

They have also healed the hurt of my people slightly

God called on the tribe of Benjamin who lived in the Jerusalem area to blow the trumpet (a horn); this signalled grave danger (1; cp. 4:5,19, 21). The invaders would come and destroy the land, as sheep devour lush pasture (3–5). The day of peace was running out, giving way to the long shadows of evening (4). Jerusalem was rotten to the core being likened to an underground reservoir which supplied only polluted water. The wicked city was ripe for judgment (6–8). The whole nation was corrupt, and to make matters worse, prophet and priest were lulling the people into complacency by smooth talk with promises of peace. *They have also healed the hurt of my people slightly, saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace* (14). Sin is like a tumour that needs to be removed by thorough surgery. The ointment of soothing platitudes is useless.

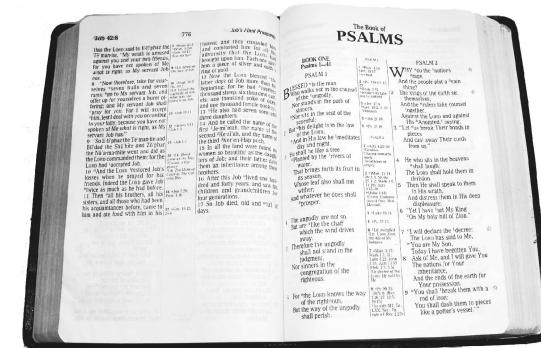
The parallel for us today is obvious. False 'Christianity' with its men-pleasing leaders has forsaken God's word, except for its comforting passages. They do not warn of judgment nor of hell; they do not preach biblical repentance and faith in God; they deny the necessity of atonement for sin through the death of Christ. Thousands are enchanted and deceived by these false teachers. They do not realise that they are following them to destruction. **Rogue preachers may ease the pain of a guilty conscience by pretending that there will be no judgment for sin, but they fail to deal with the real problem of those who are lost.** Pray much for your pastor and for all gospel ministers, that they will be kept faithful to God's word and that they will boldly proclaim the whole counsel of God.

*When nations are to perish in their sins,
'Tis in the church the leprosy begins:
The priest whose office is, with zeal sincere,
To watch the fountain, and preserve it clear,
Carelessly nods and sleeps upon the brink,
While others poison what the flock must drink.*

(from William Cowper's 'Expostulation')

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



May 2015

Bible readings from Revelation chapters 13 to 22
Jeremiah chapters 1 to 6

But what will you do in the end?

Jeremiah searched Jerusalem to find a God-fearing man, a seeker of truth (1). Many used the name of God to confirm their solemn oaths, saying, ‘*As the LORD lives*’ (2) but those words were not a reality in their lives. They were living as if God did not exist; they were stubborn and rebellious (3–5). The people used the name of the Lord, saying, ‘*As the LORD lives*’ (2), but they were also swearing by false gods (7). God said, ‘*When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery*’ (7). Unfaithfulness was the mark of Jeremiah’s people. They were unfaithful to God and unfaithful to their own wives (8). Religion was in a sorry state where the recognised prophets *spoke falsely of the LORD and have said, ‘He will do nothing’* (12, ESV).

The Lord gave Jeremiah another grim prophecy of judgment (14–18). He would not bring complete destruction but when judgment came, the survivors would ask, ‘*Why does the LORD our God do all these things to us?*’ (18–19). They were blind to their own wickedness and could not imagine that they deserved judgment. God’s answer to their question was that because they had forsaken him to serve foreign gods in Judah, they would be punished in having to serve foreigners in a foreign land (19). They had not sought him to give rain for their harvests (22–25). We know from the rest of the prophecy that they had turned away from God to worship Baal. This god was supposed to be able to give good harvests but it was powerless.

Wicked men in Judah oppressed the poor, the needy and the orphan (26–29). Even more terrible was the corruption of religion. God charged and challenged the nation, ‘*An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and my people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?*’ (30–31). Many people still love to hear preaching which comforts them in their sin rather than challenging them to repent. **If this describes you, I repeat the question that God addressed to his sinning people: ‘*But what will you do in the end?*’ You will be in for a rude awaking on the day of judgment!**

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I cannot hold my peace

Jeremiah had proclaimed God's call for heartfelt repentance (3:22 to 4:4) but his message was ignored. The prophet was obliged to pronounce judgment on the wicked nation. He called for the trumpet to be blown. This was the blast of a horn which signalled grave danger (5). Jeremiah's message was hated because he told the people that God would bring disaster upon them because of their sin and that there would be an invasion from the north (6,8,17,27–29; cp. 1:13–15). *The lion* (7) is probably a reference to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Jeremiah did not enjoy preaching a message of judgment. He was pained from the depths of his being and he said, '*I cannot hold my peace.*' He felt compelled to warn the people of coming judgment (19–20). The Bible warns us about the day of judgment, of hell, and of everlasting torment for the unbeliever. We need courage to proclaim such an awesome message because people will scoff at us, despise us and oppose us. We must never proclaim judgment without pointing men and women to Christ, who is their only hope. God *delights in mercy* (Micah 7:18) and he pleaded through Jeremiah, '*O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved*' (14). If we have any love or concern for sinners, we will not remain silent but rather proclaim the gospel.

At the end of this chapter, Zion (Jerusalem) is pictured first as a gaudy harlot seeking to attract lovers by dressing herself in fine clothing, adorning herself with jewellery, and by painting her face. Her lovers (Egypt and Assyria) rather than being attracted to her would turn against her. They were unfaithful and fickle, just as she had been to her God (30; cp. 2:36). The second picture is of a forlorn woman, dejected and rejected (31). **What a warning this picture presents! Satan presents sin as something very attractive and to be desired, giving us greater freedom, but its end is shame and death (cp. Genesis 3:4–5). There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death (Proverbs 14:12).**

Here is the patience and the faith of the saints

Two agents of Satan appear in this chapter: *a beast rising up out of the sea* (1–10) and *a beast coming up out of the earth* (11–18). Hendriksen describes the first beast as 'Satan's hand' persecuting the church and the second as the 'the devil's mind' deceiving the world (MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 144).

The beast emerging from the sea was a fearsome monster with ten horns each with a crown and with seven heads on which was a blasphemous name. The body of the creature was like that of a leopard with feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. He was given power and authority by the dragon; one of his heads had received a fatal wound which was then healed. The whole world was amazed and all whose names were not in the Lamb's book of life followed and worshipped the beast. He uttered pompous and blasphemous boasts against God for '*forty-two months*' (throughout the gospel age). God is sovereign over the beast: *And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them* (1–8).

