

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Part One

An Honest Look at the Text

By Gary Ray Branscome

The Book of Revelation opens by telling us that it was given by God to reveal things for which the time was “at hand” and which would “shortly come to pass” (Revelation 1:1, 3). Those words not only tell us that this book is a book of prophecy, but also that it speaks of things in the past, things that have already taken place, as well as things in the future.

That being said, one of the biggest disagreements between those who interpret this book has to do with whether the words of the text are literal or figurative. However, I am convinced that both sides in that disagreement miss the point. It is not the words which are figurative, but the dream or vision which those words describe. Let me explain:

Genesis 41:1-7 describes a dream which Pharaoh had. And, that dream was highly figurative. However, that does not mean that the words that tell us about that dream are figurative. On the contrary, the Bible tells us in plain literal words that Pharaoh saw seven thin cows eat seven fat cows. There is nothing figurative about the words of the text. It was the dream that was figurative, not the words used to describe it. And, the same holds true for the Book of Revelation. It is the dream/vision that is figurative, not the words that describe it.

Having said that, I need to make it clear that the “literal” meaning of the text is the natural, grammatical meaning of the words – the same meaning that the words would have in everyday conversation – not some artificial meaning that excludes any figure of speech. As Dr. Robert Preus put it:

“The literal sense of Scripture is the meaning, or tenor, that the words directly and obviously convey. For instance, in John 3:16 the literal sense is immediately clear. But there is also a literal sense to those passages that are tropical and figurative. Such passages we do not read superficially according to the surface tenor of the words, as when Herod is called a fox or when we are to cut off a hand that offends us — such an interpretation would be absurd. In figurative statements of this kind, not only the words according to their native sense but also

the thing or point (res) that the words express according to their quondam imagery must be considered. The literal sense, then, is the sense intended by the writer, whatever trope or genre is used. Figures of speech, words, and even ideas all have their literal sense. And the literal sense (meaning, intention) of a pericope is drawn from all these ingredients. Glassius makes it quite clear that the literal sense of a Scripture passage or pericope is not necessarily identical with the surface meaning of the words, but the genre of the text or the tropes therein must also be ascertained, when necessary, to determine the literal sense of a text.” [TTOPRL, pages 321-322.]

That being understood, as we read the text we need to distinguish between the words, which give us a literal description of what John saw, and the dream/vision which is highly figurative. For example: In chapter twelve the Bible tells us, in plain literal language, that John saw a woman, clothed in the sun, who was giving birth to Christ (verses 1-5). Now, it should be obvious that even though those verses are describing Christ’s birth, they are not describing literal earthy events that actually took place in Bethlehem. Those verses also tell us of a great red dragon who tries to kill Christ as soon as he is born. And, again it should be obvious that even though the words of the text give us a literal description of what John saw, they are not giving us a literal description of earthy events near the time of Christ’s birth. On the contrary, the people actually living in Bethlehem at that time saw Herod’s soldiers, not a red dragon. This should be a clue as to how the Book of Revelation is to be understood. Although John’s vision corresponds to past and future events, we should never assume that it is a literal description of those events. Nor should John’s vision ever be interpreted to contradict what the Bible clearly and explicitly says!

An Overview of the Book

Although the Book of Revelation contains many different scenes which some might view as separate visions, because many of those visions relate to one another and seem to fit together, I believe that there are three primary visions. Those are; 1) The vision of Christ and the seven churches, 2) The vision of the heavenly throne, the seven seals, and the seven trumpets, and 3) The vision of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. I realize that those visions contain much more than just what I mentioned, but as I go through them one by one I will explain how the various parts relate to one another and why I think they should be grouped that way.

I also need to point out that visions given by God often have two aspects to them; 1) what is seen, and 2) what is said. For example: The dream that God gave to Pharaoh consisted only of what he saw. However, the first time an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream, he not only saw an angel, but he received a message from the angel, saying, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife etc. (Matthew 1:20). The point I want to make is that the Book of Revelation is no different. It not only records the things that John saw, but also records things that were said. And, those words sometimes give us a clue as to the meaning of the vision.

For example: I mentioned previously that chapter twelve begins with a vision of a woman clothed in the sun, who was giving birth to Christ (verses 1-5). Of course Catholics assume that the woman is Mary. But, what does the Bible say? Well, when we look for statements that might give us a clue, we find that the last verse of chapter twelve says, “the dragon was angry with the woman, and went to make war against the rest of her children, who keep God’s commandments, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”.

As you read that statement, notice that the woman is the **mother** of those who have the testimony of Jesus Christ. On the surface that seems like an odd statement. However, the words of Galatians 4:26, “The Jerusalem which is above is free, and she is the **mother** of us all,” then tell us that the woman is the heavenly Jerusalem. The words, “I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” then tell us that the woman (the heavenly Jerusalem) is the bride of Christ (Revelation 21:2), His church (Ephesians 5:23, 30, 31, 32).

Conclusion

Two key things to remember are, 1) the distinction between the words of the text (which are literal) and the images John saw (which are figurative), and 2) The fact that the vision consists of both what was seen and what was heard. Also, as you read the Book of Revelation do not fail to notice the many doctrinal statements that are often overlooked. For example: “To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,” (Rev. 1:5 and 5:9). Or, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8).

In the next section we will examine the vision of Christ and his message to the seven churches.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Part Two

The Seven Churches

By Gary Ray Branscome

John's first vision begins with the words, "To the seven churches that are in Asia," (Rev. 1:4). In reading what is said it is important to know that these "seven churches" were seven actual congregations which existed in Asia Minor at that time. As the vision progresses, Christ has a message for each of those congregations, and each of those messages relate to things that were actually going on at that time. However, while there have been congregations throughout history that had similar things going on, and could, for that reason, apply Christ's words to their particular situation, there is absolutely nothing in the text to indicate that these congregations represent different periods of church history. That is purely the figment of someone's imagination! Therefore, when those who profess themselves to be wise claim that these seven churches represent a "church Age," they are, like the false prophets of old, teaching for doctrine the imagination of their own heart (Jeremiah 23:16).

