

The book of Revelation



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Estudo Bíblico Evangélico

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I thank the Lord, the One who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One who is and who was and who is to come, for all His help and revelation in writing this book and for showing me that His words are clear, true and faithful and for increasing my faith in His Omniscience and His righteousness.

I dedicate this book to the brothers in Christ who need to overcome the barriers of prejudice, lack of knowledge and fear in relation to this very important book, because without it the bible would be incomplete and we would lose the understanding of God's loving and eternal purposes for all of us.

“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” (Lk. 12: 40).

Index

Introduction 7	7
Autor and main theme of the book	8
The figures of speech	10
Theological lines of interpretation	12
Panoramic view of the book	13
First section – Chapters 1–3	15
Chapter 1 – The glorified Lord	16
Chapter 2	22
Ephesus	22
Smyrna	26
Pergamum	31
Thyatira	40
Chapter 3	47
Sardis	47
Philadelphia	56
Laodicea	61
Second section – Chapters 4–7	70
Chapter 4 – The vision of the throne	71
Chapter 5 – The scroll with seven seals	81
Chapter 6 – The Lamb opens the seals	84
Chapter 7 – The 144,000 sealed and the 7 th seal	90
Third section – Chapters 8-11	93
Chapter 8 – The 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd and 4 th Trumpets	95
Chapter 9 – The 5 th and 6 th Trumpets	98
Chapter 10 – John and the Little Scroll	104
Chapter 11 – The Two Witnesses	107
Fourth section – Chapters 12-14	115
Chapter 12 – The woman and the dragon	116
Chapter 13 – The two Beasts	123
Chapter 14 – The 144,000, the harvest and the vintage	129
Fifth section – Chapters 15-16	135
Chapter 15 – The song of the redeemed	136
Chapter 16 – The Plagues	139
Sixth section – Chapters 17-19	142
Chapter 17 – Babylon the Great and the ten horns	143
Chapter 18 – The fall of Babylon	149
Chapter 19 – The return of Christ	152
Jewish marriage in the time of John	153
Jewish marriage today	155
Alambamento	157
Lobolo	160
Jesus has already paid the dowry	160
Seventh section – Chapters 20-22	165
Chapter 20	166
The Millennium	167
Satan's imprisonment	168
The Reign of the Saints in Heaven	170

The Final Defeat – Armageddon	172
God’s Judgment	174
Chapter 21: 1-8 – The New Heavens and the New Earth	176
Chapter 21: 9-27 – The New Jerusalem	178
Chapter 22: 1-5 – The River of Life	184
Chapter 22: 6-21 – Final instructions	187

Notes:

- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995). The New International Version (NIV) will be used in brackets in some verses to make it easier for readers to understand.
- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [/] or parenthesis (), in *italics*, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- In some texts we’ll use ‘Lexicon Strong’s Concordance.’ Strong’s Concordance is a concordance of the King James Bible (KJV), created by the English theologian Dr. James Strong (1822-1894), along with a team of theologians, and first published in 1890. It is about a cross-reference between each word in the KJV and the original text in Hebrew or Greek. To each word in its original language is given an entry number for the biblical concordance of KJV. Lexicon means a dictionary of ancient classic languages. In order to interpret Lexicon Strong’s Concordance properly it’s necessary to take into account the cultural context of that time, because Strong’s numbers do not consider figures of speech, metaphors, idioms, common phrases, cultural references, references to historical events, or alternate meanings used by the writers of that time period to express their thoughts in their own language (source: Wikipedia.org).

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- J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2nd edition 1995.
- Reverendo Hernandes Dias Lopes – Primeira Igreja Presbiteriana de Vitória (‘Estudo em Apocalipse’ – Brasil [First Presbyterian Church of Vitoria (sermons about the book of Revelation)]).
- Wikipedia.org.
- Source for most images: Wikipedia; Christian movie: ‘The Apocalypse’ – The Bible Collection.
- Email: relacionamentosearaagape@gmail.com

Introduction

The book of Revelation in the bible has been misinterpreted for thousand years in History, not only by impious and scoffers of the Word but also by Christians of various theological lines, creating in people's minds various types of feelings and fantasies. So, they start to associate it with catastrophes, cataclysms, with the punishment of an implacable God, they start to feel uncertainty and fear of the future, they create an exaltation of eschatological characters described there as the Antichrist (Beast), the False Prophet and the Dragon, for example, as if they were the greatest power that determines the course of the planet or the history of humanity. Worse than that, in recent centuries there has been a lot of mystical influence on the interpretation of this book, creating confusion about various subjects and symbols placed there, even generating theories completely contrary to the other biblical accounts. One of the most controversial subjects is the 'millennium', the reign of Christ on earth over a period of a thousand years.

Another consequence of the misinterpretations and myths on the subject has led many people in the past and present to commit suicide for fear of the 'prophetic revelations' that were made in a completely distorted way. And these days, the subject of Revelation has become an obsession for many lay people and even theologians, trying to find secular characters who fit the role of those described there. In their eagerness to discover a prophetic map and to rummage through the eschatological contents too much, they get lost in relation to the real message of the book, which is the glory and sovereignty of God over all that was created, bringing justice and victory to His people and that, instead of being alarmed by the imminent expectation of Jesus' return, the most important thing is to be prepared for this event, cleaning their spiritual clothes and seeking holiness and separation from worldly things so as not to fall into Satan's seduction. Evil will never go unpunished and all the good we do for the sake of the kingdom of God has its rewards.

Many passages described by John can perfectly fit historical events of his time under the rule of pagan Rome, as in later events under Papal Rome of the Middle Ages and even later, in the Modern and Contemporary Era, where God allowed certain catastrophes by sending 'warning trumpets', giving the human being the chance of repentance, not being restricted only to the end times, with the corporeal manifestation of the eschatological Antichrist, since 'antichrist' and the antichrist worldly system were already common and present concepts at the time of John (1 Jn. 4: 3) and of Paul (2 The. 2: 7), especially in the person of unscrupulous rulers and religious leaders (1 Jn. 4: 3; 2 Jn. 7; 2 The. 2: 3-10).

Several characters in History have been considered as Antichrist: for Daniel, he was personified in the person of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Titus Vespasian was another emperor considered an eschatological antichrist figure, for he destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD quite violently and persecuted both Christians and Jews. For John, the Antichrist was Nero, for he supposedly burned Rome during the night of July 18th – 19th, 64 AD, and the fire lasted five to six days, and then blamed the Christians. Opinions on this event differ among ancient writers: Suetonius, Cassius Dio, Tacitus, and others. After Nero's death, a legend arose that he would rise again. Domitian was considered the second Nero (Among the many atrocities he committed, this emperor exiled John to the island of Patmos). In the 16th century, the Antichrist was the figure of the Pope, according to the reformer John Calvin. The phrase which is written in Latin letters on the Pope's miter, 'Vicarius

Filii Dei', i.e., 'Substitute of the Son of God' inspired this view among church reformers. Hitler and many other rulers in the Contemporary Era were also considered 'antichrists', for they instilled terror and death, persecuted the church and tried to destroy Christianity. But the Antichrist will certainly arise at the end of time, at the time of Jesus' second coming.

The Antichrist is called 'little horn' by Daniel (Dan. 7: 8); the 'abomination that causes desolation' or the desolating sacrilege' by Jesus (Matt. 24: 15; Mk. 13: 14); 'the man of lawlessness', 'the man doomed to destruction' or 'the lawless one' by Paul (2 The. 2: 3; 8-9). Only John in his epistle calls him Antichrist (1 Jn. 2: 18; 22; 1 Jn. 4: 3), and in Revelation calls him 'Beast' (more specifically referring to the beast rising out of the sea – Rev. 13: 1).

The term 'beast' comes from the Greek, 'thêrion' (dangerous animal), and is depicted by a large and ferocious animal that within the biblical symbolism represents a powerful kingdom, a great empire.

Autor and main theme of the book

The Greek word Apokálypsis means revelation, discovery.

The book of Revelation was written around 90–95 AD by John, the apostle of Jesus (Rev 1: 2), to the provinces of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey – Rev 1: 9-11), during the rule of Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD), while John was a prisoner on the island of Patmos (Rev 1: 9), a small island fourteen kilometers long by ten kilometers wide, in the eastern Aegean Sea (between Greece and Turkey today, where the seven churches were at that time), in order to warn the believers not to forsake their faith in Christ, assuring their victory by standing with God. John took charge of the Church in some towns in the Ephesus region. He died a natural death in Ephesus in 103 AD, when he was 94 years old, after being released from prison during the reign of Nerva, the Roman emperor who succeeded Domitian. A very old Latin tradition reports that he escaped without being burned, after being thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. This would have happened in the city of Rome. There is no proof of this.

The central theme of this book is the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 1: 7-8), and the author's goal is to bring us the certainty of God's total control over all events of humanity (Rev. 1: 16; 18; 20; Rev. 2: 1; Rev. 3: 7; Rev. 3: 14), always promising His children victory over evil (Rev. 2: 7; Rev 2: 11; Rev 2: 17; Rev. 2: 26-28; Rev. 2: 26-28; Rev. 2: 11 3:5; Rev. 3: 12; Rev. 3: 21) and the full restoration of your intimacy with God, as it has been since the creation of man. And that certainty brings faith and courage to overcome the trials of the Christian life. In the end, the saved will live in eternal blessedness with the Lord, free from the darkness and evils of this world (Rev. 7: 17; Rev. 21: 3-4).

The book of Revelation encourages us to seek holiness and to prepare ourselves for His second coming; it encourages us in times of suffering; encourages us to worship only the One who is on the throne, above any other spiritual force, and who holds control of the entire Universe, angels and demons and the history of mankind, and who will never be defeated by the forces of darkness, never was nor will ever be taken by surprise by anything or anyone. It is as if the bible would be incomplete without this book. It explains why everything written in the bible, especially God's plan of salvation for man.

We can notice some main points in it:

1) The certainty that Jesus totally controls His church.

- 2) Jesus totally controls History.
- 3) The church remains indestructible despite persecution from the world and the devil (Matt. 16: 18). Despite persecution and even death, the name of Jesus is glorified and the weapons of hell are frustrated.
- 4) The persecutors of the church will be overcome. Christ's enemies will face His judgment on the Last day and be damned, while His church will be glorified, will live in eternal blessedness.

The book of Revelation also shows us some peculiar characteristics:

- 1) It is centered on Jesus and His victorious project, not what on the devil can do.
- 2) It is an open book to those who believe, that is, it is the revelation of Jesus Christ to those who want to know a little more about His projects.
- 3) It is a book composed of many symbols; therefore, while He reveals God's purposes for His church, He hides it from the ungodly.
- 4) It is a book of prophecy that not only describes end-time events, but the victory of Jesus Christ and His Church in the end times. The focus is on Jesus' triumph over evil in a definitive way.
- 5) It has a complete blessing for the church, what theologians call 'The seven beatitudes of Revelation:'
 - Rev 1: 3: Blessed is the one who reads, hears and keeps the words of the prophecy.
 - Rev 14: 13: Blessed are those who die in the Lord, for they will rest from their labors.
 - Rev 16: 15: Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.
 - Rev 19: 9: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.
 - Rev 20: 6: Blessed and holy are those who take part in the 1st resurrection because the 2nd death has no power over them. They will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him a thousand years
 - Rev 22: 7: Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.
 - Rev 22: 14: Blessed are those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.
- 6) Revelation deals with things that will soon happen, and it means that they are not only chronologically close, but they will be sudden. God's timing is different from ours. Therefore, He exhorts to watchfulness.
- 7) It is the book of the 'throne of God.' This word appears many times, indicating that God remains on His throne and rules over all; He's in control.
- 8) He describes tribes, peoples, languages, and nations as being part of God's glorious program, not just Jews.
- 9) It is the climax of the bible, for it explains the entirety of God's plan, which began in Genesis and is completed in Revelation.

Jesus is "He who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev. 1: 4; Rev. 1: 8; Rev. 4: 8), which comforts us with the certainty that He was not a God of the past who made miracles and left it recorded in a storybook; nor is He a God who will only do justice in the future and sees injustices and abominations in the present without intervening, who stands idly by just watching His chosen ones suffer. But He is a God present in all ages of mankind, doing justice and judgment in one way or another,

avenging His people from the evil deeds of the devil and His servants in every generation.

Jesus said to the Sadducees who questioned Him about the resurrection, for they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead: “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob... He is God not of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22: 32; Mk. 12: 26-27; Acts 7: 32). The verb is in the present tense, “I am,” for just as God is eternal and cannot die, so His servants who believe in Him also have eternal life.

When we look at the persecution of Christians by pagan Rome, we can see the great number of emperors who died violent deaths or who faced wars against barbarian peoples or even overwhelming natural, political and economic disasters in their government. What are all these looting, wars, social unrest and natural disasters? Coincidence or the hand of God doing justice to His servants?

Great part of the book of Revelation can fit the circumstances experienced by the author at that time, the 1st century of the Christian era, but it can also describe a panorama of History from that time to the end of everything, that is, the space between the first and the second coming of Christ. There are other theologians who see the book from chapter 4 onwards from a futurist point of view, that is, relative to the end times, as a prophecy of what would happen after the letters to the seven churches (Rev. 1: 19; Rev. 4: 1) until the final establishment of God’s government, but how then could it be understood by readers at that time? Thus, we can imagine that the book combines a little of each of the elements. We can notice that John writes several times about Jesus as “He who is, and who was, and who is to come”, and this shows us that Revelation is a contemporary book, for all of us living today, and as well as a futuristic one, describing in more detail the end-time events, when God’s plan will be completed.

Figures of speech

Although many of the words used there must be interpreted in their literal sense, John also uses symbols and figures of speech, common to ancient readers, and very similar to the prophets of the OT (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Zechariah, and Joel) to refer to the great changes in religious, secular and governmental life before and during the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 6: 12-14 cf. Matt. 24: 29; Mk. 13: 24-25; Lk. 21: 25; Isa. 13: 10; Isa. 34: 4; Ezek. 32: 7; Jl. 2: 31).

As I said before, it is a book composed of many symbols; therefore, at the same time it reveals God’s purposes for His church, it hides it from the ungodly.

For example, the text of Rev. 6: 12-14: “When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place” may be compared with Isaiah (Isa. 13: 10): “For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.” This means a situation where everyone will be dark and disheartened, where men will have no hope because of the destruction they will experience. When they try to lift up the hope of the soul, they will soon be disappointed. Those being punished will think that the powers of heaven are against them. Their comfort and hope will fail. ‘The stars of the heavens will not give their light; the sun will be dark.’ – such

expressions are often employed by the prophets, to describe the great changes of governments.

In Isa. 34: 4 the prophet writes about Edom: “All the host of heaven shall rot away [NIV: All the stars of heavens will be dissolved], and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall wither like a leaf withering on a vine, or fruit withering on a fig tree.” This figure of speech is used to express the horror of this calamity, as if the heavens themselves, the sun, moon, and stars were affected by it (cf. Isa. 13: 10). The heavens will be rolled up like a scroll. When a scroll (book) was rolled up, no one could read any more from it; that is, God had nothing more to say or reveal on that subject. The above description may mean the total removal and abolition of all dignities and offices, supreme and subordinate, civil and ecclesiastical, in the whole jurisdiction of a nation. The stars represent princes and magistrates, advisors and important government representatives. The expression ‘the host of heaven’ not only represents the heavenly hosts of God or the stars, but the armies of nations to which He addresses this word of judgment. ‘His sword is drunk’ (Isa. 34: 5: “When my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens, lo, it will descend upon Edom, upon the people I have doomed to judgment.”) – it means the word decreed by God Himself, ready to act in wrath (drunk with His wrath).

The same metaphor is used in Revelation when it comes to describing God’s calamities against the forces of darkness and the haughtiness of men. This was a kind of language much understood by the Jews; therefore, the apostle John (first century AD) made use of it to describe apocalyptic events. Although we cannot set aside their literal interpretation, we can notice that the above passage (Rev. 6: 12-14) is still inserted in the section on seals, not trumpets and plagues, and later we will see the difference between them.

John also reports God’s judgments on the wicked with the same symbols as in the book of Exodus regarding the ten plagues of Egypt.

Like Isaiah, John’s prophecies do not necessarily have a temporal sequence, but parallel and progressive sections; in other words, he describes in different ways the human situations, good and evil, and the actions of God’s judgment, and he always returns to report the events that will take place at the second coming of Christ.

Several times he speaks of the victory of the saints and of God and His punishments over evil, when the eschatological characters are more precisely identified, being punished on the occasion of the 2nd coming of Christ until the final defeat of the devil, his angels and his followers in God’s final judgment and ending with a new life for the redeemed, eternal life with God in the heavenly paradise, where the New Jerusalem appears to be a symbolic language of that eternal bliss. Although compared to a city, it symbolizes the church of Christ, redeemed and glorified. It is no longer a physical creation as we know it today, but a new creation, where our glorified body will not be flesh and blood, nor just spirit, but a different matter (just like the glorified body of Jesus), as we can even imagine that may this new cosmic order (‘new heavens and new earth’) be again the glory of God in eternity, before the creation of a universe of time and matter. All of this is just conjecture, since the book of Revelation is full of figures of speech, perhaps more understandable to the readers at that time. In other words, in this passage of Revelation 21, we move from chronological time to eternity. Sin, death, and all forces antagonistic to God were forever annihilated. What we have in this last section is a description of the eternal home of the redeemed in Christ.

Theological lines of interpretation

‘Eschatology’ is a word that derives from two Greek roots: ‘eschatos’ (ἔσχατος), which means ‘last’; and ‘logy’ (λογία), which means ‘study’, therefore, the study of ‘things of the end.’ In a broad sense, the word eschatology, or the expression ‘things of the end’ can be applied to the ultimate fate of individual souls and the entire created order, based primarily on the biblical texts of the Old and New Testaments.

- Preterism is a Christian eschatological view that interprets some or all prophecies of the Bible as events which have already happened. This school of thought interprets the Book of Daniel as referring to events that happened from the 7th century BC until the 1st century AD, while seeing the prophecies of the Book of Revelation as events that happened in the 1st century AD. Preterism claims that Ancient Israel finds its continuation or fulfillment in the Christian church at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, or else, with the Papal era that followed.

The book of Revelation is the book of the bible most connected to the end times. Because of different interpretations regarding the chapter of Rev. 20: 1-6, in particular verse 2 (which speaks of the thousand years of Satan’s imprisonment), the whole book ended up being interpreted differently by the various theological lines:

- Dispensational premillennialism – believes that the second coming of Jesus Christ will be an event in the physical world, involving the pre-tribulation rapture (a first secret rapture, before the Great Tribulation) and a seven-year period (The Great Tribulation), and after it the battle of Armageddon (i.e. a visible second coming of Christ) will take place; it also believes in two resurrections and the establishment of Christ Millennial Kingdom on Earth, a literal golden age of a thousand years of peace where He reigns here physically with His saints, materially fulfilling the numerous OT prophecies for the Jews (2 Sam. 7: 12-16; Ps. 2: 1-12; Isa. 11: 6-12; Isa. 24: 23; Hos. 3: 4-5; Jl. 3: 9-21; Am. 9: 11-15; Mic. 4: 1-8; Zeph. 3: 14-20; Zech. 14: 1-11). This theological line also believes that Israel is separated from the Gentile church and that, after the rapture of the Gentile church, God will turn His attention to Israel, that is, God’s way of dealing with the First Covenant elect will be different from the Gentiles. In other words, this line believes that the Church did not replace Israel in God’s program and His promises to Israel were not transferred to the Gentile Church, the Church of Christ, the Israel of God. They will be fulfilled in this period of a thousand years.

- Historical premillennialism – unlike Dispensational premillennialism, this line believes that the second coming will not occur in two turns (a secret church rapture and then a visible one), does not believe in two resurrections, but believes that when Jesus returns, He will establish a physical reign of thousand years on earth, based on a literal interpretation of Rev. 20: 1-6.

- Postmillennialism – emerged in the 17th-19th centuries and understands the reference to the thousand-year period only as the symbol of a golden age of justice and spiritual prosperity that would be started in by the spread of the gospel in the present church age and would be completed with the return of Christ. In other words, the world will gradually be evangelized by Christ until all nations surrender to Him. References to Christ’s reign on earth primarily describe His spiritual reign in the hearts of believers in the Church. But this theory collapsed in the 20th century with the two world wars, the liberal movement in the churches of Europe and America, and the growing apostasy of the world.

- Amillennialism: does not deny the existence of the millennium, but interprets it symbolically, not literally. The millennium comprises the time from the 1st to the 2nd coming of Christ, which is unique and visible. When He returns, History ceases, the dead rise, the living are caught up and the final judgment comes on the scene, then there will be new heavens and new earth and the wicked will go to eternal damnation. The OT millennium prophecies are now being spiritually fulfilled in the church (both on earth, for those who are alive, and in heaven, in relation to the souls of the saints who have died physically).

Despite the different views above there are immutable doctrines: Jesus will return, the dead will rise, there will be a final judgment, there is eternal blessedness for the saved and eternal damnation for the wicked (hell).

Let's understand one thing:

'Millennium' was a conception created by Jewish scholars in the post-exilic and Intertestamental Period to endorse a belief and hope for redemption and regeneration of Israel in a physical and overly material way, for they misinterpreted the words of the prophets, and they did not expect that their Messiah would come differently, so they did not believe in Him. Even because the prophets of God never used the word Messiah (Mashiach – mâshiyach – משיח) to refer to the spiritual Savior of Israel. This word is only clearly written, in reference to Jesus, in the book of Daniel (Dan. 9: 25-26 – 'The Anointed One' in NIV, or 'an anointed one' in NRSV), when an angel announces to the prophet that the Messiah would arise and be killed sixty-two prophetic weeks after the rebuilding of Jerusalem, before the city and temple were again destroyed (which happened in 70 AD by the Romans).

For our study, I will use the amillennial interpretation, for it seems to be more compatible with biblical accounts, with Paul's letters and general letters, including the prophecies of Jesus in the gospels. The NT teaches that judgment is universal and will immediately follow Christ's second coming. He will come and sit on His throne of glory and will judge the nations, not a thousand years later, but at His second coming (Matt. 24: 29-31; Matt. 25: 31-34; Matt. 16: 27). In this way, when Jesus comes (Matt. 25: 31; Matt. 16: 27; Matt. 19: 28), everything is consummated and His kingdom is established (the final judgment shortly after the coming of Christ).

Panoramic view of the book

The book of Revelation can practically be divided into two parts:

Chapters 1–11 report the world struggling against the church and the judgments of God in answer to the prayers of the saints.

Chapters 12–22 describe a more relentless persecution against the Lord's church, undisguised, because Satan (the dragon) appears with his allies: the beast out of the sea (the Antichrist), the beast out of the earth (the false prophet), and the Babylon (the great whore).

Furthermore, the amillennial interpretation divides Revelation into several sections, so when we read carefully, we notice a kind of 'repetition' of words and subjects. In other words, the book does not follow a chronological line, but is divided into several parallel and progressive sections embedded in the period between the first and second coming of Christ, so we have the feeling that the book goes back and forth, repeats scenes. And the eschatological characters are identified more precisely, being punished on the occasion of the second coming of Christ until the final defeat of the devil, his angels and his followers in the final judgment of God.

The sections are:

1) Chapters 1-3 – John sees the risen Lord, the seven lampstands, and sends messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor, rebuking those churches where they had failed and encouraging them to continue in Christian service.

2) Chapters 4-7 – John reports the visions of the throne, the visions of God and the Lamb (Rev. 4: 1-11 – Rev. 5: 1-14), and afterwards we read about the seven seals (Rev. 6: 1-17; Rev. 8: 1). Between the sixth (Rev. 6: 12-17) and the seventh seal there is an intermission (Rev. 7: 1-17 – Rev. 8: 1), a period of preparation and prelude to the seven trumpets, and a vision follows the each of them (Rev. 8: 2-13 – Rev. 9: 1-21; Rev. 11: 15-19).

3) Chapters 8-11 – after the seven seals come the seven trumpets, and a vision follows each one (Rev. 8: 2-13 – Rev. 9: 1-21; Rev. 11: 15-19). Between the sixth and seventh trumpets (Rev. 10: 1-11 – Rev. 11: 15-19) there is another intermission. In chapter 10 John speaks of the angels and the seven thunders and the little scroll that is given for him to eat. In chapter 11 he refers to the two witnesses.

4) Chapters 12-14 – John describes several wonders in heaven: a woman who gives birth to a son, a male child (Rev. 12: 1), and who suffers opposition from Satan (Rev. 12: 1-17); beasts that oppose God (Rev. 13: 1-18), the Lamb on Mount Zion, along with His followers (Rev. 14: 1-5). Then (Rev. 14: 6-20) angels appear whose voices announce to men the judgments of God, ending with the harvest and the vintage.

5) Chapters 15-16 – Show John's vision of the redeemed singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15: 1-4) and the seven plagues (the bowls filled with of God's wrath) that are being poured out on the earth (Rev. 16: 1-21). There is no interlude between the plagues; they are one after the other. The end of the 6th plague refers to the final battle, Armageddon, the moment of the rapture of the church and the defeat of the kings and all who worshiped the beast, as well as the Antichrist and the false prophet.

6) Chapters 17-19 – this section talks about the fall of the beast (Antichrist) and the false prophet; judgments are also pronounced against the woman dressed in scarlet (the prostitute), which is another figure of speech used of Babylon (Rev. 17: 1 – Rev. 18: 1-24), and there is great joy in heaven because of her downfall (Rev. 19: 1-10). Christ visibly returns to the battle of Armageddon, riding His white horse and followed by the armies of heaven (Rev. 19: 11-21).

7) Chapters 20-22 – describes the scene of the reign of souls (millennium), Satan's imprisonment and the final judgment (lake of fire); the new heavens and the new earth, and the final admonitions and promises (Rev. 20: 1 – Rev. 22: 21).

First section – Chapters 1–3



The glorified Lord | The seven lampstands |
Order to write the letters to the 7 churches

First section – Chapters 1–3

John sees Jesus glorified in the midst of the seven lampstands, representing the seven churches of Asia Minor, and sends messages to them, rebuking them where they have failed and encouraging them to continue in Christian service. The central vision of the book is: The Lord will come visibly, a second time, but now to judge (Rev. 1: 7-8).

Chapter 1 –

- Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter that makes clear its author, how it was written and what its purpose is. The central vision of the book is: The Lord will come a second time, visibly, to judge (Rev. 1: 7-8). And all His children must be prepared for His coming.

- Rev. 1: 1-3: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.”

The author is John, one of the twelve apostles who walked with Jesus during His ministry, and in v. 1 he makes it clear that everything he wrote was by revelation of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the revelations was to show God’s servants the things that would soon happen so that they would be prepared for them.

- Rev. 1: 4-6: “John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father (cf. Rev. 5: 10), to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

John greets the churches in the name of Jesus Christ. Here he gives several indications that it is about Jesus, the Son of God, the same God who visited Moses in the burning bush and told him His name: “I am.” Therefore, John wrote: “from him who is and who was and who is to come.” The Trinity is explicit. He writes to the churches with this greeting, which comes from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and says that God loves His children and has given them authority in His name to act on earth (‘kingdom, priests’). In Rev. 4: 5b it is written: “and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God.” This means the fullness of the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 11:2).

- Rev. 1: 7-8: “Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him (cf. Zech. 12: 10); and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (cf. Heb. 13: 8; Rev. 4: 8b).

The central vision of the book is written here: The Lord will come to judge. The coming is visible, unexpected and victorious (‘every eye will see him’). This is a key

point in every section: the second coming of Jesus to judge the world. So, at the end of each letter he describes the rewards to the winners.

• Rev. 1: 9-11: “I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.’”



John was a prisoner on the island of Patmos, a small island fourteen kilometers long and ten kilometers wide in the eastern Aegean Sea (between Greece and Turkey today, where the seven churches were at that time), and he was sent there by Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD) because of his preaching, witnessing about Jesus. It was customary for Roman emperors to consider themselves gods, and that’s why God emphatically condemned imperial worship in the Epistles and Revelation. Domitian (among other emperors) made himself a god. Therefore, John’s preaching was an affront to the emperor.

Patmos was a coal mining island, where criminals and political prisoners were sent; they lost everything and were subjected to forced labor.

‘On the Lord’s day’ may mean a day when he was worshiping God or refer to a Sunday (‘the Lord’s Day’), when he was in spirit, in contact with the throne of God, and heard a loud voice like a trumpet (i.e., a sovereign, heavenly, glorious voice) giving him an order to write down all the visions he received from then on and to send to the seven churches in Asia over which he had jurisdiction as elder, especially Ephesus.

The purpose of the letters was to rebuke them where they had failed and to encourage them to continue in Christian service. The letters were also intended to warn believers not to abandon faith in Christ, assuring their victory by standing on God’s side.



Then John sees Jesus glorified in the midst of the seven lampstands, representing the seven churches of Asia Minor:

- Rev. 1: 12-20: “Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.’”



It's interesting to notice that the bible says that the Lord is with the seven stars in His right hand. However, He is among the seven golden lampstands. 'Stars' or 'the angels' of the seven churches refer to the leaders of them. Angel, in Hebrew, means 'messenger', a name used to refer to the prophets too.

We must also pay attention to what is written: "In his right hand he held seven stars", i.e., the right hand is a symbol of honor, power, authority, blessing, might and privilege, and this means that it is the Lord who holds the leadership of the Church under His authority. He holds the power.

So, we can say that the seven stars correspond to the human part in the church, held by the power of God and under His government (Rev. 1: 16: "In his right hand he held seven stars"), but it was not alone. The seven spirits of God who are before His throne, that is, the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit, the seven anointings were poured out by Him on the human part of the church to complete it, to supply what it lacked.

So, Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5: 14-16).

His churches and their leaders within them (the human part of the church) were made to be light, to shine, but they could only do so in the strength of the Holy Spirit (the divine part that strengthened them).

Jesus was walking in the midst of the lampstands, i.e., of His church, not only to inspect it or to know its spiritual state, but to pour out on each one of them a portion of His seven Spirits, in order to strengthen them for the future combats. However, that would depend on the response of each church to His guidance. In other words, the lampstands represented the seven churches of Asia Minor, but they also symbolized the Holy Spirit distributed among them, to bear witness to Christ among the Gentile nations in which they were inserted.

The Spirit of God has always been represented as the light present in God's elect. In the Old Covenant the lampstand with seven lamps given to Moses (Ex. 25: 31-40; Ex. 37: 17-24; Num. 8: 1-4; Heb. 9: 1-10) represented the Spirit of God among the people of Israel. Here in Revelation, it represented the presence of the Holy Spirit with power, anointing and revival among the church of Jesus Christ, composed mostly of Gentile converts. So, Jesus told some of them that if they didn't heed His words, He would remove the lampstand from there. It is not simply a matter of closing the doors of the church, but of removing the spiritual force that placed them in those places like a flame of light in the darkness of the world. Their weakened and defeated members would scatter; would no longer be able to support the churches.

When He says in v. 19, 'Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this', this is not limited to the past, the present or the future. The book would be necessary for all times. In that sense, as a message for today, seven represents the entirety of the church of Christ on earth at all times. John's letters to the seven churches of Asia have nothing to do with periods in History, as some consider.

When John describes the glorified body of Jesus, he notices some particularities:

"... I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held

seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.'" (Rev. 1: 13-18).

1) v. 13 – "one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest" (cf. Dan. 7: 13) symbolizes that Jesus is dressed as a high priest.

2) v. 14 – "His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow" – a description very similar to that of Daniel (Dan. 7: 9), when spoke of the 'Ancient of Days.' This figure of speech reflects the wisdom and eternity of Jesus, for He is God.

3) v. 14 – "his eyes were like a flame of fire" (cf. Rev. 19: 12) – indicates: omniscience. He scrutinizes, knows what is hidden (cf. Dan. 2: 22).

4) v. 15 – "His feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace" – much radiance, signifying His omnipotence and His overwhelming power over enemies.

5) v. 15 – "and his voice was like the sound of many waters" (cf. Ps. 29: 3-5; 7) – sovereign voice, powerful voice, of judgment. The only one who judges is God.

6) v. 16 – "In his right hand he held seven stars" – the hand that rules. He holds the power. The Lord holds the leadership of the Church under His authority.

7) v. 16 – "and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword" (cf. Rev. 19: 15). That sword is His word of judgment.

8) v. 16 – "and his face was like the sun shining with full force" – Jesus no longer shows himself here as the suffering and humiliated man, but the glorified Christ whose face shines like the sun. His strength, glory and holiness are reflected in this image.

9) v. 17b-18 – "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades." – Not only is He alive, He is in control of everything, for He begins and ends what He started. It all began with Him, and everything will be finished by Him (Col. 1: 15-18; Jn. 1: 1-3). He is the one who has complete victory over death and over him who has power over it, namely, Satan ("I have the keys of Death and of Hades"). Key is a symbol of power and authority, usually exercised through the Word of God (Matt. 16: 19). Jesus has authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28: 18).

As I said before, Jesus was walking in the midst of the lampstands, i.e., of His church, not only to inspect it or to know its spiritual state, but to pour out on each one of them a portion of His seven Spirits, in order to strengthen them for the future combats. However, in these letters we can see that He inspected them meticulously and made His appreciation of each one, commending their qualities and rebuking them in the weak points, in what displeased Him. This already confirms that Jesus does not see as we see, but with other eyes. We may note that He commended two churches, for in His eyes they were found to be upright, blameless: Smyrna and Philadelphia. To Laodicea He only made reproof, for no good was found in it. And for four others, there were positives and negatives points: Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis.

Jesus also walks in the midst of the church to encourage, correct, exhort, comfort, console and bring promises to the winners.

With that, we can also notice in this book, that before John was caught up to the throne of God and began to see visions of seals, trumpets and plagues, the Lord gave him letters to write to the Christian churches. This means that before God sends

judgment into the world, He visits the church with His judgment to correct it. His judgment begins with the church (cf. 1 Pet. 4: 17).

Chapter 2 –



• Rev. 2: 1-7 – Letter to the Church in Ephesus

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands: ‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.’”

Before talking about the church in Ephesus, it is important to note that Jesus presents Himself to each church in a certain way, that is, as the one who is able to locate exactly their error and bring the appropriate solution to each case. And so, He affirms each of His characteristics seen by John in chapter 1. Here it is written: “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.” Jesus reaffirms that He walks in the midst of His church (lampstands) to investigate what is happening to it and is the one who holds all its power, members and leaders.

Ephesus means desirable. It was a great commercial, cultural and religious center of Asia, which currently corresponds to Turkey. The city had an excellent port, which served as an export center and as a natural stopover for travelers to the Empire’s capital, Rome. It is now uninhabited and in ruins; remains excavated and is probably the largest and most impressive ruin in Asia Minor. The main part of the city had a theater, public baths, libraries, a market, and marble-paved streets. The initial settlement of Anatolia (present-day Turkey), where Ephesus was located in the 1st century, began many centuries ago, but was expanded in the 12th century BC by the

Ionic settlers (Greeks). The ancient goddess of Ephesus acquired the name Artemis, but retained her primitive characteristics of fertility (hence always represented as a figure endowed with many breasts). The goddess Artemis (in Greek) was also the goddess of the moon and hunting.

In 560 BC, Ephesus was conquered by Croesus (king of Lydia); but in 547 BC it passed into the hands of the Persians. In 365 BC the temple of Diana suffered a great fire, but it was rebuilt. It was destroyed by the Goths in 260 AD.

The city did not have a great history until 133 BC, when it became part of the kingdom of Pergamum, which Attalus III ended up handing over to Rome. Pergamum continued to be the capital of the Roman Province of Asia, but Ephesus also continued to be the most important city with a population of about 333,000.

There, the most common religious practice was the cult of Artemis (in Greek), also known as Diana by the Romans, the Latin name for the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 7: 18; Jer. 44: 17; 18; 19; 25) or Isis (by the Egyptians; also called Astarte or Asherah by the Phoenicians).

There was a large Jewish colony in Ephesus, and Jews enjoyed a privileged position during the early Empire. Christianity probably reached Ephesus through Aquila and Priscilla in 52 AD, when Paul made a brief visit to that city on his second missionary journey (Acts 18: 18-19), leaving them there. In Acts 19: 10, on his 3rd missionary journey, Paul spent two years teaching in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (an inhabitant of Ephesus, probably a rhetorician), and it was there that the turmoil between Paul, Demetrius and the Greek people of the city arose (Acts 19: 23-40). The miracles that God performed through them made an impact on idolatrous people, causing them to confess their sins and publicly denounce their works; and those who practiced magical arts gathered their books and burned them in the public square, the word of the Lord spread and grew in Asia (Acts 19: 18-20). Paul sent Timothy to lead the church in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1: 3) and wrote to them during his imprisonment in Rome, telling them about faith and love. Soon after, the apostle John exercised jurisdiction there over the seven main churches of Asia Minor.

But after 40 years the initial generation was no longer in the leadership of the church. Thus, the church suffered the influence of many false teaching and was disturbed by many false teachers; not to mention Domitian, who was the Emperor at that time and harshly persecuted the Christians. Thus, the Early Church in Ephesus, under many pagan influences and almost without the spiritual strength to break with the old Greek habits, was gradually losing its 'first love', i.e., the initial flame of the revival was cooling down.

When John wrote his letter to Ephesus by God's order he said that the Lord recognized in them the work, perseverance, their opposition to Nicolaitans, their justice in relation to leadership in the church (they have tested those who claim to be apostles but were not, and have found them to be false), their endurance in the face of persecution and trials; however, He asked of His people the sincere repentance and the return to the revival, otherwise He would remove the lampstand, that is, the anointing of the Holy Spirit; in other words, His very presence among them.

The term "Nicolaitans" has controversial origin. It is assumed that Nicholas of Antioch (Acts 6: 5 – chosen in the beginning of the Church as a deacon), presumably, would have given his name to a group inside the church that tried to get commitment to paganism in order to allow Christians to participate without embarrassment in some social and religious activities of the pagan society in which they were. The guidance of the sect would be similar to that of Balaam the corrupter of Israel in the Old Testament (Numbers chapters 22, 23 and 24): to eat things sacrificed to idols and

to commit fornication or sexual laxity in the Church. So, God mentions not only His disapproval about this practice, as He praises the church of Ephesus for having opposed the sect as well.

In short: Ephesus valued the true doctrine, did not tolerate the sin of its members, endured adversity, had work and perseverance, but there was no more love for Jesus in what they did; the church has lost its love for its Redeemer. And God told them to repent and do the works it did at first, otherwise, He would remove the lampstand from there. The church defended the intellectual truth of doctrine, but without association with practical life; there was no more piety in what it did. It was barren. Jesus only asked His children to associate the doctrine with love, so He said: “Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first”, that is, ‘remember the past, where you had more intimacy with me and where you started to cool down.’ “Do the works you did at first” meant: not to discourage and to go back in the direction of restoration.

Besides the divine exhortation to the return to the Christian practices of the beginning, He says that the prize for those who managed to overcome this type of situation that was occurring in the community would be to eat from the tree of life that is in the Paradise of God, symbolizing not only the eternal life, but also in the present, the truth of Jesus in contrast to the false teaching and idolatry, legalism, perfectionism and religiosity. Acting the right way, Ephesus would be desirable for Him again.

The church in Ephesus, however, did not change its attitude, could not revive the fervor of the beginning and ceased to exist.

Our motivation for work must be the love of Jesus. Otherwise, doctrinal orthodoxy is worth nothing. Excessive rationality and desire to serve God with rigidity and perfectionism block emotions, and logically love, cool the flame of the Spirit, bring spiritual death.

