defeat them and so humanity better get on board with them. Those who try to stay faithful face great persecution, though they have God's promise that he will never abandon them.*

*In the face of the power of the beast John offers us a word from heaven that judgment has finally come. God has been saving the best for last... he will*

*judge the beast and all who follow him. This becomes another word of encouragement not to give in to God's enemies even in the face of severe persecution because God will win in the end.*

1 Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! And with him were one hundred forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

*Lamb - once again the Lamb is at the center of the action. He has been missing for a chapter or two while the action has been elsewhere, but now he is about to enter into the fray.*

*144,000 - again we have the perfect number of persons. They have all been stamped with both the name of the lamb and of God... probably meaning baptism. This is a reminder that God has claimed his own*

2 And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, 3 and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth. 4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, 5 and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless.

*Voice from heaven - on the one hand the voice is loud... you cannot miss it (thunder) yet on the other hand it is sweet and melodic (harp). It is bringing good news.*

*Sing a new song - there is something unexpected here... something the world has not nor cannot know on its own. This is a song a liberation, much like that of Miriam when Moses led the people out of Egypt. Heaven knows that liberation is at hand.*

*144,000 - again we have the perfect number who have been redeemed because they kept themselves pure... notice it is only men... they are the new priests.*

*First fruits - God will not stop with the 144,000. They are merely the down payment for what God has in store. Though some commentators argue that "first fruits" means the complete gift to God... and not merely the first of many... the perfect number of 144,000 in and of itself also represents the perfect number of people who would come in... thus representing those who have come in and those who will come in later. What this also means is that other believers who have been marked are still on the earth during the tribulation.*

6 Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation and tribe and language and people. 7 He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

*Eternal gospel - this is the promise of God that those who believe, even at this late date will be saved. There is still some grace left.*

*Fear God - they are to fear God because the judgment is coming. This is the God who made everything and will judge everything, including the beast and his friends.*

8 Then another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

*Fallen, fallen - this is an interesting phrase in that Babylon will not fall for a while either in history or in the Book. However once God says something is going to happen... it is as good as done. Thus it can be proclaimed that it is already accomplished.*

9 Then another angel, a third, followed them, crying with a loud voice, "Those who worship the beast and its image, and receive a mark on their foreheads or on their hands, 10 they will also drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name." 12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.

*Those who worship the beast - the punishment will not merely be for the leaders. It will also be for those who follow. There are consequences to our choices. Whom we choose to follow has eternal consequences.*

*Tormented - the future of those who oppose God will not be pleasant. To be burned has always been the most terrible of punishments. It is a dire warning and it will not happen in private but will take place in full view of God's servants. This is first century fire and brimstone preaching. The issue we have to ask ourselves here however is what does this mean in light of all the other apocalyptic images.*

*No rest - there is no place for the evil doers to sit and recoup their strength. The punishment is night and day for those who have received the mark of the beast... who have played on his team.*

*Call for endurance - the saints are to learn from this that it is better to die for Christ than it is to burn forever.*

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them."

*Blessed are the dead... in the Lord - these are those who die with the mark of the Lamb and not the beast. Their lives will not be ones of pain and suffering but of rest and reward. There is a clear delineation here between the two groups. This becomes another encouragement to remain faithful to the end.*

*Deeds will follow them – here we are once again faced with the understanding that deeds have a place in judgment. It is not merely saying one believes in Jesus, it is also living ones life as if that confession is true.*

14 Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand! 15 Another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to the one who sat on the cloud, “Use your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” 16 So the one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

*One like the Son of Man – this is a reference from Daniel and Rev. 1:13 about the messiah. Though some have debated whether this is or is not Jesus it would seem only appropriate as the one who will judge all of humanity that it be he who puts in the sickle of judgment.*

*The earth is fully ripe – the time has come and Jesus will act*

*The one who sat... swung – Jesus does the judging... though he will have help later on. It is ultimately his duty alone to judge the earth*

17 Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, “Use your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” 19 So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and he threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God. 20 And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse’s bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles.

*Another angel – the judgment will be conducted by heavenly beings and not by humans. This is important because it says to the powerless that they do not have to kill others, but God will avenge them.*

*Wine press of the wrath of God – this is an allusion to OT texts such as Isa 63:1-6; Lam 1:25; Joel 3:13 in which God’s wrath is compared to a wine press where his anger is lived out.*

*Blood flowed – this will be a large scale punishment. This is not a few people here or there... this is an epic slaughter. The people have come to know this kind of destruction. History is replete will instances of this kind of death. The crusaders caused this kind of destruction when they took Jerusalem.*

*Two hundred miles – this is about 1600 stadia or 4 (corners of the earth) time 4 times 100 (multiplier) meaning all the over the earth*

Page Break Revelation Chapter 15

Handout

1 Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and amazing: seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended.