As we read the text, the words, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet," tell us that John is seeing something "in the Spirit," a vision (Rev. 1:10). Then, as he turns to see who is speaking, he sees "one like the Son of man," (Rev. 1:13). Notice that he does not claim to actually see Jesus. In his dream/vision he sees an image that looks like Jesus. And Jesus is standing in the midst of seven candlesticks, and has seven stars in his hand (Rev. 1:16). The words, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks that you saw are the seven churches," then make it clear that the vision John was seeing was highly figurative (Rev. 1:20). Remember, it is not the words that are figurative, it is the vision which is figurative. Notice also that the seven stars in the vision are said to be seven "angels". In understanding this section it is important to know that in the original Greek, the word "angel" means "messenger". This is significant because the context and substance of the messages indicates that they are addressed to the pastor of each congregation, not to a spirit being. [NOTE: The words, "I was in the Spirit" tell us that John was in a trance. See, Acts 10:10, 11:5, and 22:17.]

As you read Christ's message to each of the churches, you will find that many of the things said are relevant to situations we face today. For example: The angel/messenger of the church at Ephesus is commended because he, "tested those who claim they are apostles, and are not, and found them to be liars," (Rev. 2:2). I see that as highly relevant, because American churches are full of men who claim to be teaching Bible prophesy when they are really teaching lies, and leading people away from the Word of God. We know that those who refuse to believe what the Bible says about creation, the virgin birth of Christ, or His physical resurrection are false teachers. But, what about those who claim that the seven churches represent a "church age," when the Bible says no such thing, or, those who claim that Christ will "rapture" believers before that last day. We know that is a lie, because Christ plainly said that He would raise believers up "on the last day" (John 6:39, 40).

After commending those things worthy of praise Christ goes on to say, "Nevertheless I have something against you, because you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent," (Rev. 2:4-5). Far too often, when people read these words they assume that the problem is lack of works. However, that is not point at all! Our works are as filthy rags in the sight of God (Isaiah 64:6). The words, "first love" call to remembrance the love for the gospel, and the zeal for spreading it, that is characteristic of a new convert. And the words, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen," indicate that he had forgotten how sinful his life was before. In other words, those who do not think they have many sins tend to have less appreciation (love) for Christ and the things of faith, than those who, like Paul, are fully aware of their sin (Luke 7:47, 1Timothy 1:15).

As to other problems, both Pergamos and Thyatira are rebuked for allowing sexual sin, and that is all too common today (Rev. 2:14, 20). In fact, the words, "I have a few things against you, because you allowed that woman Jezebel... to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication," sounds very much like a congregation that I have heard of, which has a lesbian pastor.

However, in looking at the statements that might relate to us today we should never lose sight of the fact that these churches were actual congregations that existed at that time. And, because they were actual congregations, some things that are said may seem cryptic to someone living almost two thousand years later. For example: in Rev. 3:18 we read "anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see". What on earth does that mean?

Well, it is interesting to know that archeologists have discovered that eye salve was being manufactured in Laodicea. However, the words, “You say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and do not know that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,” tell us that the problem was spiritual blindness, not physical blindness (Rev. 3:17). Christ simply used the fact that eye salve was manufactured there to make a point. Moreover, the words, “You say I am rich etc.” tell us an all too common story. It is easy for people to grow lax in their spiritual life when everything is going well. It is easy for them to become blind to their own sin, and think that all is right between them and God, just because everything is going well. And, that seems to be the problem Christ was addressing at Laodicea.

In verse 20 we read, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me,” (Rev. 3:20). Although this passage is well known and often quoted, the people who quote it generally pull it out of context and misrepresent what it says. Read it carefully! It says nothing about asking Jesus into your heart. If the people at Laodicea had all asked Him to come into their heart it would have not changed a thing. They needed to open the door to Christ by acknowledging their sin and looking to Him for forgiveness. We are not saved by asking Christ into our heart we are saved by believing God’s Word when it says that we are sinners, and believing that Christ died on the cross so that we could have forgiveness.

Conclusion

Two important things to remember are 1) These seven churches were actual congregations that existed in Asia Minor, and 2) there is nothing in the text to justify the claim that they represent different periods of history, or a “church age”. That claim does not come from the Bible, but from an overactive imagination, and it is being used by Satan to lead people away from what the text actually says.

In the next section we will examine John’s vision heaven and the seven seals.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Part Three

The First Six Seals

By Gary Ray Branscome

The vision of the seven seals begins with the words, “After this I looked, and saw a door opened in heaven: and the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet; said, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this,” (Rev. 4:1). As you read these words I want to call your attention to two things; 1) The voice that John hears is the same voice that he heard in chapter one, verse ten, and 2) These words were spoken to him alone. This is important because there is absolutely no justification for the claim that this voice is calling believers from the grave, or that the rapture will take place at this time. Do not take my word for it, read the verse. These words are words that John heard in a dream/vision almost two thousand years ago, not some voice in the future. Like the false prophets of old, those who teach otherwise ignore the words of God while teaching for doctrine the imagination of their own heart (Jeremiah 23:16).

After going through that door (in his dream/vision), the things that John describes tell us that he is seeing a symbolic vision of heaven, not the actual place. For example: The seven lamps symbolize the “seven Spirits of God” (Rev. 4:5). Christ is portrayed as a lamb “having seven horns and seven eyes” (Rev. 5:6). And, the golden vials full of incense symbolize the “prayers of saints” (Rev. 5:8).

Now, I believe that everything John sees, from the beginning of chapter four to the end of chapter eleven, should be grouped together. And, this is why. It is in John’s vision of heaven that he sees the seven seals being opened. What is described in chapter seven is seen as the seals are being opened, and the seven trumpets of chapters eight through eleven come out of the seventh seal. Those facts tie chapters four through eleven together.

So let us look at some of the things John actually sees:

There is an ancient tradition that interprets the four “living creatures” that John saw around the throne, – which resemble, in turn, a “lion”, a “calf”, a “man”, and an “eagle” – as the writers of the four Gospels. For that reason, it is not uncommon in more traditional churches to see icons portraying these creatures. However, I see no support for that interpretation

in the text. The only possible connection between those beasts and the Gospel writers is the number four, and that is really stretching it. Besides, how could John have been the creature that looked like an eagle (which tradition claims) when he was looking at all four of them.