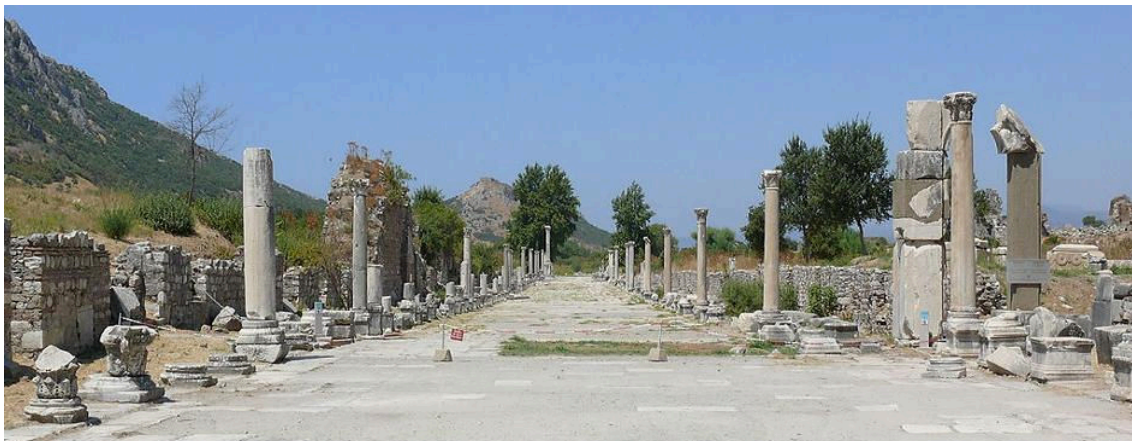


Image above:

- Street scene at the archeological excavations at Ephesus. Ephesus (Ancient Greek "Ἐφεσος, Turkish Efes) was an ancient Greek city on the west coast of Anatolia, near present-day Selçuk, two kilometers northeast of the ancient city of Ephesus, in the Izmir Province. Photo: Ad Meskens. Wikipedia.



• Façade of the Celsus library, in Ephesus, near Selçuk, west Turkey. Photo: Benh LIEU SONG. Wikipedia.



• Artemis Statue, 1st century AD, retrieved from the temple of the goddess in Ephesus. Today it is in Ephesus Archaeological Museum. Photo: Metuboy. Wikipedia.

How can we bring this to our days?

Unfortunately, many churches begin under the spiritual revival, but along their walk they let many things undermine the flame of the 'first love.' Both members and leaders transform the church service and the prayers in a sad routine, ceasing the true communion with the Holy Spirit. Although opposing the unclean practices mixed with the gospel, enduring the tests and oppositions patiently and bearing up, doing social work and putting to the test the false teachers and the false prophets, although striving to remain in the original doctrine, seeking holiness and not getting involved with the fads of the world, they can no longer resume their original purity, because the love that moved their hearts to do the work was defiled by external influences, for the fear of developing spiritually and experiencing something new from God; or by the perfectionism of the flesh, wanting to please God by their own strength; or else, by religiosity and the willingness to walk in righteousness and apply God's Word to the letter. Perhaps for fear of the spiritual manifestations of the Holy Spirit, they were taken for rationality, without allowing Him to touch hearts deeply; Or because excessive struggle and resistance to evil ended up taking away motivation and led to accommodation. Afraid to change, to recycle and renew the anointing; Afraid of falling into the sinful and licentious extremity, the church opts for stagnation and orthodoxy. Whatever the pretext, God is not pleased with the sad religious routine that prevents His Spirit from acting. In fact, radicalism is an impediment to the novelties of God and also does not take the community anywhere. However, what God means is that it is no use walking through the extremisms of morality, when the heart no longer feels gladness in being, in fact, in the presence of the Lord.

Activism of flesh gives a false impression of movement, productivity, correct exercise of spirituality, thinking that it pleases God.

Anything that occupies the place of Jesus in our lives is a reason to extinguish the flame of the 'first love' in the hearts, so He directs His people to repent of what made them cool down spiritually, otherwise, the anointing can be removed from among that community.

In Ephesus, the prize for those who resisted this kind of temptation was to eat from the tree of life that was in the paradise of God. In Eden, Adam and Eve were permitted to eat from the fruit of the tree of life, in contrast to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which was forbidden to them. This means that those who turn to the sound practices of the gospel, such as seeking the Lord with righteous heart, abandoning completely sin and the old works of the flesh, and loving their fellow man, but let Him lead things and not their own ego, come to have a renewed intimacy with the 'tree of life', which is Jesus; thus, they resume the learning of the Word based on divine truth in a practical way, motivated and full of life.

This makes us think of many things we are doing and need to be changed so that the flame of 'first love' can be lit once again. Everything has a basic ingredient that is the simplicity of the gospel that there was at the beginning of the Early Church, accepting the things of God like children do. Ephesus needed to remember everything that it felt when the church began the work of God, when its members experienced the true revival; they should resume this posture again.

• [Rev. 2: 8-11 – letter to the Church in Smyrna](#)

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life: ‘I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they

are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.”

Smyrna means myrrh or bitterness, which reminds us the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; maybe because of this it is written in verse 8, “These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life.” Smyrna was a city of the Roman province of Asia at the beach in the Aegean Sea, within the current Asiatic Turkey, like other churches described in these letters of John. It was fifty-five kilometers north of Ephesus. It was one of the most prosperous cities in Asia, the most beautiful and the second after Ephesus, and loyal ally of Rome, with great splendor and magnificence of its public buildings. It had helped Rome even before it was an empire; therefore, it was the biggest center of emperor worship. The temple of Tiberius Caesar (14-37 AD) was in Smyrna. Currently, it is a city in Turkey called Izmir.

The city was important because of its commerce, because it had a natural port with an old trade route that crosses the Valley of Hermus River, and its interior was very fertile. It supported athletic games and had a large sports center. In addition, it was important because of its cultural influence, for it had the highest concentration of libraries, theaters, palaces and luxurious buildings, bold and pompous, rich and beautiful architecture. There was at the place of Smyrna a Greek colony from very ancient times, perhaps around 1000 BC, but it was captured and destroyed by the Lydians in the late 7th century BC; it was re-founded in its present location by Philip Lysimachus (360-281 BC), one of the four generals of Alexander the Great, in the early 3rd century BC. From there it developed into one of the most prosperous cities in Asia Minor. Many Jews were concentrated there and strongly opposed to the Christian church. Here, the presbyter Polycarp, a disciple of John, was martyred in AD 155, at the age of 86, forced to deny Jesus. And they threatened him with wild beasts and, then, burned at the stake. He was burned alive, and then stabbed when the fire failed to consume his body, but died singing.

No one knows who founded the Christian church there, whether it was Paul (Acts 19: 10) after being in Ephesus. What is known is that it was a church that was going through tribulation, adverse circumstances, and a hostile and dangerous environment. For the most part, it was composed of slaves; therefore, even deprived of their own freedom, not only goods; and the free Christians who were there had their goods confiscated. They were taken to Roman prisons and many died there of hunger, infections and despair.

Around 303 AD, there was Diocletian Persecution (284-305 AD) or ‘Great Persecution.’ It was the last and perhaps the bloodiest persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, also known as ‘the age of martyrs.’ Diocletian and his colleagues Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius Chlorus issued a series of edicts requiring Christians to comply with the traditional religious practices of the Roman Empire, namely, performing sacrifices to their deities. The first imperial edict of 303 AD ordered the general destruction of churches, objects of Christian worship (burning Christian books and their meeting places), and the dismissal of officials who were proselytes of the new religion; a second edict ordered the general imprisonment of the clergy (the leaders of the Christian church were threatened and forced to worship the gods of Rome). A third edict provided for the release of Christians in case of apostasy, and the fourth and last edict in 304 AD, ordered the entire population of the empire to sacrifice to the gods on penalty of death or forced labor in mines. Christians went to the quarries and got sick there. Diocletian’s wife and daughter,

who were Christians, also suffered persecution, but were killed later, under Licinius (308-324 AD). They were beheaded, and their bodies were thrown into the sea.

Jesus now introduces Himself to the church in Smyrna saying: “These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life.” Because there the citizens gave priority to the emperor, Jesus told the oppressed church that in Him everything makes sense; He was the center, not Caesar. “Who was dead and came to life” – the Lord told this because if the church was facing persecution and martyrdom His children should know that He is the conqueror of death, He died and won. It was a word of encouragement for the church. They would not feel alone in passing through death; He would be with them. It would not be by human daring, but by divine strength. From Polycarp (who died in 155 AD, during the reign of Antoninus Pius) until Diocletian and the Great Persecution (303 AD) there were almost 150 years of persecution of Christians, especially those in Smyrna; hence the word of the Lord to this church.

The church in Smyrna faced the opposition on the part of the Jews, as well as the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 2: 9; Rev. 3: 9). They allied with Rome to destroy the Christians. Therefore, the Smyrna believers would be put to the test. Thus, we can see that the Lord knew the tribulation of His church, its poverty in confrontation with material wealth and the opposition of the Jews who blasphemed against the true teaching, because they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. But for Jesus, they were spiritually rich.

Jesus did not need to rebuke this church. He knew what it was going through (“I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”).

“I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich” – Jesus saw that they were rich despite what they lacked materially.

“I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” – it took at least ten people to start a synagogue. It is not known, exactly, if these Jews who persecuted them gathered in a synagogue, but in any case, they considered themselves faithful to God and thought that they were the ones who were right for following the law and, therefore, would be saved. But Jesus called them the synagogue of Satan because they gathered to persecute Christians. “A person is a Jew who is one inwardly” (Rom. 2: 29), not by the law but by faith.

“Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison” – Satan is an agent that activates forces; he was the instrument to mobilize the Roman emperors against the church.

Symbolically, God’s children would have to carry their cross, that is, to experience the physical death because of their loyalty to the Lord, but they were also being comforted with the promise of the resurrection on the Last Day. The test would be as bitter as myrrh, but it would make them overcome the confusions and blasphemies there. Those who resisted until the end would be saved and would receive the crown of life, symbol of victory for the ones who ran, as Paul says, to achieve the incorruptible crown.

Spiritually speaking, they would not see the harm of second death, that is, they would attain salvation. The first death was the sin of Adam (Rom. 5: 12; 14; 17); the second death, symbolized by the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14), means the ultimate separation from God for those who abandon Christ for the sake of Satan (eternal death). The bible speaks of a tribulation of ten days that need not necessarily be this chronological time, but a symbol of fidelity, of something complete, but brief;

the first number of a major beginning, which is the biblical meaning of number ten. Thus, the church of Smyrna would be put to test in its covenant and in its fidelity to Christ.

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” means, be faithful even if it costs your life. This church did not back down in the face of poverty, persecution or death.

The word ‘crown’ here in Greek is *stephanos* (στέφανος – Strong #4735), which means ‘crown, garland, honor, glory’, more specifically, a chaplet (as a badge of royalty, a prize in the public games or a symbol of honor generally; but more conspicuous and elaborate than the simple fillet, diadem). This crown that John is talking about here was like those that people received at special times, like the crown given to victors at games (1 Cor. 9: 25; 2 Tim. 2: 5). The Christian life is like an athlete’s race. “I have finished the race,” Paul said (2 Tim. 4: 7). ‘Stephanos’ (crown) was also given at a feast; then they will receive it at the wedding supper of the Lamb. People also received such a crown when they entered the temples of the gods; therefore, Jesus spoke to the believers in Smyrna about the joy of entering the presence of God in the New Jerusalem.



Ancient Greek laurel wreath

What does this mean for us?

There are many churches of Christ in dangerous places on the planet, where being a Christian is forbidden, places where secular powers do not allow freedom of worship, because Satan works there instigating the rulers. Many believers suffer serious persecution and even face physical death because of their faithfulness to Jesus. But as the strength does not come from man but from God, He empowers them for this. And despite this kind of adversity, He always finds ways for more people to hear His voice, receive Him as Lord, so that His church does not die. That’s why, many times, He asks us to intercede for lives that we don’t even know personally, but are our brothers in faith.

In the East of the planet the persecutions are more physical; This does not mean, however, that we should belittle the persecutions and struggles faced by the church

in the West, with many subtleties of false teaching, false prophecies, unrestrained technology, media, science, money and other subtle and invisible forces, but that oppress the path of those who do not want to play Satan's game or worldly Babylon. The situation is worse when the money is withheld, because it makes it very difficult for the true church to move strongly to preach and evangelize. God's work cannot be done in the world's extravagant way, but in God's simple way, as it can often be done without spending money, avoiding the consumerist, competitive and corrupt behavior of the world.

While the world sees the appearance, the Lord sees the heart. The world likes wealth, and unfortunately, it attracts the church to live by His parameters. Only those who are firm in the Word of God have the conscience to know that His values are different and resist oppressions and external trials. Ungodly people are used by Satan to criticize, condemn, speak evil and even act violently against God's children who seek to live under His truth. But the Lord has power to give strength and supply those who belong to Him in all circumstances and in all ways.

If we look at the life of the faithful believer, there will always be a period of trial, sooner or later, to see on which side he will continue, because this is a way of God to perfect salvation in His people. Those who overcome it prove to be true children of God and confirm to be worthy of receiving the crown of life, namely, eternal life. They tasted the myrrh, the cross, leaving in it their wills and their particular desires, in order to resurrect spiritually full of the anointing and the power of God. Now they are ready to be tuned instruments in His hands. Through them, the Lord can accomplish His work on earth.



- Arches of the ancient city of Smyrna, an ancient Roman agora. Agora is a public meeting place or a public square in Ancient Greece that served as commerce and for political and civil acts; a central public space in Ancient Greek city-states. The Agora of Smyrna is alternatively known as the Agora of İzmir (Turkish: İzmir Agorası). Photo: Benh LIEU SONG from Torcy, France. Wikipedia.



River Gediz (Hermus, in ancient times) in its downstream section crossing İzmir Province in western Turkey. Photo: Mr. Necdet Düzen. Wikipedia.

Smyrna needed to cry out to the Lord for understanding to know how to remain strong in trials and not fall into the errors and blasphemies of the wicked. The correct understanding of God's revelations would lead it to experience the true strength of the Spirit and leave the old allegiances of the flesh, as the city had been a faithful ally of Rome, to be faithful to Christ. Understanding the revelation of Jesus as Son of God and Savior of the world and as the only true God would lead Smyrna to better understand what He wants for those who have an encounter with Him: to leave the past, in order to live a new life (true conversion), and have another kind of wealth and strength. Smyrna, being loyal to Jesus rather than Rome, would overthrow the idolatry of money within the church and achieve the Lord's right thinking for its members.

• [Rev. 2: 12-17 – letter to the Church in Pergamum](#)

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword: ‘I know where you are living, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas [*abbreviation of Antipater – martyr of the church of Pergamum, which according to tradition, was roasted on a bronze receptacle during the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD)*] my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives [NIV: I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. You yet remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives]. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication. So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone,

and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.”

Pergamum (in Greek: Πέργαμος) means citadel, burgh, village and it was the administrative capital, the center of the official religion and headquarters of authority and the Roman imperial justice in the province. The city was built on a promontory twenty-six kilometers off the coast of the Aegean Sea, on the northern edge of the Kaikos or Caicus River Plain (present-day Bakırçay) and northwest of the modern city of Bergama (now the territory of Turkey) since ancient times. During the Hellenistic period, under the Attalid dynasty (281-133 BC), it was the capital of the Kingdom of Pergamum, and one of the main cultural centers of the Greek world. The Pergamum massif, composed mainly of volcanic rock, is three hundred and thirty-five meters above sea level. Therefore, it was considered a fortress (citadel, burgh). The Attalid dynasty was a Greek lineage that ruled in the city of Pergamum after the death of Philip Lysimachus of Thrace (360-281 BC), one of the generals and successors of Alexander the Great. Philetaerus was one of Lysimachus' officers, and took power in the city in 282 BC, reigning until 263 BC. His descendants continued to rule it:

- Eumenes I (263-241 BC)
- Attalus I Soter (241-197 BC)
- Eumenes II (197-160 BC)
- Attalus II Philadelphus (160-138 BC)
- Attalus III (138-133 BC)
- Eumenes III Aristonicus (133-128 BC – pretender to the throne, for he was the illegitimate son of Attalus II, but his revolt failed).

In 133 BC Attalus III bequeathed the Kingdom of Pergamum to the Roman Republic, for he didn't have heirs.



Theatre of Pergamum was one of the steepest theatres in the world (inclined 70 degree) and had a capacity of 10,000 people and was constructed in the 3rd century BC. Photo: Bernard Gagnon (Wikipedia).

Pergamum surpassed Ephesus and Smyrna, for in that city there was the largest library in the world in the 1st century, after Alexandria. Pergamum had two hundred thousand scrolls and was built by Eumenes II between 220 and 159 BC at the northern end of the Acropolis.

Manuscripts were written on parchment, rolled, and then stored on the shelves. It is true that the word 'parchment' is derived from Pergamum (from Latin *pergamenum*, and from French *parchemin*). During the Hellenistic period, Pergamum was a major center of parchment production, but parchment was not invented in Pergamum, as legend says. Parchment was in use in Anatolia and elsewhere long before the rise of Pergamum. What happens is that parchment helped the Roman Empire not to depend so much on Egyptian papyrus, as it was used in the library of Alexandria, and allowed the spread of knowledge in Europe and Asia.

Pergamum was also the center of the largest pagan worship: Zeus (in Greek) or Jupiter (for the Romans), the ruler of the gods, the god of the sky that showed himself in the atmospheric phenomena, linked more closely to Mercury (for the Romans) or Hermes (for the Greeks), the god of the word (The same Jupiter and Mercury found in Lystra and Iconium by Paul and Barnabas, Acts 14: 12); Athena or Pallas Athena (for the Greeks) or Minerva (for the Romans), the goddess of civilization, wisdom, handicraft, strategy and warfare, justice and skill; Dionysus (for the Greeks) or Bacchus (for the Romans), the god of wine; Aphrodite (in Greek) or Venus, for the Romans, the goddess of love, beauty and sexuality. Demeter (in Greek) and called Ceres by the Romans, the goddess of harvest, agriculture, cultivated land and the seasons, propitiator of wheat, a plant symbol of civilization. There was also a great temple of the Egyptian gods Isis-Serapis. Serapis or Sarapis, in Egyptian, was initially called Aser-hapi (i.e., Osiris-Apis), who became Serapis. His symbol was a cross. He was said to be the god Osiris in his entirety. Osiris ruled the realm of the dead and was linked to Ra. Isis was his consort. Apis (Hapi-ankh), the bull of Memphis, was the personification of the earth and the reincarnation of Osiris; symbolized the strength of the king (Pharaoh).

Antipas, who mentioned in that letter, fits into this context. Antipas is the abbreviation of Antipater. He was a presbyter, disciple of John and a martyr of the church of Pergamum, who, according to tradition, in 92 AD was roasted in a bronze receptacle (a bronze bull, similar to an incense burner) by the worshipers of Serapis during the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD). The bronze bull represented the bull god Apis. The martyrdom of Antipas is one of the first recorded in Christian history, highlighted by Christian Scripture through the message sent to the Church of Pergamum in the Book of Revelation.

Another important god worshiped there was Asclepius (Asklepios, Greek) or Aesculapius in Latin, the god of healing, whose symbol was a serpent. The sanctuary dedicated to him was considered one of the most famous therapeutic and healing centers in the Roman world. Galen, the most famous physician in Antiquity after Hippocrates, was born in Pergamum and received his initial training at the Asclepeion (the temple of Aesculapius). People from all over came to be healed.

Pergamum appears in Revelation as the place where the throne of Satan is (Rev. 2: 13); it was considered as the seat of the power of evil, because in the imperial cult the power given by God belonging to the State had been employed in the blasphemous

worship of a man (worship of the emperor). So, what happened was the perversion of the divine authority given to the State, being the Roman emperor transformed into a deity [As in the case of Domitian, who still alive proclaimed himself a god], rather than just occupy his position of secular authority. Christ is the real and final owner of that authority, which is symbolized by the two-edged sharp sword, the sword of His judgment for those who remain in error.

It was custom of the Roman Emperors consider themselves gods, so God condemned so much the imperial cult in the Epistles and in Revelation. Gaius Julius Caesar (49-44 BC), in life, in the year 44 BC, consented in the construction of a statue of himself where the inscription *Deo invicto* ('To the Invincible God') could be read. In the same year he appointed himself dictator for life. There was a period of civil war during the transition from the Republic to the Roman Empire, which began in 29 BC with Octavian, Julius Caesar's nephew and heir. Caesar Augustus (Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian Augustus – 29 BC-14 AD), ordered that was built a temple in Rome dedicated to the 'Divine Julius.' The adoptive son of Augustus was Tiberius (Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar – 14-37 AD). Both allowed to be erected a single temple in their honor during their lifetimes. These temples contained not only the statues of the ruling emperor at the time and who could be worshiped in the manner of a god, but also were devoted to Rome (the city of Rome), in the case of Augustus, and to the senate (in the case of Tiberius). Both temples were located on the Asian side of the Roman Empire. The temple of Caesar Augustus (built in 29 BC) was located in Pergamum, while Tiberius' was in Izmir (Smyrna) and he did not allow another temple or statue in his honor anywhere else. He assured before the Senate that he would rather be remembered for his deeds more than for stones. But he permitted the construction of a temple in honor of his predecessor and adoptive father, the 'Divine Augustus', in Tarragona (current Catalonia, Spain), in 15 AD. Caligula (37-41 AD) became the first emperor to present himself before the people as a god; not through statues, but openly in his own body.

Once a year Roman subjects went to these temples to burn incense to Caesar. Those who refused were persecuted. Here the persecution of the church began, because Christians refused to worship another god as Lord. At the same time, the persecution of the church of Ephesus by Domitian took place.

"I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives" – This means that God knew that the believers in Pergamum kept His name and did not deny the faith, despite the oppressions of Rome and the Greek culture of the city. God knew the evil place where this church was, but He wanted them to understand one thing: Satan's throne was not in a building, in an idolatrous temple like those ones, but in the pagan system that led people to worship many false gods. This was a conspiracy to the true Trinity. They would have to resist the deceit and heresy of this place, the seductive world there. The church took the risk of mixing with the world, of conforming to doctrinal deceit and committing to moral sin. So Jesus goes on saying,

"But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication. So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans" – Some believers of the church in Pergamum held the doctrine of Balaam or the doctrine of Nicolaitans. The term 'Nicolaitans' has controversial origin. It is assumed that Nicholas of Antioch (Acts 6: 5 – chosen in the beginning of the Church as a deacon), presumably, would

have given his name to a group inside the church that tried to get commitment to paganism in order to allow Christians to participate without embarrassment in some social and religious activities of the pagan society in which they were. The guidance of the sect would be similar to that of Balaam the corrupter of Israel in the Old Testament (Numbers chapters 22, 23 and 24): eating food sacrificed to idols, simultaneous coexistence with paganism, with prostitution and with the false teaching, which were ties in the path of the Church. It wasn't the whole church that practiced this. Some of them were just delighted by the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and Balaam (son of Beor, who was bought by Balak, king of Moab, son of Zippor, to curse Israel when they entered the Promised Land). However, this was dangerous for the community as a whole. They were subtle attacks of heresy and sin, mixing the gospel with paganism (ecumenism). The moral level was going down.

Then the Lord comes and says: "Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth." Again He calls His people to repentance; otherwise, they would experience death by the sword, that is, the divine judgment would come to punish disobedience and blasphemy. Therefore, He presented Himself to this church as the one who has a sharp two-edged sword, the one who has authority to judge the ungodly and believers: "These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword." The whole church had to repent; not because everyone had gone astray, but because everyone conformed, they tolerated error. The source of sin was Satan's throne, his rule in that city, creating mental confusion, lack of light, deception, blindness and sin. But the part of the believers was to resist and keep the flame of the Spirit burning. It was not an easy task, but a necessary one.

"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it." – The prize for being faithful to Christ would be the hidden manna (spiritual sustenance of God to those who sought His revelation) and the white stone. The manna was the bread from heaven, known to the Israelites, and which sustained them in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus came and said that He was that bread of life (Jn. 6: 31-35; 48-51; 54-55). Those who did not defile themselves with the banquets of the world would eat the banquet of God, the true manna.

The little stone mentioned in the text was a small cube, made of ivory, bone, metal or wood (*tessera hospitalis*) used as a ticket to somewhere, and also as a password for the big parties in the city. For the conquerors, those who rejected the worldly banquets, it would represent the entry into the kingdom of God and the wedding supper of the Lamb. There is a second hypothesis for the 'white stone': in the courts of the ancient world, jurors voted with a white or black stone. If the majority were white, the defendant was acquitted. If it was black, he would be condemned. Therefore, it could indicate that even if the believers were condemned by the courts of earth, they would be acquitted by the court of God.

"And on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it." – the new name can refer to Jesus, the owner and Lord of those who believe in Him and give their lives to Him; or else to 'His new name' written in Rev. 19: 12: "He has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself." and Rev. 3: 12: "If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new

name” may be a new name which will only be revealed to us at His second coming, and only those who are inscribed in the Lamb’s Book of Life will know.

There is also a third hypothesis about this white stone if we think about this detail about ‘a new name’ written on it. At the time, there was a custom: when a child was born and the father recognized it as his, he would write the child’s name next to his on a white stone. And this can mean for us that our names are written in the New Jerusalem, for we are recognized by God as His children.

The two-edged sword of Christ, the Living Word, would separate the holy from the profane so that Pergamum could be again a strong city, a burgh, a citadel, symbol of the New Jerusalem, which is the promise given to those who manage to overcome the tribulation of the Christian life.

Image below:

- Young Aesculapius – Roman copy of the 3rd century AD from the original Greek of the 4th century BC – Museo Chiaramonti. Photo: Photo: tetraktys, 19 January 2011 (UTC) – wikipedia.org.



Images below:

- Acropolis (Akrópoli Ακρόπολη, or Akrapol, Ακράπολ) in the current city of Bergama (Pergamon) – Turkey. Photo: Adam Jones (Wikipedia).
- The ruins of Acropolis of the ancient city of Pergamum, now Bergama, Turkey. Photo: Haluk Comertel (Wikipedia).




How can we bring this to our days?

For us, the letter to Pergamum tells us: many churches of the Lord are in places where the State authority has been completely distorted and corrupted, oppressing the people of God to serve a man who, in short, is the symbol of human idolatry. This kind of thing displeases Him totally because a corrupted human being is an evil tool in the hands of Satan. Some, for fear, submit themselves to this ‘spiritual prostitution’, serving concurrently several gods and denying the true God. Even in

cases where a government authority is not worshiped nor requires such a degree of reverence and obedience, spiritually speaking many gods can arise in people's lives as seen in Pergamum: Zeus (Jupiter), the god of the sky that was exhibited in atmospheric phenomena, can still be worshiped in the form of superstitions that see omens in the sun, moon and stars by people who only have their hair cut at the full or new moon; or keep such superstition rooted within them when they neurotically need to read horoscope before leaving home to make sure that everything will be all right that day. There are also those who link their birthday to certain celestial bodies and think that they behave 'this or that way' because of this (Zodiac signs and astrological chart, for example). Thus, the person doesn't want to amend himself and simply makes of God a 'more eclectic and more indulgent' being with certain human vices that are not simple bad habits, but true idolatry.

As I said, the other god most closely related to Jupiter was Mercury (Hermes), god of the word, which can be seen disguised in the seduction of the word in the mouth of someone more influential, whether a character from the world or from the church. Pretty talking deceits many people. Athena (Minerva) was the goddess of wisdom; this means that false wisdom, even within the church can corrupt the children of God, who do not read the bible the right way and go on repeating what they hear like parrots, without judging or reasoning upon which they are hearing and without checking it with the Word. Dionysus (Bacchus), god of wine, is another kind of god who seduces; not necessarily that the church preaches alcoholism, but it means everything that inebriates an unsuspecting believer, making him as someone unconscious of the biblical truth: sensations, emotions, 'shivers', opulence, beautiful appearances and vices of preaching that become the 'trademark' of the church, removing the reasoning of people, putting them under a cloak of influence restricted as a primer to be obeyed to the letter. Asclepius (Asklepios, Greek, or Aesculapius, Latin; Eshmun or Esmun to the Phoenicians), the god of healing, is the other god much revered by the people, personified in a doctor or a man of God who has the gift of healing and, sometimes without knowing, becomes an idol to many people. Medicine and Dentistry adopted the snake wrapped

around a stick, known as the Rod of Asclepius or the Staff of Aesculapius . Neptune was worshiped by sailors as the god of the sea (for us, symbolizing the spiritual world and the human unconscious) and held a trident in his hand (Psychology took the trident to its symbol – Ψ). How many get proud of being able to work psychologically with people!

When John wrote his letter to Pergamum by order of God, he said that the Lord recognized that they kept His name and did not deny the faith, even under persecution, as in the case of Antipas. However, some members in that church followed the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, participating without embarrassment in some social and religious activities of that pagan society, such as eating food sacrificed to idols, prostitution and sexual laxity within the Church and condoning with false teachings. Hence, God mentions His disapproval of this kind of practice. And He knew that even knowing this the rest of the church did not object.

Unfortunately, many churches start under spiritual revival, but along their way they leave vigilance aside, making room for the works of the flesh and false teaching that begin to undermine the flame of the Spirit. God is not pleased with our lack of commitment to His truth, with our self-indulgence or with the sad religious routine that prevents His Spirit from acting, much less with our tolerance with certain carnal attitudes that open a gap for fads and for the adulterous shaping of Word to human convenience, with the excuse that we cannot be radical.

The several demands of modern life lead us often to fall into some snares of the devil, diverting our attention from what is really important, for example: unexpected 'diseases', precisely at the time when the Spirit moves us to sow and invest in His work, making God's money being diverted unnecessarily to the pharmacy, as well as the desire to pray and seek His direction on the throne stays in background. Another example: those phone calls completely meaningless and without a fair reason, exactly at the time of prayer or praise in which God will begin to give an important spiritual revelation. We leave the 'connection' with Him to respond quickly to the connection with the world. If we are not connected to the Spirit, we will not realize the strategies used by the enemy.

Besides these demands already mentioned, it occurs the same that happened with the case of 'Nicolaitans', in which not only human teaching are introduced assuming air of truth, but sex within the Church becomes to be treated with certain negligence. Explaining better: leaving aside the moralism that serves only to judge and condemn past mistakes, leaders are unable to approach this issue more openly, leaving the members in ignorance; these, in turn, omit of the leader, during a counseling, for example, the real situation of the couple and life goes on carelessly, thinking that God will approve the situation and bless what in itself is already cursed. Anything that occupies the prior place of Jesus in our lives is a reason to extinguish the flame of the 'first love' in the hearts, so He directs His people to repent, otherwise, would come and would bring judgment: "Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth."

In addition to the gods already mentioned at the beginning of the text (as they are worshiped today in our midst), even within the evangelical churches, what happened in the church in Ephesus is happening here, for example: the influence of the Queen of Heaven, the consort of Baal (or Asherah, Diana and all the other names she used over the centuries, including Isis, the consort of Osiris), bringing rebellion, human idolatry, lack of dominion over the flesh, worldly customs disguised as holiness, permissiveness with many attitudes that do not please God, irreverence, lack of fear of God, family breakdown, etc. These things gradually infiltrate, including in the leadership due to excessive emotional and spiritual pressure or lack of sufficient preparation to occupy certain positions, even due to ignorance of the Word itself; not necessarily the lack of knowledge of what is written, but the lack of real spiritual experience with it, which only the Holy Spirit can give.

The Lord has seen this kind of attitude in some of His children, which saddens His heart deeply; so, He says that sooner or later, they will experience the power of His two-edged sword because of the perversion of His authority. The bible says that, for believers in Pergamum, the prize for loyalty to Christ would be the hidden manna and white stone. The Lord desires that we seek our spiritual sustenance and the revelation that we need in Him and nobody else. That's why some believers feel completely helpless when a leader ceases to treat them as babies and encourages them to seek by themselves the solutions to their problems in the Lord. This is not a lack of shepherding but a conscious shepherding, removing the false supports of the sheep so they can be carried by the true Shepherd. The leader is only a channel for the manifestation of God's power, but he is not God, and this can never be mistaken so that he does not carry yokes completely unnecessary. Human beings have a huge tendency to idolatry and therefore the Holy Spirit treats some children under certain condition of loneliness, so they can find the right course in life. When our spirit and soul are in this internal willingness of knowing exactly who our true God is, then yes,

we can say we are a strong city, with the right to receive from Him our ‘stone of entry’ in the New Jerusalem.

Pergamum had lost the fear of God, coming to worship the Roman Emperor, turning him into a god, besides those already existing in the city. Thus, they had taken Christ out of His place of honor, putting Satan on the throne. This was catastrophic for the church and would lead it to spiritual death. If the church did not repent, the spiritual death would come upon it, that is, it would not receive eternal life or enter the New Jerusalem. In Isa. 42: 8 it is written, “I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.” Whether is graven image or persons, professions or any other god that insists on occupying the heart of man, the Lord will not approve, much less give His glory to this.

Pergamum needed the Spirit of the fear of God (Is 11: 2).

The Spirit of Fear of the Lord means reverence, priority, respect and devotion to God, acknowledgement for who He is and not to use His name in vain. The fear of the Lord lifts us up to the throne and puts us in contact with His holiness. It puts us in a position of separation from worldly chores in order to give reverence and priority to the person of God. Through it, we know His Love and the strength of the praise and worship of the angels around the throne. Before Him, all irreverence, idolatry and disturbance of the peace fall down. It’s interesting to notice that in the bible the word fear or dread (or awe) comes from several Hebrew and Greek roots, such as: a) Phobos (Greek) = rapture, fear, terror, alarm; the object or cause of fear; reverence, respect; to be put in fear; alarm or fright (phobos φόβος – Strong #5401; Matt. 14: 26; Matt. 28: 4; 8; Mk. 4: 41; Heb. 2: 15 etc. = 47 times in the NT. b) Deilia (Greek) = fear, cowardice, timidity (deilia δειλία – Strong #1167, as it in 2 Tm 1: 7 – only once in the NT); c) Eulabeia (Greek) = prudence, reverence, caution, fear of God, piety; Strong #2124, eulabeia, εὐλαβείας, as in Heb. 12: 28; Heb. 5: 7 = only twice in the NT). d) Pachad, the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word Phobos (Pachad, Strong #6343; פחד, as in 1 Sam. 11: 7; Ex. 15: 16; Gen. 31: 42; 53; Deut. 2: 25; Deut. 11: 25, Ps. 119: 120, etc. = 49 times in the OT) = dread, dreadful, fear, great fear, terror; a (sudden) alarm; to fear, to be anxious or terrified; a helper or a companion for life (referring to death), until Jesus came to free us from fear of it (ref.: Heb. 2: 15).

But in Isa. 11: 2-3, there is a Hebrew word for fear (or to fear), which is yirah, יִרָא, Strong #3374, and means fear; excessive fear or to fear exceedingly; dreadful, or fearfulness; (morally) reverence. It appears 45 times in the OT, usually referring to God or together with the expressions, ‘fear of the Lord’, ‘fear of God’ or ‘fear of the Almighty’ [Gen. 20: 11; Ex. 20: 20; 2 Sam. 23: 3; 2 Chr. 19: 9; Neh. 5: 9; Neh. 5: 15; Job 4: 6; Job 6: 14; Job 15: 4; Job 22: 4; Job 28: 28; Ps. 2: 11; Ps. 5: 7; Ps. 19: 9; Ps. 34: 11; Ps. 90: 11; Ps. 111: 10; Ps. 119: 38; Ps. 1: 7; Prov. 1: 29; Prov. 2: 5; Prov. 8: 13; Prov. 9: 10; Prov. 10: 27; Prov. 14: 26-27; Prov. 15: 16; Prov. 15: 33; Prov. 16: 6; Prov. 19: 23; Prov. 22: 4; Prov. 23: 17; Isa. 11: 2-3; Isa. 29: 13; Isa. 33: 6; Isa. 63: 17; Jer. 32: 40; Ezek. 30: 13 (fear throughout the Land of Egypt); Jon. 1: 10; Jon. 1: 16]. Only 3 times, this word appears as a reference to fear or calamities or the enemy (Deut. 2: 25; Ps. 55: 5; Isa. 7: 25) and only once (Ezek. 1: 18), referring to his fear of the rims of the wheels of the cherubim (KJV: dreadful; NIV: awesome), but anyway, fear of the supernatural.

• Rev. 2: 18-29 – letter to the Church in Thyatira

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze: ‘I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call ‘the deep things of Satan,’ to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden; only hold fast to what you have until I come. To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered—even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’”

Thyatira in ancient Greek was called Pelopia (Πελόπεια) and Semiramis (Σεμίραμις), before it was renamed to Thyateira (Θυάτειρα) in 290 BC by Seleucus I Nicator (323-281 BC). It was destroyed by a great earthquake during the reign of Augustus (29 BC-14 AD), but was rebuilt with the help of the Roman Empire. Today, a larger Turkish city (Akhisar = ‘white castle’) continues to exist on the same site over the ancient city of Lydia.

Thyatira means ‘sacrifice of work.’ In the 1st century AD the city housed city housed a border garrison and was an important point of the Roman road system, one of which came from the provincial capital, which was Pergamum, to Laodicea and continuing to the eastern provinces, to Byzantium (Constantinople); today Istanbul. It was also an important manufacturing center; dyeing, garments, pottery and work in bronze were done there. It had a long military story (hence the ‘iron rod’ mentioned by Jesus to John – v. 26-27, symbolizing authority). Among the ancient ruins of the city, inscriptions related to the guild (syndicate, *suntechuia*, συντεχνία) of dyers of the city were found. Inscriptions mention: wool-workers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave-dealers, and bronze-smiths.

Lydia, the woman Paul met in Philippi (Acts 16: 14) was probably trading purple-dyed wool in this city, for she was from Thyatira.

The city was home to a Christian community from the apostolic period, which continued until 1922, when the Orthodox Christian population was deported.

The text of Revelation mentions the name of a prophetess accepted into the church community, who taught and seduced the Christians of Thyatira to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. This fictitious name of the woman could be related to Jezebel, wife of Ahab, the idolatrous king of Israel in the time of the prophet Elijah. Some commentators such as Benson and Doddridge have concluded that what was practiced in Thyatira was the same apostasy promoted in Israel by Jezebel as mentioned in the Books of Kings (1 Kin. 16: 31-33; 1 Kin. 18: 18-19). Jezebel, Ahab’s wife, had priests who were in charge of the worship of Baal-Melcart, the official protective deity of Tyre, which was connected to nature; and his consort Asherah (Astarte or Ashtoreth, goddess of fertility of the Canaanites, later called the Queen of Heaven by the prophet Jeremiah). This Jezebel accepted in the

community of the church was a seductive prophetess who encouraged immorality and idolatry using religion as a subterfuge. Her teaching probably condoned with pagan activities, associated with the social clubs or guilds or corporations that organized the various businesses in the city (trade in wool, leather, linen, ceramics and bronze works, etc.). They were trade associations for the purpose of protection, benefit, and recreation.

It was practically impossible to pursue a commercial activity without belonging to one of these corporations; however, their meetings were associated with acts of pagan worship and immorality, for each had its main deity. After these pagan religious meetings there were parties and food was dedicated to the gods, to idols, and they ended up in immorality.

But there is an interesting detail to comment if we place our vision on the spiritual side of the symbolism of this name. Jezebel is a name used to designate a demon of high hierarchy that acts on human emotions (an 'Authority', mentioned by Paul in Eph. 1: 21 or 1 Co 15: 24 – NRSV; NIV) that is like the 'right arm' of the principality 'Queen of Heaven' (Paul calls 'Ruler'; 'Queen of Heaven' is used in the book of Jeremiah, worshiped and called by other names in Antiquity and today too, but with other name). This Authority acts on human emotions, therefore, bringing false prophecy and false teaching, deception, emotional imbalance, prostitution, seduction, sensuality, idolatry and lies.

Thus, the name used by John for this woman seems to be pertinent. She would be a symbol of apostasy and false prophecy in the church of Thyatira. The Lord addresses her using a figure of speech that can be compared to the professional activity of the city: "These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze." This meant that He was searching what was going on in His church in that city and that He would trample all these evil works and the people who practiced them as a way of making His judgment.

This false prophetess brought a 'solution' to believers. She taught 'the deep things of Satan' (Rev. 2: 24), that is, she taught believers that they should be part of these corporations, participate in sin and then, yes, they would be able to overcome it, because they had experienced it.

Then Jesus says: "I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols." This means that the church of Thyatira was a hardworking and brave church, it had works, love, faith, service, perseverance, the last works greater than the first (which indicated maturity and growth), but kept the tolerance with false prophecies and false teaching, seduction of words taking it to idolatry (To eat food sacrificed to idols); therefore, it lived together with darkness pretending to be truth. At those parties, things were happening that were incompatible with the gospel. The church tolerated the false prophetess Jezebel, even under Jesus' rebuke. This behavior undermined the church from the inside out. This false prophetess induced people to seek a deep knowledge of Satan, that is, by participating in the guilds, believers did not risk their financial lives; however, it was a way of making them exchange gods, from the true God for Mammon and all the others existing in each of these pagan meetings. She also encouraged experiencing sin to overcome it, but it is not biblical ("Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself" – 1 Cor. 6: 18). It was liberal Christianity without laws or norms, to suit paganism of the 1st century.

