

Understanding Revelation

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1. The Purpose and Theme of the Book

Revelation was written to exhort the church community of the New Testament to persevere in the midst of hardships by obtaining an eternal perspective and faith. "The church community of the New Testament" includes the early churches that sprouted from the Pentecostal coming of the Spirit to the churches present today. "The latter days" or "The church age" denotes the age inaugurated by Christ's first coming and concludes with his final appearance (1 Cor. 10:11, 1 Pet. 1:20, 1 John 2:18). In other words, Revelation is the word of God given to all churches to motivate them to view their lives from a heavenly perspective. Therefore, it is not, as some people assert, a description of the great tribulation preceding the second coming of Jesus Christ. Except for chapters 19 through 22 that describe the perfect completion of God's kingdom, Revelation consistently urges churches to have faith and hope amidst the afflictions and temptations of this world.

Chapter 1 is the preface of Revelation. John explains that he is commissioned, having seen Jesus abundantly full of authority and glory, to write this letter and communicate to the churches. John, who was imprisoned at the time, was given encouragement of a spiritual promise.

The seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 who were the recipients of the letter were exposed to terrible affliction and spiritual temptation. The number 7 symbolizes "completeness." Therefore, the seven churches signify all churches of this world. The problems these seven churches endured are exactly the same as those facing the churches of the last two thousand years. Churches have and continue to betray their faith because of persecution, lose their liveliness by becoming a rigid religion, lose their purity because of heretic lies, and stumble because of worldly pleasures.

Chapters 4 and 5 contrast the earthly churches against the complete and beautiful heavenly church. Earthly churches are weak and sinful but the eternal, heavenly church is preserved by God to

be pure and holy. Revelation, by showing both the earthly circumstances and the trans-historical reality at the same time, encourages churches to gaze at the eternal hope and peace. It also teaches us through heavenly worship that the true mission of the church is to worship God and Jesus the Lamb.

The seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments in chapters 6, 8, 9, and 16 all describe God's judgments on the world for persecuting and tempting God's churches. These judgments, which appear augmentative and repetitive, are not separate ones in different time periods but the same judgments. They have been and will be poured down upon this world in "church ages." Even now, many judgments are sweeping through the world. They are caused by man's greed, Satan's work, and natural disasters, and they all point to the impending judgment. Believers, as well as nonbelievers, will be vulnerable in these times. To the world, these disasters will be God's judgment, but to believers they are only tools that help slay sin and provide hope for God's eternal salvation.

Chapter 7 again shows the spiritual church. The church is described as 144,000 or a great multitude that no one could count. The number 144,000 is derived from multiplying the 12 tribes (Old Testament churches) and the 12 apostles (New Testament churches) and the 1,000. This method was used in counting armies in the Old Testament ($144,000 = 12 \times 12 \times 1,000$). In other words, churches are to be readied as armies for spiritual battles. A great multitude that no one could count signifies the same church that is described as the 144,000 (v. 9).

In **chapter 10**, John takes a little scroll and eats it. The scroll tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth, but turned his stomach sour. This scroll representing the gospel is good to eat, however, digesting it and delivering its message ensues pain. The reason John ate the scroll is to show that believers can only return to God through the gospel and not through judgment. Therefore, churches are commissioned to proclaim God's message until the very last chosen one hears it and is saved.

Chapter 11 shows the mission of the churches in the form of two witnesses. The heavenly church is protected through measurement, but the earthly churches are excluded from measuring and are exposed to persecution and trial. Two witnesses who symbolize the churches proclaim the gospel with spiritual authority. Satan and his followers attack the churches until the last days, but never enough to harm them. Churches, when done with their mission as witnesses, appear to be slain by the world. However, they come back to life to surprise the world. The churches are then taken to heaven and the world will face its judgment.

Chapter 12 tells of the churches that are described as a woman, of the first coming of Jesus, and of the believers who are left in the world for the latter days, or "church ages," to fight against Satan. The reason churches are left in the desert is for the purpose of tasting victory against Satan and to be brought up as holy and blameless. At Jesus' first coming, Satan is deprived of his authority and hurled down from heaven to this world. He knows he does not have much time and frantically tries to harm churches.

Chapter 13 describes how Satan persecutes and tempts believers. The beast that comes out of the sea symbolizes the spiritual power that persecutes churches with political influence. The beast disguises itself as Jesus the Son of God. Another beast that comes out of the earth, pretending to be the Holy Spirit, is religious and strives for ideological influence. This beast is called a "false prophet." Churches are martyred and tormented by beasts that work for Satan. Those who belong to Satan will show themselves by following after their ideas and ways of life. Satan deceives and enslaves people by pretending to be a false trinity, but their ultimate failure is proclaimed in the symbolic number 666.

Chapters 14 and 15 describe believers who, in contrast to those who belong to Satan, are sealed by belonging to God. A pure heavenly church will sing about God's righteous judgment and

gracious salvation through a new song and a song of the Lamb. The impending judgments are described as harvests.

Chapter 16 shows that bowls of God's wrath will destroy Babylon, a hotbed of vice and worldly power. **Chapters 17 and 18** describe the destruction of Babylon in further detail. Babylon symbolizes all worldly influence such as materialism, commercialism, hedonism, and a spirit of competition. The world entices believers by pretending to be eternal, but it is doomed for a downfall. Believers, therefore, are to walk out of the dying world.

Chapters 19 and 20 describe Christ as judge and Satan's complete defeat. Chapter 19 shows believers as brides of Christ while simultaneously being an army that follows Jesus, the mighty warrior. Jesus will defeat Satan and his followers before the actual fight begins. The millennium in chapter 20 describes believers as servant kings in the "church ages." When the "church ages" are over, Jesus will come as a warrior and throw Satan and his followers into a lake of fire. Then, there will be the last white throne judgment where God will judge those whose names are not recorded in the book of Life.

Chapters 21 and 22 show a new heaven and a new earth. The heavenly church is the New Jerusalem and is described as a beautiful bride. The Covenant of God and men being together for eternity, which had been predicted throughout the Scriptures, will be accomplished. Jesus will quickly and surely come to complete this task.

2. The Incorrect View of Dispensationalism

Revelation is the most misunderstood book of the Bible. The biggest reason for this is Satan's interference. Satan hates the idea of believers receiving strength and encouragement from the book of Revelation as well as courage to fight against him in spiritual battles. Historically speaking, the biggest misunderstanding originated from the Catholics who did not want the Reformers to ascribe

the beasts and the dragon to the Pope and Catholic influence. The Jesuits, a group started by the Catholics to resist the Protestant Reformation, intentionally fabricated two views, the futurist and the preterist¹. This was to intentionally mislead churches and to eliminate the Protestant interpretation of Revelation, which defied the Pope and Roman Catholics.

Another movement was the Dispensational interpretation. Dispensationalists interpret the Bible in chronological order and treat Revelation as a book about future events. Dispensationalists believe most of Revelation to be describing historic Israel and the Jews. The futurist view did not have much influence in Christianity until some people claimed that they were given prophecy in the meetings of John Darby in the middle of the 19th century. When Scofield put together these interpretations in the Scofield Reference Bible, it had a huge impact on 20th century evangelistic churches. It was this Dispensational movement that influenced Korean churches' interpretations of Revelation. One of the typical interpretations is "Dispensational premillennialism."

Dispensational premillennialism asserts that the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 are churches that have been in actual history and in the order given in the Bible. Therefore, the church in Ephesus is the early church, the church in Smyrna is the church under Roman rule, etc. Right before the final latter days, Jesus will come back and take believers with him. While heaven hosts a celebration for believers, the earth will see a seven year tribulation as depicted in chapter 6. Dispensational premillennialists insist that the descriptions of the earthly churches are for the Jews. For example, the 144,000 are Jews, along with the two witnesses, and the woman who is assaulted by the dragon. After the tribulation comes Armageddon where all who assaulted Israel are destroyed. Only after the disasters have killed most of humanity will Jesus come on earth. Satan will be imprisoned

¹ The Preterist view (Preterism) interprets Revelation as past events which occurred in the 1st century (Preterism is from Latin *praeteritum* which means "the thing that is past.").

for one thousand years, and believers will reign as kings over the remaining people on the earth. Satan will be released for a short period of time and will proceed to gather people for the last battle in which fire will burn them up. Following that will be the white throne of judgment, and heaven will come down on this earth to make an eternal kingdom.

This interpretation is the most familiar one for Korean churches. However, the dispensational interpretation of Revelation severely distorts the Bible and damages the unity of the Old and New Testament. We know this view is wrong considering the following three arguments: **First, this view limits Revelation to a specific period of time called the Great Tribulation.** They profess that believers will be raptured before or during the great tribulation. According to that theory, Revelation is useless to believers. To make up for this discrepancy, dispensational premillennialists insist that it is for the future believers who will repent after the rapture that Revelation was written. Another reason it was written is to show the recovery of the Jews. It is because of this interpretation that people came to either neglect or fear Revelation, whose original intent was to help churches understand God's plan concerning the last days.

Second, the "rapture" is vastly misunderstood. The words "rapture" or "Great Tribulation" are not even mentioned in the Bible. The idea of the "rapture" is derived from the phrase "caught up in the clouds" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Dispensationalists say that Jesus will come in the air, take all the believers to heaven, and have a celebration for seven years while the tribulation takes place in the world. This interpretation is incorrect. The Bible explicitly tells us that the reason believers are "caught up in the clouds" is to "meet the Lord." The word "meet" (Greek, *apantesis*) in classical Greek is used when citizens of a city go out of the town to greet and honor their new ruler and then return back to the city with him. In other words, when believers are caught up in the clouds, it is not for the purpose

of having a celebration in heaven but rather to welcome Jesus the King and to come back down to this world with him. Therefore, the rapture is not an escape from tribulation but a glorious welcoming ceremony for Jesus' second coming.

Third, dispensationalists mar the unity of the Bible by dividing the salvation and the eschatology of the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews and Israelites of the Old Testament are in the same lineage as the believers and churches of the New Testament. Revelation says that the 12 tribes (Old Testament churches) and 12 apostles of the Lamb (New Testament churches) are both recorded on the gates and foundations of the Holy City, Jerusalem (21:12, 14) and that they are the 24 elders who symbolize the heavenly church (4:4). The only way to salvation, whether for a Jew or a Gentile, is faith in Jesus Christ. Dispensationalists, on the other hand, teach that God will save Jews because of their lineage and that they will suddenly turn to God in the last days. They also assert that the 144,000 in Revelation denote the Jews and that Jesus' second coming will take place in Jerusalem. All of these arguments sprouted from an incorrect understanding of the Old Testament. The Word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments is one book given to God's churches. Therefore, dispensationalists incorrectly separate the Jews from the Gentiles.