The crowns that the twenty-four elders cast before the throne are not something they have earned by their works (Rev. 4:10). On the contrary, all of our own righteousness is as filthy rags in the sight of God (Isaiah 64:6). The crowns which they cast down are the crowns that are given to every believer by grace alone, by virtue of the fact that all who trust in Christ have been made “kings and priests” (Rev. 1:6 and 5:10).

Chapter five begins with a scroll that is sealed with seven seals. And, here John is sorrowful because no one was worthy to open it – that is until Christ (who is described as the lion of Judah) prevailed (Rev. 5:1-5). Now, I want you to ask yourself: Where did Christ prevail? And, the only Biblical answer is: On the cross. Therefore, what this is describing is something (symbolized by the seven seals) which would never have taken place if Christ had not died on the cross, and rose again.

When the first seal was opened, John “saw a white horse: and its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Rev. 6:2). As the next three seals are opened, he sees, in turn, a red horse and rider, a black horse and rider, and a pale horse and rider. Tradition interprets these horses as; 1) Christ, 2) war, 3) famine, 4) pestilence. There are others who point out that the rider of the first horse could not be Christ, because Christ is the one who is opening the seals. However, they then go to the opposite extreme by assuming that the rider of the first horse is the antichrist. I believe that both of those views are wrong. It would be inconsistent for the rider of the first horse to be a man, if the riders of the last three horses only represent abstract things such as war, famine, and pestilence. For that reason, I would like to suggest an alternative view.

In order to understand where I am coming from, I want to point out a parallel between the red horse and white horse of chapter six, and the red dragon and woman clothed in the sun (the light being white) of chapter twelve (Rev. 6:2-4 and 12:1-5). Now, I explained previously how the Bible identifies this woman, but let me go over it again. Revelation 12:17 tells us that this woman is the mother of those who trust in Christ. Galatians 4:26 tells us that the heavenly Jerusalem is the mother of those who trust in Christ. And, Revelation 21:2 tells us that the heavenly Jerusalem is the bride of Christ, His church (Ephesians 5:25-33). When we put those verses together it becomes clear that the woman clothed in the sun is Christ’s

church. Therefore, we can identify the color white with Christ's church, and the color red with persecution (Rev. 12:17).

Now, I mentioned previously that the seven seals represent something that would never have happened if Christ had not triumphed through His death on the cross, and been found worthy (Rev. 5:9). Therefore, we need to ask: What things would never have happened if Christ had not defeated death and been found worthy? And, one obvious answer is that the Spirit would never have been poured out on the day of Pentecost. So what happened as a result of Pentecost? Christ's church went forth with the Gospel "conquering, and to conquer" (Rev. 6:2). Before going further, let me point out that even though we should never use force of arms to advance the Gospel, the New Testament often uses the language of war. In 2Corinthians 10:4 we read, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God". In Ephesians Paul talks about putting on the armor of God. And, when we look at actual history the church did conquer Rome, not with weapons but through the power of the Holy Spirit. So this interpretation fits the facts.

After the day of Pentecost the church immediately encountered persecution. So identifying the red horse with persecution also fits the facts. And, if we identify the red horse with persecution, we can identify the great sword that is given to its rider (Rev. 6:4) as the sword of political power mentioned in Romans 13:4.

That brings us to the other two horses. Traditionally the black horse has been associated with famine. However, Amos speaks of a famine that is "not a famine of bread, or thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD," and that suggests apostasy (Amos 8:11). In fact, the color itself implies that the light of the gospel has been darkened. Then, the fact that the fourth horse is "pale" but not "white" implies that it represents an imitation of the white horse, a counterfeit gospel, false religion. And, that all fits what we see in the world.

When the fifth seal was opened John saw the "souls" of those who "were slain for the word of God, and for their testimony" (Rev. 6:9). That supports our identification of the red horse with persecution. Then, as the sixth seal is opened, John sees the stars fall from heaven (Rev. 6:13), the sky itself depart like a scroll (Rev. 6:14), and we are told that the great day of God's wrath has come (Rev. 6:17).

Now, the fact that the events described in connection with the sixth seal are the events of the end and we are specifically told that the great day of God's wrath has come, tell us that the seven seals do not represent

different periods of history. The things described in connection with the first five seals are things that have been going on since the day of Pentecost, and are going on today. And, the fact that chapter 6:17 and chapter 11:18 both say that the day of God's wrath has come, tells us that the events described in connection with the sixth seal cannot take place before the events described in connection with the seventh seal. Both have to do with the same time period, the time of the end.

Conclusion

Three important things to remember are: 1) John heard the voice mentioned in chapter four, verse one, almost two thousand years ago, in a vision. 2) There is nothing in the text to justify the claim that John heard that voice in the future, or that the "rapture" takes place when he hears it, and 3) John went through the door into heaven in his dream/vision, while he physically remained on the isle of Patmos.

In the next section we will look at chapter seven, the seventh seal, and the seven trumpets.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Part Four

Chapter Seven and the Seventh Seal

By Gary Ray Branscome

The portion of John's vision that is recorded in chapter seven has to do with sealing the saints. In reading this section it is important to know that this sealing is not something that will happen in the future, but something that has been going on for centuries. As it is written, "you... were also **sealed** with the holy Spirit of promise, after you believed," (Ephesians 1:13). And, again, "Do not grieve the holy Spirit of God, by whom you were **sealed** for the day of redemption," (Ephesians 4:30).

In the previous lesson I pointed out that the "white horse" of chapter six corresponds to the gospel going forth on the day of Pentecost, while the "red horse" indicates persecution. I also gave the reasons for that interpretation. And, am referring back to that because chapter seven was inserted between the sixth and seventh seals to clarify what is going on.

Just as the "white horse" corresponds to the gospel going forth after the day of Pentecost, the sealing of the Jews mentioned in verses four through eight also corresponds to the gospel going forth on the day of Pentecost. How do I know this? Why, because that is exactly what the Bible tells us in the Book of Acts. The Bible tells us that, "about three thousand souls were added *to their number* that day," the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). And, those "souls" were primarily Jews, if not all Jews. A short time later, "about five thousand" more were added (Acts 4:4). And, it has been estimated that almost one third of the population of Jerusalem had accepted Christ by the time the Temple was destroyed. Moreover, the book of James is addressed to the believing Jews that had been "scattered abroad" (James 1:1).