This teaches us that we should be tolerant of one another, but not of heresy, religious deception, false teaching, perversion of the truth, because all this pervert character.

“I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.” Both she and the sinful believers were invited to repent, but the bible says that there was no repentance of the woman; therefore, God would put her to bed and bring her suffering; her children would undergo death and there would be tribulation for those who followed her. This was a consequence of divine justice, for God had no more tolerance.

The church at Thyatira would have all its work frustrated if it did not remove from its midst the false prophecies and the seduction that led to carnality and idolatry, for this would undermine its strength and would prevent the Holy Spirit from acting through the revelations and knowledge of the truth. Thus, Thyatira needed to cry out for the Spirit of knowledge of the Lord (Isa. 11: 2), that is, what brings the revelation of the Word and dethrones all sorts of lies and false prophecy. In Hos. 4: 6 it is written: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”

In the text of Revelation the Lord writes: “But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling [NIV, misleads] my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. Beware! I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.”

This means that more than the members that were sinning, the leaders were the primarily responsible for leaving the false teachings corroding the church that had been erected. Therefore, God rebuked them and talked to them about returning to repentance, because this sinful attitude polluted the newest members in faith.

By casting out from them the false prophecies that blinded God’s people, the church could once again receive visions, dreams and have again the spiritual experiences that it needed for its growth. Both in the OT and in the NT the words used for ‘knowledge’ bring the idea of revelation, to uncover something hidden so that it can be seen and known as it really is; to manifest, to make it clear, to expose, to unfold, to instruct, to admonish, to warn and to have God’s response. The word of knowledge is more related to the prophetic ministry; hence, the church of Thyatira needed this characteristic of God’s Spirit.

“But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call ‘the deep things of Satan’, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden; only hold fast to what you have until I come.” The Lord knew those who stood firm. Therefore, it is possible to be faithful to the doctrine of Christ, even when others stray. It’s difficult, but it’s possible. Another comment: “But to the rest of you who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan” – this should not be confused here with ignorance of spiritual things, since it is necessary for a believer to have the study and know how Satan works in the area of human knowledge, not only to avoid their evil snares as well as to be able to help those who

are deceived by false teachings, mysticism, etc. What Jesus is saying is not to participate in evil things; instead, to strengthen ourselves in His word; however, not to run away from the information that is necessary to have true spiritual victories. After all, “With their mouths the godless would destroy their neighbors, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered” (Prov. 11: 9).

“Hold fast to what you have until I come” – the holiness, the experiences, and the intimacy they had with God, the knowledge of His word, and the inner peace of having obeyed Him were enough. They did not need to seek the novelties of sin to know His grace. What the others did was distort the word of God: “but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom. 5: 20b).

“To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered – even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” This means: the faithful should keep what they had until the coming of the Lord to receive authority over the nations: an iron rod (Iron symbolizes divine strength) shattering the clay (the things of the flesh and the perishable things). In other words, the Lord will give them the authority to judge the wicked.

As a reward, besides they can rule over the nations with a rod of iron, the faithful remnants would receive the Morning Star. He was proposing to His children that, instead of knowing the deep things of Satan, they should know more of Him, the Morning Star; to experience the glory of Christ and to remain shining with Him.

In Rev. 22: 16, the bible says that Jesus is the Morning Star. This could mean a light, a glow that remains after a period of darkness. At the end of times, when the period of spiritual darkness pass and the Antichrist, the beast and the devil are defeated, Jesus will prevail; He’ll remain standing despite all the opposition He faced.

In Rev. 21: 23 it is written: “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”

In Rev. 22: 5 the same text is repeated in other words: “And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever”.

This prophecy was already in Isa. 60: 19: “The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.”

Therefore, the Morning Star (Jesus) will be the very glory of God shining upon His victorious children.

How can we bring this to our day?

We can be a brave church, a church that shows spiritual works even greater than the material ones, we can have love, faith, service and perseverance, but if we have tolerance with false prophecies and false teaching, we will give place to darkness, hindering the understanding of the Word, undermining our power and our spiritual authority before Satan. Jesus says we are the light of the world, but how can a people emotionally ill and influenced by Rulers and Powers [*hierarchy of demons*] have authority over the spiritual world and still wanting the Morning Star? We may think that this is not true and that we have dominion over the demons that annoy us, but what is our true testimony if we sincerely look inside ourselves, seeing countless things of the ‘old self’ that are still present, if we are provoked by someone or some situation? What about so much contention, division and power struggle within the

House of God? What do we have to say about so much gossip and so many works of the flesh still fully alive and active in believers ‘converted’ years ago? What do we have to say about so many people who stray from the gospel because of such pain of the disappointment experienced within the church? What about many church members or their relatives, who say they are converts, but don’t show a single sign of that true conversion that is love for God and neighbor? What do we have to say about so much ‘anointing’, which actually is not used for anything, because there are few who are willing to pay the price to be a powerful instrument of healing and deliverance in the hands of the Lord? What do we have to say about believers who after years sitting on the bench are unable to speak by heart a biblical verse (at best, “Jesus wept”)? Worse than that, unable to apply it in their daily lives! What about unresolved sexual problems? What about the financial attachment that still prevails over the needs of the Work of God? What about the mixture the gospel with business influences? What about the adulteries behind-the-scenes?

It’s no use making of the altar a place of manifestation of demons to say that the power of God exists, but leaving our mind under complete submission and dominion of the Holy Spirit of God to judge all things and hold fast to what is good. We must let Him give us daily the strategies for our own lives in order to individually win our personal battles, achieving what was devastated or stolen from us: our relationships, professional honor, financial life, people’s respect for our patience and meekness in the face of situations apparently hopeless, health and so forth. It’s necessary to read too much the Word to know its real content and not let the ‘Jezebels’ enter and make an abode in us. Nowadays, everyone wants to be a prophet, pastor and apostle. They are the most coveted positions, however, the bible says that “No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven” (Jn. 3: 27). Without vigilance on our part, without consecration to God and without certainty of our call, it is no use wanting to remove the speck from our brother’s eye, having a beam placed in ours. These are the gaps given by pride and arrogance of the flesh that God wants us to cut off from our midst, otherwise all the good that one day we did will go down the drain. We need to wash ourselves thoroughly; then we will have real authority in the spiritual world and will remain standing after the dark period of our Christian journey. As winners, the sacrifice of our work will not have been in vain.

Images below:

- Ruins of the Byzantine basilica of Thyatira. An excavation carried out in the center of the city discovered a street with columns 100 meters long that led to a monumental entrance and a large civic basilica (40m×10m), probably from the 5th or 6th century. A small archaeological museum is adjacent to the site. Photo: Klaus-Peter Simon – Wikipedia.

- Ruins of the ancient city of Thyatira (Thyateira) – Photo: Akkinvet – Wikipedia.



Chapter 3 –

• Rev. 3: 1-6 – letter to the Church in Sardis

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: ‘I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up [KJV: be watchful], and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’”

Sardis means: sun, prince of joy, because of the extreme wealth derived from the alluvial gold from Pactolus. Pactolus River (in Greek: Πακτωλός; in Turkish, Sart Çayı) is a river near the coast of the Aegean Sea in Turkey. Its wellspring is on Mount Tmolus (now Bozdağ) and flows through the ruins of the ancient city of Sardis, the capital of Lydia, and empties into the river Gediz, the ancient Hermus. Pactolus contained an alloy of gold and silver (the ‘Electrum’), which was the basis of the economy of the former state of Lydia in Ancient times. The Electrum is a natural alloy of gold and silver, with traces of copper and other metals such as nickel, sometimes zinc. Depending on the proportion of gold and silver, the ancient Greeks called it ‘white gold’ or ‘gold’, to distinguish it from refined gold; so it would be more appropriate to call it ‘pale gold.’

The original city was a fortress city, almost impregnable, towering high above the broad Hermus valley and almost entirely surrounded by cliffs separated by precipices compounded of treacherously loose rocks. Its apogee was in the 7th century BC, shortly before the time of King Croesus, ruler of Lydia in the 6th century BC. The city also enjoyed this wealth in the times of NT. The Christian community living there was imbued with the spirit of the city, resting on its past reputation, but without any great achievement in the present; it still failed, just as the city had failed twice, for not learning from the previous experiences and for not having an attitude of vigilance (Cyrus the Persian in 549 BC took the city by surprise attack and Antiochus the Great in 214 BC repeated the feat). Alexander the Great rebuilt it and brought Hellenism to it. In 17 AD the city was destroyed by an earthquake. Tiberius rebuilt part of it and it absorbed the Roman culture, becoming lascivious and permissive. The church lost its values and then the Lord sent it this letter. Sardis conformed to paganism. The main trade of the city was dyeing and manufacturing garments of wool.

Symbolically, Sardis was a church living on the glories and on dead works of the past and without vigilance; it had entered a stagnation that gave gap to the theft (“If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you”, which means that God’s trial would be sudden). The believers were lukewarm and drowsy. Only a small group remained faithful. The people who remained faithful would be holy and worthy (white robes) and would attain salvation (would have their names written in the Book of Life). They would display the brightness of the Lord (known as the ‘Sun of Justice’).

For us, the message that remains is that past honors and glories do not sustain us today and lack of vigilance and stagnation lead only to theft; more than material theft, there is spiritual theft, which is more serious.

There were different groups of believers inside that church:

1) Spiritually dead believers, not truly converted (“I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead”). The church in Sardis had an apparently lively liturgy, with celebrations, but no spiritual life. Solemnities and rituals impacted people, but they had no life before God. Faith was not from the heart.

2) Believers full of emotional and spiritual wounds and almost dead, unwilling to follow their path with Christ (“Wake up [KJV: be watchful], and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death”). The flame of the spirit was almost quenched in them, for worldliness was a great influence on them and it defiled their garments. The Roman way of life and the style of the mundane society of the time spoke louder; therefore, they had little interest in sanctifying and purifying themselves.

3) Believers who do not live a life of integrity (“For I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God”) – the church was involved in projects and works (The main business of the city was dyeing and making woolen garments). Believers could even do social works there, help people, but maybe it was just to receive the applause of men, not God’s, because what they did was not to give glory to Him but to themselves. The motive was not the kingdom of God, and this was called ‘lack of integrity.’

4) Believers openly defiling themselves with worldly practices; others managed to resist (“Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy”). Few believers had not been contaminated by the influences of society and the world.

In short: This church in Sardis did not face persecution from the emperors or the Jews, nor from heresy, but it had become a partner with the world.

“Wake up [KJV: be watchful], and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent” – this meant an appeal from God for them to urgently return to the Word and keep what they had received, namely, the true doctrine, which would make them grow and receive the solid food of a mature church, not the spiritual milk of beginners in the faith. The fact that He said, “be watchful” meant a warning to wake up, because they were being robbed of their spiritual strength and God’s plan for them and they didn’t realize it. “Be watchful” [Strong #1127 – grégoreó; γρηγορέω; means: to be awake (in the night), watch, to be watchful, on the alert, vigilant. From egeiro; to keep awake, i.e. watch (literally or figuratively). Therefore: be vigilant, to wake, to watch, to be watchful].

“Strengthen what remains and is on the point of death” – this means that those who are awake must wake up those who are sleeping, almost dying.

“For I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God” – integrity was closely linked there to the motivation of their attitudes; first of all, they must look for holiness, that is, to come out of sin and make their lives right with God.

But the Lord knows His church thoroughly; He knows who each one is: “These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars... Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.” He was there ready to pour out the seven Spirits of God upon them, that is, the fullness of the Holy Spirit to revive them. They were quenching the initial flame of the Holy Spirit they had received by giving their lives to Jesus. They still had the Holy Spirit; however, they were not filled with

the Spirit. Therefore, they were almost dead (some really were; they extinguished the flame of the Spirit), they did not have the life of God within their hearts.

It is interesting to meditate a bit about the blessing that this church has lost because of self-indulgence and 'paralysis' in relation to the things of God. Apparently, Sardis was situated in a very privileged place, close to an alluvium of gold that allowed it to extract the ore and market it. Furthermore, it was a city practically unassailable, protected by rocks that, when loose, were a real trap for the enemy. The city had other means of survival that was to manufacture garments of wool and even dye them. We can say that it went into shock when there was the first assault by Cyrus, but it didn't learn from the defeat; it chose to live in a fantasy of wealth and was taken for the second time.

From there, it seems that it overlooked its possessions and its protection once for all. Gold in the bible, in most cases, refers to things that were placed in the tabernacle or in the temple, precious spoils of war or taxes to be paid to an empire. Therefore, it gives us an idea of something very precious, something more directly set apart for God or very important to a nation, as a ransom, for example.

The reprehension of God about watchfulness is that they lost the precious asset that the Lord had given them, which was salvation, their relationship with Him, His protection and His living word. The natural blessings (rivers of gold and the fortresses of the rocks) were granted by God and were neglected; hence, He allowed them to be stolen so that there was a new awareness of values. What their flesh produced was very small in comparison to the blessing of God; they produced garments and dyed them, which cost them the sweat of their brow. In other words, everything they could make was dyed garments, probably from the wool of the sheep and rams, not of linen, because a place like that didn't seem to be a fertile ground for planting. The fabric of linen was rarely made in Palestine; it was commonly imported from Egypt. It is manufactured with the fiber whose scientific name is *Linum usitatissimum*. Once appropriately treated, i.e., after the separation of the fiber from the woody part of the stem, the thread produces the linen, and the seed produces linseed oil. Once the fiber was treated, it was woven by women to become cloth. The use of linen garments by the priests was given as guidance from God to Moses and the people wove them with linen brought from Egypt. Samuel wore a linen ephod (1 Sam. 2: 18); David danced before the ark using a linen ephod (2 Sam. 6: 14). It seems indeed that the use of linen was associated with special people, holy ones. Linen and fine linen were reputed as precious gifts to a woman loved by a man (Ezek. 16: 10; 13, when God compares Jerusalem to His bride). Hence, the bible says that the Lord has set apart for His Church, for His bride, garments of fine linen, bright and pure, because the fine linen is the righteous deeds of saints (Rev. 19: 8); therefore, holiness, not to mix with the 'garments of sin' of the world. He told the priests about changing clothes when approaching other people (Ezek. 44: 19), that is, we cannot talk or discuss the word of God on equal terms with those who do not yet understand it, because they would mock it and would scorn it. It would be like giving finest pearls to pigs. In Ancient times, the sweat was a sign of impurity, so the guidance given to the priests was not to use wool so that they did not sweat (Ezek. 44: 17-18). For us, this means that a priest does not need to use 'heavy clothing', that is, knowledge that does not have the wisdom of God, nor impure thoughts and impure feelings of the world, because they bring an unnecessary burden to his life, besides it does not please the Lord.

"Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. If you conquer, you

will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels.”

Thus, there were still some within the church who resisted the lie of wealth and opulence, and walked in righteousness and integrity before God. Whoever lived in holiness here on earth will have white robes in heaven. There is no salvation for one who has no garments without integrity. White is a symbol of holiness, purity, victory. The church in Sardis would be dressed in white linen again when it was faithful and just. The whiteness of his garments would shine like sunlight or the glow of gold.

“I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels.” – A revived person will have his name proclaimed in glory before the Father.

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” – understand and obey the word.

What does this mean for us?

As church, when we do not watch what the Lord gives us, which are the spiritual and natural gifts, in addition to the material blessings we have, we pay the price for our neglect, laziness and ingratitude. A new revival is necessary. Tactics used in the past are no longer effective. If demons are ‘updated’, why the Church of Christ is not? Just look at the traditionalism that surrounds us and we’ll see that it hasn’t brought newness of life, much less real liberations. Churches that do not present their children to the Lord! Churches that do not believe in prophecy or spiritual revelation coming from the Spirit! Churches who do not speak of tithes or offerings in public not to ‘shock’ visitors! What about *Malachi 3: 10*? The Pentecostal movement of other churches also does not seem to be producing the desired fruit. Screams and music at high volume are not synonymous with revival. Lives still chained to the deeds of darkness made many years ago and that generated curses that persist, without an effective cure! Just ask how many were the achievements in relation to dreams and projects done years ago, and we’ll see if the methods used so far have been effective. We need something more than faith, we need real action, passion for the things of God that can inflame our hearts and gives us a real reason to live; more than all this, the anointing that breaks every yoke. We do not inherit the glories of our ancestors; it is a mistake to think that. It is easier to inherit the hereditary curses for their sins than the blessings they accumulated to our lives. Just look at our families and the problems we face today. The answer to this is simpler than we can imagine: each one of us has a throne and a crown with our name and only we can conquer. Jesus says, “The disciple must carry his cross,” which means that each of us has a war, a surrender, a victory and a crown to be presented before Him. Another word: “The soul who sins will die” (NIV – *Ezek. 18: 1-32*). Therefore, self-indulgence won’t lead us anywhere.

It is also important to mention something else: God is not against money, but against love of money. Money that is misused, just for the aggrandizement of certain ministries just because the world wants to hear about Jesus in a new way, ends up leading the leaders and the sheep to exhaustion, because they allow themselves to be involved by the subtleties, the attractions, superfluous and for the demands and competitiveness of the world. Everything has a balance point. We today are often forced to use worldly mechanisms to spread the gospel of Christ, but it is the Spirit of God that sets the limits. The victories we have conquered so far are ours, no one can take them away, but they must be watched over and seen as proof that it was the Lord who gave them to us; they are an incentive to move forward and conquer what He has already determined. This He reveals every day. It is not the human being who

needs to do something for Him as if he wanted to show service. This is not how the kingdom of God works. The world, indeed, is demanding and cares about productivity. Nothing is good enough. And when we try to please the demands of the world, our spirit doesn't let God speak; then the Holy Spirit fades, because the ego has taken over. So the advice "be watchful" is quite pertinent here.

Jesus said: "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven" (Matt. 10: 32-33). Therefore, a church that accommodates and does not watch will not be praised and honored. And 'to watch' is not to control the lives of others, but look inside oneself and inspect one's own soul to see the color of one's own clothing. God does not want us to wear garments of wool dyed by sin, worldly contamination and laziness, but with fine and shining linen of the acts of justice we practice.

In short: The church of Sardis was living on the glories of the past and now needed to be reborn and watch over not to be caught by surprise anymore. Watch what? The precious that the Lord had given them: salvation, the relationship with Him, His protection and His living Word, the true doctrine that would make them grow and receive the solid food of a mature church, not the spiritual milk of beginners in the faith. They needed to cry out for the Spirit of counsel, that is, to have the right strategies of God to position themselves, to walk, to get out the stagnation they were in and start to experience the Living Word of the Lord within them. More than that, they should know how to manage the material goods that the Lord had given His children.





In the two images above:

- Ruins of Greek-Byzantine shops in the city of Sardis. Photo: Wikipedia.
- Temple of Artemis at Sardis, Turkey. Photo: simonjenkins – Wikipedia.
- River Pactolus (in Turkish: Sart çayı). Photo: Spiridon Ion Cepleanu. Wikipedia.

In the two images below: Ruins of Sardis Synagogue, late 3rd century AD. In the second image, a closer view of the entrance to the building and the places where the leaders sat to teach. Photo: Carole Raddato – Wikipedia.



There is something interesting to say about the synagogue at that time: in one part the scrolls of the Law were kept, and in another, the scrolls of the prophets and scribes. There was also 'the chair of Moses' and 'the chair of Elijah', where the scrolls of the law and the prophets were taught. The person read standing up, but then sat down in the chair to teach (cf. Lk. 4: 16; 20, when Jesus read the scroll of Isaiah standing up and then sat down). That's because in ancient culture, important things could not be explained and taught in a hurry, but calmly. In Matt. 23: 1-7, Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees so harshly, because they sat in 'Moses' seat' to explain the law, but did not put into practice what they taught.



‘Moses’ Seat’ – archaeological find in a synagogue in Chorazin, made of basalt, found in 1920.

I want to make a parenthesis here to put some interesting information about synagogues in ancient times, especially in the 1st century of the Christian era.

Synagogue comes from the Hebrew, *Kenēseth* (the equivalent in Greek is *synagogē*), which has the sense of a meeting of any persons or things and for any purpose; also, a meeting of individuals from one location with the purpose to worship or to do something in common. The basic activity in the synagogue is the prayer and reading of the Torah (or Pentateuch, which corresponds to the first five books of the bible). The synagogues were built following the model of the temple of Jerusalem. Probably, the institution of the synagogue as the meeting place of the Jews to learn the Torah, to pray and to resolve administrative matters occurred during the Babylonian exile (Ezek. 14: 1), since the temple of Jerusalem no longer existed. Both Jesus and Paul ministered in synagogues wherever there were Jews.

The synagogue served for worship, education (a school for boys to learn Torah), and governing the civil life of the community, such as festivals. But sometimes it was a place used to discuss political matters. Jesus Himself warned His disciples that they would be taken to be judged in the synagogues (Lk. 12: 11), and that they would be flogged in their own rooms (Matt. 10: 17). Flavius Josephus informs that in the synagogue of Tiberias the leaders met for political interests.

Opposite the entrance of the building there was a portable ark like the Ark of the Covenant, where they kept the scrolls of the Law and the Prophets (meghillah). The law was read from a *bēmâ* (platform), in post-biblical Hebrew *bimah* (בִּימָה), ‘platform’ or ‘pulpit’, surely derived from the ancient Greek word for a raised platform, *bema* (βῆμα).

Beside the platform for reading the Law were the main seats for the religious leaders and rulers of the synagogue, the most honorable seats (Matt. 23: 6; Jam. 2: 2-3). Men sat separately from women [J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2nd edition 1995].

The synagogue was ruled by the elders. They exercised discipline and punished members if necessary (scourges and excommunication). The synagogue ruler (like

Jairus – Mk. 5: 22; Acts 13: 15; 18: 8) supervised the worship. The attendant (Lk. 4: 20) presented the scrolls of Scripture that were to be read and replaced them in the ark. A competent interpreter translated the law and the prophets into the local Aramaic and, because they were qualified to do so, they were allowed to lead the services (Jesus, for example: Lk 4: 16; Mt 4: 23; and Paul: At 13: 15). The Sabbath was the appointed day for public worship (Acts 15: 21).

The Mishnah (the ‘Oral Law’, instituted in the second century AD) says that worship consisted of five parts:

First the Shema Israel (Sh’ma Yisrael – ‘Hear, O Israel’) was read (the prayer includes Deut. 6: 4-9; Ex. 13: 1-10; Ex. 13: 11-16; Deut. 11: 13-21; Num. 15: 37-41). Then came eighteen prayers or eighteen blessings. The first magnified the Lord’s name. The second interceded for Jerusalem. In the others, the restoration of Israel to the land of their fathers, the return of the glory of God’s presence to the temple and the city of Jerusalem already rebuilt, and the restoration of the Davidic dynasty were themes repeated, and remembered the origin of the synagogues during the exile in Babylon.

After the prayer came the reading of the Word and the elder read the Torah scroll. Today, the Pentateuch is read in synagogues on an annual cycle.

Then usually came the reading of the Prophets. In Jesus’ time this portion was not yet fixed, but the reader was allowed to make his own selection. Often, after reading, someone explained the text of the prophets and extracted an exhortation from it. Sometimes a young man was invited to give his interpretation. And when there was an illustrious visitor, he was called to speak, as happened to the apostle Paul (Acts 13: 14-41). Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises made to Moses, David and the prophets. Almost every Jew could make his explanation of the Word of God.

Finally, came the final blessing (generally, the priestly blessing of Aaron – Num. 6: 24-26).





Images above: The Bath-Gymnasium complex at Sardis, late 2nd – early 3rd century AD. Photo: Carole Raddato (Frankfurt). Wikipedia.

• [Rev. 3: 7-13 – letter to the Church in Philadelphia](#)

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens: ‘I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’”

Philadelphia means brotherly love. It was founded in 189 BC by Eumenes II (197-160 BC) and received the name Philadelphia because of the loyalty of Attalus II Philadelphus king of Pergamum (160-138 BC), his brother, to him. Attalus II Philadelphus has already died. The city was on the imperial mail route as a gateway to the east; hence it was called ‘the gateway to the east.’ The site is currently occupied by the village of Alaşehir. Philadelphia is the figure of the church loyal to Christ, because of the loyalty of the two brothers, Attalus and Eumenes.

It was situated on an interior plateau, fertile, which explains its commercial prosperity. The fertile region of the plateau was an open door to the wealth of the city, as well as this door was given to the Christians, both materially and spiritually speaking.

However, it was subjected to frequent earthquakes (the earthquake that destroyed the city of Sardis in 17 AD also destroyed Philadelphia). The people then went to live outside the city in tents outdoors. Rome restored the city; so the citizens of

Philadelphia willingly renamed it Neokaisareia. Vespasian (69-79 AD) changed its name to Flavia (for being the first emperor of the Flavian Dynasty). The earthquakes symbolized an unstable life, in contrast with the winners who receive the promise of ultimate stability of being part of the building of God's temple. Jesus would make them pillars that would never be shaken, and this would be to comfort them in their insecurity and instability.

It was known by the large number of temples and festivities, but there is no reference to participation of this church in the acts of paganism existing there.

Such as the Lord did with Smyrna, He only had good things to say to Philadelphia.

In a church with false teachers and so much idolatry, He shows Himself as the Holy and the True One: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens." The key of David means the authority and the power of Christ. He is the key that opens the door to salvation. And He gave that key to His church in Philadelphia, the key to evangelism and preaching the Word. At the same time that the city had an open door to commerce in material life, Jesus also opened for His church the door to spread the gospel, for there were many pagans in the city, and pagan people likewise came to it by the roads.

And it seems that the church in Philadelphia was faithfully doing the work of God, for the bible says: "I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name." The Lord had opened the door for His work, they had taken advantage of it, for it is written that they did not deny His name, but the church had little strength. Perhaps because it was a small church, or because it was made up of slaves or poor people, without political influence like Pergamum or Smyrna, for example, which had temples dedicated to Caesar. So, for a church without strength in the eyes of the world, Jesus congratulated it on its faithfulness and promised that the door would not be closed. It was faithful and God gave strength to it to continue.

"I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you" – Philadelphia faced opposition from the Jews, as did Smyrna. They denied the Messiah; therefore, they were false teachers, their meetings were to plot against the Christians and that's why He called them the synagogue of Satan. They thought that they alone were saved because they kept the precepts of the Law. Philadelphia might be hated by the world but it was loved by Jesus. This was a strength it could not despise. One way or another, Jesus would make them acknowledge His love for that church.

Perhaps His way of doing this would be to protect it from pagan invasions, from Roman persecutions by Trajan, according to some sources, and from martyrdom. We can notice that in the next verse it is written: "Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth." The judgment of God would fall on the wicked and on the rebellious church, but those faithful to Him would have this promise, for they exercised love, and the love of God in them made them spiritually strong, would attract His blessing. If this church had kept His word in the trials and persecutions thus far, now Jesus promises to keep it in the trials that will come. Philadelphia is the example of the church that trusts in the faithfulness of its God.

As in other passages of Revelation (Rev. 22: 7; 12; 20) the Lord here repeats the phrase, "I am coming soon" (Rev. 3: 11). He also gives the same guidance to

Philadelphia that He has given to other churches: to hold fast to what it has and watch lest it be stolen – “Hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.” He tells this church to hold fast to the pure gospel, based on His love, which it knows and practices (cf. Matt. 24: 12-13).

Crown is symbol of victory and royalty, power to reign. And here, the word ‘crown’ is the same used for Smyrna (Rev. 2: 10), that is, *stephanos* (στέφανος – Strong #4735), which means ‘crown, garland, honor, glory’, more specifically, a chaplet (as a badge of royalty, a prize in the public games or a symbol of honor generally; but more conspicuous and elaborate than the simple fillet, diadem). This crown that John is talking about here was like those that people received at special times, like the crown given to victors at games (1 Cor. 9: 25; 2 Tim. 2: 5). The Christian life is like an athlete’s race: “I have finished the race” said Paul (2 Tim. 4: 7). ‘Stephanos’ (crown) was also given at a feast; then they will receive it at the wedding supper of the Lamb. People also received such a crown when they entered the temples of the gods; therefore, Jesus spoke to the believers in Philadelphia and Smyrna about the joy of entering the presence of God in the New Jerusalem.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the text, there were many temples to pagan gods in Philadelphia. Their followers could receive a crown upon entering them, but believers would receive it upon entering the heavenly city of God. The church in Philadelphia, unlike the others, was the only one who resisted faithfully without letting the false teaching enter inside it, not being conniving with the spiritual prostitution of its countrymen and contemporaries. It preferred to be injured instead of fighting back or giving up. This gave it the protection of God.



And the Lord goes on saying, “If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it.” In addition to receive the crown that the winners gain for taking possession of the Lord’s promises and carrying out the call He gives them with faith and perseverance, the Philadelphia winners would be ‘pillars’ in the sanctuary of God. This means that if we remain faithful here, in the New Jerusalem we will be with the Lord. The pillar is the symbol of security,

something firm that supports a building. Thus, ‘crown’ and ‘temple’ would be a contrast to the religious festivities and rites of the city.

“I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” – As the city has changed its name several times, the winners will receive new names that will show their permanent participation in the City of God. There is a reference to a new name of Christ not only in this text (Rev. 3: 12) but also in Rev 2: 17 and Rev. 19: 11-12.



Images: Ruins of the Church of St. John in Alayehir (ancient Philadelphia), Turkey. Photo: Wolfymoza (Simonjenkins' photos). Wikipedia.

What does this mean to us?

The church in Philadelphia teaches us to be faithful to Jesus like a brother was faithful to another; it makes us think that beyond the loyalty to the Lord, we must also learn to be faithful to the brothers in Christ, rather than distort the word of God giving gaps to the devil by stating the verse: “Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals.” Why not to read the whole verse? “This is what the LORD says: ‘Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD’” (Jer. 17: 5). This not only has generated suspicion among believers, exacerbating what they already bring from the world, but also gives room for the enemy to rob and to kill and destroy through hatred, strife, discord, betrayal, frustration and disappointment. God does not command us to put our trust in human flesh, but does not forbid us of being friends, or having true friends. True friendship does not separate us from the Lord. In the book of proverbs it is written that there’s closest friend than a brother (Prov. 18: 24). Jonathan loved David as his own soul, and Jesus called Abraham and His disciples, friends (2 Chr. 20: 7; Neh. 9: 7; Isa. 41: 8; Jam. 2: 23; Jn. 15: 14-15). He still left the ordinance: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Where there is true love there is no suspicion, for who has the true Spirit of God’s love in his heart not only cares for his own life, but also cares for others and

does not give gap in the flesh for the devil to use it with treason and other thoughts and bad feelings. We are the greatest destroyers of walls, for it is within the Church where we suffer the major injuries, because even the destroying word and the bad feeling come with 'anointing' (here meaning force that, instead of being directed to good, is used to evil). Hence, perhaps, the earthquakes suffered by Philadelphia forced its members to have an unstable life, which for us may be quite true from emotional standpoint, because the emotions of man are the main target of Satan to bring destruction. It starts with the meaningless oppositions that we have to suffer without having done anything wrong to deserve them.

The believers of Philadelphia faced much opposition from the Jews, not only for envy of their fertility, which also brought wealth, as well as for their friendly attitude, willing to love and to share and to do God's Work with faith, joy and perseverance, even having little power, without help from outside, both from the money of Rome and the moral support of Christians sympathizers. The greatest opposition that Satan makes us is to love, for by stopping this force he stops our lives. In bitterness and curse, in selfishness and greed, in resentment and hatred, in haughtiness and disputes there is no fertility, let alone God's presence!

The faithful to Christ faced opposition, so much so that the Lord's promise was to bring to them those who had humiliated them to acknowledge that He loved them. Jesus knew that, despite their little strength and because of such hostility and instability, they never denied His name: "I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth." Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. Therefore, the Lord speaks that He would bring trial to the world to test the inhabitants of the earth. Without passing through the great test of unconditional love of God will be impossible to be a pillar in His sanctuary. We're not talking about a transformation from night to day, but an inner willingness to love, which requires patience because the act of loving is a constant exercise and puts our ego down so that Jesus prevails.

The Lord is in control of all things and knows the purposes of every heart. Sooner or later He can bring us people who hate or despise our work to show them that what they found small and weak is honored by Him and has more strength than what the world exalts so much, that it proves to be so great. The end of the faithful to Christ is salvation and honor beside Him, but the end of the wicked is the condemnation.

"I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." The door that the Lord opens no one shuts; and the one He shuts no one can open. All authority and wisdom are in Him.

The church in Philadelphia resisted the false teachers, the false prophecies, human knowledge and the seduction of the world; therefore, those who remain in constant relationship with the Lord know His thoughts, His will, His faithfulness and His strength. The strength to resist evil comes from the Spirit of God, not from man's flesh (see Jn. 6: 63: "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life").

As I mentioned before, in contrast to the inconstant earthly life, the winners receive the promise of ultimate stability; to be part of the building of God's temple, from where they will never leave, as well as they will receive new names, which will show their permanent participation in the holy city: Jerusalem, the city of peace. When we crucify our flesh through the surrender and love of Jesus, our instability

turns into peace and might, because we begin to be edified by God Himself, protected from attacks of the carnal oppositions, in addition to have honor before those who humiliated us.

The Church in Philadelphia had already experienced a lot of instability in all senses because of so many forces contrary to it, however, remained firm in the Lord, so it needed so much the Spirit of might (Isa. 11: 2), in order to continue standing, in the face of so many struggles. Philadelphia had accomplished great deeds, but needed to walk under God's strength.

• [Rev. 3: 14-22 – letter to the Church in Laodicea](#)

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation: ‘I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing’. You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve [KJV: eyesalve] to anoint your eyes so that you may see. I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

Laodicea means justice of the people, righteous people and it was founded by Antiochus II in the third century BC (250 BC) and received this name because of his wife, Laodice. Originally it was called Diospolis and Rhoas. The site is currently in ruins, being called by the Turks Eskihsar (Old Fortress). It was a thriving commercial center, the most rich in Phrygia, and was destroyed by an earthquake in 60 AD, but for being rich it refused the imperial aid for reconstruction. It stood at an important crossroads of the world's major trade routes, so it was an important banking and currency exchange center. It was situated in the wide valley of Lycus River and was surrounded by fertile lands. Its major products were robes of polished black wool and tabloids or medicinal powders (known as Phrygian powder, which mixed with oil, was used to produce ear ointment and eye drops). There was no permanent water supply nearby. The water was carried by pipes to the city, coming from hot springs that stayed at some distance, and came to it already warm; in other words, despite all its wealth, it could produce neither the healing power of hot water of Hierapolis, a neighboring city, nor the refreshing power of the cold water of Colossae, but could only produce warm water, just useful as emetic.

The site was eventually abandoned and the modern city, called Denizli, grew up around the hot springs.

Laodicea received the gospel probably when Paul was living in Ephesus (Acts 19: 10), through Epaphras (Col. 4: 12-13; 15-16: “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you [*the Colossians*] and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis... Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you [*the one he wrote to Ephesus*], have it read also in the church of the

Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea”). Apparently, Paul did not know Laodicea personally: “For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you [*the Colossians*], and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face” (Col. 2: 1).

It is evident that this church maintained the connections with communities in the neighboring cities of Hierapolis and Colossae. In Col. 4: 16 it is more likely that Paul sent a copy of his epistle to the Ephesians to be read at Laodicea, not specifically a letter dedicated to this church: “And when this letter has been read among you [*the one he wrote to Ephesus*], have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.”

The city of Colossae was about sixteen kilometers southeast of Laodicea, in the Lycus valley; today fifteen kilometers east of the city of Denizli. In that church there was a mixture of Jewish, Greek and Phrygian elements, as we can infer from Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

The city of Hierapolis was nine kilometers north of Laodicea on the opposite side of the broad Lycus valley. Hierapolis means ‘city of sanctuary’ or ‘sacred city’, for it was a center of pagan cults since ancient times. There is currently only one small village nearby, called Eçiriköy. In 17 AD, during the rule of Emperor Tiberius, a great earthquake destroyed the city of Hierapolis. It was completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1354. Philip, the apostle of Jesus (not the evangelist described in Acts 6: 5; Acts 8: 5; Acts 21: 8-9), preached the gospel in Palestine, Greece, and Asia Minor, including in Phrygia, where the wife of a Roman Proconsul was converted. He lived there in Hierapolis, preached and died, according to Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus in 190 AD. Philip was crucified and then stoned in the year 80 AD in Hierapolis, Phrygia, by order of the Proconsul. One might think that it is about Proconsul Sextus Julius Frontinus (c. 40–103 AD), a prominent Roman civil engineer, author, soldier and senator of the late 1st century AD, and a successful general under Domitian (81–96 AD). An inscription at Hierapolis in Phrygia, as well as a number of coins of Smyrna, attests that he was proconsul of Asia in 86 AD. It’s just a hypothesis.

The church thought to have no need of anything, but in fact, it needed gold refined by fire, whitened garments and salve, more effective than its bankers, tailors and physicians could supply. Similar to citizens not hospitable to a traveler who offers extremely valuable goods, its members had closed their doors and had left outside their real provider.

Of all the letters this is the most severe. There was no compliment from Jesus, only rebuke. It was a rich, opulent city and the Christian church assimilated its diverse cultures and values, for it was the center of many roads and welcomed visitors from all over the world. In other words, the city shaped the church. It ended up tolerating the culture of the pagan gods of the city and the gods of the nations that visited Laodicea; not just the gods, but many Greek, Phrygian and other philosophies from Anatolia, eastern Turkey.

Laodicea exerted influence in four ways:

- 1) Financial – it was the banking and financial center of Asia.
- 2) Commercial – as the center of Asia’s textile industry; its wool was exported all over the world.
- 3) Scientific – Laodicea was an important medical center, especially in the field of ophthalmology. There was a famous medical school in Laodicea. The well-known ‘Phrygian powder’ the city produced was an important ingredient for eye drops and this was a real miracle in curing eye problems.

4) Tourist – because of the thermal waters of the neighboring cities: Colossae and Hierapolis. The city of Colossae produced cold waters; Hierapolis, hot waters, also medicinal. But only warm waters reached Laodicea. Therefore, taking advantage of this characteristic, Jesus says that the behavior of the church is like the temperature of water, lukewarm, which only serves as an emetic.

Walking among the lampstands, Jesus knows the spiritual health of His church. He saw that it had lost its spiritual revival, its values and its spiritual vision, and its robes were not white, its heart was lukewarm; quite different from the disciples on the way to Emmaus, when Jesus met them after His resurrection and whose hearts were burning (Lk. 24: 32: “They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’”); quite different from a cold heart, where there is neither love nor faith, and therefore lack of God and ungodliness (Matt. 24: 12: “And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.”; Ezek. 36: 26: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” cf. Ezek. 11: 19).

Laodicea was symbolically a lukewarm church, accommodated and proud because it thought that by the wealth it had it did not need anything else; on the contrary, the Lord told it that despite everything, its inhabitant was wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Its lukewarm attitude only served to make God vomit, because for Him this behavior was disgusting. So He says, “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

“Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve [KJV: eye salve] to anoint your eyes so that you may see.” – Laodicea was lukewarm, apathetic to the things of God, and did not recognize this. Because of being pitiable and poor in spirit, the church needed the refined gold, the precious gift of God, which was His word of Life, His precious teaching and that pride did not let it to receive. Its sins made it naked and unprotected, so it needed white robes of purity and holiness. Pride made it blind, despite many physicians and many remedies, so it needed the salve from God to remove its spiritual blindness.

He was the Creator of all things, so He was able to make promises and fulfill them: “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation.” Laodicea thought it worked many wonders, but the Lord could do much more than the church could ever imagine, in particular, make it open its eyes to see its situation.

“I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.” – Laodicea was being placed before a divine choice: to let Jesus enter or let Him out. It was being reprimanded, so that it could correct itself. The Lord asked of it two basic things: zeal for the Word and repentance for its sins. By letting Him come in for the ego to go out, it would eat what He can provide. Repentance is attitude, not emotion; it means changing one’s mind, values and principles. “If you hear my voice and open the door” means the invitation is personal. He knocks at the door through the circumstances that people go through, and calls them through the Scriptures. But how

can He call them and how can they hear without even wanting to read the bible and look for the answers to their problems?

