

# 13. COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

## PART 1

### Chapters 1-5

#### What is now

<b>The risen Christ</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Letters to church leaders</b>	<b>2 – 3</b>
<b>God's throne in heaven</b>	<b>4 – 5</b>

#### The title and origin of the book (1:1-3)

The revelation of what must take place soon that God gave to Jesus Christ to show his servants. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who has testified to everything he saw - that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

#### Relevant texts

**Dn 2:29** As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and *the revealer of mysteries* showed you what is going to happen.

**Re 22:6** These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord God, who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.

This book is a revelation given by Jesus the Messiah. It's also about him and given through the mediation of an angel to the apostle John. It's to be believed because it originates with God and it's Jesus' testimony. It deals with the final catastrophic period of world history when the Messiah, after mortal combat with the powers of evil, will emerge victorious.

John sees a series of visions that are prophecies about the future, relating to the end of this age, and culminating in the end of the world. It mainly describes the events that will precede Jesus' second coming, but also his messianic reign that we're looking forward to and the reason why we pray that God's kingdom will come and his will be done on Earth.

God's servants (Greek δοῦλος = slave) are God-fearing people who have surrendered their lives into his care. What must *soon take place*, that was written nearly 2000 years ago, is described as *near*. God wants us to keep these future events in mind and to live in expectation of the Messiah's return. His coming is our blessed hope, resulting in our glorification and it encourages believers during persecution.

When John said, 'The time is near,' it's not a mistake; the concept is stated many times. Jesus repeats the statement, 'I'm coming soon, four times, and twice we have the phrase 'what soon must take place soon.' Greek-English lexicons sometimes give an alternative meaning for the Greek word ταχὺ, 'soon', as 'without unnecessary delay'. The book of Revelation makes it clear that God has a plan. The timetable is set and Jesus will be revealed at the appointed time. Because these things were spoken of as taking place soon, some people assume the events of the book of Revelation are now in the past, it's history. Some say the book was written before 70 AD so that they can include the destruction of Jerusalem as a prophecy. However, everything leads up to the return of Jesus as Messiah, and that hasn't happened yet!

As the message is revealed to John in visions, the book is quite different from the historical books or the epistles. It is presented to us in picture form using symbols and metaphors, to *show* us what must take place; but we must use our sanctified imaginations. There is a blessing for you here, just from hearing the Apocalypse read, or from reading it yourself, and more to the point, if you submit yourself to God and do his will.

## Greetings to churches and praise to Jesus (1:4-6)

John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him (God) who is, who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the Earth's kings. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

**Ex 3:14** *I am who I am.*

**Ex 19:5-6** Out of all nations you'll be my treasured possession. ... you'll be for me a *kingdom of priests* and a holy nation.

**Ps 89:27, 37** I'll appoint him (David) to be my *firstborn*, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. ... David's line will be established forever like the moon, the *faithful witness* in the sky.

**Is 55:4** I've made him a *witness* to the peoples.

John greets the seven churches to whom this letter (the whole book) is addressed. The churches were in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, not far from the island of Patmos, where John was imprisoned, but they represent all churches down to the present time. The benediction is from the eternal, triune God. He who is, who was, and who is to come is a paraphrase of the divine name, YHWH, meaning I am. The seven spirits before the throne refer to the Holy Spirit, as the phrase is bracketed together with the other members of the godhead. Seven is a sacred number that occurs 55 times in Revelation.

Jesus is called the faithful witness. He came into the world to testify to the truth (Jn 18:37). He's the firstborn from the dead, an allusion to Psalm 89:27: I'll appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the Earth's kings. And Psalm 2: I've installed my king on Mount Zion, my holy mountain. He's the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Ti 6:15). This is all in anticipation of the Messiah ruling the world.

John ascribes glory and power to Jesus because he loves us, and nobody can separate us from his love (Ro 8:35). Also, because he's freed us from our sins by his blood. We've been justified by his blood, and we'll be saved from God's wrath through him (Ro 5:9). The final reason for praise is that he made us to be a monarchy of priests to serve his God and Father (Ex 19:5-6).

The expression 'kingdom of priests' was first attributed to Israel, and here it's applied to believers in Jesus. The word 'kingdom' has the primary meaning of kingship or royal power. It refers to those who possess the kingship, the monarchy in the Messiah's government. Jesus is the coming king, and the saints, his people, will reign with him. They'll inherit the kingship (Dn 7:27, Mt 5:5, Jas 2:5), and reign with him (2 Ti 2:12) on Earth (Re 5:10), and they'll serve God as priests because they alone have access to God and can mediate between him and unbelievers. The monarchy is a fulfillment of Moses' civil law, and the priesthood is a fulfillment of the ceremonial law. The phrases 'God's servants' (Re 1:1) and 'the saints' (Re 5:8) always refer to Christians throughout Revelation. They are the royal family; heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Ro 8:17). That is the climax to which this book inevitably builds.

## **Jesus' second coming (1:7-8)**

Look, he's coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the land will mourn for him. So it'll be! Amen. <sup>8</sup>I'm the first and the last, says the Lord God, who is, was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

**Is 40:5** The glory of the Lord will be revealed, and *all people will see it together*, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken!

**Dn 7:13** In my vision at night I looked, and behold, one like a son of man, *coming with the clouds* of heaven.

**Zec 12:10** And I'll pour out my Spirit on David's household and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and they'll understand my grace and pray to me. *They'll look on me, the one they crucified*, and they'll mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, they'll grieve for him as one grieves for a first-born son.

A key to understanding an author's purpose is to understand their literary structure. With greetings dispensed with, John opens his drama with two dramatic statements. The first is the announcement that the Messiah is coming, and every eye will see him. Isaiah connects his coming with Jerusalem (Is 52:10):

Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem.  
The Lord has comforted his people; he's redeemed Jerusalem.  
The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations,  
And all the ends of the Earth will see the salvation of our God.

The second is a statement by the Messiah himself, declaring that he's the Almighty God who was, is, and is to come (cf. Re 22:11-13). 'He is coming with the clouds' is a phrase from a messianic prophecy (Dn 7:13-14), from which Jesus took the title 'Son of Man'. He'll come physically with the clouds, possibly clouds of angels (Mk 8:38, 18:36) to establish his eternal kingdom, and all nations will serve him.