*Seven angels: once again we have a portent, a sign that is a complete number of angels with a complete number of plagues in order to complete the wrath of God*

*Wrath of God is ended: there is an end. The wrath of God will not be forever, it has a beginning and an end*

2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

*Glass mixed with fire: this is a vivid image of God's glory and God's wrath (fire) being reflected in the glass.*

*Who conquered the beast: these are the people who have stood firm in their testimony even to the point of death (defeated the beast through dying... interesting thought); they are the 144,000 who have been marked.*

*Its image and the number of its name: this is referring to 666 which comes from the image... these 144,000 have followed God and not the image and are marked with God's seal and not 666*

*Sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb: this is a single song based on the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:1-8. In the ancient synagogue the people would sing the song of Moses as a reminder that God is ruler of the universe and sets his people free. This idea ties in with the plagues which God is visiting on the world in order to set his people free from the beast. It is another song of liberation. The words are not exact from Exodus but most lines and ideas can be found somewhere in the OT.*

“Great and amazing are your deeds, (Psalm 139:14)

Lord God the Almighty! (Amos 4:13)

Just and true are your ways, (Deut. 32:4)

King of the nations! (Jer.10:7)

4 Lord, who will not fear

and glorify your name? (Psalm 86:9)

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come

and worship before you, (Isaiah 56:6-8)

for your judgments have been revealed.” (Isaiah 24:21)

*Great and amazing: the words used here stand in stark contrast to the praise given the beast. It is a reaffirmation that God alone is the one who holds all power. The others are merely imposters.*

*All nations will come: this is the end result. It is an affirmation of the OT claims and gives hope to the church that in the end God alone will reign.*

5 After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, with golden sashes across their chests. 7 Then one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever; 8 and the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended.

Temple of the tent of witness: before the temple was built the people housed the ark and altar in a tent while they traveled. It is almost as if God is once again on the move... thus carrying forward the Exodus theme which is contained in Chapters 15 and 16.

Seven angels: this forms an enclusio which is a form of writing in which a section begins and ends with the same theme (we begin and end with angels and plagues).

Smoke of the Glory of God: this is the shekaina glory of God who came in a cloud when the people came close to him in the wilderness

Plagues: Exodus theme again... let my people go

No one could enter: this may be because God is present in a very real way and his anger is set to finish what he has begun

Page Break Revelation Chapter 16  
Handout

*This chapter seems to follow very closely the pattern set up in Chapter 8. The plagues are similar and are centered around the basic divisions of nature: earth, sea, rivers, sky. There are here seven plagues, meaning the fullness of God's judgment. The differences between these and the plagues of Chapter 8 have to do with the fact that most of these plagues affect not only the earth but the people living on it, whereas in Chapter 8 only one of the plagues affects humanity directly. Also these plagues are total in effect... all of the things die. What this chapter promises is that none of God's enemies will escape the sure and certain judgment of God.*

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

*The time has come and nothing is going to stop God from fulfilling the promises he has made to the saints.*

2 So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and a foul and painful sore came on those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped its image.

*Each of these plagues is offered in rapid fire order. There is no great explanation... merely a statement that they are occurring.*

Mark of the beast -notice that the focus of the plague is not on the saints, they are protected, only those who have abandoned God are harmed.

3 The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in the sea died.

All living things - the sea is where most of the ancient world derived its protein... so to destroy all in the sea was to pose the question of how will we survive?

4 The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, "You are just, O Holy One, who are and were, for you have judged these things; 6 because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!" 7 And I heard the altar respond, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and just!"

*Rivers and the springs - life cannot exist without water. Now that the people cannot have it they will begin to perish... which fits with the theme of God recreating the world*

*You are just - this is not God simply being angry... this is justice as delivered in a court of law. The people have transgressed and God has declared them to be guilty.*

*Shed the blood - what goes around comes around. The people have killed the innocent followers of God, so now they suffer the consequences.*

8 The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch them with fire; 9 they were scorched by the fierce heat, but they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.

*On the sun - very frightening because there was no cure for being burned*  
*Cursed God - this becomes a spiritual lesson. They know that God is in charge and they prefer to continue to worship the beast because they believe that the beast has all power. There is an amazing thing about people and faith, even when the one they follow has been proved to be false people seldom leave, they only become more fixed in their loyalty.*

*Did not repent- there is still time to change... God is always open*

10 The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their tongues in agony, 11 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.

*Throne of the Beast - no longer does the Beat appear to have all power. Those who follow him can no longer see where they are going... nor can they really follow.*

*Gnawed their tongues - they had give all power and loyalty to the beast... they had spoken allegiance now they regret it*

*Did not repent - even though they regretted what they had done they were still not willing to admit their guilt and repent. They become even more intransigent.*

12 The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east. 13 And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. 14 These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

*Great river Euphrates - this is the place of those who have always been opposed to God. The East was the location of Assyria, Babylon and Persia. Without a river to cross it will make it easy for the forces of evil to gather and make on last push to destroy the people of God.*

*Three foul spirits - these are spirits unleashed by the three false gods, in an attempt to fool the kings of the East into their plans... this is done by the signs they perform.*

*Great day of God Almighty- the is the Day of the Lord, the day when God will finally act and bring to ruin all those who have opposed him*

15("See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame.") 16 And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Harmagedon.

*I am coming - this is a recurring theme in the New Testament. Jesus often reminds his followers that they need to be constantly vigilant because there are those who would deceive them and if they are deceived they might not be ready for the Day of the Lord. Also see the churches of Sardis and Laodicea. They each receive a similar warning... thus tying the book together.*

*Harmagedon - this has been explained as the place where the final battle will take place. Many people have tried to tie it to an exact geographical location (Meggido) however the way Hebrew works it could simply mean the place where the armies will gather.*

17 The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"

*Voice from the temple, from the throne - the angel pours but God declares. The final portion of God's wrath has come.*

18 And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; 21 and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people, until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.