“To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” – As a reward, it could sit on the throne with Him, but for this it had to learn, to fight and to win; only then it could reign. Humility would make it experience the justice of God, His forgiveness and redemption from its sins, with the right to be an heir. When we have fellowship with Him, we have a place on the throne, He publicly honors us.

What does this mean for us?

Here we have another example of what the Lord asks of us as a Body: to throw away the pride and let Him really enter into the deepest places of our being, where only He knows, and pluck out of there the weeds and the false curatives that have been offered to us, the false robes that we try to produce to cover us, pretending everything is all right; to abandon the idea that our status of saved people by itself entitles us to enter the New Jerusalem and a quick prayer covering us with the blood of the Lamb is enough for the devil to respect us. What our soul needs is deep healing. Only the Holy Spirit can change the ingrained patterns of behavior, including doctrines of a church that was founded centuries ago but that are no longer useful to the believers today because the wars and challenges are different.

This does not mean accepting fads and novelties, but ‘updating’ the teachings and revelation that the Lord transmits today, day by day, through His Spirit to everyone who takes time to be in His presence without the distractions of what is around and without unnecessary activities that attract His children today. Therefore, God guides us to truly heal ourselves before the cross, obeying His word that says: “because apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15: 5b). Being converts many years ago, having read the bible ten times, being preachers or having any position of leadership do not make us special before God, much less exempt us of His treatment. All His children in the bible were worked and forged by Him until the end of their lives and grew at the pace determined by Him, not the human pace self-imposed, fast, light, without pain and in a careless way. Who is the father that stays impassive, watching his son go astray through wrong ways without reproaching him? If he does nothing, it is more than clear that he doesn’t love him.

Having good financial conditions and a good reputation in the evangelical circle and even in society does not mean that we are pleasing God. What are the fruits of our work for Him? The applause of people can blind the eyes to the reality of the interior of the heart, to the real color of the spiritual clothes, stealing the sensitivity of our spirit to the silent and subtle voice of the Holy Spirit, who speaks many times through a feeling in our heart, of something that does not let us perceive the smile of approval of Jesus for what we do.

Being open to communication with all churches in the Body of Christ does not necessarily mean building and strengthening. Many churches do not watch over, and impart ‘revelations’, new doctrines and modernized learning that they have inadvertently let in from the world or other religious lines. And then this ‘evangelical ecumenism’ starts to contaminate the minds of believers who are not used to praying or reading the bible, who just like to listen to online sermons wherever they are, even in the middle of driving home or to work, without having some time reserved to meditate in silence together with the Holy Spirit and to do a self-analysis; no privacy even to cry. The voice of God is not heard in the midst of noise and agitation, but in the silence of the mind and heart.

The church of Laodicea was used to receiving all kinds of information and doctrine that came through the city gates, its rich and important members helped to update their knowledge with what they probably heard in the commercial centers of the city, with the latest philosophies of the Greek culture. They helped the church with money and could even give advice on how to use it 'correctly', for they were in contact with the banks and with secular knowledge on how to apply the money in the most convenient way. The influence of science brought a sense of security and well-being; perhaps even making them disbelieve in the divine miracles they once saw when Jesus' apostles went out to spread the gospel.

And this still happens today, when the church of Christ has become a company, where members within it have important professions and influence too much with secular knowledge, instead of leaving the Spirit of God free to do things His way, to keep the faith, hope and belief of the members that God is the Creator, He is above finance, science, the arts and knowledge and is still able to work miracles, and do them in the simple way that He has always did because of the innocence of His children's hearts. Doctors treat; only God heals. Psychologists help to locate problems, but don't provide a profound or effective solution to them. Bankers and business administrators give tips on how to manage resources and generate productivity, but a housewife faithful to God is better able to know how to feed a family with what little food they have at home. God's wisdom will always be greater than human wisdom. We are not despising study and intellectual ability, but calling attention to the fact that Jesus is knocking at the door in order to enter and participate in our lives.

Laodicea, Colossae and Hierapolis were a tourist complex because of their thermal waters, and great celebrities of the time ended up living and dying there. Even Roman senators made their home in that place. The church of Christ cannot be a bathing resort, which warms hearts with a beautiful and convenient word, but unfortunately uncommitted to salvation, conversion and correction of lives. Concerts, for the most part (with a few exceptions), don't convert people to Christ, they just draw crowds. On the other hand, a serious course of biblical teaching has few students.

Besides proud, Laodicea was a lukewarm, indecisive and accommodated church, which strengthened its pride, at the same time that all this was also a fruit of it. Who thinks that everything is fine and does need nothing, not even to learn and grow, accommodates and becomes lukewarm, for one of the advantages of the wars in which the Lord puts us is to make us warmer toward Him and more 'inflamed' with the enemy, not letting us fall in the faith or give up being a warrior. The lukewarm state and the self-indulgence cause indecision because the wars also put us before choices, and our ability to decide and exercise our free will becomes more sharpened. When there is nothing to choose indecision settles down.

Repeating what was written above: as a reward for its change of attitude, Laodicea could sit on the throne with God, but for this it had to learn, to fight and win; only then it could reign. Humility would make it experience the justice of God, His forgiveness and redemption from its sins, with the right to be heir. Remember: Laodicea means: God's justice, righteous people. The same thing is for the Church today.

The Church of Laodicea was the proud church that thought it did not need anything and had wisdom enough to walk without God's treatment. So, it needed so much the Spirit of wisdom of the Lord, leaving aside its worthless human wisdom.

Images below:

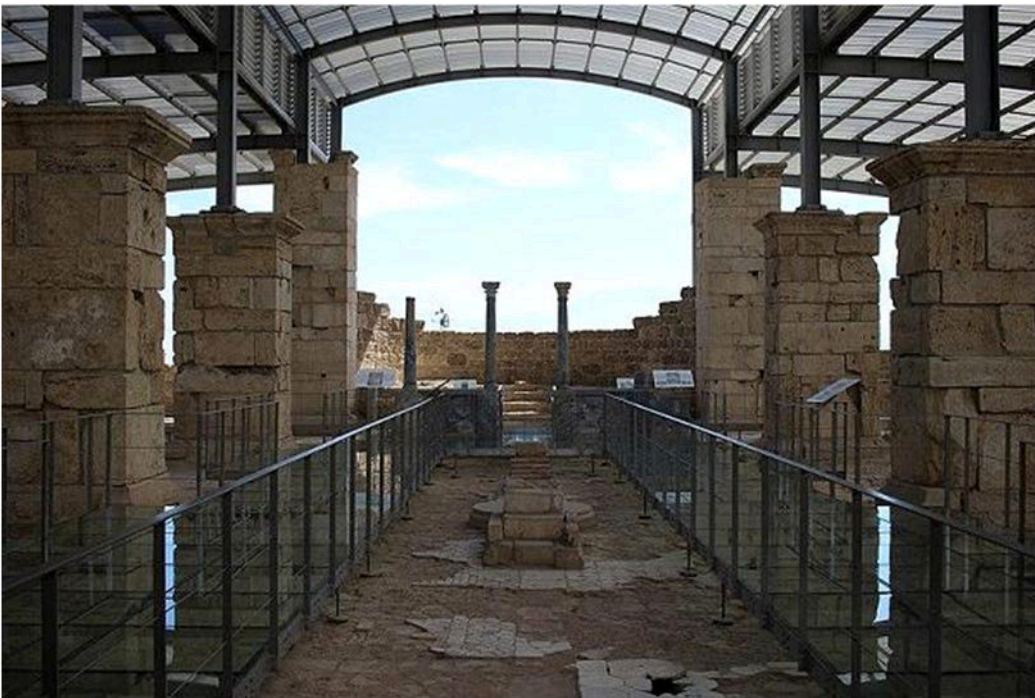
- Ruins of Laodicea. Photo: Klaus Walter. Wikipedia.
- Temple 'A' – Archaeological site of Laodicea on the Lycus between Pamukkale and Denizli, Turkey. Photo: A. Savin. Wikipedia.



Images below:

- Laodicea on the Lycus Valley, western theatre. Basak (2021). Wikipedia.
- Ancient city of Laodicea (Laodikea Antik Kenti). Photo: Gargarapalvin (2019). Wikipedia.
- View of the site of Hierapolis, Turkey. Photo: Bernard Gagnon – Wikipedia.
- Temple 'A' – Archaeological site of Laodicea on the Lycus, Phrygia, Turkey. Photo: Carole Raddato from FRANKFURT, Germany. Wikipedia.





Inside The Church of Laodicea of the Lycus, Denizli, Turkey. Photo: Blcksprt. Wikipedia.



Remains of the ancient city of Colossae near Denizli, Turkey. Photo: A.Savin (Wikipedia).



Purported Tomb of Philip the Apostle, Hierapolis. Francesco D'Andria found this first-century Roman tomb that he believes once held the remains of the Philip the Apostle. Photo: Blcksprt – Wikipedia.

Second section – Chapters 4–7



The vision of the throne | The scroll with
seven seals | The vision of the 144,000 sealed
| The Lamb opens the seals

Second section – Chapters 4–7

John reports the visions of the throne of God, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, the vision of the scroll sealed with seven seals and the vision of the Lamb (Rev. 4: 1-11 – Rev. 5: 1-14), the vision of the glorified and the one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed of Israel (Rev 7: 1-17), after which we read of the seven seals (Rev. 6: 1-17; Rev. 8: 1). Between the sixth and seventh seals there is an intermission, a period of preparation and prelude (Rev 7: 1-17) for the seven trumpets, and a vision follows each of them (Rev. 8: 2-13 – Rev. 9: 1-21; Rev. 11: 15-19).

Seals mean: trouble, suffering, persecution, represent the world persecuting the church.

The seventh seal, composed of the judgments prefigured in the seven trumpets, is to be the most important; in other words, the trumpets can be seen as subdivisions of the seventh seal. But before the trumpets begin to sound there is a period of silence in heaven (Rev. 8: 1) of half an hour. Not only are the multitude and the angels silent, but God is also waiting to hear the cry of His people (the golden censer hurled to the earth – Rev. 8: 3-5). There is silence and supplication in anticipation of God's judgment on the world that persecuted the church. The heavens are astonished and silent because of gravity and solemnity.

Chapter 4 –

Now, in chapter 4: 1-11, John is caught up and sees the throne of God. He describes the same living creatures that Ezekiel described (Ezek. 1: 1-14; Ezek. 10: 14-15); the living creatures have the appearance of a lion, an ox, a man and an eagle, and are symbols of the cherubim that surround the throne of God. He also describes the twenty-four elders and the unceasing praise before the throne of God.



• Rev. 4: 1-5: “After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’ At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God” (cf. Rev. 1: 4; Rev. 5: 6).

In these verses he conveys the idea that it is important to know that what he wrote or will write came from the Lord, from someone who is in a much higher place (‘there in heaven a door stood open’; ‘Come up here’), inaccessible to man and in control of all things and of everybody, as well as allowing or forbidding His servants to receive certain revelations. This confirms God’s sovereignty over men and over History.

• Rev. 4: 5: “Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God (cf. Rev. 1: 4; Rev. 5: 6).” – The figures of speech such as lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder reflect the majesty and power of God, His authority over all things, as was His manifestation at Sinai with Moses and His people who came out of Egypt. Ezekiel, when he saw the cherubim before the throne, also described them with language like gleaming amber (Ezek. 1: 4), burnished bronze (Ezek. 1: 7), and burning coals of fire (Ezek. 1: 13), and that they moved like a flash of lightning (Ezek. 1: 14). This meant a God of power, an awesome and fearsome God, who had the ability to purify the souls of men as fire purifies gold, and who was worthy of respect. And His angels are swift as lightning when it comes to carrying out His orders (cf. Ps. 104: 4).

The seven flaming torches, which are the seven Spirits of God, represent the fullness of the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11: 2) and His exclusive role in executing judgment.

John describes the twenty-four elders. Daniel also talks about them:

• Dn 7: 9-10; 26: “As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One [*NIV: The Ancient of Days – meaning God’s eternal figure*] took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court [*God and the twenty-four elders*] sat in judgment, and the books were opened ... Then the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away [*To take away the Antichrist’s dominion, is what he means, for he was speaking of the fourth beast, which had a mouth that spoke with insolence*], to be consumed and totally destroyed.”

In the book of Revelation, the twenty-four elders are described:

• Rev. 4: 4; 10-11: “Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads... the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the

throne, singing, ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.’”

- Rev. 5: 5; 8-10: “Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals’...When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sing a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.’”

- Rev. 11: 16: “Then the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God.”

- Rev. 19: 4: “And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, ‘Amen. Hallelujah!’”

The twenty-four elders will participate in the judgment of evil, in the end times. But in all the texts we’ve read above, they only bow down before God and worship and praise Him for His justice and judgment. They do not speak words of judgment from their own mouths. All we can think is that they know the thoughts and the will of God more than anyone else, and they are in accordance with the Lord. Before the Lord, they are holy; so can sit at His side. They are not angels; they are humans who were redeemed, for the bible speaks of crowns; and angels won’t receive a crown, but the saints (1 Cor. 9: 24-25; 1 Pet. 5: 4).

But as for the identity of the twenty-four elders, it is difficult to say exactly who they are, that is, identifying them with the patriarchs and with the twelve apostles of Jesus is not entirely correct; hence it is more accurate to say that they represent the court of God (Dan 7: 9-10; 26), the OT and NT Church, the universal church of Christ in the position of honor, because they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, and has authority to judge.



- Rev. 4: 6-11: “and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures [*cherubim, cf. Ezek. 1: 1-14; Ezek. 10: 14-15*], full of eyes in front and

behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.’ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.’”

“And in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne” – this symbolizes the clarity and purity, the transparency of the throne of God, where nothing is unclean or hidden. It reflects His glory and His light.

“And on each side of the throne, are four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside.”





John describes the same living creatures as Ezekiel (Ezek. 1: 1-14; Ezek. 10: 14-15). The living creatures have the appearance of a lion, an ox, a man and an eagle, and are symbols of the cherubim that surround the throne of God. The difference is that John says that each of them has different faces, whereas Ezekiel sees the four faces on the four cherubim (Ezek. 1: 6, 10; Ezek. 10: 14).

John and Isaiah say that these beings have six wings and Isaiah calls them 'Seraphs' or 'Seraphim' or else 'seraphims' (KJV) – Isa. 6: 2: "Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew" (NRSV).

Ezekiel says they have four wings (Ezek. 1: 6) and under them the hands of a man (Ezek. 1: 8). The bible calls them cherubim (Ezek. 10: 9,12).

Isaiah and John say that these beings (angels) praise the Lord uninterruptedly:

- Rev. 4: 8 "And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.'"

- Isa. 6: 3: "And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.'"

The three writers describe in fact two hierarchy of angels: The cherubim and seraphim, that is, angelic beings responsible for certain functions of watchfulness and worship. Seraphim were agents of purification by fire, according to Hebrew scholars who seek to link the name seraphim to the root *sāraph* = to burn, consume with fire. They lead worship in heaven and protect God's holiness. That's why the writers often use figures of speech, both for God on His throne and for the angels of high hierarchy like gleaming amber (Ezek. 1: 4), burnished bronze (Ezek. 1: 7), and burning coals of fire (Ezek. 1: 13). This meant a God of power, an awesome and fearsome God, who had the ability to purify the souls of men as fire purifies gold.

The cherubim (*kēruhīm*, plural of 'cherub' = heavenly, celestial) are also celestial beings and in the book of Genesis it is written that they had the responsibility to guard the way to the tree of life [symbol of Jesus] in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3: 24), and were placed over the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25: 18-22; Heb. 9: 5) to protect the sacred objects stored in it (1 Sam. 4: 4; 2 Sam. 6: 2; 2 Kin. 19: 15; Ps. 80: 1; Ps. 99: 1). In other words, they are guardians of the Throne of God.

Ezekiel and John describe the cherubim ('living creatures') like beings full of eyes, which means that these creatures see everything, have great intelligence and are knowledgeable of the divine mysteries. The cherubim are a class of angels with great strength of knowledge, wisdom and divine light and that reflect the beauty of the Creator.

It's interesting that the word cherub or cherubim, in Assyrian, is *kirubu*, an expression designating a winged bull (symbol of Adad, 'the thunderer', an Assyrian deity equivalent to Baal, the god of the storms). Perhaps this is why Ezekiel wrote that the first face was that of a cherub (Ezek. 10: 14: "Each one had four faces: the first face was that of the cherub, the second face was that of a human being, the third that of a lion, and the fourth that of an eagle."). In addition to this winged bull, there is another in the form of a winged lion (symbol of Ishtar), which not only served as decoration on the walls and doors of the temples, but were found in pairs (of winged lions or bulls), also serving as guards at the entrance of Mesopotamian temples. These creatures were called 'lamassu', a female deity; or 'shedu', the male counterpart of a lamassu. Because he was in captivity in Babylon, Mesopotamia, Ezekiel also may have seen the cherubim that way due to the influence of local culture. On the other hand, as a priest, the Levitical education inside him allowed him a greater knowledge and more focused on the root of his own people than to idolatry.

Both John and Ezekiel speak of the face of the cherubim around the throne:

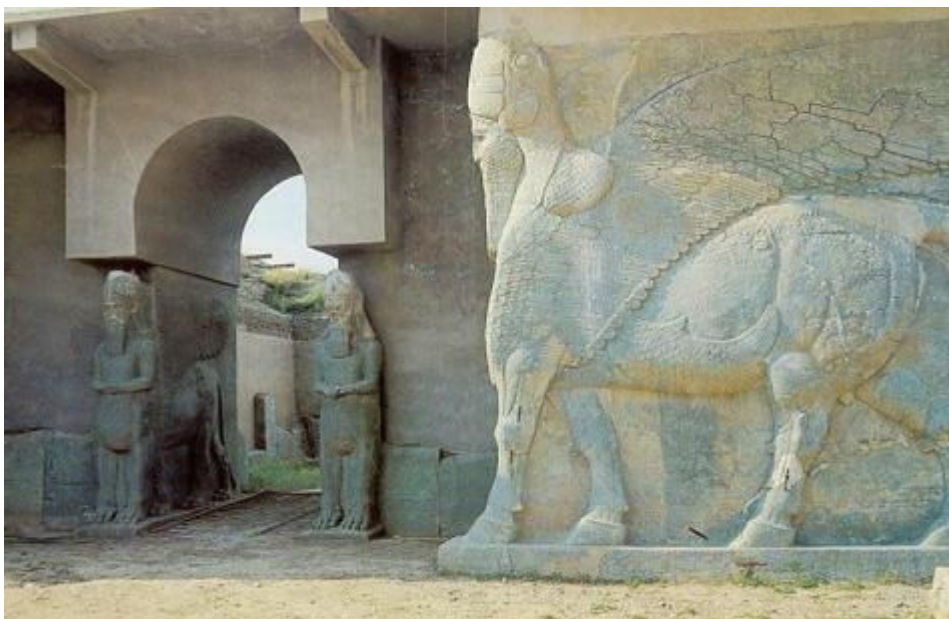
- Face of man, symbolizing the intelligence and the free will, given by God to man.
- Face of a lion, symbolizing royalty, authority, strength, leadership, spiritual power.
- Face of an ox, symbolized the physical strength, the supply, provision, wealth and abundance, in addition to be an animal used in the worship of God; in other words, obedience and service to Him.
- Face of eagle, symbolizing majesty, longevity, renewal (at the age of forty the eagle experiences a process of physical renewal), the ability to see far, to have free movements to dominate the space, to reach great heights, therefore, to reach to spiritual heights (spirituality).

What John saw in the cherubim not only reflected the nature of God, but what He desires for His church, which will one day be with Him in the New Jerusalem. Thus, to be there we need to develop four characteristics in ourselves:

- a) the proper use of the authority, power and spiritual leadership that have been placed in us (lion);
- b) the proper use of the intelligence and the free will, given by God to His children (man);
- c) the wisdom to deal with material goods and to be a real worshiper, to obey and serve (ox);
- d) the desire to reach the spiritual heights and be ready for the renewal that comes from the Holy Spirit (eagle).

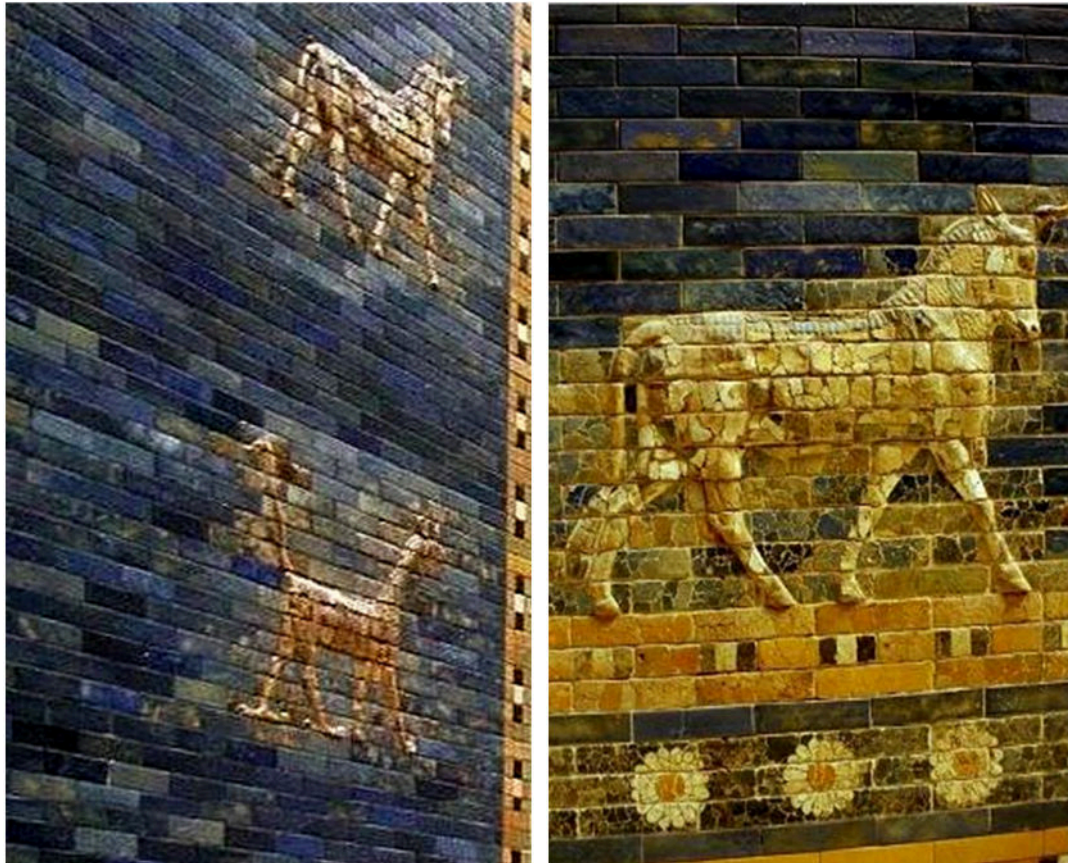


An Assyrian winged bull – Wikipedia



Above: A winged bull in the northern palace of Ashurbanipal in Nimrod (Nimrud; the name of the ancient Calah), one of the main four archaeological mounds of the city of Nineveh – Wikipedia.

The images of bulls and winged lions you've seen were found at the entrance to the palaces of the kings of Assyria. In the palace of Nebuchadnezzar similar animals were also found: the lion, on the walls of the throne room, on the gate of Ishtar and in the northern wall of the city of Babylon (the bull and dragon).



- On the left the bull and dragon ('mushrushu', mušhuššu, symbol of Marduk), seen at the Ishtar Gate in Babylon – Wikipedia.
- On the right, a detail of the bull (symbol of Adad) – Wikipedia.
- Below, a detail of the dragon and lion at the Ishtar Gate, symbol of this goddess. The lions, dragons and bulls were lined up alternately at the Ishtar Gate (vertically) – Wikipedia.



Looking at all these animals, we can understand why Ezekiel (captive in Babylon) described the cherubim with characteristics similar to an ox and a lion. When we look at the curtains of the Tabernacle of Moses (Ex. 26: 1-2; 31; 1 Kin. 6: 23-28; 2 Chr. 3: 10-13) and the walls of the temple of Solomon in some images, we can notice cherubim with shapes similar to that of a lion (at least the body). Coincidence or not, we can at least imagine that since ancient times, these animals had an important symbolism for humanity.



Curtains of the Outer Court of the Tabernacle



The Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple – source: 'Messages of Christ' (video).

We can understand why John also saw the cherubim like a lion (“the first living creature like a lion”) and Jesus is called the lion of Judah. The lion symbolizes royalty, authority, strength, leadership, spiritual power, as well as the manifestation of powers or influences on us (remember Samson).

Chapter 5 –

• Rev. 5: 1: “Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.”

Then John sees the scroll written on the inside and on the back and sealed with seven seals. There is a resemblance to what is written in Ezek. 2: 9-10: “I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.”

Seal represents what is safely possessed, something that is complete, sign of authority and authenticity of the writings; the truths of God to be revealed to men. In this vision of John, the seals represent the decrees of God that had already been issued, which was already determined to humanity, especially for the Church (seven is the perfect number, the number of God), that is, the tests that His children would have to face, the problems, the suffering, the persecution of the world, but the guarantee of the victory of God’s Word over any opposition that Christians would come to suffer.

In this part of the book, the seals represent the world pursuing the church.

• Rev. 5: 2-5: “and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?’ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.’”

John saw that no one was able to break the seals, neither in heaven, nor on earth nor under the earth. His suffering was relieved when one of the elders told him that the lion of Judah, the root of David, the Lamb of God, Jesus has conquered and he could open the scroll and its seven seals.



- Rev. 5: 6-10: “Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sing a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.’”

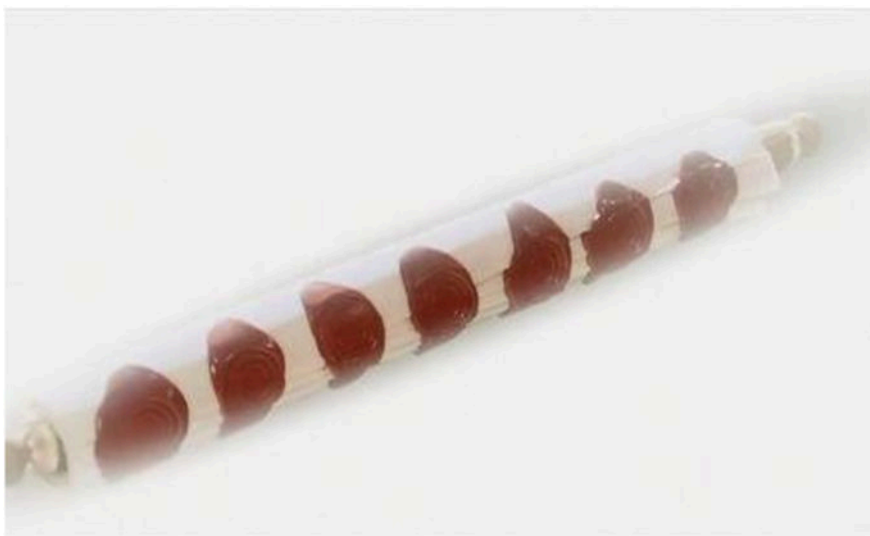
Here Jesus presents Himself to John not as a lion, but as a lamb that had been slaughtered. And the Bible says, “having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” The seven eyes are the seven spirits of God sent throughout the earth. In short, the Spirit of God sees everything, knows everything and His wisdom rules the whole earth and all God’s creation (cf. Zech. 4: 10b: “These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth”).

And when the Lamb takes the scroll, the four living beings, and the elders prostrate themselves, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5: 8; Rev. 8: 3). They praise the Lord for winning and rescuing them with His blood and to make them to be a kingdom and priests for God, and to reign on earth.

The saints pray to God and He hears; their prayers rise as incense to Him, such as burning incense on the Tabernacle or Temple, on the golden altar before the Ark of the covenant.

- Rev. 5: 11-12: “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’”

John also sees angels surrounding the throne, myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, proclaiming honor and glory and praise to the Lamb of God.



• Rev. 5: 13-14: “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, ‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ And the elders fell down and worshiped.”

All creatures in heaven, in the sea, on earth and under the earth also praise the Lord, the whole universe. All of this shows that God has man’s history in His hands; He does not lose control.

What happened historically at that moment?

Peter and Paul had already died. Thirty years ago Nero had been burned down Rome and the persecution of Christians began. The apostles had already been martyred and only John was alive on the island of Patmos. The church was powerless and suffering in the hands of the powerful. And God then reveals to John the seals, showing that God is on the throne, He won to open the scroll and break the seals. In this part of the book of Revelation, the seals represent the tests that His Church would have to face, the problems, the suffering, the persecution of the world, but the guarantee of the victory of the Word of God over any opposition that Christians would suffer.

The seven seals comprises the period from the ascension of Christ to His second coming. Who breaks the seals is not the devil, but Jesus. Therefore, as the horses come into History, the events of judgment are totally under the control of Jesus Christ. Everything is useful for His purposes.

This continues to mean the same to us today: His children are persecuted on earth in one way or another for doing His work, but their prayers go up to the throne and He hears them, sends His help and His strength so that they can stand the tests, as Jesus endured His own. He said, “I have said this to you [*His suffering and resurrection*], so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (Jn. 16: 33).

Chapter 6 –



• Rev. 6: 1-2: “Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, ‘Come!’ I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.”

The first seal is the white horse, mounted by a knight dressed in white and he came out conquering and to conquer. White means victory, justice and conquest, purity, holiness and redemption. Thus, it is a reference to Jesus (cf. Rev. 19: 11), who came as just and conqueror. Jesus goes ahead, opening the seals. He is the only one who has come winning and to win.



• Rev. 6: 3-4: “When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, ‘Come!’ And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was

permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.”

The second seal is the red horse, and his knight was given a great sword and the authority of taking peace from the earth through war. Therefore, the red symbolizes war. Certain historians (The preterist line of interpretation of Revelation) connect this seal to Trajan and Hadrian, who pursued many Christians. But in the twentieth century, Nazis (with Adolf Hitler), fascists (with Benito Mussolini) and radical Islamists exterminated many of God’s people.



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

The third seal means the scarcity of food and hunger, grief and mourning, and is represented by the black horse, whose rider has a pair of scales in hand. As a result, it also means injustice, the fruit of selfishness. ‘A quart of wheat for a day’s pay’ [NIV: Two pounds of wheat for a day’s wages] corresponds to the salary of a working day, showing the exorbitant prices in the period of scarcity and hunger. Hunger is a consequence of war.

Oil and wine refer to the olive tree and the vine, which do not suffer as much as the cereals in the drought. This could mean that this scarcity did not refer to superfluous, such as olive oil and wine, that people could pass without, but to the needs of life (wheat and barley, with which bread is made). While some go hungry, others enjoy the best in time of hunger because of economic interests.

Theologians of Preterist line of Revelation say this could have occurred in the times of Septimius Severus (193-211) and other emperors that lived during the Crisis of the third century (235-284), which comprises almost fifty years of civil wars, pandemics, foreign invasion and a collapse in economy, when the Roman Empire was ruled by soldiers.

But this is the reality we live in today and the one we have for the future, increasingly accentuated by the economic interests of great world powers that hold not only economic interests, but technology and the media, accelerating the process of corruption of the human personality, bringing lack of love and compassion, cooling in relationships, selfishness, egocentrism and indifference, cruelty in treating others, hatred, violence, greed, covetousness, consumerism of superfluous things and taking advantage of the misery of others. That's what Paul said in 2 Tim. 3: 1-5: "You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!"

NIV writes: "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them."

God is not against money, but against the love of it, a very evident characteristic of this anti-Christian world and this financial Babylon, that is, the world monetary system, blind to the truths of God and totally focused on sin and destruction. That is why Paul said in 1 Tim. 6: 10: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." Therefore, all those who deviate from the values of the kingdom of God to agree with the corrupt worldly system are the first to have their lives destroyed, with pains that begin in this life and end in hell, where they will go.

For a faithful believer, there is a way to live and resist this: to be content with what he has, with his needs met in a simple and humble way, giving priority to the true values of the kingdom of God: "Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?' Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Heb. 13: 5-8); 1 Tim. 6: 8: "but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these."

Money is the force that moves life in the world and often puts pressure on God's children, especially when they have little strength in this area. However, this has been the enemy's threatening lie to intimidate people and show that he holds this power, but the Bible says otherwise: God is the true owner of gold and silver (Hag. 2:8: "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts"; Ps. 37: 25: "I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread."). And if He is allowing this evil force to prevail, it is to separate His own, those who are destined for salvation, and who have His promise of basic sustenance in their lives (Phil. 4: 19: "And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus", where the word 'need' is in focus), even if it is just a roof, bread, water and clothing, for the hand of God can turn a little into much, and leave the wicked with all his 'superfluous abundance' under judgment.



- Rev. 6: 7-8: “When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, ‘Come!’ I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth.”

The fourth seal means ‘Death’ (Rev. 6: 8), for the ‘pale green’ is the pale color of a corpse, and God could use various ways for this (cf. Jer. 15: 3 – sword; dogs; the birds of the air; the beasts of the earth; Ezek. 5: 12: plague, famine, sword, exile). Hell (Hades) comes after death. Death overthrows and hell gathers the dead. Hence, this seal would represent death from disease, pestilence (Rev. 6: 8), sword, famine, wild animals, and other types of calamities sent by God as a way of executing His judgment against sin and all enemies of His people; as some see the type of death of certain Roman emperors as God’s revenge for what they did to Christians (who were killed by wild animals in Roman arenas), for example, but many emperors died violent deaths, even for what they did against the Roman people themselves. And the bible writes about the fourth part of the earth, that is, God is still using His mercy, leaving lives intact. Certain historians link this seal to Caesar Gaius Iulius Verus Maximinus Augustus, known as Maximinus Thrax or Maximinus I (235-238 AD).

During several eras of humanity there were serious pandemics such as smallpox (165–180); smallpox or measles (250–271); bubonic plague – 6th century; black plague (bubonic plague around 1300-1351); typhus during the Crusades (1489 and 1542), in 1812 at the time of Napoleon and in Second World War; cholera (4 times between 1829–1875); influenza (three times between 1729-1733; 1580; 1889-1892); Spanish flu (1918-1920), which started shortly after the end of the First World War and disappeared in eighteen months; Coronavirus, the most recent one that started in China in 2019.

In all the seals, there is a cry on the part of men.

- Rev. 6: 9-11: “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; they cried out with a loud voice, ‘Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?’ They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number

would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.”



The fifth seal shows in heaven the souls of martyrs who were slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony of Christ, for great was the persecution of Christians, for which reason John was exiled to Patmos (Rev 1: 9). These souls are told to rest in the Lord for a while. Certain historians link this seal to Diocletian, for it was in his reign that the great persecution took place.

The souls are under the altar because the blood of the sacrifices was shed at the base of the altar in the temple (Ex. 29: 12), that is, the fact that John sees the souls under the altar may be an allusion to the blood of the sacrifices of burnt offerings, which were made on the bronze altar of the temple.

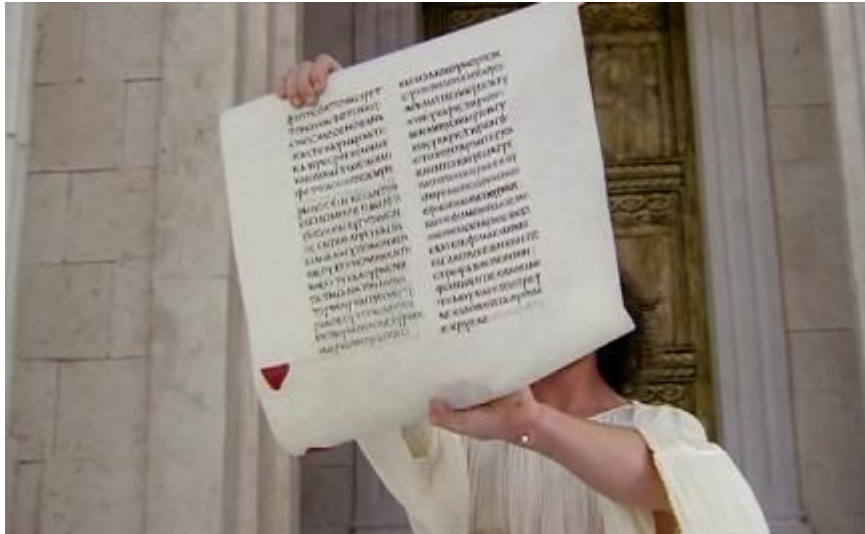
John Wesley explains the first part of the verse as the martyrs slain under pagan Rome, and the following as the martyrs slain under Papal Rome.

But the martyrs are impatient and ask the Lord to avenge their blood and judge the wicked (Rev. 5: 10). They ask for the vindication of God's glory. Then the Lord says that this vengeance will not be fully accomplished until the defeat of the great harlot is accomplished (Rev. 19: 2). Many others would still die for their faith in Christ.

Since the book is separated by sections, where new revelations are given to previous visions, we could say that the souls of the beheaded (Rev. 20: 4) were also among those under the altar or of those yet to be added. As happened with the Roman Empire in the time of Trajan (Rev. 3: 10) it will happen at the end of time with the Beast, in the period of the Great Tribulation, a terrible time of persecution for those who believe in the gospel and remain faithful to God and His Word (cf. Rev. 7: 13-14; Rev. 13: 15; Rev. 14: 1-5; Rev. 18: 24).

- Rev. 6: 12-17: “When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the

caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”



The sixth seal speaks of the signs in the heavens, that is, the structure of the universe is shaken. The universe flees from the one who is on the throne and judges everything and everyone. Therefore, it is a dramatic scene of the second coming of Christ (cf. Matt. 24: 29-31) and the final judgment, where there is no more opportunity for sinners, the grace of God has closed. John is touching on the same subject. From verse 15 onwards, all social and economic classes (“The kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free”) will suffer this judgment and hide for fear of the wrath of the Lamb (“for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”).

Many people are truly afraid of world events and the signs that we are already witnessing among nature and humanity, but a word in the gospels comforts and strengthens us: “Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Lk. 21: 28).

Chapter 7 –

- Rev. 7: 1-17 opens the vision of the church, for it enters into the possession of the Lord's kingdom. Rev. 7: 16-17 refers to the second coming and the Day of Judgment, where the saints will live a life of peace with the Lord eternally. In this part of the text, John speaks of those sealed with the seal of God, to be spared from His judgments (Rev. 7: 3).

- Rev. 7: 1-3: "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree. I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, saying, 'Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.'"

The four winds signify that God's judgment is upon the whole earth ('the four corners of the earth'). 'Winds' are symbols of destructive powers; this implies that God makes a distinction between His people and the wicked, for the angel will only act when God's servants are sealed (Rev. 7: 3).

Seal means: 'that which is securely possessed, something that is complete, a sign of authenticity and authority, the property of someone or something'. The seal of God on the foreheads of His servants, therefore, signifies: protection, inviolability, property of God the Father and the Lamb. The sealed never depart from the faith.

God delivers His people **in** the midst of tribulation, but doesn't spare them **from** the tribulation. The church will go through the Great Tribulation, but it will be spared from divine judgment in the tribulation.



- Rev. 7: 4-8: "And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel: From the tribe of Judah twelve thousand sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the

tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand sealed.”

Here John mentions the one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed of Israel.

The number twelve symbolizes the number of God’s elective purposes; in other words: the number of the election and the God’s call to a person. One hundred and forty-four means: twelve times twelve. One hundred and forty-four thousand means an infinitely large number of saved for the Lord; symbol of wholeness (12x12x1000), referring to all who will be saved (both OT and NT) and those who will be sealed in the Great Tribulation period (Rev. 7: 3; Rev. 9: 4 cf. Ezek. 9: 4-6 ; Rev. 7: 13-14) with the seal of the Father and the Son, rather than having the mark of the beast (Rev. 13: 17); therefore, to be preserved from the calamities to come.

They washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb:

- Rev. 7: 9-17: “After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.’ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you are the one that knows.’ Then he said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

There is no separation between Jews and Gentiles in these texts; all are saved in the same way: by faith in Jesus and by His grace. Hence it is written in Rev. 5: 9b-10: “for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.”

The one hundred and forty-four thousand belong to spiritual Israel, not the natural Israel (cf. Gal. 6: 14; 16; Rom. 2: 28-29; Rom. 4: 11). The countless multitude is the countless seed promised to Abraham (Heb. 11: 10-12).

