

The blessings of goodness

Most Bible commentators understand this psalm as speaking of Christ the King and his victories. Matthew Henry writes, ‘In this there is an eye to the Messiah, the Prince, and the glory of his kingdom; for to him divers passages in this psalm are more applicable than to David himself.’ The first seven verses of this psalm acknowledge God’s goodness to the king (David). Verses 8 to 13 look forward, anticipating the triumph of God’s kingdom.

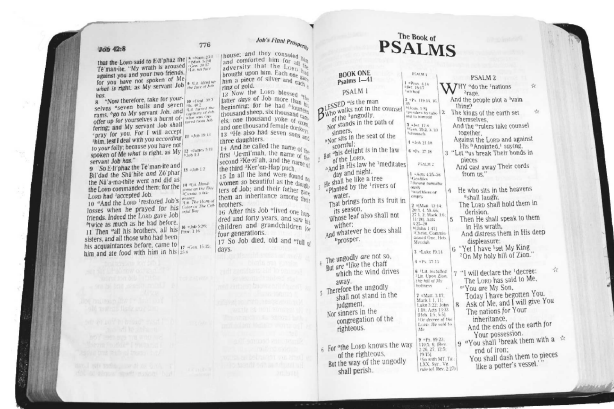
This psalm gives us much encouragement. There are also precious lessons to be drawn which relate to the believer’s experience of God. Who more than the Christian should rejoice in God’s strength and salvation (1)? We may not have battles against earthly armies like David, but the Lord has given us victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4), victory over sin and over Satan (Romans 6:14; 16:20). We are also encouraged that God hears and answers prayer (2).

What is said of David is also true of every Christian; ‘*You meet him with the blessings of goodness*’ (3). How wonderful! What great ‘*blessings of goodness*’ God gives to us. We may not be earthly kings but we belong to the Lord Jesus who is the King of kings, the exalted Lord of glory. He has given us eternal life and has placed *honour and majesty* upon us (5). We are *most blessed* and God makes us *exceedingly glad* with his presence. He is with us wherever we go and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves (3–6).

David affirmed his trust in the Lord and his confidence that through divine *mercy* (or ‘*steadfast love*’) he would not be shaken (‘*moved*’; 7). Christians also know that wonderful love of God and this gives us great stability. **Think about these and other ‘*blessings of goodness*’ with which God meets us and gratefully worship him.** *Be exalted, O LORD, in your own strength! We will sing and praise your power* (13).

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God’s holy Word simply explained and applied



November 2020

Bible readings from Revelation chapters 10 to 22
Psalms 20 and 21

We will remember the name of the LORD our God

Psalms 20 and 21 form a pair. The first is a prayer for the king before battle and the second a psalm of thanksgiving for victory after battle (the answer to the prayer of Psalm 20:4 is recorded in Psalm 21:2). These psalms serve as a timely reminder that we must pray for the leaders of our nation (cp. 1 Timothy 2:1–3).

Verses 1 to 5 describe the prayer of the people for the king. Look at each of the requests beginning with the word ‘*May*’. David would have been greatly encouraged by such prayers. In verse 6 the person speaking is possibly the king or the high priest, expressing his confidence in God (the ‘*we*’ of verse 5 changes to ‘*I*’ in verse 6). The psalm finishes with the people affirming their trust in the Lord (‘*we*’ – verse 7) and their prayer for deliverance.

The name of God (1,7) reveals his character. What is God like? He is all-powerful (omnipotent) and absolutely sovereign in the universe. He is full of wisdom, goodness and mercy. We can therefore be confident in him when we come to him in prayer: ‘*May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble; may the God of Jacob defend you*’ (1). Christian, if you are burdened with great trials, grief, pain or heartache, remember that the Lord is faithful, that he is with us *in the day of trouble*, and that nothing can separate us from his love (1; Romans 8:31–39).

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God (7). We must never trust in worldly methods such as entertainment in our evangelism, but in our spiritual warfare *remember the name of the LORD our God (7).*

Are you faithful in attending the prayer meeting? Do you pray for your fellow-church members and for the Lord’s people elsewhere? Corporate prayer encourages us in every adverse situation (cp. Acts 4:23–31) and without it the church is weak. **Let us remember the name of the LORD our God and be encouraged to pray.**

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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 and of the whole 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!*’ **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?