The chapters leading up to Jesus' dramatic return describe a terrible time of tribulation that will occur under the reign of the Antichrist, culminating in the battle of Armageddon, when the whole world will rebel against God. It will be a time of great suffering, as on the one hand, the Antichrist brings war and persecutes God's people, and on the other, as God pours out his wrath on a defiant world, including the greatest earthquake that man has known. The face of the Earth will be destroyed and covered in darkness, and telecommunications will be down, so the world's population won't be seeing Jesus' return on phones or TV. His coming will be like lightning flashing across the whole sky.

Zechariah predicted that the Jews would look on the one they'd pierced (crucified), and all their clans would mourn for him (Zec 12:10-13). As verse 7 is a clear allusion to Zechariah 12, 'all the tribes of the land' is a better translation than 'all peoples on Earth' (NIV). In both Hebrew and Greek, earth and land are the same word, but in Zechariah, it's the people of Jerusalem who look on the one they pierced, and the land (Israel) mourns for him, each clan by itself. In Revelation 16:9, 11, 20, as the angels pour out their bowls of wrath, the unbelievers refuse to repent and curse God, so to suggest that they were mourning for the

returning Messiah here in Revelation 1:7 is a contradiction. However, the glory and noise of Jesus' return will be so great that he may well be visible to all.

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The Messiah is the Lord God, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He controls all human history. In Revelation, Jesus, the Son is seen seated on the throne together with the Father. Jesus said that he and the Father are one (Jn 10:30); the Father is in him and he's in the Father (Jn 10:38). Father and Son have equal authority throughout Revelation. Praise is given in one breath to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb (Re 5:13. 7:10). The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the Holy City, and his servants will serve *him* (Re 22:3). The pronoun 'him' relates to both God and the Lamb, the Father and the Son. Both are referred to as the Lord God Almighty and as the one who was and is and is to come.

### **John, the writer (1:9-11)**

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingship and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of God's word and the Jesus' testimony. On the Lord's Day, I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying: Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

John never reveals his identity beyond 'John', but early tradition is unanimous that the author was the apostle John. He identifies himself with fellow Christians. He is their brother and companion, patiently enduring and suffering with them, imprisoned on the isle of Patmos.

Paul said that we have the privilege, not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for him (Phil 1:29). He said we're heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ *if* we share in his sufferings. And we'll also share in his glory (Ro 8:17). This theme of martyrdom is emphasized in many verses (Re 2:10, 3:10, 6:9-11, 12:17, 13:7, 10, 14:12-13, 16:6, 17:6, 18:24, 20:4). The Church needs to be patient and endure, knowing that kingship awaits them. They'll reign with the Messiah over the entire

world. All the kingdoms of this world will become the possession of the saints of the high places, and they'll reign forever and ever (Dn 7:27).

The Lord's Day is Sunday, the first day of the week, when the early Christians chose to meet for worship. John was 'in the Spirit,' (cf. Re 4:2), a state of spiritual awareness produced by the Holy Spirit, in which John saw his visions. Visions, in contrast to dreams, are seen while one is awake. He was instructed to write down what he saw in his visions on a scroll, a sheet of parchment, which in the first century was the equivalent of a book. What he saw included specific messages to the seven churches, and in addition, all the visions that he saw and recorded in the book of Revelation.

John heard the voice of the Lord Jesus speaking to him. It sounded like a trumpet, just as Moses had heard on Mount Sinai when he received the Ten Commandments (Ex 19:19).

Many commentators refer to the way John wrote this book as if it were his choice. But Jesus told John to write what he saw, and we assume he obeyed. Revelation 2 – 3 are the words of Jesus. The rest of the book is what John recorded as an eyewitness: what he saw and heard. There are hundreds of allusions to the OT but it's Jesus and angels that allude to them, not John. Arguments that claim that John would not talk about the far future, because the recipients wouldn't understand it, are therefore invalid. This book is the revelation of Jesus Christ. John only bore witness to what he saw and heard.

## **The Son of Man (1:12-16)**

I turned around to see the person speaking to me, and I saw seven golden lampstands. Among them was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like a flame fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of much water. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword was coming out of his mouth. His face was shining like the bright sun.

**Dn 7:9, 13** The Ancient of Days came and sat down. His clothing was as white as snow; *his hair was white like wool*. ... As I was looking in my vision at night, I saw someone *like a son of man*, coming with the clouds of heaven.

**Dn 10:5-6** I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with *a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist*. His body was like a golden jewel, his face like lightning, *his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs gleaming like burnished bronze*, and his voice like a roaring crowd.

**Ez 1:26-27** Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a sapphire throne, and high up on the throne was someone like a man ... from his waist up he looked like glowing metal sparkling like fire, and from his waist down was like fire.

**Ez 43:2** I saw the glory of Israel's God coming from the East. *His voice was like the roar of much water*, and his glory illuminated the land.

Jesus the Messiah stands there with his face shining like the sun as it did at the transfiguration (Mt 17:2), symbolizing his glory. Out of his mouth comes a sharp double-edged sword (Heb 4:12), symbolizing the power and authority of the word of God. In his hand are seven stars, which stand for the messengers of the churches. Some interpret them as guardian angels of the churches, but why would the Lord hold them in his hand and address commendations and rebukes to angels and tell them to repent? The primary meaning of the Greek word ἄγγελος is 'messenger,' but it's also used for angels. The church leader who brings God's messages to his flock is the most appropriate interpretation. The title of the book Malachi means 'my messenger' and refers to the prophet Malachi. As in Greek, the Hebrew word also means both messenger and angel.

There was a golden lampstand with seven lamps in the temple, with which Jews were familiar. Instructions on its manufacture are given (Ex 25:31-40). The significance of a lampstand and its lamps is that they give light, a fitting symbol for the local church.

The title 'Son of Man' is used by Jesus to identify himself as the Messiah, as described in Daniel's prophecy. It expresses both his

divinity and humanity. In each context where it's used, it either points to the Messiah's present lowliness or his future glory. In Daniel's vision, God gives the glory and kingship to the Messiah, a man who comes with the clouds so that all people and nations might honor him. The long robe with a golden sash around the chest is the high priest's attire. Jesus is our high priest, as well as our coming King, and he makes us a kingdom of priests. This is a vision of the glorified Messiah, who was described similarly by Daniel, Isaiah (6:1), and Ezekiel, all of whom saw a glorified human Messiah in their visions.

