

# REVELATION



An Explanation of This Book  
Especially for you

Ger de Koning

**ROCK  
SOLID  
12**



# Revelation



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Rock Solid #12

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Layout: Jan Noordhoek

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## Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

### **Old Testament**

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah  
Nah – Nahum  
Hab – Habakkuk  
Zep – Zephaniah  
Hag – Haggai  
Zec – Zechariah  
Mal – Malachi

**New Testament**

Mt – Gospel of Matthew  
Mk – Gospel of Mark  
Lk – Gospel of Luke  
Jn – Gospel of John  
Acts – Acts of the Apostles  
Rom – Letter to the Romans  
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians  
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians  
Gal – Letter to the Galatians  
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians  
Phil – Letter to the Philippians  
Col – Letter to the Colossians  
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians  
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians  
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy  
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy  
Tit – Letter to Titus  
Phlm – Letter to Philemon  
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews  
Jam – Letter of James  
1Pet – First Letter of Peter  
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter  
1Jn – First Letter of John  
2Jn – Second Letter of John  
3Jn – Third Letter of John  
Jude – Letter of Jude  
Rev – Revelation

## Explanation of general format

**PERSONAL PRONOUNS** are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

**BRACKETS** [ ] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

**SHARP BRACKETS** < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** \* are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

**ALL CAPS** in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

# Revelation

## **Introduction**

The book of Revelation is probably written around the year 90 by the evangelist and apostle John. This book is addressed to seven churches in Asia (Rev 1:11) in the first place, but is also meant for the whole Christian church through the ages.

Revelation has its own, unique place among the twenty seven books and letters the New Testament contains. After the five historical books and the twenty one letters in which also prophetic portions appear, the book of Revelation is in its whole a strictly prophetic book (Rev 1:3). This last book of the Bible reveals our *future* and is in that way a nice counterpart of the first book of the Bible that declares our *origin*.

In the book of Revelation it is about the future of the Lord Jesus. And His future determines the future of the world, of Israel, of the church and of the devil and his henchmen. In this Bible book the Lord Jesus is in the center. It is about His Person, about His redemption work, His resurrection, His glorification and His return.

This book is the great terminus where all trains that have started to run in the Old Testament, reach their final destination. I haven't checked, but someone has found, in the four hundred and four verses that make up this book, at least two hundred and seventy-eight verses that you can somehow connect to a verse or section in the Old Testament. That, of course, is not strange if you consider that Christ is also the subject of the prophecy of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament we are pointed ahead to Him as the One Who is coming. In the book of Revelation He has come and as the revealed Christ He is the Center of all events.

It is the book of contrasts. You will discover how the spiritual powers light and darkness and good and evil oppose each another. In the same way God and Christ and satan are opposites. Other opposites are people who are saved and people who are not saved, and also holy and unholy angels.

All these persons are actors who are performing on the world stage. You will see how the stage changes and transforms from time to eternity and vice versa. The backdrop of the show is formed by heaven and earth and the abyss and the lake of fire.

Everything is supported by music and songs and other expressions of feelings. The song of the victory and the 'woe' cry of the defeated cause happiness and also sadness. But the outcome is that God triumphs and that the glories of the Lord Jesus in both the millennial kingdom of peace and in eternity shine in undimmed and immortal beauty and splendor.

There are various possibilities to subdivide this book. The simplest and clearest one is supplied in the book itself, in Revelation 1 (Rev 1:19). It is a subdivision in three parts:

1. the things which you have seen (Revelation 1:1-20),
2. the things which are (Revelation 2:1-3:22) and
3. the things which will take place after these things (Revelation 4:1-22:21).

# Revelation 1

## **Rev 1:1 | Purpose of the Book**

*1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated [it] by His angel to His bond-servant John,*

V1. The first word of the book, “revelation”, indicates that something is about to be unveiled. There is something to be made known which formerly was hidden. It is therefore remarkable that to many Christians this book is incomprehensible and mysterious. I do not claim that everything is easy to explain, but I do say that the events in this book are not obscure, but are made clear. The veil over the future is taken away.

You shall indeed have to make efforts to figure out in which way the future is clarified here. Many symbols, for example, are used. But your attempts to also understand this part of God’s Word will be doubly rewarded if you continually remind yourself that God finds this the best way to communicate to you His thoughts about the future.

If you only read this first verse carefully and allow that to sink in, you will see that it is full of instructions for understanding the contents of this book. It says that it is the revelation “of Jesus Christ”. That means that Jesus Christ is the One, Who reveals or makes known (cf. Gal 1:12). *He* acts. At the same time it is of course also true that the revelation refers to Him, which means that He is the One Who is revealed. He is both the Center and the Executor of God’s counsels.

Then you read that “God gave Him” that revelation. That means that the Lord Jesus is seen here as Man, Who has taken a place of dependence. He receives everything out of the hands of God. He is so truly Man, that it is written of Him that He as Man does not know when the fulfillments of the things will take place (Mk 13:32). Here you stand before the inconceivable mystery of God and Man in one Person.

Then John writes about the purpose of the revelation and that is “to show His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place”. The bond-servants here are in the first place the prophets (Rev 10:7; 11:18), but they also represent the believers in a general sense (Rev 7:3; 19:5; 22:3; Rom 6:19-22). To be able to see the future things and to take them in, you need the mind of a bond-servant. Conversely, knowing the things to come will make you a better slave. You will be serving with insight in accordance to the great plans of God, with a view to the church, professing Christianity, Israel and the world.

The word “show” plays an important role in the book of Revelation. God continually ‘shows’ things to John, and John in his turn passes on what has been ‘shown’ to him. The aim of this book is to *show* that the judgment is coming. It must “soon” take place or ‘in a hurry’, which is rapidly, quickly.

You may say that it is not that soon, for it is nearly two thousand years ago that this has been written down and it still has not happened. But don’t be mistaken. This word remains in force, for time doesn’t count for God and for faith (Psa 90:4; 2Pet 3:8). And it “must” happen. You may say that there is mention here of a Divine must. God is not only the *omniscient* God Who tells what is going to happen, He is also the *omnipotent* God Who makes things happen the way He wants.

To make known His plans with the world and most of all to reveal His Son, He has used angels. Angels have been used more often by God as mediators (Acts 7:38; Gal 3:19). The fact that God uses angels indicates that there is a distance between Him and John to whom He gives His messages. This goes even more for those to whom John in his turn has to pass on those messages.

Formerly John received messages from the Lord while he was reclining on His bosom (Jn 13:23-26). That indicates confidentiality. However, John is not apostle here, but prophet. Prophets speak to God’s people when decay takes place. They warn for of the judgment that is imminent. John is the last one in the chain of five links through which the revelation of God reaches His bond-servants:

1. the revelation is *from* God;

2. comes of Jesus Christ;
3. *by* His angel;
4. *to* John;
5. *to* His bond-servants.

The revelation was “communicated” or “signified” (NKJV) to John. This expression “signified” is typical for this book. It is derived from the word ‘sign’. John often receives the messages on the things to come by the means of signs or symbols, through which he gets to see what must take place. Something like that we see in Matthew 13 where the Lord makes use of parables. He uses them to teach. He tells His disciples why He does that and says that through His explanation they will be able to understand the deeper meaning of these parables, while it will remain hidden for the mass of people (Mt 13:10-17,34-35).

In this book you will see that the symbols which are used especially are borrowed from nature:

- celestial bodies – the sun, the moon, the stars;
- the natural phenomena, such as wind, lightning;
- the world of plants, such as trees, grass;
- the world of animals, such as lamb, the grasshopper;
- the world of men, such as mother and child, harlot and bride;
- the world of culture, such as musical instruments;
- agricultural tools.

Also the many numbers used in this book are often symbolic: two, three, three and a half, four, five, six, seven, eight, ten, twelve, twenty-four, forty-two, one hundred and forty four, six hundred and sixty six, one thousand, twelve hundred and sixty, sixteen hundred.

Its explanation is not left to your imagination. The symbols are explained

1. by the book itself,
2. by the context of the book and

3. by the use of it in the Old Testament.

That does not mean that there is always one unambiguous explanation for each symbol. It also happens that certain matters or events are no symbols, but that they must be taken literally.

All in all, by opening this book to read it we stand at the beginning of an exciting discovery journey. Let us do that with the humble mind of people who are aware that the omnipotent God wants to share His plans with us. Let us at the same time pray that what He reveals to us will have the effect that we put our life at His disposal.

Now read Revelation 1:1 again.

Reflection: Thank the Lord that He wants to involve you in His future plans and ask Him to help you to live in accordance with them.

## Rev 1:2-6 | Recipients, Blessing and Praise

*2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, [even] to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. 4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6 and He has made us [to be] a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him [be] the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

V2. The revelation of which John is a witness and in which he involves you, is no fabrication of himself. It comes to you with all the authority of the Word spoken by God. What John testified about the coming events, comes from the mouth of God. As an extra emphasis it is added that what God has said is completely covered by “the testimony of Jesus Christ”. The Lord Jesus testifies to what God has spoken.

“All that he saw” is the contents of this whole book. Everything that John has seen and what he has written in this book is therefore the Word of God, while the testimony of Jesus Christ indicates the prophetic nature of it. After all, it is about the revelation, the becoming visible in the world, of Him.

V3. There is a special blessing associated with reading or the reading aloud this book and the listening to its contents: you are “blessed”. No one can ‘read’ it and ‘hear’ it without being blessed. What you read and hear are messages about future events that are inspired word for word.

Beside reading and hearing it is also important to “heed the things which are written in it”. “To heed” means that you treasure these things in your heart, so that they may have an influence in the practice of your life too. After all, from your heart your life is governed (Pro 4:23). The call to heed returns one more time at the end of the book (Rev 22:7). What is written in this book is therefore sandwiched between these two calls.

As a matter of fact, that it is “written”, means that it is of lasting value. It is always possible to be read in order to see what must yet take place and it can also be read to check on what is happening around you. You therefore have a perfect manual of the future in your hands. I would like to advise you to often consult it because “the time” when everything is brought to a decision “is near”. The Lord Jesus is about to appear and to judge.

V4. John is the right person to write this book. The Lord Jesus said of him that he, concerning his ministry, would remain until He comes (Jn 21:22). That means that John also has a ministry regarding the future. He already achieves that ministry in a sense when he speaks in his first letter about the antichrist and the return of Christ and the decay that was already showing up. But the full achievement of it we find in this book of Revelation.

He writes the book “to the seven churches that are in Asia”. The mention of the number “seven” is not insignificant. The number seven represents perfection. The seven churches represent the whole church. It indeed are seven different churches. You will see it better when we will study chapters 2 and 3. That means that the whole church has been manifested on earth in different ways.

You must have noticed in the letters which Paul has written to various churches that local churches are different from each other. That variety is not only seen in the different local churches, but also in the various periods of the existence of the church on earth. You recognize that directly if you only think of how the church was at the beginning and how the church is today. In that way there are more differences in the development of the church.

All those different churches may learn a lot from one another and we also can learn a lot from it. That’s why it is so wonderful that in God’s Word we have this writing of John to them.

It is also beautiful to see that the blessing of “grace” and “peace”, which you can remember from the letters of Paul, is also wished by John here to the seven churches. “Grace” is the source of all blessing, it is the unmerited favor of God, which you receive just on the basis of Who He is. If you

realize that God deals with you in grace, the result will be that you will go your way with “peace” in your heart, whatever the circumstances.

But there is a difference with the letters of Paul when it comes the question from Whom you get the blessing. In those letters the blessing comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Here it is “from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne”. That is fitting with this Bible book.