Violent earthquake - again even the earth itself... which has saved the woman...is being torn apart. Creation itself is being used to attack God's enemies.

Great city was split... the cities of the nations fell - the very strongholds of opposition to God cannot stand against the wrath. Even though it seems they are invincible, they are not

Babylon - the center of evil is given special attention by God for it is the center of evil

Hailstones - everything is bigger than life

Cursed God - this is what Peter does when he denies Christ

Page Break  
Revelation Chapter 17  
Handout

*Chapter 17 is one of the pivotal chapters of the book and its interpretation will control the interpretation of the rest of the book. Historically most commentators have interpreted the whore Babylon as Rome. The seven mountains (vs. 9) are the Seven Hills of Rome. The seven kings (vs. 9) are the emperors from Augustus to Domitian. The ten kings (vs. 12) are client states that desire freedom. Rome had been killing Christians and so the vs. 6 fits as well.*

*The difficulty with this is that it limits God's judgment to only the Roman Empire. It once again makes Revelation a time limited book... only good for historical information. However, regardless of how one tries to tie Rome to this chapter (and chapter 18) there are problems with some of the numbers tying neatly into any one historical sequence. One must strain credulity to make it all work.*

*The other way to view this chapter is to make it tie in with the rest of Revelation in the sense that evil, personified by Babylon (and in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century manifested in the Roman empire) is always around us until the end. Therefore this vision stands along side the Old Testament prophetic visions of an evil city (both Babylon and Jerusalem). These can be found in Jeremiah 50-51, Ezekiel 16, Nahum and Isaiah 14. They illustrate common characteristics among these evil cities: Royal dignity and splendor combined with prosperity, overabundance and luxury; self-trust, boastfulness, power and violence against God's people, oppression, injustice and idolatry.*

*The evil city becomes the archetype for evil besetting the world. It is the world that is opposed to God.*

17 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is seated on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk."

*I will show you the judgment- God is beginning the final judgment and it will come not in some generic way but in concrete retribution against those who oppose God.*

*of the great whore - the idea of the whore is one who cannot remain faithful but goes after whomever is willing to pay. The Prophet Hosea was instructed by God to use the theme of faithfulness/prostitution in this words to the people of Israel. This is also present in Ezekiel 16:15 ff, Nahum 3:4 and Isaiah 23:16-17 when referring to different cities who could not remain faithful to the living God.*

*Who is seated on many waters - this ties back in with Jeremiah's oracle about the original Babylon which lay on the banks of the Euphrates with many canals around the city.*

*Kings...inhabitants of the earth - this shows the extent to which the evil kingdom has spread its influence*

3 So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; 5 and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations." 6 And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly amazed.

*Wilderness - this is the place of testing and the place from which evil can come and John's reaction...amazement... is one that leads to going to the dark side  
Seven heads and ten horns- just like the beast in Chapter 13...probably the same one.*

*Purple and scarlet - this is royalty...as in trying to convince people that she actually holds power, however since she is not clothed in white she is not pure and Godly, but just the opposite... blood red*

*Gold, jewels - here is the temptation to power because there is great wealth... John was not enticed by wealth and saw it as one temptation to lead people away from God*

*Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations - again we could look at Babylon as Rome, however since she is the mother of all who stand against God, then she is in many ways more ancient than Rome...hence the name Babylon. She becomes timeless and placeless.*

*drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus - this is a vivid image... here you have someone drunk with power and violence... look at any modern dictator who has enjoyed watching the death of those who oppose him.*

*Greatly amazed - this is giving into temptation (see vs. 8) where those who are not aware fall under her spell.*

7 But the angel said to me, "Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the

foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

Why are you so amazed – John is being taken in and now is being confronted by his failing

The beast you saw – this is a theological statement and not an historical one (succession of Roman emperors).

was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction – this refers to the beast as having been in power and control (once upon a time), is no longer in control (he has been defeated by Jesus on the cross), and is continuing to be judged (the language of coming the pit is present tense which means continuing action. So it is now in the process of being judged... continually.

Not written in the book of life – this reminds John that only those who can be duped because they have not been saved ought to be amazed... not one who has been marked out by Christ.

9“ This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, 10 of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven and it goes to destruction. 12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. 13 These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast;

Seven heads are seven mountains – this is usually the basis for the Woman = city = Rome hypothesis. The very fact that it appears to be so obvious (7 hills are in Rome) almost works against buying into the theory. 1) if this is a mystery why then is it so obvious? Everyone knows that Rome has seven hills. 2) the hills belong to the monster (the seven heads are the seven hills) and not to the woman 3) if the city is the Roman empire it could not exert influence over seven emperors because the fact was the opposite... and this is true because the woman is seated on the hills it means she exercises power over them 4) the word translated here as hills is used several other times in Revelation and is always translated as “mountain.” Only here is it made to be hills... which might presuppose a biased view as to the meaning of the mountains. Mountains can also mean power which can then be used to talk about the seven kings as having power 5) remember that the number seven means complete and so what we have here is complete evil and complete power

Of whom five have fallen – this is one way of saying that God is already at work... or has been at work defeating the powers of evil over time.