3. Characteristics of Misunderstanding

Along with the dispensational premillennial view, several ideas contribute to misconstruing Revelation. **The first common misunderstanding occurs from an attempt to understand it chronologically.** Reading chapters 5-22 in chronological order would create a paradox. For example, chapter 12 alone summarizes several thousand years of church ages, including the Old Testament churches, Jesus' coming, and the New Testament churches. If it was to be read chronologically, chapter 12 should come before chapter 2.

Another misunderstanding comes from an attempt to characterize an apocalyptic event as an historic event. Revelation's descriptions may be applied to a historic event, but it is written not solely for that purpose. The Bible uses a "prophetic perspective representation." This method applies a principle of one prophecy to many events and completes an ultimate eschatology. For example, Jesus' teaching on eschatology in Matthew 24 was accomplished in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 but it includes the present and also what will happen in the latter days. Revelation should not be limited to one specific event or person.

Third, misunderstanding is inevitable when Revelation is thought to be limited to specific times around the rapture. The Bible does not mention a seven-year tribulation. Seven years is an arbitrary concoction of the words "time and times and half a time, 1260 days and three and a half years" found in books of Daniel and Revelation. It does not mean a literal seven or three and a half years. It means the church age. The fallacy in this concept of time disregards it as a book meant only for a few in the future.

Fourth, misunderstanding comes when various symbols and images are interpreted literally. Revelation belongs to a unique genre called "apocalyptic literature." John made up special images from Old Testament words that were familiar only to believers. Revelation is therefore a strange book of pictures and visions for non-believers, but it is designed to be clear to those who know the Old Testament. Therefore, one must not expect Revelation to be accomplished literally. For example, the dragon and the beasts are not specific dictators such as Hitler or Stalin. Instead. The symbolic meanings behind the images must be uncovered.

Fifth, Revelation is misunderstood when it is interpreted without the help of the Old Testament. Revelation is made up of 404 verses with more than 300 direct quotations from the Old Testament and at least 1,000 indirect quotations or allusions. In other words, Revelation is almost a

re-citing of the Old Testament, especially the latter half of the books of Daniel, Zechariah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. It is impossible to correctly interpret Revelation without knowing the words of the prophetic books.

In conclusion, Revelation is a progressive recapitulation of salvation history; it has multi-layered prophecies, symbolic meanings behind the language, and is to be understood with the Old Testament background.

4. Various Interpretative Approaches

There have been four main interpretative approaches to the book of Revelation: the preterist view, the futurist view, the historicist view, and the idealist view. Each view has its own strengths and weaknesses. However, eclecticism, which takes a symbolic interpretation under redemptive-historical form of modified idealism, is the most appropriate of them all.

1) The Preterist View

The Preterist perspective has two forms. The first sees Revelation as a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., which then requires that the Apocalypse be dated prior to 70. A significant problem with this approach is that it limits most of the book's prophecies to 70 A.D. and asserts that these prophecies of salvation and judgment reached their climactic fulfillment at that time. The second form of the preterist interpretation holds that Revelation is a prophecy of the fall of the Roman Empire, which was known as "Babylon the Great."

Interpreting Revelation in the context of historic circumstances helps us understand chapters 2 and 3. However, preterists mostly deny the possibility of multi-layered accomplishments of the

prophecies of the Bible. According to the preterist view, Revelation is already accomplished and is of no more use to believers in the 21st century.

2) The Futurist View

This view understands the prophecies as referring exclusively to a future time immediately preceding the end of history. The futurists consider chapters 4 up through 19 as pointing to the seven years of the great tribulation. The most well-known futurist view would be dispensational premillennialism.

The futurist view was first proposed by a Jesuit priest in 1585 to halt the Protestant's interpretation of the dragon as the pope. This was barely known until Darby and Scofield revived it in the 19th century. The futurists view does give hope and expectation for Christ's coming and a new heaven and creation. However, it degrades the book of Revelation, which was given to all churches of the New Testament, by making it into a book useful only for times just prior to the Judgment. Revelation is not to be interpreted as referring only to a specific seven-year time period.

3) The Historicist View

Historicist interpreters generally see Revelation as predicting the major movements of Christian history, most of which have been fulfilled up to the time of the commentator. They have understood the book as unfolding, successive events of history in a general chronological order. Proponents of this view, living at different periods of church history, have not agreed with one another because they limit the meaning of the symbols only to specific historical referents contemporary with their own times. This approach is the weakest in that it tries to identify historical movements too specifically.

4) The Idealist View

The idealist approach is different from the symbolic interpretation of liberals. Liberals claim that whether Jesus was actually raised or not is unimportant but that the meaning it conveys is all it counts. This is clearly wrong. However, the idealist view interprets and decodes the symbolic meanings of apocalyptic Revelation with the help from the Old Testament meanings. Proponents of this view think that Revelation has been accomplished repetitively throughout history. Revelation is given to all churches starting with the Pentecost and ending with the second coming of Christ.

The idealist approach affirms that Revelation is a symbolic portrayal of the conflict between good and evil. However, it neither takes into account the historical circumstances and the accomplishments like the Preterist view, nor depicts any final consummation to history like the futurist view. This notion identifies none of the book's symbols with particular historical events.

5) Eclecticism or a Redemptive-Historical Form of Modified Idealism

A more developed or modified version of the idealist perspective is called "eclecticism." It acknowledges a final consummation in salvation and judgment and focuses more on redemptive history. In other words, Revelation is believed to present salvation history in a more comprehensive and symbolic form. The pictures and symbols indicate God's sovereign reign, salvation through Jesus Christ, the ultimate judgment of evil, the nurture and protection of the church, as well as the completion of the heavenly church.

The idealist view tries to interpret the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 against the historic circumstances. However, these letters are intended for all churches of all ages. Also, chapters 4 through 18 are recorded as "progressive recapitulation" throughout the church age. "Progressive recapitulation" means that different events in Revelation are actually one story but told

from different and more developed angles. For example, the seal, the trumpet and the bowl judgments describe the same eschatological judgment poured down upon the world throughout the church age. In the same way, several battles of Revelation (e.g., Armageddon, the battle of Gog and Magog) also describe one battle.

Revelation is then interpreted through this modified idealist view: (1) It re-explains the redemptive history by using the same words and images of the Old Testament; (2) the same stories are told from different angles; (3) Revelation, like the Old Testament prophetic books, talks about repetitive and multi-layered accomplishments of prophecies; (4) every believer of every age needs the book of Revelation; (5) Satan's oppression and temptation is getting fiercer and more cunning. The latter days are now and we need Revelation's help and promise more than ever before.

5. The Historical Context of the Book

The consensus among 20th century scholars is that the Apocalypse was written during the reign of Domitian around A.D. 95. After Vespasian died, his first son, Titus, who was famous for taking the city of Jerusalem, reigned. When Titus suddenly died as well, the next son in line, Domitian, became an emperor. Unlike his father or brother, Domitian did not have any military experience. To change his image of a weak emperor, Domitian relied more on a force of arms than any other emperors before him. Domitian even insisted on a divine title, Lord and God (*Dominus et Deus*) in order to increase his tyrannical hold on the reins of government. This was the same title believers used for God and Jesus (John 20:28). Many Jews and Christians refused to acknowledge these new titles for Domitian and were persecuted. It was during this time that the apostle John was exiled to an isle of Patmos.

Politically, Israel was under Rome's absolute reign. When Titus took the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, historic Israel was no more. It is no exaggeration to say that any and every civilized country was under Rome's control. Under Domitian's reign, Rome enforced emperor worship; a collision with Christian beliefs was inevitable. Cities built temples for the emperors and had coins engraved with the words "The emperor is Lord and God."

Religiously, Rome had an intermixture approach. In those days, people embraced polytheism; accepting an emperor as one of many gods was not difficult. They even built an altar for "a god whose name we do not know" (Acts 17:23). Most of the Roman gods were adopted from Greece and given different names. These gods promised affluence, protection and publicly offered pleasure. In most temples, priestesses took on the roles of prostitutes and collected much money. Many cities, in the name of their gods, held festivals that promoted opportunities for dissipation and debauchery. Under these circumstances, Christians who insisted on monotheism and strong ethics were inevitably persecuted.

Economically, in cities where commerce was lively, guilds were developed. A guild was a trade association where people of the same trade would gather and serve their guardian god. People would pledge allegiance and collect money to preserve their god's temple. Christians were either ostracized from these guilds or did not join them. This meant they could not carry on business in that city and often went broke. For some, the government confiscated their property. Many Christians led financially troubled lives.

Regarding churches, many heresies were actively at work. In chapters 2 and 3, John warns them about heretic teachings regarding the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel. These teachings can be understood as Gnosticism, materialism, and secularism. When church leaders are tainted with heretical and unbiblical thoughts, it impacts the entire church.

Under *Pax Romana*, everything was abundant and peaceful regarding politics, economy, and religion. However, it was the most oppressing and painful period for the Christians. Their doctrines were not yet solidified and temptations from heresies were rampant. Therefore, Christians started to look for places of refuge, worshiping in secret and living in catacombs (underground tombs) in Rome. Inevitably, their average life span in catacombs was less than 30 years and a fully-grown man was about four feet tall from lack of sunlight and nutrition. While the world was enjoying peace and pleasure, Christians were going through brutal hardships. Revelation was written primarily to these Christians.

6. The Symbolic Significance of Numbers

In Revelation several numbers and important words or phrases are used repeatedly. John wants to convey a certain message through the repetitiveness of certain numbers and words. Therefore, understanding their symbolic significance will help in interpreting the message of Revelation.

The number seven is used 55 times. It is used regarding church, stars, Spirit, lamps, seals, horns, eyes, angels, trumpets, thunders, heads, judgments, bowls, mountains, and kings. The number seven was used in the Old Testament as a symbol of "perfection." God created the world in 7 days (Gen 2:2). The 7 years of great abundance and 7 years of famine during the time of Joseph in Egypt meant complete abundance and complete famine, respectively (Gen 41:25-26). God warns that if God's people refuse to listen to him, he will multiply their afflictions 7 times over (Lev 26:21). Likewise, Revelation uses the number 7 to represent the perfection of God's churches, the completion of God's

judgments, and the wholeness of God's spirit. One thing to note is that Satan also has seven heads to mimic God's perfection (12:3).

The significance of seven is seen not only in numbers but also in the frequency of important words or phrases. The name "Jesus" is used 14 times (7×2). Among them, "the testimony of Jesus" or "witness of Jesus" is used 7 times. "Christ" is used 7 times. "The Lamb" is used 28 times (7×4) and the word "Lamb" alongside "God" is written 7 times. "Lord God Almighty" is used 7 times (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22). The word "believers" is used 14 times (7×2) and "blessings" is used 7 times to mean complete blessing (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). Furthermore, praise for Jesus and God in Revelation 5:12 and 7:12 have 7 traits. The horses from Revelation 9:7-10 show 7 characteristics: ① crowns of gold on their heads; ② faces resembling human faces; ③ hair like women's hair; ④ teeth like a lion's teeth ⑤ breastplates of iron; ⑥ the sound of their wings; ⑦ tails and stings like scorpions. The word "soon" regarding completion of the prophecies or Jesus' second coming is also used 7 times (1:1; 2:16; 3:11; 22:6, 7, 12, 20). "The word of God" is also used 7 times (1:2, 9; 6:9; 17:17; 19:9, 13; 20:4). John asserts the significance of the completeness by intentionally using these words or phrases seven times or its multiples.