Here you see God as He is presented in the Old Testament: as Yahweh, the God of the covenant, the God of faithfulness to His covenant. Then what is said next is not first ‘Who was’, but “Who is”. That means that He is seen as the “I AM WHO I AM” (Exo 3:14). But He is also the One “Who was”. That is the God of the past, Who has always taken care of His people and the whole earth. He is also the One “Who is to come”, for He is also the God of the future.

Then in the blessing “the seven Spirits” are mentioned. This is the Holy Spirit, but as the Spirit of power through Whom God will execute the judgments from His throne. The number seven refers to the variety and the perfection with which the Lord Jesus will execute the judgments in the power of this Spirit at His return (cf. Isa 11:2). Therefore the attention is drawn to the “throne” of God, which emphasizes that it is about reigning and the exercise of power.

V5. Finally grace and peace are wished “from Jesus Christ”. Just like with the seven Spirits, to Whom is added “Who are before His throne”, also something is added to the name of Jesus Christ. You can actually say that three titles of Him are mentioned which all are in relation with the earth.

He was “the faithful witness” to God in the past on earth (1Tim 6:13), from the manger to the cross (Jn 18:37). He has always been faithful. The church was also meant to be like that, but it failed and still fails to do so.

He is also “the firstborn of the dead”. This He is in the present time, since His death and resurrection (Acts 26:23; Col 1:18). ‘Firstborn’ means that He is the highest in the realm of the resurrection.

Third He is “the ruler of the kings of the earth”. This He is also now, but this He will be openly in the future, so He will be revealed (Psa 89:27).

When He is thus presented, the church spontaneously responds. That will be your response too. The heart of each who loves Him agrees to it that He “loves us”. He has loved us and still loves us. Isn’t it great that He, Who is emphatically presented in this book as Judge, is the One Who loves you? His love has been especially expressed in the way that He “released us from our sins by His blood”. This meant to Him that He had to go into death, for only His blood could redeem you from your sins. To you it means that all future judgments will pass you by completely, for He has redeemed you once and for all. Isn’t that a reason to praise Him?

V6. But He has done much more than He did regarding the past, which was necessary to deliver you from judgment. He has taken away your sins to make you to something together with all believers, namely, “[to be] a kingdom, priests to His God and Father”. What you have become is what He has made you to be. There is absolutely no achievement from your side. You owe everything to Him. It is nothing more than great grace that you may partake of His government. As a redeemed person you receive, together with all believers, royal dignity together with Christ, “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (verse 5), so that you also are exalted above the kings of the earth (1Pet 2:9; cf. Exo 19:6).

In addition to this, you are also made a priest before His God and Father. Everything that the Lord Jesus did He did with a view to the honor of His God and Father. You are made someone who may praise and worship in God’s presence (Rev 4:10; 5:9; Heb 13:15; 1Pet 2:5). You can do that now already. When the Lord Jesus will take His royal majesty upon Himself, you may be a means of blessing to those who are enduring hardships on earth and who go to God with their suffering. You then may bring “the prayers of saints” before God (Rev 5:8).

To Him be the glory for everything He has done for you. Everything you have become reflects His glory. While man always did all things to his own glory and in his own strength, the Lord Jesus did everything to the glory of God from Whom He drew all power as a Man. As a Man He lived from all the words that came from the mouth of God (Mt 4:4). What characterized Him as Man and what He has achieved, will be seen and rejoiced in forev-

er. There is nothing more left for you to do than to wholeheartedly agree with the “amen” with which this praise ends.

Now read Revelation 1:2-6 again.

Reflection: What do you learn here about the Word of God and about the Lord Jesus?

**Rev 1:7-12 | John on Patmos**

7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." 9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance [which are] in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like [the sound] of a trumpet, 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send [it] to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;

V7. With a "behold" John draws the attention to Him Who will appear in person. This is the great event toward which the whole book is working. It is said in a way that it should not be looked forward to only later, but already now. You may call it the 'prophetic present tense'. It indicates how real and close the events are, not only for John in those days, but also for you today.

The Lord Jesus will appear "with the clouds of heaven" (Dan 7:13) and also "on the clouds of the sky" (Mt 24:30) which, as it were, form His throne. So it is not about His coming to take up the church, which you may call His first coming, for that will take place "in the clouds", and will not be visible for everyone (1Thes 4:17; cf. Acts 1:9; Lk 21:27). That will surely be the case at His second coming. Everyone will come face to face with Him, no man excepted.

Of all those people John mentions a certain category, namely, "those who pierced Him". This primarily refers to the Jews (Zec 12:10), but it also refers to the Gentiles, for a Roman soldier pierced Him (Jn 19:34). They who committed this deed of contempt will be full of fear when they behold Him. It will cause an enormous mourning among the Jews (Zec 12:10-14), which will be the beginning of their conversion. This is the way it will happen, "so it is to be. Amen". 'So it is to be' or 'yes' is the Greek confirmation

and 'amen' the Hebrew version of it, indicating for Gentiles and Jews that God's Word is established.

V8. Then He, Who is coming, makes Himself heard. He says Who He is: "I am the Alpha and the Omega." The alpha and the omega are the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet. In these two letters all the other letters are embedded. In this name you also see that He is 'the Word of God'. What He has started as the Alpha He will accomplish as the Omega. He Who shall come and is speaking here is the Lord Jesus. He is 'the first and the last' (Rev 1:17; 2:8; 22:13). That is also what Yahweh, LORD, the name of God in the Old Testament, says of Himself (Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), which is again another proof that the Lord Jesus is Yahweh.

He Who is speaking is 'Yahweh Elohim' or "the Lord God", which is the Lord Jesus. He is the One "who is", the Eternal One. He "was" and will always be. He is also the One "who is to come". He is the Almighty Who will realize all His promises and plans. He Who was pierced, when He as the weakness of God was hanging on the cross, is Yahweh Himself, "the Almighty", Who has all power in the universe and Who is about to reveal that power. This is a comfort for His people, because He carries and supports them with His omnipotence. At the same time it is a threat for His enemies, because He will judge them and render to every man according to his works.

V9. No one else than John addresses his readers. He doesn't present himself as an apostle, but as a "brother" among the brethren. In his Gospel he calls himself "the disciple" (Jn 21:24), and in his letters "the elder" (2Jn 1:1; 3Jn 1:1). He also calls himself "fellow partaker in the tribulation" from which we derive that he shares the same fate as his fellow believers who also had to endure suffering under the emperor of Rome. Tribulation goes together with faith. It is the path along which you must enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

The time to reign has not come yet. You still have to persevere, right through all kinds of tribulations and tests, till the moment comes to reign. When the Lord Jesus returns, that is when it will be. You may remember that the Lord Jesus is also still waiting for the establishment of the kingdom.

John speaks about “Jesus” here, which is the Name of His humiliation and a reminder of His sojourn on earth. When He was on earth He also showed that perseverance. When Pilate asks Him if He is the King of the Jews, He testifies that He is, but adds: “But as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm” (Jn 18:36). Pay attention to the words ‘but as it is’. It shows that during His presence on earth He did not establish His kingdom. That establishment is future even now.

John testified from God’s Word of that kingdom. This was not to the liking of the Roman ruler who saw in it a threat to his own kingdom and position (cf. Acts 17:7) and therefore expelled him to “the island called Patmos”. John did not speak what men loved to hear, otherwise he would not have been a captive now. He was ‘uneducated’ (Acts 4:13), but he spoke the Word of God with power and authority. In his preaching he testified to Jesus, Who is the center of all God’s thoughts and plans.

V10. There John was sitting, isolated and lonesome on an island. He is not voluntarily there, to have a break, but as a captive. He was exiled to that place, without any prospect of release. It doesn’t look like that he could expect a visit from time to time. But it doesn’t mean that the Lord was not with him and that the Spirit could not use him. On the day of the Lord, literally: the day pertaining to the Lord, the first day of the week (cf. 1Cor 11:20) he fell into a trance through the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 10:10; 22:17). The day of the Lord, the first day of the week, is the day of His resurrection (Jn 20:1,19, Acts 20:7; 1Cor 16:2). On this day John receives all information and visions that are written in this book.

But before he *sees* something, he *hears* something behind him. It is as if he is standing with his back to the churches, while he is looking at the kingdom in the expectation that it will come. But the Lord has not finished yet with His church on earth. He has to deal with it first. He calls John to look, so that he has to turn and must pay attention to what the Lord is paying attention to.

What he hears is “a loud voice like [the sound] of a trumpet”. It is not the voice of the good Shepherd, Who calls His sheep by name. He heard that voice when he walked with the Lord Jesus through Israel (Jn 10:11,14). But

now he hears the voice of an ominous Judge, of Someone Who pronounces and executes judgment.

V11. The voice of the Judge commands John to write in a book what he sees. That implies that he must sharply observe and take in. All his observations must then be documented in writings so that they will be preserved for later generations. However, the book is not only meaningful for later generations, but also for the seven named churches in Asia Minor, in the western part of present-day Turkey.

There were more churches in Asia Minor. But the Holy Spirit of God has chosen these seven because they are, as a matter of fact, a reflection of the church in its whole through the ages. That's why it says "the" seven churches. It is these seven particular churches to which this book should be sent. That there are seven, shows that it is about something complete. It is about the complete history of the church on earth.

Also the order is not random, but of certain importance. You will see that when we will take a closer look at these seven churches in the next two chapters. At the same time, each church is also mentioned separately, which you can derive from the word "to" that is before the name of each church.

V12. When John heard the voice and what it has said, he turns. He wants to see the voice that was speaking with him. Of course you cannot see a voice, but the voice is of a person. That Person is the Lord Jesus. He is the Word. When John turns he first sees "seven golden lampstands" and then only he sees the Son of Man. Isn't it like how it happens today, that we first see the believers and then only, as it were through them, the Lord Jesus?

John notices that the lampstands are of gold. Gold represents the glory of God. A lampstand is meant to spread light. Therefore, the fact that the churches are compared with golden lampstands means that the purpose of local churches is to spread Divine light.

Each local church ought to display in its environment Who God is. It can only do that by taking His Word into consideration. By listening to the truth of God's Word and obeying it, the light will be spread in the darkness. Darkness rules everywhere in the world and it covers more and

more places in professing Christianity. You will see how it happened that the light of the lampstand is getting weaker and weaker and that even a situation can arise that a lampstand is taken away.

Now read Revelation 1:7-12 again.

Reflection: What is the reason for John being on Patmos?

**Rev 1:13-20 | In the Middle of the Lampstands**

*13 and in the middle of the lampstands [I saw] one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet [were] like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice [was] like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

V13. After having seen the golden lampstands, John sees Someone standing in the middle of them. John recognizes Him as no one else than the "Son of Man", that is the Lord Jesus (cf. Dan 7:9-13). He is standing here – figuratively – in the middle of the churches, in order to judge them. That can be derived from the characteristics that are then observed by John. You find these characteristics also in Daniel 7, but there as characteristics of the Ancient of days, that is God Himself. That proves once more that the Lord Jesus is God. The wearied Man sitting by the well at Sychar (Jn 4:6) and the Creator Who "does not become weary or tired" (Isa 40:28) is the same Person.

The first characteristic of the Son of Man is that He is "clothed in a robe reaching to the feet". He is not the Servant here Who lays aside His garments to serve His disciples as a humble Servant (Jn 13:4; cf. Lk 12:35). It is the garment of the Judge. The Lord Jesus judges the church in connection with the responsibility it has as a testimony on earth (cf. 1Pet 4:17).

The second characteristic is that He is "girded across His chest with a golden sash". His "chest" speaks of love. 'Gold' speaks of Divine glory. The

“sash” speaks of serving. From this you can derive that He also as a Judge serves in love.

V14. He carries out His service as Judge reverently and with wisdom and in accordance with the purity of heaven. That is what the next characteristic refers to: “His head and His hair were white like white wool” (Pro 16:31; 20:29).