The sea is a symbol of the peoples and nations of the world (cp. 17:15). The beast represents their godless kings and governments which have persecuted the people of God throughout the ages – Babylonia, Rome, etc. (cp. Daniel 7:1–8,17,21). One of these empires was given an apparent death blow but later revived and continued to persecute the church. Some rulers have blasphemed God and taken divine titles. The Roman emperor of John's day demanded to be worshipped as God. Throughout church history governments have claimed authority that belongs to God and have persecuted the church. The persecution will become more intense than ever towards the end of the age. **What are Christians to do when the cause of God seems to be in terminal decline? We must remember that God is sovereign and that all his purposes will be fulfilled (see Psalm 11).** He will avenge his suffering people. Let us always persevere! *Here is the patience and faith of the saints* (10; cp. 14:12).

The mark ... of the beast

The *beast coming up out of the earth ... had two horns like a lamb, and spoke like a dragon* (11). Lambs are harmless and attractive creatures but this beast was a dragon in lamb's clothing! He caused everyone to worship the first beast, deceiving them with his satanic signs and wonders. He made an image of the beast which appeared to speak. All who did not worship the image were killed (13–15). He decreed that everyone on earth should receive a mark on their right hand or forehead. Only those who had *'the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name'* were allowed to buy or sell (16–17).

The second beast was also called *'the false prophet'* (19:20). He represents all manner of false religion. They have their counterfeit miracles which deceive the gullible and there will be a dramatic increase in false religion before the second coming of Christ (cp. Matthew 7:21–23; 24:24). New-age religion with its occult practices is spreading at an alarming rate and some of its ideas have found their way into many churches (eg. healing of the memories, healing with crystals and speaking 'creative words'). *Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light* (2 Corinthians 11:14).

There are many theories concerning *'the mark of the beast'*. The number 'seven' so often used in Revelation is the number of perfection. Hendriksen writes, 'Six means missing the mark, or failure. Seven means perfection or victory. Rejoice, O Church of God! The victory is on your side. The number of the beast is 666, that is failure upon failure upon failure! It is the number of man, for the beast glories in man; and must fail!' (MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 151).

God's people are sealed in their foreheads because they belong to him (7:3; 14:1), whereas those who have the mark of the beast are those who belong to Satan. They are at home in this world with all its activities (buying and selling) but they have upon them the mark of eternal loss and doom. **Whose mark is upon you? If you are not a Christian, repent of your sin and follow Christ before it is too late!**

I will heal your backslidings

The theme of Judah's unfaithfulness to God is continued in today's reading. Israel, the northern kingdom, and Judah in the south, were like two sisters, both unfaithful to their God (6–11). The Lord had pleaded with Israel to return to him but she had ignored his pleas. She was now divorced from God and was languishing in Assyrian captivity. Judah should have taken Israel's experience as a warning but she did not fear the consequences of her own sin and spiritual adultery (7–9). The worship of Jehovah that was found in Judah was a pretence (10; cp. 2:22). We too must be wary of hypocrisy. The Lord is not deceived by sham religion; he wants our wholehearted commitment.

God is patient, kind and gracious. He passionately pleaded with his backsliding people to return to him (1,7,12,14; 4:1): *'Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings'* (22). The Lord was waiting to hear heartfelt words of repentance such as are found in verses 22b to 25. He was looking for more than circumcision, the outward symbol of commitment to himself. He wanted a circumcision of the heart, which would be seen in love, obedience and faithfulness to himself (4:1–4; cp. Romans 2:25–29). The Lord promises those who truly repent and turn to him, *'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely'* (Hosea 14:4). God longed to bless his erring people but this was not possible unless they returned to him (19).

Have you grown cold in your love and devotion to God? Are you miserable deep within your heart? Why continue in your backslidden condition? God has not changed. He still says, *'I will heal your backslidings.'* He is waiting to receive you as you come to him in repentance.

*The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne
And worship only thee.*

(William Cowper)

My people have forgotten me

God had planted Israel and Judah as a choice vine but they did not produce the good fruit of holiness. They had become like a wild vine that produced bitter fruit (21; cp. Isaiah 5:1–7). This bad fruit was that of spiritual adultery (20). When we come to faith in Christ, our relationship to him is like that of a bride to her husband. Israel was the ‘bride’ of God (32; 3:1), the church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25–27; Revelation 21:2,9–10).

The Jews were bent on unfaithfulness to God going after the fertility religions of Canaan. They were likened to a female donkey on heat, sniffing at the wind for the scent of a mate (23–24). Baal was a fertility god and worship of him involved immoral acts with supposedly sacred people at the shrines. Some forms of witchcraft are similar in their practices. Unfaithfulness to God is spiritual adultery and the people of Judah were likened to a prostitute (3:1–3).

Sin has a dreadful effect upon the conscience if we refuse to turn from it. The people lied about their idolatry (23) and they killed God’s true prophets (30). They were responsible for the slaughter of the poor and the innocent (34) and yet they claimed that they had not sinned (35). They had no sense of shame (3:3) because of the hardness of their heart.

The Lord said, “*My people have forgotten me days without number*” (32). That is a common problem. We so easily forget God, taking his blessings for granted and rarely giving thanks. **We then neglect to have regular times of worship, prayer and Bible reading.** If we forget God, we will almost certainly find that our thinking will be conformed to the ways of this world. If we love and follow the world, we will be guilty of spiritual adultery (James 4:4).

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord

This chapter has three sections, each beginning with the words, ‘*I looked*’ or ‘*I saw*’ (1,6,14). John saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with one hundred and forty-four thousand; these are the whole company of God’s elect (1; cp. 7:4). Mount Zion is not earthly Jerusalem but *the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem* (Hebrews 12:22). It is heaven because John writes, ‘*And I heard a voice from heaven*’ (2). He heard powerful but glorious singing and the playing of harps. The song was a new song that only the redeemed could sing; it was a song of grateful adoration to the Lamb who loved them and died to save them from their sins. Some characteristics of the redeemed are described in verse 4.

- They are described as ‘*virgins*’ because they have kept themselves for the Lamb and are faithful to God. Unfaithfulness to God is likened to adultery in Scripture (James 4:4).
- They *follow the Lamb*; this indicates obedience to his voice.
- They are *first-fruits to God and to the Lamb* (cp. James 1:18). The first-fruits of the harvest were given to God in Old Testament times. This is a symbol of separation from the rest of the world to God.

John then saw three angels (6,8,9). The first had ‘*the everlasting gospel*’ which must be preached throughout the world until Christ returns (Matthew 24:14). He urges everyone to honour God, to give him glory and to *worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water* (6–7). Babylon stands for the world with all its seduction and the second angel announced its fall (8). The third angel proclaimed judgement on those who worship the beast. They will be tormented in hell for ever and ever (9–11). Heaven is everlasting and so is hell! John then heard a voice from heaven telling him to write, ‘*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord*’ (13). They are now at rest from their labours which are recognised by God and rewarded. To ‘*die in the Lord*’ leads to indescribable blessing, but to die without Christ leads to unimaginable suffering. **How are things with you? If you want to die in the Lord, you must live for him now.**

The great winepress of the wrath of God

John now sees the Lord Jesus coming as King and Judge (14; cp. Daniel 7:13; Matthew 25:31). He is described as *'one like the Son of Man'*, the title is used for the Lord Jesus in chapter 1:13. The Lord Jesus also described himself as the *'Son of Man'* (eg. Mark 2:10). The end of the world is likened to reaping a harvest (15; cp. Matthew 3:12). The Lord Jesus has a sharp sickle in his hand. An angel comes out of the temple, the place of God's holiness with a message from God the Father. He calls on the Son to thrust his sickle on the earth and to reap. The righteous are gathered to join their Saviour in glory but the ungodly are gathered to suffer God's wrath (14–20).