The number twelve is used 23 times and means "unity in diversity" as well as "completeness." Twelve is the result of multiplying 3 (God's number) and 4 (all of the world). Israel is made up of 12 tribes, which symbolize all of God's people. The 12 apostles signify that various people make up one church. 24 (12×2) elders include God's people of the Old and New Testament marking a whole and complete church.

The number four is used 19 times. The four corners of the earth represent the whole earth. The combination of numbers 7 and 4 means completeness and wholeness. "The Lamb" is used 28 times (7×4). This shows that the Lamb's sovereign reign will influence even the ends of the world. The

phrase "every tribe and language and people and nation" is used seven times (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). Revelation calls people in four different ways and repeated it seven times to mean all people on the earth. God's judgments include the seven seals, seven trumpets, seven thunders, and seven bowls (7×4) and signify the wholeness and completeness of God's judgments. The seven Spirits are also used four times and mean the perfect and absolute reign of God's Spirit. The praise song for the Lamb occurs four times (5:13), there are four judgments brought by a pale horse (6:8), and judgments brought by the angel filling the censer with fire from the altar occur four times (8:5; 16:18). Four also includes the wicked things sinners do (9:21), the number of musical instruments that will never be heard in Babylon (18:22), and the expression used of God, "who lives forever and ever," appears four times (4:9, 10; 10:6; 15:7).

Ten is used 9 times (2:10; 12:3; 13:1(×2); 17:3, 7, 12(×2), 16). Except for 2:10, it is used to describe a beast with ten horns. Originally ten meant "fullness" or "completeness." Ten horns signify ten kings, which signifies all the kings and their power.

As one can see, numbers in Revelation have significant symbolic meanings, and the literal interpretation of the seven-year tribulation or millennium would be a diversion from the overarching theme of Revelation. The reason numbers were symbolically used is that Revelation was written in a special genre called apocalyptic literature. John shows apocalyptic images while also focusing on the perfection of God's kingdom and the reign of Jesus Christ.

7. Seven Churches of Asia Minor

Revelation takes on a form of letters from Jesus to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Only seven churches were mentioned because the number seven symbolizes "all." In other words, seven

churches stand for all the churches of all church ages. These seven churches were historically present at the time of the apostle John and were under the circumstances that Revelation depicts. Upon receiving the letter, each church must have felt awe for Jesus who knew both their physical and spiritual reality. Jesus commends the churches, encourages them with his promises, but also condemns them for their lack of witness. Believers should learn from reading Revelation 2 and 3 what earthly churches are like.

First, earthly churches need to continue to mature. Ephesus, who had lost its first love, was rebuked because they had forsaken God (2:4). On the other hand, Thyatira was commended because they were doing more than they did when they first believed (2:19). A church is a living entity that needs to grow. Chapter 12 explicitly shows that the reason churches, likened to a woman, are left on earth amidst Satan's persecution are so that they can be "taken care of" or "nurtured"(12:6, 14). A church's growth does not necessarily mean a bigger congregation or abundant finances. Standing firm against Satan's attacks and temptations by being immersed in faith is what the Bible calls maturity.

Second, earthly churches are bound to experience outer oppression and temptations. Churches will face afflictions, poverty, slander (2:9), persecution (2:10), martyrdom (2:13), lies (3:9), and trials (3:10). These painful attacks come because Satan (2:9-10) is now at work and rules the "kingdom of the air" (Eph 2:2). Satan persecutes and tempts churches through spiritual media represented by beasts or worldly media represented by Babylon. Therefore, a true believer cannot expect a peaceful and trouble-free life here on earth. The more commended a church is, like Smyrna, the more persecuted it will be. Even Jesus says, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Satan's oppression and temptations cannot destroy a church.

However, if a church loses faith it cannot partake in the victory Jesus has already won. A believer should expect more resistance and assaults as he becomes more faithful to the word of God. If he is not afraid of what he is about to suffer and proves faithful, Jesus will give him the crown of life (2:10-11).

Third, earthly churches are attacked by false doctrines and heresies. Many different influences can damage churches, including those who claim to be apostles (2:2), Nicolaitans who insist on dualism (2:6, 15), the temptation of materialism, supplication for blessings (2:14), actions that destroy morality and holiness (2:20), and worldly power that takes away spiritual riches (3:17). These influences threaten and weaken the essence of churches even more than outer persecution. More examples of threatening influences today include Christian leaders who do not qualify as such, and those who lose their grip on the spiritual riches because of their plentiful physical riches. A church like this is not strong enough for spiritual battles. A church that has lost passion, life, power, fruit, and love is no longer called God's church (3:16). To turn from this, one needs to repent of his shameful deeds, ask for Jesus' healing power and fight against evil (3:18-21).

The reason earthly churches are left in the world as incomplete, without peace, and problematic is so that they might be nurtured, sanctified, strengthened, and found standing firm and steadfast (Eph 4:12; 1 Thess 5:23; 1 Pet 5:10; Rev 12:6, 14). A church becomes mature as she conquers oppression and temptations on the outside and fights against misleading doctrines on the inside. No church was or is exempt from struggles and combats. A church's ultimate victory is already promised. Only those who conquer the battles will taste the promised blessings.

8. The Essence of Worship as Taught by the Heavenly Church

While Revelation 2 and 3 describe the reality of earthly churches, chapters 4 and 5 describe a spiritual and complete heavenly church. There are glimpses of a heavenly church in other parts of Revelation as well. In chapter 7, for example, she is a multitude that no one can count and, in chapter 14, she is 144, 000 with the name of the Lamb and the Father on her forehead (14:1-5). In chapter 21, earthly churches and the heavenly church become one and are called the New Jerusalem. The greatest characteristic of the heavenly church in chapters 4 and 5 is that they worship. The church is described as 24 elders who exist to worship God and Jesus. The church's most important task is to worship God and Jesus eternally. To praise God the Creator for his holiness and power, and to praise Jesus for his salvation and glory is the church's mission. If an eternal mission of the church is to worship, then earthly churches need to practice and ready themselves for eternal worship.

Earthly churches can learn the following by watching the heavenly church: **First, a church is to worship only God. This is about the object of worship.** Jesus is God incarnate, so when one says, "I worship God," Jesus is included. The Holy Spirit is also God and the object of a believer's worship. However, the Holy Spirit does not take the glory and praise but always attributes it to God and Jesus. In order for us to worship in spirit and truth, we need the Spirit's help so that our worship is glorifying to God (John 4:23-24).

Everyone knows that the object of worship is only God. However, it is difficult to find believers who worship only God and Jesus in this life because men desire to be worshipped. Unless men fight against self-worship until the day they depart from this earth, they will not worship God alone. The word "worship" is made up of the syllables "worth" and "ship." "Worship," then, means that we endow a person or a thing we find worthy with our love and attention. In other words, in order to worship

only God, we should think of God as uniquely set apart and important. Those who think God and money are equally important are actually worshipping both God and Mammon² (Matt 6:24). A person who thinks money is worth his love and attention is in fact worshipping self, who wants to be satisfied through money. To worship God alone on this earth is an incomparably difficult task.

Second, a church is to praise God for who he is and what he has done. This is the content of worship. The praise song of the 24 elders includes 4 creatures that represent every creation, as well as angels that declare who God is and what he has done. They sing of God's holiness, glory, honor, power, and wisdom. They also sing of God's creation and salvation. Earthly churches are to learn from this and focus on proclaiming who God is and what God has done. This is the gospel.

However, earthly churches often worship contrary to this. Their songs, mainly rooted in humanism, demand that God should comfort, protect, and encourage them. Their sermons are worse. Instead of proclaiming the gospel and God's messages, they please, excite with laughter, and give lessons in secrets of success and psychological therapies. People shop around for ear-pleasing sermons. Prayers are only another way to list what people need and want and who God is and what God has done is a mere formality. All of this points to where earthly churches have gone wrong.

Third, the heavenly church illustrates perfect unity. This is about the features and methods of worshippers. The angels who are spiritual beings, the four creatures who represent all God's creation, and the 24 elders who represent churches all worship God are in order. Their praises form a beautiful harmony. The content of the five worshipers in chapters 4 and 5 are diverse. Worship is not strictly homogeneous but a unity that allows for diversity.

The worship of earthly churches should pursue this kind of unity in diversity. Different worship styles, hymns, musical instruments, length of worship time, the order of worship are just tiny details

² Mammon is a Greek god who controls money.

that are liable to change. It is wrong for a person or a specific group to prefer one worship style and force it on others. For a more beautiful worship experience, it is important for churches to challenge one another's style. Long and lively worship services of Africans are meaningful. A more traditional worship style of the Presbyterians, which emphasizes rituals, is equally valuable. It is crucial to sing timeless hymns as well as contemporary songs, and sing them sometimes with the help of contemporary musical instruments. What is essential is that worshippers be united in heart and spirit; otherwise, their worship will be like a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

Revelation speaks about heavenly worship to teach earthly churches how they should worship. If they are worshipping themselves instead of God, if their songs are based on humanism instead of praising God and his works, or if their oneness is broken, then that is not true worship. Preparing oneself for true worship is the most important task of life on earth in preparation for eternal life. When we learn the true object, contents, and methods of worship, then even on this earth we will be partakers in the everlasting heavenly worship.

9. The 144,000 and A Great Multitude

Heretics often use the number 144,000 in Revelation to delude believers (7:4; 14:3). Most heresies contend that only their sect will be the 144,000. However, the 144,000 shows an aspect of a church. The 144,000 is described as "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" (7:9). This shows that the 144,000 should not be interpreted literally.

Revelation 7:5-8 describes how the 144,000 came to be: 12 tribes of 12,000 people make 144,000. In Revelation, the number 12 is used especially regarding churches and signifies a complete church. The 24 elders in chapters 4 and 5 are made up of the 12 tribes that represent the Old

Testament churches and the 12 apostles that represent the New Testament churches. In chapter 21, the number "12" is used many times to describe the New Jerusalem, which signifies the church. The New Jerusalem has 12 pearly gates inscribed with the 12 names of the tribes and is guarded by 12 angels. 12 jeweled foundations with the 12 names of the apostles is 12,000 stadia in length and width, and the width of the wall is 144 (12×12) cubits.