## The resurrected and glorified Jesus (1:17-20)

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he put his right hand on me and said: Don't be afraid. I am the first and the last, the living one. I died, and see, I'm alive forever and ever! I possess the keys of Death and Hades. So, write what you've seen, what is now, and what will happen after this. This is the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

**Is 41:4b** Who causes the generations to exist from the beginning? It's me, the Lord. I'm with the first of them and with the last.

**Is 44:6** *I'm the first and I'm the last; apart from me there's no God.*

**Mt 2:7** A priest's lips should preserve knowledge. He's the Lord Almighty's *messenger* and people seek instruction from him.

John collapses before this glorious apparition of Jesus, but Jesus reassures him that he's the risen Christ who holds the keys of death and the underworld. As Paul said, Christ was raised from the dead and can't die again. Death no longer has mastery over him (Ro 6:9). He is alive forever and controls the destiny of departed spirits. He has the power to raise the dead on the day of resurrection. He gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven so that he and the other apostles could preach the gospel, opening the way for believers to enter his Messianic reign and eternal life (Mt 16:19). In the same vein, he later breathed on them and

told them to receive the Holy Spirit. If they forgave anyone their sins, they'd be forgiven; if they didn't forgive them, they wouldn't be forgiven (Jn 20:23-24).

The fact that Jesus holds the keys of Death and Hades is an encouragement to the saints. It inspires them in times of tribulation and persecution to persevere and be faithful to their Lord, even if it involves martyrdom. Jesus is the First and the Last. He's sovereign over the whole length of human history, and as he said, he's the resurrection and the life. He's the one who can raise the dead and give them eternal life. Whoever believes in him will live, even if he dies (Jn 11:25). He died, and yet he's alive forevermore, and the same will be true for those who believe in him.

There is a three-fold division of the book: what he's seen (ch. 1), what is (ch. 2 - 5), and what is going to happen after this (ch. 6 - 22), starting with the opening of the seven seals. One purpose of God in creating the world is the salvation of those who believe in Jesus, Christians, who are organized into churches and are led by God's messengers.

The basic meaning of the Greek word for angel is messenger, one who bears a message from man to man or from God to man, as angels do. Jesus stands among seven lampstands (churches) holding seven stars in his hand. The stars are the messengers of/to the seven churches, and it's to them that the seven letters are written (ch. 2 – 3), not to angels, and indirectly to the churches. The messenger is the church leader; an overseer or shepherd, the one responsible before God for his flock. The Greek word 'you' in these letters is always singular. Jesus addresses the messenger, saying I know your deeds, your hard work, your perseverance etc, or entreat, hardly messages for angels. And sometimes he addresses the whole church: And now to the rest of you (2:24). At the end of each letter, all Christians, or at least those who have ears to hear, are requested to take note of what the Spirit is saying to the churches. So the letters are addressed to the overseer, not to the church.

### **Ephesus – whose leader lost his first love (2:1-7)**

To the messenger of the church in Ephesus write: He who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands says this: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you can't tolerate wicked

men, and that you've tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them to be false. You've persevered and endured hardships for my name, and haven't grown weary. Yet I have this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you've fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you don't, I'll come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victorious one, I'll give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in God's garden.

**Jr 2:2** I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me.

**Gn 2:9** In the middle of the garden were *the tree of life* and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

**Gn 3:22** The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from *the tree of life* and eat, and live forever.

Each letter begins with a different description of the author, Jesus, as he was described in Chapter 1. Paul spent two years ministering to the church in Ephesus. He was preceded by Aquila and Priscila and followed by Timothy and John. So, the saints there had great teachers. There were no church buildings at that time; the word 'church' refers to a group of believers who met weekly, usually on Sundays, in someone's home. Ephesus was a large city, and the church quickly grew.

The seven letters are addressed to the *messenger* of each church; the pronoun 'you' is always singular. The commendations, complaints, and corrections relate primarily to him, but 'whoever has an ear' is encouraged to listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. Each of the seven churches typifies local churches in the world today, so everyone can learn from what is said.

The Ephesian church leader had worked hard and persevered in the face of persecution. He had made a stand against false teachers and prophets and had not grown weary. The first love is the initial enthusiasm or devotion (Jr 2:2) that the leader had when he first believed. That initial

love had waned, his love for God, and maybe his love for others as well. If a leader's love has grown cold, he's lost his purpose and ceases to be a true leader. Loving God and your neighbor is the greatest of all the commandments. He may have been doctrinally correct, hating the practices of the Nicolatian heresy, but faith must always be accompanied by love. Jesus tells his servant to repent. Otherwise, his church would go downhill.

The tree of life gives immortality to those who eat its fruit. After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, the tree of life was denied to them. The tree of life in Revelation is in New Jerusalem, the city God has prepared for us, where God and believers will be restored to perfect fellowship, and the redeemed will rule as they were created to do (Re 22:2, 14, 19).

### **Smyrna – whose leader was suffering (2:8-11)**

To the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: He who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again, says this: I know your afflictions and your poverty - yet you're rich! I know about the slander of those who say they're Jews and aren't, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you're about to suffer. Listen, the devil will put some of your people in prison to test them, and they'll suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to death, and I'll give you life as your victor's crown. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The second death will never hurt the victorious one.

**Dn 1:12** Test your servants *for ten days.*

God allows his servants to live in poverty and with afflictions because they can be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, poor, yet making many rich, having nothing, yet possessing everything (2 Co 6:10). God chose those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith, and to inherit the kingship he promised those who love him (Jas 2:5). They are the fortunate ones; their sins are forgiven, they're God's children and co-heirs with Christ. Their reward is great. To have Christ is to have everything.

Unfortunately, in different times and places, Christians are called upon to live in hostile environments, where they're treated as second-class citizens and suffer economically. The Smyrna leader suffered much. He had to put up with the slander of an actively hostile Jewish population, whose synagogue belonged to Satan rather than God.

Polycarp, a leader at Smyrna, was an early martyr. The devil is behind these persecutions, which are allowed to test the faith of God's servants for a sufficiently long time (ten days). Jesus encourages him to be faithful, even if it means death, because he'll give him the crown of life, the reward of eternal life while ruling with the Messiah. Christians who persevere and stand firm to the end will be saved (Mt 10:22). The second death is hellfire, also called the lake of fire (Re 20:14), and the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Re 21:8). It has no power over the victorious who will be resurrected, becoming immortal.

Millions of Christians in the world today live in hostile environments because they belong to ethnic or religious minorities. Thousands die as Christian martyrs each year, especially the leaders. There'll be an enormous number of martyrs in the last days, so we need to think seriously about Jesus' command to be faithful, even to death, and he'll give us the crown of life.