The following characteristic, “His eyes were like a flame of fire”, indicates that He sees through everything and tests everything that is not in accordance with His holiness. Nothing can remain hidden from this flame of fire. This is how He tests the entire professing Christianity of which the seven churches are a picture.

V15. That “His feet [were] like burnished bronze” means that the standard of His judgment is His own walk. What He should expect of the spiritual condition of the church is that it responds to what He has shown in His walk on earth in dedication to God. “Bronze” is a picture of a righteousness that can stand the fire of God’s judgment (Num 16:37-39), because there is nothing that has to be consumed by the fire. Everything is in accordance with God.

While He shows Himself in this way, “His voice [was] like the sound of many waters” (Eze 43:2; Psa 93:4). This expresses the power of His words with which He will pronounce the judgment. The power of His voice will prevent any possible reply. No one will dare to dispute His verdict.

V16. He also has “in His right hand ... seven stars”. What the seven stars mean is explained in verse 20. They are the seven angels, that is, the responsible ones in each of the seven churches. The Lord Jesus has them in His right hand, which is the hand of His power. That indicates that He has the control over them.

The “sharp two-edged sword” that came “out of His mouth” (Isa 11:4; Rev 2:12,16; 19:15,21), is a picture of the Word of God (Heb 4:12; Eph 6:17). Christ judges the churches by this Word, which they have known, but neglected in so many ways. The Divine, revealed Word is the standard according to which everyone will be judged (Jn 12:48). It will have to be acknowledged by everyone.

The description of His Person is concluded with a description of “His face”. That is “like the sun shining in its strength” (Mt 17:2; Acts 26:13; Mal 4:2). The sun places everything in the light, nothing remains hidden. His countenance is the same countenance at which people have been spitting (Mt 26:67).

V17. When John has seen Him in His full majesty, he falls “at His feet like a dead man”. The sight is so terrifying that he almost dies. When the Lord was on earth John knew the confidential intercourse with Him and was reclining on His bosom (Jn 13:23-25). But now he sees the Lord as he has never seen Him before.

Then the Lord “placed His right hand” on him. That expression doesn’t only mean that the Lord touches him and in that way comforts and encourages him. The touch of the hand has life giving power. To John it is a remembrance that this Judge is His Redeemer. To you it implies the encouragement that you have nothing to fear of Him, Who will judge Christianity, if you know Him and love Him.

That is also said by the Lord. The words “do not be afraid” from His mouth have been a great comfort and encouragement for the believers through all ages. He points to Himself as “the first and the last”. As “the first” He is before everything and above everything and the origin of all things; everything comes from Him. As “the last” He will have the last word. Why should you fear? He is the rock of strength for the wearied feet and for the heaviest burdens of life.

V18. He is also “the living One”. This is the great distinction between the true God and all false gods. He has life in Himself. He is able to give it to others too (Jn 5:21,24-26). To be able to do that *He* has been in death. Therefore John did not need to become like a dead. Death could not hold Him, for in His death He took away everything through which death had power.

Death has lost its power and right and will never ever be able to have any control over Him. He is “alive forevermore”. The victory is complete and eternal. Through His victory He also has full power over “death and ...

Hades”, which is demonstrated in the possession of “the keys”. The Lord Jesus can dispose of death and Hades as He sees fit (Heb 2:14; Rev 20:14).

He had not been left in the grave and His body was not allowed to undergo decay (Acts 2:27-28). The glory of the Father has raised Him out of it (Rom 6:4) because the Father was glorified by Christ and His work and in that way all God’s holy demands were fulfilled. On this basis, death and Hades also no longer have authority over anyone who believes (Mt 16:18).

V19. After the encouraging words of the Lord, John receives the order to write some things. It is an order in three parts. In these three parts you also have the basic division of the book. He had to write “the things which you have seen” and “the things which are” and “the things which will take place after these things”.

1. “The things which you have seen” you already read in the previous verses: the Lord Jesus as a Judge in the middle of the seven lampstands.

2. “The things which are” refer to chapters 2 and 3. There the situation is described of the seven churches in Asia Minor mentioned in verse 11. That was the present time for John. In the broader sense it is the entire time period of the church on earth, which began at Pentecost in Acts 2 and will end at the rapture of the believers.

3. “The things which will take place after these things” start with chapter 4 (Rev 4:1) and ends with the last verse of the book. This third part totally lies in the future. Those are things that take place after the things that we still experience in the present dispensation.

V20. Before the Lord Jesus addresses the seven churches He first gives an explanation of “the seven stars” and of “the seven golden lampstands”. This is necessary, for it about a “mystery”. A ‘mystery’ is something that is a secret and is hidden until it is revealed. The mystery is now revealed by the Lord Jesus.

The stars are *in* His right hand here, as they are in verse 16. He supports them with His power and shows them as it were in their public relationship with Him. Stars shine in the night. They are a symbol for the angels of the seven churches. The word ‘angel’ literally means ‘messenger’ or ‘representative’. It can also be used in a broader sense for people. The an-

gels are not cherubs or other spiritual creatures here, but people who are representatives of the churches.

Just like stars lampstands are also meant to spread light in the darkness. The lampstands are a symbol of the whole of each local church, while stars are more a symbol of the individual, out of which the churches exist. You also see that both the individual and the whole are held responsible for spreading the light. In the next two chapters you will see how the Lord Jesus judges the way this responsibility is met.

Now read Revelation 1:13-20 again.

Reflection: What impression does the description of the Lord Jesus make on you?

## Revelation 2

### **Rev 2:1 | The Seven Messages**

1 *“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:*

Revelation 2 and 3 are of exceptional interest. Therefore I would like to make some introductory remarks before we deal with the text itself. In these two chapters seven churches are addressed with regard to their actual spiritual condition. It is however clear that the meaning goes beyond what happened then.

It is also clear that you can draw spiritual lessons from their spiritual condition for our time. But these two chapters show in the seven churches also seven sequential stages in church history, from the beginning of the church until its rapture. They contain a prophetic outline of the history of professing Christianity, for the whole book is after all prophecy (Rev 1:3), thus including both these chapters.

You read here the history of the church as it has behaved and developed on earth through the ages. It is all about its responsibility. On other places in the Bible you read about the church as how it has been formed and seen by God. In that case we speak about the church *in accordance to the counsel God*, wherein everything is perfect. That is not the side from which the church is presented in this book.

In this book of judgment the house of God, professing Christianity, is judged first (1Pet 4:17). This judgment takes place in accordance to the way it has fulfilled its duty to be a testimony (a ‘lampstand’) in the world. After the judgment on professing Christianity, from chapter 4 the judgment on Israel and on the world follow.

Briefly said you can see in the sequential letters the following periods in church history:

1. Ephesus (means: lovely) is the time that followed right after the death of the apostles when outwardly a lot of things were in order, but the first love had been abandoned.
2. The time of Smyrna (means: bitterness) corresponds with the time of the Christian persecution by the Romans. Of all these persecutions there were ten that took place under ten Roman emperors. It could be that the tribulation of 'ten days' refers to that (Rev 2:10). That period comprises the end of the second century and the third century.
3. The time of Pergamum (means: fortress) runs from the fourth to the seventh century. It begins with the acceptance of Christendom by emperor Constantine. Christendom became the state religion. It became advantageous to be a Christian.
4. The time of Thyatira (means: incense or sacrifice) covers the period from the seventh to the sixteenth century. In that period the roman-catholic church dominates in the person of the pope over the world, the reverse of Pergamum, where the church sought protection from the world. As a ruling church the roman-catholic church has (for now) come to an end, but as an institution it still exists and it will exist until the coming of the Lord.
5. In the time of Sardis (means: remnant) protestantism originates from and next to the roman-catholic church in the sixteenth century. Also the protestant churches will exist until the coming of the Lord.
6. During the period of protestantism, the period of Philadelphia (means brotherly love) emerged in the nineteenth century. God's grace causes in dead protestantism a faithful biblical revival movement that separated itself from it. Like roman-catholicism and protestantism, Philadelphia remains until the coming of the Lord.
7. The final stage of church history is characterized by Laodicea (means: people's government) which also finds its origin in the nineteenth century. The characteristic of Laodicea is lukewarmness. There is the high confession of Philadelphia, but the Lord is outside. We find that spiritual condition in all kinds of churches and denominations that emerged from the revivals of Philadelphia, but which are today often worse off spiritually than Sardis. Also Laodicea remains until the coming of the Lord.

To conclude these introductory remarks on Revelation 2 and 3, let me point out the structure of the letters. It is roughly the same in all the letters:

1. The command: "write".
2. A characteristic of Christ from chapter 1 followed by: "says this".
3. The assessment: "I know".
4. The judgment (except for Smyrna and Philadelphia): "but I have against you".
5. The exhortation: "repent".
6. The appeal: "he who has an ear".
7. The promise: "to him who overcomes".

It is also remarkable that in the last four messages the promise is first given and then the appeal follows.

V1. The first message is addressed to the church in Ephesus. This church has played a major and typical role in the early church history:

1. Paul has worked there during his third missionary journey for a period of three years (Acts 20:31);
2. he has spoken out his important farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus with a warning for the oncoming decay (Acts 20:17-35);
3. he wrote to them his letter with the highest Christian truths (the letter to the Ephesians);
4. after Paul also Timothy worked there (1Tim 1:3); to him Paul wrote his farewell letter about the decay in the last days and about the path of the believer in that time, the second letter to Timothy;
5. and now the Lord addresses Himself to the church in Ephesus as the first of the seven churches.

John does not receive the command to write to the *church* in Ephesus, but to the *angel of the church*. As I already remarked earlier, angel means 'messenger' or 'representative'. To think of a literal angel gives more troubles than solutions. As a matter of fact, there is nowhere an example that an angel

fails in his duty and even less that an angel is called to repent. The angel represents people who are responsible for the condition in the church.

You could think of persons who have a special responsibility in a church, like elders. But that doesn't alter the fact that also the rest of the people have a responsibility. Each member of the church is responsible to ensure that the church is faithful to God's Word and that there is faithfulness in testifying to the truth. You can compare this with the people of Israel and the king who ruled over them. God held the king responsible for the condition of the people, but He did not thereby diminish the guilt of the people.

The Lord Jesus presents Himself here as "the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand". All stars are in His hand. He "holds" them in His right hand (cf. Rev 1:16,20). That indicates power and authority, protection and support to keep it from total ruin, but also to exert control over her. This authority He exerts in all local churches and He checks up on it whether His authority is taken into consideration in the right way. Therefore He walks "in the middle of the seven golden lampstands". He, as it were, goes around to see whether the lampstands are burning clearly, whether they spread the light which He has kindled.

Now read Revelation 2:1 again.

Reflection: Learn the order of the seven messages by heart and try to relate them to the sequential periods in church history.

## Rev 2:2-7 | Message for Ephesus

2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them [to be] false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 4 But I have [this] against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent. 6 Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

V2. The Lord Jesus starts by saying "I know". That He can say because He is the all-knowing God. It is a great privilege that He knows everything about you (Heb 4:12; Amos 4:13). It means that He totally knows you. He is involved with everything you go through, He knows what you think and feel, He knows all your plans (Psa 139:1-4). If that knowledge makes you restless, there may be something in your life that you do not want Him involved with. Then tell it to Him.

In the church in Ephesus there are many good things. They are mentioned by the Lord first. He always first seeks the good. When Paul writes his letters to the churches he also often mentions things first which are praise worthy before he deals with things that are not good. The Lord says that He knows the "deeds", the "toil" and the "perseverance" of the church in Ephesus. He sees that they are engaged in good works, that they give their best efforts for it – you can say 'labor' is hard work – and that they persevere in it. That is a beautiful appreciation.

But something is missing. You see that if you read what Paul could say of the Thessalonians. With them he could speak of "your work *of faith* and your labor *of love* and your steadfastness *of hope*" (1Thes 1:3). It is striking that here in Ephesus their deeds do not stem from the true Christian characteristics of faith, hope and love. The heart is not involved (anymore).