What happens is that these are two phases of the same vision of the church of Christ, the spiritual Israel of God: the first phase where John ‘hears’ the number of those who will be sealed, before God sheds the seventh seal (‘And I heard the number of those who were sealed’ – v. 4), and who will face tribulations. Then John ‘sees’, as a consoling promise given by God, that same multitude, already victorious, redeemed and glorified, before the throne of the Lamb, celebrating the victory (‘After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and

before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands'). 'Palm branches in their hands' and 'They cried out in a loud voice' are expressions of victory.

In the third text (Rev. 14: 1-5), John speaks of the one hundred and forty-four thousand set apart, sealed, redeemed from the earth (v. 3), as we shall see later.

Between the sixth and seventh seals there is an intermission (Rev. 7: 1-17) and before the 7th seal there is a period of preparation and prelude to the seven trumpets (Rev. 8: 1).

The seventh seal, composed of the judgments prefigured in the seven trumpets, is to be the most important (Rev. 8: 5); in other words, the trumpets can be seen as subdivisions of the seventh seal. But before the trumpets begin to sound there is a period of silence in heaven (Rev. 8: 1) of half an hour.

Not only are the multitude and the angels silent, but God is also waiting to hear the cry of His people (the golden censer hurled to the earth – Rev. 8: 3-5). There is silence and supplication in anticipation of God's judgment on the world that persecuted the church. The heavens are astonished and silent because of gravity and solemnity.



Third section – Chapters 8–11



The Trumpets | John and the Little Scroll |
The Two Witnesses

Third section – Chapters 8–11

The seventh seal, composed of the judgments prefigured in the seven trumpets, is to be the most important (Rev. 8: 5); in other words, the trumpets can be seen as subdivisions of the seventh seal. But before the trumpets begin to sound there is a period of silence in heaven (Rev. 8: 1) of half an hour. A vision follows each one (Rev. 8: 2-13 – Rev. 9: 1-21; Rev. 11: 15-19). Between the sixth and seventh trumpets there is an intermission (Rev. 10: 1-11 – Rev. 11: 14).

While the seals speak of the world persecuting the church, the trumpets speak of God's partial judgment on the world that persecutes the church, when divine judgment is tempered with mercy, i.e., He still gives man a chance to repent: a third of the earth, and a third of the trees, and of all the green grass (Rev. 8: 7); a third of the sea became blood (Rev. 8: 9); a third of the rivers and on the springs of water (Rev. 8: 10-11); a third of the stars (Rev. 8: 12-13); demons torment men who have not been sealed with the seal of God upon their foreheads (Rev. 9: 4); afterwards, they receive authorization to kill them (Rev. 9: 15), the sixth trumpet. Trumpets symbolize a warning to repent.

The trumpets are sent in answer to the prayers of the saints to God (Rev. 8: 5), that is, the censer carries the prayers to the throne, whence also the judgments on earth, the wrath of God, are poured out. In this section of the trumpets the hand of God is at work in History through the prayer of the church.



The trumpets are not successive of the seals, but parallel to the seals. This means that, although the world persecutes the church, it prays and God sends His judgment on the wicked, brings His warning to the sinner.

That's what I said about the Roman emperors' persecution of Christians in the 1st century. They persecuted, Christians prayed and God brought His warnings. It was no coincidence the way most Roman emperors died, nor the natural catastrophes nor the breakdown in politics that occurred during the Roman period.

Here in this section there is a parallelism with the plagues of Egypt, for they also prayed and God came down to exercise judgment.

All these signs will intensify in the end times.

In addition to the trumpets, there is also mention of the angels and the seven thunders, John and the little scroll (Rev. 10: 1-11) and the measuring of the sanctuary of God and the two witnesses (Rev. 11: 1-14), who are a prelude to the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11: 15-19), 'the trumpet of God' mentioned by Paul in 1 The. 4: 16. The two witnesses represent Christ's own Church (made up of Jews and Gentiles) witnessing during History, proclaiming the gospel; and only in the time of the end will the Lord allow the Antichrist to rise. It is the representation of the people of God who preach and prophesy the word during the period between the 1st and 2nd coming of Jesus.

Chapter 8 –

- Rev. 8: 1-6 (The seventh seal. The seven angels with their trumpets): "When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them."

- 1st trumpet (Rev. 8: 7): "The first angel blew his trumpet, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up." – damage to a third of the earth, of the trees and all green grass (Rev 8: 7), by a hail and fire mixed with blood. It is a plague, a judgment similar to that of Egypt (Ex. 9: 23-25). For us, it can mean earthquakes, fires, meteors, for example. God is not insensitive to injustices against His children on earth. His servants will be avenged. 'Hurled to the earth' – this is a term showing that God is the agent of what happens in nature.



- 2nd trumpet (Rev. 8: 8-9): “The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.” – damage to a third of the sea. This suggests maritime calamities more serious than the first trumpet, for it affects ships, commerce and, indirectly, the lives of men. Mainly in the 1st century the trade was based on the ships, the maritime trade. In v. 8 – ‘a great mountain, burning with fire’ can symbolize an erupting volcano pouring its lava into the sea.

- 3rd trumpet (Rev. 8: 10-11): “The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter.” – damage to a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. Fresh water is transformed into bitter. Creation conspires against man himself; it is an attack on the planet’s drinking water. It seems even more tragic than the first two because water is essential to life and therefore affects human beings.

“A great star, blazing like a torch. The name of the star is Wormwood.” – the expression ‘great star’ can be a symbol of the divine wrath poured out upon the drinking waters, which is the vitally necessary part of the habitable earth; or it could be an asteroid that bursts into flames when it hits the earth’s atmosphere. Wormwood is a bitter plant, whose name is used here, perhaps, to symbolize the bitterness of this situation.



“A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter.” – could be the effect of the meteor striking and contaminating the waters and putting men to death; or it could be water contaminated with chemicals or deadly radioactivity.

- 4th trumpet (Rev. 8: 12): “The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night.” – here the damage occurs to a third of the stars – sun, moon and stars. This can mean

meteors, eclipses, hurricanes and tornadoes that visit the earth and darken it; they are God's warnings to mankind. These calamities are universal in scope, showing that no one escapes God.



Prelude to the 5th trumpet (Rev. 8: 13): “Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in midheaven, ‘Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!’”

An eagle flying in the sky predicts that the worst is yet to happen. And the trumpets are called woe. The three times the eagle says ‘woe’ means absolute emphasis. It predicts indescribable pain.

Chapter 9 –

- 5th trumpet (Rev. 9: 1-12):



• Rev. 9: 1-3: “And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit [NIV: Abyss]; he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit [NIV: Abyss], and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft [NIV: Abyss]. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth.”

“A star that had fallen from heaven to earth” – may mean an angel of darkness (‘fallen star’, as one of the high-ranking angels who fell along with Satan, or he himself) who executes divine judgment. This demon is under the orders of God.

“And he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit [NIV: Abyss]” – The bottomless pit is the place of demons’ imprisonment (cf. Lk. 8: 31; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 11: 7; Rev. 17: 8; Rev. 20: 1, 3). The beast, who is the Antichrist, comes up from the bottomless pit [NIV: Abyss] (Rev. 11: 7). The devil does not have the key; this was given to him. This means that his authority is limited. Jesus is the one who holds the keys of death and hell (the Abyss) in His hands.

The smoke is an accurate description of a huge swarm of locusts seen from a distance, which in a great swarm obscures the sunlight. This shows the large number of demons that would come out of the Abyss with their leader. Locusts darken the air, such is their number, as happened in Egypt in the time of Moses (cf. Ex. 10: 12-15).

Smoke is a symbol of darkness, of confusion, of something that clouds the vision, that is not clear or reveals itself. When the bible says “from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft” we can see that demons are spirits of obscurity that blind the understanding of unbelievers, through philosophies, postulates, false religions,

and all this prevents people from knowing the truth of God's word. Their minds get blinded to the things of God.

- Rev. 9: 4: "They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads."

These demons cannot harm the grass of the earth or the trees, nor can they kill men, nor can they touch the sealed ones of God.

- Rev. 9: 5-6: "They were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. And in those days, people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them."

They are allowed to torment men (scorpion tail and stinger, through which they inject their venom) and their time is limited to five months, a symbolic number, signifying the locust's maturation period. It is the time that God allows (until the day of judgment). But this torment is only permitted upon men who have not been sealed with the seal of God upon their foreheads (Rev. 9: 4). This means that God will keep His people not from the persecution of the world, but from His wrath on the wicked. God knows those who belong to Him.

The locusts seen by John are demons that come to torment those who do not have the seal of God. They came in all generations of History. Trumpets also intensify God's plagues in the world today, tormenting people. They seek refuge in many things, but find no relief. Corruption destroys social structures, generates violence, affects the sexual area, and all these are consequences of these locusts. Human beings also have a fallen nature, and demons accelerate these activities.

In spite of all that the devil of the Abyss was permitted to do, his time is limited (five months) and so is his authority, i.e., 'he was given the key' (Rev. 9: 1), for he does not have it. Only Jesus has. Demons are fallen angels who are imprisoned in shackles, that is, they have their authority limited by God (2 Pet. 2: 4; Jude 6 = 'angels bound in everlasting chains' [NIV] or 'kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness' [NRS], in addition to those acting today).

- Rev. 9: 7-10: "In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails like scorpions, with stingers, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months."

The star fallen from heaven receives the key to the bottomless pit and opens it; out of it come the locusts (symbolizing demons) like horses prepared for battle, with the face like human face and on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; they have hair like women's, teeth like a lion's, scales like iron breastplates, wings that are noisy, and a tail like a scorpion, with stinger.

This can symbolize that they are strong, agitated and like war horses and they have the intelligence of a man, they have the ability to make plans. 'Crowns of gold' are a symbol of dominion and power, which indicates that they can be part of a hierarchy as principalities [Rulers, in other biblical versions], powers [Authorities, in other biblical versions], princes of darkness. They work in the children of disobedience.

Women's hair can symbolize sexual seduction [it was a special reference to the pagan cults of the time, especially to Dionysus (Bacchus, for the Romans), focused on sexuality and wine, prostitution, homosexuality, sensuality, etc.].

Teeth like lion's allude to their power of destruction, and the breastplate like iron's conveys the idea that they are overpowering and violent. Their very noisy wings symbolize great agitation and disturbance.

- Rev. 9: 11: "They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon."

John says that the locust army is led by their king, called Abaddon (in Hebrew) or Apollyon (in Greek). He is called 'Destroyer'.

This verse talks about the organization of the locusts out of the bottomless pit under the leadership of a king; and the fact that they themselves wear crowns (v. 7) indicates that they can be part of a hierarchy like principalities, powers, princes of darkness. The angel of the Abyss is a demon that controls the demonic locusts. The name of the angel in Hebrew and in Greek means 'destruction.'

Here opinions differ somewhat as to the identity of this angel. Some theologians think it is Satan himself, Lucifer, now under another name. The mission and specialty of this group and its king, who would be Satan, is destruction. He would be the 'star that had fallen from heaven' of v. 1.

But when he fell, he fell with one third of the angels, and angels of different ranks. Then, there are others who think he is one of Satan's most trusted leaders, a high-ranking demon.

In Hebrew 'abhaddôn means 'Destroyer, i.e. Destroying Angel' or 'place of destruction' and is regularly translated as such in certain versions in the Old Testament to denote the region of the dead. This region was considered by the ancient Jews as 'hell', sheol in Hebrew, hades and geenna in Greek, the latter name coming from ge (valley of) hinnôm (Valley of Hinnom), where idolatrous sacrifices were made south of Jerusalem.

In Job 28: 22 'Abaddon' ('Destroyer') is translated as 'destruction' [NIV]: "Destruction and Death say, 'Only a rumor of it has reached our ears'" – Abaddon (אֲבַדּוֹן – Strong #11) means: abstract, a perishing; that causes suffering, destroyer, destruction; concrete, Hades. In Greek, 'Apollyon' has the same meaning.

'Abaddon' occurs several times in the bible (Job 26: 6 – destruction; Job 28: 22 – 'destruction'; Job 31: 12 – 'destruction'; Ps. 88: 11 – 'destruction'; Prov. 15: 11 – 'destruction'; Prov. 27: 20 – 'destruction').

In this verse (Rev. 9: 11), Abaddon is given personified meaning ('the destroyer') and is translated into Greek by 'Apollyon', the present participle of the verb apollymi ('to destroy').

- Rev. 9: 12: "The first woe has passed. There are still two woes to come."

- 6th trumpet (Rev. 9: 13-21) – here is not only torment, but death. It is God's last warning to humanity, for the 7th trumpet is already the final judgment; there is no more opportunity.

- Rev. 9: 13-15: "Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of humankind."



The voice that John hears here comes from the throne, from the golden altar that is in the presence of God, which makes us think that it is the Lamb Himself who speaks to the angel who holds the sixth trumpet. The golden altar is where the prayers of the saints are, so God sends this trumpet upon the wicked in answer to the prayers of His children. This shows us that our prayer associates us with the government of God and His participation in the history of humanity.

In this passage are mentioned the four angels who are bound by the great river Euphrates, and they are angels charged with the destruction of a third of men. It is no longer demons that torment (locusts), but demons that are now authorized to kill a third of men. These angels of destruction are agents of divine justice; not angels of God, but demons. Again, we can see the absolute sovereignty of God, for He is in control of History and everything will take place at His appointed time (v. 15: ‘the hour, the day, the month, and the year’). The demons here obey God Himself for His purpose, His purpose to kill a third of humankind.

The bible symbolically uses the ‘River Euphrates’ here as a symbol of a boundary given to the enemy’s invasion, but which can now be breached, for the River Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the Promised Land which was given as a promise to Abraham (Gen. 15: 18). However, when the people who came out of Egypt entered it, they could not reach that limit, that is, the Israelites did not take all the land that the Lord had set aside for them.

The Euphrates can also symbolize the site of Satan’s previous victory in Eden, as well as the geographic location from which powerful enemies such as Assyria and Babylon, who attacked Israel (Isa. 8: 5-8).

In John’s time, the Euphrates was the eastern limit of the Roman Empire (border with the Parthian Empire).

Therefore, Euphrates symbolizes the persecution that will come from the world that neither fears nor knows God and will rise up with war. This war is not limited to the Euphrates, but reaches the whole Earth (number four: north, south, east, west). According to the biblical account, a large part of humanity goes to death. It is a great war that invades the earth, a demonic invasion of human history with death and violence.

Wars are included in God’s sovereign purpose in History, for it is a trumpet to bring man to repentance. War is not just a demonic action on man’s perversion; it is also a consequence of man’s rebellion against God.

It will be a time of calamity, deep distress, and a very great war. Humanity has suffered for generations because of war. And with each generation this intensifies, especially when the time of the end approaches.

- Rev. 9: 16-19: “The number of the troops of cavalry was two hundred million; I heard their number. And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur; the heads of the horses were like lions’ heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm.”

The riders who came to kill men numbered two hundred million, which may be representative of countless numbers of these agents of judgment. However, upon carefully reading the account, we can see that it is not a human army, but hordes of demons. These ones, yes, instigate men to make physical war. Demons act in and through men, the servants of the devil, evil rulers instigated by these demons.

The description of demons (horses and riders) shows us that they are unattainable beings. The riders and horses have breastplates the color of fire, and of sapphire and of sulfur. The heads of the horses were like lions’ heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur come out of their mouths, the three plagues used to kill men (v. 18). John writes that the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, which are like serpents; therefore, like the locusts of the 5th trumpet, these are also poisonous, venomous and evil beings.

‘Color of fire’ – fire burns, consumes, destroys what it touches, therefore, this figure of speech speaks in favor of its great power of destruction, of its overwhelming fury. This indicates that they cannot be dealt with conventional weapons, for they are demons.

‘Lions’ represent strength, ferocity and destructive power.

‘Smoke’ is a symbol of darkness and confusion. It takes away visibility, blinds people’s eyes. Sulfur pollutes.

“Fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths” – These three weapons come out of the horses’ mouths, that is, from the mouths come destructive words, concepts, philosophies and ideas that generate distorted behaviors in men, and that pollute their minds. This mouth in the service of Satan can be the press, the media, used to create confusion in the mind (smoke), destroy ethics, values, society structures and morals (fire), and pollute the minds and hearts of men, especially those who are already corrupted by sin.

- Rev. 9: 20-21: “The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts.”

God’s purpose is salvation, but the sinner does not repent. God judges them, but men blaspheme against Him. Impiety is rejecting God; perversion is demoralization; depravity; deviation from normality, especially in the psychic and moral area.

Here, the bible speaks of worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood. To prostrate oneself before idols is to prostrate oneself before evil beings who act through these idols. The prophet Hosea (Hos. 4: 12) said that the spirit of fornication enters the inanimate being to deceive the person, to turn

him away from the living God. When graven images are worshiped, they are nothing in themselves and can do nothing, but the one who receives the worship is a representative of darkness, and that is why God is so angry with idolatry; because Satan ends up receiving worship and honor that do not belong to him. He tried at first, and God threw him out of His presence, but even today he persists, using people who are disobedient to the Lord.

Verse 21 (“And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts”) also speaks of the breaking of the law of God, of His commandments by these people because they persist in their murders, their sorceries, their fornications and their thefts. Murders, because they have lost the sense of the value of life, and choose war and death. Sorcery, because they are enchanted with their ‘magic potions’, their fantasies, their drugs, to escape reality and the presence of God. The Greek word used here for sorcery is *pharmakeia* (φαρμακεία – Strong #5331), which means: magic, sorcery, enchantment, medication (‘pharmacy’), by extension: magic (literally or figuratively); sorcery, witchcraft (use of spells). Therefore, it’s a numb society; not just for chemical drugs or illegal drugs, but for everything in the world that can numb people’s senses to the voice of God. Another breaking of God’s law in this verse 21 is fornication (prostitution), in a society that no longer respects moral purity, where ethical values are undermined (such as in the family and at work). It also talks about theft, that is, private property is no longer respected. And the verse ends by saying that the wicked do not repent and continue in their practices, even breaking the commandments of the Law of God in all those sins.

Chapter 10 –

• Rev. 10: 1-11 – 11: 1-14 – In chapter 10 John speaks of the angels, the seven thunders, and the little scroll, which are a prelude to the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11: 15-19). Also in chapter 11 he refers to the two witnesses. We may remember that the 5th, 6th and 7th trumpets were announced by the eagle and describing the severity of the punishments ('woes'). First, the locusts to torment men to the point of seeking death, but not finding it; then the cavalry of millions of horses and riders with orders to kill humanity.



• Rev. 10: 1: “And I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire.”

John sees a mighty angel. From the description, it is Jesus Himself. He is wrapped in a cloud (cf. Rev. 1: 7), a symbol pertinent to God Himself, for that is how He showed Himself on Mount Sinai and in the wilderness. Jesus at His transfiguration (Matt. 17: 5; Mk. 9: 7; Lk. 9: 34-35) and ascension (Acts 1: 9) was wrapped in a cloud. The cloud not only represents the glory of God, where the Holy Spirit is implied, but it is also a physical symbol of the divine essence that is partially hidden from man.

Following the description of the angel, John speaks of a rainbow over His head, just as the Lord is described in chapter 4 (sitting on the throne). And the rainbow over the throne is a symbol of mercy, not just a throne of judgment. It is also the symbol of God's covenant with man, made through Noah.

His face is like the sun, as the glorified Jesus was seen by him (Rev. 1: 16). The angel's legs were like pillars of fire, similar to chapter 1 (Rev. 1: 15), because where He treads, He refines; reveals the glory and holiness of God Himself.

• Rev. 10: 2: “He held a little scroll open in his hand. Setting his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land.”

In his hand is an open scroll, such as the scroll with the seven seals (chapter 5).

But this little scroll is not the scroll that reveals the destiny of the church in the hand of Jesus; this little scroll is just a particularity, because it reveals what is in that prelude; others interpret this scroll as the very word of God, the prophecy, because when John eats, he prophesies. Ezekiel also ate the scroll (Ezek. 2: 8-9) which contained God's designs for mankind in the end times.

The angel has his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. And this represents that he is claiming ownership over the entire world (v. 6: "and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it: 'There will be no more delay'"), which speaks once again in favor of the angel being Jesus. Here God claims His sovereignty over the entire universe.



- Rev. 10: 3-4: "He gave a great shout, like a lion roaring. And when he shouted, the seven thunders sounded. And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.'"

'Roaring of a lion' – The lion imposes fear upon other creatures, as does the voice of him who calls to the throne of judgment.

The seven thunders spoke, but John was told not to write. What are the seven thunders and why not write? Because they represent God's judgment on the earth and on the wicked, but the Lord did not want to reveal it. John knows only that there will be no delay in God's purposes; He is answering the prayers of the saints.

- Rev. 10: 5-6: "Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it: 'There will be no more delay.'"

The Angel takes an oath: 'There will be no more delay.' The six trumpets had already come. Why, then, the delay? Because God, in His kindness and forbearance, wants everyone to repent and come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Pet. 3: 8-9).

"There will be no more delay" means that the cup of God's wrath has run out. His wrath will be poured out on humanity. There is no more time for repentance. Because of the hardening of his heart, man does not repent despite pain and punishment (Rev. 9: 20), hence the interlude in this part.

- Rev. 10: 7: “but in the days when the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God will be fulfilled, as he announced to his servants the prophets.”

“The mystery of God” has to do with the evil of the world. In the days of the seventh angel’s voice, the 7th trumpet will initiate the seven plagues, the most desperate moment that will lead to the final judgment.

- Rev. 10: 8-10: “Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, ‘Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.’ So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, ‘Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.’ So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.”

John is commanded to eat the scroll. It means the command to preach the word of God, but he has to absorb it, digest it, internalize it, make it a living word. This means for us to experience the bible. The scroll was sweet in his mouth. This has an interesting parallel with Jewish culture: when a child was starting to learn to read, the teacher took a tablet and covered it with flour and honey and drawn the letters on that honey. When the child memorized the alphabet by drawing on the honey on the tablet, his teacher gave him the order to eat the letters, symbolizing that the letters were sweet to the taste.

But in his stomach, the scroll turned bitter, which means that the word of God has implications that generate bitterness, suffering, and pain for those who reject it. It is not so easy to ‘digest.’

- Rev. 10: 11: “Then they said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.’”

John is now commanded to prophesy about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.

Chapter 11 –

• Rev. 11: 1-2 (The temple of God is measured): “Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, ‘Come and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months.’”

The measurement of God’s temple is still an interlude between the 6th and 7th trumpets. And here we can have different interpretations because of theological lines. Dispensationalists are referring in this part to the physical rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Others believe that in this passage God works specifically with the Jewish nation.

But we may notice that in the minds of the Jews, the sanctuary, i.e., the temple in Jerusalem from the first one that was built by Solomon, was the place where God dwelt with His people. When Jesus came in the flesh, He taught us that He was God’s tabernacle with men while He was on earth; and the believers were also the sanctuary where the Spirit of God dwelt with them.

The temple was divided into different courtyards: for the priests, for the men, for the women and for the Gentiles. And here is what John **is talking about, Christ’s church** (‘the sanctuary’ of God) **being separated from the ungodly world**, where the unclean were. The church of Christ is one: Jews and Gentiles. During the various sections of Revelation, the church was compared to the Jewish nation (one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from Israel; seven lampstands, the woman with the crown of stars on her head).

So this part can be interpreted as follows: in v. 1-2, the verb ‘to measure’ (compared to the measurement of the city of Jerusalem described by Zech. 2: 1-5) means the clear separation of the true church and the ungodly world or the church not committed to Christ. The sanctuary is the true church, the glorified and sealed church, which does not receive the mark of the beast. This act of measuring has the connotation of immunity, protection from harm, delimitation for protection and care.

The concordance here is with Lk. 21: 24: “they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Jesus spoke of the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Titus in AD 70, when the time of the kingdom of God for the Gentiles began (Matt. 21: 43; Lk. 21: 24; Rom. 11: 25). The time of the Gentiles declared by Jesus goes from His 1st to His 2nd coming, when the physical city of Jerusalem, the land of the Jews, will be dominated by other non-Jewish peoples.

But John leaves us the vision concerning the church of Christ for the people of his time, for future generations and for the end times, when 3 ½ years (‘they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months.’ – Rev. 11: 2) may correspond to the time when the church of Christ, sealed by God, is exposed to the most varied persecutions of the world between the first and second coming of Christ, while it is preaching the gospel, maintaining its testimony, but is still protected by the Lord from great harm. Or, in the eschatological context, the church being separated and protected by God in a time of intense persecution and massacre of the Antichrist, where the distinction is made between the true worshipers and those who are not under the true covenant with God, but the church still will be preaching His Word. In other words, the time when the church is exposed to the persecution of Antichrist,

when the two witnesses will be prophesying and cannot be touched until their work is done.

Forty-two months or 3 ½ years symbolize the dominion of unbelievers in the world; as with Jesus and the time of His ministry, the number 3 ½ is the symbol of the victorious power of the world, compared to the number seven, which signifies the number of the fullness of God. It is also a time that the Lord shortens by His mercy (cf. Rev. 12: 6; 14).

So, in these first two verses, the church fulfills its mission as a worshiper of God. And in the next few verses it fulfills its second mission, which is to proclaim and prophesy the Word ('the two witnesses').

- Rev. 11: 3-14 (The two witnesses):

- Rev. 11: 3-4: “‘And I will grant my two witnesses authority to prophesy for one thousand two hundred sixty days, wearing sackcloth.’ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.”

In v. 3 it can be noted that the time given to them to prophesy is the same time written in the previous verse, in relation to the time of the Gentiles: 3 ½ years ('they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months.') – Rev. 11: 2), the time when they are exposed to the persecution of the Beast, but cannot be touched until their work is done.

In v. 4 an allusion is made to the two olive trees, mentioned by Zechariah (Zech. 4: 3; 11-14), on either side of the lampstand he saw.

- Zech. 4: 3: “And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.”

Zechariah's vision concerns the work of the Holy Spirit through two individuals: the king and the priest, who are at the side of the lampstand, that is, in the service of God. Joshua (the high priest) and Zerubbabel (ruler of Judah) foreshadowed Christ's office as King and priest in the service of the Father.

Here the reference is made to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the two anointed ones (the 'two olive trees') who were separated by God after the return from Babylonian captivity to lead His people, that is, in the position of king and priest, according to the theocratic regime of Jewish government. God separated the civil and the ecclesiastical representative to rule together (the 'bowl on the top of the lampstand', meaning equal power and authority to rule), as it was with Moses (the lawgiver) and Aaron (the high priest). Zerubbabel and Joshua were the 'two olive trees' through whom the Holy Spirit (the oil) supplied the people with the light and courage necessary to rebuild the temple.

- Zech. 4: 11-14: “Then I said to him [*the angel who spoke with the prophet*], ‘What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?’ And a second time I said to him, ‘What are these two branches of the olive trees, which pour out the oil through the two golden pipes?’ He said to me, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ I said, ‘No, my lord.’ Then he said, ‘These are the two anointed ones [literal translation: ‘the sons of the oil’] who stand by the Lord of the whole earth’ [NIV: So he said, These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth (or ‘the ‘two who bring oil and serve’)].”

Here, Zechariah comes back to say that the lampstand is fed by two pipes with oil that go out of two olive trees (or 'two branches of the olive trees' – v. 12), which pour oil in a bowl placed above the candlestick (verse 3). This was an encouragement

to Zerubbabel and Joshua, for through them God would bring revival, strength and courage to His people.



Therefore, the lampstand of Zechariah means the people of Israel under the anointing of the Holy Spirit through the two anointed ones that He chose to govern them. When we speak of the Menorah in the OT (the gold lampstand of the Tabernacle and the Temple), it always symbolized the presence of God with His people, the light of the Spirit of the Lord with them.

For us, this prophecy of Zechariah chapter 4 was fulfilled in the person of Jesus in His office as King and Priest, pouring out the anointing of His Spirit on the Church so that it can carry out its mission of restoring the temples destroyed by sin, and in darkness for lack of knowledge of the word of God.

The two witnesses (Rev. 11: 3-14)

- Rev. 11: 5-6: “And if anyone wants to harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; anyone who wants to harm them must be killed in this manner. They have authority to shut the sky, so that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.”

These witnesses will have the same power as Elijah (Rev. 11: 6: ‘to shut the sky’ cf. 1 Kin. 17: 1) and Moses (‘authority over the waters to turn them into blood’ cf. Ex. 7: 17-19), an authority given by God to proclaim His word in that terrible time (‘And if anyone wants to harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; anyone who wants to harm them must be killed in this manner’). They can also symbolize the OT and NT, the very word of God that was proclaimed through the law and the prophets.

If we think of it from the Jewish point of view or the line of Dispensational premillennialism, they will bring revival to the old covenant people in the role of king and priest (like Joshua and Zerubbabel – Zech. 4: 11; 14 – ‘two olive trees on

the right and the left of the lampstand', 'two branches of the olive trees' – cf. Rev. 11: 4), standing against the Antichrist (who will claim the role of civil ruler) and the false prophet who, in addition to deceiving the people with false prophecy, will also desire the role priest among the Jews. They will prophesy for 3 ½ years in the name of the Lord to convert the Jews to Jesus.

However, from the point of view of Amillennialism, they represent the very church of Christ witnessing throughout History, proclaiming the gospel, and only at the end time will the Lord allow the Antichrist to arise. **They are the representation of God's people** who preach and prophesy the word during the period between the 1st and 2nd coming of God. And that means the church will be indestructible until it has completed its mission.

- Rev. 11: 7: "When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the bottomless pit [NIV: Abyss] will make war on them and conquer them and kill them."

When they have completed their testimony, they will be killed by the beast that comes up out of the bottomless pit [Abyss], but after 3 ½ days (Rev. 11: 11) the Spirit of God will resurrect them and they will be caught up. Then divine judgment will come upon the city. The beast that rises out of the Abyss, if we compare it with other biblical references (Dan. 7: 3; 20-21; 25; Rev. 13: 1; 5-7; Rev. 17: 3; 8), is the Antichrist himself. The fact that it is written Abyss or bottomless pit suggests that its power is satanic. Furthermore, the references are placed in different sections of the book of Revelation:

- Rev. 11: 7 (3rd section – Chapters 8–11).
- Rev. 13: 1; 5-7 (4th section– Chapters 12–14).
- Rev. 17: 3; 8 (6th section – Chapters 17–19).

Abyss = the Greeks employed this word in reference to the underworld of spirits, a huge bottomless pit into the depth of the earth, where evil spirits were imprisoned until the final punishment. The word used for 'bottomless pit' or 'abyss' is 'abussos' or 'abussou', and conveys the idea of a place so deep that it becomes unfathomable (cf. Lk. 8: 31). 'Abussos' or 'abussou' = bottomless, immeasurably deep, infernal, abyss, deep, bottomless pit. They also use the word 'phrear' = pit, a hole in the ground (dug for obtaining or holding water or other purposes), i.e., a cistern or well; figuratively, an abyss (as a prison), well, pit.

The Hebrew word for Abyss (or 'deep') can be written as thowm or thom or tēhom, meaning an abyss (as a surging mass of water), especially the deep (the main sea or the subterranean water-supply), deep place, depth.

- Rev. 11: 8: "and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that is prophetically called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified."

The bible says that the name of the city is Sodom and Egypt. If we compare these names with Isa. 1: 9-10, we can say that it is very likely to be referring to the city of Jerusalem itself, where there will also be much corruption at the end of time, in the same way that Isaiah wrote how God compared it. Later in the same verse, John writes that it was the city where his Lord (with capital letter) was crucified, that is, Jesus.

Other theologians say that the city mentioned in Revelation is the city of men, the world hostile to God and the church, not Jerusalem or Rome. According with this thought, John calls the city Sodom, symbolizing the sinful world in which Christ was crucified and the model of moral degeneration in a great city (Gen. 19: 1-29). And

Egypt is the prototype of the rampant idolatry and servitude imposed by powerful rulers and the worldly and demonic system.

However much we know that the reign of the Antichrist will be universal, that is, it will cover the whole Earth (according to the Amillennialism), we cannot deny that the apex of the conflict will take place in Israel, more specifically in Jerusalem, even because Zechariah, who is regarded as an apocalyptic prophet, wrote: “See, a day is coming for the Lord, when the plunder taken from you will be divided in your midst ... On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward ... And you shall flee by the valley of the Lord’s mountain, for the valley between the mountains shall reach to Azal; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him” (Zech. 14: 1; 4; 5). Azel or Azal (Atsel, אֶזֶל, Strong #682) can be the name of an Israelite or an unknown place in Palestine that has existed in the past or will still exist.

Compare with Ezek. 38: 19-20 [NIV]: “In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground.”

Why, then, would Zechariah write such words in relation to the coming of Jesus? Why would Luke repeat this in Acts 1: 9-12, that Jesus’ ascension took place on the Mount of Olives, and His coming will likewise take place there in a visible manner? In Ezekiel this place is also described (Ezek. 11: 23). Does the Ezekiel scene described above (Ezek. 38: 19-20) not correspond to the language used by John in Revelation for the day of Jesus’ coming, judging the wicked?

So, the conclusion we come to is that Revelation cannot be understood fully in a literal way nor fully in a symbolic way. Sometimes yes; Sometimes no.

- Rev. 11: 9-10: “For three and a half days members of the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb; and the inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and celebrate and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to the inhabitants of the earth.”

The wicked will rejoice at the death of the two witnesses, the world will rejoice when it gets the impression that the Antichrist was greater than God and managed to destroy His church.

Several times in History the church was persecuted and killed, the wicked rejoiced each time God’s servants were martyred for preaching His word. Christ’s enemies rejoiced, but His servants are with Him in heaven today, and His gospel never ceased to be preached.



- Rev. 11: 11-12: “But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and those who saw them were terrified. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here!’ And they went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies watched them.”

After the 3 ½ days, the witnesses stood on their feet, signifying the glorious resurrection of God’s people, tortured and dead. The witnesses go up in a cloud and Jesus comes in a cloud at the same time, for the seventh trumpet will sound. This is the moment of the visible Rapture of the church, which shows terror to the world. It is the same scene of the Last Judgment; hence, the despair of the wicked (Rev. 11: 11; 13 cf. Rev. 6: 12-17 – the 6th seal).

When Jesus first came, He tied Satan. In the gospels (Mk. 3: 27) he is the strong man who holds people (‘goods’, ‘possessions’). Jesus is ‘the strongest man’ that binds him, that is, the Lord limits the power of the devil. We were rescued from darkness to light. And that means that God’s plan cannot be thwarted. Satan cannot prevent those who have heard the word of God from being saved, so it is said that he is tied. He can no longer touch those who are already in heaven with the Lord. Our owner is Jesus.

But Satan is loose in the sense that he is still persecuting the church, although it cannot be destroyed as long as it is preaching the word of God. The spirit of the Antichrist has been operating since the time of Jesus’ apostles, but he will act with indescribable cruelty and persecute the saints in the last times because God will allow it. The Antichrist will kill the saints (Rev. 11:7; Rev. 13:7), but the days will be shortened, Jesus said. The church will win because of the word and the testimony it has given, that is, the faithful will not deny the faith.

- Rev. 11: 13-14: “At that moment there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed. The third woe is coming very soon.”

This scene speaks of Jesus’ second coming, the moment of the Rapture, when the saints ascend with the Lord and the wicked are frightened by His judgment and what happens to nature around them.

- Rev. 11: 15-18 (The 7th trumpet) –

This scene will occur at the second coming of Jesus (cf. 1 The. 4: 16-17; 1 Cor. 15: 24-25). Before this trumpet, Jesus showed Himself to John with the little scroll in His hand (interlude), in the same way that there was much silence in heaven before the seventh seal (Rev. 8: 1).

- Rev. 11: 15: “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.’”

Now the glory of the kingdom of God has come over all, hence the songs of praise. Here the power of Christ is seen in its fullness. The 7th trumpet is not just an event, but it leads to the seven plagues of God’s total wrath (Rev. 15–16), hence the despair of the wicked (Rev. 11: 11; 13).

- Rev. 11: 16-17: “Then the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, singing, ‘We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken’ your great power and begun to reign.’”

The elders (figure of the OT–NT church) who are seated on the throne prostrate themselves because Christ reigns sovereignly (Rev. 11: 17) and because there is reward and righteousness (v. 18). It is the church worshiping the conquering King.



- Rev. 11: 18: “‘The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth.’”

Here occurs the judgment of the dead, which will take place after the second coming, and the receipt of rewards (1 Cor. 3: 11-15).

Thus the seventh trumpet heralds the time of the end; the kingdom of the world became Christ’s.

The church gives grace and the wicked are enraged because there is no more chance. The wicked will not be annihilated, but will be tormented day and night forever (Rev. 20: 10 b). So there is no annihilationism.

We can see, then, that suffering itself cannot lead man to repentance (Rev. 9: 20-21; Rev. 16: 21), that is, God keeps calling to repentance until the end, for Jesus said: "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." (Jn. 18: 9 cf. Jn. 17: 24).

In Rev. 11: 13 it is written, after the two witnesses are caught up, "At that moment there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven."

But in the passages of Revelation described above (Rev. 9: 20-21; Rev. 16: 21), those who have not repented of their sins nor with the judgments of God are really the ones not destined for salvation.

- Rev. 11: 19: "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail."

John now shows another scene: communion with God is full, it is God Himself with men. The Ark of the covenant implies that communion with God is only possible through the atonement, for it was on the ark of the covenant that the high priest sprinkled the blood of the animal sacrificed as a sin offering and as a burnt offering, for himself and for the congregation once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16: 14; 15; 29-30; 34 – Yom Kippur). This atonement was made by Jesus on the cross. He is our high priest; through Him we have full communion with the Father. The Ark also symbolizes the presence, leadership, and protection of God in the blessing related to the new covenant (as it was for Israel in the wilderness and in the Promised Land).

The manifestations that appear with the opening of God's sanctuary in heaven for the Ark to be seen (lightning, voices, thunder, earthquake, and great hail) not only resemble those of God on Sinai, but may point to the coming of the end, namely, His judgments.

Fourth section – Chapters 12–14



The woman and the dragon | The two Beasts |
The Lamb on Mount Zion and His followers

Fourth section – Chapters 12–14

As I said at the beginning, chapters 1–11 symbolize the world struggling against the church and the judgments of God in answer to the prayers of the saints.

From chapter 12 (Revelation 12-22) the bible describes a more relentless persecution against the Lord's church, without disguise, because Satan (the dragon) appears with his allies: the beast rising out of the sea (the Antichrist), the beast rising out of the earth (the false prophet) and Babylon (the great whore).

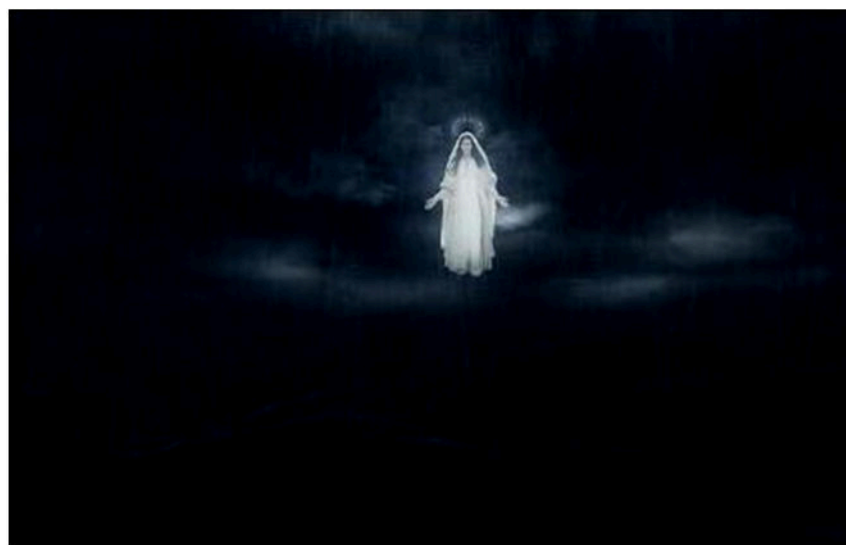
In this section, John describes several wonders in heaven: a woman who gives birth to a son, a male child (Rev. 12: 1: "A great portent appeared in heaven"), and who suffers opposition from Satan (Rev. 12: 1-17; v. 3: "Then another portent appeared in heaven"); beasts that oppose God (Rev. 13: 1-18), the Lamb on Mount Zion, along with His followers (Rev. 14: 1-5). Then (Rev. 14: 6-20) angels appear whose voices announce to men the judgments of God, ending with the harvest and the vintage.