One is living – there is at this moment a power at work in the world to defeat God's people

The other has not yet come – this means that we have not yet seen the end of the evil... there is more out there but it will be confronted by God's power in the Lamb

It is an eighth but it belongs to the seven – the beast will try and imitate Christ who was raised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day... if you will the old weeks are gone and he is alive

*on the first day of the week (7+1). And in Revelation all the sequences of seven, the seventh becomes the new beginning for a new sequence (or the 7<sup>th</sup> becomes the 8<sup>th</sup>). However in this case the 8<sup>th</sup> does not begin something new as did Christ but it belongs to the old life, the seven.*

*Kings for one hour - these other kings who will have power will only share it for a moment, for a little while because they too will fall because they are dependent upon the beast.*

14 they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

*War on the lamb - this is the purpose of the entire recounting of the woman, beast and kings. They will try and defeat the Lamb*

*Lamb will conquer them - this is the final outcome however... so that even when the saints are faced with dire circumstances they will not fall away.*

15 And he said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. 16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. 17 For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. 18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

*The waters - we now come to understand that the woman (pure evil) sits on the waters (the people) and dominates them for her own purposes.*

*Will hate the whore - the forces of evil cannot hang together. They will turn on one another trying to save themselves.*

*For God has put it in their hearts - this turning on one another will be God's doing. God's victory will not come through violent means (war, etc.) but through God's overwhelming power being used to confuse and confound his enemies.*

*The woman - she is the great city... the evil city... the epitome of evil.*

#### Page Break **Revelation Chapter 18 Handout**

*This is the description of the previously announced judgment of the prostitute (17:1). Babylon has been described as a prostitute and now as a city... a great commercial city. This is not merely a description of the fall of Rome or any other city. It is a depiction of the destruction of the entire satanic view of wealth and power as the be all and end all of creation. This becomes both the song of triumph of those who have been oppressed and the lamentation of a funeral dirge for those whose wealth was created by the beast.*

18 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. 2 He called out with a mighty voice, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

It has become a dwelling place of demons,  
a haunt of every foul spirit,  
a haunt of every foul bird,  
a haunt of every foul and hateful beast.  
3 For all the nations have drunk  
of the wine of the wrath of her fornication,  
and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her,  
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury.”

*Another angel...made bright with his splendor – this is perhaps the greatest announcement since the birth of Christ. Just as the sky was filled with the glory and splendor of God at that moment, so too now is the announcement of the enemies destruction.*

*Fallen, Fallen – this brings us back to Isaiah 21:9; Jeremiah 51:8) in which we read about the fall of the real Babylon. This is a theme in scripture. All those who oppose God and God’s people fall. First it was Egypt, then Assyria, then Babylon and later Persia. So this is not an unexpected event.*

*A haunt – Again this is the same fate as befell these other city states. They became wastelands for a time. This is also predicted in Isaiah and Jeremiah (34:11; 50:39). So from being on top of the world they become a wilderness.*

*For all the nations – this reminds the readers of the judgment of Tyre and Babylon (Isa 23:17; Jer 51:7). The idea of fornication here is not merely worshipping other gods, but worshipping wealth. This is wealth that has been gained at the expense of justice and righteousness.*

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,  
“Come out of her, my people,  
so that you do not take part in her sins,  
and so that you do not share in her plagues;  
5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven,  
and God has remembered her iniquities.  
6 Render to her as she herself has rendered,  
and repay her double for her deeds;  
mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed.  
7 As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously,  
so give her a like measure of torment and grief.

Since in her heart she says,  
‘I rule as a queen;  
I am no widow,  
and I will never see grief,’  
8 therefore her plagues will come in a single day--  
pestilence and mourning and famine--  
and she will be burned with fire;  
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”

*Come out of her my people – this is the burden of Jeremiah's refrain about Babylon (Jer 50:8; 51:6-9). This refrain does not mean that the people are actually supposed to physically leave the city. In fact scripture told those exiles in Babylon to settle down and become productive. Instead it refers to a spiritual removal. The followers of God are not to participate in the injustices and practices of those around them. This is part of the first two chapters and the seven churches.*

*God has remembered her iniquities – one of the worries of any oppressed people is that those who hurt them will get away with it; that there will be no justice. The readers are reminded here that there will be justice and God will take care of it.*

*Repay her double – one image of this could be the fall of Germany after WWII. The destruction was massive...beyond what they had caused. The writer is reminding us that the consequences for hurting God's people are not merely an eye for an eye... it is double.*

*Luxuriously...in her heart...I will never see grief – these are the essence of all of her sin. First she has used the back breaking labor of others to increase her own wealth. She has not shared what God has given her. Second, the in her heart refers to her pride, she is proud of her power that she is a queen and rules over all. Third is her avoidance of suffering (I will see no grief). She believes her wealth and power will save her. Instead they will drag her down.*

*Therefore – the consequences of her actions and attitude will see a sudden fall. She will be utterly destroyed...burned with fire. Not only will she be sick, but all she has will be lost.*

*Lord God – this is not the natural consequence of time and history. Her downfall will be at the hand of the Lord.*

9 And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; 10 they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

“Alas, alas, the great city,  
Babylon, the mighty city!

For in one hour your judgment has come.”

11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, 12 cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble, 13 cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves--and human lives.

14 “The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you,  
and all your dainties and your splendor are lost to you,  
never to be found again!”

15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

16 “Alas, alas, the great city,  
clothed in fine linen,  
in purple and scarlet,  
adorned with gold,

with jewels, and with pearls!