The 144,000 (12×12×1,000) is made up of 12, the number of Old Testament churches multiplied by 12, the number of New Testament churches, times 1,000. The number "1,000" signifies vastness but, more importantly, in the Old Testament, 1,000 men are drafted from each tribe for a battle against the Midianites (Num 31:3-4). In other words, 1,000 represents the number of chosen soldiers for a battle. Therefore, the 144,000 imply that all churches are soldiers who participate in spiritual battles. Chapters 12 and 13 describe a ferocious battle between a church and Satan and in chapter 14, the number 144,000 is mentioned again, thus confirming the idea of churches being armies (14:1). Earthly churches are persecuted and oppressed by Satan and his beasts. However, with the names of the Lamb and the Father on their foreheads believers never worship Satan or beasts, even at the cost of their lives. A church, therefore, signified by the 144,000, is in a battle against Satan.

There is yet another proof that the 144,000 describes a church at war. Among the names of the tribes in chapter 7, the tribe of Dan is omitted. The territory they were given as an inheritance was near the Philistines who grew stronger during the time of Judges and tormented the Danites. God knew of their struggle and granted them the most powerful judge, Samson. However, the tribe of Dan never combined forces with Samson to fight against the Philistines. One of the major reasons for Samson's failure is that he always fought alone without any support from his tribe. After Samson died, the tribe of Dan did not want to continue fighting against their enemies. They forsook their God-given inheritance in Canaan and moved north to Laish. On their way, they took with them a god

and priest from Micah's house. Israelites were warned not to sell their inheritance because it was God's promise of his kingdom to his people. However, the tribe of Dan rejected the fight and left Canaan. As a result, their name was removed from the heavenly church in Revelation. Without a spiritual battle on this earth, there will be no inheritance of God's kingdom.

The content of the spiritual battle can be seen in the change of the name from "the tribe of Ephraim" to the "tribe of Joseph" (7:8). In the Old Testament, the tribe of Ephraim is often used to represent northern Israel. Whenever the name was mentioned, it always entailed a rebuke of idol worship and judgments. The connection of Ephraim and idol worship traces back to the book of Judges. Ephraim tried to usurp God's glory in a battle. Ephraim quarreled with Gideon to take his victory (Judges 8:1-2). Ephraim also tried to partake in Jephthah's victory without contributing anything, and the whole tribe was destroyed (Judges 12:1-6). Since idol worship is defined as trying to stand in God's place, the Bible calls northern Israel "Ephraim." Hosea rebukes Ephraim for their spiritual adultery (Hosea 6:10). The reason "the tribe of Ephraim" is changed to "the tribe of Joseph" is to show that God will fight against idol worship in all of us until the end.

Churches have a mission to engage in spiritual battles and will, as a result of these battles, have eternal rest. The church of 144,000 is now described to be "a great multitude no one could count (7:9)." "People, tribe, nations, languages" is a fourfold repetition of similar words that symbolize "wholeness." In other words, they denote all peoples of the earth. The 144,000 have come out of the great tribulation (7:14) and have fought in spiritual battles amidst their adversaries. They "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). It is only by the blood of Jesus Christ that a believer is saved. "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be

their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7:15-17). Eternal rest, peace, protection, and provision are given only from God.

In order to receive rest, churches have to go through countless battles. They are thirsty, hungry, and often harmed by the sun or scorching heat. They need to learn through their experiences in the dessert that only God is the living water, that earthly things can never quench their thirst, and that they should live on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Church members need to learn to be guided and protected by God's pillar of clouds. Their time on earth is the time to learn that only God is our life, protector, and guide. Only those who have learned this will be privileged to enjoy God's life and rest.

10. The Great Tribulation

The biggest reason Revelation is misunderstood is that the numbers in the book are interpreted literally. The phrase "seven-year tribulation" is not in the Bible. People who were ignorant of the Scriptures combined several numbers from the books of Daniel and Revelation. This approach belittles Revelation, seeing it as fit for a short time in the future and yet useless for the present.

The main theme of Revelation is to show God's master plan and purpose regarding churches, which should offset the fallacy of a literal interpretation of the seven-year tribulation. Revelation is God's edifying message for the incomplete earthly churches that are enduring adversity and hardship. For the last two thousand years, Revelation has been given to churches as a relevant message for whatever they were facing. The believers of the early church shed tears while reading the book and did not consider Revelation as a prophecy of events in a vague and distant future but as the exact message meant for them. Revelation has always strengthened and equipped churches for battles

against the world. Luther, for example, moved onward with the Reformation amidst the oppression of Catholics by the empowerment of Revelation. For churches throughout the ages, Revelation has provided God's cheerful message: "True churches, have courage. You will surely win!"

However, there was a trend in the 19th century to interpret the book as regarding a specific time period. In 1830, John N. Darby, from England, spread a dispensational interpretation of Revelation. An American pastor, C. I. Scofield, published the Scofield Reference Bible Commentary, which is grounded in Darby's interpretation of Revelation. This interpretation spread to the rest of England and the USA, impacting many pastors and believers. Missionaries were also impacted, and, thus, the interpretation reached Korea. Korea, at that time, was being ruled by Japan. In gloom and despair, believers were greatly comforted by Revelation. Koreans had not even heard of other interpretations of Revelation. Without a choice or any doubt, Koreans became dispensational premillennialists. Dispensational premillennialism is a recent interpretation in church history concocted by a few.

The concept of the "seven-year tribulation" can be traced to the phrase "a time, times and half a time" (12:14) and the numbers "1,260 days" (11:3; 12:6) and "42 months" (11:2; 13:5). It is also derived from the phrases "in the middle of the seven" (Dan 9:27) and "a time, times and half a time" (Dan 12:7). These numbers all signify "three and a half years." Most dispensationalists assert that seven years will be divided into two three and a half year periods. The reason the seven-year tribulation will be divided into two is because of Jesus' coming and rapture or because of the intensity of persecution reaching its climax. People who insist on the latter idea presume there will be a certain amount of freedom in the first tribulation, but the last tribulation will resemble hell. It seems plausible if you only deal with numbers, but in the context of the whole Scriptures this is a mere conjecture, an unreasonable speculation.

Revelation 11:3 describes two witnesses that are clothed in sackcloth who prophesy. When the two witnesses prophesy for 1,260 days or 42 months, the Gentiles will trample on the holy city (11:2). The temple of God, the altar and worshipers in Revelation 11:1 all signify a heavenly church. They are included in the measuring and are thus protected. However, the outer court is not measured but given to the Gentiles. The outer court signifies earthly churches, which have been persecuted. Two witnesses are churches who are commissioned to be witnesses to the world. Revelation 11, through symbols and pictures, shows that throughout the church age, churches will take courage and continue to witness against the world even amidst hardships.

The 42 months in 11:2 and again in 13:5, is the period when a beast coming out of the sea was given permission to persecute believers. This signifies church ages when churches will be oppressed by the world. Chapter 12 shows this more explicitly. Revelation 12:6 tells of 1,260 days when a woman flees to a place prepared for her by God to be cared for. Another similar verse is 12:14. It reads, "The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach." This woman was clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head (12:1). This picture, borrowed from Joseph's dream, signifies the church often symbolized by twelve Israelite tribes. Revelation 12:5 describes how these Old Testament churches gave birth to Jesus and how Jesus ascended: "She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne." In other words, this woman represents earthly churches that are under Satan's attack. Therefore 1,260 days and a time, times, and half a time, all denote the period when earthly churches are taken care of.

Dispensationalists interpret the 70 sevens in the book of Daniel literally (Dan 9:24-27). Seventy sevens are divided into 7 sevens, 62 sevens, and 1 seven (7+62+1). After 7 sevens, the temple will be

rebuilt and 62 sevens from that the anointed one (Messiah) is prophesied to come and die (Dan 9:26). Proponents of Dispensationalism insist that the remaining seven will be the seven-year tribulation. This approach is wrong in that it removes the church age from church history. Daniel prophesies that he will put to an end to sacrifices and offerings in the middle of the remaining "seven," which would be three and a half. This signifies the downfall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 when Rome destroyed the temple and sacrifices. This was scheduled to be half a "seven" after Jesus' crucifixion, so it cannot be a literal three and a half years. There is about a forty-year difference, not three and a half, between Jerusalem's fall and the crucifixion. However, history will come to a close when all seventy "sevens" are fulfilled. In order for seventy to be fulfilled, it still needs a three and a half after the downfall of Jerusalem. So, the remaining half a seven or three years and a half signifies the church age. Daniel 12 explains that "it will be for a time, times and half a time." When the power of the holy people has finally been broken, all these things will be completed (Dan 12:7). In other words, when the persecution reaches its climax and churches seem unmistakably defeated by the world, that will be the close of history. The book of Daniel, consistent with Revelation, shows that three and a half years represents the church ages.

In conclusion, half of seven, three years and a half, 1,260 days, or 42 months in the books of Daniel and Revelation all denote church ages that started with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The reason the Bible describes two thousand long years as a short period of time is to show that from a heavenly perspective, persecution in the world is only a passing moment. Revelation is not about the great tribulation in the future but is given to all churches of all ages. It would be a great loss to be deceived by dispensationalists or misleading eschatologists and thus deprived of the abundance and comfort of the Word of God.

11. The Characteristics of the Last Day Judgments

In Revelation, there are four recorded sets of judgments. The judgment of the "seven thunders" is not recorded, so there are only three judgments: the seal, trumpet, and bowl (10:4). If these judgments are to happen during the seven-year tribulation, then we can imagine natural disasters and wars as depicted in movies. However, because Revelation is written about things that are currently happening, these judgments can and should be interpreted as happening now spiritually. Certainly, these judgments will happen with more intensity and concentration as the final days near. However, it is wrong to think that there will be no judgments for the present age and then suddenly and surprisingly they will happen all at once preceding Jesus' second coming.

These judgments portray several characteristics. **First, each judgment is a record of similar contents in a repetitive and a progressive manner.** The trumpet and bowl judgments are almost the same but with an expanded scope. The seal judgment has similar contents as well, just with a different description. For example, the first disaster of the seal judgment is a quest for victory and conquest between countries, described as a white horse. The first disaster of the trumpet judgment hurls down hail and fire mixed with blood, burning up a third of the earth. The first disaster of the bowl judgment brings ugly and painful sores on the people who have the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image. In other words, the first disasters of each of the judgments are on the earth. The other disasters have the same pattern. The second disasters all have the motif of "blood," represented by a fiery red horse (seal) and sea turning into blood (trumpet and bowl). All judgments describe the same contents with expanding ranges, showing that a certain judgment will repeat itself in a more progressive and intensifying manner over a long period of time; its repercussions will impact the whole world.

Second, these judgments will fall on believers as well as nonbelievers. Many people presume that these judgments will happen after believers are raptured. However, the Bible teaches that believers are to be judged while still living on this earth. This particular judgment is called "discipline." 1 Corinthians 11:32 says, "When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world." Hebrews teaches that "if you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons" (Heb 12:8). A believer's old self is put to death through discipline, which comes in the form of judgments. Discipline is indispensable because the new self can only grow in proportion to the death of the old self.