### **Pergamum – whose leader tolerated false teaching (2:12-17)**

To the messenger of the church in Pergamum write: He who has the sharp, double-edged sword says this: I know where you live, it's where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You didn't renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city, where Satan lives. Nevertheless, I've a few things against you: You have some people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice Israel into eating food sacrificed to idols and committing immorality. Likewise, you have people who hold to the Nicolaitan teaching. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I'll soon come to you and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victorious one, I'll give some

of the hidden manna. I'll also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

**Ex 16:4, 31** I'll rain down bread from heaven for you ... The Israelites called the bread *manna*.

**Nm 31:16** They were the ones who followed *Balaam*'s advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the Lord in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the Lord's people.

**Is 56:5** To them I'll give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a *name* better than sons and daughters, I'll give them a *name* that will endure forever.

**Jn 6:32** It's my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

Pergamum was the official center of emperor worship in Asia (present-day Western Turkey), so it's described as a place where Satan lived and had his throne. Pergamum is known for its many martyrs. Satan and his demons are active in all our towns and cities, but like God, they live in a different realm. Satan influences governments and others in authority to be anti-Christian, and demons enslave people through superstitions and animistic religion. Demon possession and black magic are still rampant in many parts of the world. Balaam symbolizes false teachers who compromise with morality. This leader turned a blind eye toward some in his congregation who embraced this false teaching.

Satan is mentioned 35 times in the NT, including four times in these letters. We should not doubt his existence. He's also called the dragon, the ancient serpent (Gn 3:1), or the devil. He's a deceiver and an accuser. Paul calls him, the ruler of the domain of the air, and the spirit who is presently at work in those who are disobedient (Eph 2:2). He says our struggle isn't against humans, but against the cosmic powers of the darkness around us, the evil spiritual forces in the heavenly realm (Eph 6:12).

The sword in Jesus' mouth represents his authority. Cf. Re 19:15, and 2 Th 2:8, where the Lord Jesus overthrows the lawless one with the breath of his mouth. The promises of Jesus in each letter apply to the time when he returns, and the saints are resurrected. This gives hope to Christians of all generations. He's the resurrection and the life (Jn

11:25), the true bread from heaven (Jn 6:32). Whoever eats that manna will live forever. The white stone was sent as an invitation. Here, it's an invitation to the Messianic banquet, and the recipient will have a secret name. Jesus will also have a name written on him, known only to him (Re 19:12).

## **Thyatira – whose leader tolerated paganism (2:18-25)**

To the messenger of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze, says this: I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you're now doing more than you did at first. However, I've this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching, she misleads my servants into immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I'll cast her into a sickbed, and I'll make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent and turn from her ways. I'll strike her followers dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I'll repay each of you according to your deeds. I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who don't follow her teaching and haven't learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, I won't impose any other burden on you, except to say, hold on to what you have until I come.

**1 Kgs 21:25** There hasn't been anyone like Ahab, who gave himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by his wife *Jezebel*.

**Jr 17:10** I the Lord *search the heart and examine the mind*, and I reward a man according to his conduct, as his deeds deserve.

After giving initial commendation for his faith, love, service, and perseverance, the Lord blames the church leader for tolerating a so-called prophetess who was leading people into immorality and idolatry. Converts from pagan backgrounds often find it hard to change their worldview and relinquish their previous spiritual convictions, especially idolatry and food laws. Jesus declared all foods clean (Mk

7:18-19) and good for Christians to eat, but Paul warned against eating food offered to idols. Those who fear and follow their traditions ignore and nullify the word of God. We must let the word of God go deep into our lives. Doctrine is important; it determines our behavior. Both bad habits and bad beliefs must be repented of. Otherwise, we can expect judgment, suffering in this world and the next.

“Jezebel misleads my servants (church members) into immorality.” Committing adultery with this prophetess means joining with her in her idolatrous ways and its associated immorality, including sacrificing to idols. She and her followers were to be punished with sickness and even death. They’d be made examples of so that other believers won’t be tempted to join them. The Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire, knows the hearts and minds of all and repays everyone according to their behavior. The Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son (Jn 5:22).

Tolerance is the buzzword of our day. Non-judgmentalism and inclusion mean that we have no right to judge the actions of others, no matter how immoral or sinful we believe them to be. There is no right or wrong, no male or female, no place for the Ten Commandments. The leader had tolerated Jezebel and her teachings, and some in the church had been led astray. Maybe they were taught that what was done in the body wouldn’t affect their spiritual lives. Or maybe they were taught that to appreciate the grace of God fully, they must first experience the depths of evil. But God said we should be holy because he’s holy (1 Pt 1:16). Jesus encourages the faithful to persevere until he returns.

## **Overcomers will rule with the Messiah (2:26-29)**

To the victorious one who does my will to the end, I’ll give authority over the nations. He’ll rule them with an iron scepter and dash them to pieces like pottery, just as I’ve received authority from my Father, and I’ll also give him the morning star. Whoever has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

**Num 24:17** *A star will come out of Jacob; a ruler will arise from Israel.*

**Ps 2:6-9** I've installed my King on Zion, my holy mountain. I'll proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me: You're my Son; today I've become your father. Ask me, and I'll make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the Earth your possession. *You'll subdue them with an iron rod, you'll dash them to pieces like pottery.*

The important Messianic Psalm 2 is quoted here. Immediately after his return, the Messiah will rule over the nations. He'll rule them with severity until all his enemies are subdued and relinquish their evil ways. He'll restore the world that has been marred by the curse, and which will be nearly destroyed by man in the last days. As the Jewish Messiah, he'll restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6) and rule the world from Jerusalem.

The promise to the overcomers is that they'll rule with him. The authority that the Father gives the Messiah is shared with the saints who are resurrected and transformed at Jesus' return. They'll reign with the Messiah in his kingdom. The word 'kingdom' means kingship or royal authority; the saints won't be subjects. They are God's children, and therefore his heirs, and co-heirs with Christ. They'll form the Messiah's government, as illustrated in the parable of the minas. One good servant's reward for his faithfulness in doing small things was to have charge of ten cities in his Master's coming kingdom (Lk 19:17).

The creation is waiting in eager expectation for God's children to be revealed (Ro 8:19). During the Messiah's 1000-year reign, the creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children (Ro 8:21).