17 For in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste!"

And all shipmasters and seafarers, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off 18 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

"What city was like the great city?"

19 And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out,

"Alas, alas, the great city, where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth!

For in one hour she has been laid waste.

*Kings of the earth... merchants of the earth... shipmasters of the earth - this was power and luxury shared with others as a way to control them. This comes from Ezekiel 27 and the fall of Tyre. What we see is that Babylon had spread its tentacles far and wide. There were many who profited from her evil. There were many who were willing to sell their souls for what luxury can buy.*

*Committee fornication and lived in luxury... no one buys - Babylon was not alone. There were many who would happily share in her injustice and cruelty to others. The lure of wealth and power have always been present and so there were those who made their living off of her. They see it all disappearing and proclaim woe three different times... as if for each beast.*

*Stand far off - the heat of the fire and the fear of being burned as well keep the others at a distance. Fire spread quickly in this day and so distance was the only hope of survival. They are rats leaving a sinking ship. They fear her torment.*

*In one hour - They are also afraid of the suddenness of the fall. None of them saw it coming... sort of reminds us of Enron.*

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven,

you saints and apostles and prophets!

For God has given judgment for you against her."

*Rejoice - this is hardly what many of us expect. We have been taught to be nice. However to gain an understanding all we have to do is to look at pictures from the end of WWII when Japan finally fell. There was great rejoicing all over the world because of the pain and destruction that the Empire of Japan had caused. This is also one reason people in some parts of the world rejoiced at 9/11. They see us as the great Satan who is attempting to make the world look like us (wealth, pornography, violence).*

*For you - God has done this for us. God's love for us was so great that he brought down our oppressors and set us free.*

21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

"With such violence Babylon the great city will be thrown down,

and will be found no more;

22 and the sound of harpists and minstrels and of flutists and trumpeters

will be heard in you no more;  
and an artisan of any trade  
will be found in you no more;  
and the sound of the millstone  
will be heard in you no more;  
23 and the light of a lamp  
will shine in you no more;  
and the voice of bridegroom and bride  
will be heard in you no more;  
for your merchants were the magnates of the earth,  
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.  
24 And in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been  
slaughtered on earth."

*Mill stone - very large and very heavy and thus it sinks instantly. There is no hope for it to be raised once it has hit the water.*

*Found no more - there will not even be any evidence of it.*

*Sound of - this is a marvelous piece of poetry in which we sense the complete and utter destruction of a nation. There will not be one breath of life left in it in any way. There will be no music, no commerce and no weddings (family life).*

*All nations were deceived - this is not a local phenomenon. This is a universal deception. All people are deceived by the satanic forces at work.*

*Found the blood - this is a just judgment because they have slain the innocent....not only of God's people but of all people across the earth. Everyone has suffered from the evil that has been at work.*

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 19 Handout**

*This provides a remarkable contrast to the mourning of those who had gained great wealth and power through their association with the beast/Babylon. Here we will hear the ever increasing song of joy which will ultimately include all who live in heaven.*

1 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,  
"Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power to our God,

2 for his judgments are true and just;

he has judged the great whore

who corrupted the earth with her fornication,

and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

3 Once more they said,

"Hallelujah!

The smoke goes up from her forever and ever."

4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God

who is seated on the throne, saying,

"Amen. Hallelujah!"

5 And from the throne came a voice saying,

"Praise our God,  
all you his servants,  
and all who fear him,  
small and great."

*Hallelujah - there is great celebration in heaven and it moves from the outer circle to the inner circle. Recall that on the outside of the circle around the throne is the multitude which cannot be numbered, then there are the twenty four elders and four living creatures, then on the throne is the lamb. These are exodus psalms reminding the people that God is a liberating God.*

*Salvation and glory and power - this is the theme of this whole book. God is the only one with the power to save his people... because their captivity is not merely political, though it may be that, it is also spiritual and economic.*

*Fear him - this is a righteous fear... because he does have the power to bring down those who are against him... yet he is faithful to the thousandth generation to those who fear him*

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out,  
"Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God  
the Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and exult  
and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready;

8 to her it has been granted to be clothed  
with fine linen, bright and pure"--  
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

*Hallelujah - this is the final Hallel psalm (Psalm 93:1; 97:1; 99L1) in which the people are preparing for the coming of the new king. This is the new coronation.*

*Marriage - compare this with the image of the prostitute and the reaction of those who lived off of her. There was no loyalty and only bitterness. The relationship was about using one another get something. This new relationship is about faithfulness and love. The bride is pure (white) and holy (linen).*

*Righteous - meaning that the saints, the holy ones, had kept themselves from relationships with the prostitute Babylon.*

9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God." 10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb - this is the fourth of seven beatitudes. This is the beginning of the celebration of the new*

*life that is coming to those who are faithful...for that is those who will be invited.*

*Words of God - this is a blessing from God and not from the angel*

*I fell down- John finds himself committing spiritual adultery. He is worshipping a creature and not a creator. Fear of angels may be an appropriate response but not worship*

*You must not do that - the angel understands. He is merely a fellow servant*

*Worship God - this is the heart of all of the book. God alone through the testimony of Jesus is to be worshipped.*

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God.