Another angel comes from heaven with a sharp sickle to gather the harvest of the wicked. He is also urged by another angel to thrust in his sickle. The ungodly are likened to fully ripe grapes to be thrown into *'the great winepress of the wrath of God'* (17–20). A huge lake of blood comes out of the winepress for one thousand six hundred furlongs about (180 miles or 288 kilometres).

The very language of these verses proves that this is not a literal description of the judgement when Christ returns. The *'vine of the earth'* is a picture of godless humanity while *'her grapes'* speak of individual unbelievers (18). The wrath of God and the torment in hell are described in physical terms (10–11, 19–20) but the spiritual reality will be far worse than words can describe. Our own minds can hardly come to terms with such judgement. **We must humble ourselves before the all-wise God when we meet with difficult passages in the Bible which is quite clear in teaching that all who die without Christ will suffer in hell.** It will be a dreadful day for tyrants like Hitler or Stalin, but how sad for those who have heard the gospel regularly in church or youth groups, and, though near to God's kingdom, have never followed Christ in faith and repentance. Let us examine our own hearts to be sure that they are right with God. If there is any doubt, we must call upon God to save us.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters

Many Bible scholars believe that chapters 2 to 6 cover the first five years of Jeremiah's ministry. This was before the Book of the Law was discovered in the temple. Josiah then destroyed idol shrines and encouraged the people to worship Jehovah (2 Kings chapters 22 to 23). This reformation was short-lived however.

In this chapter, the Lord reminds his people of the youth of their nation. When they left Egypt, they loved God, they followed him and they were separated to him. *'Israel was holiness to the LORD'* (2–3). He asked his people what injustice they had found in him to cause them to be idolaters (5). They had wickedly spurned God and were forgetful and ungrateful for all his goodness to them. Their priests did not know nor seek the Lord, their rulers were wicked and their prophets were false (6–8).

In charging the Jews with unfaithfulness, God contrasted them with the people of heathen nations. The idol worshippers had remained faithful to their gods which were useless, yet the Jews had left the living God to embrace useless religion (9–11). God charged them with two evils: *'They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters* (which were pure, clean and satisfying), *and hewn themselves cisterns — broken cisterns, that can hold no water.'* These *'cisterns'* were murky, stagnant and polluted (12–13). The people had taken in the useless waters of trusting in Egypt and Assyria, and their gods, rather than trusting in the Lord. They had forsaken the Lord because his fear was not in them (17–19). God is always faithful to us, yet we are prone to wander from him. How we need his fear within us! What do you know of *'the fear of the LORD'*, which is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10)?

*I tried the broken cisterns, Lord, but ah! the waters failed!
Even as I stooped to drink they fled and mocked me as I wailed.*

*Now none but Christ can satisfy, none other name for me:
There's love and life and lasting joy, Lord Jesus found in thee!*

(Name of author unknown).

I am ready to perform my word

The Lord gave Jeremiah two visions, one of a branch of an almond tree (11) and the other of a boiling pot facing away from the north (13). There is a play on the Hebrew word for ‘*almond tree*’ (‘shaqed’) and the word in verse 12 for ‘*ready*’ (‘shaqad’) which can be translated ‘*awake*’ or ‘*watchful*’. The almond tree was the first tree to ‘*awake*’ and blossom in the spring in Judah. In this vision the Lord told Jeremiah, ‘*I am ready to perform my word*’ (12). God was reassuring the prophet that his word is true and sure, and that he would do what he said he would do.

In the vision of the boiling pot (13), God was indicating to Jeremiah that though the Assyrian empire was crumbling he would use another northern country to inflict judgment on his wicked, unfaithful people (14–16). This message of judgment was to bring bitter persecution to the prophet but he was still to speak all that God commanded him. He had no need to fear, however, for God was with him (17–19). ‘*They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you*’ (19). If we are faithful to the Bible and to its teaching we will be despised. We have the truth that this world desperately needs and we must proclaim it whatever the personal cost.

God had warned the Jews about the consequences of unfaithfulness and idolatry hundreds of years earlier, when they were about to enter the promised land (eg. Deuteronomy 4:23–28). The northern kingdom (Israel) had already been dispossessed of their land and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire. Judah in the south had not heeded the warnings given by the prophets. God was now ready to perform his word. **We must not confuse the patience and mercy of the Lord with indifference to sin (Romans 2:3–8). God will perform his word and punish sinners.** *He who is often reprovved, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy* (Proverbs 29:1). Let us never forget this warning and pray that God will give us grace to remain faithful to him.

The song of Moses ... and of the Lamb

We now come to the fifth parallel section of Revelation in which God’s judgement on the wicked throughout history is revealed. John saw *another sign in heaven, great and marvellous: seven angels having the seven last plagues*. One of the four living creatures (cp. 4:6–9) gave them *seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God* (1,7). These bowls speak of the judgements of God through history, the seventh speaking of the final judgement. ‘*It is done!*’ (16:17).

John saw in heaven *something like a sea of glass mingled with fire* (2). Hendriksen sees this as a symbol of ‘*God’s transparent righteousness revealed in judgement upon the wicked*’ (MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 159), taking the statement in verse 4 as a comment on this – ‘*For your judgements have been manifested.*’ God’s people from all ages are described here as those who have victory over the beast. The unity of Old and New Testament saints is seen in the title of their song: ‘*The song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb*’ (3).

Read the song of Moses in Exodus chapter 15. It is a glorious song of victory which magnifies God for his triumph over the Egyptians after he had destroyed Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea. When the Lord Jesus has destroyed Satan and all the wicked we too shall exalt the Lord in ‘*the song of Moses ... and the song of the Lamb*’. Look at the great themes expressed in this song (3–4).

- God’s works are *great and marvellous*.
- His ways are *just and true*.
- He is to be feared and his name glorified.
- He is holy in his judgements.

What glory it will be to worship and to adore the triune God in heaven! What a privilege to be with him for ever and ever and to be made perfect at last! *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Romans 8:18). **Let us be encouraged to persevere and make it our aim to please the Lord Jesus who has done so much for us.**

The wrath of God who lives forever and ever

John looked and saw that *the temple* (better translated ‘sanctuary’) of *the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened* (5). The Jewish tabernacle on earth housed the ark of the covenant which contained ‘*the testimony*’ (the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God on tablets of stone; cp. Exodus 25:16, 21; 31:18; 34:1). God’s commandments have been broken by all people and *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men* (Romans 1:18).