Chapter 12 –

The woman represents the church at the 1st coming of Jesus. Here He is called a male child (Rev. 12: 5 cf. Isa. 66: 7). Then the devil persecutes, both Jesus and His church (Rev. 12: 6; 13-14), but it is protected by the Lord from the fierce onslaught of the enemy ('desert' – Rev. 12: 6; 14) by a time symbolizing a short period of distress; a period of time which the Lord would shorten by His mercy (1,260 days or 'a time, times and half a time' – Rev. 12: 6; 14). The devil's persecution of the church is most intense in the description of verses 13-17, and it will intensify in the end period, in the Great Tribulation.

John describes the woman (the church at the 1st coming of Jesus) as follows:

- Rev. 12: 1-2: "A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth."



‘Clothed with the sun,’ she is clothed in light, that is, in the garment of God. This shows that she is glorious, resplendent, because the glory of God is in her.

‘With the moon under her feet’ – that means she has authority, power. But this authority proceeds from God, not from the church, for the moon has no light of its own; the light, she receives from the sun.

‘And on her head a crown of twelve stars’ symbolizes that she is more than a conqueror (crown) and shows in her the victory of Christ. The twelve stars represent the 12 patriarchs and the 12 apostles.

‘She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs’ – this means that the church of Christ is the Israel of God, who were born of faith (as a son of Abraham) to bring the Messiah into the world.

I) First, the Dragon fights the Lamb (Rev. 12: 3-5):

- Rev. 12: 3-4: “Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born.”



So John describes Satan as a dragon, great, red, with seven heads, ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.

‘Red’ is the color of fire, which consumes, destroys what it touches, therefore, this figure of speech speaks in favor of his great power of destruction, of his overwhelming fury.

‘Seven heads’ and ‘seven’ diadems symbolize the splendor, power, and glory of Satan as the god of this age (Rev. 13: 1).

‘Ten horns’ symbolize his universal reach over the earth and his total authority over the kingdom of darkness; horn is a symbol of power.

‘His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth’ – here may be a reference to the rebellion of the third part of the angels who fell with him when he tried to usurp the throne of Jesus.

‘Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born.’ – this is a reference to the attempt

to destroy Jesus when he was born, which the devil almost achieved through Herod the Great, killing all the newborn of Bethlehem (Matt. 2: 3-16).

- Rev. 12: 5: “And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne” – speaks of Christ’s authority (‘a rod of iron’) over all nations, but as His kingdom is not of this world, He does so from His throne in heaven; hence there is mention here of His resurrection and his ascension.

II) Then the devil pursues the church:

- Rev. 12: 6: “and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.”

The fact that it is written that the woman fled into the wilderness so as not to be persecuted (v. 6 cf. 13-14) means the devil fiercely persecuting the church, but it is protected by God (‘wilderness’). ‘Wilderness’ or ‘desert’ means a place of protection prepared by God, as Egypt was for Mary, Joseph and Jesus after His birth; how was God’s miraculous provision at Sinai during the Exodus; and as it was at the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus (69-70 AD), when the Christians escaped in time to the city of Pella, in the desert, beyond the Jordan (Pella was in the Decapolis, on the northern edge of Perea, formerly ruled by Herod Antipas). However, this escape is questioned by some historians.

Forty-two months (Rev. 11: 2) or 1,260 days (Rev. 12: 6) or ‘a time, two times and half a time’ (Dan. 12: 7 – equivalent to half a week of years); ‘a time, times and half a time’ (Rev. 12: 14), which equate to 3 ½ years, are non-literal measures of time in the bible, but they symbolize a short period of affliction; a period of time which the Lord would shorten by His mercy. This number (3 ½ years) is the symbol of the victorious power of the world, unlike the number seven, the number of divine fullness. The world felt victorious at Jesus’ death, but that was just the beginning of something bigger. The bible says that Jesus made a firm covenant with many: “He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease” (Dan. 9: 27a – cf. Isa. 42: 6; Isa. 53: 11; Jer. 31: 31-34; Matt. 20: 28; Matt. 26: 28; Lk. 22: 20; Rom. 5: 15; Heb. 9: 28), abolishing (causing to cease) Jewish sacrifices and Levitical temple worship forever, for the old covenant was abrogated; this is what Antiochus IV Epiphanes did in the past, and the eschatological Antichrist will try to do to imitate the deed of Jesus.

III) Angels fight in heaven against the dragon:

- Rev. 12: 7-9: “And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

John describes the battle between the dragon and Michael, because of a rebellion that started in the angelic world, before the creation of the world when Lucifer and 1/3 of the angels were expelled from heaven, but the persecution against the throne of God continued, and then since man was created, Satan also insisted on seducing the world through Adam and Eve, always chasing the woman’s son. Therefore, he led mankind to the downfall.



But I see in this verse not just a fall like there was before the creation of man. Satan fell a second time when Jesus died on the cross, paying the price for our sins, and even more at the time of His resurrection and ascension, for He removed the enemy's dominion over men's lives and over death; in short, the power he had to act freely on earth and which he received when Adam fell. By doing this, Jesus limited him in his power and made him fall from his arrogant attempts to rule the world. In His resurrection this victory was shared with His followers, who overcome the devil by the blood of Jesus and by the word of their testimony about Him (v. 11).

During His ministry Jesus was spiritually conquering for men all that was in the power of the devil, through the healings and miracles that He and His disciples performed: "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning." (Lk. 10: 18).

Jesus said in Jn. 12: 31-32: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (cf. Jn. 16: 11). This means that despite the devil's attempts to affront God's own glory by destroying His Son, he would fall again, would be thrown to the earth and lose his power over the redeemed of Christ.

Satan has made many attempts to destroy not only Jesus but the faithful children of God. Cain killed Abel and left a seed of corruption in the human being, until the Lord intervened with the Flood. Satan tried to kill Moses in Egypt when he was born, because he knew of his mission as a God's chosen one to deliver His people. Afterwards, he almost led the house of Judah to extermination in the time of Joash, because his grandmother Athaliah killed all her grandchildren, so as not to have a threat to the throne. In Persia, in the time of Esther, the devil used Haman the Agagite to make that horrible decree to kill all the Jews in Susa. And in all the other ages of the church he always tried against the life of God's anointed ones, but he didn't succeed, because neither the Son of God could be killed, nor those who receive eternal life from Him.

IV) The victory of Christ and His people:

- Rev. 12: 10-12: "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the

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

There is an acclamation for the victory of Christ. The dragon thrown down on earth, has no power to touch who is already in heaven, that is, who has already received salvation. Jesus cast out the accuser of the children of God who accused them without interruption. But in their faithfulness to Him they overcame the dragon by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, not by their works, nor by their own strength. Even in the face of death, they didn't love their own lives (Rev. 12: 11). This means that they were able to resist martyrdom, but they did not abandon their faith. These are the weapons of the church: the blood of Jesus and His word. The devil fears the blood of Jesus, not the blood of martyrs.

The devil's persecution of the church is most intense in the description of verses 13–17, and will intensify at the end of the Great Tribulation period. The v. 12 of the song shows this: “Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

This expression: “his time is short” refers to the time of the Great Tribulation, when he will have his power released to persecute the church, but it will be a limited time, for his destiny will be the lake of fire.

V) The dragon returns to pursue the church:

- Rev. 12: 13-17: “So when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time [NIV: ‘so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she could be taken care of for a time, times and half a time’]. Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.”

Both after Jesus' resurrection, throughout these thousand years of the church and at the end of time, the dragon persecuted and will persecute the church (v. 13), but it always ends up being protected by God, and that leads us to the next reasoning.

In v. 14 the wilderness is mentioned again, as it was in v. 6, but in a little more detail: “But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.”

‘The two wings of the great eagle’ can refer to a great deliverance, where the Lord lifts His church to a higher spiritual level and very quickly, where His children can feel more protected with Him and away from their persecutors, from places where they suffer oppression. This happened to the people who came out of Egypt, where they were oppressed and their slave mentality did not allow them to know the right decision to make. Upon arriving at Sinai and receiving the law of God, they had their understanding opened to think otherwise and, consequently, they felt more aware of the power and protection of their God.



The wilderness, as we have seen, is a place of God's protection for His church, whether it is spiritual or physical, even if it is for a short time ('a time, and times, and half a time'), but for sure, it is a time He gives His Church to remake itself.

'So that she could fly from the serpent' [NIV: 'so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert'] may be a way of saying that the work of the church temporarily ceases to trouble the serpent; it is not seen or goes unnoticed, by an intervention of God Himself.

- Rev. 12: 15: "Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood."



'Water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood' – here we may notice that these waters come out of the serpent's mouth, and are copious, with the purpose of sweep the woman away as in a flood. Perhaps we could make a parallel here with Noah, with the crossing of the Red Sea, and even with the exile in Babylon (Isa. 43: 2).

Spiritually speaking the waters symbolized, both for Noah and for Moses and for the exiles in Babylon, a period of great affliction, a great difficulty in separating from the world, from the old things; to face the new and have a new beginning, to live a new life with God.

Very copious waters like a flood remind us of problems, afflictions, challenges and many things that come together all at once without giving us time to remake us, that come embroiling us in order to make us lose control.

In the case of the serpent, that is, the dragon's persecution of the church, the bible says in this verse that these waters come out of the dragon's mouth. Therefore, this could be interpreted as rumors, threats, false accusations and many confusing situations coming from malicious words to take the church at the same pace as the world, to be engulfed and dragged along with the world.

- Rev. 12: 16: "But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth."

Perhaps, the 'earth' here can be an aid from the governments of the Earth that, in a sympathetic way with the church of Christ, give it a sense of solidity, through laws or material support that prevent it from being destroyed in any way by the worldly weapons. Or else, God Himself will thwart the evil plans against His church. It is impossible to know what this is or how it will unfold, but the main teaching is that the Lord will always provide an escape for those who are His. All living beings are under His authority and can be used as He wills for His service. We cannot forget that at the same time that the church is persecuted, its prayers provoke the intervention of God and His help, so He not only blows His trumpets, but also puts His angels at our service to help in our difficulties. Angels protect us, deliver us and serve us.

- Rev. 12: 17: "Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus."

The saints who survived the first trials will continue to resist the dragon's onslaughts.

Chapter 13 –

• Rev. 13: 1-10 (The Beast rising out of the sea): “And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed. In amazement the whole earth followed the beast. They worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’ The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered. Let anyone who has an ear listen: If you are to be taken captive, into captivity you go; if you kill with the sword, with the sword you must be killed. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.”

Chapter 13 describes the emergence of the beast that comes out of the sea, the Antichrist, trying to show himself powerful and invincible (Rev. 13: 4) and speaking blasphemies for a short period of time (42 months, i.e. 3 ½ years – Rev. 13: 5) and fiercely persecuting the saints of the Lord (Rev. 13: 7). Beside him another beast appears and comes out of the earth (the false prophet), and also works signs and wonders and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.



Antichrist is called ‘little horn’ by Daniel (Dan. 7: 8); the ‘abomination that causes desolation’ or ‘the desolating sacrilege’ by Jesus (Matt. 24: 15; Mk. 13: 14); ‘the man of lawlessness’, ‘the man doomed to destruction’ or ‘the lawless one’ by Paul (2 The. 2: 3; 8-9). Only John in his epistle calls him Antichrist (1 Jn. 2: 18; 22;

1 Jn. 4: 3), and in Revelation calls him 'Beast' (more specifically referring to the beast rising out of the sea – Rev. 13: 1).

The imperial cult in the province of Asia Minor evidently suggested some of its characteristics to John.

The term 'beast' comes from the Greek, 'thêrion' (dangerous animal), and is depicted by a large and ferocious animal that within the biblical symbolism represents a powerful kingdom, a great empire.

• Rev. 13: 1-3: "And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems (NIV, 'with crowns on his horns'), and on its heads were blasphemous names. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed. In amazement the whole earth followed the beast."

Here John describes the beast: like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. It also had ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names (cf. Dan. 7: 8; 11; 20; 24). Its horns are borrowed from the fourth beast of the book of Daniel (Dan. 7: 7); its seven heads indicate that its authority will derive from the dragon (Rev. 12: 3; Rev. 12: 17).

We can notice a similarity in the symbolic language used by John to describe the dragon (Rev. 12: 3): "Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads." The beast out of the sea (Rev. 13: 1) described here also has "ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems (NIV, 'with crowns on his horns'), and on its heads were blasphemous names." And John confirms in v. 2b that his power comes from the dragon: "And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority."

'Seven heads' and 'seven diadems' symbolize the splendor, power, and glory of Satan as the god of this age (Rev. 13: 1).

'Ten horns' symbolize his universal reach over the earth and his total authority over the kingdom of darkness; horn is a symbol of power.

Let's remember the appearance of the animals seen by Daniel (Dan. 7: 1-28): lion with eagle's wings (Daniel 7: 4 = symbolized Babylon), bear with three ribs in its mouth (symbolized the kingdoms of Media and Persia), leopard with four wings of a bird on its back and four heads (It symbolizes Greece), and the fourth animal with terrifying look, exceedingly strong and with great iron teeth (Dan. 7: 7), devouring everything around and presenting ten horns on its head (Dan. 7: 7; Dan. 7: 19; Dan. 7: 24 = it symbolizes Rome).

The three animals: leopard, bear and lion (found in Dan. 7: 4-6 as symbols of empires that preceded Rome) instilled all their features on the qualities of the Roman Empire: the swiftness of conquest of the Macedonians (Greeks), the strength and tenacity the purpose of the Persians and the Babylonian greediness. After its fall, the Roman Empire turned into separate kingdoms, ending the imperial form of government. Even so, it continued to exist. The head wounded to death ('One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow') symbolizes the lack of an emperor to rule it. The prophecy of Rev. 13: 3 symbolizes the restoration of imperial form of government; more than a confederate empire, the head whose deadly wound was healed means that there is an emperor again (the Beast), so the empire was restored.

Various characters in History have been considered as Antichrist: for Daniel, he was personified in the person of Antiochus IV Epiphanes; Titus Vespasianus was another emperor considered an eschatological antichrist figure, for he destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD quite violently and persecuted both Christians and Jews. For John, the Antichrist was Nero, for he supposedly burned Rome during the night of July 18th to 19th, 64, the fire lasted 5 or 6 days, and then blamed the Christians. Opinions differ as to this event among the ancient writers: Suetonius, Dio Cassius, Tacitus, and others. After Nero's death, a legend arose that he would be resurrected; Domitian was considered the second Nero (Among the many atrocities he committed, this emperor exiled John to the island of Patmos). In the 16th century, the Antichrist was the figure of the Pope, according to the reformer John Calvin. The phrase that is written in Latin letters on the Pope's miter, 'Vicarius Filii Dei', i.e., 'Substitute for the Son of God' inspired this view among church reformers. Hitler and many other rulers in the Contemporary Era were also considered 'antichrists', for they instilled terror and death, persecuted the church and tried to destroy Christianity. But the Antichrist will arise indeed at the end of time, at the time of the second coming of Jesus.

Therefore, for the time of John the beast that emerges from the sea means an Emperor of the mighty Roman Empire. The sea represents the world, the unbelieving nations (Rev. 17: 15: "And he said to me, 'The waters [*sea*] that you saw, where the whore [*the city of Rome; the apostate church, prostituted with worldly abominations*] is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.'")

Even if the spirit of Antichrist is already among us (meaning the idea, the dominant force, the temper, the tendency, the thought contrary to Christ), the Antichrist will be known only in the form of a man during the period of the Great Tribulation. The spirit of the antichrist means a system of government, empires, kings, a totalitarian state opposed to the Work of God.

The Beast that rises out of the sea (the Antichrist) will carry out the role of king or ruler. In the 1st half, the Antichrist will show himself favorable, trying to unify countries and pacify the world and will promise solution to world problems, but in the second half he will reveal his true character. He will unite all nations under his economic, political and military power against the true Church of Christ, but the Messiah (Jesus) will defeat him: the battle of Armageddon – There are not four battles, but one described in several ways: Rev. 16: 14b; 16; 17; 21; Rev. 17: 14; Rev. 19: 17-21; Rev. 20: 7-10.

The Antichrist will emerge in the period of the Great Tribulation, in a time of apostasy where faith and the things of God were abandoned in favor of mysticism and religious syncretism and when people are living in apathy and spiritual drowsiness. He is the little horn described in Dan. 7: 8. He will appear at a time of great political, social and religious turmoil; it will be a period of great unrest, earthquakes, epidemics, famines, wars. Then he will promise a solution to the world's problems.

He will perform great miracles, signs and lying wonders (2 The. 2: 9-10), for at this time there will be false teachings, religious heresy (2 The. 2: 11) and people will listen to doctrines of demons, with much esoteric and mystique literature. With so many wonders, he will be an object of worship (Rev. 13: 4).

The only ones who will oppose him will be those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev. 13: 8). He will make war on the saints and to conquer them (v. 7).

Paul wrote about the man of lawlessness in 2 The. 2: 6 and says that there is something now restraining him; and in v. 7 he says that there is someone that restrains him. The something is the law, so he will appear at a time when there is no more law (anomia = lack of law, disrespect or violation of law); and the one who now restrains him is the one who makes the law happen, that is, the institutionalized government. Therefore, he will arise when there is no law, when there is political and social confusion and religious apostasy:

- 2 The. 2: 6-12: “And you know what is now restraining him [*the law, so he will appear at a time when there is no longer law (anomia = lack of law, disrespect or violation of law)*], so that he may be revealed when his time comes.”

- Rev. 13: 11-18: “Then I saw another beast that rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all; and by the signs that it is allowed to perform on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived; and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six.”



The beast coming out of the earth (The False Prophet) represents the apostate religion.

The Antichrist (The Beast that rises out of the sea), in fact, will manifest (2 The. 2: 3; 2 The. 2: 7-12; Dan. 9: 27; Dan. 11: 31; Dan. 12: 11) in the person of a political leader, an ungodly ruler (Rev. 13: 1-10 – symbolizing the Roman Empire in the time of John), allied with ten kings and helped by a religious leader, the false prophet (the beast rising out of the earth – Rev. 13: 11-15), in the period of the Great Tribulation

(Dan. 9: 27; Dan. 12: 1-2; Matt. 24: 15-31; Mk. 13: 3-27; Lk. 21: 5-28; Rev. 7: 14). In the 1st half, the Antichrist will show favorable to the nations, but in the 2nd half he'll reveal his true character. The Beast that rises out of the sea will combine the culture of Greece and the glory of Rome (As it happened with the emperors of the past).

While the horns of the beast that rises out of the sea (Rev. 13: 1) are political (kings), acting in the physical world, the power of the false prophet (the beast that rises out of the earth) is meek, it acts in the spiritual ambit, making use of piety and persuasion, deceiving people. The two horns represent the religious power structure that began in Israel with the priest and the prophet; in this case, the false prophecy and false priesthood. That's why Jesus spoke about the false prophets. Pretending to be a lamb, the False Prophet is, in fact, a wolf in sheep's clothing. He will make use of lying wonders (2 The. 2: 9), and will deceive people, causing them to believe in the beast (The Beast rising out of the sea or Antichrist: Rev. 13: 1-10) as if he were the promised Messiah. Israel, for example, has always seen the Messiah as a physical leader, a material one, manifesting himself with power in the natural world, a king (like David, for example) who one day will come to deliver them from the oppressing power of the Gentiles. He will unite all religions under the same doctrine (A religious syncretism), demanding the Antichrist to be worshiped as a god. We can already see today this religious syncretism mentioned above in the occult sects mixed with the doctrines of the church, in the eastern sects infiltrating the West, the increasing influence of Satanism, of the sects that use the invocation of the dead and in the worship of man (Humanism). Humanism is an outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters. Humanist beliefs stress the potential value and goodness of human beings, emphasize common human needs, and seek solely rational ways of solving human problems. The False Prophet will do signs and wonders, all in deception and lies:

- 2 The. 2: 9: "The coming of the lawless one [Here it's about the Antichrist, the anti-Christian power of the world, allied with the false prophet, the anti-Christian religious power] is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power (Greek: *dunamis* or *dunamei* – *δυναμις* – Strong #g1411 = ability, power to perform miracles), signs, (Greek: *semeion* = miracle, sign, token, wonder), lying wonders (Greek: *teras* or *terata* or *teras* = of uncertain affinity; a prodigy or omen, wonder sign, token, proof)."

- Rev. 19: 20: "And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur."

- Rev. 13: 12-15: "It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all; and by the signs that it is allowed to perform on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived; and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed."

- Rev. 19: 20: "And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur."

But the false prophet will only deceive those who have not accepted and will not accept Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (Rev. 13: 8: those whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the Lamb's Book of Life), for the true Church, faithful to Christ, those who accept Him and acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior will withstand the false prophet and the Beast. They won't give up faith.

Another thing I think is important here is the Greek word for 'earth' (4 times in this version of the passage of Rev. 13: 11-18): 'ge' (γῆ, Strong #1093), meaning: the contracted form of a primitive word with the signification of: soil, therefore, a region, or the solid part or the whole of the terrene globe (including the occupants): the earth, soil, land, region, country, inhabitants of a region, country, earth, ground, land, world. By consequence, we can say that here the bible can be talking about the land of Israel or the planet Earth, in a complete way. The beasts will have universal dominion.

- Rev. 13: 16-18 – John mentions the mark of the beast, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead of those whose name are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. The bible says: "Also it causes all [*it's speaking of the False Prophet, the beast coming out of the earth*], both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead (cf. Rev. 14: 9), so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six."

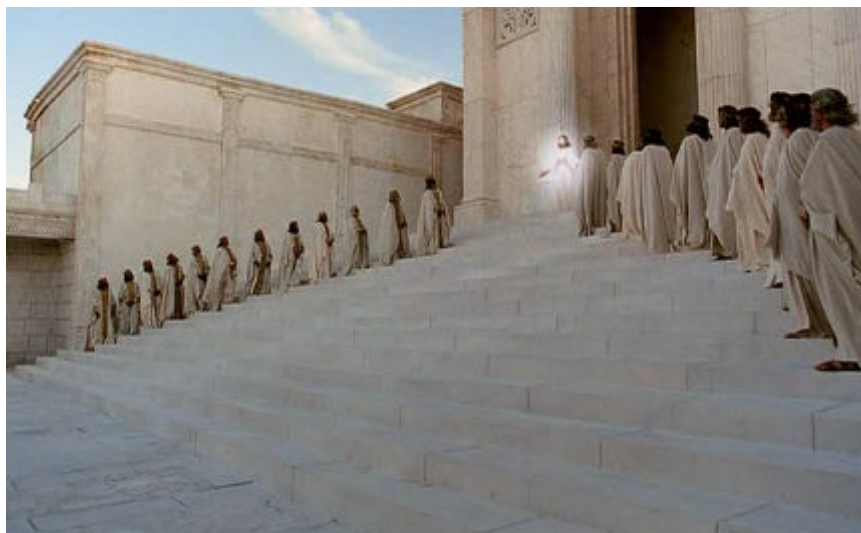
In Hebrew, each letter is assigned a definite numerical value, which is called gematria (Jewish numerology), where a word is the sum of the values of the letters that compose it. This is an esoteric method often used by Kabbalah to explain the Scriptures, that is, by the numerical value of words. Thus, according to the calculations of Hebrew and Greek letters, some characters in History had their name calculated as 666. For example: Nero Caesar, Domitian, Hitler and the phrase that is written on the Pope's miter in Latin letters, 'Vicarius Filii Dei' ('Substitute for the Son of God'), as the reformers of the Middle Ages considered it. None of this, however, can be considered reliable information. We only know that 6 is the number of man; for some, it is the imperfect number, symbol of failure, of evil in a superlative degree, although Satan has limitations (he cannot touch God and those who are in heaven; it cannot generate apostasy in true believers).

In fact, it is not known what the mark of the beast is or what it looks like.

From the point of view of Greek philosophy, the flesh was bad, but the spirit was good (the Manicheans of the 4th and 5th century, for example, said this). Therefore, John says that every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is the antichrist (1 John 4: 2-3). The new Gentile converts of John's time did not believe that the Son of God, who was good, could incarnate in a human body like ours.

Chapter 14 –

• Rev. 14: 1-5: “Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! And with him were one hundred forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless.”



As there are the introductory chapters that precede the judgments presented by the opening of the seven seals and the blowing of the seven trumpets, so here too, preceding the last series of judgments, we have an introductory chapter.

Chapter 14 begins with the scene of Christ and the church in heaven (‘The Lamb and His redeemed on Mount Zion’), that is, here the image of the one hundred and forty-four thousand is repeated (Rev. 7: 4-8), which corresponds to the totality of the saved in all church history; those saved in the OT and NT and those who will be sealed in the period of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7: 3; Rev. 9: 4 cf. Ezek. 9: 4-6; Rev. 7: 13-14) with the seal of the Father and the Son, instead of having the mark of the beast (Rev. 13: 17); therefore, to be preserved from the calamities to come. In chapter 7, John hears the number one hundred and forty-four thousand. In chap. 14 he sees the entirety of the church. Here is clearly defined the place where they are: in the heavenly Jerusalem, heaven, together with the Lamb.

The bible also talks about the “Lamb standing on Mount Zion”, which refers to the heavenly Jerusalem (only reference to Zion in Revelation – cf. Heb. 12: 22), the whole church with Christ in glory. These one hundred and forty-four thousand are already in heaven. Therefore, the bible speaks of them being the ‘firstfruits’ (cf. Heb.

12: 23 – ‘the church of the firstborn’); for they are those who were saved at the time of the harvest and the vintage (Rev. 14: 14-16 – the harvest; Rev. 14: 17-20 – the vintage), i.e., were separated from the wicked, which corresponds to the same scene in Rev. 16: 16 (the rapture of the church, before Armageddon), before the Lord brings the punishment described in Rev. 16: 17, namely, the seventh plague, His wrath fully poured out on the wicked.



“They sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth.” (Rev 14: 3) – this verse signifies the song of victory (cf. Rev. 5: 9-10) for their redemption by Christ and only those who are already in heaven and the hundred and forty-four thousand redeemed from earth can sing it.

“Redeemed from the earth” means the Earth, generally speaking, in the period of the Great Tribulation.

In this text, the bible says that “It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless” (Rev. 14: 4-5). They are the same one hundred and forty-four thousand who were sealed (chapter 7) and who withstood the lies and the onslaughts of the beast, and did not allow themselves to be corrupted with idolatry, separating themselves to Christ and not denying His name.

“Firstfruits” means all saved unto God (“the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven”, described in Heb. 12: 23), for in their mouth no lie was found; they have no blemish, that is, they are blameless as to the testimony of Christ, they have spiritual purity.

“These follow the Lamb wherever he goes” – means those who follow Jesus to the end, even if it is to martyrdom, and who are now with Him in glory, alongside His person, as a reward for their faithfulness to Him.

- Rev. 14: 6-20 – Then angels appear, whose voices announce the judgments of God to men:

• Rev. 14: 6-7 (The first voice): “Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation and tribe and language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.’” – the angel announces to those who dwell on the earth to fear God and give Him glory, for the hour of His judgment has come.



• Rev. 14: 8 (The second voice): “Then another angel, a second, followed, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’” – another angel announces the fall of Babylon the great (Rev. 17: 5).



The word “Babylon” in Sumerian is written as *kà-dingir-ra*, which means “Door of God”; and in Hebrew it is written as *Babhel* (Strong # 894; Gen. 10: 10; Gen. 11: 9 – the tower of Babel), which comes from the Hebrew root *bālal* (Strong #1101),

meaning “confusion” or “mixture.” Ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia was the political, commercial, and religious center of a world empire. It was known for its luxury and moral decadence.

Today, more than the ancient city of Babylon in Chaldea (with its spiritual prostitutions) or the city of Rome (seen by the apostle John as the symbol of all that represented a force contrary to the teachings of Christ), we can say that Babylon represents this anti-Christian force, the confused, perverse and profane world system, antagonistic to the Kingdom of God, using not only religion (The apostate church, prostituted with worldly abominations, that is, the religious system of the Antichrist) but also secular powers (such as the world monetary system, trade and politics) to oppress and try to steal faith in God’s word preached by Jesus. As in the past Babylon has brought oppression and confusion upon people, including God’s people, it brings the same thing today, trying to oppress and divert believers from the path that God has drawn for them. The Rulers and Authorities of the darkness are the instruments of the devil to do this. Many theologians and historians summarize this definition of Babylon as: the entire political, economic and religious system of the world in general under the rule of the Antichrist.

- Rev. 14: 9-12 (The third voice): “Then another angel, a third, followed them, crying with a loud voice, ‘Those who worship the beast and its image, and receive a mark on their foreheads or on their hands, they will also drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name.’ Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.” – another angel announces the doom of the apostate church. These will drink of God’s wrath without mercy. ‘fire and sulfur’ show the intensity of the suffering of the wicked, eternal torment.



- Rev. 14: 13 (The fourth voice): “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.’”



The voice comes down from heaven saying that blessed are those who die in Christ, for they leave the body to dwell with the Lord; they are blessed because they rest, while the wicked are tormented.

- Rev. 14: 14-16 (The harvest): “Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand! Another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to the one who sat on the cloud, ‘Use your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.’ So the one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.” – the harvest describes Christ’s second coming for the harvest of the righteous (Matt. 13: 39; Matt. 24: 29-31) and the tares (NIV: ‘the weeds’) being gathered into the furnace.



- Rev. 14: 17-20 (The vintage): “Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had

the sharp sickle, 'Use your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.' So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and he threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles."

The vintage (Rev. 14: 17-20 cf. Isa. 63: 2-6) is judgment against the wicked, followers of the beast. The figure of the vintage and the crushed grapes reflects the wrath of God. The one who treads this winepress is Jesus Himself.

Verse 20 says, "And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles." This means that the wrath of God will strike all the wicked, the entire apostate church (two hundred miles or three hundred kilometers correspond to the distance from Dan to Beersheba in Israel). The height of the horses' bridles indicates considerable height and therefore a massacre, a great victory over evil.



Fifth section – Chapters 15–16



The song of the redeemed | The seven plagues
| The defeat of the Antichrist and the False
Prophet

Fifth section – Chapters 15–16

Chapters 15-16 show John's vision of the redeemed singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15: 1-4) and the seven plagues (the bowls filled with of God's wrath) that are being poured out on the earth (Rev. 16: 1-21). There is no interlude between the plagues; they are one after the other. The end of the 6th plague refers to the final battle, Armageddon, the moment of the rapture of the church and the defeat of the kings and all who worshiped the beast, as well as the Antichrist and the false prophet.

Chapter 15

- Rev. 15: 1-4: "Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and amazing: seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended. And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: 'Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations! Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed.'"



Chapter 15 begins with John's vision of the redeemed (Rev. 15: 2) singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15: 1-4). Before seeing the scene of the Last Judgment, the horror of the plagues, and hearing the blasphemies of the wicked, he heard the song of the redeemed. John contemplates the delights of the saved. They are standing beside the sea of glass before the throne of God and they exalt Him.

It's about the same song of praise. The Song of the Lamb is the song of spiritual deliverance from sin and Satan's hands, just as the song of Moses was the song of the physical deliverance from Pharaoh. When the bible says 'beast' (Rev. 15: 2), it is

not referring only to the eschatological Beast, but to the entire history of the Church, when the Antichrist (Roman Caesars, for example) were assisted by the system of corrupt religion, which the bible calls 'The Great Babylon.'

- Rev. 15: 5-8: "After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, with golden sashes across their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever; and the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God (cf. 1 Kin. 8: 10-11; 2 Chr. 5: 13-14; Ezek. 10: 3-4 – 'cloud'; Isa. 6: 4 – 'smoke') and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended."



The Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon are figures of speech to represent the glory of God, His presence with His redeemed. Smoke is that symbol, as it appeared in the tabernacle to the people of God in the wilderness, when Solomon consecrated the temple in Jerusalem, and when Isaiah received his call.

From the sanctuary come His representatives in the world. They come down with seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God. This is the time for God to send the plagues. Now, there is no more time for intercession or repentance. The sinner has no more chance.

As I said at the beginning, seals are symbols of trouble, suffering and persecution; the world persecuting the church. Trumpets signify God's partial judgment on the world that persecutes the church. It is the hand of God acting in History through the prayer of the church and sending a warning. Still at this point His judgment is tempered with mercy, He gives man a chance to repent.

The trumpets are not successive of the seals, but parallel to the seals, that is, the world may persecute the church, but with its prayer God acts and makes His partial judgment, brings His warning to the sinner (Rev. 8: 5).

Plagues (bowls) refer to God's merciless judgment against the wicked, as in Sodom and Gomorrah and in Egypt. There is no interlude between the plagues; they are one after the other. It is the picture of God's judgment on the followers of the Beast.

The end of the 6th plague refers to the final battle, Armageddon, the moment of the rapture of the church and the defeat of the servants of the dragon: those who worshiped the beast and the kings who gathered to fight against God, as well as the Antichrist and the false prophet.

When in History the trumpets do not act on the wicked, God will not leave them unpunished. The wrath of God is accumulated as if in bowls until reaching the limit. The judgment of God will come and there will be no more repentance or chance. The bible refers to this in the OT as ‘the cup of God’s wrath’: Isa. 51: 17; Isa. 51: 22-23; Jer. 25: 15-16.

Trumpets and bowls (plagues) deal with the same period, that is, it is not restricted to the days that precede the second coming of Christ. In the history of the Church, trumpets and bowls have occurred, i.e., those who died and die today without Christ receive the bowls of God’s wrath; their doom is already sealed.

The two sections (trumpets and bowls) end with the final judgment. The harvest and the vintage (Rev. 14: 14-20), the seventh plague (Rev. 16: 17-20) refer to the second coming of Christ, when the wrath of God is consummated. And after this, the judgment of God (Rev. 20: 11-15).

John sees seven angels with bowls and each one pours them out on the earth (Rev. 15: 1 – Rev. 16: 21). The bowls reach the whole earth, the rivers, the seas, the air and men, no longer a third, as the trumpets were.

Chapter 16 –

The interpretation in this chapter is not necessarily literal; they are probably figures of speech, showing that man will have no place of support. Those sealed by the beast are under the wrath of God. This chapter shows the destruction of creatures and nature. Even suffering, the wicked do not repent; just as it was with Pharaoh. The end of the 6th plague refers to the final battle, Armageddon, the moment of the rapture of the church. Here the plagues are described:

- 1st plague: foul and painful sores, like the festering boils in Egypt (cf. Ex. 9: 10).

- Rev. 16: 1-2: “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.’ So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and a foul and painful sore came on those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped its image.”

2nd plague: the sea became like the blood and every living thing in the sea died. ‘Blood’ in the waters means that there is no more life on the Earth (rivers, springs and seas no longer have aquatic life).

- Rev. 16: 3: “The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in the sea died.”

3rd plague: the rivers and the springs of water became blood (cf. Ex. 7: 17-21).



- Rev. 16: 4-7: “The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, ‘You are just, O Holy One, who are and were, for you have judged these things; because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!’ And I heard the altar respond, ‘Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and just!’”

‘Blood’ means that there is no more life on the Earth because rivers, springs and seas have turned into blood. Here, not only does the angel who poured out his bowl give glory to the Lord, but also the souls of those under the altar of burnt offering that is in the presence of God.

4th plague: men are scorched with fire (v. 8 – ‘the fierce heat’). This refers to the amount of heat the Earth receives from the sun.

- Rev. 16: 8-9: “The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire; they were scorched by the fierce heat, but they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.”

5th plague: the kingdom of the Beast turns into darkness (cf. Ex. 10: 21).

- Rev. 16: 10-11: “The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their tongues in agony, and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.”

6th plague: the river Euphrates water dried up (cf. Isa. 11: 15-16) –

- Rev. 16: 12-16: “The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east. And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. (‘See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame.’). And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Harmageddon [NIV: Armageddon].”

Drying up the Euphrates means preparing the way for the kings who come from the East for the battle of Armageddon. It may represent the removal of the impediment to the march of the world’s ungodly power towards the Holy Land. The Euphrates River was the eastern limit of the land given to Abraham by God. This means that there are no more barriers to the invader. In this passage, it is clear the presence of unclean spirits (demons like frogs; spirits that perform signs) taking the rulers of the earth under their command.

At the church’s most critical moment the Lord comes and makes His judgment against the ungodly. His coming is unexpected.

Here the rapture of the church takes place, the battle of Christ’s triumphant victory over all opposing forces, the final battle called Armageddon.

7th plague:

- Rev. 16: 17-21: “The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’ And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people, until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.”



Now comes the wrath of God upon the wicked, after the rapture of the church. At this point, the worldly system opposed to God enters into crisis and collapses by the action of God Himself. In verse 17, John hears a voice from the throne saying, 'It is done!', that is, 'It is finished!', the curtain of History has closed and the scene of judgment enters.

This triumphal victory of Christ over all opposing forces is described figuratively (v. 17-19): His wrath is directed against the air ('flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake,' culminating in huge hailstones falling from the heaven – v. 18-21), over the cities of the Gentile nations ('the cities of the nations') and 'great Babylon', which according to some theologians may refer to Rome (v. 19), but seems to refer to the anti-Christian world system and the apostate church, opposers of God.

Sixth section – Chapters 17–19



The fall of the beast, the false prophet and the prostitute (The great Babylon) | The return of Christ

Sixth section – Chapters 17–19

This section talks about the fall of the beast (Antichrist) and the false prophet; judgments are also pronounced against the woman dressed in scarlet (the prostitute), which is another figure of speech used of Babylon (Rev. 17: 1 – Rev. 18: 1-24), and there is great joy in heaven because of her downfall (Rev. 19: 1-10). Christ visibly returns to the battle of Armageddon, riding His white horse and followed by the armies of heaven (Rev. 19: 11-21). We can notice that in chapters 12 and 13 they rose in an order: 1st the dragon, 2nd the Antichrist and 3rd the false prophet. Now they fall in reverse order: those sealed by the beast, then Great Babylon (the anti-Christian world system and the apostate church), Antichrist and the false prophet, and the dragon last (chapter 20 – next section).

The word “Babylon” in Sumerian is written as *kà-dingir-ra*, which means “Door of God”; and in Hebrew it is written as *Babhel* (Strong # 894; Gen. 10: 10; Gen. 11: 9 – the tower of Babel), which comes from the Hebrew root *bālal* (Strong #1101), meaning “confusion” or “mixture.” Ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia was the political, commercial, and religious center of a world empire. It was known for its luxury and moral decadence. Today, more than the ancient city of Babylon in Chaldea (with its spiritual prostitutions) or the city of Rome (seen by the apostle John as the symbol of all that represented a force contrary to the teachings of Christ), we can say that Babylon represents this anti-Christian force, the confused, perverse and profane world system, antagonistic to the Kingdom of God, using not only religion (The apostate church, prostituted with worldly abominations, that is, the religious system of the Antichrist) but also secular powers (such as the world monetary system, trade and politics) to oppress and try to steal faith in God’s word preached by Jesus. As in the past Babylon has brought oppression and confusion upon people, including God’s people, it brings the same thing today, trying to oppress and divert believers from the path that God has drawn for them. The Rulers and Authorities of the darkness are the instruments of the devil to do this. Many theologians and historians summarize this definition of Babylon as: the entire political, economic and religious system of the world in general under the rule of the Antichrist.

Chapter 17 –

In chapter 17 John sees and describes the great whore, also called Babylon the Great. The figurative image depicts her as a whore; therefore, not only the profane world system, but the apostate church in contrast to the bride of Christ (chapter 22).

Here, John emphasizes the religious part of this perverse anti-Christian system, the ecclesiastical system of Satan, the religion prostituted with worldly abominations, the religious system that speaks in the name of God, in a syncretism that leads humanity to false salvation and to apostatize from the faith.

• Rev. 17: 1-18:

1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is seated on many waters,

2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk.'

3 So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.

4 The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication;

5 and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: **'Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations.'**

6 And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly amazed.

7 But the angel said to me, 'Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.

8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to **ascend from the bottomless pit** and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

9 This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings,

10 of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while.

11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.

12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.

13 These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast;

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

15 And he said to me, 'The waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.

16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire.