In chapter seven, the sealing of the Jews is followed by the sealing of a great multitude "that no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," (Rev. 7:9). "These are those who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). And, we know that they were sealed, because all who have had their sins washed away through faith in Christ have been sealed. [Compare Ephesians 1:13, with Galatians 3:2.]

The “great tribulation” that is mentioned in chapter seven is **persecution**. Those “who have come out of great tribulation,” have come to faith in Christ in the face of great persecution. And, this has been going on throughout history. Paul spoke of it when he said, “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). And again, “We also rejoice in persecution: knowing that tribulation produces commitment,” (Romans 5:3). Therefore, everything that John saw in chapter seven relates to what he saw in chapter six. The sealing of believers relates to the “white horse” and the outpouring of the gospel. And, the persecution relates both the “red horse” and to the martyrs mentioned in connection with the fifth seal.

These are things that have been going on since the day of Pentecost, and there is absolutely nothing in the text to support the claim that this tribulation will only last for seven years. Nothing! That claim is rooted in a private interpretation of Daniel 9:27, a verse that says absolutely nothing about the antichrist or tribulation. All of those things are being read into the text. And, reading unscriptural ideas into the text is the mark of a false prophet (2Peter 1:20). The people who make that claim are so far off base that the 2014 Journal of the “Spiritual Counterfeits Project” devoted an entire chapter to it (Volume 37:3-37:4). It was Christ who brought an end to animal sacrifice, not some future antichrist.

At the beginning of chapter eight the seventh seal is opened, and seven angels are given seven trumpets. At this point, I want to stress that fact that John is seeing a vision, not actual events. One place where the Bible reveals that is in chapter twelve, where John sees a red dragon who tries to devour Christ as soon as He is born. As you read those verses it should be obvious that the people who lived in Bethlehem at that time did not see a red dragon. Although what John saw does tell us that Satan was behind what Herod did, the people living in Bethlehem saw Herod’s soldiers, not a red dragon. And, you should keep that in mind as you read these chapters, and other chapters.

At the beginning of chapter nine, as the fifth trumpet sounds, the bottomless pit is opened, releasing the forces of hell upon the earth (Rev. 9:1-2). In connection with that opening I want to point out some parallels between this vision, and the vision that is recorded in chapters twelve through twenty-two. I have already pointed out the parallel between the white horse (Rev. 6:2), and the woman clothed in the white light of the sun (Rev. 12:1); and, between the red horse (Rev. 6:4), and the red dragon (Rev. 12:3). But, the fact that the both visions mention Satan’s release from the

bottomless pit provides us with another parallel (compare Rev. 9:1-2 and Rev. 20:2, 3, 7). The vision of the seven seals covers the period from Christ's victory over death (Rev. 5:5) to the end of the world (Rev. 6:13-17 and 11:18). And, the vision recorded in chapters twelve through twenty-two covers the period from Christ's birth (Rev. 12:1-5) to the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1). As you read the things that John describes it is important not to be sidetracked into useless speculation about unexplained details. While there is much that we will never understand this side of glory, speculation only tends to lead us away from God's Word (1Corinthians 3:19).

In the fifteenth verse of chapter eleven, the seventh and last angel sounds his trumpet. And, we know that the resurrection will take place at that time, not only because the Apostle Paul said, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible," but also because verse eighteen tells us that it is the time for the dead to be judged (Rev. 11:18).

For that reason, we need to look at what the Bible says about the last day. I am not talking about looking at interpretations, because interpretations are often wrong. We need to look at truths so clearly stated in Scripture that we do not need to interpret them. So here is the doctrine of the Last Day, presented line upon line, line upon line, Just as Isaiah said (Isaiah 28:10).

John 6:40 And this is the will of him who sent me, that every one who looks to the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life: and I will **raise him up on the last day**.

John 11:24 Martha responded, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the **last day**.

John 12:48 He who rejects me, and does not receive my words, has one who judges him: the word that I have spoken, will judge him on the **last day**.

2Timothy 4:1 I charge you therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom [on the last day, John 12:48].

1Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and **the dead in Christ shall rise first** [on the last day, John 6:40]: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

1Corinthians 15:52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump [on the last day, John 6:40]: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

2Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise [on the last day], and the elements will melt with intense heat, and the earth and everything in it will be burned up.

Conclusion

Three important things to remember are: 1) The sealing of the saints, which John saw in chapter seven, has been going on since the day of Pentecost, 2) The great tribulation is a reference to persecution, which has always gone hand in hand with the spread of the gospel, and 3) there is absolutely nothing in Scripture to support the claim that this tribulation will only last seven years, or that it will take place after Christ raises believers from the dead.

In the next section we will look at the vision of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet which begins with chapter twelve.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Part Five

The Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet

By Gary Ray Branscome

The fact that chapter eleven ends with the final judgment (Rev. 11:18), while chapter twelve begins with the birth of Christ, tells us that chapter twelve is the beginning of a new vision – a vision which introduces the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. This vision unfolds into a series of visions that continue to the end of the book.

Chapter twelve opens with John's vision of, "A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head" (Rev. 12:1). And the verses that follow tell us that she "travailing in child birth" and gives birth to "a man child, who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron," namely Christ. At the same time, John also sees, "a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns on his heads," who "stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born" (Rev. 12:3-4). Verse nine then tells us that this dragon is Satan.

The words, "her child was caught up to God, and to his throne," point to Christ's ascension, while the words, "the salvation, the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ has come," point to His death, burial and resurrection (Rev. 12:10). However, we are left with a question: Who is the woman? And, the words, "The dragon was angry with the woman, and went to make war against the rest of **her children**, who keep God's commandments, and **have the testimony of Jesus Christ**," give us a clue as to her identity (Rev. 12:17). The fact that her children have the **testimony of Jesus Christ** points us to Galatians 4:26, "the Jerusalem which is above is free, and **she is the mother of us all**". As we compare those two passages, it becomes clear that the woman is the heavenly Jerusalem. And, chapter twenty-one, verse two tells us that the heavenly Jerusalem is the bride of Christ, His church (Rev. 19:7, 2Cor. 11:2, Eph. 5:23).