Seven angels came out of the sanctuary. They were clothed in pure bright linen and each had a belt of gold around his chest (6). One of the four living creatures gave to each of the seven angels *seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever* (7). The four living creatures were cherubim (cp. 4:6; Ezekiel 1:4–28; 10:20–22); these angelic beings guard the holy things of God (cp. Genesis 3:24; Exodus 25:20). The golden bowls were *full* of God’s holy wrath, indicating the fierceness and severity of his anger.

The sanctuary was filled with smoke coming from the glory of God, a symbol of God’s holy anger (cp. Psalm 18:7–8; Isaiah 6:3–4). No one was able to enter the sanctuary until the *seven plagues of the seven angels were completed* (8). God’s wrath is not like human anger when self-control is often lost in an explosion of rage; it is his settled, controlled and righteous indignation and reaction to sin. We need a Saviour because we are sinners. **Praise God for his marvellous grace and mercy in giving his holy Son to die on the cross to be our Saviour! If you have not trusted in the Lord Jesus to save you, I urge you to repent of your sins and follow him.**

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned he stood;
Sealed my pardon with his blood:
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!*

(Philip P. Bliss)

I have put my words in your mouth

The Lord told Jeremiah, ‘*Before you were born I sanctified you; and I ordained you a prophet to the nations*’ (5). Jeremiah was painfully aware of his own youthfulness and replied, ‘*Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth*’ (6). Who would pay attention to such a young man who was probably a teenager? Most people in Judah would prefer to listen to older people with experience behind them and take counsel from them; they respected the wisdom of their elders.

Dale Ralph Davis writes, ‘Notice that you see also the prophet’s position with the Word. The Lord says, “See I have appointed you this day over the nations and the kingdoms.” That is absolutely staggering ... So whatever Yahweh says about a nation or a kingdom through Jeremiah will take place. You see that fleshed out in chapters 18 and 27. (TRUE WORD FOR TOUGH TIMES, Page 18)

The Lord reassured Jeremiah concerning his enemies, ‘*Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you*’ (8–9). He touched Jeremiah’s mouth saying, ‘*Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant*’ (9–10). There is an emphasis on judgment here, the four negative statements are placed before the two positives.

Jeremiah had a tough, heartbreaking ministry but God was always with him. Do you feel inadequate to serve God? That is not a bad thing because like Jeremiah, you are inadequate in your own strength. Remember, when God calls us to work for him, he also equips us. Are you full of foreboding or of fear? **He does not promise us an easy Christian life, but he will safely bring us through trials, through suffering and through death, if we will but trust him (Romans 8:35–39).**

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest in the town of Anathoth, some three miles north-east of Jerusalem (1). The priests of Anathoth were probably descended from Abiathar, who was disgraced during the reign of King Solomon (1 Kings 2:26). Jeremiah would have been born during the reign of Manasseh, the most wicked king ever to reign over Judah. Josiah became king two years after the death of Manasseh.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in the days of:

- Josiah (640–609 BC). *He did what was right in the sight of the LORD* (2 Kings 22:2).
- Jehoahaz (3 months) also known as Shallum (Jeremiah 22:11). *He did evil in the sight of the LORD* (2 Kings 23:32).
- Jehoiakim (609–598 BC) also known as Eliakim (2 Kings 23:34). *He did evil in the sight of the LORD* (2 Kings 23:37).
- Jehoiachin (3 months) also known as Jeconiah (Jeremiah 24:1). *He did evil in the sight of the LORD* (2 Kings 24:9).
- Zedekiah (597–586 BC) also known as Mattaniah (2 Kings 24:17). *He also did evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD* (2 Chronicles 36:12).
- Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were the sons of King Josiah. Jehoiachin was the son of Jehoiakim

The Lord had set Jeremiah apart (*'sanctified'*) for his work before he was born. He reassured Jeremiah, telling him, *'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you'* (5; cp. Galatians 1:15). God the Father has also chosen every believer in Christ *according to the good pleasure of his will*. This choice was made before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4–5; 2 Timothy 1:9). Let us think back as far as we can in our imagination – before the great galaxies were created and placed in the vastness that we call 'the universe'. God set his love upon us and chose us in Christ before time began. **If God is for us and has purposes of good for us, what have we to fear (see Romans 8:28–31)?**

Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments

Chapter 15 introduced us to the seven angels having the last seven plagues (15:1,6–8). John heard the voice of the Lord commanding the seven angels to *pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth*. (1). The first five of these plagues and the first four of chapter 8 remind us of some of the plagues visited upon Egypt. Hendriksen writes, 'These plagues recorded in Exodus 7–10 foreshadow all the manifestations of God's wrath upon the wicked (cf. Deuteronomy 28:20). Throughout history, especially during this entire new dispensation, God is using every part of the universe to destroy the impenitent and persecutors of his people' (MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 161).

The first bowl was poured out on the earth (land) causing a *foul and loathsome sore* to come upon *those who had the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image* (2). They were selected for judgement, but the Lord's people were preserved. God's judgements are not sent to punish his people; the Lord Jesus has already borne our punishment. The second plague was poured out on the sea so that it became as blood, killing every living creature within it. The third plague affected the rivers and springs of water in a similar manner (3–4). God has punished the wicked with plagues and national disasters throughout history, but at the end of the age his judgement will be universal (as it was when he flooded the whole earth).

John heard the angel of the waters saying, *'You are righteous, O Lord.'* (6). It is just that God punishes the enemies of his people. They had shed the blood of saints and prophets and they now reap what they had sown; he gave them blood to drink (5–6). The souls of the martyrs were crying from beneath the altar for divine retribution (6:9–10) and John heard a voice from the altar saying, *'Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgements'* (5–6). **The Lord is perfectly wise and fair in his judgement of sinners. He never makes a mistake and he does answer the prayers of his persecuted people.**

They blasphemed the God of heaven ... and did not repent

The fourth angel poured his bowl of wrath upon the sun, causing it to scorch people with fire (8). This picture contrasts with that of God's people in heaven – *'The sun shall not strike them, nor any heat'* (7:16). We are again reminded of God's sovereignty in judgement; he *has power over these plagues* (9).

The fifth bowl was poured on *the throne of the beast* (10). This throne was the centre of antichristian government. Derek Thomas writes, 'The very seat of his government is challenged, plunging his kingdom into darkness. It is reminiscent of the plague of darkness over Egypt. In the Exodus story, the plague was a direct attack upon Pharaoh who was believed to be the sun god Ra. The fifth bowl identifies God's total sovereignty over Satan and his forces' (LET'S STUDY REVELATION, page 129).