Most judgments in the Old Testament, especially in the prophetic books, are directed to the Israelites, not the Gentiles. The reason of these judgments is to produce "remnants." The remnants that have undergone judgments will shed sin and love God alone. "When you see their conduct and their actions, you will be consoled, regarding the disaster I have brought upon Jerusalem, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause" (Ezek 14:21-23). The "survivors" of the judgments upon Israel are the churches. Believers grow in holiness by going through various disciplines, which at the time seem as judgments. Only those who are judged in this world will be free from the eternal judgments.

Third, these judgments convey spiritual meanings more significant than real and natural disasters. Many phenomena that describe these judgments use the same word pictures that the Old Testament used to deliver special spiritual messages. For example, the third trumpet judgment where "a great star blazing like a torch fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water and turned a third of the waters bitter (8:10)," is not a meteorite that causes an environmental disaster. In the Old Testament, "a torch" is an instrument of God's judgment (Judg 7:16; Zech 12:6), and a "star" is either an object of idol worship (Deut 4:19) or man's desire to become God (Isa 14:12-14).

"Wormwood" symbolizes God's judgment on the evilness of idol worship, (Jer 9:14-15) and "springs of water" always signifies the source of eternal life (Jer 2:13). In other words, the third trumpet judgment describes a picture of God's judgment on man's desire to elevate himself and how those idol worshippers agonize from lack of eternal life.

The locusts of the fifth trumpet judgment also ought to be interpreted from a spiritual perspective. In the Old Testament, "locusts" are instruments of God's judgment against those who forsook God and worshipped idols (Ps 78:46; Joel 1:4). The phrase "stings like scorpions" signifies that all people who are sinners under law will inevitably be "stung" by death (1 Cor 15:56). Those who wander from the faith and are greedy for money will also experience the same agony as that of a locust's sting (1 Tim 6:10). As can be seen, Satan uses desire and fear to enslave and torment man. God judges sinners, using Satan as an instrument. In order to interpret and apply Revelation, one must first understand the spiritual significance of the judgments.

From these characteristics, the following can be concluded: Judgments in the form of disasters will repeat themselves in human history in a gradually more intensifying manner. As we near Christ's second coming, these disasters will have more impact on the world and the spiritual judgment is usually hidden from man's eye.

12. Phenomenon of Judgments

The seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments are presently being poured down upon us and are intensifying. Consider these judgments on earth: Human death caused by war, massacre, famine, and diseases have been inescapable parts of history. However, these judgments have never been more serious than in the twentieth century. For example, there were between 25 to 50 million deaths

caused by the Spanish flu in 1919, 20 million deaths in World War I, 50 million deaths in World War II, and 20 million deaths caused by Stalin. There were also 26 million deaths in China from the onset of Communism till the Great Proletarian, 30 million deaths caused by famine around 1960 in northern China, and 23 million deaths from AIDS since the 1980s. Human deaths caused by war, massacre, famine, and diseases have increased throughout the church age.

These judgments are prophesied about in Revelation as well as throughout the whole Bible. For example, the second trumpet judgment where a huge mountain is thrown into the sea is an image of the last day judgment from the Old Testament (8:8). Jeremiah prophesies of this particular destruction: "I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth. I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned-out mountain" (Jer 51:25). This is part of the prophesy of Babylon's destruction. Babylon is a country set on level ground but is called the "destroying mountain" or "burned-out mountain." Babylon's temples were Ziggurats, structures resembling mountains on top of which Babylonians had sacrificial rites for their gods. A "burned-out mountain" refers to the fire people lit in the temples that devoured them and made Babylon a burning mountain. A huge mountain being thrown into the sea depicts the self-destruction of the world from greed and idol worship.

These disasters are happening now. Man's agony over the pollution and destruction of the environment is in fact the result of man's greed. Mad cow disease is an example of man's greed. To accelerate the growth of cows, people fed them fodder made of other cattle's bones and internal organs fit for carnivorous animals. Cows began to produce holes in their brain and the disease spread to humans who ate those cows. Man's greed was poured back on himself.

These disasters can be visible—famine, disease and wars—but are most likely in forms we cannot discern with our eyes. For example, the fifth disaster of the trumpet judgment, the smoke

from a gigantic furnace, and locusts are one such example (9:1-11). This disaster describes a scene where evil spirits from the Abyss spiritually agonize people. Those who were stung "will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them" (9:6). Locusts are instruments of God's judgment (Isa 33:4).

One typical phenomenon is addiction. People who have addictions show symptoms of spiritually being stung by scorpions and poisoned. One big trait of people suffering from addictions is that they totally lose control over the very thing they are addicted to. Addiction is the result of being spiritually enslaved. Trying to get better, demonstrating willpower, or getting help from others will not free one from addiction. Internet surfing, gambling, pornography, alcohol, drugs, games, TV, shopping, and sex are considered vulgar or low-grade addictions. However, many people are addicted to other kinds of things: relationships, children, money, work, exercise, sports, their reputation, fame, diplomas, or hobbies. Some people are even proud that they are addicted to the things just listed. The problem lies in that addiction will destroy the person by pushing him to a spiritual and physical death. Addictions make people unable to come to God; they also result in broken relationships with people. Addiction is a mere wrapping on the outside of a person, but on the inside they are numb from Satan's sting. Addictions prove that in the spiritual realm, judgments are already being poured down upon people.

13. The Two Witnesses

There are two witnesses in Revelation 11. Many people think they will witness for a certain period of time and then be put to death before Jesus comes back. In fact, people are not interested in these two witnesses believing they belong to the future and are irrelevant for present times. Would God have included this story in the Bible if it were irrelevant and useless to the churches of the last

two thousand years? No! These witnesses represent churches that are commissioned to be witnesses of the New Testament. They show us who we are and who we are to be. Thus, we should look closer and discover how they fought against the world and took on the mission as witnesses.

Revelation 11:1-2 describes the measuring of the temple. This is a summary version of Ezekiel 40-48. To measure the temple means that it will be protected for God's purpose. A reed was used in place of rulers. The temple of God, the altar, and the worshipers are included in the measuring. A heavenly church will not be harmed in any way because it is under God's protection. The outer court is excluded from measuring and is exposed to persecution and oppression in the world for 42 months. Revelation 11:3 calls the same period of time 1,260 days. This number represents the church age of the New Testament, which Revelation 12 calls "a time and times and half a time."

Churches have to endure persecution and oppression by nonbelievers and during that time two witnesses are commissioned to witness to the world. Therefore, the two witnesses represent the mission for the churches of the New Testament to be witnesses. Verse 4 says that these are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. Jesus himself explained that the lampstands are the churches (1:20). Olive trees since the Old Testament times symbolized God's people or churches (Ps 52:8). The reason there are two witnesses is from the law that dictates there must be at least two people for a matter to be established (Deut 19:15). The witnesses are clothed in sackcloth because they urge people to repent of their sins (Dan 9:3).

The acts of authority by the witnesses portray the ministry of both Moses and Elijah. Just as Moses turned water into blood and invoked many plagues on Egypt, these witnesses strike the earth (11:6). Likewise, just as Elijah put to death those who came to capture him with fire and shut up the sky so that it did not rain, these two witnesses display that same authority (11:5). Moses' miracles

were instruments to save God's people by bringing judgments on Egypt, which stood for sinful influence. Elijah's miracles were similar in that they brought people deceived by the world back to God. Churches are given spiritual power and authority to save those who are enslaved by Satan. Jesus says that churches with this kind of spiritual authority will not be overcome by "the gates of Hades" (Matt 16:18). Jesus also says that the keys of the kingdom of heaven will be given to these churches so that "whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever they loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:19). The authority of churches that can free both the enslaved and the deceived are shown in the book of Acts where countless people are saved through the ministries of the churches.

However, when they finish their testimony, the beast from the Abyss will kill them (11:7). The day they finish their testimony will be the last days when churches will have finished their mission as witnesses. It is the time when the very last one of God's predestined people is saved. Revelation 20 explains that Satan is bound with a great chain and thrown into the Abyss for a thousand years (20:1-3). The thousand years in Revelation 20 also signifies a church age. Satan being bound shows his fatal defeat with the victory of Jesus' crucifixion (12:9; Col 2:15). However, at the time when all God's people are saved, Satan will be released from his prison for the last battle (20:7).

Satan's victory will only be temporary. His followers will be intoxicated with their apparent victory and celebrate by sending each other gifts (11:10). The world will falsely gloat over the church's destruction. However, just as Jesus died on the cross but was risen in three days, the two witnesses will stand on their feet after three and a half days (11:11). "Three and a half days" or "time and times and half a time" show that the churches will appear to be dying physically, but, in fact, they will be very much alive spiritually. Two witnesses will go up to heaven in a cloud (11:12), which is the church's rapture (1 Thess 4:17). The world will then receive God's last judgment: a severe earthquake and the

collapse of a tenth of the city. This judgment is described in Revelation 19 as the sword that came out of the Jesus' mouth on the horse and killed idol worshipers (19:21). In chapter 20, it is the fire that came down from heaven and devoured the enemies of God's people (20:9). The world will be judged, but churches that have completed the God-given mission on this earth will be with God forever.

Revelation describes churches and two witnesses in order to highlight the mission of earthly churches. Believers are and will be persecuted by the world but should nevertheless continue the mission of saving the lost and urging people to repent from their sins. At the very hour when churches have completed their mission, it will seem as if they are falling as helpless victims. It can be likened to a caterpillar wrapping itself up in a cocoon. Later, the church will cast off its earthly skins and weaknesses and be transformed into a glorious heavenly church. The two witnesses are a symbolic picture that shows the great mission and spiritual authority of the church.

14. The Woman and The Red Dragon

Revelation 12:1 shows a woman "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head." The image of the sun, the moon, and the stars are borrowed from Joseph's second dream and symbolize the Israelites (Gen 37:9). In the Old Testament, "the sun, moon and stars" signified "glory" (Isa 24:23; 60:19). This woman is a symbol for Israel, the glorious church of the Old Testament. She cried out in pain as she was about to give birth (12:2). This alludes to the hidden promise in the curse given to Eve that "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children" (Gen 3:15-16).

With the sign of a woman comes another sign of an enormous red dragon (12:3). The "red" hints that this dragon will persecute churches and will shed their blood (13:10; 16:6; 17:6). It has seven heads and being that "seven" is God's complete number, we know that it is imitating God. The seven crowns on its head are its authority over the world. This dragon has ten "horns." These horns signify "the power [needed] to rule the earth" (Pss 89:17; 132:17). Satan here mimics Jesus where, in Revelation 5:6, Jesus the Lamb has seven horns.