Chapter thirteen opens with something new, a beast with seven heads and ten horns which rises out of the sea and receives its power from the dragon (Rev. 13:1-2). This beast will be referred to time and again in the following chapters, and it is one of the things that ties those chapters together. In chapter seventeen, John sees a woman sitting upon that beast

(Rev. 17:3). At least it appears to be that same beast, because it is also described as having seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 17:7). And, that woman is described as “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Rev. 17:5). Now, the reason I have brought this up is because, in that chapter an angel tells John that the woman he saw, the one sitting on the beast, “Is **that great city, which reigns** over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 17:18). Notice, that the city “reigns” (present tense). The use of the present tense points to the time the angel was speaking. And, the city which reigned at that time was Rome. Moreover, we know that following Christ’s death His church was persecuted first by Jews, and then by Rome. For that reason, I identify this beast with Rome.

In verse three we are told that one of the heads of the beast was “as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed” (Rev. 13:3). And, there are many different opinions as to what that wound signifies. There was an attempt to assassinate Nero, which he survived. However, we do not know if that is what is being referred to because the Bible does not tell us. The key fact is that the beast has something to do with Rome, and is persecuting the saints (verse 7). Other than that, this is just one of those details that we should not let ourselves be sidetracked with. The words, “no prophesy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,” tell us that the Holy Spirit will never give anyone their own private explanation of the text (2Peter 1:20)

In verse eleven John sees “another beast coming up out of the earth,” one that has “two horns like a lamb,” but speaks “like a dragon”. Now, the “horns like a lamb” call to mind Christ’s warning to “beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15). Therefore, it is no surprise that he is called a “false prophet” in chapter nineteen (Rev. 19:20).

Now, it is important to remember that we are reading the description of a dream/vision, not actual earthly events. The Bible tells us that time and again. Such as when it tells us that the heads of the beast represent both mountains and kings (Rev. 17:9-10). We need to keep that in mind as we read the text. For, just because John saw a beast (not man) cause fire “come down from heaven to the earth in the presence of men,” does not necessarily mean that some man will do that (Rev. 13:13). Just as the people living in Bethlehem did not actually see a red dragon, the world may never see a false prophet calling down fire from heaven. In fact, in light of our modern technology it might not even impress people if someone did. The thing we need to notice is that this false prophet has power from Satan to deceive.

Part of that deception involves leading people to make an image of the first beast (Rev. 13:14). However, what is the nature of that image? If the first beast represents the Roman political system, one could hardly make a statue of that. However, could that image represent a power wielding organization or institution that is patterned after the Roman political system? If so, the Papacy would certainly fit that description. And, at the time of the Reformation, when the Papacy was actively burning people at the stake, there were many who thought so. [If so, the false prophet would correspond to the black horse in chapter six.] Moreover, if that image does represent the Papacy, then the one who causes it to speak would be its spokesman, the Pope, the false prophet (Rev. 13:15).

This brings us to the “mark” of the beast, which is described in the last verses of chapter thirteen (Rev. 13:16-18). These verses actually speak of three things that seem to go together: 1) the mark, 2) the name of the beast, and 3) the number of his name. We are not told what these three things are, but they must involve unbelief for the Bible makes it clear that those who receive them are not saved (Rev. 14:11). [If so, the mark of the beast would correspond to the pale horse in chapter six.]

While we are told that the number is the “number of a man” (Rev. 13:18), the fact that the “mark” is to be received on the forehead or on the right hand harks back to the Old Testament, where the Children of Israel were told to bind God’s commandments upon their forehead and hand (Deut. 6:8 and 10:6, 17). That parallel with the law of Moses suggests that the mark may represent works righteousness. It may involve either placing those who received the mark under the Law – which was the problem at Galatia – or leading them to rely on their own works for salvation rather than on Christ (Galatians 5:4). And, that was clearly the problem at the time of the Reformation.

Conclusion

Three things to remember are: 1) Chapter twelve begins a new series of visions that are tied together by repeated references to the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, 2) Just because John saw something in his vision does not mean that people living on earth will see the same thing, and 3) the mark of the beast must involve unbelief.

In the next section we will look at chapter fourteen and fall of “Babylon”.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Part Six

Chapter Fourteen and the Fall of Babylon

By Gary Ray Branscome

As chapter fourteen begins, John sees a “Lamb” (not a man) standing on Mount Zion. However, the words that follow, “and with him a hundred forty-four thousand, who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads,” tell us that the “Lamb” in John’s vision represents Christ.

Here, again, I want to stress the fact that we are not interpreting the words of Scripture, for those words only tell us what John saw in his dream (2Corinthians 1:13). What we are interpreting is the dream/vision itself. For that reason, even an expert knowledge of the Greek words that are used will not help us in understanding the dream, for the words tell us only what John saw. Moreover, because we are interpreting a dream, that dream should never be interpreted to contradict what the Bible plainly says elsewhere. Furthermore, if we want the truth we should never base our doctrine on interpretations, for interpretations are the word of man not the Word of God. On the contrary, our doctrine should consist of those truths that are clearly and explicitly stated in Scripture, and no interpretation should ever contradict those statements of Scripture (Isaiah 8:20 and 28:10).

Now, when we looked at chapter thirteen I pointed out the connection between the beast, the false prophet, and Rome (Rev. 17:18). In keeping with that connection, the fact that the one-hundred and forty-four thousand who were with the Lamb were said to be virgins (who have not been defiled with women) points to the forced celibacy imposed by Rome, and thus to the thousands who were saved out of that system at the time of the Reformation (Rev. 14:4). That is why the angel (messenger) in verse six, who has the “everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth,” has long been associated with the Reformation (Rev. 14:8).

In verse eight, another angel follows, “saying, Babylon the great has fallen, has fallen, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her immorality” (Rev. 14:8). This is the first mention of Babylon in the Book of Revelation, and the mention of it here ties the beast and false prophet mentioned in chapter thirteen with what is said about Babylon in chapter seventeen. As to the immorality of Babylon, Rome is notorious not

only for her idolatry, but also for priests who father children by their housekeepers, priests who molest children, and priests who are homosexual.