*Heaven opened - again we have the image of immediate connection between heaven and earth. There is nothing to stop the powers of heaven from invading the earth.*

*White horse - purity*

*Faithful and true - this is the one who has never moved away from completely following the will and command of God.*

*In righteousness he judges - this is not done out of spite or vengeance, this is done because it is right and true.*

*Makes war - as we shall see this is not a physical war... this is a war by way of the spiritual power of God to defeat his enemies.*

*Flame of fire - again purity*

*Many diadems - meaning great power. We could count the diadems on the heads of the beasts but these are so many they cannot be counted.*

*A name...no one knows - this means that no one can have power over him. He alone knows what is good and right to do.*

*Robe dipped in blood - this is the blood of the lamb which saves and makes clean*

*The word of God - this comes from the opening of John's gospel... and the word was made flesh*

14 And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords."

*Armies of heaven - the rider does not come alone. Notice they too are wearing the clothing of the bride. These are the martyrs who are at his side.*

*From his mouth - the sword which slays is not a physical sword but the very word of God. This harkens to Genesis where the word of God called all things into being...and now it is reforming the earth...renewing the earth.*

*Rule them - this is Christ's role...he is to rule the world as King. Remember Isaiah 11:3.*

*King of Kings and Lord of Lords - this is the station that Christ holds... there is no one who can guide and direct the actions in righteousness other than the one king*

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, 18 to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and their riders--flesh of all, both free and slave, both small and great."

*Angel - again we have a pronouncement that is worth hearing.*

*Great supper of God - this is a horrifying vision... but one with which most of the people of the time were familiar. After a battle the corpses would rot in the sun and the birds would come and pick the bones clean.*

*Kings, mighty... slave - all of those who had committed adultery would find themselves at risk. This was all the way down to the slaves. Status and station did not make or break one in terms of committing prostitution... that was a matter of whom you chose to follow.*

19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army.

*Make war - those who know they are about to lose everything will not go quietly.*

20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21 And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

*Beast was captured - so much for the battle of Armageddon. This is hardly a big deal. It is hardly a big deal because in the end the beast has no power. He is up against the King of Kings. The battle was won at the cross... not on the battle field.*

*The false prophet - the rest of the cast goes down as well.*

*Thrown alive into the lake of fire - there could be no more terrible punishment than that.*

*Killed by the sword of the mouth - the very word of God kills them... the cross is victorious.*

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 20 Notes**

*This chapter raises some of the most controversial aspects of Revelation. The 1000 year reign has posed problems for commentators for centuries. When is the 1000 years? Is it a real 1000 years? Is it a metaphorical (numerological) 1000 years? Does the 1000 years come before Jesus returns? Does it come after Jesus returns? Is it the age of the church? Why bother with 1000 years of peace if we*

*are only going to let Satan loose again? What does it mean for Satan to be bound? All of these questions and more face those who venture into Chapter 20.*

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

*Angel - again God sends his messengers to carry out his plan*

*Key to the bottomless pit - this is the place where the demons live and where they came from in the beginning. The key shows that God even holds power over the home of the demons.*

*Seized the dragon - Satan has no power, not even over the angels who are more powerful because they work with God's power in Christ.*

*Bound him... threw him... locked and sealed - Satan can no longer go walking about the earth deceiving people until he is allowed back on the earth.*

*Must be let out - evidently part of God's plan.*

*For a little while - God is still in charge and Satan will never rule forever.*

4 Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.

*Thrones and those seated on them - we are not sure who these people are. Speculation has ranged from an angelic court, to all the martyrs who had been judged by earthly courts and now will sit in judgment themselves.*

*Souls of those who had been beheaded... they had not worshipped the beast - souls is the terms used to describe those who were under the altar, who had lost their lives for Christ. The Greek allows for two interpretations of this section. One is that there is only a single group of people... martyrs who did not worship the beast. It could also allow that there are two groups... those who were martyrs and those who did not worship the beast... meaning all of the followers of the Lamb. One other way to take this section is to assume that the martyrs represent all believers even if they have not died... so all reign with Christ during the 1000 years.*

*Came to life - this has been seen in several different ways. It has been seen as some sort of spiritual resurrection in which the dead come from sleep into spirit life again. It has been seen as referring to the reign of the church when they are let loose into the world. Finally, and I believe rightly, it refers to physical resurrection. The Greek uses the same word John uses to describe the resurrection of Jesus. All of Revelation ultimately points to a resurrected life for all who believe... not merely an eternity in heaven.*

*The rest of the dead – again this can carry two meanings. If the martyrs above, refers only to martyrs, then the rest can refer to the rest of those who believed in Christ. If martyrs refers to all believers (either represents all believers or there are two groups referred to) then the rest means those who died and did not believe in Christ.*

*First resurrection – this means that after the 1000 years there will be another resurrection of the rest.*

*Second death – physical death was the first death. This is hinting that there is another death awaiting those who did not give their lives over to the Lamb.*

*Priests of God and of the Lamb – these will have the honor of serving the very creator of the universe.*

7 When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. 9 They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. 10 And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

*Satan will be released – the thousand years is but a prelude to the final chapter of the story*

*Will come out and deceive the nations – what this appears to imply is that Satan is not in the end the source of evil in the world. There is something in the very heart of humans that makes them want to follow others and not God that is not even done away with after 1000 years. This also implies that God continues to allow people the freedom to make their own decisions.*

*Gog and Magog – while these names have been associated with historic or even present national entities (Scythians, Russians, Chinese, etc.) here they more than likely represent all of those opposed to God and his reign in the world.*

*Marched – they were ready for battle and believed that they had surrounded the small group of survivors and the great city*

*Fire came down – God is having no part of this. God allows them to make the final decision that they will attempt to destroy his people and then he destroys them.*

*Lake of fire – this is the final resting place for those who oppose God. Rather than eternal life on the new earth (large place)... they receive eternal punishment in the lake of fire (small place).*

11 Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. 13 And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done.