Nevertheless the Lord continues to mention the good things e sees with them. They also "cannot tolerate evil men". Here you see an important

characteristic of a church. The evil may reveal itself, but it must not remain. It will be obvious to each sincere Christian that the holiness of the Lord is incompatible with the welcoming evil people as if they are Christians. Evil people are people who refuse to break with sin, either in practice or in doctrine. Such people have always been there and they still are. If strangers present themselves, they will have to be put to the test.

In the beginning false apostles have tried to ruin the church with lies. But the Ephesians did not accept everyone who presented themselves as apostles. As watchful as they were, they tested the spirits of those they did not know (1Jn 4:1). They applied the test of the Scripture. This is also the touchstone to be applied to every confession today.

V3. The Lord has more reasons to praise them. The church has not only started well, but it also shows “perseverance”. Perseverance is important if you want to grow in your faith. You have to deal with opposition. You have to learn to endure that. It goes without saying that it is about opposition for the sake of the Name of the Lord Jesus. As soon as you openly come out for His Name’s sake you will notice that.

The Ephesians also “have not grown weary”, which means that they did not think of giving up being a Christian because they began to find it more and more burdensome to fight against the evil or to face resistance for the sake of His Name.

V4. If this is where the description had stopped, you could say that the church in Ephesus, except for one minor issue, was a perfect church. Which church today could compare itself to this? But the ‘minor issue’ that is missing in verse 2, shows that something essential is missing and that is what the Lord is pointing at when He has to say: “But I have [this] against you.”

What He has against them is “that you have left your first love”. After all the positive mentions, yet this word of exhortation must follow. Amongst all outwardly perceivable and also valuable activities there was something inwardly missing. That is what the Lord has against them. It is ‘only’ one thing, but it determines the real value of all outward activities. The contrast with what is previously said, is therefore great.

Leaving the first love is the origin of all evil in the church, as the following churches show. A lot of various activities may be done in the church, but if the heart is not involved, it misses its real value. A wife may act out of obligation toward a husband and a husband toward a wife and do it in such a way that everything seems to be okay. However, when it is no more than an obligation, while the love of the heart is missing, which was there first, the other will notice that. He or she will then not be satisfied anymore with everything that is done for her or his sake. The Lord always remembers the first love and also reminds His own of it (Jer 2:2).

The Ephesians did not *lose* the first love, but they had *left* it. It is an activity. The Lord Jesus cannot stand it that a distance arises between Him and His own. Love can only be satisfied by love. He longs for your love, for your 'first love'. The first love is the best or highest love. It indicates the quality of this love. It is a love that only seeks the Person of the Beloved and it submits everything else to it. Works are good, they are even necessary, but they are only valuable if they are done out of love for Him.

V5. In His grace the Lord appeals to repent. That starts with a reminder of the beginning of the deviation, how it was before that time (cf. Lk 15:17). In case you have deviated from the Lord you are to return to the moment where the deviation started and you are to confess that. The Ephesians had fallen from the high position which they had learned to know and enjoy by the means of the letter Paul wrote to them.

They can show the proof of their conversion by doing "the deeds" they "did at first". 'First deeds' are deeds that are motivated by the first love. Without the first love there is no mention of first deeds. Only if a church starts to love Christ again, it can be a real testimony, a real light bearer.

If a church does not give Christ that place, He has to come as a Judge and intervene. He will then take away the lampstand of its place, which means that a church ceases to be a bearer of the light it once had, but now has lost. Just as now the darkness of the islam surrounds the places where once the seven churches were located, we observe that removal and darkness in the churches of the West. If they do not continue in the kindness of God they will also be cut off (Rom 11:22).

V6. The Lord always praises what is worthy of praising, also even after threatening to be taking away the lampstand. By doing it this way He puts emphasis on it. It concerns the hatred of a special kind of evil, hateful both to the Lord and to the church. Not the people, but the works are hated. Nicolaitans means 'overcomers of the people or of the laymen' which probably indicates that here clericalism, that is, the exercise of power through the clergy, is found.

You find this doctrine when people are appointed by people to do spiritual work, for which they get payment and power is being given to them to command (cf. Acts 20:28; 1Tim 6:5; 1Pet 5:3), because otherwise the church should not be able to function and disorder would enter. It is a denial of the fact that the church has only one Head and that all believers are 'brethren' (Mt 23:8). The Lord hates this doctrine and practice, because it makes 'laymen', 'accursed ones who do not know the law' (Jn 7:49) of those who were bought with a high price. They are kept ignorant, dependent on the clergy that dictates how the Bible must be read.

V7. The Lord speaks to the whole, but in the whole He addresses the individual. The point is that you hear personally what the Spirit says to the churches (plural). Also, what is said to the other churches, is to be taken to heart by you. Notice that it is about what *the Spirit* says, not about what the church teaches, to which the demand is attached that each member submits himself to the decisions of the church. Each member of the church is called to acknowledge what is of the Spirit.

The Lord concludes with a promise for "him who overcomes". In each church overcoming has got to do with overcoming the evil that is found in that particular church. Here overcoming is holding on or returning to the first love, right against all abandonment of the first love. The reward is that the Lord Himself will give you to eat of Himself, He is the tree of life. This blessing is indeed for each believer, but here it is promised as a special consolation to everyone who on earth has kept his first love or has returned to it. Such a person has overcome.

If you want to persevere in the first love, it will be a precious promise for you that once you will enjoy Him always and undisturbed. That will happen "in the Paradise of God" (cf. Lk 23:43; 2Cor 12:4). A paradise is a

pleasure garden, a beautiful garden with fruit trees (Ecc 2:5; Song 4:13). The "Paradise of God" is a paradise of which the delights and the splendor can never again be forfeited by the unfaithfulness of man. The overcomer will then find himself in the glory of the resurrection and he will perfectly enjoy what he chose for on earth. Is that your goal too?

Now read Revelation 2:2-7 again.

Reflection: How about your first love for the Lord Jesus?

## Rev 2:8-11 | Message for Smyrna

*8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: 9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'*

V8. John receives the order to write a second letter. He must address that "to the angel of the church in Smyrna". In this letter we find no blame. This we also will see in the letter to Philadelphia. It is a letter full of comfort. This comfort is important because the church in Smyrna has to face tribulation, poverty and blasphemy. Each of those tests separately means a great suffering already. Now they have to face three trials. In such a case comfort is very desirable.

The comfort comes from the Lord Jesus, Who presents Himself to this tested church as "the first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life". So you see that the Lord presents Himself in accordance to the condition of the church. What He says of Himself here is also connected with the characteristics that you have seen of Him in the previous chapter (Rev 1:8,17-18). He shows Himself as the One Who rules over time and eternity, Who has everything in control, even death. Death has no power over Him. He has conquered death, for He has risen from the dead. He is sovereign in the greatest tribulation. This is a great comfort for those who run the risk to be killed.

That this letter directly follows after that one to the church in Ephesus, implies an important lesson. In the letter to the church in Ephesus you have seen that the Lord has to blame them for leaving their first love. In the message to Smyrna you read about several tests. Therein you can see the love of the Lord Who, through the means of tests, wants to work that His people return to Him with their heart. He would like to have their first

love again. He again wants to be the only One for them to Whom their affection goes.

The same can happen in your personal life. If you deviate from the Lord, if He does not mean everything anymore to you, He will not let you go. He will through certain, sometimes unpleasant, events make sure that you will ask for Him again. You actually are only happy if you live in fellowship with Him and your whole life is for Him. He has the right to your life, but it is also a privilege to live for Him, to which also the greatest possible happiness is connected.

V9. If there is “tribulation”, “poverty” and “blasphemy” in the life of a church, He knows about it. He is involved. It is not that He allows it and is passively watching, but it affects Him. In a certain respect, He even directs it so. You can see that with Job. There satan comes to God and God draws satan’s attention to Job. Then satan challenges God, as it were, by suggesting to Him to test Job. And God permits satan to strike Job. However, God stands behind and beyond the tests that come on Job. That is how Job also sees it when he says: “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away” (Job 1:21). So Job does not blame satan, but accepts everything from the hand of the Lord (Job 2:10).

After all his vain attempts to tempt Job to sin, satan had nothing more to say. But God had not achieved His purpose with Job yet. God used the corruptness of satan to bring Job to the point where He could bless him. Job needed to become aware of the evil in his *heart*. That awareness starts to grow in the conversations that are held from Job 3 and onward between Job and his friends.

Until Job finally, after God has spoken to him, cries out: “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6). Then he comes to the point where God wanted him to be and He showers Job with greater blessings than he had before. Therefore God’s actions are always blessed, even though it seems hard.

The awareness that what happens to you, happens from the hand of your Father Who loves you, gives strength to bear it. Faith knows and holds on

to: "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1Cor 10:13).

Except that the Lord Jesus knows of all trials and that God has His way and loving purposes with them, the Lord Jesus Himself has experienced them all. He Who says this, speaks from experience. Also that is a great comfort to those who have to face suffering and have a lack of everything. It is a special honor to them to be that close to Him and to be so like Him. It may be the same for you when you suffer for His Name's sake (Lk 6:22-23; Acts 5:41; Phil 3:10-11).

With tribulation also comes poverty. They suffer from a shortage of food-stuff. The Lord knows it. He comforts them by pointing at their *spiritual* riches. You can gain the whole world, but what profit is it if you lose or forfeit yourself (Lk 9:25)? However, in the midst of the greatest poverty you can have the greatest peace and joy in your soul, if you consider that you have Christ and everything that is in Him. What you have in Christ is yours forever and ever. Those treasures are in heaven and are untouchable for people who can rob you from everything on earth or withhold food from you.

An additional painful test is the blasphemy of people who profess to be "Jews", that is, people who claim to be the people of God. Just like in the church in Ephesus (verse 2) there are also people here who pretend to have the true knowledge and claim to be superior to others. They moderate themselves to be the true people of God with the exclusion of others.

This moderation is present during the whole history of professing Christianity. You also deal with it today. Especially the so-called Christians make it very difficult for the true Christians to remain faithful to the Word of God. Whether it is about being a church or about forms of cohabitation, as soon as you let God's Word speak, you bring the blasphemy of nominal Christians upon yourself. Such people refuse to obey God's Word, but are a mouthpiece of satan. Do not let yourself be intimidated by them, but remain faithful to the Bible.

V10. With the words “do not fear what you are about to suffer” the believers are – and you are – encouraged to face the future without fear, even though that future surely includes suffering. They are prepared for the suffering in a comforting way. Tribulation, poverty and blasphemy are awful enough, but worse things will happen. There is not only persecution, but also being captured. Freedom has disappeared; satan gets the power to determine what happens to the believer. It may imply death.

But the Lord has His own goal with it. The test serves to purify the faith and cleanse the life (1Pet 1:6-7) and not to bring the believer down. In addition, He also determines the limit of the tribulation, that is, He determines its duration (cf. Dan 1:12). The tribulation will last for “ten days” and not one day longer. Likewise, God has set the number of days of the great tribulation in the end time and that is twelve hundred and sixty days, that is three and a half years, a period that will not be exceeded (Mt 24:21-22; Rev 11:2-3).

Prophetically, there is something remarkable connected with the period of ten days. That has to do with the period of church history that bears the character of Smyrna, that is the second and third century of our era. In that period ten great persecutions took place. The prophetic application is therefore that the tribulation of ten days refers to ten separate periods in which the believers were oppressed by Roman rulers.

The Lord encourages His tested church in Smyrna to be faithful until death. Hasn't He been faithful? As an encouragement He also promises them in advance that they will be rewarded with “the crown of life” which He Himself will give to them. The enemy cannot go further than death (Mt 10:28). Up to that moment the believer is encouraged to remain faithful. What follows after that is the resurrection, the world of the Risen One. That is where his eye is focused.