When the fourth, fifth and seventh bowls were poured out men *blasphemed the God of heaven ... and did not repent of their deeds* (9–11,21). Though they had seen the awesome power of God in judgement and *were scorched with great heat and gnawed their tongues because of the pain ... they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they did not repent of their deeds* (9–11; cp. verse 2). Like Pharaoh the Egyptian they hardened their hearts against God (Exodus 7:13–14; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,12,35).

The longer we continue in sin, the harder our hearts become towards God. We become deliberately blind to the works of God in judgement and in mercy. When natural disasters occur, unbelievers often blame God. **Disasters are God-given warnings calling us to repentance (Luke 13:1–5). We will have no excuse if we refuse his offers of mercy.**

1. Prophecies and events in Judah (chapters 1 to 42)

The call of Jeremiah	–	1:1–19
Prophecies mainly in Josiah's reign	–	2:1 to 20:18
Prophecies mainly in Zedekiah's reign	–	21:1 to 24:10
Prophecies during Jehoiakim's reign	–	25:1 to 26:24
Prophecies during Zedekiah's reign	–	27:1 to 34:22
Prophecies during Jehoiakim's reign	–	35:1 to 36:32
Prophecies during Zedekiah's reign	–	37:1 to 38:28
The collapse of Jerusalem	–	39:1–18

2. Prophecies in Egypt (chapters 43 to 44)

3. Jeremiah's message to Baruch (chapter 45)

4. Prophecies against foreign nations (chapters 46 to 51)

5. Review of Zedekiah's reign; collapse of Jerusalem and exile in Babylon (chapter 52).

Recommended book:

True Word for Tough Times by Dale Ralph Davis published by Evangelical Press. The book is a transcript of five sermons on Jeremiah which were preached at the Evangelical Movement of Wales Conference in Aberystwyth in August 2010.

JEREMIAH

8 MAY

Revelation 16:12–21

Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches

Jeremiah is the longest book of the prophets. He was the son of a priest, and his ministry covered a period of more than forty years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign over Judah until after the fall of Jerusalem (1:1–2; 43:1 to 44:30). This period is covered in 2 Kings chapters 22 to 25 and in 2 Chronicles chapters 35 & 36. Josiah, a godly king, purged the land of idolatry (2 Chronicles 34:3–8) but his reformation did not remove idolatry from the hearts of the people. Josiah's sons were wicked and the religious leadership was corrupt. After Josiah's death, idolatry again flourished.

Jeremiah warned the people that the Lord would punish them by delivering them into the hands of the Babylonians. He told them that it would be futile to resist because the Babylonians were God's instrument of judgment upon them. Jeremiah was hated and considered to be a traitor for bringing such a message but he pleaded with the people to forsake their wicked ways and to return to the Lord. He was persecuted, imprisoned and threatened with death (20:2; 26:8–11; 37:1 to 38:13). Even the people of his own town of Anathoth and family members threatened to kill him (11:21; 12:6). Jeremiah experienced much loneliness and heartache in his ministry and he is known as 'the weeping prophet' (9:1; 13:17). His message was not only of judgment but also of a gracious God who has mercy on repenting sinners (eg. 3:12–15,22; 4:1–2). He also saw beyond the captivity of the Jews in Babylon to the coming of Christ, the '*Branch of righteousness*' (23:5–6; 33:14–17) and to the New Covenant (31:31–33; 32:40).

After the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was treated kindly by the Babylonians (39:11–12; 40:2–5). The Jews who were left in the land fled to Egypt after the murder of Gedaliah, the governor appointed by Babylon. They took Jeremiah with them against his will and he prophesied against them (chapters 42 to 44). Jewish tradition has it that Jeremiah was stoned to death by the Jews in Egypt because of his prophecies against them.

The sixth bowl was poured out on the great River Euphrates which represents Assyria, Babylon and the wicked world. It was dried up and a road was prepared so that all the antichristian powers could make their final assault on the church. These were represented by the dragon (Satan), the beast (antichristian government) and the false prophet (antichristian religion). This leads us to the battle of Armageddon which is also described in chapter 19:11–21; Armageddon means 'mountain of Megiddo'. The Lord had once delivered Israel and given a great victory on the battlefield of Megiddo (Judges 5:19–20). God delivers his people when all seems hopeless (cp. 2 Kings 19:10–11, 35–36) and so it will be at the end of the age.

All the powers of hell unite to crush the people of God once and for all but the Lord Jesus will return suddenly to deliver them (13–16). Hendriksen comments, 'When God's children, oppressed on every side, cry for help; then, suddenly, dramatically, Christ will appear to deliver his people. That final tribulation and that appearance of Christ on clouds of glory to deliver his people, that is Armageddon' (MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 163).

The seventh bowl paints a terrifying picture of the final judgement. John again heard the voice of God calling from the temple of heaven saying, '*It is done!*' (17; cp. verse 1). The earth will be shaken with the greatest ever earthquake, cities will collapse, islands and mountains will disappear. Babylon, with all its seduction and opposition to Christ, will be crushed for ever. Massive hailstones will rain down from heaven on impenitent sinners who blaspheme God (18–21).

The Lord Jesus says, '*Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments*' (15; cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). **He will return suddenly! What must we do to be prepared?** We must keep our garments; in other words, we have to keep ourselves unspotted from the world and its godless ways and lead a holy life, aiming always to please God (cp. James 1:27; 1 Peter 1:15–16).

Drunk with the blood of the saints

Chapters 17 to 19 contain the sixth parallel section in the book of Revelation in which we read of:

- The character of Babylon (17:1–6).
- The history of the beast (17:7–18).
- The fall of Babylon (18:1–24).
- Rejoicing in heaven because of the overthrow of Babylon and because of the marriage of the Lamb (19:1–10).
- The battle of Armageddon (19:11–21).

One of the angels who had the seven bowls of wrath invited John to witness the judgement of *'the great harlot'* who is Babylon (1,5). We must not confuse this woman with the radiant woman of chapter 12 who fled into the wilderness. That woman is the church, the bride of Christ, *'the holy city, new Jerusalem'*. She is a beautiful bride (21:2). The woman we are now reading about is also a city. She is Babylon and she is an ugly prostitute. The scarlet beast on which she was seated is the same creature we read of earlier which is *full of names of blasphemy* (3; cp. 13:1). He is a symbol of the antichristian governments and kings of the world who have persecuted God's people through the ages.

'The great harlot' was arrayed in costly garments and adorned with expensive jewellery which was a covering for her moral and spiritual ugliness. The golden bowl in her hand was full of abominations and filth. Her character is marked by gross immorality. She was drunk *with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus* (4–6). Babylon is this world with all its seductive charms. Hendriksen observes, 'It symbolizes the concentration of the luxury, vice and glamour of this world. It is the world viewed as the embodiment of *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life* (1 John 2:16)' [MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 168]. **We must not be deceived by the seduction of the world but rather seek with all our heart to lead a godly life. We have been called to shine as lights in the darkness (Ephesians 5:1–14).**

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

The glorious prospect of heaven may seem too good to be true, but it is no illusion. The angel said to John, *'These words are faithful and true'* (6; cp. 21:5). There is a blessing for all who keep the words of this book but a curse for any who dare to take away from it by denying parts of the Bible or by adding their man-made traditions to it (7,18–19). The angel said, *'Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.'* Do you believe and obey the Bible? John was so overwhelmed with all that he had seen that he again repeated his earlier mistake of attempting to worship the angel who showed him these things (8; cp.19:10).