It will be as sweet as honey in your mouth

There was an interlude between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets, just as there was between the sixth and seventh seals (chapter 7). John had a vision in which he saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. This angel was a giant, having one foot on the sea and the other on land. He was *clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. And he had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land* (1–2). The foot treading on something is a symbol of submission (Joshua 10:24). The angel’s face was a symbol of God’s holiness and the cloud of divine judgment (Psalm 97:2; Zechariah 1:15). God is absolutely sovereign over the world (6–7). When the Lord Jesus comes again, he will be seen to be sovereign (1 Corinthians 15:25; Philippians 2:9–11).

John was about to record the things that he saw when a voice from heaven ordered him to refrain from writing (3–4). The angel swore by God who lives for ever, who created the world and all its species. He said that the final judgment was about to take place with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (5–6). God may allow evil to have its day (as seen in chapter 9) but he is in total control of the universe. *The mystery of God would be finished, as he declared to his servants the prophets* (7).

John again heard the voice from heaven telling him to take the little book from the angel. John said to the angel, ‘*Give me the little book.*’ The angel told him to eat it, saying, ‘*It will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth*’ (10; cp. Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 2:9 to 3:4). The gospel message gives sweetness to those who love it, but it brings suffering when they proclaim it. This little book is the Word of God (cp. Psalm 119:103). The angel commanded him to ‘*prophecy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings*’ (11; cp. chapter 17). **You are now reading this prophecy. Pray that the Lord will help you understand it and be encouraged by it.**

Great fear fell on those who saw them

This chapter is rich in its symbolism and the variety of interpretations among Christians testifies to the fact that it is not easy to understand. There are three sections:

- The measuring of the temple of God (1–2).
- The ministry of the two witnesses (3–13).
- The sounding of the seventh trumpet (14–19).

John was given a *reed* (a stick) *like a measuring rod* and the angel told him, ‘*Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.*’ He was not to include the outer court which had been given to the Gentiles who would tread down the holy city for forty-two months (1–2). This situation continues throughout the gospel age (represented by ‘*forty-two months*’ and its equivalent of ‘*one thousand two hundred and sixty days*’ or three and a half years, 2–3).

Alun Ebenezer comments that ‘the two witnesses are a collective symbol of the church ... They are identified as two olive trees and two lampstands (11:4). They are identified like this because the church is constantly supplied with the oil of the Holy Spirit and shows light to a dark world like a lampstand. It reveals truth to a world that is being deceived, showing them things as they really are. Christians on their own cannot persuade anyone to turn to Christ. We are totally reliant on the Holy Spirit. Only he can change a person’s heart, convince them of their sin and show them the Saviour’ (REVELATION, page 104).

The beast made war against the witnesses, overcame them and killed them. After three and a half days they were raised from the dead and *great fear fell on those who saw them* (7). This is a short time in relation to the gospel age (‘*forty-two months*’). The witnesses were called up to heaven; the church will rise again from seeming destruction. The sounding of the seventh trumpet announced the final judgment, but our attention is focused on the scene in heaven where there is an outpouring of worship to God. His people are rejoicing in heaven, safe at last and for ever. **Will you be there?**

They shall see his face

The Greek noun translated ‘*Paradise*’ means a ‘park’ (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.

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). There will be access to the tree of life and these verses indicate that there is a park with many trees which bear fruit every month. The *water of life* speaks 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! *They shall see his face ... and they shall reign for ever and ever* (4–5). **We cannot see Jesus now (1 Peter 1:8) but we shall see him in all his matchless splendour in heaven.** Heaven is a place of life and light; *there shall be no night there* (5). William Hendriksen comments, ‘Taken together, all these items symbolize the superabundant nature of our salvation’ (MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 206).

Read E. Margaret Clarkson’s great hymn, ‘In resurrection bodies’. It is copyright and I cannot therefore reproduce it here. You can access it from the internet.

The bride, the Lamb's wife

One of the seven angels (16:1) showed John the church in great splendour, having the glory of God (9, 11). The church is described as 'new Jerusalem' (2), as 'holy Jerusalem' (10) and as 'the bride, the Lamb's wife' (2,9). The language of precious stones is used to describe the glory of God (4:2–4) and the same language is used to describe the glorified church which is pure gold, like clear glass (18–21).