Great white throne - here we are once again able to see into the very heavens and see God himself enthroned because heaven has fled away. There is no more separation...all is one.

Dead, great and small - now we have the final judgment. There is some disagreement about who gets judged here. Some say it is merely the enemies of God since all of God's followers have already been resurrected and are with Christ doing the ruling and reigning. Others say this includes all the dead...now including the dead who were not raised at the first resurrection. Still others say it is all who were not martyrs...thus it is followers of Christ as well as those who opposed him...including those who were destroyed in the final battle.

Book of life - there appears to be two books present. The first is the book of deeds which records all we did in our lives. This forms the basis for the judgment. This is not salvation by works, but instead the recognition that a life in Christ brings forth a certain quality of life and thus certain deeds.

14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; 15 and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Death and Hades - now the final enemies of God and God's desire to restore the world are done away with. Death which robs people of their vitality and life, and Hades which is the haunt of the enemy are all removed from existence.

The second death - this is the spiritual death in which those who opposed God. Again, rather than eternal life there is eternal death. Some speculate that this means the end to conscious existence and others say it is prelude to eternal pain.

Book of life - evidently this is where the final distinction is made. Good Calvinists say our names are either in it, or not, from the beginning of time. Revelation appears to suggest however that it is our choice whether or not our names appear therein.

Page Break Revelation Chapter 21 Handout

This portion of the book brings together themes from virtually every other section. It also contains a myriad of OT references and archetypal images. The use of numbers, dimensions and colors complete the mix. We can find Isaiah and Ezekiel references to the New Jerusalem and temple woven together. Finally we see the completion of God's work of redemption as we return to a state of Eden where God is with God's people and all is right with the world.

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

New heaven and new earth - the language here is one of quality and not quantity. The new means a renewed heaven and earth...not another one that is geologically different from the first.

*The sea was no more - the sea was the place of chaos and of the beast and this is no longer a possibility. It is metaphor.*

2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them as their God;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

*Holy city - this is the city that is set aside for the sole purpose of God's people worshipping God. A city carries with it all the meaning of a city today... activity, life and people. This is not a place where folks glide around playing harps*

*Bride - it has been specially chosen and loved... it is ready for this moment Throne of God is among mortals - now there is no separation between heaven and earth. They are all one because God has returned and taken his rightful place in the midst of his creation. No longer is there a reason to hide in the bushes and be ashamed.*

*Wipe away every tear - all there is is life and so there is no reason to be sad. All that humanity needs will be provided by God. Death is gone. Temptation is gone. The initial things are all passed away....the things of sin are vanished.*

5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” 6 Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. 7 Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

*Making all things new - again this is the sense of being restored to the purpose for which they were created.*

*Write these words - they come as a promise to us and can be believed in order to give us courage*

*It is done - God has restored his creation and redeemed his people. He has been at the beginning and will be here to the end.*

*Water of life - image of Jesus being the water of life... eternal life in the physical sense.*

*Those who conquer - this is a word of encouragement to those who are still waiting for the new heaven and new earth.*

*As for the cowardly - again this is a word to those who are trying to decide which way to go... to give in to the forces of the beast and perish or be a conqueror and live. The image returns to the previous chapter.*

9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; 13 on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. 14 And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

*Show you the bride - we are circling back to the earlier part of the chapter.*

*Wife of the Lamb - Christ is brought into the mix as the husband of the church. It has the glory of God and a radiance - we are in the midst of metaphors here. It is something completely different from any city that has ever been seen. It is opposed to the dirty cities of their time and our own. This is a Godly place and not merely a sinful human place.*

*Twelve - we have a series of twelve here. We have twelve gates... meaning people can come into the city. We have twelve angels meaning that the gates are guarded in order that only God's people are allowed in. We have the names of the twelve tribes meaning that there is a continuation of God's calling... his covenant is sure. We have twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles showing that there is a new foundation to the city... faith in Jesus Christ.*

15 The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. 16 The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. 17 He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using. 18 The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.

*Measuring rod - to measure something means to secure it for blessing and to protect it from evil.*

*The city lies - the measurement of the city shows its perfection. There is nothing out of place and everything is the right dimension.*

*The wall is built of - there has been much work put into trying to figure out the significance of the jewels. Some argue it is merely to show the glory of the city. Other refer to the twelve stones as referencing the stones of the Zodiac which adorned the standards of the twelve tribes. This comes from Philo and*

*Josephus. Still others want to link them to the stones on the breastplate of the high priest.*

*Gold and clear as glass - refers to the purity of the bride and her ability to reflect God's glory.*

22 I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. 25 Its gates will never be shut by day--and there will be no night there. 26 People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

*No temple - there is no need of a place to go and worship God since God is right there in the middle of things. Thus there will be no need of a rebuilt temple.*

*No need of sun or moon - again wonderful metaphor bringing us back to Genesis and the idea that light was created before the sun and moon... the very light of the glory of God that gives humanity all that it needs.*