The angel told John, *'Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand'* (10). The message of Revelation, of the Bible, must be proclaimed. We must warn sinners of the wrath of God, explain the good news of the gospel, point them to our precious Saviour. Time is short; we cannot afford to be complacent.

There is a frightening finality about the words of verse 11 with no second chance to be right with God or to be cleansed from sin after we die. The unrighteous and the filthy will remain that way and they will be shut out of heaven for ever (15).

The Lord Jesus states three times in this chapter, *'Behold, I am coming quickly!'* (7,12,20). He will richly reward faithful service (12) and will give access to the tree of life to those who keep his commandments (14). There are words of encouragement here for any who desire to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. The Holy Spirit says, *'Come!'* The bride (the church) says, *'Come!'* **Are you thirsting for God? Come to Jesus and take the water of life freely (17).**

The aged John, having had a glimpse of glory and all that awaits the children of God, prays, *'Even so, come, Lord Jesus!'* He couldn't wait to see his Saviour's face and to be with him in glory for ever. How much are you yearning for Christ's return and for heaven?

They shall see his face

The Greek word translated ‘Paradise’ means a ‘park’ or a ‘garden’ (cp. 2:7); it also refers to heaven (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:2–4). Genesis describes ‘Paradise lost’ but Revelation describes ‘Paradise regained’. God created Adam and Eve and put them in a garden in Eden which was watered by a river. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden (Genesis 2:8–10). Adam’s sin brought death to himself and all his descendants, and the ground was cursed (Genesis 3:17–19); he was driven out of Eden and kept from the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). In Christ all this will be restored. The Lord Jesus suffered the curse of God in a garden and there died to save guilty sinners from divine wrath and judgement. He rose in triumph from the grave in that same garden (John 19:41–42)! **As you think about this, doesn’t your heart overflow with ‘Hallelujahs’ and praises to God?**

John saw a pure, clear, sparkling *river of water of life* proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. *And on either side of the river, was the tree of life* (1–2). The *water of life* and the *tree of life* speak of our eternal life in Christ which comes from knowing him (John 17:3). To know God is to have fellowship with him. We are now forgiven but that does not remove the remains of sin within us and its effects. These will be completely and eternally removed when we get to heaven. *There shall be no more curse* (3).

Heaven is a place of eternal rest from sin and suffering but it is not a place of idleness We *shall serve* the Lord Jesus (3) and what joyful, satisfying service that will be! Heaven is a place of life and light; *there shall be no night there* (5). **We cannot see the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 1:8) but we shall see him in all his matchless splendour in heaven. They shall see his face ... and they shall reign for ever and ever** (4–5). He will also greatly desire our beauty then for we will be perfected (Psalm 45:11; cp. 1 John 3:2). Hallelujah!

The Lamb will overcome them, for he is ... King of kings

The sight of the vile woman sitting on the scarlet beast caused John to marvel *with great amazement* (6). The angel asked him, ‘*Why did you marvel?*’ and then went on to explain *the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her* (7). The beast *was, and is not, and yet is* (8). ‘The beast is the entire antichristian persecution movement throughout history, embodied in successive world empires’ (Hendriksen – MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 168). The seven heads of the beast are symbols of seven mountains, the seven hills of Rome (9). When John received his visions recorded in Revelation, the Roman empire was the centre of both antichristian persecution and antichristian seduction.

The seven heads also symbolise seven antichristian world empires, five of which are past. Hendriksen suggests these five past empires are Old Babylonia, (the kingdom of mighty Nimrod – Genesis 10:8–11; 11:4), Assyria, New Babylonia which took the Jews into captivity, the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians, and the Greco-Macedonian empire, out of which came Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria (175–164 BC), a bitter enemy of God’s people. These empires represented by the beast have been destroyed but they are succeeded by another evil empire; the beast raises his head to replace them after every defeat. This causes those whose names are not written in the Book of Life to marvel but they fail to realise that evil empires will come and go until the final battle at the end of time (8).

Rome, the persecutor of the church at that time, was the king that ‘*is*’; the seventh is yet to come (10). The ten horns are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom. They later turn on the prostitute, but why this self-destruction among the forces of evil? *God has put it into their hearts to fulfil his purpose* (17). **Evil may be rampant but God is in sovereign control at all times. Hallelujah! When they make war with our great Saviour, they haven’t a chance of victory. The Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with him are called, chosen, and faithful** (14). Are you a follower of the Lamb? Are you seeking always to be faithful to him?

Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins

John saw another angel coming down from heaven to pronounce the fall of Babylon. This angel had great authority and radiated a glory which illuminated the earth (1); the nations were to be left in no doubt that this judgement was from heaven. He cried with a loud voice, ‘*Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen.*’ Her doom was pronounced as if it had already happened. Babylon the splendid had become a desolate wilderness, a prison for every demon and filthy spirit (2).

Babylon was built when proud men attempted to reach the heavens with a tower (Genesis 11:4) but it has always been *her sins* that *have reached to heaven*. God will repay her the exact amount that her sin has earned her (this is the meaning of ‘*repay her double*’, 5–6). Proud Babylon had confidently boasted that she sat as a queen and would never see sorrow. She was complacent in her wickedness but destruction would come suddenly. *Therefore her plagues will come in one day — death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire.* She was powerless to prevent her ruin at the hands of God, *for strong is the Lord God who judges her* (7–8; cp. Isaiah 47:8–9).

This world with its materialism, temptations and sin is always attempting to seduce the Christian away from the Lord. What are you living for? Another voice from heaven has a solemn message for all worldly-minded believers: ‘*Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues*’ (4). **If you live for material things, you will find that they will be taken from you (14; cp. 1 John 2:16–17).** The Lord Jesus urges you to lay up treasures in heaven and not on earth, ‘*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*’ (Matthew 6:19–21).

*Fading is the worldling’s pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion’s children know.* (John Newton)

The bride, the Lamb’s wife

What will we be like in heaven? The church is described as ‘*new Jerusalem*’ (2), as ‘*holy Jerusalem*’ (10) and as ‘*the bride, the Lamb’s wife*’ (2,9). John sees the church in great splendour, having the glory of God (11). He had used the language of precious stones to describe the glory of God (4:2–4) and he now uses the same language to describe the glorified church which is radiant with that glory (18–21).