V11. Although the whole is addressed, the individual responsibility is fully maintained. The point is whether you have an ear for it to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches”. If you have understood the message addressed to the angel in Smyrna and want to heed it, you are an overcomer. You don't let trials knock you out, but through all opposition you remain faithful to Him, Who bought you with His blood.

The reward for that faithfulness to the extreme is that you “will not be hurt by the second death”. “Will not” is a strong expression with the power of ‘in no thinkable way’. Also this promise is the portion of each believer, but also here it is for the believers who are in oppression and are facing death a great encouragement. The enemy has the power, that is, he is allowed, to make them die the first death (Mt 10:28). But they may know that the second death, that is hell, Rev 20:14) has been conquered for them and has no power over them whatsoever.

Now read Revelation 2:8-11 again.

Reflection: In what way do you have to deal with tribulation, poverty and blasphemy?

## Rev 2:12-17 | Message for Pergamum

*12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit [acts of] immorality. 15 So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give [some] of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'*

V12. A new period begins in church history. This period is presented in the church in Pergamum. In Smyrna you have seen the period of the Christian persecutions of the Christians. After that period, a period of rest begins, which starts in the year 313. In that year, the emperor Constantine the Great outwardly converts to Christendom and therefore Christendom becomes state religion. It becomes profitable to be a Christian, for that delivers a job, money and status.

Satan changes his strategy from here. In Smyrna he incited pagan rulers to persecution. There he manifested himself "like a roaring lion" (1Pet 5:8). However, his attempts to eradicate Christendom had no effect. In Pergamum he becomes a protector of Christendom and "disguises himself as an angel of light" (2Cor 11:14). He makes sure that the church feels at home in the world so that it goes on focusing on a comfortable residence in the world.

But there is Someone Who sees through this deception. That is "the One who has the sharp two-edged sword", that is the Word of God (Heb 4:12). Only through the Word of God you will become aware of the deceptions of satan. If satan does not succeed to defeat you through adversity and trials, he will try to make you become unfaithful to your calling as a Christian

through luxury and prosperity. He will make his best efforts to cause you to forget that you are connected with Christ in heaven, Who was rejected on earth. But by reading God's Word and the desire to live up to it, you will remain faithful to your heavenly calling.

V13. The Lord begins by saying that He knows that the church dwells "where Satan's throne is". To *find yourself* where satan's throne is, is not to be blamed; it is inescapable. But it is indeed to be blamed if you *dwell* there. 'To dwell' has the meaning of feeling at home somewhere, not only reside somewhere, but it includes having all your interests there and being bound to that.

But how can the church feel at home on the territory where satan's throne is, where he rules? Satan is "the ruler of the world" (Jn 14:30). He rules the world and puts it to his will. The church has been rescued from the world (Gal 1:4), to be one with the glorified Head in heaven (Eph 4:15-16). It is not God's purpose that Christians get established in the world and feel themselves at home in it. However, because of the deception of satan the church did not hold on to the Head, but has become earthly focused (Phil 3:19).

But still the Lord notices that the church in Pergamum holds on to the basic elements of being a Christian. They have held on to the Name of Christ and have not sworn by the name of Caesar. They also have not given up the faith in Him, the Son of God and the Son of Man, and His redemption work. They have not succumbed under the enmity from the world, which they certainly experienced, in spite of their connection to it. In what has happened to Antipas they could see that the world has not really changed in its nature, regarding its tolerance for a worldly Christianity.

Faithfulness to the Name of the Lord will always arouse the hatred of the world. The Lord calls Antipas "My witness, My faithful one". It is a great tribute to this witness. Antipas means 'against all'. Even though the mass of people let themselves be tempted to a comfortable Christendom, he continued to go against the grain and testified to his Lord.

It is remarkable that the Greek word for witness is *martus*, which means 'martyr'. The voice of Antipas could not be silenced except by death. This

was also the fate of earlier witnesses, like John the baptist (Mk 6:16-18), the prophets (Mt 23:34) and above all the Lord Jesus (Rev 1:5). What Christ was to God, Antipas was to Christ.

V14. After the praise, which the Lord still has for this church, He tells them what He has against them. He blames them for being tolerant toward the false teachers in their midst. Their false teaching is called “the teaching of Balaam”. The corruptness of this teaching is the deceptive way of mixing the truth with lie and the children of God with the world. Balaam tempted the Israelites “to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit [acts of] immorality” (Num 25:1-2; 31:16).

It is a major deception of satan, which is also very successful today. You see that everywhere where worldly principles get entry into the church. ‘The teaching of Balaam’ gets entry if you see the church as an organization or company. If you want to make a company prosperous, then structures are to be established, duties to be delegated and consultative group meetings need to be developed. The church has a product that has to be promoted and must be made attractive to ‘buy’. Name recognition of the group is important. Also political influence is of importance.

This development can be found throughout the history of the church since Pergamum. The followers and defenders of such development are called “adulteresses” by James (Jam 4:4). It is spiritual adultery when the church unites with the world. Also eating the sacrifices of idols can be found in a spiritual sense in professing Christianity. When I recently visited a church, it shocked me again when I saw people kissing images of saints and respectfully bowed themselves before these images. The adoration of Mary and the pope is inextinguishable. Countless people give in to and ‘eat’ sacrifices of idols. Mary and the pope are not consecrated by the church to Christ but to the devil. The reverence the people ascribe to them is accepted by demons.

V15. In the footsteps of the teaching of Balaam is “the teaching of the Nicolaitans”. That teaching also got entry in Pergamum, for which the Lord also had to blame them. What in Ephesus only consisted of works and also was hated (verse 6), here already had been elevated to a teaching. As it was already noted in verse 6, Nicolaitans means ‘conquerors of the people or of

the laymen'. These conquerors of the people consider themselves the clergy and see the church people as laymen. By speaking about 'the teaching of the Nicolaitans' the distinction between clergy and laity is elevated to the status of an institution.

You can hear this distinction already in the names that were accepted by the clergy since the third century in Christianity. In those days the Roman bishop, for example, was called 'papa' for the first time, from which the familiar word 'pope' has been derived. This evil has deeply established itself in professing Christianity, it is anchored in it.

V16. After the blames, not the judgment follows, but the call to "repent". You cannot see that other than as a proof of grace. The Lord gives an opportunity for repentance before judging. The church can heed that call by breaking the connections with the world and removing the corrupted teaching from among them. If that does not happen Christ will come and execute judgment on them through His Word.

Evil in the church must always be condemned on the basis of the Word. If the church does not do that, He Himself will do that. By the way, here you see the distinction between the angel and the faithful ones on the one side, "I am coming to *you*", and the followers of the wrong teachings on the other side, "I will make war against *them*". Here we see the two groups – designated "you" and "them" – present in that church.

V17. Here the call to hear is still done before the overcomers are addressed. That means that the whole is addressed, while what is said, is personally to be practiced by each believer.

Each believer who obeys the call, is a conqueror. The victory is gained by each one who does not let himself be dragged by the dangers that threaten this church. Such a person is a true pilgrim who does not come under the influence of the ruler of this world.

In order to gain victory in a situation in which the church has started to feel at home in the world and has allowed the ideas of the world to enter among them, it is necessary that the believer lives in secret with God in the power of the Word. The "hidden manna" speaks of the Son of God, Who became Man to give us life and Who has humbled Himself and has entered

into all of our circumstances. With this bread the angels fed the people of God in the wilderness (Psa 78:25).

The manna was within arm's reach for God's people each morning during the whole journey in the wilderness that lasted forty years. This is how Christ has to be our daily food. When the church in its heart turns to the world, it feeds itself with 'the onions and the garlic of Egypt' (Num 11:5). You can compare that with the television soap series and tabloids. It seems spicy, seasoned, but has no nutritional value and stinks.

Overcomers are they who like Christ have lived separated from the world. To them 'the hidden manna' is promised by Christ Himself. This can mean that He, Who in His life on earth was perfectly separated to God, will tell the overcomer about His wondrous way on earth.

The "white stone" speaks of approval and appreciation. In case law, it meant acquittal. At an election people made their preference for a person known by giving a white stone. The Lord Jesus will do that with the overcomer in Pergamum. It expresses the personal fellowship between the Lord Jesus and the overcomer.

The "new name" on the stone is the name of the believers by which he is registered in heaven (Isa 62:2; 65:15; Lk 10:20; Heb 12:23). It is a name "which no one knows but he who receives it". That indicates that we, although we enjoy together with others the things in heaven, also will have a personal bond with and joy in the Lord Jesus, in which another person will not share.

Now read Revelation 2:12-17 again.

Reflection: What about your separation from the world?

**Rev 2:18-29 | Message for Thyatira**

18 *“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: 19 ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. 20 But I have [this] against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit [acts of] immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her on a bed [of sickness], and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. 24 But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. 25 Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. 26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; 27 AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received [authority] from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’*”

V18. Prophetically, this church shows the bleakest period of church history. In Pergamum, the church was under the protection of the world. In Thyatira, the church rules over the world. This is the period in which the roman-catholic church has conquered and exercised the world power. It is generally accepted that that period started in the year of 590 with the election of Gregory the Great as the first pope and has lasted to the reformation in the beginning of the sixteenth century. The pope has had such a great influence in that period that no king or prince could resist him. In this ruling church you see what the Lord Jesus calls in verse 20 “the woman Jezebel”.

The Lord Jesus addresses Thyatira as the Son of God. As the Son of God He is the foundation of the church (Mt 16:16-18). That is totally in contrast

to the roman-catholic church that claims that Peter is the rock and at the same time the first pope. Every next pope is considered to be the successor of Peter.

As the Son of God the Lord Jesus is also Son over His house (Heb 3:6). That is in contrast to 'the woman Jezebel' who acts as if the church is her house. In contrast to the evil of the roman-catholic church the Son of God presents Himself as the One Who "has eyes like a flame of fire". That indicates His Divine insight with the capability to judge the evil. He will judge everything that is in contrast to His holiness and will do so by the way of perfectly clear righteousness, to which "His feet like burnished bronze" point. You have already seen His eyes and feet in chapter 1 (Rev 1:14-15).

V19. Although the situation in the church in Thyatira is a low point in church history, the Lord still sees here things that are commendable. His praise is even more abundant than the praise that He has for other churches. The reason is that because in such dark times the faithfulness of the faithful ones shines clearer. In the dark Middle Ages there was a great power of faith and commitment with little light with those who wholeheartedly loved the Lord Jesus. Examples of such people are the Albigenses and Waldenses who opposed the gross errors of the powerful church of Rome.

The Lord speaks of "*your* deeds, and *your* love and faith and service and perseverance". He mentions each aspect of their effort and dedication separately. He pays attention to every detail of the expression of their faithfulness. He can even say to them "that your deeds of late are greater than at first". Instead of them succumbing to the pressure, He observes increase with them.

V20. Then He has to tell them what He has against them. They "tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess" that "she teaches and ... leads astray". She represents the strange element in the church that does not belong there, like the historical Jezebel did not belong to the people of God (1Kgs 16:31), but who got the leading role. In addition, she moderates to be 'a prophetess', that is, she claims to speak words of God. This is papacy all over. The Lord Jesus blames the angel for tolerating her. That is a great sin. It is tolerating what God hates.

Jezebel “teaches”. That is what the roman-catholic church does: she claims to have the authority of teaching. The church system, represented in a woman (cf. Zec 5:5-11), claims to have the true teaching and that she cannot make doctrinal mistakes. She decides the teaching and life of her professors. From the claimed infallible speaking – the so-called *ex cathedra*, which is the authoritative speaking from Rome by the pope – she tries to seduce the bond-servants of the Lord and makes them commit apostate deeds. You see here that the teaching of Balaam that *some* in Pergamum held (verse 14), is taught by this woman, the church *as a whole*, and is brought as a deception. The leaven of Pergamum penetrates further in Thyatira.