The city has massive thick walls and is a perfect cube, its length, breadth and height being equal, extending to almost 12,000 furlongs ('stadia') which is almost 1,400 miles (16–18). Our local church may be small and insignificant in the eyes of the world, but many millions belong to the universal church in heaven and on earth (7:9). The thick city walls speak of the security of the church. We are secure in Christ now, but we will then be free from all danger and our gates will always be open (17,25). The Lamb is the temple of the church (22) and we shall enjoy perfect fellowship with him. 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 the glorified church (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.' Our suffering will give way to great glory in that wonderful day. *These words are true and faithful* (5). There are many false churches and only those whose names are written in 'the Lamb's book of life' are in the true church (27). **Are you looking forward to heaven and 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)

You have taken your great power and reigned

The first woe is described in chapter 9:1–12 and the second woe in verse 13. We are now informed that *the third woe is coming quickly* (14). When the seventh seal was opened, there was silence in heaven (8:1) but after the sounding of the seventh trumpet there were loud voices in heaven saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever!' (15). They were rejoicing in the triumph of God over all his enemies. When Christ returns, he will crush all his enemies for ever. The emphasis in these verses is on the joy of the redeemed rather than the misery of the lost at the final judgment.

The twenty-four elders come down from their thrones and fall on their faces to worship God (16). These elders are the redeemed of all ages (see notes on chapter 4). Heaven resounds with the praise of God's people. They rejoice in the eternal God, saying, 'We give you thanks ... because you have taken your great power and reigned' (17). The anger of the godless nations does not intimidate God who will destroy them (18).

When God judges the dead he will reward not only the prophets but also the humblest saint who fears his name (18). All that we have done for the Lord – in the home, in the local church or in our place of work will be remembered and recognised. Those who have suffered for their Christian testimony, those who have spent hours in praying for God's people and for the lost will all be rewarded. What a glorious day awaits those who love the Lord!

The ark of the covenant of God was seen in the temple and this speaks of his presence among his people. The future of the ungodly is full of gloom, however. They will suffer terror and natural disasters before the last judgment (19). **Christian, do you love the Lord for all that he has done to save you from such a dreadful end and for giving you everlasting glory and joy? How is this love seen in your life?**

A male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron

We now move into the second half of Revelation where we see that behind the conflict between the church and the world is the conflict between Christ and Satan. This war on earth (11:7) has a heavenly dimension (verse 7; cp. Ephesians 6:12). This chapter sets three scenes before us:

1. Satan's attempts to destroy Christ (1–6).
2. The expulsion of the dragon (7–12).
3. Satan's attacks on the church and individual Christians (13–17).

The first scene is set in heaven where John first saw *a woman clothed with the sun*. The moon was under her feet and she was crowned with twelve stars but she was in much pain as she was about to give birth to a child (1–2). The woman represents the church from both Old and New Testament dispensations and is seen here in her splendour (1; cp. 21:10–14; 1 Peter 2:9; Exodus 19:5–6; Isaiah 60:2; 62:3). The church on earth appears to be weak and she is despised, but in heaven she is radiant and glorious. The male child is Christ *who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron* (2,5,10; cp. 2:27; Psalm 2:9). He comes through an earthly line (Romans 9:5; Galatians 4:4).

John then saw *a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads* (3). The dragon is *that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan* (3,9). When Satan rebelled against God and fell, he had with him *a third of the stars of heaven*, a vast army of demonic angels (4; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). He seeks to *devour* the child. There has been conflict between Christ (the '*seed*' of the woman, Genesis 3:15) and the serpent from the beginning, but Christ emerges victorious. The Old Testament records many Satanic attacks on the Jews and on the royal line of David from which the promised Saviour was to come (eg. 2 Kings 11:1–3). As soon as Jesus was born, Herod sought to kill him (Matthew 2:13). After his death and resurrection Christ ascended to heaven and now he reigns (5). The 1260 days represent the gospel age (6). **The church is secure despite the fierce hostility of Satan and his attacks upon us (6). Let us take heart!**

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 first heaven and the first earth passed away* (1; cp. 2 Peter 3:10–12). The Greek adjective translated '*new*' in the verses before us does not mean brand-new, but speaks of renewal when everything will be transformed. The curse which came through Adam's sin will be removed (Genesis 3:17–19; Romans 8:18–22). *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). All our enemies and troubles will be gone. The Lord told John, '*Behold, I make all things new ... Write, for these words are true and faithful*' (5). These things are so certain that God said, '*It is done*' (6).