The city is a perfect cube, its length, breadth and height being equal (17–18). The inner sanctuary of the temple which was also a cube, symbolised the special dwelling-place of God (1 Kings 6:20). God dwells in the midst of his people and in heaven we shall enjoy perfect fellowship with him with no need of a temple (22). The thick city walls speak of the security of the church. We are secure in Christ now, but in heaven we will be free from all danger and our gates will always be open (17,25). The church in heaven will need no sun because the glory of God and the Lamb will be her light. There will be no sin in heaven (23,27).

Christian, is your faith being sorely tried? Do you feel discouraged and broken? Look at J.B. Phillips’ paraphrase of Romans 8:18–19, ‘*Whatever we have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has planned for us. The whole creation is on tip-toe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.*’ It will be worth it all for everything will be transformed. Hallelujah! *These words are true and faithful* (5). Only those whose names are written in ‘*the Lamb’s book of life*’ will go to heaven (27). **Are you looking forward to heaven, to glory?**

*I know not, O I know not,
What joys are waiting there,
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare!* (Bernard of Cluny)

Behold, I make all things new

This chapter tells us what heaven will be like and what we will be like in heaven. John saw *a new heaven and a new earth* for the old order had passed away (1; cp. Isaiah 65:17–19; 2 Peter 3:10,12). The church is described as *‘the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’* (1–2). The Lord told John, *‘Behold, I make all things new’* (5). The Greek word used for *‘new’* in this chapter does not mean brand-new, but speaks of renewal and transformation. Everything will be transformed.

God is with us now, but in heaven we will be much more aware of his presence, with no sin or suffering to disturb our fellowship with him (3). Look at the *‘no mores’* in verses 1 to 4.

- *There was no more sea* (1). The sea is a symbol of turmoil and unrest in Revelation. The beast rose out of the sea (13:1) and wicked Babylon sat on many waters (17:1). *No more sea*. All our enemies and troubles will be gone.
- *There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away* (4). Hendriksen writes, ‘Every stain of sin, every scar of wrong, every trace of death, has been removed’ (MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 198).

Heaven is our happy home of indescribable joy. Oh, how the words of today’s reading should thrill our hearts! *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him* (1 Corinthians 2:9). Heaven is not a vain hope: God said to John, *‘Write, for these words are true and faithful’* (5). **Are you looking forward to going to heaven, to being with your Saviour?** The alternative is too dreadful to contemplate. All kinds of sinners will have their part in the lake of fire, including the *cowardly and unbelieving* (8).

Are you thirsting to know God? You too can know him and enjoy him. He promises, *‘I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts’* (6). Come to the Lord and drink.

In one hour such great riches came to nothing

The kings and rulers of the world (9–10), the merchants (11–17) and the owners of ships and overseas traders (17–19) were shown weeping and lamenting over their beloved city. All that they lived for had been snatched away from them – the kings and rulers had lost their power, the merchants and those *who trade on the sea* had lost their wealth. They lamented, *‘For in one hour such great riches came to nothing’* (17). They were seen *‘standing at a distance for fear of her torment’* (10,15). They had traded in precious metals, food and slaves, but they now had nothing. They were once able to indulge in having whatever they desired, but all that had now been taken from them (12–14).

While the world lamented, heaven, the holy apostles and prophets whom they had persecuted and killed, were called upon to rejoice over the fall of the wicked city (20). Babylon will be thrown down and buried out of sight like a huge boulder hurled into the sea and buried in the ocean bed (21). Babylon will be destroyed but its people will remain for ever in hell. There they will be deprived of everything that gives joy and meaning to life (21–26). Notice how the words, *‘shall not be found (or heard) in you any more’* are repeated several times. No music, no creative work, no opportunity to provide for oneself, no more light, no more joy in sweet human relationships. **All is darkness and unrelenting misery. Hell is truly unbearable!**

Oh, be sure that your heart is right with God who delights in mercy (Micah 7:18)! If you are not a Christian, you are lost and your only hope is to repent of your sin and call upon the Lord Jesus to save you. He will gladly receive you and pardon you; he will give you eternal life, peace and joy. He will be your Good Shepherd and dearest Friend.

*I would not change my blest estate
For all the world calls good or great;
And while my faith can keep her hold
I envy not the sinner’s gold.*

(Isaac Watts)

Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!

The ungodly will lament the destruction of Babylon (18:9–24) but here we find heaven rejoicing in a torrent of worship and praise because of the final defeat of *'the great harlot'*. Babylon's *smoke rises up forever and ever!* (3). John heard a great multitude saying, *'Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honour and power to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are his judgements ...'* (1–2). God's glory, honour and power are revealed in his judgement on Babylon. He has perfected the salvation of his people by destroying their great enemy.

The word *'Alleluia'* (or *'Hallelujah'*) means *'praise Jehovah'* and it is found four times in these verses (1,3,4,6). God does avenge his elect. (2; Luke 18:7; Romans 12:19). The cry of God's people who had been slain for their testimony was now heard (cp. 6:9–10). The voice of those still being martyred in various parts of the world for the sake of the Lord Jesus is also heard. Babylon was no more and heaven is filled with rejoicing. The multitude said, *'Alleluia! And her smoke rises up forever and ever!'* (3; cp. 14:11,; 18:9,18). Babylon will never rise again to seduce believers nor to persecute the church. The twenty-four elders (the church) and the four living creatures (the cherubim) fall down and worship God who sits on his heavenly throne, saying, *'Amen! Alleluia!'* (4).

John heard a voice coming from the throne of God calling on all his servants to *'Praise our God'* and he heard their response, *'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!'* (5–6). The worship was as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty thunderings. **The worship in heaven is truly wonderful! Christian, you will be there, praising God with perfect voice and sinless heart. We have a wonderful eternity of worship and joyful service ahead of us.**

The Book of Life

Verses 7 to 9 refer to the battle of Armageddon (cp. 16:12–16; 19:19–21). At the end of the gospel age (*one thousand years*) Satan is released from his prison to set in motion the greatest ever attack of persecution on the church. He musters Gog and Magog to make this final attack on *'the camp of the saints and the beloved city'* (9).

Gog and Magog are first mentioned in Ezekiel 38; there they symbolise Israel's great oppressor, the king of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes, who was defeated by the Jews. Here they are identified with the nations which are in the four corners of the earth (the whole world), representing the enemies of God's people. Satan and his hordes surround the beloved city (the church) and all appears to be hopeless for the people of God. When the devil launches this final attack on the church, God will send down fire from heaven to devour her enemies (9). The Lord Jesus will come again *with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ* (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8). The devil will then be cast into the lake of fire to join the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night, forever and ever (10).