In Revelation 22, Jesus declares that he's the Root and Offspring of David and the bright Morning Star (Re 22:16). The morning star is the planet Venus that signals the dawn and rules over it. Roman generals pointed to Venus as a symbol of their rule. When Jesus returns, it's the dawn of a new era; the beginning of eternal life for the overcomers. He'll rule, and the saints will rule with him. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever (Dn 12:3).

### **Sardis – whose leader was dying (3:1-6)**

To the messenger of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says this: I know your deeds. You've a reputation for being alive, but you're dead. Wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I've not found your deeds perfect in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you've received and heard. Obey it, and repent. If you don't wake up, I'll come to you like a thief, and you won't know the moment I'll come to you. However, you've a few people in Sardis who haven't soiled their clothes. They'll walk with me, dressed in white, for they're worthy. The victorious one will be dressed in white like that, and I'll never blot out his name from the book of life. I'll acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. Whoever has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

**Ex 32:32** But now, forgive their sin, and if not, blot my name out of *the book* you've written.

**Ps 69:28** *Blot them out of the book of life*, don't list them with the righteous.

**Dn 12:1b** At that time, your people will be delivered, all whose names are found written in *the book*.

Jesus has the seven spirits of God. This phrase expresses the presence of the Holy Spirit, whom he promised to send to his followers. The Holy Spirit is our Counselor, the Spirit of Truth (Jn 15:26). Jesus is presently seated at the right hand of God and continues to send the Spirit to believers, just as he did on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2:33). We've already seen that the seven stars in his hand represent the messengers of the seven churches that are under his supervision.

Only those who have the Spirit of Christ living in them belong to Christ. It's they who are spiritually alive and who will be resurrected (Ro 8:9-11). Those without the Spirit of God are nominal Christians; they're described as asleep or dead because they don't know God. The church leader at Sardis was asleep. He's told to wake up, repent, and obey the word of God that he's heard. Otherwise, Jesus will return when he doesn't expect him, and he'll be like one of the foolish virgins who were not prepared when the bridegroom returned (Mt 25:10-13).

However, some in the Sardis assembly weren't asleep. They were spiritually alive, and their sins were forgiven. They'd received the righteousness that comes from God, symbolized by the white robes. They're worthy because their faith and their conduct proved them to be worthy. They'll be overcomers on that day when Christ returns. Their names are written in the Lamb's book of life, and they'll never be erased. Christ will vouch for them before the Father (Mt 10:32). They're not nominal Christians; they're genuine. Jesus told his disciples to rejoice because their names are recorded in heaven (Lk 10:20).

## **Philadelphia – whose leader was an evangelist (3:7-10)**

To the messenger of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy and true, who holds the key of David, who opens and no one can shut, who shuts and no one can open, says this: I know your deeds. See, I've placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you've kept my word and haven't denied my name. I'll make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they're not but are liars, I'll make them come and fall at your feet and acknowledge that I've loved you. Since you've kept my command to endure patiently, I'll also keep you from the hour of trial that's going to come upon the whole world to test the inhabitants of the Earth.

**Is 22:22** I'll place on his shoulder *the key to David's household. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.*

**Is 60:14** The children of your oppressors will come bowing before you. All who despise you *will bow down at your feet* and call you the Lord's City, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

**Dn 12:1** There'll be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time, your people, everyone whose name is found written in the book, will be delivered.

Christ holds the key of David; he controls access to the house of David, the royal household. During the Messianic reign, it's the Church, God's

children, who will constitute the royal household and reign with Christ. During this present age, the Church is being called out of all nations. After Paul's first missionary journey, he returned to Antioch and reported all that God had done through them and how *he'd opened the door of faith to the Gentiles* (Ac 14:27). The Philadelphian leader was an evangelist; he was busy spreading the gospel. He didn't have much strength, but Christ knew his deeds, and he placed before him an open door. The Lord has been opening doors for his servants for centuries (1 Co 16:9, 2 Co 2:12, Col 4:3), and multitudes have heard the gospel and responded. They've entered the kingdom as members of the royal house of David.

This leader may have been Jewish, as he had a major conflict with a synagogue. During the Messianic reign, every knee will bow to Jesus, and all who oppressed Christian workers will be forced to acknowledge that they're the Messiah's beloved people, bowing before them in respect, recognizing that they're from a supernatural realm.

The reward for his endurance and faithfulness is that he, or other faithful people like him alive at the time, will be kept from the hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world. This isn't a promise of pretribulation rapture as taught by some, despite it having little scriptural support. It's a promise of preservation through trial following Jesus' prayer to the Father, when he said he wasn't asking God to take them out of the world, but that he'd protect them from the evil one (Jn 17:15). In the history of the spread of Christianity, there have always been martyrs. The Lord doesn't necessarily save his people from persecution and martyrdom. To the contrary, we're called not only to believe in Jesus but also to suffer for him (Phil 1:29).

In Revelation 6:11, the souls of those who'd been slain for the word of God were told to wait until the number of their fellow servants and brothers, who were to be killed as they had been, was completed.

An hour of trial may refer to any time of persecution of Christians, but the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world is the Great Tribulation that Jesus said would come at the end of this age, unequaled from the beginning of the world until then, and never to be equaled again (Mt 24:19). This trial is the focus of the Book of Revelation from ch. 6 - 18. During this time, an out-of-control dictator will cause havoc, and God's wrath will be poured out on unbelievers. The final

outpouring of God's wrath will occur after the resurrection. Jesus said: Not a hair of your head will perish (Lk 21:18), but he was talking about our eternal security, not physical safety. When the martyrs are resurrected, nothing will have been lost.

The Philadelphian leader won't be around for the Great Tribulation, but the warnings and promises to these church leaders apply to churches and Christians of all generations.

It is obvious from following chapters that Christians will suffer persecution and martyrdom during the last days, but they're not the objects of God's wrath. By persevering and remaining faithful unto death, they'll not love their lives when faced with death (Re 12:11), and their greatest victory will be achieved. Those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture rapture themselves out of the Great Tribulation and then include themselves with converts from that period. That doesn't make sense. Once the Church is raptured, the door is shut, and entry into the Messiah's monarchy is closed. Those who are alive at the Lord's coming will be raptured at his coming, and at the same time, God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep (died) in him. The second coming, resurrection, and rapture are all contemporaneous.