In verse fifteen, John sees one, “like the Son of man,” sitting on a cloud, “having a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand”. [Notice that John is not seeing Christ Himself, but a likeness of Him (in his dream).] And, He uses the sickle to reap a mighty harvest (of souls). However, this harvest is reaped in “the great winepress of God’s wrath” (Rev. 14:19). And, the imagery used here, with its reference to blood, could be reminiscent of the wars that followed the Reformation, as Rome sought to force all Evangelical Christians back under its control.

As chapter fifteen opens John sees seven angels “having the seven final plagues; that complete God’s wrath” (Rev. 15:1). Here again, although the Bible is giving us a plain and literal description of what John saw, John is not seeing earthly events. The things that John saw could be as different from what is seen on earth as the red dragon in chapter twelve was different from Herod’s soldiers.

For example: In chapter seventeen we are told that the sea upon which Babylon sits represents, “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and language groups” (compare Rev. 17:1 and 15). Therefore, the seas spoken of in chapter 15:2 and 16:3 could be symbolic of, “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and language groups”.

In chapter 16, verse 13 John sees “three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet”. And, in verse 14 we are told that they “are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty”. “And He gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon” (Rev. 16:16).

In the light of these verses, it is interesting to note that during the past century many, if not most, of the governments of the world have turned against Christianity, including our American government. We have seen the Ten Commandments banned from public schools and courtrooms, communities told to stop putting up manger scenes, and towns forced to remove Christian symbols from their official seal. As to the fact that these spirits come out of the dragon, beast and false prophet, according to one source of information, Adam Weishaupt (who founded the secret Luciferian order of Illuminati in 1776) was trained by the Jesuits and came out of that organization. Some years later, after a number of European governments had suppressed his organization, some of its former members were instrumental

in forming the Communist Party. And, up to the time the iron curtain fell the Communist Party was playing the major role in turning governments against Christianity. At present, secularism, humanism, and atheism are playing that role, but Satan is still hard at work.

Now, while the name “Mageddon” (or Megiddo) suggests divine deliverance – because God fought against Sisera in that valley – the prefix “Ar” or “Har” means mountain, and Megiddo is a valley not a mountain (Judges 5:19-20). Therefore, just because John saw a battle there in his dream/vision does not mean that is what the people living on earth will see. However, it is interesting that the communist reign in Russia lasted exactly seventy years (from 1918 to 1988), the same length of time as the Babylonian captivity of Israel.

Chapter seventeen opens with one of the seven angels taking John aside, saying, “Come with me; I will show you the judgment of the great whore who sits on many waters” (Rev. 17:1). Now, in an earlier lesson I pointed out that dreams recorded in Scripture sometimes consist only of what is seen, but at other times include a spoken message. In chapter seventeen John is given a spoken message. The angel explains the image of Babylon and the beast that carries her (Rev. 17:7).

John is told that the seven heads are the “seven mountains, on which the woman sits” (present tense), but are also “seven kings” (Rev. 17:9-10). The city of Rome claimed that it was built on seven hills. Since that time, other cities have mimicked that claim, but it originated with Rome. Of the seven horns, it is said that, “five are fallen” (past tense), and “one is” (present tense) (Rev. 17:10). John is also told that the ten horns represent ten kings, who “will give their power and authority to the beast,” but will “hate the whore,” and “burn her with fire” (Rev. 17:12, 16). Remember that reference to “fire,” because Babylon will burn in chapter eighteen.

John is then told that the woman he saw (Babylon) “is that great city, which reigns [present tense] over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 17:18). The use of the present tense points to the time the angel was speaking, and at that time Rome was the great city which reigned over the kings of the earth.

As chapter eighteen opens John sees another angel “come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was illuminated by his radiance”. Now, that radiance could be symbolic of the gospel. If so, the angel’s appearance could indicate another great outpouring of the gospel. At any rate, as soon as the angel appears the cry goes out “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen,” (Rev. 18:2).

That being said, I want to point out a key parallel between chapter fourteen and chapter eighteen. In both chapters John sees an angel. One has the “everlasting gospel” to preach, the other illuminates the earth (compare Rev. 14:6 with 18:1). And, in both chapters the cry “Babylon is fallen,” follows the angel (compare Rev. 14:8 with 18:2). That parallel raises this question: Does the fall of Babylon happen twice, or is chapter eighteen referring to the same events as chapter fourteen? Personally, I would like to believe that there will be another reformation, in which millions turn to faith in Christ. But, the parallels between chapters 14-16 and chapters 18-19 strongly indicate that these chapters both relate to the same events.

In chapter seventeen we were told that the kings [represented by ten horns] who were supposedly under the authority of Babylon, would hate her, and “burn her with fire” (Rev. 17:12, 16). Now, we are told that, “she will be utterly consumed by fire,” and that many will weep when they see “the smoke of her burning” (Rev. 18:8, 9, 18). That prophecy seems to have been fulfilled in 1529 when the king of Spain – who had taken his army to Rome to help the Pope wage war against Evangelical Christians – was so offended by the immorality of Rome that his soldiers burned the city. The rest of the chapter talks about that burning, and about the judgment of God on that city.

Conclusion

Three things to remember are: 1) As we read this account of John’s vision, we need to clearly distinguish between the words of Scripture – which tell us only what John saw and heard (2Corinthians 1:13) – and the vision itself, which is highly figurative; 2) The parallels between chapters fourteen and eighteen suggest that they both may relate to the same events; and, 3) The dreams that are recorded in Scripture always need to be interpreted in the light of what the Bible clearly and explicitly says – never in the light of other interpretations.

In the next section we will look at chapter nineteen and the Thousand Years.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Part Seven

Chapter Nineteen and the Thousand Years

By Gary Ray Branscome

Chapter nineteen opens with, “the voice of a great multitude in heaven, shouting, Hallelujah; Salvation, glory, honor, and power, belong to the Lord our God” (Rev, 19:1). This cry of rejoicing is one of the many doctrinal statements that I mentioned in the first lesson, statements which are often overlooked. The reason for the rejoicing is the fall of Babylon (Rev. 19:2). And, we are told that her smoke “rises up for ever and ever,” indicating that her fall is permanent.

The reference to the twenty-four elders (in verse 4) harks back to the vision of the heavenly throne room in chapter four, where this series of visions began (compare Rev. 4:4 and 19:4).