V21. The Lord has had patience with her for a long time. That long patience made the persistence of her malice all the more apparent. There is not only blindness and ignorance, but also a will that acts in rebellion against God. “She does not want to repent of her immorality.” She does not want to abandon the world. Exercising authority ‘feels’ too good.

V22. Because she does not want to repent the judgment is spoken out to her and it will strike her inevitably. The “bed”, as a symbol of her sexual immorality and pleasure, will be turned into a symbol of sickness and pain by God. That God will “throw her on a bed [of sickness]” means in effect that He surrenders her to her corrupt ways.

The judgment of God, however, doesn’t only come on the roman-catholic church. It also comes on “those who commit adultery with her”. This concerns all churches that pursue ecumenism with her. Also several protestant churches want to share in the influence of the politics of the world and are therefore seeking rapprochement with the roman-catholic church. This church will absorb them. The church system that will then arise is called ‘Babylon the great’ and will be judged by God (Rev 17:1-18; 18:1-24). However, for those who have joined her, without being considered to belong to them, there still seems to be an opportunity to repent of her deeds.

V23. The “children” of Jezebel are the unbelievers who participate in the system and who are also responsible for it. They are the kindred spirits, people of whom Jezebel is the spiritual mother. They will be killed by the Lord. Each life will be taken away by Him.

Through this judgment all other churches, that is the rest of professing Christianity, will know that it comes from God and that He acts with perfect knowledge. Possibly they may have been attracted to her teachings. Through the death the Lord brings there, they will see how depraved it was. The judgment of the Lord will be exercised by Him to the extent of the responsibility that each class had that belonged to Thyatira. That applies to the angel, to Jezebel, to her children and to those who have committed adultery with Jezebel.

V24. Now the Lord addresses a remnant in Thyatira. As characteristics He mentions that they have not accepted the false teachings of the roman-catholic church and that they “have not known the deep things of Satan”, which refers to the occultism of that church.

The Lord will “place no other burden on” them. He does not yet say here that they have to leave that place. In Sardis He will give them that opportunity. In the end time, in which we live, the call sounds: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues” (Rev 18:4). It indicates that until the coming of the Lord there will be faithful ones in the roman-catholic church.

V25. What the faithful ones have is not that much. Still, the Lord calls them to hold fast what they have until He comes. Thyatira, or roman-catholicism, will exist until the coming of the Lord, which is in contrast to the previous three churches that have had their time in the prophetic history and passed away. Thyatira will not be replaced by Sardis, but Sardis will emerge from it and develop alongside Thyatira. Sardis is protestantism that will continue to coexist with roman-catholicism.

V26. Also in Thyatira the Lord has a promise for the overcomers. However, He not only speaks about overcomers, but also about keeping His deeds. His deeds are the deeds that were ordered by Him and are done in His power. Therefore there is mention of a twofold condition here. To those who meet that condition He promises that they will share in His government over the nations. Thyatira has ruled and they have not participated in it. Now they are allowed to rule with the Lord. Those who have refused to rule over the world during the absence of the Lord Jesus, will receive from Him the power to rule in the day of His glory (cf. 1Cor 4:8-9).

V27. He who overcomes will reign “with a rod of iron”, which is a rod that cannot be broken. His reign consists of “rule”, that is guiding, keeping and protecting the nations that have entered the millennial kingdom of peace.

His kingdom will also consist of breaking the ungodly pagans to pieces. The execution of that judgment is ascribed to the Lord Jesus (Psa 2:9), but is also declared to be of application to those who have overcome in Thyatira. Each authorization of power granted by the Lord Jesus is the authorization of power that He Himself has received from His Father (cf. Mt 11:27; 28:18; Jn 3:35; 5:22,27; 13:3).

V28. As an extra reward the conqueror receives out of the hands of the Lord Jesus “the morning star”. The morning star is the Lord Jesus Himself (Rev 22:16). It means that as an encouragement He presents Himself to them in a special way as the One Who comes for His church (2Pet 1:19). Before He rises as “the sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2), He will rise as ‘the morning star’ to bring His church into heaven, including the faithful in Thyatira. They will not perish in the judgment on Babylon.

V29. The message to Thyatira closes with a call to the individual who has an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. In this case this has extra significance, for it is totally in contrast to what the roman-catholic church says: ‘Hear what the church says.’

Here this call appears for the first time after the promise to the one who overcomes. In the previous churches each church was called as a whole. Now this call is addressed only to those who overcome. They hear the voice of the Spirit to the churches. The whole of professing Christianity *cannot* repent anymore. The Spirit is still speaking to the churches, but only of a faithful remnant, not of the whole, is expected that they will hear.

Now read Revelation 2:18-29 again.

Reflection: Which characteristics of ‘that woman Jezebel’ do you recognize in professing Christianity?

## Revelation 3

### Rev 3:1-6 | Message for Sardis

*1 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 So remember what you have received and heard; and keep [it], and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

V1. In church history the periods that are presented in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and Thyatira succeed each other, whereby the succeeding church takes the place of the previous one. Ephesus disappears and Smyrna appears, etcetera. With Sardis that trend does not continue. Sardis does not replace Thyatira, but emerges from it, while Thyatira also continues to exist. So you see that to this day roman-catholicism and protestantism coexist.

As it is said, Sardis emerges from Thyatira. That happened in church history in the sixteenth century. Then through God's grace a reformation came about, for which He especially used Luther and later also Calvin and others. God opened the eyes of these men to the errors of roman-catholicism. The intent of the reformation was to reform the roman-catholic church, but due to the rejection by the catholic leaders it became an entirely new movement.

However, what started as a work of God's Spirit became more and more a work of men. There is little left from the freshness of the reformation. What emerged from the roman-catholic church, today we call protestant-

ism. Since May 1, 2004, its greatest representative in the Netherlands is the PKN, the protestant church in the Netherlands. The connection between church and state is reflected in this name, just like it was earlier in the 'Dutch reformed church'. That phenomenon is also to be seen in other countries. In such a way there is reference to the English state church and the German evangelical church.

National churches were formed everywhere. All these churches had their own national organization. Protestantism was made dependent on the national governments. You see here the connection with the world similar to that in Pergamum. Yet this is different. In Pergamum, the world had authority over the whole church. In Sardis, the domination of the world, in the form of the state, over the church is a matter of each separate country. This is far away from God's thoughts about the church, in which a distinction of nationality does not exist (Col 3:11).

By connecting itself to the state and by putting itself under its protection, the church disconnected herself from the biblical model. In protestantism biblical truths are indeed confessed, but they are being implemented in a purely worldly manner. The church claims to be alive, that name it likes to have, but the Lord Jesus says of it that it is dead. Has all hope gone now?

No, fortunately not. If you see how the Lord Jesus presents Himself to this church, then hope is shining for everyone who finds himself in such a situation. He has "the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars". In this way He ensures the faithful ones in Sardis that in Him there is the true source of life and power that never will fail. The world may have entered where the Spirit of God had to be ruling, but that does not change anything about the fullness – of which the number 'seven' speaks – of the Spirit at His disposal. Neither will He in any way give up His right to the churches as light bearers, represented in the 'seven stars'.

Every time after He has presented Himself, He has said to the preceding churches "I know" and then noticed something that He can appreciate in that church. Also to Sardis He starts by saying "I know". However, after that comes not an appreciative remark, but one that speaks of disapproving. That disapproval regards the appearance of the life that the church professes to have, while in reality there is no life, but death rules.

Life has gradually faded away from the reformation, turning it into what we now recognize as protestantism. Religion has become more and more a confession led by an organization. Only relatively few have life from God. Most of them have shifted to the new doctrine in imitation of their spiritual leaders, without personal exercises of conscience.

You cannot say that there is a wrong teaching. The confession is orthodox. However, it is a dead form, in which life is missing. Also today there are a whole bunch of people who *confess* Christ, but relatively few *live* with Christ.

V2. Death may be ruling in general, but there are still souls the Lord can address. If they hear, there is still hope for them. The appeal sounds as follows: "Wake up, and strengthen the things which remain." The sleeping believers in Sardis urgently need a wake-up call and resume their place on the watch posts. They need to become aware again that the church and the world cannot be mixed. Due to the fatal sleeping disease of the believers the world has gained entrance into the church. That must change. Obedience to the call will work that.

If the call is heeded, it will prevent that the few faithful ones, "which remain", in whom a spark of life is left, will give up. The situation is more than critical. The Lord Jesus has to say that the works of the church of Sardis do not meet the demand of God. In church history we find this also in protestantism that emerged from the roman-catholicism. Many issues that are typical for the roman-catholic church have been integrated in protestantism.

Thus, as far as church structure is concerned, there has been no return to God's Word, but rather the adoption of elements from the roman-catholic church. People wanted to return to the 'sound teaching, but because of the mixture with the world, they stuck to the teaching, because the practice breathed the spirit of the world. Just as in the roman-catholicism, there was no living expectation of the coming of the Lord in protestantism. The religious institutions also continued to lead the church, through which in practice no room was given to the Spirit of God to lead the church.

V3. Then the call comes “so remember”. They are reminded of the moment when they heard and accepted the gospel and received the belief (of the reformation) as a lasting treasure. It refers to the rediscovery of the Scripture and the way to salvation that is received by faith, without works of the law. In case of deviation we are always reminded of the unchangeable Word of God and the immoveable authority of God Himself.

This also goes for your personal life of faith. In case you have deviated in that, if faith does not live like that, remember then the moment that you heard and accepted the gospel. That will bring you to repentance of your deviation.

If there is no alertness, if the coming of the Lord is not considered, that coming will be just as unexpected and undesirable as the coming of a thief (cf. Mt 24:43-44; 1Thes 5:2,4; 2Pet 3:10). He then will come to them as He will do to the world. Protestantism has put itself under the protection of the world. It has connected itself with the world and has sought and striven for the interests and approval of the world. Therefore professing Christianity will also share the fate of the world and will be judged with the world.

V4. Fortunately, the Lord has also discovered a few, “a few people” literally “a few names”, in Sardis who have remained faithful. They not only believe the right teaching, but they also live in sincere separation from the world, with their eyes fixed on the Lord. They have “not soiled their garments”. That is, they have personally kept themselves clean from the many defilements that are typical for protestantism, such as bible criticism and modernism.

The Lord appreciates this in a special way. As they walked in purity before Him on earth, so they will be allowed to walk with Him in “white” in the future. The Lord emphasizes the special appreciation of their separation in Sardis by His mention that “they are worthy”. This expression is therefore special, because in this book it is further only used for God (Rev 4:11) and the Lamb (Rev 5:9,12).

V5. It is the part of the overcomers to “be clothed in white garments”. That means that the purity they had on earth will always characterize them.

An additional reward is connected to their “name”. The Lord knows each one of the overcomers by his name. On earth their names may be removed from church registers because they do not go the course that the church goes. But they may know that there is a register kept by the Lord Jesus in which their names are written down in indelible ink. This book is the book of God’s chosen ones (Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27; cf. Dan 12:1; Lk 10:20; Phil 4:3). As an additional consolation the Lord adds that He will draw the attention of His Father and His angels to their name because of their faithfulness to Him (Lk 9:26; 12:8).

V6. Also here the call to the individual believer to hear what the Spirit says to the churches cannot be addressed to the whole. You have seen that the whole is dead, but also that there is a call to wake up and that there are those who ‘remain’. Therefore the call “he who has an ear” follows after the promise to overcomers. If there is someone among them who has an ear, he will certainly take the message to heart and will then receive the reward for the victory.

Now read Revelation 3:1-6 again.

Reflection: How do you make sure ‘that your garments remain white’?