### **Overcomers will be pillars in God's temple (3:11-13)**

I'm coming soon. Hold onto what you have, so that no one takes your crown. I'll make the victorious one a pillar in my God's temple; he'll never leave it again. I'll write on him my God's name and the name of my God's city, New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God, and my new name. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

**Ez 48:35b** And the name of the city from that time on will be: The Lord is there.

A pillar is stable and permanent, but the righteous won't be literal pillars in the temple. Rather, they'll be indwelt by God's Spirit, and they'll dwell permanently in his city, New Jerusalem. Paul said we're God's temple because God's Spirit lives in us (1 Co 3:16). In Christ we're

being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph 2:22), but that is our present status; living in New Jerusalem is a new reality, described by all the promises given to those who are the victorious.

The 144,000 have the name of the Lamb and the Father written on their foreheads (Re 14:1), a sure sign of possession. Here, Jesus writes his new name, the Father's name, and the name of New Jerusalem on the overcomers. They have a special relationship to Jesus and the Father, and New Jerusalem is their eternal home. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in New Jerusalem, and they'll serve him there. They'll see his face and his name will be on their foreheads (Re 22:3-4). It's the inhabitants of New Jerusalem who are the bride of Christ, the glorified Church. It is a metaphor for the universal community of God's people, expressing their intimate relationship. The saints are God's royal family, and they'll rule with him forever and ever. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life may enter this city. This is our destiny on the new Earth. The city comes down out of heaven from God so that God's dwelling will be with mankind. He'll live with them, and they'll be his people, and he'll be their God (Re 21:3).

All the promises made to the overcomers relate to our eternal union with God as described in Revelation 21:1 - 22:5: The promises are New Jerusalem (Re 21:2), no second death (Re 21:8), our names in the book of life (Re 21:27), the tree of life (Re 22:2), reigning forever (Re 22:5), a new name (Re 22:5), and the morning star (Re 22:16), the promise of entry into the new age.

### **Laodicea - the lukewarm leader (3:14-22)**

To the messenger of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation, says this: I know your deeds, that you're neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! So, because you're lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I'm about to vomit you out of my mouth. You say: I'm rich; I've acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you're wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke

and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. To the victorious one, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

**Is 65:16** Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth (Hebrew = amen).

God doesn't like lukewarm Christians. He is a jealous God, meaning that he demands exclusive service (Dt 6:14-15). 'Amen' signifies what is valid and binding or changeless. Christ is the truth (Jn 14:6). He's trustworthy and faithful, in contrast to the Laodicean leader. He's the ruler of God's creation. The word 'ruler' can also mean that Jesus is the origin or first cause of creation. He's not the beginning of creation; that would mean he was the first thing created.

The Laodicean church was rich, but wealth isn't a measure of a church or its leader's strength. Maybe he'd not invested in God but in this world; his focus wasn't on the spiritual but on the physical and material. Wealth without the gospel results in spiritual poverty and blindness. His state before God was pitiful and wretched. He is described as naked because he wasn't clothed with the righteousness that Christ provides.

He's counseled to buy gold refined in the fire, the genuine riches of faith (1 Pt 1:7), white clothes, the righteousness provided by God (Mt 6:33), and eye salve to correct his spiritual blindness. Paul prayed that the hearts of the Ephesian Christians might be enlightened so that they'd know the glorious inheritance that God had called them to (Eph 1:18-19). The Lord wants his servants to have true wealth, not the passing riches of this world.

As all good fathers should do, the Lord rebukes and disciplines those whom he loves. He is standing at the door and knocking, and the invitation is addressed to individuals rather than churches. This picture was made famous by Holman Hunt's painting 'The Light of the World', where Christ is knocking at a door overgrown with vines, and there is no doorknob on the outside. Those who open the door to him and receive him and believe in his name become children of God (Jn 1:12).

To the contrary, anyone who doesn't have the Spirit of Christ doesn't belong to him (Ro 8:9). He promises to come in if only we'll open the door.

The overcomers, those who are saved by trusting in Jesus and persevering through trial, have a glorious future. They are called according to God's purpose. They are predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son. They are justified and glorified. This glorification consists in being resurrected with immortal bodies and reigning with Christ during the millennium and on into eternity. Jesus will give them the right to sit with him on his throne (on Earth), just as Jesus sat down with his Father on his throne (in heaven).

Christ is knocking and waiting for us to invite him in. He's doing it now, it's nothing to do with his return. He wants to come in and eat with us; to have fellowship with us, sharing spiritual food in an atmosphere of intimacy, affection, and companionship. This is real life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

### **John's vision of God's throne (4:1-3)**

After this, I looked and saw a door standing open in heaven. Then the voice I'd first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said: Come up here and I'll show you what will happen after this. At once I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. His appearance was reddish like ruby, and an emerald rainbow encircled the throne.

**Gn 9:16** Whenever I see a *rainbow* appear in the clouds, I'll remember the everlasting covenant I made with every kind of creature on the Earth.

**Is 6:1** *I* (Isaiah) saw the Lord *seated on a throne*, high and elevated, and his robes filled the temple.

**Ez 1:26-28a** *I* (Ezekiel) saw something above the vault over their heads that looked like a sapphire throne, and high above *on the throne was a figure like that of a man*. From what appeared to be his waist up, he looked like glowing metal, full of fire, and from his waist down, he looked like fire. Brilliant light surrounded him with the appearance of a *rainbow* in the clouds on a rainy day.

**Dn 7:9** As I looked, I saw thrones put in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow, the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.

In a vision, John sees an open door in heaven. Then Jesus (cf. Re 1:10) calls him to come and see what must soon take place. He enters heaven through the door, as in a dream, and what he sees, he records in the rest of the book. He's fully conscious, and he sees the future. He's not really in heaven, and what he sees isn't reality, it's a vision. All the same, what he sees is accurately reflecting the things that must take place, the visions he saw and recorded in ch. 4 – 22.

He sees God sitting on his throne. Can you imagine God sitting on a chair? The vision expresses God's sovereignty. His glory resembles the glory of precious stones, and the rainbow surrounding the throne reminds us of his covenant with creation. Daniel says his throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. Ezekiel's vision of the Lord was a figure like that of a man, not meaning that God is a man, but man's body is the most perfect body that we know of and the most appropriate body for rendering visible God's invisible spiritual being. Attributing a human form or personality to God is called anthropomorphism. Since the days of Noah, the rainbow has been the sign of God's covenant with mankind, his commitment that he'd never again destroy living things by a worldwide flood. God is always faithful to the covenants he makes.