17 For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.

18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.'

• Rev. 17: 1-4: "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk.' So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication."

The woman identified as a whore is seen in the wilderness, sitting on a scarlet beast. The description of the scarlet beast clearly associates it with the beast of the sea, the Antichrist (or the beast of the abyss – cf. Dan. 7: 3; 20-21; 25; Rev. 11: 7; Rev. 13: 1; 5- 7; Rev. 17: 3; 8), while they fiercely persecute God's people (v. 13-14). Like the dragon, this beast is also red in color (Rev. 12: 3).

She is seated 'on many waters', which means that this apostate religion mixed with the world's profane anti-Christian system has a worldwide influence (cf. v. 15: "And he said to me, 'The waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages'").

"The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication" – this shows her wealth, ostentation, trying to impress the world and seducing people.

- Rev. 17: 5: "and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: 'Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations.'" This is an interesting comparison with the custom of ancient Rome, where prostitutes carried their names on their foreheads. False religion, that is, the worship of gods other than the one true God, is called by Him spiritual prostitution. The word 'mystery' is explained in v. 7-8.

- Rev. 17: 6: "And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly amazed."

The woman called Babylon is drunk with the blood of Christian saints and martyrs (Matt. 24: 21), as well as with the wine of her fornication (Rev. 17: 2). Both violence and fornication are repugnant to the Lord, for they persecute God's people. In this verse the woman's hatred of Christianity is clear. To be drunk with the blood of the saints indicates a time of extraordinary slaughter. The Roman Empire worshiped emperors. Christians were opposed; then martyrdom came. Papal Rome under the regime of the Inquisition sentenced millions of faithful to death. In the 20th century, the world wars, with the Holocaust, consequently, the 'iron curtain' and the 'bamboo curtain' and the Islamic countries with their persecutions of Christianity led millions of faithful to Christ to death.

- Rev. 17: 7-8: "But the angel said to me, 'Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.'"

For John's time, the beast rising out of the sea, or the beast that comes up from the bottomless pit (or Abyss) it is the same entity, and means the mighty Roman Empire. For other times, it was represented by many pagan empires. In the case of the eschatological Antichrist, a totalitarian state opposed to the work of God.

This means that the view of this text is not just for John's days, or just for the Middle Ages, for example, but for the entire history of the church and for the end times. The Roman Emperors embodied, so to speak, the spirit of the antichrist, for they rose up against God and His doctrine brought by Jesus ("The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction"). But he has not yet personified himself in the eschatological Antichrist, who will bring

Christ's final victory over evil. Antichrist will only have power over those who do not have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

- Rev. 17: 9-10: "This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while."

As we saw previously, 'beasts' (terrifying-looking animals) are symbols of empires. The angel told him that the seven heads are seven mountains and also seven kings.

'Mountains' can be a reference to the seven hills along the Tiber, a well-known designation of the city of Rome ("on which the woman is seated"), influencing peoples and multitudes and nations and languages, but it can also refer to the successive world empires, since mountains are symbols of kingdoms and empires of the earth (Ps. 30: 7; Jer. 51: 25; Dan. 2: 35; 44-45). Antichrist embodied himself in the Roman emperors, but it can also refer to empires that have passed (before the Roman Empire) and also have fallen, and to those that are yet to come.

"Of whom five have fallen" – besides the seven mountains referring to the seven hills of Rome, on which the corrupt religion is seated, the seven heads, the seven mountains, symbolize the great empires of History that have passed: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece.

"One is living" means the Roman Empire, in which John was inserted and which would last materially until the 15th century (1453), but would continue to exert its spiritual influence.

"And the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while" – the seventh king or kingdom. This is linked to the next verses (v. 11-12), about the ten kings:

- Rev. 17: 11-12: "As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast."

It means that the anti-Christian spirit has materialized in various rulers throughout History, but it is not yet the real character, the 8th king, who will trigger the return of Christ and the restoration of all things, that is, the eschatological Antichrist. The ten kings (the ten contemporary kings) will be the kingdoms of the world ('the seventh king' or 'the seventh kingdom') that will support the eschatological Antichrist, but they will be short-lived ('One hour') and out of them the Antichrist will arise ('the 8th king'), who will claim full honor and sovereignty. They will all gather against the Lamb for Armageddon (v. 14), but they will be destroyed, just as Antichrist will be slain by the sword that comes out of Jesus' mouth ("it goes to destruction"). We can think of the seventh world empire as a kind of revitalized Roman Empire over which the Antichrist establishes the imperial authority of a dictator, and will become the 8th and final king demanding universal authority.

- Rev. 17: 13-14: "These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

The ten kings who have not yet received the crown are the ten contemporary kings. When John wrote about the beast rising out of the sea in Rev. 13: 3 (“One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed. In amazement the whole earth followed the beast”) he was saying that the mighty Roman Empire (The Beast rising out of the sea, in the figure of a leader and a confederate empire) even after being divided and fragmented among many nations and without a single emperor to rule (“the head that seemed to have received a death-blow”), in the future will find restoration of its imperial form of government, as it will have an emperor again (the Beast).

These kings will receive power for a short time (“for an hour”) and will support the Antichrist. They will unite (Battle of Armageddon) to fight against the Lamb, but they will not prevail. This means the world will collapse and be defeated at the 2nd coming of Christ. The church follows the victory of the Lamb (v. 14). The church is God’s elect, those faithful to Him, those who believe; who seek holiness and life with God; therefore, they are blameless.

- Rev. 17: 15: “And he said to me, ‘The waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.’”

In the same way that John uses two figures of speech to describe the church of Christ (‘bride’ and city, the ‘new Jerusalem’), he also uses two images to describe the apostate, corrupt church: ‘Babylon’ and ‘whore.’ Here it is clear that the whore is known for her worldwide influence (“whore who is seated on many waters”, i.e., nations, peoples, multitudes, and languages); therefore, the apostate church acts in the world and uses the culture of the world; it is Satan’s ecclesiastical system that speaks in the name of God, it is mixed in a religious and political syncretism that leads people to apostasy and false salvation. But it is not neutral, it is opposed to God, it is anti-Christian. Rome tolerated all the gods of the nations, but didn’t tolerate true Christianity; so Rome persecuted Christians.

Continuing in his description of the whore, John shows that she is also known for wealth, vanity, pomp, arrogance, spiritual prostitution, violence, cruelty, thirst for conquest, greed and ostentation of power and a limitless ambition, wanting to reach the crowds and impress the world with her appearance (v. 4-5). In this respect, the city of Rome in the time of the emperors or the city of Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar was not different from the city of Nineveh in the time of the Assyrians, described by Zephaniah and Nahum: an arrogant and very confident city, bloodthirsty (for it lived on wars and spoils), known for its cruelty, full of lies and theft (Nah. 3: 1), and lived on spiritual prostitution for the multitude of gods with which it corrupted other nations; ‘mistress of sorceries’, who led astray many peoples (Nah. 3: 4); mercantile city (Nah. 3: 16), greedy and insatiable, which devoured what it saw ahead (Nah. 3: 17). Like Babylon, the city of Nineveh had a great supply of water and very great wealth (Nah. 2: 2-4; 7-9).

- Rev. 17: 16-17: “And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.”

God will provoke an internal war in the kingdom of the beast, that is, the kings will turn against the whore (Rev. 17: 16-17), for God has put this idea in their thoughts (v. 17), and they will totally destroy her.

The Antichrist, ‘the man of lawlessness’ (or ‘the man doomed to destruction’ or ‘the lawless one’ – 2 Thessalonians 2: 3; 8-9), whose political power has always been opposed to God throughout the centuries and with greater intensity at the end of time, uses religion according to his convenience, but in the end he will turn against apostate religion and will destroy it. The religions that support the Antichrist will also be destroyed by him. He will look for a single religion. He will position himself as the supreme king and as a god (in place of the true God – cf. Dan. 11: 36; Matt. 24-15; 2 The. 2: 4).

Rev. 17: 16: “And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire.” – As this description is similar to that of God’s judgment on Babylon (Rev. 18: 8), it seems that the Lord uses the armies of the beast as His instrument of judgment over the kingdom of Antichrist (Rev. 18) before they themselves are destroyed (Rev. 19: 19-21). As it was God Himself who instilled this division (Rev. 17: 16-17), this proves His sovereignty. He never lost control of History.

- Rev. 17: 18: “The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth”.

As I have explained above, the woman in John’s vision (v. 1-6) is Rome, symbol of the great city of Babylon (Rev. 16: 19) and also the ancient mother of whores (Rev. 17: 5). Thus, the Satanic influence of this city on world leaders continued from Babel through Babylon to Rome (v. 9-10), its classic manifestation in the first century AD.

Chapter 18 –

In chapter 18 John hears four voices:

1) Condemnation: v. 1-3: “After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. He called out with a mighty voice, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul bird, a haunt of every foul and hateful beast. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury.’”

The angel announces the fall of Babylon the great. In the mind of God it is already an eschatological fact accomplished. Because of her luxury and fornication (worship of money and power in opposition to the true God) she will be totally destroyed, she will collapse.

2) Separation: v. 4-8: “Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief. Since in her heart she says, ‘I rule as a queen; I am no widow, and I will never see grief,’ therefore her plagues will come in a single day— pestilence and mourning and famine— and she will be burned with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.’”

As God spoke in the past for His people to keep away from Babylon so as not to contaminate themselves with its fornications and iniquities, He repeats this in this passage, that is, not to agree with His sins and principles. Babylon has always walked along with the church (Cain and Abel, for example).

But the church must be different from this paganized culture. There cannot be an unequal yoke.

- v. 5: “for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her as she herself has rendered” – sometimes it seems that God is too tolerant, but His cup and His patience have a measure; then comes destruction.

- v. 6 – “and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed.”

This verse conveys a kind of revenge against the evil she did in her pride (cf. Jer. 50: 15; 29). The Lord warns us not to put our trust in our own strength and in the strength of the world.

- v. 7 – “As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief. Since in her heart she says, ‘I rule as a queen; I am no widow, and I will never see grief.’”

This means that she glorified herself. This verse portrays the worship of pleasure and lust. But man will no longer be satisfied with this and will collapse.

- v. 8 – “therefore her plagues will come in a single day— pestilence and mourning and famine— and she will be burned with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”

The entire system will be dismantled in a single day. As I said before, God will use the beast’s own armies to destroy it, or on the day of Jesus’ return (the 7th plague).

3) Lamentation: v. 9-19:

9 And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning;

10 they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, 'Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon, the mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore,

12 cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble,

13 cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves—and human lives.

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

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

16 'Alas, alas, the great city, clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!

17 For in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste!' And all shipmasters and seafarers, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off

18 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, 'What city was like the great city?'

19 And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out, 'Alas, alas, the great city, where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in one hour she has been laid waste.'

Those who supported themselves from Babylon will see their fall and mourn (v. 9-10), that is, the political world (kings of the earth), the business and commercial world go bankrupt (v. 11: "And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore").

In the same way that Babylon of Chaldea was destroyed by fire (Isa. 47: 14; Jer. 51: 25; 32; 58) and Rome suffered many times with natural fires (the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, destroying the Roman cities of Pompeii, Herculaneum, Oplontis and Stabiae; fire of Rome in 80 AD, with little historical information) or fires from barbarian peoples (Visigoths in 410 AD; Attila the Hun in 452 AD; Genseric the Vandal in 455; Odoacer, king of the Heruli, in 476 put an end to the Western Roman Empire), the eschatological Babylon will be destroyed in the same way (Rev. 18: 9; 18 – 'the smoke of her burning').

John cites 29 luxury items grouped in a group of four:

- v. 11-12: gold, silver, jewels and pearls – jewels.
 - v. 12: fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet – textile industry.
 - v. 12: scented wood, ivory, articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble – ornamentation and embellishment of palaces.
 - v. 13: cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense – cosmetics.
 - v. 13: wine, oil, choice flour and wheat – cooking.
 - v. 13: cattle, sheep, horses and chariots, slaves, human lives – living goods.
- All kingdoms (animal, mineral and plant) go bankrupt.
International trade (17-19 – 'sea'); the economic world collapses.

She will be taken by surprise: Rev. 18: 10, 'For in one hour your judgment has come'; Rev. 18: 17: 'For in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste!'; Rev. 18: 19: 'For in one hour she has been laid waste' – cf. Jer. 51: 41.

4) Celebration: v. 20-24: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, you saints and apostles and prophets! For God has given judgment for you against her. Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, 'With such violence Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and will be found no more; and the sound of harpists and minstrels and of flutists and trumpeters will be heard in you no more; and an artisan of any trade will be found in you no more; and the sound of the millstone will be heard in you no more; and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more; and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more; for your merchants were the magnates of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth.'"

While Babylon weeps on earth, in heaven the bride of Christ (the Church) rejoices over the sudden destruction of the world system.

In Babylon one will no longer hear music, one will not see work, art, creativity, new things, supply ('the sound of the millstone'), but hunger (v. 22).

Nor will it have light; it will be a place of darkness, namely, separation from God, eternal damnation. There will be no love relationship ('the voice of bridegroom and bride').

This describes the scene of the Last Judgment, hell (v. 23).

the v. 24 repeats that she was a sorceress (she practiced false worship) and was a persecutor of the servants of God, leading them to martyrdom.

Chapter 19 –

- Rev. 19: 1-10 – it shows the downfall of God’s enemies and how heavens react to the fall of Babylon.

- v. 1-6: “After this [*the complete ruin of Babylon*] I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.’ Once more they said, ‘Hallelujah! The smoke goes up from her forever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, ‘Amen. Hallelujah!’ And from the throne came a voice saying, ‘Praise our God, all you his servants, and all who fear him, small and great.’ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.’”

In v. 1-6 John hears the voice of a multitude in heaven rejoicing over the fall of Babylon. All extol the power of God and His just judgment over evil and avenging His servants. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures also fall down and worship God.



- v. 7-8: “‘Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.’”

In Rev. 19: 7-8: The multitude declares the sovereign reign of the Lord and rejoices at the arrival of the marriage feast of the Lamb.

The bride (the Church of Christ) is exalted. She receives a garment of fine linen, bright and clean, thus showing that she is spotless, pure, holy and without blemish, because fine linen, bright and pure is the righteous deeds of the saints. We can see that the clothes are not her own, but given to her; this means that the work of sanctification comes from God, not from us. The marriage of the Lamb symbolizes

the figurative union of Christ with His wife, His church, the redeemed, those who were purchased by His blood.

Making an analogy with the ancient Jewish wedding (which you can read in the next paragraph), Jesus paid the bride's dowry on the cross (it was 'the betrothal'). And between the 1st and 2nd coming is the 'waiting interval.' The 'consummation' of the wedding is at the 2nd coming of Christ. The bride of Christ are the children of light.



Jewish marriage in the time of John

Let's interrupt the study a little to talk about what Jewish marriage was like in John's day. It had some important steps.

The betrothal

The bride and groom made a public commitment before of the family. Usually, the parents of the young man chose a wife for him (Hagar and Ishmael – Gen. 21: 21; Judah and Er – Gen. 38: 6). Sometimes, the young man made the choice and his parents made the negotiations (Shechem – Gen. 34: 4,8 and Samson – Judg. 14: 2). Rarely did a young man marry against his parents' wishes (Esau – Gen. 26: 34-35). Sometimes the young woman was asked if she consented to his marriage (Rebecca – Gen. 24: 58). Occasionally, the young woman's parents would choose a suitable young man to be her husband (Naomi and Ruth – Rut. 3: 1-2; Saul and Michal – 1 Sam. 18: 21). At this stage, the agreement was already like the fidelity agreement of a marriage. They were considered husband and wife; they were just not allowed to have sex. And that waiting interval was usually one year.

At this early stage of the engagement there was an exchange of **gifts**. They could be in three forms:

1. *môhar* (translated as 'wedding dowry'), as with Dinah (Gen. 34: 12; Ex. 22: 17 – for a seduced virgin) and Michal (1 Sam. 18: 25).

The môhar can be considered in the case of Rebekah (Gen. 24: 53 – gold and silver jewelry, articles of clothing, gifts to her mother and brother), Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 29: 18 – the seven years of work).

It could be regarded as a compensatory gift given by the groom to the bride's family, sealing the pact between the two families.

2. The dowry ('wedding gift'): was a gift given to the bride or groom by the bride's father, and which sometimes consisted of servants (as with Rebekah: Gen. 24: 59,61; Leah: Gen. 29: 24; Rachel: Gen. 24: 29) or of lands (Acsah – Judg. 1: 15; Pharaoh's daughter, Solomon's wife – 1 Kin. 9: 16) or of any other property.

3. The bridegroom's gift to the bride sometimes consisted of jewelry and articles of clothing as with Rebekah (Gen. 24: 53).

Today in the Near East, the contributions of each family are fixed in a written engagement contract (India, Indonesia, some countries in Africa and the Middle East).

Interval

Each stayed at his house for a year to prepare for the wedding. They saw each other, but kept themselves sexually pure. At that time, the new house, the gown, the party and many other details were being prepared, but especially the interior preparation for the new life. 'The friend who attends the bridegroom' (Jn. 3: 29 – NIV; 'the friend of the bridegroom' – NRSV and KJV) or 'the friend'; 'companion' [KJV] or 'the best man' (Judg. 14: 20; Judg. 15: 2) i.e., best man of the bridegroom (Hebrew: shôshebhîn), acted as the groom's assistant, who made arrangements for the wedding, and played an important role in the marriage festivities ('the master of the banquet' [NIV] or the 'chief steward' [NRSV] or else 'governor of the feast' [KJV] – Jn. 2: 8-9), in which he was also assisted by the groom's assistants, who are referred to in Mk. 2: 19 and Matt. 9: 15 as 'the guests of the bridegroom' [NIV] or 'the wedding guests' [NRSV] or 'bridechamber' (KJV).

Procession to the bride's house

After a year of betrothal the groom went with his friends to the house of the bride, who was already ready and waiting. Sometimes the feast of celebration was held there in the bride's house: Gen. 29: 22; Judg. 14: 10; Matt. 25: 1-13. But usually the feast was held in the house of the bridegroom (Matt. 22: 1-10; Jn. 2: 9).

Procession to the groom's house

The bridegroom and his friends took her to the bridegroom's house – the feast was held there (Ps. 45: 14-15; Matt. 22:1-14; Jn. 2: 9). The procession could be accompanied by singing, music, and dancing (Ps. 45: 15; Jer. 31: 4) and by lamps if the feast was at night (Matt. 25: 7). Usually the feast was held in the house of the bridegroom (Matt. 22: 1-14; Jn. 2: 9) and often at night (Matt. 22: 13; Matt. 25: 6). Many relatives and friends were present; hence the wine might occasionally run out (Jn. 2: 3). 'The master of the banquet' or 'friend' supervised the party (Jn. 2: 9-10). Guests wore wedding clothes (Matt. 22: 11-12).

Parents and friends blessed the couple and wished them happiness (Gen. 24: 60; Rut. 4: 11).

A marriage contract was presented in writing by the bride's father, namely, the covenant of fidelity (Ezek. 16: 8; Mal. 2: 14).

A bridal chamber was specially prepared. The Hebrew name for this room is chuppah (Ps. 19: 5; Jl. 2: 16 – Strong #2646, from chaphah; a canopy; chamber, closet, defense), originally a pavilion or tent, while in the Greek, the word is nymphōn (Mk. 2: 19; numphōn, νυμφών – Strong #3567: bridal chamber, the bridal room).

The word chuppah is still used among Jews today to indicate the pavilion under which the bride and groom sit or stand during the ceremony.

Consummation of the marriage

The marriage was consummated: the bride and groom were accompanied to this room, often by their parents (Gen. 29: 23) or by the guests (Matt. 9: 15). Before they came together (in Hebrew, the expression is 'to know'), the prayer was offered for the husband and for the wife.

Proof of virginity – A cloth or nightgown stained with blood was displayed as proof of the bride's virginity (Deut. 22: 13-15). This custom continues in some places in the Near East.

The wedding festivities continued for a week (Jacob and Leah: Gen. 29: 27; Samson: Judg. 14: 12). It had a lot of music (Ps. 45: 7; 15; Ps. 78: 63) and games like the riddle presented by Samson (Judg. 14: 12-18).

Wedding parties had a lot of music and dancing. It was common for guests to observe the bride, the center of attention, dancing at the celebrations.

The Jewish marriage today

A Jewish marriage is performed exclusively between Jewish bride and groom, preferably Jewish-born (children of a Jewish mother). Marriage between Jews and non-Jews is not permitted; on the other hand, there is the possibility of conversion, as long as the desire to become a Jew is genuine and not just to comply with the rules of marriage.

According to Jewish tradition, on the day of the betrothal, the bride and groom sign a contract (Shtar Tena'im, the 'Document of Conditions'), when they commit to marry at some future time and determine the conditions under which it must be performed. After the reading, the couple's mothers break a porcelain plate, symbolizing the irreversibility of the commitment. The tenaim is signed by the bride and groom and two witnesses. Witnesses must be adult males, Jews and must not be related to each other (not by blood or in-laws, such as brothers-in-law) or related to the bride and groom. Tenaim is usually done in advance, but it can also be done before the chuppah, where they are read and signed.

A Jewish wedding does not necessarily need to be performed in a synagogue, nor does it need to be performed by a religious leader, but it needs to be performed by someone very close or an older and wiser family member. It is a little different in Orthodox congregations and especially in Israel, where it is the rabbi who performs the ceremony.

Chuppah is the tent under which the Jewish wedding takes place, symbol of the couple's new home; it is open on all sides, representing unconditional hospitality to friends and relatives, and is usually set up outdoors as a sign of divine blessing. Inside the Chuppah are the bride and groom, family members, closest friends and the

performer of the ceremony. Men wear the Tallit and then keep what was worn by the bridegroom.



A Chuppah of an outdoor wedding

Guests are seated separately, men on one side and women on the other, but this custom has changed lately in some communities.

The bride's dress must be white; it cannot have a neckline and must have long sleeves, preferably (Nowadays it is already allowed to wear short sleeves). The bouquet of flowers is to her liking. It is not customary to wear jewelry, both the groom and the bride.

The wedding ring must be made of gold, fine and simple, without stones; it only has the engraved name of the spouse and the date. It is placed on the index finger of the bride's hand (if she is right-handed, on the right hand and if she is left-handed, on the left).

Before heading to the Chuppah, the groom wears his white robe, the Kitel, to remind him of his mortality, that his marriage is lasting and of God.

The bride's father takes her with her face uncovered, but before entering the Chuppah, the groom covers her with a veil. The bride circles the Chuppah seven times, led by her mother and mother-in-law, as a reminder of the seven days of the creation of the world. She also presents the groom with a Tallit (the shawl of prayer that men wear), which must be worn for the first time at the wedding ceremony.

On the wedding day, they sign the Ketubah (Kethübhâh, as the Mishnah teaches), the contract that defines the husband's responsibilities to the wife, such as marital rights, maintenance and provision of the house. As with the betrothal contract, the Ketubah is signed in the presence of two witnesses, two Jewish men, to ensure that legal Jewish tradition is followed.

During the wedding ceremony at Chuppah and at the party, two cups of wine are used and the bride and groom always drink the drink in the same cup, symbolizing that they will fully share their life. After drinking the wine, non-Orthodox Jews pronounce a short Hebrew marriage vow. Orthodox Jews do not do this.

They break the two cups of wine with their feet in reprisal for the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

In Israel, it is only possible to have a religious marriage. Only Orthodox rabbis do the celebrations, because even non-Orthodox Jews have difficulties getting married; if they come from other countries and are not children of Jewish mothers, they are also refused. As a result, many mixed marriages between Arabs and Jews, for example, or between Jews and people of other religions, end up being held civilly in Cyprus. In other Western countries, the Jewish community is still divided on this issue, but Jews can marry civilly, according to the laws of the countries where they live.

In Israel, Jewish Orthodoxy has a complete monopoly on marital legislation. Until recently there was no civil marriage, but recently an agreement was made between the Israeli Minister of Justice and the Jewish Orthodox leader allowing couples who are not considered Jewish under Jewish Orthodox law to be united in a civil marriage, which will be held in a court.

Alambamento

Let's talk about some curiosities about engagement and marriage.

As for *môhar* (translated as 'wedding dowry'), mentioned earlier, there is an interesting curiosity about a similar practice in some countries in Africa and Indonesia (East-Timor) today. I don't know if you've heard of 'alambamento', a traditional ceremony, especially in the culture of Angola and Guinea-Bissau, for example. In South Africa and Mozambique it is called lobola or lobolo. Although most Angolans still practice this tradition, in some families it is already falling into disuse. In India, this type of dowry is called a *durgavat*.

Alambamento is a neologism from the Portuguese language created by Angolans to designate the original word 'ovilombo' (marriage proposal) in Umbundu; *ovilombo* comes from the umbundu verb 'okulomba' (to ask).

The alambamento or 'request' for them is a tradition that is even more important than the civil or religious marriage, when the boyfriend asks her family for his girlfriend's hand, more specifically to the uncle, who plays a fundamental role in the realization of the wedding, more than the bride's father himself. The role of uncles is as important or more important than that of parents, for uncles are also responsible for the education of the bride.

In some families and countries, 'alambamento' is synonymous with 'traditional African marriage.' It is also very common to celebrate the wedding right after the proposal, so the terms merge.

When a young man and a young woman date and decide to get married, there are certain steps to take. There may be differences in the alambamento steps from region to region. It is also common for families to adapt the ceremony. The steps are:

1) Introduction: the man formally introduces himself to the bride's family (uncles, grandparents, brothers and cousins) through a letter that he delivers to one of the uncles of the woman he intends to marry. In this letter he explains his intention to unite in marriage.

2) Next, the uncle marks the date of the *alambamento* (a list of items that the suitor needs to get by the day of the official proposal for his girlfriend's hand). Who prepares the list is the uncle of the future bride after the man delivers a letter to the uncle. It's like a dowry, and it's made up of food and even money.

The requests made by the uncles of the brides are, in general, always the same:

- Money (in dollars): 300, 400, 500 USD, depending on what the uncle stipulates.
- Juices from some trees and fruits, generally 'palm wine', also called 'mandijevo' (in Angola) or 'toddy', which is an alcoholic beverage obtained from the fermentation of the sap of several species of palm trees such as Palmyra and coconut trees. Fermentation is fast and can last up to five days; the more it ferments, the higher the alcohol content. In certain African countries, 'palm wine' or 'mandijevo' is the main drink consumed in cultural activities, some traditional festivals (*alambamento*, for example), meeting of village elders or meeting of authorities and in traditional judgments. In East-Timor (the eastern part of the island of Timor, in Southeast Asia, connecting it to Indonesia to the west, and to the south to Australia) palm sap is also extracted to make palm wine. There are other fruits of plants belonging to the *Cola* genus.

- Beer: in many families, the crates (bales) of the drink must be stacked and reach the height of the bride.

- Wine.
- Coke.
- Affectionate items: photos of family members and others.
- Fabrics.
- Costumes (typical clothes): a suit for the uncle and some shoes for the mother, or a complete set of clothes for the mother and father.
- Animals: goat, oxen, bulls, chickens.

All these items are offered by the groom to the bride's family to meet the expenses of the banquet.

If the girlfriend is pregnant, the list is longer. Families can also customize the requests.

3) When the items on the list are gathered, the couple meets with the bride's family, introductions are made. The uncle begins to read the request presented by the groom. The two families decide whether the candidates can marry. The decision must be unanimous. The requested items are verified without the presence of the bride and groom.

4) If the request is accepted, then the groom gives the wedding ring to the future wife.

5) The bride and groom's family celebrate the event (the engagement) and the wedding date is set. The groom can only enter if the bride's aunt spreads out a kind of rug (of typically African fabric). It may seem like a kindness from the family he's joining; however, he needs to tip the bride's aunt. After this stage, the woman enters accompanied by her aunt, as is traditional. From this day forward, if all goes well, the couple is considered to be husband and wife.

Some people do the wedding and the *alambamento* on the same day and with a great feast and it can last for a few days. In some African countries, the family comes from all over for this event.

Usually the bride makes two dresses, one for the alambamento ceremony and one for the wedding. Although the wedding dress can be a typical country outfit, most brides choose a white dress. The man is dressed in a dress shirt, suit and tie. Before the ceremony begins, the bride covers herself with a cloth. Afterwards, they follow on a green carpet to the altar, a separate space for the couple like a Jewish Chuppah.

Sometime later, as was the agreement between the parties, the bride's family takes her to the house that the groom has already prepared for the couple and there they can live together. Civil marriage becomes a separate choice, after this traditional formal union, when the documents are paid and signed in the presence of a judge.

The formality of a civil or religious marriage is considered less important than the alambamento, although it has no legal validity.

Unfortunately, many couples choose not to have a civil marriage because of the cost, but this brings with it another inconvenience, such as relationships with other women and, consequently, one or more families.

Although currently one does not find references to spiritual ceremonies associated with alambamento, there is a work by the University of Coimbra, citing an interesting finding. In Cabinda (northwest Angola), a region of the ancient Kingdom of Congo, a carved table in high relief was found by Catholic missionaries (apparently dating from the 18th century), which is currently in the Science Museum of the University of Coimbra. In addition to the board with high-relief drawings, the nkobe-bingu box, the protective deity of the family, was also found. The drawing shows the origin of the tradition in the culture of the Cabindas and suggests the difficulty of agreement between the families of the bride and groom regarding alambamento, trying to negotiate and seal the traditional marriage contract.

The expression 'nkobe-bingu' can be literally translated as 'the bingu box', where all the tutelary gods of the family are represented. In bingu there are mortal remains of the most illustrious ancestors who were consulted by the head of the family ('mfumu kanda') to resolve family disputes and maintain harmony, and this he did through a Nganga-Mbingo ('spiritual operator' or soothsayer). Each family had its soothsayer, and he was responsible for celebrating the ceremonies of bingu and for upholding the established precepts, including in relation to marriage; he kept the nkobe-bingu box, a private object for each family, in a special place. In the nkobe-bingu not only was a part of the mortal remains of the ancestors (nails, hair, etc.), as well as other items such as chalk or lime, red clay, the fruit and leaves or pulp of certain plants, seeds, whelks, stones and even fabrics. Due to the importance of this box and its responsibility to ensure respect for the impositions concerning marriage, this explains its representation on the high-relief board that was found.

As the practice of consulting one's ancestors was testified even today in rural area of Mozambique for lobolo, it is very likely that in our days there are still some similar practices in relation to alambamento. It is not known for sure when it began, but there are records from the 16th century or before Portuguese colonization in Africa.

In this same work by the University of Coimbra, the following comment can be found: "There are situations in which lobolo, a source of income for the girls' parents, is not only intended to obtain a woman for marriage, but can be reserved for the acquisition of a young woman to be initiated into the mysteries of spiritual possession" [source: Martins, M. do R. A. R., & Tavares, A. C. P. (2017). *Museological singularities of a board with sculptures in dialogue: from alambamento to marriage in Cabinda (Angola)*. *Annals of Paulista Museum: History and Material Culture*, 25(2), 83-115. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-02672017v25n02d04>].

Lobolo

In South Africa and Mozambique there is a practice similar to alambamento, called lobola or lobolo. It has some particularities that can still be followed in Angola with alambamento, in relation to the spiritual part, which has been part of their tradition since before Portuguese colonization. Spiritual ties in the rural context of lobolo are much more evident than in the urban context, when communication between the living and their dead ancestors is sought. The custom follows practically the same steps as alambamento, just with different names. The meeting of the groom's relatives and close friends at the girlfriend's house is called hikombela-mati ('to ask for water'), which is when the initial gifts are brought and the families are introduced and the bride's relatives deliver the list of requirements (letter of lobolo) for the ceremony. When the groom gets all the items, he takes them to the bride's family. The requested items are checked without the presence of the groom. The bride is called to evaluate the gifts and hear the marriage proposal. Then the lobolo ceremony takes place. After lobolo, the groom becomes mukon'wana (son-in-law). The last stage is called xigiyane, in which the bride's gifts are taken by her family to her new home.

Usually, long before the lobolo ceremony, the kuphalha takes place, when there is a cult invoking the ancestors and a dialogue with them, so that the lobolo goes well. Those who usually direct this cult are the vinyamusoro (healers). The Bantu or Bantu (ethnic subgroups of sub-Saharan Africa) believe that harmony between the couple and between families occurs through connecting with the spirits of the ancestors and fulfilling their demands. For them, after that moment the ancestors will be with the couple forever. If everything is in accordance with these bonds and requirements, there will be blessings and prosperity in this new family [Source: Rhuann Fernandes – "lobolo – Mozambican wedding ritual"] – <https://mundonegro.inf.br/lobolo-ritual-de-casamento-mocambicano-e-tema-de-livro-de-sociologo-brasileiro/>

Jesus has already paid the dowry

Why did I put all this? To reinforce the marriage analogy and traditions with Rev. 19: 7-8, when the multitude declares the sovereign reign of the Lord and rejoices at the coming of the wedding feast of the Lamb, the union of Christ with His church, His bride, all who were bought by His blood.

Jesus paid the bride's dowry on the cross; He paid the price Satan demanded of mankind for man's sin, which began in Eden. He paid the exorbitant price for the lives of all human beings who acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior. We are living in a time of waiting, when we are prepared as a bride, cleaning our garments to receive Him. Let us not allow sin and Satan's lies to deceive us and rob us of this status as the bride of the Lamb. The consummation of the wedding will be at His second coming.

Returning to the text on Revelation:

- Rev. 19: 9: "And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.'"

In v. 9 the angel tells John that blessed are those who are called to the wedding and confirms the veracity of God's words.

- Rev. 19: 10: "Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'"

In the face of so much majesty and visions and revelations so great for a human being to see, he falls down to worship the angel (cf. Rev. 22: 8-9). First, the angel made it clear who is the only one to be worshiped: God. He, the angel, is just a servant of God and instructed by Him to serve us. Then he reminds John to keep the testimony of Jesus, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. This means that he should maintain the testimony about Jesus (Rev. 1: 2; 9), for the biblical prophecy expresses or depends on Christ's work and its proclamation (1 Pet. 1: 10-12).



- Rev 19: 11-21 – after the fall of Babylon comes the defeat of the beast and the false prophet. Heaven is open for Jesus to descend. He visibly returns to the battle of Armageddon, the last battle, riding His white horse and followed by his armies to establish his kingdom absolutely.

Here we can see His features:

v. 11: "Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war." – He is faithful and true and does justice.

v. 12: "His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself."

'His eyes are like a flame of fire' – it conveys the idea of His power to judge the nations and that He searches everything.

'On his head are many diadems' – Diadems are crowns of victory, of triumph. This shows His dominion and might; He came winning and to win.

'He has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself' – that is, He is unfathomable. Nobody knows Him fully. He is beyond human comprehension.

v. 13: “He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God.” – This means that He is the word of God in action, the One who created all things and today judges evil.

v. 14: “And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.” – the armies that are in heaven are His followers, and they ride white horses, and their garments are of the fine linen, white and clean. This concerns the angels and the souls of the redeemed who are in heaven since Abel and who return to fetch his glorified body (cf. Rev. 17: 14). That’s why Paul wrote in 1 The. 4: 13-18 that the saints will come with Him in glory; Jesus will bring with Him those who sleep. In 1 The. 4: 14 it is written, “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.”

v. 15: “From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.” – In this verse He shows Himself as a furious warrior, who rules the nations with a rod of iron, and strikes them down with the sharp sword that comes out of His mouth to judge the wicked. The bible says that He personally treads the winepress of the fury wrath of God the Almighty. The winepress where the grapes are crushed is a figure of speech for revenge against the enemies, so in v. 13 it is written that He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood. This scene is the same scene of the judgment described in Rev. 14: 20, as if the entire nation of Israel were covered in blood, that is, the height of the blood of the enemies reached as far as the horses’ bridles, for a distance of about two hundred miles, which correspond to three hundred kilometers long.

v. 16: “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, ‘King of kings and Lord of lords.’” – In other words, His name is exalted.



v. 17-18: “Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and their riders—flesh of all, both free and slave, both small and great.’” – Here is not spoken of the supper of the Lamb with His bride, but of God’s Supper for judgment. The image used for this ‘banquet’ is that of birds of prey, summoned to

clean the earth, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and their riders, both free and slave, both small and great. These are all the followers of the beast (cf. Ezek. 39: 4; 17-20).

v. 19: “Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army.” – the bible makes it clearer now that this multitude that goes up to make war against the Lamb and His army are the beast and the kings of the earth that it has summoned, in addition to the false prophet; a battle already described in Rev. 17: 14 and Rev. 16: 14; 16, where it is named Armageddon. There are not four battles, but one described in various ways: Rev. 16: 14; 16; Rev. 17: 14; Rev. 19: 19-21; Rev. 20: 7-10.

It is not about the well-known geographical place located in Israel as many think, where so many battles were fought in the valley of Jezreel, also called the Valley of Esdrelon (Greek form of the name Jezreel) or Megiddo (Barak defeated the Canaanites: Judg. 4: 13; Judg. 5: 21; Saul’s army camped before the battle of Gilboa: 1 Sam. 28: 4; 1 Sam. 29: 1; 1 Sam. 31: 1; Joram and Ahaziah were killed by Jehu: 2 Kin. 9: 16; 24; 27; Josiah died in 609 BC in the confrontation with Necho II, Pharaoh of Egypt: 2 Chr. 35: 22).

Jezreel (yizr’e’el) means ‘God plants’ or ‘God sows.’ It is a symbol of final Judgment (Hos. 1: 4; 11); it’s also a symbol of fertility and divine favor (Hos. 2: 21-23). Another name for it is Armageddon (in Greek), which comes from the Latin word ‘Har-Magedone’, which means Mount Megiddo. Armageddon can also refer to the plain or valley below the hill of Megiddo – Har Megiddo. Megiddo today is an archeological hill (‘tell’ = mound) made of 26 layers of ruins of ancient cities, which were built on the first settlement of Megiddo, thousands of years before Christ. Harmagedon (in Latin, Har-Magedone; in Hebrew, Megiddo or Esdrelon), in Greek, is Armageddon. Megiddo means place of troops; Armageddon means hill of Megiddo, mount of the place of multitudes.

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

Nor will it be a physical battle with armed armies, but a spiritual one, when ‘the sword that came from his mouth’ (Rev. 19: 21), ‘with the breath of his mouth’ (2 The. 2: 8), ‘with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips’ (Isa. 11: 4), that is, the sword of the Lamb’s mouth will overcome his enemies: the kings of the earth, the Antichrist and the false Prophet, who will be thrown out alive to the lake of fire and sulfur, symbol of eternal torment, hell.

If the beast and the false prophet were thrown alive into the lake of fire and sulfur (Rev. 19: 20) and his followers were slain with the sword that comes out of Jesus (Rev. 19: 21); if in Rev. 16: 16 it is written that the kings of the earth were gathered together in the place which in Hebrew is called Armageddon; if in Rev. 20: 8-9 it is written that Satan will seduce the nations of the earth to besiege the camp of the saints and the beloved city, it is because, at least on the side of the evil hordes, a battle will be planned in a physical, material way, with war equipment. But God will kill them in His supernatural way (cf. Ezek. 38: 8), for His coming will be unexpected, with no time for a war (‘like the lightning’ – Lk. 17: 24). The Lord and his army do not come in a natural way, in the flesh, nor in a spiritual way, without a body; He will come with His glorified body, another kind of matter, like the one Jesus appeared

after His resurrection, when He ate broiled fish (Lk. 24: 42) with His disciples. This will catch the enemies of Christ's Church off guard (cf. Ezek. 38: 1-23).

'The beloved city' (Rev. 20: 9) most likely refers to Jerusalem (cf. Ps. 78: 68; Ps. 87: 2), where Zechariah said that Jesus would set His feet on the Mount of Olives. The name Armageddon means: mount of Megiddo, mount of the place of the multitudes. It may only be to designate that somewhere there will be multitudes gathered for the purpose of making war against the Lamb and His chosen ones, perhaps Jerusalem itself.

Seventh section – Chapters 20–22



The reign of the souls | Satan's imprisonment
| The Final Judgment | New heavens and new
earth

Seventh section – Chapter 20–22

This section describes the scene of the reign of souls (millennium), Satan's imprisonment and the final judgment (lake of fire); the new heavens and the new earth, and the final admonitions and promises (Rev. 20: 1 – Rev. 22: 21).