Satan attacks Israel so that Israel will not give birth to Jesus. A picture of Satan sweeping up a third of the stars and flinging them to the earth in 12:4 is found in Daniel 8:10. The stars of the sky in the book of Daniel signify the faithful Israelites who were killed by Antiochus Euphianes. Satan, through evil authorities of the world, persecuted Israel and tried to interfere with the birth of the Messiah. This kind of interference of Satan has always been a part of history. Cain killing Abel, Pharaoh killing Israelite infant boys, Saul's attempt to kill David, were all the result of Satan's oppression. It reached its apex when Herod had all the boys two and under, killed in Bethlehem and its vicinity (Matt 2:16). However, Jesus did come to the world through Israel. Jesus will rule all the nations with an iron scepter (Ps 2:9), showing his sovereign rule that will come into full view at his second coming (19:15).

After Jesus had ascended into heaven, the woman fled into the desert (12:6). The woman now signifies the churches of the New Testament. The Israelites of the Old Testament and churches of the New Testament are described as one. The 1,260 days the woman stayed in the desert to be nurtured is the same period as "42 months" (11:2; 13:5) or a "time and times and half a time" (12:14), signifying the church age between the ascension of Jesus and his second coming. In other words, the reason that churches exist before Jesus returns is to be nurtured."

The way churches should be nurtured in the desert is well shown in Deuteronomy 8. Moses explains that God led the Israelites in the desert “to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands” (Deut8:2). God allowed the Israelites to live in the desert to learn gentleness and humility. Likewise, churches need to learn to humbly depend on God and obey his commands with a gentle heart (Matt 5:3, 5; 11:28-30). However, every human heart is proud, evil, and unable to be humble and gentle at heart. For this reason, God killed the first generation in the desert. This shows that a believer’s old self has to die and only the new self, born through the Spirit, can enter God’s kingdom. Dying to self through Satan’s persecution is the very definition of “being taken care of” and results in maturity.

Satan will deceive and persecute churches to the end. Satan’s offensive weapon, from Genesis through Revelation, has been deceit and lies. David, in the Psalms, describes the lies as great waters and pleads to be saved from them (Ps 144:7-8). Satan also entices believers by using false prophets (Matt 7:15; 24:11, 24; Luke 6:26; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1; Rev 13:13-14). God will demolish all lies with an iron scepter of truth and save believers.

The Bible describes a life enduring Satan’s assaults as a life “given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of” (12:14). This is cited from the Old Testament where God carried the Israelites as a father carries his son (Deut 1:31), and an eagle spreads its wings to catch its young and carries them (Deut 32:10-12). God protects the spirits of his chosen ones. From a heavenly perspective, it is natural that our bodies die (Matt 10:28). Those who know this truth willingly sacrifice their bodies for the gospel (12:11). Just as Jesus trampled Satan with the cross, Jesus’ followers who do not spare their lives for the gospel will trample Satan’s power (12:11).

15. The Dragon and the Beasts

Revelation 12 describes a dragon and the Bible explicitly refers to it as "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (12:9). The name "the ancient serpent" implies Satan who deceived Adam and Even in Genesis. "The devil," translated from the Greek word *diabolos*, means a "slanderer." "Satan" is a transliteration of Hebrew and means "adversary." Satan is described as a red dragon because dragons are snakes deified. Through the dragons of worldly culture, we can see the mighty influence of Satan. However, the Bible explains "there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven" (12:7-8). The dragons' attempt to usurp the throne of God failed completely.

In Revelation 13 we read about beasts that work for Satan. The reason the dragon persecutes churches through the beasts is that Satan is now chained and locked in the Abyss (20:1-3). One such beast comes out of the sea, has ten horns and seven heads, and resembles a leopard, bear, and a lion (13:1-2). Mimicking Jesus, it dies but comes back to life and can be called the anti-Christ (13:3). It is given the power to utter blasphemies and make war against the saints for forty-two months, which is the church age (13:5-10).

Since this beast is described as having been given authority throughout the church age, there is not just one anti-Christ who will appear during the great tribulation. It symbolizes the spiritual authority that persecutes churches through the political and military powers of the world (Dan 7:2-8). At every age, there have been various authorities that oppressed believers at Satan's instigation. Since Christianity began, Rome most likely had the power that this beast symbolizes. In the 20th century it was communism. Now, it can be surmised to be the Islamic force shown in politics and religion. Many people mistakenly believe that oppression against Christianity has disappeared, but presently 176,000

people die because of their faith every year. In more than sixty countries, 100 million people face persecution because of their faith, and the persecution is growing. The antichrist changes its form in many ways and continues to threaten and kill believers. Satan wages war against churches through the powers of the world.

The other beast comes out of the earth (13:11) and has two horns like a lamb but speaks like a dragon (13:11). Taking the shape of a lamb shows that this beast is a religious power that pursues peace and goodness. Speaking like a dragon, it will tempt and deceive churches with the power of words and ideas. Therefore, it is called the false prophet (19:20). It performs miracles, orders people to worship the image of the first beast, and forces everyone to receive the mark of 666, which is the name of the beast. Performing miracles alludes to mysticism, which entices believers. Ordering people to worship the worldly power signifies materialism, which is idol worship of power for the sake of satisfying self. Forcing people to receive the name of the beast means that it will capture people with ideas of success, money, and reputation, weeding out whoever will not follow the status quo. When Christianity is tainted by mysticism and materialism, we know it is from the influence of the beast.

The dragon, the beast that comes out of the sea, and the beast that comes out of the earth form a false trinity of Satan. The dragon mimics God, the beast of the sea mimics Jesus the Son, and the beast of the earth acts as the Holy Spirit. The combined force of this anti-Christ persecutes and deceives believers. Churches never face Satan directly. Satan is always at war against churches through evil worldly powers or the spirit of the times. In many cases, even believers worship the dragon or the beasts. As Revelation 13 shows, churches are engaged in these spiritual battles against the beasts.

16. The 666

Some people believe that in the latter days, an anti-Christ will appear and inscribe the 666 on their foreheads or arms. Does the number signify bar codes or verification chips? Absolutely not! Even believers of the early churches clearly understood what that number meant. 666 should be understood in the context of John's symbolic use of numbers in his writing, Revelation 13, and the Old Testament.

First, John emphasized the symbolic meaning of the number 666 by repeating it three times. The number 7 denotes "completeness." Therefore, 6 is Satan's number because it is one short of 7. Since the number 3 also signifies completeness, the number 777, a combination of three sevens means "complete, complete, complete." On the other hand, 666 means utter insufficiency and cries out "incomplete, incomplete, incomplete." In other words, the 666 is a symbolic number that delivers the message that "Satan's attempt to persecute churches through a false trinity will be incomplete and end in failure."

Second, the number 666 must be understood in the context of chapter 13. 666 is the mark of the beast that signifies worldly ideas and religious influence. A literal "mark" will not be physically inscribed on people but rather it is a sign to show to whom people belong. Believers will have the "name of the Lamb and his Father's name" written on their foreheads (14:1), however, these names are not physically visible. The forehead symbolizes "intellect" and the hand signifies one's "actions." If a man belongs to Satan, both his thinking and his actions will convey it.

Without this "mark," no one could buy or sell. Throughout history, the most worldly and satanic idea that has swayed people is materialism. The love of money is the mightiest power that has controlled the souls from the Old Testament times up to present times (Matt 6:24; 1 Tim 6:10).

The love of money wears a religious form; people not only desire it, but also worship it, serve it, love it, and sacrifice for it. People can kill, reveal their own disgrace, betray friends, and even abandon their children for money. Money poses as God, and people desire to become God through money. Materialistic principles, where people worship money and money rules them, is satanic. Many communities are built upon this principle. In a society such as this, it will be hard for Christians to survive when they reject the very idea on which the community was built. The 666 shows those who are enslaved by Mammonism and materialism and that they belong to Satan.

Third, the 666 must be understood in the context of the Old Testament. The only 666 used in the Old Testament describes the weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly (1King 10:14). Since 1 talent is about 34kg, 666 talents would be about 23 tons. One kilogram of gold is about \$72,000 according to the currency in March of 2022, so 23 tons of gold would be about \$1.65 billion. This detailed description shows the vastness of Solomon's richness. However, the very next chapter describes Solomon's spiritual degradation. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. The concubines turned his heart after other gods such as Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, and Molech, and he built high places for them. Conclusively, the description of Solomon's incredible worldly possessions in chapter 10 of 1 Kings was a mere backdrop of the explanation of his corruption in chapter 11. Because of his priceless treasures that amounted to 666 talents, Solomon forsook God. This is the economical background in Revelation 13 regarding the explanation of the number 666. The fact that no one could buy or sell without the mark (13:17) suggests a satanic influence that will prompt people to chase worldly success. Sadly, this desire for and accomplishment of worldly success will be the very instrument used to turn people against God.

In summary, Satan enslaves people through the love of money. His attempt is expressed in the number 666. However, God has exposed that plan and will completely destroy it. The number 666 shows how pathetically imperfect Satan's plan is. The false believers who are in fact slaves of Satan will receive the mark of 666 and will love money, worldly power, and eventually go to ruin. A true church with the name of the Lamb and the name of his Father on their foreheads will praise God forever (14:1).

17. The Destruction of Babylon

Revelation 16-18 is a record of the destruction of Babylon. In contrast to the short description of the downfall of Satan and the beasts that served him, the description of the destruction of Babylon is recorded in detail in more than two chapters. This is because Babylon has a great impact on believers.

The word "Babylon" is used 252 times in the Old Testament. Babylon, which destroyed Judah, was the most powerful country in the Old Testament. The subject matters of Babylon in the Old Testament focus on three things: First, it relates to the destruction of Judah (2 Kings 20:17); second, Babylon's authority and glory is under God's sovereignty (Dan 4:34-35); and third is the destruction of Babylon (Isa 14:4). The destruction of Judah by Babylon signifies the process of God's believers being stripped of their sins through afflictions. The book of Daniel shows that all the countries and their authorities are under God's sovereign reign and supreme power. The destruction of Babylon symbolizes the judgment against the worldly powers that tempted and afflicted God's people. It shows that Babylon, the society that persecuted and tempted God's people, will be used in God's grand plan but will surely be destroyed in the end.

In the New Testament, Babylon was used as a metaphor for the Roman Empire. Peter called Rome "Babylon" and the churches in Rome he referred to as "[S]he who is in Babylon, chosen together with you" (1 Pet 5:13). The Roman Empire dominated the world for the longest time in history. Rome had ruled for almost a thousand years over Europe, Africa, and Palestine, which consisted of most of the world at that time. Its political, cultural, military, and economic power was at the highest level up to that point in history.