John then saw *a great white throne* from which God will judge everyone who has ever lived, through the Lord Jesus Christ (11; cp. Acts 17:31). They were standing before the almighty, righteous Judge who sits on the throne. You will be there and so will I. We will be judged by our works which are recorded in God's books. John saw another book opened *which is the Book of Life* (12). The names of every person chosen by God are written in this book. Their sins are forgiven and there is no condemnation for them. The ungodly who die without Christ are not written in the Book of Life. They will be cast into the terrible lake of fire, to be with the devil and his evil spirits, to suffer *day and night forever and ever* (10). ***This is the second death* (13–15). *Is your name written in the Book of Life? I beg you to be sure that you are right with God.***

Over such the second death has no power

John first saw what happens on earth during the ‘millennium’ with Satan being bound during this gospel age (1–3). He now sees what happens in heaven during the ‘millennium’ (4–6). William Hendriksen writes, ‘The binding of Satan and the reign of the saints, are most intimately related. It is in connection with the personal reign of our divine and human Mediator as a result of his atoning work (see Rev. 5) that Satan is bound so that his influence on earth is partly paralysed. It is in connection with this same personal reign of Jesus in and from heaven that the souls of the departed saints are reigning above (cf. Rev. 3:21). This personal reign of Christ in and from heaven underlies all the visions of the Apocalypse. It is the key to the interpretation of the “thousand years” (MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 190).

John saw thrones in heaven; those who sat upon them were those who had been *beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God*. They had been faithful to Christ and *had not worshipped the beast or his image ... and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years* (4). John sees the souls of the faithful and the martyrs, not their bodies. These are *the spirits of just men made perfect* who are in *the heavenly Jerusalem* (Hebrews 12:22–23). They are *‘blessed and holy’* (6).

The first resurrection occurs when the souls of God’s people are taken to be with the Lord when they die (5; cp. 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21–23). There is only one resurrection of the body when believers and unbelievers will be raised at the return of Jesus (John 5:28–29; cp. Daniel 12:2–3; Matthew 13:30,41–43, 49; 22:12–13; 24:30–31; 25:31–46; Acts 24:15). The ungodly dead do not live in heaven when they die. They will be subject to *the second death* when the Lord Jesus comes again as Judge. They will be cast into hell to suffer in body as well as in soul. *The second death has no power* over the Christian (6), because Christ has paid the price of his sin. There is no more condemnation for him (Romans 8:1). **Child of God, this should fill your soul with grateful praise!**

Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb

John heard rejoicing in heaven for the marriage of the Lamb (6–7). The marriage customs in Bible lands are reflected in the description of the marriage of the Lamb. There was the betrothal which was a binding agreement in which the couple were legally husband and wife (cp. 2 Corinthians 11:2). Between the betrothal and the wedding feast there was an interval during which the groom paid a dowry to the bride’s father. At the close of the interval the bride adorned herself in preparation to meet the groom. The groom, in his best clothes, walked in procession with his friends, all singing and bearing torches. He took the bride from her house and they returned in procession to his house or that of his parents (cp. Matthew 9:15; 25:1–13). The wedding feast included the marriage supper and the festivities which lasted for seven days or longer.

The church is betrothed to Christ who has purchased her with his own blood (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25–27). The interval is the time between Christ’s ascension to heaven and his second coming. During this period the bride makes herself ready to meet the Bridegroom (8; cp. 1 John 3:2–3). God has called us to be holy and to make ourselves ready to meet the Lord. Our *righteous acts* do not save us, but they are evidence that we belong to Christ (8). The Lord Jesus is coming again with the angels (Matthew 25:31) to receive his bride, the church. *Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb* (9). **What a day of rejoicing that will be!**

*The church’s one foundation
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
She is his new creation
By water and the word;
From heaven he came and sought her
To be his holy bride,
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died.*

(Samuel J. Stone)

The supper of the great God

We have already seen in Revelation that ungodliness and wickedness will greatly increase before the Lord Jesus comes again. This escalating wickedness will be accompanied by ever increasing persecution against the church. Things will get worse before the final great assault on God's people. These verses speak of the final defeat and judgement of the beast and the false prophet.

John saw heaven opened and Christ seated on a white horse. The titles of the Lord Jesus describe his character. He is called '*Faithful and True*' (11), '*the Word of God*' through whom God reveals himself (13; cp. John 1:1,18) and '*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*' (16; cp. 17:14). His robe is dipped in the blood of his enemies (13; cp. 14:20; Isaiah 63:1–3) and a sharp sword comes from his mouth to strike the nations (15; cp. 1:16; 2:12,16). He comes with the armies in heaven, with his saints and angels (14).

John then sees another angel crying with a loud voice to summon the birds to '*the supper of the great God*'. This feast is a complete contrast to '*the marriage supper of the Lamb*' (9). We do not have a picture of happy guests feasting on choice food, but of vultures gorging themselves on rotting flesh. The food for this supper is the flesh of the ungodly who gather with the beast and false prophet to make war with the almighty Son of God and his army (17–19). The battle of Armageddon will not last long. Christ will destroy his enemies in an instant (16:16; cp. 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9; 2:8). The beast is a symbol of the persecuting kings and governments of the world and the false prophet represents all false religion (cp. 13:1–15; 17:10). They will be taken alive at Armageddon and cast into the lake of fire while the birds will feed on the flesh of God's enemies (20–21).

Two suppers are described in this chapter – the glorious *marriage supper of the Lamb* (9) and the terrifying *supper of the great God* (17). **If you are not at the marriage supper of the Lamb, you will be present at the other supper. Which one do you expect to attend?**

He laid hold of ... Satan and bound him for a thousand years

The interpretation of Revelation 20 is the subject of much disagreement and controversy. The main questions involved are:

- Will there be a literal millennium of one thousand years?
- Will there be two resurrections, one for the just and a later resurrection for the unjust?

Some evangelicals believe that Christ will secretly appear at the end of the age to take all believers to be with himself. He will then raise the bodies of those who have died in Christ ('*the first resurrection*', verse 5). There will then be seven years of great tribulation in the world before Christ comes again in great power to overcome Satan and the nations following him. Satan will then be bound for a thousand years ('*the millennium*') during which there will be universal peace. He will then be loosed for a short time and defeated in a last act of rebellion. All the ungodly will then be raised (the second resurrection), judged and cast into hell with Satan.

I do not agree with that interpretation. The book of Revelation is full of symbolism and the one thousand years mentioned in verses 2 to 7 are also symbolic. The Bible teaches that there is only one resurrection of the body, and that is when Christ comes again (see notes for tomorrow). I agree with those Bible commentators who teach that the one thousand years represent the gospel age in which we now live; this age will end when Christ returns to judge the world (11–15). John saw an angel who *laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years* (2). The Lord Jesus bound Satan at his first coming (the binding of '*the strong man*' in Matthew 12:29 has the same Greek word as '*bound*' in verse 2 of this chapter). Satan fell as *lightning from heaven* (Luke 10:17–18; cp. John 12:20–32); this corresponds to verses 2 and 3. Satan is bound and his power is limited; he is under the control of God. He still deceives men and women but the Lord Jesus has triumphed over him (Colossians 2:15). **The gospel is being preached throughout the whole world and sinners are being saved. Hallelujah!**