John saw '*the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*' (2; see notes on chapter 19, verse 7). 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 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).

We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). The words of today's reading should thrill our hearts! We look forward to a future of indescribable joy but 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 looking forward to going to heaven, to being with your Saviour?** He promises, '*I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts*' (6). Are you thirsting to know God? If you are not a Christian, you too can know God if you will repent of your sins and trust in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord. You will then enjoy his peace and blessing in your life

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 (2 Corinthians 5:9–10). 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.**

And war broke out in heaven

And war broke out in heaven (7). The archangel Michael leads the angels of God to attack the dragon and his evil angels (7; cp. Daniel 12:1; Jude 6). Hendriksen rightly points out that this 'battle in heaven and the hurling down of the dragon are not to be understood literally. Satan is hurled down from heaven in this sense, namely that he has lost his place as an accuser of the brethren' (MORE THAN CONQUERORS, page 141). Christ conquered Satan and his evil forces through his death and cast them out (Luke 10:18; Hebrews 2:14).

The Lord Jesus also satisfied the justice of God so that guilty sinners could be freely pardoned and saved. Satan's accusations against us now carry no weight (10; Romans 8:1, 33–34). Christian, you belong to God's kingdom. The people of God share in Christ's victory even though Satan may kill them. They overcome the great dragon *by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death* (11). Is it any wonder that heaven rings with joyful praises (10,12)?

Satan does not accept that defeat. He continues to attack the church and individual Christians (13–17). The devil knows that he only *has a short time* (12). He failed to destroy Christ and now he attacks the woman (the church) with great wrath (12–13). God protects and nourishes his church, frustrating every satanic attempt to ruin her (14–16). The devil then turns his attention to individual Christians (*the rest of her offspring* 17; cp. 1 Peter 5:8). **We are not defenceless, however. Let us be vigilant and put on the whole armour of God (Ephesians 6:10–18).**

*Be thou my shield and hiding place, that, sheltered near thy side,
I may my fierce accuser face and tell him thou hast died.*

*O wondrous love! to bleed and die, to bear the cross and shame,
That guilty sinners, such as I, might plead thy gracious name.*

(John Newton)

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).

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 saw 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!**

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

The interpretation of Revelation 20 is the subject of much controversy and disagreement. 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!**

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).

This second beast is 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!**

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 judgment 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 supper of the great God

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). The armies of heaven, his holy angels are with him at his second coming (14; Matthew 25:31).

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 judgment of the beast and the false prophet.

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?**

*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; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10) 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 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 judgment 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 judgment. **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.

The song of Moses ... and of the Lamb

We now come to the fifth parallel section of Revelation in which God's judgment 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 judgment, *'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 judgment 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.**

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 judgment 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 Lord is King; lift up thy voice,
O earth, and all ye heavens rejoice!
From world to world the joy shall ring:
'The Lord Omnipotent is King!'*

(Josiah Conder)

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 *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).

Babylon was guilty for shedding the blood of prophets and God’s people (24) and 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)

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 sash 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)

Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgements

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 judgment, but the Lord’s people were preserved. God’s judgments 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 judgment 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.*’ It is just that he punishes the enemies of his people. They had shed the blood of saints and prophets and they now reap what they have sown; God had given 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 judgments*’ (7). **The Lord is perfectly wise and fair in his judgment of sinners. He never makes a mistake and he does answer the prayers of his persecuted people.**

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. The nations were to be left in no doubt that this judgment was from heaven. The angel had great authority and radiated a glory which illuminated the earth (1) 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 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?

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 judgment; 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 judgment 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 judgment 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.**

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

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 (16) 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 judgment. 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 will return suddenly! What must we do to be prepared? He 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). We must be watch (be ‘ready’) and keep our garments; in other words, we have to keep ourselves from the pollution of the world and its wickedness, aiming always to please God (cp. James 1:27).

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 judgment 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).**