As can be seen, the systemized world power which is hostile toward God's people is called "Babylon." Babylon is bound to appear as a specific country and civilization. In the Old Testament, Babylon was one of the many countries that fought against God's people. In the early churches, Rome replaced the role of Babylon. Babylon symbolizes the leading countries Satan uses in order to rule its people and persecute God's people.

The reason Babylon is called the "great prostitute" is that it influences others and sets trends. The leaders and the inhabitants of the earth who are swayed by powerful countries and civilizations are said to have been "intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries" (17:2). Babylon adorned itself with stupendous clothing and jewelry, symbolizing the magnificent cultures and materials (17:4). The beast she rides signifies Satan's dominance. Satan and the civilized powers of the world unite to blaspheme God and assault his people (17:3, 6). This beast, with seven heads and ten horns, will have an antichrist in every age (17:9-13). Babylon sits on the world to show that its influence covers a wide range.

Babylon used to buy the most extravagant consumer goods of its time, conveying the desire of its people to spend and seek pleasure (18:12-13). Today, this looks like modern consumerism, materialism and epicurean hedonism. In other words, the powers of this world force us to avert our

eyes from pursuing the spiritual and eternal truths by enticing us to chase temporary pleasure and contentment here on the earth.

However, Babylon and Satan cannot make an eternal union. A domestic discord will trigger Satan to destroy Babylon (17:16). The glamorous power and glory of the world, which is sustained by Satan's help, will one day fade and disappear. The reason worldly culture looks attractive is that the ruler of the kingdom of the air is now at work (Eph 2:2). This false and temporary glory is only bait that Satan uses to enslave people (Eph 2:3). He who is deceived by this splendor, in conjunction with his own greed, chases worldly power but will end up serving Satan.

Revelation 18 describes the destruction of Babylon in detail. Babylon is a great city that has a strikingly opposite image of God's holy city, Jerusalem (17:18). It seems only natural that before the New Jerusalem is completely ready, the promiscuous and dirty city be destroyed. Babylon is pictured as a great prostitute that forsook God and loved the world. The world, which had been the source of adultery, will be judged before the appearance of the holy bride (19:7-8).

In short, Babylon is a symbol that persecutes believers with power and entices them with their culture. In every age, new influences have appeared and led the world. In the middle ages, Catholicism posed as Babylon and persecuted or corrupted believers. The Renaissance and Modernism followed suit, along with Great Britain in the 19th century and the USA in the 20th century, replaced by the evangelism of "Coca-Cola and McDonald." Presently, "Babylon" is internet technology rather than national influence. For example, companies like Apple have become a religion and have worldwide fanatics. Internet sites like Facebook have 500 million members and its influence has no national boundaries. With the help of Satan, these worldly influences are so attractive that they can snatch people's souls. These powers will undoubtedly be destroyed. To the believers who have

forgotten their true identity because of the intoxication of worldly powers, God shouts, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues" (18:4). The place for God's people is in God's holy kingdom, not Babylon.

18. Armageddon

The word "Armageddon" is only used once in the Bible (16:16). When the sixth bowl of judgment is finally poured down, all the worldly kings will gather at Armageddon to join forces against God. However, a real battle will not take place. This battle scene in chapter 19 also describes Jesus' second coming (19:17-21). The same battle is again described from a different point of view in 20:7-10. Chapter 19 describes the judgment of the beast, the false prophet and those who opposed God. Satan, who was at work behind them all, will face an eternal judgment as described in Revelation 20.

The movie "Armageddon" familiarized even nonbelievers with the concept of plagues and wars that will precede the end of the earth. While it is true that Armageddon is the final battle that induces complete destruction and judgment on Satan and his followers, it will not take the form of a meteorite or a nuclear war as often depicted in science fiction movies. Instead, this battle is symbolic of the ultimate spiritual battle and collapse of Satan.

"Armageddon" is the transliteration of the words "mountain of Megiddo" into Greek. Megiddo is a plain that is placed between the valleys of Jezreel in northern Palestine. Many battles took place there, including the battle of Barak of Israel against Sisera's army (Judges 4-5), Gideon's battle against the Midianites (Judges 7), and the battle of Saul against the Philistines where Saul was defeated (1 Sam 31). The word "mountain" in "mountain of Megiddo" is "Mount Carmel," which is the nearest mountain that surround the plain of Megiddo. Mount Carmel was the place of spiritual battle

between Elijah and 850 Baal and Asherah prophets (1 Kings 18). In other words, Armageddon signifies the clash between idol worship and true faith in God.

Jezebel, the wife of king Ahab, committed idolatry and witchcraft (2 Kings 9:22). "Idolatry" is the worship of idols instead of God, and "witchcraft" is any attempt to make something happen through religious acts. Jezebel, whose name means "Baal is my husband," was the source of idol worship and supplication for material goods—the very thing Elijah fought against at mount Carmel. Elijah fought for the people who made their own gods to restore their faith in Jehovah. The church in Thyatira in Revelation 2 had a prophetess just like Jezebel of the Old Testament. She corrupted churches by misleading God's servants into sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols (2:20-21). Those who commit adultery with her will suffer intensely, and their children will be killed (2:22-23).

The Armageddon of the last days is the complete judgment for those who worship idols. Satanic spirits that have formed a false trinity will entice the kings of the earth to gather at Armageddon. This has begun because the bowl of God's judgment has been poured down. Satan's throng, who opposed God, will be destroyed, showing that Satan is under God's sovereignty.

The Armageddon battle will not actually occur. Satan and his followers will either be killed or captured before they fight Jesus, who fights with a sharp sword and iron scepter. Revelation 19:11-16 describes the second coming of Jesus, depicting him as the most powerful warrior of all. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Those who opposed God will be killed with the sword that comes out of the mouth of Jesus, and the beast and false prophet will be thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (19:17-21).

The battle of Gog and Magog in chapter 20 is the same Armageddon battle that will bring about the downfall of Satan, only described from a different perspective (20:7-10). In Revelation, the

Greek word *polemos*, which is translated as "battle" or "war," appears 9 times. Three times in 16:14, 19:19, and 20:8, are used with the article "the." This shows that "the war" of Armageddon in chapters 16 and 19 and "the war" of Gog and Magog in chapter 20 are the same. This apparent collision can be understood in that Revelation is not recorded chronologically but is progressively recapitulated. The background of the battle of "Gog and Magog" can be found in the eschatological battle in Ezekiel 38-39. "Gog and Magog" symbolize the world powers that oppose God. They, who were like the sand on the seashore, are devoured by fire, which came down from heaven (20:9). The devil, responsible for deceiving them, is thrown into the lake of burning sulfur (20:10). This will be the end of the spiritual wars between God's people and Satan's forces.

The battle of Armageddon or of Gog and Magog bring about the destruction of those who, deceived by Satan, worship idols and oppose God. This will take place with Jesus' second coming. Jesus, who came as a helpless baby and was crucified on the cross, will come as a mighty warrior killing any opponents with sword and fire. The Armageddon battle will allow believers to finally see how big and strong Jesus is (20:9). Believers have no reason to be afraid of Armageddon. Just as God showed himself to be the true God by responding to Elijah by fire, God will prove Himself to be the God of the universe by burning up Satan and his throng.

19. The Millennium

The idea of the millennium is the most controversial topic in Revelation. How you interpret the millennium depends on how you interpret the capture of Satan, the first resurrection, and the timing of the battle of Gog and Magog. Premillennialism dictates that Jesus will come back before the millennium, and that Christ will reign as king on this earth for a literal thousand years. Postmillennialism contends that Jesus will come at the end of the millennium, but few support this

view. Amillennialism states that the thousand years is symbolic and denotes the church age and that Christ is “already” reigning as king in the hearts of believers.

Revelation supports amillennialism with its language, grammar, and contents. Therefore, chapter 20 must be interpreted in light of the view of amillennialism. **First, all numbers in Revelation are used symbolically.** No one number in Revelation is used literally. John is trying to deliver symbolic messages through numbers. For example, a thousand years signifies a long period of time. The numbers that point out the sufferings of churches are small, such as three years and a half or 42 months. On the other hand, Christ’s spiritual reign is represented with the number one thousand and shows spiritual relevance.

Second, the battle of Gog and Magog, which is said to take place after the millennium, is actually the same battle as “Armageddon,” which already took place in chapter 19 but from a different perspective. Verses 16:14 and 19:19, which describe Armageddon and the Greek *polemos* (war) in 20:8, both call Armageddon “the war” because they depict the same war. Chapter 20 does not speak of the future but instead is a repeated statement of the previous event in a more progressive level.

Third, people who hope for a literal millennium desire to “obtain worldly power and show it off” instead of “giving it up and sacrificing.” Even though these people have been oppressed and persecuted on earth, they desperately want to lord over others in the millennium. However, Jesus showed what it meant to be different, saying, “[W]hoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (Mark 10:43-44). Jesus came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). For a Christian to rule

means a life of service and sacrifice. Those who desire a literal millennium for revenge on those who oppressed them are themselves chasing the desires of the world.

Satan is chained and locked in the Abyss for a thousand years. Jesus made a public spectacle of Satan, triumphing over him through way of the cross (Col 2:15). Revelation also describes the fight between the archangel Michael and Satan in which Satan is hurled down to the earth (12:7-9). Satan had authority and splendor in the world before the church age, and he temporarily possessed what he stole from Adam (Luke 4:6). Jesus bought back the authority with his cross. Genesis prophesies about this event when it says that the offspring of the woman will crush the snake's head (Gen 3:15). Just because Satan is locked in the Abyss does not mean he cannot act at all. His every activity is solely limited to what God has permitted. Satan, along with his followers, the beast and the false prophet, continue to oppress and tempt churches even in the church age. However, this is what God allows so that churches grow and become holy (12:6, 14).

At Jesus' second coming, Satan will be released for a short time and will tempt the world to stand against God. He will try to destroy all churches with his power. Chapter 11 says, "[N]ow when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them" (11:7). However, when the breath of life from God enters them, churches will stand on their feet and go up to heaven (11:11-12; 1 Thess 4:17). Anyone who opposed the churches will be judged and destroyed.

It seems like Satan has persecuted and tempted churches throughout the church age. All this is under God's sovereign providence. A thousand years is the time when Satan threatens churches like a chained lion. A thousand years is also the time when God's kingdom spreads through churches and believers. God's kingdom arrived at Jesus' first coming (Matt 4:17) with its influence and rule and

expanded spiritually (Matt 11:12). God's people cannot but experience the mighty power and authority of the Holy Spirit who expands God's kingdom in their hearts, fiercely exposing and driving out sin (Matt 12:28). Those who are ruled by Jesus will be like the king who gives his life for others (John 15:13). This is the kingship for believers in the millennium. Therefore, we are living in the millennium right now and are kings and priests of God's kingdom (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 20:6).