Chapter 20 –

• Rev. 20: 1-15:

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.

2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,

3 and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

4 Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.

7 When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison

8 and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. 9 They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them.

10 And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them.

12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books.

13 And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done.

14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire;

15 and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

The book of Revelation is not a linear, chronological book. He brings similar scenes side by side recording the same facts in different ways. As I said before, this book was written showing parallel and progressive scenes.

The millennium of chapter 20 is not a chronological sequence of chapter 19, but is a symbolic episode between the 1st and 2nd coming of Christ. It is the last parallel section.

Chapter 12 introduces the enemies of the church. Now their fall is in reverse order; therefore, the dragon was left for last. Just as the woman (Rev. 12) represents the church at the 1st coming, in chapter 20 John returns to the 1st coming of Christ.

The Millennium –

‘Millennium’ was a conception created by Jewish scholars in the post-exilic and Intertestamental Period to endorse a belief and hope for redemption and regeneration of Israel in a physical and overly material way, for they misinterpreted the words of the prophets, and they did not expect that their Messiah would come differently, so they did not believe in Him; even because the prophets of God never used the word Messiah (Mashiach – mâshiyach – משיח) to refer to the spiritual Savior of Israel. This word is only clearly written in reference to Jesus in the book of Daniel (Dan. 9: 25-26 – ‘The Anointed One’), when an angel announces to the prophet that the Messiah would arise and would be killed 62 prophetic weeks after the rebuilding of Jerusalem, before the city and temple be destroyed again (what happened in 70 AD by the Romans).

Here, we are going to clarify a much-discussed point which is the reign of Christ, in a physical way, with a glorified body, for a thousand years on earth, as Dispensational premillennialism and Historical premillennialism think.

A literal thousand years on earth is an unthinkable situation for several reasons:

1) The NT does not speak of an earthly millennium where the world is living with the glorified church of Christ. Neither in the gospels, nor in the letters of Paul, nor in the general letters is the millennium on earth mentioned.

2) The kingdom of Christ is neither physical nor political nor material, but spiritual (“My kingdom is not from this world” – Jn. 18: 36). And the apostle Paul describes in Rom. 14: 17 that the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit; that is not a matter of talk but of power (1 Cor. 4: 20).

3) Dispensational premillennialism considers a time of God reserved especially for the Jews, with the temple materially rebuilt on Mount Zion, trying to restore the kingdom of Israel as it was in its heyday with David and Solomon. This, then, would re-establish the Jewish church as the center of God’s Church and different from the Gentile Church, but Paul wrote that at the cross God made the two peoples one people, one church. Jesus broke the enmity between Jews and Gentiles on the cross (Eph. 2: 14-22). Therefore, there can be no distinction again between Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 10: 12-13), but only one church. They will turn to Jesus in the same way as the Gentiles, before or during the Great Tribulation (Rom. 11: 5).

Dispensationalism is a theological system that presents two basic distinctions: (1) A literal interpretation of Scripture, in particular biblical prophecy. (2) The distinction between Israel and the Church in God’s program (God will fulfill the promises to them in the millennium).

In that case, it would need three resurrections: that of the Gentiles before the millennium; that of the converted Jews after the millennium, and that of the wicked followers of the beast on the Day of judgment. However, the resurrection is a unique fact: believers and the ungodly will rise to life or to damnation, concomitantly, on the day of Jesus' return and His judgment.

John writes in Jn. 5: 28-29 that the dead will hear Jesus' voice and be raised – some to life, and some to judgment, which will take place at Christ's second coming:

Dan. 12: 2: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

Matt. 25: 31-34; 41; 46: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world';... Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels';... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

4) The coexistence of Christ and the glorified saints with unregenerate men, in a natural body of flesh: what would the area of business, politics and the economy look like? It would be impossible.

5) Rev. 20: 7-10 – the bible mentions a war led by Satan against the saints and the city of Jerusalem after the thousand-year period in which he was chained. But a revolt after a beneficial thousand-year period of Christ's reign on earth seems strange, with the beast and the false prophet already being thrown into the lake of fire. How do you explain nations ('Gog and Magog') conspiring against the peaceful thousand-year reign of Christ? It's impossible.

6) The NT teaches that judgment is universal (Jews and Gentiles; the believers and the wicked) and will immediately follow the second coming of Christ. He will come and sit on His throne of glory and will judge the nations, not a thousand years later, but at His second coming (Matt. 24: 29-31; Matt. 25: 31-34; Matt. 16: 27). In this way, when Jesus comes (Matt. 25: 31; Matt. 16: 27; Matt. 19: 28), everything is consummated and His kingdom is established (the final judgment shortly after the coming of Christ).

We can see some different scenes here:

First Scene: Satan's imprisonment

- Rev. 20: 1-3: "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while."

An angel came down from heaven holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon (the ancient serpent, the devil, Satan),

bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended.

The word ‘abyss’ in Revelation can be seen in: Rev. 9: 1 and 2 (Abyss); Rev 9: 11 (angel of the abyss); Rev. 11: 7 (beast of the abyss); Rev. 17: 8 (abyss); Rev. 20: 1,3 (abyss). In all of these verses, the Greek word used is abussos (αβυσσος), with the exception of Rev. 9: 1-2 (Abyss), where the word abussos (Strong #g12) is used together with phrear (φρέαρ), where abussos means: the (hell) abyss, unfathomable depth, without depth, an especially Jewish conception, the house of the dead and evil spirits. And phrear (Strong #g5421) means: well, cistern; a hole in the ground (dug to obtain or retain water or other purposes), i.e., a cistern or well; figuratively, an abyss (like a prison). In short, it is a bottomless pit, an abyss with a lid that can be opened, closed and sealed.

In all the seven times this expression appears in Revelation, the abyss (or bottomless pit) refers to the place where fallen angels and evil spirits are imprisoned, awaiting the lake of fire, the final hell prepared for them (Matt. 25: 41).

Now, let’s reason. Satan is a fallen angel, and angels are spirits; they don’t have bodies like ours. A spirit cannot be bound with chains or padlocks, nor can be thrown into a pit, which is locked and sealed over him.

So this is figurative language, where ‘chaining’, ‘binding’ is symbolic of restriction of power and authority. It does not mean that he is inactive, but he is limited. God has set limits for him ‘so that he would deceive the nations no more.’

Remember that in chapter 12 he was driven out of heaven and had his power limited in time and authority.

When Jesus said in Matt. 12: 29 that if anyone wants to enter the strong man’s house to steal his goods, he must first bind him, He meant that the strong man is Satan who held back lives (‘goods’, ‘possessions’) in the world (‘his house’), under his power. Jesus was stronger than he and came into the world to take the power from him and rescue the lives that are God’s. God’s plan cannot be thwarted. In other words, Jesus restrained Satan’s power. He cannot prevent God’s elect from believing in the Lord and being saved (cf. Rev. 5: 9; Rev. 6 and 7 – the redeemed are in glory with God; therefore, His design is victorious). Those who had been beheaded (v. 4) are reigning in heaven since Abel. Jesus tied up the strong man and did so at His first coming. Thus, He has also given authority to His own to do His work on earth:

- Lk. 10: 17-18: “The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’ He said to them, ‘I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.’” This means limitation of power.

- Jn. 12: 31-32: “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out [*Satan, defeat by Jesus on the cross*]. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

- Jn. 16: 8-11: “And when he comes [*the Holy Spirit on Pentecost*], he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”

- Heb. 2: 14-15: “Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.”

- Rev. 20: 3: “and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.” – ‘deceive the nations no more’ means that the word of life that was once limited to the Jews (God’s promise of salvation and His Law entrusted to them), now in the hands of Jesus’ followers, spreads through the nations, calling the elect.

So, this limitation of power imposed on Satan by God Himself occurred at the 1st coming of Christ, not the 2nd coming.

In Col. 2: 14-15 we can read that on the cross Jesus erased the record (the curse of the law) that stood against us, He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, for with His blood He purchased us for the Father and redeemed us from the hands of Satan and the law of sin and death.

Under this reasoning, we can say that the thousand years are not literal. Number 1 brings the concept of unity and the unparalleled character of God, unity between Christ and the Father, the union between believers and God. The number 10 can also signify the first number of a greater beginning, something complete or faithfulness, as well as being considered by some to be the number of the Church. The number 1000 means 10^3 (10 raised to its cube), that is, a complete time from the 1st to the 2nd coming, the symbolic number of the age of the church, fullness, wholeness, of a spiritual condition of the redeemed (the souls of the dead in heaven with Jesus, and the living doing His work on earth, preaching His word of salvation and repentance).

Then, in Rev. 20: 3 it is written: “After that he must be let out for a little while.” And in v. 7 is repeated: “When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison.”

“Be let out for a little while” or “released from his prison.” – means the time before the return of Jesus, when the apostasy, the Great Tribulation and the manifestation of the man of iniquity (Antichrist) will be seen, that is, the short time that Satan is allowed to work on earth; a final moment of atrocious persecution against the saints and the Lamb, when, then, he will be overcome (Rev. 20: 7-10 cf. Dan. 7: 19-27). In the meantime, in these ‘thousand years’ of his imprisonment, symbol of the complete number, from the 1st to the 2nd coming of Christ, the redeemed will be exercising His authority on earth and preaching His word of salvation and repentance. The souls of saints who were dead reign with Him in heaven.

Second Scene: the reign of the saints in heaven with Christ

- Rev. 20: 4-6: “Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.”

- Rev. 20: 4 – John says: “Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God (cf. Rev. 6: 9 – 5th seal). They had

not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”



The beheaded seated on thrones – ‘throne’ is the symbol of authority to judge. That kingdom is in heaven.

The word ‘throne’ in Greek is ‘thronos’ (θρόνος – Strong #g2362) and appears 63 times in the NT, and always refers to thrones that are in heaven. The only times where thrones are on earth refers to the throne of Satan (whose references are in Revelation): Rev. 2: 13 – Satan; Rev. 13: 2 – the dragon; Rev. 16: 10 – the beast.

The souls of those beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and who did not worship the beast or receive his mark on their foreheads are alive and reigning with Jesus in heaven. John is not seeing bodies. They are the same (Rev. 6: 9) who died; however, their souls cry out before God for their brothers who are being killed because of persecutions, but they wait until their number is complete and their souls join their glorified body at the 2nd coming of Jesus. They are reigning with Christ in heaven at the right hand of God.

So, the mission of those who died in Christ is to be in co-regency with Him. They are given the authority to judge (believers sit on thrones).

The mark of the beast referred to here is not just that of the eschatological beast, but every force hostile to Christ in History. And the believers withstood the beast; these are the ones who are with Christ. It doesn’t matter what kind of mark it is. The seal of the blood of Jesus on the foreheads of those who are saved is a spiritual mark. That of the beast can also be spiritual, symbolizing the obedience of its servants to it; therefore, they are its property. ‘The beheaded’ here are the martyrs (cf. Rev. 6: 9; Rev. 18: 24; Rev. 19: 2). The term can be interpreted as a general term for ‘execution’, not necessarily a specific method (decapitation). The martyrs of the Great Tribulation will be executed for refusing to receive the mark of the beast, but they will reign. It includes the believers of the Great Tribulation, along with the redeemed of all ages, the OT and NT.

The bible says that all the saved ones will reign with Christ (2 Tim. 2: 12) and will receive the power to judge the world and the fallen angels: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you

incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters?” (1 Cor. 6: 2-3).

Still in the second scene:

- Rev. 20: 5-6: “(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.”

In verses 5-6 John mentions the first resurrection, and that they are blessed to share in the first resurrection, for the second death has no authority over them. The first resurrection is called the ‘resurrection of the righteous’ (Lk. 14: 14) or ‘resurrection of life’ (Jn. 5: 24). It means regeneration, the spiritual resurrection, not physical, resurrection at the time a person receives Christ. He (She), then, passes from death to life; is made alive with Christ because he (she) believes in Him (Rom. 6: 4; Col. 2: 12):

- Jn. 5: 24: “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

- Rom. 6: 4: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

- Col. 2: 12: “when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”

So, a believer, a convert, does not see the 2nd death (“Over these the second death has no power” – Rev. 20: 6).

The 2nd resurrection (the ‘resurrection to the judgment’ or ‘the resurrection to condemnation’) is the bodily resurrection of the dead: Jn. 5: 28-29; Dan. 12: 2, also referred to by Paul in 1 Cor. 15: 20; 23-28; 44; 51-52 and 1 The. 4: 13-17 (when speaking of the bodily resurrection of those who received the spiritual resurrection here on earth by giving their lives to Jesus). This will take place on the Day of Judgment (Rev. 11: 18; Rev. 20: 11-15) before the great white throne, and that will determine the destiny of all, so the bible talks about the books (the books of men’s lives) being open, so that they may be judged by the Lord according to their works (Rev. 20: 12; Dan. 7: 9-10 cf. 1 Cor. 4: 5). The saved will not have their books opened to be condemned, but to receive the Kingdom of God. The wicked dead who are physically resurrected will receive condemnation, while those who have received Jesus in life as Lord and Savior, those who have gone through the experience of the 1st resurrection (the spiritual one), will not go through death, will not enter into condemnation.

Third Scene: the final defeat of Satan and the battle of Armageddon.

- Rev. 20: 7-10: “When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. And the devil

who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Gog and Magog symbolize the enemies of God, the Lamb and His people. This is the same battle described in the previous chapters:

Rev. 16: 14; 16 (between the 6th and 7th plague) – in the context of the plagues.

Rev. 17: 14 – the ten kings fight against the Lamb and the saints; then, against the whore.

Rev. 19: 19-21 – Jesus’ return on the white horse and God’s supper.

Rev. 20: 7-10 – Satan will seduce the nations of the four corners of the earth to gather them for battle.

It is the same battle, the universal defeat of evil when Jesus returns; they’re just in different sections.

Ezekiel also described it in another way (Ezek. 38 and 39 – final battle of God’s people: Gog and Magog, as he expresses it, are descendants of Japheth the son of Noah, according to the table of nations – Gen. 10: 1-32). Let’s read some passages and we can see that they fit the texts of John, when he speaks of the plagues and the supper of the birds of prey (Rev. 19: 17-21):

- Ezek. 38 – NIV:

- 1 The word of the Lord came to me:

- 2 “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince [*in the Septuagint, ‘prince of Rosh’ or ‘Rhos’*] of Meshech and Tubal; prophesy against him

- 3 and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal [*The Septuagint suggests Magog as a people and not a country; if so, he might as well reign over the people of Meshech and Tubal, to be called their ‘chief prince’, or ‘greater prince’. There is another explanation, suggesting Magog as the original kingdom of Gog, and that he also acquired Meshech and Tubal*].

- Ezek. 38: 18-20 (NIV): “This is what will happen in that day: When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused, declares the Sovereign Lord. In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence [*that is, the image of an earthquake that shook the entire planet*]. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground.”

- Ezek. 38: 22-23: “I will execute judgment on him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him [*Gog*] and on his troops and on the many nations with him. And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

- Ezek. 39: 6: “I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in safety in the coastlands, and they will know that I am the Lord.”

The bible clearly describes here a supernatural judgment, as it was in the Old Testament, not a war initiated by the Israel Defense Forces, like the Israeli Air Force missiles, for example. There is no evidence in the text of Israeli military forces on the move and defending themselves and their nation. The text does not provide clear evidence that the Israeli military took action to protect its country and defeat its enemies. On the contrary, he indicates that the God of Israel intervenes and defends

His people, pouring down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on the enemy forces and destroying them completely and He does so at the last possible moment, when there seems to be no more hope; something very similar to what happened in Egypt during the ten plagues. Thus, God acts to protect the nation of Israel and defeat its enemies to bring judgment and reveal Himself, His power and glory to Israel and the nations.

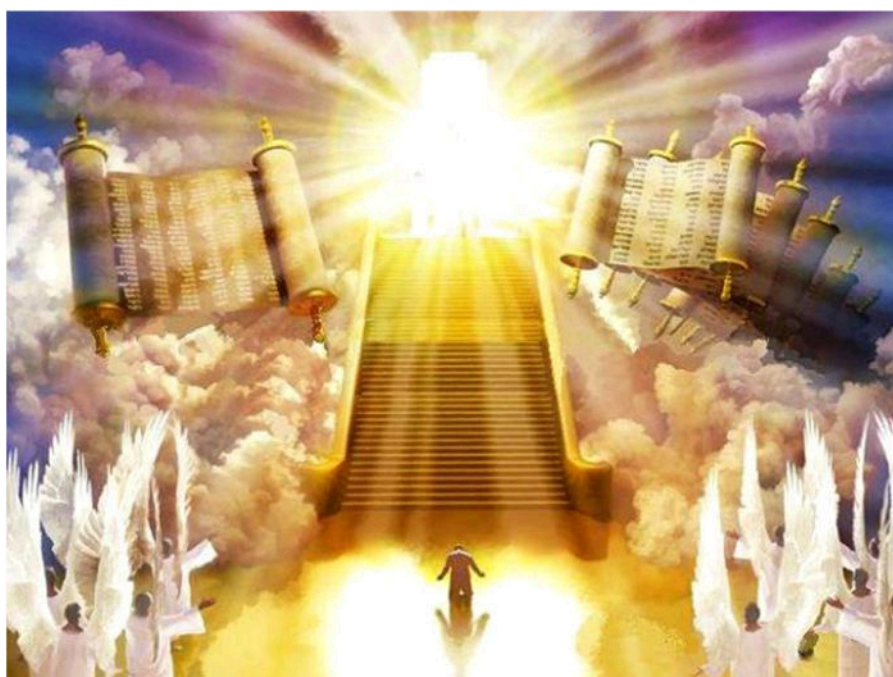
Does this not remind you the plagues, especially the seventh (Rev. 16: 18-21)? Does this not remind you of Jesus coming on the white horse killing the followers of Antichrist and the False Prophet with the sword from His mouth (Rev. 19: 21)? Ezekiel tells us that the birds [‘all kinds of carrion birds’] and the wild animals [predatory ones] will eat many bodies (Ezek. 39: 17-20 cf. Rev. 19: 17; 18; 21).

‘The beloved city’ (Rev. 20: 9) most likely refers to Jerusalem (cf. Ps. 78: 68; Ps. 87: 2). The Great Tribulation will have its climax in the land of Israel.

Before Jesus returns the world will not get better; therefore, there will be no improvement with a ‘millennium.’ However, victory is already assured.

Fourth Scene: God’s Judgment

• Rev. 20: 11-15: “Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life (Rev. 13: 8; Rev. 17: 8; Rev. 20: 15; Rev. 21: 27), was thrown into the lake of fire.”



‘The great white throne’ – This is a throne of judgment, lofty, pure, and holy. God is sitting on it as a judge in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. John saw the tainted universe go out of existence, nature will cower and flee before God (Rev. 20: 11 cf. Rev. 6: 12-17). The universe is destroyed, it will cease to exist (cf. Matt. 24: 35). Heaven and earth will be purified by fire for a restoration (2 Pet. 3: 7; 10-13). The dead will rise, both ungodly and believers.

The text speaks of a universal and individual (v. 13, ‘all were judged according to what they had done’; NIV: ‘and each person was judged according to what he had done’) and just judgment (‘books were opened’) – all will be judged according to his works. These books record every thought, word and deed of sinful human beings, all recorded by divine omniscience (cf. Dan. 7: 9-10). Their thoughts (Lk. 8: 17; Rom. 2: 16), words (Matt. 12: 37), and actions (Matt. 16: 27) will be compared to God’s perfect and holy standard (Matt. 5: 48; 1 Pet. 1: 15-16) and will be found wanting (Rom. 3: 23). Therefore, all men being sinners, the elect will be saved not by works, but by grace; therefore, the Book of Life is opened along with the other books (Rev. 20: 15). The Book of Life contains the names of all the redeemed (Dan. 12: 1).

- Rev 20: 14 says that death and hell (‘Death and Hades’) will also be thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. Death is the state of the souls of the wicked; Hades (hell) is the place, and means final separation from God, where the wicked will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20: 10).

So, we can understand from all this that from the judgment there will be no more separation between the body and soul of the human being; either will be in glory with God or in hell.

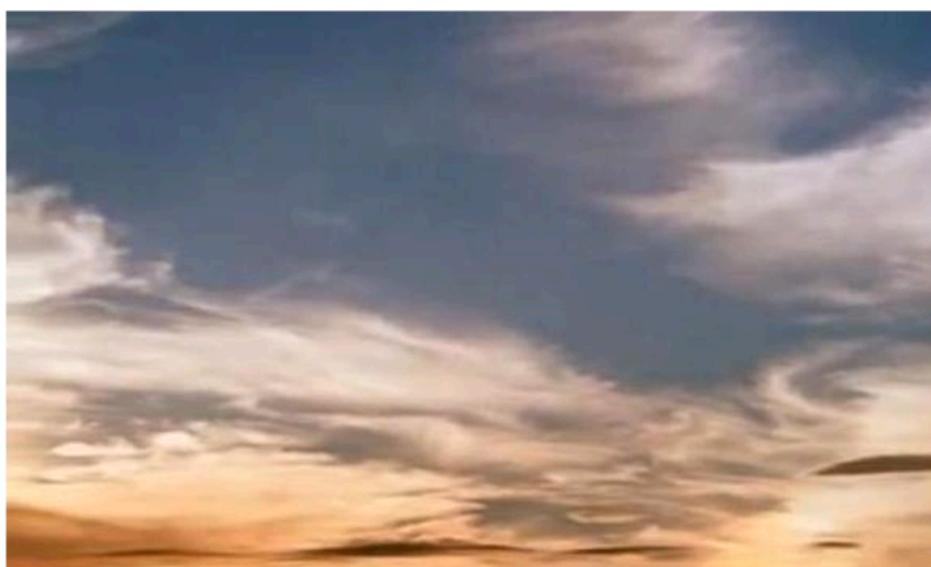
Chapter 21 –

- Rev. 21: 1-8 – The new heaven and the new earth:

From here the judgment has already happened and the curtains of History have already been closed, that is, John begins to describe the state of the church in the presence of God. Cosmic time becomes eternity.

The text begins with the marriage supper of the Lamb. The children of God are already in glory.

The new heaven and the new earth signify a new creation of God; redemption reaching the whole universe, not just man. Nature and the cosmos will also be restored from the consequences of sin. Not only man, but nature is now glorified, with another appearance, with another type of matter.



- Rev. 21: 1: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.”

In v. 1 John describes an important detail: “The sea was no more.” This can have a literal or symbolic meaning, especially for John, exiled on the island of Patmos, far from civilization, far from the people he loved and far from the brethren of the church at Ephesus, over which he had jurisdiction. The sea was a symbol of a wall of separation, isolation, solitude and remoteness. So, “The sea was no more” means that there will be no more walls separating people and God in the new Jerusalem; there will be no isolation, but full and total communion. We will be dwelling in God’s restored Cosmos, not apart from each other.

- Rev. 21: 2-3: “And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.’”

John describes God’s tabernacle with men, that is, heaven and earth are now God’s dwelling place and His glorified church. When he says “coming down out of heaven from God” this means totality, there will be no more separation between

heaven and earth. It is no longer a physical place, but the Holy Spirit descends upon the church of Christ, and He dwells with it. All are God's people (The ethnic Israel and the Gentiles, God's spiritual Israel).

At the same time he compares the new Jerusalem to a city, he also compares it to a bride, adorned for her bridegroom. It is holy, compared to Babylon, to the old Jerusalem, and to the whore. In the new Jerusalem will be the redeemed of all times.



- Rev. 21: 4: “he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

In this new creation of God, in the new heaven and new earth, no more pain will enter (either physical, or moral, or emotional), there will be no suffering, death, mourning, crying, or imperfections of any kind.

- Rev. 21: 5: “And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”

“I am making all things new.” – this is not something the church does with itself, but an intervention of God.

- Rev. 21: 6-7: “Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.’”

The bride will be there because God has completed all the restoration work: “It is done!” (cf. Rev. 16: 17: “It is done!”; Jn. 19: 30: “It is finished!”). Jesus says that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. He started all things; through Him the universe was created; and now He Himself completes what He began: the work of man's redemption, the total redemption of humanity. After defeating his enemies, Jesus hands over the kingdom to God and Father. Salvation is from God and the whole process is fully completed. It was not for the merit of the church, but for a favor of God, His grace.

In v. 7, we can see that, in addition to being the bride of Christ, we will fully enjoy God's fatherhood over us, as His heirs: “Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.”

• Rev. 21: 8: “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death [*the ‘first death’ was the sin of Adam, which led to spiritual death*].”

Who stands outside the new heavens and the new earth:

• The cowardly – those who do not commit to the truth (Jesus) and prefer the mark of the beast. They cannot deny their own life.

• The faithless [NIV: the unbelieving] – are those who do not believe in Him as the only Savior of their lives; they seek salvation in other ways.

• The polluted [NIV: the vile] – those who indulge in all kinds of sin and scoff at God and the holy things.

• The murderers – those who kill; those who have no respect for the sacredness of life. They don’t just kill people’s physical bodies, but they try to kill their souls.

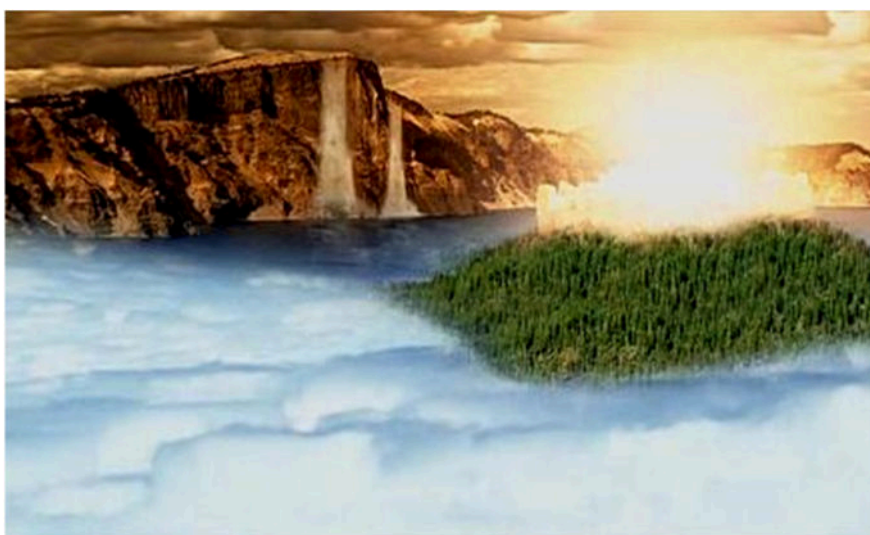
• The fornicators [NIV: the sexually immoral] – those who practice sexual immorality, the lascivious, sodomites and morally perverse.

• The sorcerers and idolaters [NIV: those who practice magical arts, the idolaters] – apostates, necromancers, spiritualists, those who seek other ways to reach God.

• Liars – are those whose word cannot be trusted, for they make false promises and practice deceit in all areas of human life to break the rules and win in their own way.

• [Rev. 21: 9-27; Rev. 22: 1-5 – the new Jerusalem.](#)

This language here is figurative; the new Jerusalem is not really a city; it is a symbol of the church; it is not only the home, but the bride of the Lamb (a city not composed of buildings). At the beginning of chapter 22, John uses another figure of speech for it.



• Rev. 21: 9-27:

9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’

10 And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

11 It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.

12 It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites;

13 on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.

14 And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.

16 The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles [*2,200 kilometers or 12,000 stadia*]; its length and width and height are equal [*a perfect cube, as was the Holy of Holies (1 Kin. 6: 20), also called Debir, in the tabernacle and in the temple, where the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was*].

17 He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits [*'high', in Greek*] by human measurement, which the angel was using [*200 feet or 65 meters high*].

18 The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass.

19 The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate [NIV: chalcedony], the fourth emerald,

20 the fifth onyx [NIV: sardonyx], the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

21 And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.

22 I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

25 Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.

26 People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations (cf. Isa. 60: 11: "nations shall bring you their wealth").

27 But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Verse 9 begins with a new call from the angel to the apostle John: 'Come.' If you remember, in Rev. 17: 1, one of the seven angels who have the seven bowls summons John to see the false church, the 'whore'; now he is called to see the 'bride.'

Here John describes the new Jerusalem as a city, symbol of the abode of the church, the full and perfect communion with God. There is His throne. The new Jerusalem is not only the home of the redeemed, but the Lamb's own bride. The city is holy, heavenly. It comes down out of heaven from God, symbolizing the totality, the Spirit of God eternally united with men. It reflects the glory of God, while showing the splendor, brilliance and beauty of the bride. There, we too will fully enjoy our status of children. There, we are the bride of Christ and children and heirs

of God. This city is founded on the truth of Jesus and has a high wall signifying His protection for the redeemed.

Some features are interesting in this text:

1) John describes the radiance and brightness and beauty of the bride, for the glory of God is in her: v. 11: “It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.”

All will be with a shining body, like the brightness of the glory of God, for there will be holiness. The garments of all shall be white and bright, they have been made white in the blood of the Lamb. And there will be nothing hidden, everything will be clear, pure, transparent, crystalline.



Jasper pebble, one inch (2.5 cm) in size – Wikipedia

He says its radiance is like jasper, clear as crystal. However, it is necessary to realize that the name of the stones written in the bible does not exactly refer to the stones as we know them today. Jasper, for example, is an opaque mineral, a variation of quartz with a red or wine color, yellow or as varied as: yellow, red, brown or green; never blue. And the colors can be in stripes or bands. So, most likely, John was comparing the radiance of the glory of the Lord and the new Jerusalem to another crystalline, transparent and very bright gemstone.

2) The description of the city shows us God’s protection there over the redeemed (‘a great and high wall’); there will be no more insecurity nor sin: “It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; ... But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (Rev. 21: 12; 27).

3) It is open to all ('gates'). All who belong to the Lord were called to be there, from the four corners of the planet, from every tribe, language, people and nation: "on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates ... Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there" (Rev. 21: 13; 25).

4) As a church, the city is founded on the word of God, from the OT and NT: "And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb... The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate [NIV: chalcedony], the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx [NIV: sardonyx], the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass." (Rev 21: 14; 19-21).

The number 12 is repeated: twelve gates, twelve angels, the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, twelve foundations, the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. This is because the number 12 is the number of the divine choice; of God's purposes for His elect, the number of those who are His chosen; therefore, the church of all the redeemed (OT/NT).

It is interesting to realize that these stones were called foundations and in them there were also twelve pearls, forming gates. It seems a contradiction between what is written in the Old Testament by Moses about the stones and what it is written by John the Apostle, for he no longer refers to the precious stones as the patriarchs, but as the apostles, giving to the patriarchs the symbolism of pearls, more precisely of one pearl. This means that the twelve patriarchs represent the gates placed by God on earth to establish His promise of ransom with men, more specifically with His chosen people ('a single pearl' – Rev. 21: 21). To them, the Law was given so that they fulfilled it and remained connected to the Creator. When Jesus came, fulfilling it and bringing the new covenant, He began to prepare children with His authority, through which many other peoples might know Salvation. These were the apostles, symbolized in this vision of John as foundations adorned with every jewel (Rev. 21: 19). A foundation is what remains on the foundation of a building, it is not visible, it does not appear, but without it a building cannot be built. It is what holds the building to the ground.

So, the new Jerusalem is built on the foundation of the truth of God's revealed word, which is Jesus. Through Him, God revealed Himself to man.

The patriarchs, therefore, were the gates which the Lord opened for the covenant with man and built His work, setting rules for the human being so that he understood that it was possible to pass to a new level of spiritual understanding and achieve perfection (four sides of the city, four orders of tribes, four letters in the Hebrew name of the Lord – YHWH, the symbol of a perfect number, of the man united to the Trinity, the number of the gospel), therefore, eternal life.

However, by sending His Son to earth, He definitely grounded the way so that perfection was reached. It was Jesus Himself who said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn. 14: 6). Thus, the disciples of Jesus, the twelve apostles are the foundations to the building of a great work, bringing the Gospel and covering all other peoples, not only Jews, but Gentiles equally (precious stones of every kind – Rev. 21: 19) in the four corners of earth.

Through the work they left established, humanity would know the way (the gate) back to the Father.

5) The city is very big, big enough to hold all the saved, and there they live in integrity: “The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles [2,200 kilometers]; its length and width and height are equal [*a perfect cube, as was the Holy of Holies (1 Kin. 6: 20)*]. He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits [*‘high’, in Greek*] by human measurement, which the angel was using [200 feet or 65 meters high]. The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass” (Rev. 21: 15; 16; 17; 18).



Pure gold here symbolizes integrity, clarity, that is, nothing hidden (‘clear as glass’).



6) Full and perfect communion with God (“I saw no temple in the city”): “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” (Rev. 21: 22).

God dwells in the church and now the church dwells with God. He is the sanctuary in the midst of His people. Every inch of this city is filled with His presence.

7) Full manifestation of the glory of God (“And the city has no need of sun or moon”) – Rev. 21:

23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

26 People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations (cf. Isa. 60: 11).

The city does not need stars to illuminate it, for the glory of the Lord is its light.

The glory of God (Heb.: *kābhôdh* or, in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the OT: *doxa*) means weight or dignity, and which can be understood as the manifestation of God’s power where it is needed, honor, victory, protection, abundance, wealth, reputation, splendor, and describes the revelation of the character and presence of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is the Jewish equivalent of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being (Heb. 1: 3). Through Jesus, we behold the majesty of God the Father.

“The kings of the earth will bring their glory into it” means the righteous, whom God has called kings and priests (Ex. 19: 6; 1 Pet. 2: 9; Rev. 1: 5-6; Rev. 5: 10), redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and in authority, they will honor Him for all eternity. Even though many were kings and important people on earth, their glory and splendor were nothing compared to what they now see in the presence of the Lord. Therefore, they pay Him homage, honor, gratitude for their victories and riches.

Chapter 22: 1-5 –

8) Paradise restored, where the river of water of life flows.

Rev. 22 (NRSV):

1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb

2 through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

3 Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him;

4 they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

5 And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.



Afterwards, John describes the New Jerusalem no longer as a city (Rev. 22: 1-5), but as a garden where the river of water of life flows, similar to Eden, the garden created by God for Adam and Eve. In the original creation the tree of life was in the middle of the garden of Eden (Gen. 2: 9). We can symbolically understand here that in this new ‘Paradise’ of God, in this new Eden, there will be no restrictions on feeding on the tree of life. His elect will fully enjoy His abundance and His fullness, for the tree is rooted and situated in a large amount of water (the river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb), on either side of the river, that is, accessible to anyone who wants to touch it. It is as if this tree was taking the place of the old tree of the knowledge of good and evil beside it in the first garden, now leaving the knowledge of God totally free for His children, for evil has been exterminated. The ancient forbidden tree (‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’) was overcome by the tree that brings the true life of God to men, for everything there is allowed for the redeemed.

Now there are no longer four rivers, as there were in the Garden of Eden, but the river of water of life, which flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It is a symbol of eternal life, salvation, full and abundant life, the constant flow of the Holy Spirit.

There, the redeemed will see God face to face and there will be no more pain or curse. There, the stars, the sun and the moon will no longer be needed because the Lord will shine on everyone. His light is enough.

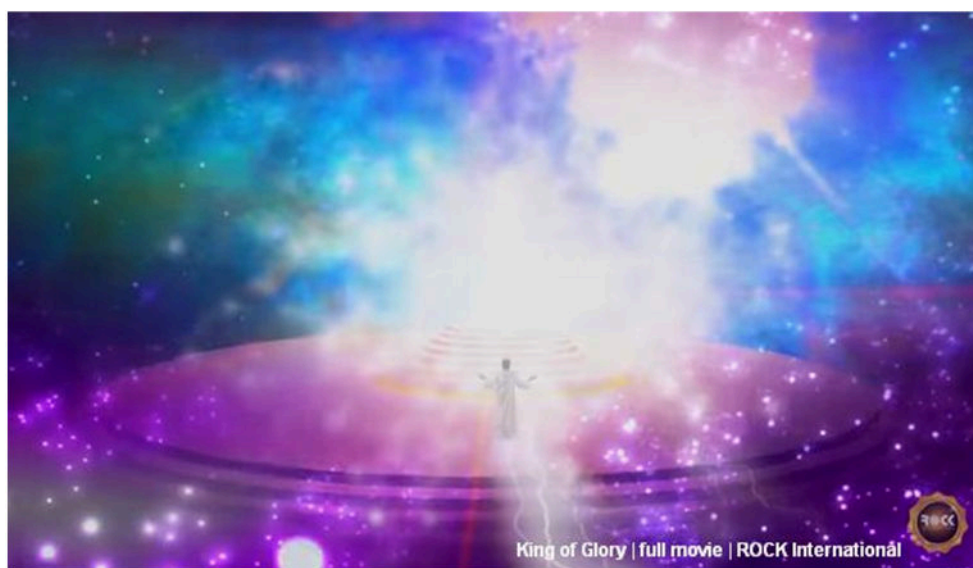
a) river of water of life: eternal life, salvation, full and abundant life, the constant flow of the Holy Spirit.

b) the tree of life: Jesus, in the center of the garden of Eden.

c) twelve kinds of fruit (every month of the year): nothing will be lacking, there will be no more hunger or need of any kind; uninterrupted fruitfulness of God's elect (cf. Ezek. 47: 12).

d) the leaves of the tree are for the healing of people: there will be refuge for those who lived unprotected and medicine for the wounds of the soul; answer to unanswered questions, understanding of all things made by God (Ps. 34: 8-11).

9) The Throne of God is in the new Jerusalem and there the redeemed will reign with Him eternally.



v. 3 Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him;

v. 4 they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

v. 5 And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

This passage tells us that in the church of the redeemed the throne of God will be established, and there will be no curse there, because there will be no more disobedience, but obedience to His will and His commands gladly. There, His servants will gladly be at His service and enjoy intimacy with God ('they will see his face'), as Adam had one day in Eden. Eternally, we will behold the face of God. Paul

wrote in 1 Cor. 13: 12: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.”

In fact, we are coming back to the point where we began. The light we will see (Jesus) one day is the same light that started all things:

- Gen. 1: 3: “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” At this early stage, the light to which the bible refers is the very glory of God coming into play in the person of Jesus.

- Isa. 60: 19-20: “The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself [NIV: Your sun will never set again, and you’re your moon will wane no more]; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.”

- Jn. 1: 1-5: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

- Rev. 21: 23: “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”

- Rev. 22: 5: “And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

Chapter 22: 6-21 – the final instructions from Jesus to John

1) Faithfulness and reliability of the word revealed to him v. 6: “And he said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.’”

2) This word must be kept (v. 7) because the Lord comes without delay (cf. v. 12; 20): “‘See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.’... ‘See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work’... The one who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

3) Not to worship anyone other than the Lord. Warning against idolatry – v. 8-9: “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’”

4) Not to seal the words (v. 10-12): “And he said to me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.’ ‘See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work.’”

So, he encourages each one to continue in what he practices. Hence this word is for all ages, for the churches of Asia, and for us today and for those to come: that the saints may be holier, the righteous more righteous; for sinners will be more sinful and the filthy will be filthier. This makes it clear that there is and must be a separation: as the world becomes more and more profane and filthy, the church is becoming more holy. And the Lord will reward each one according to his works.

5) The Lord is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last (v. 13-15): “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.’ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

He makes it clear here that it was He who began all things and He Himself will finish His work of saving man. So, only He can say who enters His ultimate purpose and who stays outside (v. 14 – those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb enter; and in v. 15 He says who stays outside His city and has no right the life tree: “Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

6) At the end of the end He still makes an invitation to the people (v. 16-17): “‘It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.’ The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.”

Jesus confirms what all the prophets said about His earthly genealogy as the generation of David, that is, of the family of David, who for the Israelites had been a model of a good king. He also made it clear that He was the Root of David, the King, the Christ, the Savior. Jesus also reveals Himself as the bright morning star, He who tells His children that the day of God is coming, which brings a new dawn, new heavens and a new earth. This can also mean a light, a glow that remains after a period of darkness. At the end of time, when the period of spiritual darkness is over and the Antichrist, the false prophet and the devil are defeated, Jesus will prevail, He will remain standing despite all the opposition He faced. He will continue to shine. The water of life means eternal life for all who accept this invitation.

7) Not to take away or add anything from the words of the book of this prophecy (Deut. 4: 2; Deut. 12: 32). He doesn't take long to come. Be prepared (v. 18-21): "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen."



Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!