### Rev 3:7-13 | Message for Philadelphia

*7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: 8 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Behold, I will cause [those] of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and [make them] know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that [hour] which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

V7. The message for Philadelphia is, like that for Smyrna, without reproach. The Lord mentions only commendable things and encourages them to continue on the same track. The name Philadelphia means 'brotherly love'. Philadelphia is a church in which is love for each other. That love comes from love for the Lord and His Word. At the same time, the love for each other forms the right atmosphere in which the love for the Lord and for His Word can be expressed.

Philadelphia emerged from Sardis. Those who had a living faith in Christ in Sardis have moved away from the deadness. A new movement arose as a work of God's Spirit that totally committed itself to the Lord and His Word. In the lives of the believers there was a personal, living relationship with Christ. He meant everything to them. We see this happening in church history in the nineteenth century.

The Lord Jesus presents Himself to this church with characteristics which you have not seen in chapter 1. Here He speaks as "He who is holy", because they have separated themselves from evil. This evil is the appearance of life in Sardis. He also speaks as "who is true", because this also belongs

to them. They want to walk in sincerity and faithfulness, according to the truth that is in their innermost being, that He is searching for and which He sees there (Psa 51:6).

He also has "the key of David". He is the true David (Isa 22:22) and the only One Who has access and right to all promises made to David. He who has the key, has the power to open and to close (Job 12:14b).

V8. The Lord knows their deeds. It is not said which deeds it is about. To the world and professing Christianity it will not be impressive deeds, but the Lord knows them and appreciates them. He tells them that He has given them "an open door". The weak remnant receives from the Lord an open door, a passable way, which no one can block (Col 4:3; 1Cor 16:9). It is a door to the treasury, to the knowledge of God's Word and its secrets and to the city of God.

Maybe you are in a situation which is comparable to Sardis. There are people around you who call themselves a Christian but they are that only by name. There is a confession, but there is no life. If you desire life, He will open a door for you to a situation in which He and His Word are everything. He will bring you into contact with others who also have that desire. Ask Him for it and He will show you the way. You can find that way in His Word which He will open with His key, so that you see His beauty in it and enjoy it.

He knows that you, as is said of the church in Philadelphia, have "little power". That means that He knows that you are dependent on Him. Philadelphia – and each believer and each church that wants to be like that – does not make its presence felt in the world. Their and also your strength is in the Lord and in 'keeping His Word'. With His Word the Bible is meant, but then as the Word that He has spoken. It gives an enormous spiritual power if you read the Bible as the words of the Savior Who loves you and Whom you love. You cherish that Word because it is about Him and He has spoken it. To you it is about Him, you have Him and that is sufficient to you.

Another appreciation that the Lord speaks about is that they have "not denied" His Name. His Name means everything to them. That's what they

hold on to. That's what you also do, isn't it? You owe your salvation to His Name (Acts 4:12); in His Name you may gather with fellow believers as a church (Mt 18:20). You do not want another name, you reject that, for that would be a denial of His Name.

V9. The remnant was under heavy pressure of the mass of the professing Christianity. A group that does not go along with the established churches, is portrayed by them as a dangerous sect. They claim "that they are Jews", which means that they present themselves as the true people of God. You may apply this to people who claim with their mouth to be true Christians and that they are entitled to everything that God has promised to the true Christians. Professing Christianity is full of such people. But the Lord calls these professors "the synagogue of Satan". Wherever He is not the center and His Word is not being considered, people become a prey of satan.

As an encouragement the Lord promised them that He will make sure that the false confessors will acknowledge that He has loved this weak remnant. He will once justify the faithful believers toward the false Christians, the nominal confessors. He will unmask all who have unjustly adorned themselves with His Name. The false confessors will be forced to acknowledge that the believers despised by them were loved by the Lord Jesus.

V10. The Lord has even more encouragements. He praises them 'for keeping His command to persevere'. By this the Lord means that He has said He will come soon. He perseveringly looks forward to the rapture of His bride. This word has found resonance in their hearts: they also look forward to Him. That implies that He still does not reign. He is still patiently waiting for His kingdom and we ought to do that too (2Thes 3:5).

Because they are looking forward to His coming with such perseverance, the Lord makes the promise to them that He will make sure that they will not be harmed by the judgments that soon will strike the earth. Before this "hour of testing" comes, He will take up the church into heaven. The second part of 'the hour of testing' is the period of the great tribulation (Mt 24:21; Jer 30:7,11; 2Thes 2:9-10).

The area upon which this hour of testing will come is "the whole world". The people who will be struck by it, are called, "those who dwell on the

earth". Those are the earth's inhabitants, the people who consider the earth to be their home and who have permanently settled themselves there as their definite residence. God and His rights and eternity lie totally outside their field of vision (Psa 17:14).

V11. As an additional encouragement the Lord promises to come quickly. He also exhorts them to hold fast what they have. What they have is not much. Still this call is necessary for them not to lose what they have: a warm love for the Lord and for each other. If they let go of that they will become lukewarm like Laodicea. We will see that in the next and final message.

This call is also important for you to take to heart. Make sure that you will not lose your warm love for the Lord! For there is a "crown" attached to your attachment to the Lord and your affection for Him. The crown is the publicly visible appreciation of the Lord for your love for Him. He will adorn and honor you with that.

V12. Although the church in Philadelphia is not reproached and no call to repentance is heard, there is still talk of overcoming. Overcomers are they who not only have left Sardis and have become Philadelphia, but who also hold on to that with their whole heart. The next message shows that it is possible that the warm love for the Lord Jesus can cool off.

He who overcomes will be made by the Lord "a pillar in the temple of My God". This is in great contrast to the place that they had on earth. There they were of no account and they were even portrayed to be annoying because they seemed to be blocking the growth of the church. However, in the resurrection they will appear to be pillars on which God's house is resting (cf. Gal 2:9). A pillar is a symbol of strength. Those who have shown much spiritual power precisely in their weakness will be pillars forever and ever. There will be no question of succumbing.

It is the overcomers in Philadelphia who make God's house a spiritual house. In that house spiritual sacrifices are offered and the Father is worshiped by His sons. That is the place where priests draw near to God and know what He is worthy of. Those who do that today will be allowed to do a special service there in the resurrection.

But the promise for the overcomer goes still further. The Lord Jesus will write on him “the name of the city of My God”. On earth the believer in Philadelphia had not a lasting city, but he was seeking the city which is to come (Heb 13:14). To that he will eternally be connected and that will also be visible. That city is “the new Jerusalem”, which is the church. At the end of this book you see that this new Jerusalem is “coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:2), but here the overcomer is already foretold this scene.

Finally, the Lord says that He also will write “My new name” on the overcomer. That is the Name which He has now in glory (Rev 19:12; Phil 2:9; Heb 1:4).

Are all these things not an exhortation for you too not to focus on the earthly things, but to look forward to the heavenly things? Do you not want to connect yourself with any religious system on earth, out of love for the Lord Jesus, but with the city which is in heaven, the church in its heavenly character? Then you will soon be rewarded by the Lord in a very personal way. You can derive that from the five times that He repeats the word ‘My’. Four times he emphasizes His own very personal relationship with God and one time His very personal relationship with each believer who is an overcomer in Philadelphia (cf. Jn 20:17; Heb 2:11-13).

V13. It may be the case that in the ‘Philadelphia’ where you perhaps are, it is to fear that the fervent love is gradually disappearing. Then for you it is important to have an ear to hear. Therefore at the end of this message the question is very personally addressed to you: ‘Do you have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches?’

Now read Revelation 3:7-13 again.

Reflection: What can you do to hold fast what you have?

**Rev 3:14-22 | Message for Laodicea**

*14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and [that] the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"*

V14. You have seen that Sardis has emerged from Thyatira and Philadelphia from Sardis. This development is continued in Laodicea, for Laodicea emerges from Philadelphia. In church history it refers to denominations and churches that have emerged from revivals of the nineteenth century. They indeed have their roots in what originally is a work of God's Spirit, but the roots have withered. They boast on spiritual inheritance, but there is no connection with the Heir.

In Laodicea you see what happens if the light, which God has given to Philadelphia, extinguishes. Or better said: when the warmth of the love for the Lord Jesus wanes and lukewarmness sets in. That lukewarmness is what the Lord Jesus blames the angel of the church in Laodicea for (verses 15-16). The church is boasting of the spiritual riches, while there is no place for the Lord Jesus. He is outside. The difference between Philadelphia and Laodicea has been aptly described this way: Philadelphia has nothing but the Lord, Laodicea has everything but the Lord.

The Lord does not present Himself to Laodicea with one of His judicial characteristics from chapter 1. The characteristics He shows here demon-

strate the contrast between what the church has become and what He has remained. He is the measure of what the church ought to be. In this way He puts the church in the light and He shows the deviation. He presents Himself as “the Amen”, because there can no new phase be expected in church history. The next thing to happen for the church is the rapture of the believers. ‘Amen’ also means that Christ will have the last word (2Cor 1:20).

While the church has fallen into great decline, He is and will always be “the faithful and true Witness”. He testifies to God’s rights in absolute faithfulness and all truthfulness. He is also, as He is the beginning of the first creation, “the Beginning of the creation of God”, in other words: the new creation (2Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). This is what is said of Him in the letter to the Colossians, a letter that was known by the Laodiceans (Col 1:18; 4:16). The church was supposed to be a manifestation of the new creation. The church has deviated from that, but Christ remains the Same.

V15. The deeds that the Lord is talking about here are not deeds that He can praise, but deeds about which He must express His disapproval. They think that they are full of good deeds but the Lord looks right through it and sees their real condition. They were not that cold as Sardis and not that hot as Philadelphia. If they could have been one of both, then at least they had a conviction. You’re better dealing with a totally unbelieving person, a person who fanatically defends something than with a person who is full of himself.

V16. Lukewarm is nauseating. It makes one’s stomach turn. The only thing that is left for the Lord is to spit them out of His mouth. He is about to do that too.

V17. Before He spits them out He tells them what their lukewarmness consists of. He also offers solutions to change their lukewarmness and gives the opportunity to the individual to repent. Their lukewarmness consists of being full of themselves instead of being full of Christ. The church is left on earth to testify to Christ. It does not do that anymore. Not only does it not bear witness to Christ anymore, but instead it starts to bear witness to itself. That shows how deeply it has fallen. The church becomes everything and Christ disappears. The church makes itself attractive, not Christ.

A small illustration of this development: Many years ago committed believers put up a sign in a building of an English church. Painted on it was the text: 'Only Jesus'. Those two words expressed their great love for Him. After many years, the letters 'Jes' on the sign faded away, so that it only read: 'Only ...us'.

The church in Laodicea talks only about itself. To them the Name of the Lord Jesus has become a means of self-exaltation, not an object of love. They are rich and they have the truth. They do not need others, for they have no lack of anything. But they do not know that they "are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" in the fullest sense of the word. They are totally blind for their own situation, for where they spiritually are. They do not even realize that the Lord is not with them anymore, but that He is standing outside the door.

V18. The Lord advises them to buy from Him. In return for handing over their self-importance they will receive "gold" from Him. Gold speaks of Divine glory and is in contrast with their human glory, the boasting in themselves. This gold is free from any impurity, for it has been purified through the fire of the judgment. The possession of Divine glory through the work of the Lord Jesus is the true wealth of the believer.

The professing Christian without Christ also has no "white garments", which speak of purity that can be in God's presence. The white garments are in contrast with the dirty clothes of self-righteousness. But the lukewarm nominal Christian can be clothed with Christ by repenting (Rom 13:14). Through the blood of the Lamb the believer is sure to be pure and covered before God. All their deeds (verse 15) are no cover, like the fig leaves that Adam and Eve made, were no cover for their nakedness (Gen 3:7,10). God gave them the right cover by the skin of an animal (Gen 3:21). That means that an animal had to be killed, which refers to the work of the Lord Jesus.