John doesn't tell us what the person on the throne looks like, but our impression will be that in visions at least, he looks like a man. He is pictured as sitting on a throne, wearing clothes, and having a head of white hair. We know that man was created in the image of God, but we can't be certain how this relates to God's spiritual form. However, in the future, we'll see his face (Re 22:4). The person on the throne isn't Jesus; he doesn't appear in the vision until the next chapter.

## God's heavenly council (4:4-7)

Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. Flashes of lightning came from the throne, accompanied by rumblings and peals of thunder. Seven lamps were blazing before the throne, representing the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four creatures, covered with eyes front and back. The first creature was like a lion, the second like a calf, the third had a face like a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle.

**Is 24L23b** The Lord Almighty will become king on Mount Zion and he'll reign gloriously in Jerusalem *before its elders.*

**Ez 1:4-6, 10, 22** I looked and saw a windstorm coming from the North, an immense cloud flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. Fire in the center of it looked like glowing metal, and in the fire were what looked like four *creatures*. In appearance, they were human, but each of them had four faces and four wings. ... This is what their faces were like: *Each of them had a face like a human being, and on the right side, a lion's face, and on the left side, a calf's face, and at the back, an eagle's face.* ... Spread out above the heads of the creatures was what looked something like an expanse, sparkling like crystal, and awesome.

**Ez 10:12** *Their entire bodies were covered with eyes; their backs, their hands, their wings, as well as their four wheels.*

Who are these 24 rulers surrounding God's throne? The Greek word πρεσβύτερος, from which 'priest' is derived, means elder, official, or leader. It was used for members of the Jewish Sanhedrin and leaders of the churches. The white clothing is symbolic of their imputed righteousness, and the golden crowns of their reward, variously described in the letters to the churches as crowns of righteousness, life, and glory. The number 24 represents 12 Jewish tribes of the OT and the 12 apostles of the NT, whose names are written on the gates and foundations of New Jerusalem (Re 21:12, 14). The saints are co-heirs

with Christ, so it's not surprising to see them connected proleptically with God's throne as Isaiah did. Man was created to rule the world, and only redeemed mankind is given this privilege. The 24 elders represent the saints of all ages.

Thunder and lightning express the awesomeness of God's majestic power. The seven lamps represent the Holy Spirit. He's never represented in Scripture as reigning or on the throne; that isn't his role. The glassy sea is immortalized in the hymn, Holy, holy, holy, by the line: 'all the saints adore thee, casting down their golden crowns around the *glassy sea*.' The sea of glass is a sea that is transparent like glass, and as clear as crystal. It symbolizes the tranquility of God's throne. Imagine the colors of the throne being reflected in it. A throne room is at the center of government, and here, everything is under control. The sea of glass contrasts with the turbulent seas of the world.

The four creatures, called cherubim in Ezekiel, are throne attendants who represent the world of nature, which will be liberated from its bondage to decay during the Messiah's reign on Earth. So, it's appropriate that they join in praising God. The lion, calf, man, and eagle represent wild animals, domestic animals, mankind, and birds. The fact that they're in heaven assures us that God's creation will be liberated during the millennium. Beyond that, we don't know; they're not promised immortality as the redeemed are.

## **Worshiping God in heaven (4:8-11)**

Each of the four creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night, they never take rest from saying: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. Whenever the creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to him who sits on the throne and lives forever and ever, the 24 elders bow down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory, honor, and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.

**Is 6:2-3** Seraphs were above him, *each having six wings*: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew and called to one another: *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty*; his glory fills the whole Earth.

In Ezekiel, the cherubim have four wings, and in Isaiah, the seraphs have six wings as here. They represent creation, just as the 24 elders represent redeemed humanity. They also portray God's attributes as reflected in creation: his majesty (lion), his omniscience (eagle), his omnipotence (calf), and his personhood (man). They are throne attendants, covered with eyes, front and back, and under the wings, indicating that nothing escapes their attention. Cherubim were stationed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life (Gn 3:24). They praise and thank the sovereign eternal God day and night, acknowledging his majesty.

The 24 elders bow down and join in worship, acknowledging his sovereignty by casting their crowns down before him. They rule with God but are completely submissive to him. They praise him as the Creator of all things and recognize that his will is supreme. He does whatever he wants and is the source of all life. The keyword is 'holy' which relates to his deity: his perfection, his apartness, his authority, and his power.

This is the throne room in heaven, the center of the universe, where God controls and sustains everything. This is the place where man's destiny is determined. Human history is under God's control, and the next chapter introduces us to the Lamb, the Savior of the world, who will reveal to John and us, the events that must occur before the end of the present age. The Lamb is one who was sacrificed so that people from every tribe, language, people, and nation might be redeemed. He's also the coming Messiah, who will come and defeat the enemy and eliminate all evil. He'll rule the world and restore it to its pre-curse condition, and then hand his kingship over to God the Father.

God is worthy to receive all power and glory because he is the creator of all things, and not only that, they owe their present existence to him, although most people choose to ignore him and to believe that they came into existence through mindless evolution. Everything was

created according to his will, not by chance. He is both creator and sustainer of the entire universe.

## The scroll of the world's destiny (5:1-4)

Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of him who sat on the throne. It had writing on both sides and was sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll? But no one in heaven or on Earth or under the Earth could open the scroll or look inside it. I wept greatly because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

**Ps 139:16** All the days ordained for me *were written in your book* before one of them came to be.

**Dn 12:1b, 4, 9** At that time your people whose names are found *written in the book* will be delivered. ... But you, Daniel, roll up and *seal the words of the scroll* until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge. .... Go your way, Daniel, because *the words are rolled up and sealed* until the time of the end.

**Ez 2:9-10** When I looked up, I saw *a hand stretched out to me*. *In it was a scroll*, which he unrolled before me. *On both sides of it were written words of lament, mourning, and woe*.

Here is a book that was written before creation, in which are recorded all the details of our lives (Ps 139:16), and the entire history of the world. It rests in the hand of God, who knows and controls everything. Daniel was told things that were written in this book of truth (Dn 10:21), and that at a certain time, everyone whose name was written in the book would be delivered (Dn 12:1).

The books of the Bible and other documents were once written on scrolls. They could be rolled up and sealed with wax, and then stamped for security. So, Daniel was told to shut up (in archives) and seal (preserve for posterity) what had been revealed to him from that book. Copies were made, and they were made public.