The “righteousness of saints” (mentioned in verse eight) is not the righteousness of works, for the Bible plainly tells us that all of our own righteousness is as “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). The only righteousness that avails before God is the righteousness that is imputed to us through faith in Christ (Romans 4:6, 11 and 10:4). And, all who have come to faith in Christ are called to His supper (compare Matt. 22:11-13 and Rev. 19:8-9).

John then sees “a white horse,” ridden by one whose name is “The Word of God” (Rev. 19:11, 13). Now, many who read this account assume that these verses are describing Christ’s second coming. However, a close reading of the text reveals that **nothing could be further from the truth.**

Whether we are interpreting a dream, or a parable, it is important to interpret it in the light of what the Bible plainly says elsewhere, and not just let our imagination run wild. And, there is nothing in chapter nineteen that is even similar to what the clear passages of Scripture tell us about Christ’s return.

When Christ returns, He will not be riding a horse (flying horses exist only in dreams), but will come in the clouds in the same way the Apostles saw Him go (Acts 1:9-11, Matt. 24:30 and 26:64, Mark 13:26, Rev. 1:7, Luke 21:27). On that day, His return will be sudden, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, // as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even to the west, // [He] will descend from heaven with a shout, // and every eye will see him” (1Cor. 15:52, Matt. 24:7, 1Thess. 4:16, Rev. 1:7). At that time,

“all who are in the graves will hear his voice, and will come out,” and He “will judge the living and the dead at his appearing” (John 5:28-29, 2Tim. 4:1, 1Thess. 4:16). Moreover, Christ Himself said that this would happen on the “last day” (John 6:39-40, John 11:24, John 12:48).

None of this is mentioned in chapter nineteen! That leads us to ask: What then could chapter nineteen be referring to? And, I believe the answer is found in Mark 16:19-20 where we read, “After the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, **the Lord working with them**”. Think carefully about the words, “**the Lord working with them**”. Those words tell us that when the power of God began to spread the gospel, after the day of Pentecost, Christ was not somewhere far away but was actively involved – as the conversion of Saul/Paul revealed. And, if Christ is actively involved in spreading the gospel, then there is a clear parallel between the white horse and rider in chapter nineteen, and the white horse and rider in chapter six. The difference lies in the fact that this horse and rider does not appear until after the fall of Babylon.

In the last lesson, when we looked at chapter eighteen, I pointed out the parallel between the angel in chapter fourteen (verse 6), and the angel in chapter eighteen (verse 1). In both cases, the cry “Babylon is fallen” follows the appearance of the angel, and that parallel raises this question: Does the fall of Babylon happen twice, or is chapter eighteen referring to the same events as chapter fourteen? Now, the reason I am bringing that up again is because the words, “He treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God,” clearly parallel the reference to “the great winepress of God’s wrath,” that is mentioned in chapter fourteen (compare Rev. 19:15 with 14:19). Keeping that parallel in mind, there is another parallel between the spiritual battle with the kings of the earth described in chapter nineteen, and the one described in chapter sixteen (Compare Rev. 16:13-16 with 19:19-21). Taken together, those parallels are a very strong indication that these chapters cover the same events.

The Thousand Years

As chapter twenty opens, John sees an angel who seizes “the dragon, that old serpent, who is the Devil, and Satan,” binds him for a “thousand years,” and throws him into the bottomless pit, to keep him from deceiving the nations until the thousand years are over” (Rev. 20:1-3).

In reading this you need to remember that you are reading the description of a dream/vision, not a description of actual events. Moreover,

these verses say nothing about Christ coming to earth, believers being raised from the dead, or some golden age when lions lay down with lambs. Yet those ideas, and more, are often assumed and read into these verses. Old Testament passages are twisted to agree with what is only being assumed in connection with these verses, and that is absurd. These verses are the only verses in the entire Bible that speak of a “thousand year” period. And, just because John saw it in his dream/vision does not mean that is what the people living on earth will see.

In my opinion, the claim that this “thousand year” binding of Satan represents the entire period from Christ’s resurrection to the end doesn’t seem to fit the text, because many of the preceding chapters say just the opposite, telling us how that Satan is working through the beast and false prophet to deceive the nations. However, here again we need to remember that we are looking at a highly figurative dream/vision, not historical events.

While the “thousand years” may refer to some future period when Christianity has gone worldwide (Hab. 2:14), Christ’s words, “My kingdom is not of this world,” make it clear that He will not be physically present on earth at that time (John 18:36).

Conclusion

Three things to remember are: 1) The “righteousness of saints” is not the righteousness of works, but is the righteousness that is imputed to us through faith in Christ, 2) There is nothing in chapter nineteen that corresponds to what the Bible tells us about Christ’s second coming, 3) In reading the Book of Revelation we need to remember that John is describing what he saw in a dream/vision, not earthly events.

In the next section we will look at the first resurrection, the final judgment, and what lies beyond.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Part Eight

The First Resurrection to the End

By Gary Ray Branscome

In chapter twenty verse four John says, “I saw thrones, and those who sat on them were given authority to judge: and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast, or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads, or on their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection,” (Rev. 20:4-5).

Now, those who read these verses often assume that this resurrection is a physical resurrection, and that these “souls” will be reigning on earth. However, we know that is not true, because Christ has specifically told us that He will not raise up believers until the “last day” (John 6:39). Therefore, the claim that those mentioned here have been raised from the dead and “raptured” before the “last day” is not only pure conjecture it is rebellion against God, for Christ said just the opposite (John 6:40). Moreover, because that interpretation has its origin in man’s imagination it is a “private interpretation,” and private interpretations are not acceptable as doctrine (2Peter 1:20). Furthermore, any interpretation that contradicts what the Bible plainly says is of the devil (Isaiah 8:20).

If we will allow the clear passages of Scripture to cast light on these verses, we will find that the first resurrection is not a physical resurrection, but is the spiritual resurrection from being “dead in trespasses and sins,” to new life in Christ (Ephesians 2:5-6). As it is written, “If you have risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at God’s right hand” (Col. 3:1). However, the Book of Revelation is not here talking about believers who are still on earth, but those who have gone on to be with Christ. For, “to be absent from the body” is to be “present with the Lord” (2Cor. 5:8). In fact, all who have died in the faith are, at this very minute, reigning with Christ in paradise (Luke 23:43). As it is written, “He who hears my word, and believes on him who sent me, has everlasting life, and will not come into condemnation; but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). What’s more, the very “angel” (messenger) who was talking to John was one of those believers.