20. Rapture and the Advent

The concept of "rapture" became widely known through Ernest Angley's novel *Rapture*. According to the book, believers will be caught up in the air right before the seven-year tribulation, and the earth will see terrible disasters. Most believers understand Revelation based on non-biblical sources like fiction novels. They also treat the Bible as a novel. The Bible does not contain the word "rapture." People imagine that it uses the term in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 where it says, "After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

Believers will be caught up in the clouds just as the Bible promised, although not in the usual manner people imagine it. The reason people are caught up is to "meet the Lord in the air." To meet is *aphatesis* in Greek. This word was used to describe the scene when a ruler came to a city and the citizens of that city would all go out to welcome him and come back to their city with him. In the New Testament, the same word is used when people welcomed the groom and entered the house of the bride (Matt 25:6) and when Roman believers went out to welcome Paul coming to Rome and then went back to Rome with him (Acts 28:15). In both cases, you would not want to welcome visitors outside and not come back to the intended place. In other words, the reason believers are caught up in the air is not to evade "the seven-year tribulation" but instead to welcome Jesus. It is a non-biblical

picture of dispensationalists that believers will be raptured before the great tribulation and that only nonbelievers will suffer from it. The Bible repeatedly states that churches are to go through persecution and oppression (Matt 24:9; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom 8:35; 2 Cor 1:4; 4:17; 1 Thess 3:3-4; 2 Thess 1:7; Rev 1:9; 2:10; 7:14).

When we are caught up in the air to meet the Lord, our current bodies will be transformed into glorious ones. Even the dead will see their spirits and physical bodies become one. This is the second resurrection; our bodies are transformed into the image of Christ in preparation for eternal life. The first resurrection is when our souls are made alive by believing in Jesus Christ (John 3:5; Rev 20:6). The rapture entails the second resurrection where the physical body will not decay. Contrary to common belief, it does not mean an escape into the air from the persecutions of this world.

Earthly churches have to go through times of persecution and temptation for two reasons: first, all God's chosen people must be saved (John 6:39); second, churches must be holy and blameless (Eph 5:27). When these two purposes are fulfilled, Jesus will come suddenly and unexpectedly.

The pre-advent will probably be the darkest and most evil period in human history, a time when the persecution of churches will reach its peak. However, God's chosen people will persevere and meet Jesus, whether alive or dead. When Jesus comes, the ends of the earth will tremble with a trumpet call of angels (Matt 24:31). The physical bodies of the dead in Christ will rise and unite with their souls that are coming down with Jesus (1 Thess 4:16). Those who are still alive will meet the Lord (1 Thess 4:17). At this time, churches will be as beautiful and glorious as brides (19:7). The eternal union of Jesus and churches will finally take place.

On the other hand, Jesus' second coming will involve the ultimate judgment and defeat of Satan. When Jesus comes back with a heavenly church, the world will be judged and destroyed by fire

and a new heaven and a new earth will come forth (2 Pet 3:10; Rev 21:1). The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, will come out of heaven prepared as a bride, and will serve God and Jesus as the king for all eternity (21:2). These are the events of the latter days, which will take place through the rapture and the coming of Jesus.

21. The Last Judgment

The last judgment, often known as the “white throne judgment,” is found in Revelation 20:11-15. This is the result of the last spiritual battle in 20:7-10 and the pronouncement of judgment on Satan and on the people who followed him. Human history will come to an end with this last judgment. Chapter 21 tells of a whole new world, including a new heaven, a new earth, and a New Jerusalem.

God’s throne of judgment includes two characteristics. First, it is “big.” Revelation uses the word “big” or *megas* in the Greek 80 times and each time its usage is dedicated to the vastness of the unimaginable spiritual world. The throne is said to be big to show that humans cannot understand or measure the greatness of God’s kingdom.

Second, it is “white.” Whiteness symbolizes holiness, victory, and righteousness. God’s people also wear white robes (7:9). Jesus rides on a white horse, which symbolizes victory (19:11). White is righteousness that does not allow even a speck of dirt (Isa 1:18). Revelation uses the word “throne” 36 times and, except for the two times where Satan and the beast imitate God (13:2; 16:10), all other cases point to God’s rule and sovereignty. God will execute the last judgment with his great holiness and authority.

At God's judgment, earth and sky will flee from his presence (20:11). With the last judgment, God's re-creation will have been completed and the first earth and sky will disappear. This completion of re-creation is explained in other parts of Revelation (6:14; 16:20). The change will not only involve the destruction and transformation of the physical environment of the earth but also every physical rule that was accepted in the physical realm.

In front of God is "the Book of Life," which is not a mere record of people's good and evil deeds. This book contains the names of believers that have eternal life through God's grace and Christ's redemption (3:5). People whose names are not recorded in this book are doomed for eternal punishment (13:8). They have not experience God's saving grace on this earth and end up worshipping Satan and participating in evil (17:8; 21:27). The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderer, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters, and all liars will permanently live in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (21:8). Those whose names are written in the Book of Life may have done evil acts, but they are judged "not guilty" on account of the grace of the blood of Jesus (Rom 8:1).

Believers, whose names are written in the Book of Life through faith in Jesus Christ, will not be sentenced to the second death (2:11). The second death is eternal separation from God (20:14). Being separated from God, the source of life, is death, torture, and hell. Those who have recovered that relationship through Christ will enjoy eternal life through the second resurrection. For believers, the last judgment is the beginning of new life with God. It is possible that those who are recorded in the book might commit more heinous sins than those in this world. However, the chosen will be saved by God's grace through Christ. This is the mystery of grace. No matter how well a person has conducted his life, if his name is not written in the Book of Life, everything he does is considered to be a rejection of God's grace. A lost opportunity here on earth means eternal separation from God.

22. The New Heaven and the New Earth

The promise for a new heaven and a new earth was made in the Old Testament. Isaiah prophesied long ago that God would create a new heaven and a new earth (Isa 65:17; 66:22). It will be created through the process of purifying the old, filthy, and abominable (2 Pet 3:10, 12). "A new heaven and a new earth" does not only mean the physical change of the earth. The order and law that ruled the earth will also be gone and a new spiritual law will dominate it. When a spiritual law rules the physical world unthinkable things will happen. The instances of the resurrected Jesus coming in through a locked door (John 20:19) or his disappearance in the middle of the conversation with his disciples (Luke 24:31) are little glimmers of the new law.

The creation of a new heaven and a new earth does not mean that the universe and the earth as we know it today will disappear. The argument that the physical environment will completely become extinct and everything will be created anew is called the "Theory of Extinction." However, the Bible teaches a "Theory of Regeneration," where broken things will be restored. **First, we know this to be true from the use of the word "new" in "a new heaven and a new earth."** This "new" is a translation of the Greek *kainos* and means "a change in quality or contents of the same substance." On the other hand, another "new" (*neos* in Greek) signifies "a new object and contents" (Matt 9:17). In this case, from the use of *kainos*, we know that the existing universe and the earth will be completely and beautifully re-created into a new heaven and a new earth.

Second, the Bible promises that God will recover the created world. Peter preached that God would restore everything (Acts 3:21). Paul talks of a time when the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom 8:21). All the creatures on the earth, not only believers, will experience a new heaven and a new earth.

Third, our lowly bodies will be transformed into a body like Jesus' glorious body (Phil 3:21). When Jesus was resurrected, his body was transformed. He told Thomas to touch his hands and side (John 20:27). Jesus' disciples recognized Jesus when they saw him. Believers, at the resurrection, do not become unrecognizable. However, they will be whole and complete, not affected by the physical laws of this world nor vulnerable to sickness or deformity. If the human body is to change and endure eternally, then their habitats will change as well.

One important change in the new heaven and new earth will be that the sea will no longer exist (20:1). Since the Old Testament times, the sea has symbolized darkness, a place where Satan resides (Ps 74:13) and people who stood against God (Psa 89:9). In Revelation, the sea is 1) a place for Satan's throng (12:18; 13:1); 2) countries of the world who persecute believers (12:18; 13:1; 17:1-6); 3) where the dead were located (20:13); and 4) where idol worshipping goods were being traded (18:10-18). **In other words, the disappearance of the sea will mean no more evil forces to oppose God; it does not necessarily mean the physical sea will not exist.**

23. The New Jerusalem

When the new heaven and new earth appear, the New Jerusalem will come down (21:2). The "New Jerusalem" is a church (21:3, 9). People who misconstrue the Bible contend that it is heaven bejeweled with treasures and pearls. The Bible precisely says that it is the church, the bride of the Lamb (21:9).

The reason a church is called the New Jerusalem is that it is contrasted against the filthy city of Babylon (18:2). The word "Jerusalem" means "city of peace." Peace is the state of perfect protection by God's presence (Ps 48:1-3). Those who are made pure by the persecution and trials of this earth

will live eternally under God's protection (21:3). Thus, there will be no more tears, death, mourning, crying, or pain (21:4). God's presence will bring peace to all of his churches.

The New Jerusalem is introduced first as the bride, the wife of the Lamb (21:9). This is in contrast to Babylon, the great prostitute who posed as the wife of Satan (17:1). Those who were in union with the world will be destroyed. Those who adorned themselves as a pure bride will be in eternal union with Christ.

The New Jerusalem is described as coming down from heaven for two reasons (21:2, 10). First, believers are caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:17; Rev 11:12). Believers who meet Jesus and come back down with him are the New Jerusalem. Second, only God can create a complete church. The New Jerusalem comes not only from heaven but also from God (21:2, 10). Revelation repeatedly shows that even while earthly churches are being persecuted on the earth, an already complete heavenly church is worshipping God (Rev 4-5, 7; 14:1-5; 15:2-4). A glorious union of the heavenly church and earthly churches at Jesus' second coming will occur at the new heaven and new earth.

The New Jerusalem is a city made up of the number 12. The 12 gates are made of 12 pearls, with 12 names of Israelite tribes and are guarded by 12 angels. The city is built on 12 foundations, each with the names of the 12 apostles. The city is 12,000 (12×1,000) stadia in length and is as wide and high as it is long. The wall is 144 (12×12) cubits thick. Everything in the New Jerusalem is made up of the number 12, which symbolizes God's people, the church. The 12 Israelite tribes stand for the Old Testament churches, and the 12 apostles stand for the New Testament churches. **The New Jerusalem symbolizes all the churches of the Old and New Testaments.**

With the same length, width, and height of 12,000 stadia, the city is a square. It dates back to the Old Testament where the most holy place of God's presence was a square (2 Chron 3:8). The high

priest entered the most holy place, wearing an Ephod with 12 jewels and the 12 names of the tribes (Exod 28:21). This was to show that the priest was the representative of God's people. In addition, the New Jerusalem has the 12 names of the tribes on the pearl gates and the 12 names of the apostles on the jewels of the foundation.

God wants to provide life, glory, and blessing to his holy and blameless people by being in union with them. Believers who enjoy God's life and grace will worship him. The place where God resides with his obedient people as the eternal King is the New Jerusalem. Come, Lord Jesus!