*The nations will walk - again the sense of journey returns. Life in the city will not be static but vibrant. People will be drawn to the light of God and the Lamb as surely as a moth to a flame and it will enable them to live as renewed people free from the power of sin and death.*

*Gates never shut - this will be a place where all of God's people are welcome and safe... safe because of the angels and safe because of God's presence.*

*Nothing unclean - all the unclean has been removed. This is also a warning to those who would try and lie their way in. It will not work. Only the truth will do.*

Page Break **Revelation Chapter 22 Handout**

as was mentioned in the introduction, Chapters 21 and 22 complete the Biblical narrative. This narrative is that God creates a wonderful creation in which love of God and neighbor are at its heart; human beings rebel and warp this good creation; God covenants with a family through which creation will be restored; God sends God's Son Jesus to make restoration possible; and now, the restoration occurs and God returns in all God's fullness to restore creation to its original condition.

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; 4 they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

*River of the water of life - Ezekiel (47:1) has an image of the water of life flowing from the Temple... which is the renewed Temple (worship center) of*

*God's people. Here since there is no temple, with God serving that purpose then the river will flow from the throne.*

*Tree of life - we have returned to Genesis. The tree which Adam and Eve were not allowed to partake of is now there for everyone since the world has been redeemed.*

*Twelve fruits - it produces constantly thus there is no "starving time" when there is nothing to eat... it is the perfect tree.*

*Leaves... healing of the nations - there will be no more conflict between nations because all the people left are those who have given their lives to the Lamb and to God.*

*Nothing accursed - it is a place of great peace and love. The people were cursed when they were expelled from Eden. Thus the curse has been lifted and there is direct access to God, the tree of life and the living river.*

*Servants will worship - people will now live life rightly... the center of their lives will be the Lamb and God and their worship will be for them and not for the beast... or self.*

*See his face - again a return to Eden. In Eden God walked in the garden and there was an intimate relationship with Adam and Eve, we are returning to such a relationship.*

*No more night - again a return to pre-Eden when light was created before the sun and the moon..light is an expression of the very presence of God when all can be seen clearly*

6 And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

*These words are trustworthy and true - this is the first of the final declarations... that the words of the prophecy can indeed be trusted... people can stake their lives on them. They can be believed because an angel has sent them.*

7"See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

*I am coming soon - this is the second of the final declarations... that not only can you trust the prophecy but it will occur soon enough that one does not have to worry*

*Keeps the words - this is the third of the final declarations....in order to gain anything from what has been read and heard one must actually do what is here... meaning living a particular quality of life in which one remains faithful to Jesus.*

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; 9 but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

*Worship God - this is the fourth of the final declarations... that worship only belongs to God. There will come many spiritual people and spiritual*

*apparitions that will demand our worship (i.e. – the beast) but we are not to be fooled. There is one and only one who deserves our worship.*

10 And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 11 Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

*Do not seal up – this is the fifth of the final declarations... the words of John are so powerful that unlike previous apocalyptic visions they should be available to all. The necessity of having people know what is coming... both good and ill are so important that it needs to be proclaimed and not hidden.*

*Let the evildoer – this is the sixth of the final declarations... people are going to be people and the task of the church is not to stop anyone from the route they are going... however by having the book opened and allowing people to know what is in it, it allows them to make their own choices.*

12 “See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. 15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

*I am coming soon – this is a restatement of the urgency of the letter... again we return to the focus on the immediacy of the content of the prophecy*

*My reward is with me – This is the seventh declaration... Jesus has good for the good and evil for the evil. We will in the end reap what we sew. This does not do away with grace, however it is a reminder that faith in Revelation is more than mental assent... it is a style of life.*

*I am – this is the eighth declaration... a recognition that there is no power that was before God and no power after God... thus God is the only one in whom one can place one’s trust*

*Blessed are those – this is final benediction... those who are willing to trust in Jesus’ death (washing robes) will have the right to eternal life and access to the city. This is also the final, seventh, benediction in the book. This again excludes those who refuse to allow the new life of Christ to change them.*

16 “It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

17 The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.”

And let everyone who hears say, “Come.”

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

*It is I – this is the ninth of the declarations... Jesus himself declares that he is the author of all that has been put down by John.*

*I am the root – Jesus continues with a self definition in order to clarify his standing in the world and in God’s work of restoration... and in the book itself*

*The spirit and the bride say - this is the tenth declaration... everyone is invited to come and partake. If someone is reading this book at this moment it is not too late to change their minds and accept Christ as the center of their lives. The water of life is open to everyone.*

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; 19 if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

*I warn - this is the eleventh declaration... this is prophecy and as such is not to be taken lightly. The book is to be left as it is because it has meaning for all believers of all times. This is also about this one book and not about all of scripture. Revelation was only added later to the scriptures and so the ending here has nothing to say about the other books.*

20 The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

*Surely I am coming soon - the final of the three pronouncements of the immanent return of Jesus.*

*Come Lord Jesus - this is the twelfth pronouncement... that we are to call upon Jesus to return as soon as possible. They were used by the early church at the close of the Eucharist. This is also close to the Aramaic "Maranatha" or "come Lord." This then ties the end with the beginning since John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.*

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

*Grace - this is the final benediction. This would be unusual for a Jewish apocalyptic, however for a Christian proclamation of God's work in the world and a letter to the churches, it is most appropriate.*