This scroll is of unparalleled significance. It contains the destiny of the world as determined by the sovereign will of God. We live in the last days, the time that extends from Pentecost to the Second Coming, and it's time for what God has determined to be revealed. But we're not given dates or names of people; prophecy is necessarily obscure.

The scroll is the title deed of the world. The Lamb has paid the price to reclaim the lost world, and he'll return to cast out the invader and take possession of it and be universally acknowledged as King of kings.

As the seals are removed, events are gradually revealed. The destiny of the world is a broad subject, but more specifically, it's Jesus the Messiah who is revealed. And not only he. Paul tells us that the creation is waiting in eager expectation for God's children to be unveiled (Ro 8:19). If Jesus' return to Earth as the King of kings is one climax to the book, an associated climax is the glorification of God's children, and another is the liberation of creation from its bondage to decay. Paul considers that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Ro 8:18).

Most of the book of Revelation describes the sufferings that we might experience before our glorification. Jesus said that nations will continue to be at war with each other, and there will be famines and earthquakes, but these are only the beginning of birth pains (Mt 24:7-8). As the seals are broken, the events of the last days are revealed to John in a series of visions, and through John to the servants of God who read his book. Jesus told his disciples about this renewal of all things, which will occur when he sits on his glorious throne and his disciples reign with him (Mt 19:28). But who is worthy to bring history to its foreordained consummation and reveal the future rulers? A mighty angel made a proclamation everywhere, and John was upset that no one worthy was found.

The scroll is the title deed of the Earth. The Lamb has paid the price to reclaim the lost world, and he'll return to cast out the invader, take possession of it, and be universally acknowledged as King of kings.

## **The Messiah is worthy to open the scroll (5:5-8)**

Then one of the elders said to me: Don't weep! Look, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the shoot of David, has triumphed. He's able to remove the seven seals and open the scroll. Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four creatures and the elders. The Lamb had 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 him who sat on the throne. When he took it, the four creatures and the twenty-four elders bowed before the Lamb. Each one held a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

**Gn 49:9-10** Judah is like a *lion's cub*. ... The kingship won't depart from Judah, nor the scepter from between his feet, until he to whom the kingship belongs shall come and all the nations submit to him.

**Ps 141:2** My prayer will come to you like the smoke from *incense*.

**Is 11:1** A *shoot* will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his *roots*, a branch will bear fruit.

**Is 53:7** He was oppressed and afflicted. *Like a lamb being led to the slaughter*, he didn't open his mouth. As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he remained silent.

**Zec 4:10b** These seven are the eyes of the Lord which range throughout the Earth.

One of the elders told John not to weep. Someone has been found worthy! He's none other than Jesus Christ! He's the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the promised Messiah. The coming king of Israel has triumphed. Jesus conquered sin, Satan, and death by his self-sacrifice on the cross. He now has the authority to defeat all his enemies, both human and demonic, and establish his kingdom on Earth, and bring it to a fitting conclusion. Because of Jesus, history will have a good ending, like a fairy tale. Life isn't meaningless.

Jesus descended from the tribe of Judah, the tribe from which Jewish kings arose. He is the conquering Messiah to whom the scepter belongs

(Gn 49:10). But rather than him being depicted as a lion, he's seen as a sacrificial animal, a lamb bearing the marks of slaughter, looking as if it has been slain, but of course, we know he came back to life. Imagine our Savior in his humiliation, how he suffered and died for us. But now he's ascended to heaven and is standing in the center of the throne, elsewhere described as seated at the right hand of the Father. His exalted position means equality with God. Jesus also was, is, and is to come. His seven horns depict his universal power, and his seven eyes are identified here as the seven spirits of God sent out into all the Earth; the Holy Spirit, whom he sends on a worldwide mission, to regenerate and indwell believers (Jn 16:7), and to mark them as a seal (Eph 4:30), until Christ returns to establish his kingdom.

Jesus comes and takes the scroll from the hand of the Father while all who are present fall prostrate to worship him. They hold harps, symbolizing the musical accompaniment to his praise, and bowls of incense, symbolizing the constant prayer of the saints. For example, as in the Lord's prayer: Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it's in heaven. The prayers of the saints of all ages have been heard, and now God will answer them. These prayers play an essential part in bringing justice to the Earth and judgment upon its rebellious inhabitants.

In the letters to the church leaders, believers are encouraged to be victorious, which they will be because of the blood of the Lamb and their testimony. They'll overcome because he overcame.

### **Praising the Messiah who suffered (5:9-14)**

And they were singing a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God people from every tribe, language, people, and nation. You've conferred kingship on them and made them priests to serve our God, and they'll reign over the Earth. Then I looked and saw many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne, the creatures, and the elders, and I heard them saying with a loud voice: The Lamb who was slain is worthy to receive authority, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and praise! Then I heard every creature in heaven and on

Earth, and under the Earth, and on the sea and all that is in them, saying: To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise, honor, glory, and power forever and ever! The four creatures said: Amen, and the elders bowed down and worshiped.

**Ps 40:3a** He put a *new song* in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

**Dn 7:10b** Thousands upon thousands attended him, *ten thousand times ten thousand* stood before him.

The Lamb is worthy to open the seals and reveal the future because by his death, he paid the price for the salvation of millions of souls: people from all language groups. He's the one who will bring the world to its planned consummation. He gave his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28). They were bought with a price (1 Co 6:20); with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Pt 1:19).

The saints have been given kingship and made priests to serve their God, as explained in Revelation 1:6. The significant information here is that they'll reign *over the Earth*. The preposition after the verb 'reign,' is more commonly translated as 'over' and after the resurrection, the home of the saints is in New Jerusalem, not on Earth. They'll rule the Earth with Christ for 1000 years from the heavenly realm, and forever after that (22:5). This is eternal life! This is our glorification and what we're saved for!

Millions of angels join in this celebration in heaven as God's will has been accomplished. The Lord Jesus Christ receives power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and praise. The angels are not exalted like the saints, who will reign with Christ (Heb 2:5-8). They're not seated on thrones, and they don't address the Lamb directly. They are described as ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation (Heb 1:14). All creation joins in to praise both Father and Son. The creatures say: 'Amen,' while the elders, representative of all the saints, bow down and worship.

The creatures and the elders sing a new song because of new circumstances. They celebrate a new act of divine deliverance. Not only are the saints saved from their sins and made righteous, but now they're

about to rule the nations on Earth under their king, the Messiah, who will liberate creation from its bondage to decay.