[NOTE: When people see the word “angel” in the Bible, they generally assume that it is referring to one of the spirit beings created at the same time Satan was created. However, in two different passages we are told that John fell at the feet of the “angel” who was speaking to him “to worship him,” and was told, “Do not do it: I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have **the testimony of Jesus**” (Rev. 19:10 and 22:9). Notice the words, “**the testimony of Jesus**,” for those words tell us that that particular angel (messenger) was an Israelite who had been saved through faith in Christ, and was at that very time reigning with Christ. I am not saying that he had changed into an angel, the Bible says no such thing. However, the word translated “angel” simply means messenger. So in this case, a believer who had passed on to be with Christ was the messenger “angel”.]

That leaves us with the question: Why does Revelation 20:4-5 speak of believers reigning for one thousand years? However, since the Bible does not answer that question, we dare not add to God’s word by making up an answer. Perhaps that number is figurative. Perhaps it points to a time when their testimony has triumphed, and Christianity reigns worldwide. Perhaps it describes the glory they have in heaven with Christ prior to the resurrection. We do not know. But we do know that they will not be physically present on earth, because Christ specifically said that He would not raise them up until the “last Day” (John 6:40).

At the beginning of chapter twenty John saw Satan imprisoned in the “bottomless pit” for a “thousand years” (Rev. 20:1-3). This “bottomless pit” is the same “bottomless pit” spoken of in chapter 9:1. And, we know that the release of Satan at the end of the “thousand years” is the same release that is mentioned in chapter 9:1, because in both cases Satan’s onslaught ends with the final judgment (compare Rev. 11:18 with 20:10). Chapters nine through eleven simply give us a more detailed account of the events that will take place after Satan is released.

This brings us to the final judgment. As John tells us what he saw, the words, “I saw the dead, **small and great**, stand before God,” tell us that everyone will be there (Rev. 20:12). There will be no exceptions! We know that those who claim that believers will not be present are not telling the truth, because the words, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,” say just the opposite (2Cor. 5:10). Moreover, those who try to get

around those words by claiming that they refer to a different judgment are adding sin to sin because the Bible says no such thing.

The words, “the Father does not judge anyone, but has committed all judgment to the Son,” tell us that it is the Son who will be sitting on the great white throne (John 5:22). And, we know that this will take place on the “last day,” because the Bible plainly tells us that it will take place on the “last day” (John 11:24 and 12:48).

On the last day, the trumpet will sound (1Cor. 15:52), the dead (including believers) will rise (John 6:39-40), and all who trust in Christ will “be caught up”... “to meet the Lord in the air” (1Thess 4:16-17). Then, on that same day, “the elements will melt with intense heat, and the earth and everything in it will be burned up” (compare 1Thess. 5:1-2 with 2Peter 3:10).

At this point, when you read the words, “everyone was judged according to their works,” it is important to understand the proper relationship of Law and Gospel. The Law was given to show us our sin and need of forgiveness in Christ (Rom. 3:19-20), and church members who are rationalizing sin, or doing what they know to be wrong, need this warning. At the same time, those who have a repentant heart and a tender conscience before God need to know that no sin is imputed to those who trust in Christ (Rom. 4:6-8). As it is written, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” (Rom. 8:1).

Because God is everywhere, the moment the dead rise they will all be standing before His throne (Matt. 25:31-32). Therefore, when Christ raptures the saints, He will be saying to them, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). At that time, all believers will be caught up to His throne, and will join Him in passing judgment on the lost. And, all who are “not found written in the book of life,” will be “thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15). As it is written, “the saints shall judge the world” (1Cor. 6:2).

The mention of the “throne” in chapter 21:5 tells us that the account of the last judgment is continued in that chapter. So it is in connection with the final judgment that John sees, “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). He then sees, “the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). The word “bride” in that passage identifies the heavenly Jerusalem as the bride of Christ. In verse nine she is called “the bride, the Lamb’s wife”. And, that identifies her as the church, for the church is the bride of Christ

(Eph. 5:23). Therefore, although the description of the heavenly city that John gives us is a literal account of what he saw, he was describing a dream/vision, not actual events. For that reason, the glory that he describes is not the glory of a stone and metal city, but the glory that will belong to every believer.

Now, as we look at the description he gives, it is important to know that translators have a hard time matching many of the ancient names for gem-stones with the names that are used today. For example: in verse eleven “jasper” is said to be “clear as crystal”. However, while “jasper” is a form of quartz, in modern gemology the thing that sets “jasper” apart from other forms of quartz is the fact that it is not clear, even in part. So, perhaps the word “jasper” might be better translated simply as “quartz”.

When it comes to the “new heaven” and “new earth,” Some Bible scholars believe that it will be completely new, while others think that the present heaven and earth will be renovated. As far as I am concerned, the fact that the stars fall from the heavens, and the elements melt with fervent heat precludes the possibility of renovation. Moreover, the fact that the new heavens and new earth will have no sun, moon, or sea is strong evidence that it will be radically different from anything we have known, and far more glorious (Rev. 21:1 and 23). As it is written, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for those who love him” (1Cor. 2:9).

The words, “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand,” then remind us that the things prophesied in this book were beginning to take place at the time the book was written (Rev. 22:10).

Jesus Himself then warns us not to add to, or take from what is written (Rev. 22:16, 18-19). And, the book closes with the words, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (Rev. 22:21).

Conclusion

The words, “we have not written anything to you, other than what you read,” tell us that the actual words of Scripture, the words that John wrote down, tell us only what John saw and heard in his dream, nothing more (2Cor. 1:13). Therefore, whenever men try to interpret what John saw, they are interpreting a dream, not the words of Scripture. For that reason, every interpretation which they devise is a “private interpretation” (2Peter 1:20). That is why we should never interpret John’s dream/vision to contradict what the Bible plainly says. We should never interpret it to contradict

Christ's words, "My kingdom is not of this world," or, "Every one who looks to the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 18:36 and 6:40).