Only through that "eye salve" is available to be able to see. It is the anointing with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; 1Jn 2:20), through which we can get insight in the things of God.

V19. In His love the Lord Jesus is punishing and chastising them. He wants to address all who find themselves in a condition that is comparable to that of Laodicea, also through events. All His efforts are focused on making their heart beat again for Him and bringing them back into right relationship with Him. He wants them to be zealous in judging themselves and that they may turn to Him.

V20. In His grace He even now tries to reach their heart and conscience. He seeks a place in their affections. He is standing at the door and He knocks. That means that the Lord is standing outside the door and they do not even realize it! They haven't even noticed that He has left. In their imagination they think that He is with them. Of course, they have the truth, haven't they?

For the church as a whole the situation has become such that it will be spit out. But the Lord addresses the individual. If there is "anyone" who hears His voice and opens the door, then He will come in to him and will dine with him and he with Him.

Are you maybe in such a situation? Then it is not hopeless. The Lord is knocking at your door now. Do you hear His voice? Then open the door for Him and let Him come into your life. His coming in means that He partakes of everything you are engaged with and wants to share in all your tests and exercises. Then He will let you share in everything that He has. The result will be that you will rejoice again in all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are in Him (Col 2:3).

V21. You can be an overcomer. An overcomer in Laodicea is someone who in the midst of this evil company opens his heart to the Lord and allows Him to come in. There is a reward attached to that and that is to reign with Him. It is not the greatest of the seven rewards. It is not a typical Christian reward. This reward is shared with all believers of the Old Testament and with those who come out of the great tribulation. Still, it is great to sit together with the Lord Jesus on His throne.

He connects Himself to the overcomer in Laodicea by saying that this overcomer has overcome in the same way as He did. Indeed the Lord gives a proof of His great mercy here by comparing their victory to His own. He

did sit down Himself on the throne of the Father, having accomplished the whole work that the Father had given Him to do. Therefore He is entitled to that place. That is not grace; He has acquired and taken that place on the basis of Who He is and what He has done.

V22. The Lord Jesus does not get tired of calling to hear, but it will stop some time. He does it for the seventh and last time. Do you have an ear to hear? Then listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Now read Revelation 3:14-22 again.

Reflection: Is the Lord allowed to come in to you to dine with you and you with Him? How do you open your heart to Him?

## Revelation 4

### Rev 4:1-7 | The Throne

*1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door [standing] open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like [the sound] of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things." 2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. 3 And He who was sitting [was] like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and [there was] a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. 4 Around the throne [were] twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones [I saw] twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. 5 Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And [there were] seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; 6 and before the throne [there was something] like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. 7 The first creature [was] like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature [was] like a flying eagle.*

V1. It is important to see that with this chapter a new part of the book starts (Rev 1:19). This new part, which is also the last and longest one of the book, starts with "after these things", which is after the events covered in the previous two chapters. In it you have seen the development of professing Christianity on earth, in which the true believers have been addressed. From chapter 4 all true believers have been taken up in heaven. That has happened at the coming of the Lord Jesus for the church and all Old Testament believers (1Thes 4:15-18).

Now the way is free for God to start His work with the earth (cf. 2Thes 2:6). He is going to judge the world and cleanse it of everything that rebels against Him. After these judgments, the Lord Jesus will come to earth to reign for thousand years. He will fulfill all promises that have been prophesied by all prophets. No word that God has spoken will remain unfulfilled.

Christ shows John the whole work that God is going to do after the rapture of the church. John sees “a door [standing] open in heaven”. From there the first voice that he “heard, like [the sound] of a trumpet” (Rev 1:10) – which is the Lord Jesus – speaks with him. The voice is saying to him to come up to heaven to see everything that will happen on earth. And you and I may look over John’s shoulder!

V2. Immediately after the command to come up, John is in the Spirit. He doesn’t have to come in his own strength; neither could he. For this he receives the power of the Holy Spirit. You also cannot get insight in the future of the Lord Jesus by your own efforts. You need the Holy Spirit to show you that (Jn 16:13). For that, however, you must give Him room and there must be no hindrances due to unconfessed sins or a carnal walk.

The first thing John sees in heaven is “a throne” and “One sitting on” it. You are in the throne hall from which reigns and judges. This is the place of action for the rest of the book. The word ‘throne’ appears no less than forty-two times as the throne of God and still five more times with another meaning, while it appears only fifteen times in the rest of the New Testament.

The throne “was standing”, which indicates the stability and firmness of Divine authority, in contrast to all earthly unsteady and changeable thrones. It is also standing “in heaven” and therefore beyond all earthly thrones. Once all earthly thrones will also be visibly subdued. That the actual government is in heaven may be an encouragement to all who suffer as believers under ungodly rulers.

There is also Someone on the throne. It seems that John cannot properly discern Him. From the description he gives, shows a great brilliance. The Person Who sits on it is magnificent, full of glory and brilliance. It is no one else than the glorified Son of Man Who has received the whole judgment of the Father in His hands (Jn 5:22,27).

V3. John uses pictures from nature to describe the splendor of Him Whom he perceives on the throne. He first mentions two gemstones. Gemstones reflect the light of the sun in numerous colorful beams. They are used to describe the glory of God in the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:19). Twelve gem-

stones are on the breastplate of the high priest (Exo 28:17-20). Of these precious stones on the breastplate, the 'sardius stone' is mentioned first and the 'jasper stone' last.

The "rainbow" is the symbol of the faithful covenant of God with the earth. It reminds us that the flood destroyed the earth and also of the blessing thereafter (Gen 9:8-17). This symbol also indicates that God's judgments have a limit and that He in the midst of the wrath also remembers mercy (Gen 8:1; Hab 3:2). The rainbow "around the throne", which is not a half but a whole closed circle, announces that His kindness never ceases, but is everlasting.

The rainbow is "like an emerald in appearance". An emerald has a beautiful green color, the typical color of creation. This is the color of the rainbow as the glorified saints will always see it. While the judgment on rebellious man and evil is announced, the remembrance of God's grace and promises toward His creation are vividly before their eyes.

V4. The Lord Jesus does not reign alone. Beside Him there are "twenty-four thrones", and on them "twenty-four elders". The number 'twenty-four' consists of two times twelve. In these twenty-four elders the believers from the Old Testament and the New Testament are symbolically represented. You can understand that when you remember that God's people in the Old Testament is originated from the twelve sons of Jacob and that God's people in the New Testament is built on the foundation of the twelve apostles of the Lord Jesus.

The "white garments" indicate the purity and priestly character of the elders. They sit as kings on thrones, as co-rulers with the Lord Jesus. They have "golden crowns on their heads". These crowns are no royal diadems, but wreaths given to overcomers. The value is not in the material, but in the public tribute. You may consider that an encouragement for yourself. If on earth you are faithful to following the rejected Lord, you will soon be allowed to reign with Him.

V5. What goes out from the throne announces coming judgments. It reminds us of the appearance of God on Mount Sinai (Exo 19:16; 20:18). The throne here is not the throne of mercy, what it is to you today (Heb 4:16).

Also in the millennial kingdom of peace the throne is a throne from which blessing comes in the form of a stream of water (Eze 47:1-12). But before that happens, judgments must come out from the throne, so that the blessing can have ample room.

With the throne of God the Spirit of God is connected. The Spirit is here represented sevenfold in “seven lamps of fire”. The number ‘seven’ indicates perfection and ‘fire’ symbolizes judgment. The judgments of God are different to each situation, but always perfect. They are executed without a chance of mistake under the perfect working of the Spirit of God. It is a good thing to consider that the God Whom you may call Father is at the same time a consuming fire with regard to everything in your life which is not in harmony with Him (Heb 12:29; cf. 1Pet 1:17).

V6. It is remarkable how everything in this chapter is connected with the throne. You have read about

“One” *on* the throne,

“the elders” *around* the throne,

“lightning and sounds and peals of thunder” *coming out from* the throne and

“the seven Spirits of God” who were *before* the throne.

Now you see something else *before* the throne and even something else *in the center and around* the throne. We first look at what is before the throne: something “like a sea of glass, like crystal”. That reminds us of the great laver in the temple of Solomon, called the ‘sea’ (1Kgs 7:23). That laver was filled with water with which the priest had to wash his hands and feet before he entered the sanctuary. The water here is ‘crystal’. In heaven there is no more need for washing. That the sea is before the throne means that the purity in heaven is perfectly in harmony with the holy character of the throne.

To understand somewhat what these four living creatures in the center and around the throne represent, you need to read some verses from the book of Ezekiel (Eze 1:5,10,18; 10:12,14). If you compare what John sees of it with what Ezekiel sees of it, you see that the living creatures are related

to the judgments of God on earth characterized by four things. That they are related to judgments is already evident from their position in connection with the throne. They are in the center of it, so they are, as it were, identified with the throne.

That there are four of them emphasizes the generality of the judgment. The number 'four' is typical for the earth. You hear it in expressions like: four wind directions, four corners of the earth, four seasons. With respect to the earth, the four living creatures are not only all-encompassing in their judgment, but they also exercise it with full insight in the future, "full of eyes in front", and in the past, full of eyes "behind". This insight belongs to God's nature, which makes Him act with full knowledge of all circumstances, of all causes and of all consequences.

V7. The characteristics of His judgments are compared with four of His creatures:

1. In the first place there is "a lion". The lion is the king among the beasts which does not retreat before any (Pro 30:30) and against whom no one can resist. In the lion you see the power and majesty of God's reign and judgments.

2. His judgments also continue steadily, like "a calf" that is plowing continues steadily.

3. His judgments are executed with wisdom and insight, with which He has gifted "man" as a creature above the beasts.

4. Finally you see in the "flying eagle" the fastness in which the judgments from heaven will strike the earth (cf. Deu 28:49).

Now read Revelation 4:1-7 again.

Reflection: Mention the things that are associated with the throne in this section.

## Rev 4:8-11 | The Four Living Creatures

*8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY [is] THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." 9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."*

V8. After the differences between the living creatures you also see what they have in common. Each of the living creatures has "six wings". The seraphim that Isaiah saw in his vision also have them (Isa 6:2). In the book of Isaiah you read what they did with the six wings. With two of their wings they covered their face, for they cannot behold the glory of God. With two other wings they covered their feet, which indicates that in the light of that glory they do not find themselves worthy of serving Him, while they continually show their readiness of that service with yet two more moving wings.

It seems that with the living creatures all six wings are moving. They have no rest as long as the earth is still in chaos and rebellion against God, as long as there is no harmony between heaven and earth and heaven is not yet reigning on earth. The holiness of God, so long trampled on earth, is before them. To that end, they want to go about their work for Him as the executors of God's judgment.

They are perfectly equipped for this work. There is perfect insight in all things around them, "full of eyes around", and inwardly they are perfectly aware of God's holiness, "full of eyes ... within". Besides that it causes them to carry out their judgmental work, for which they are, as it were, eager with impatience, they also worship God because of His holiness. They are full of that holiness, which you hear in the three times saying "holy". They know Him as the God of the history, "Who was", and the present,

“and Who is”. He is also the One “Who is to come” to fill the world with His holiness. He is the Almighty, He is able and He will do it.

V9. The four living creatures have characteristics which distinguish them from each other and they have characteristics in which they are the alike. They also collectively give “glory and honor and thanks” to God. He sits on the throne and has all power to reign. His kingdom will never come to an end, for He “lives forever and ever”. With Him and His throne they are closely connected. They cannot but honor Him and to carry out His will. All of their actions in the execution of the judgments have God’s glory as a starting point and purpose.

You can also apply that to the church if sin has been publicly revealed in its midst (1Cor 5:13b). The judgment of sin must also be done from this awareness. Personal motives should not play a role. It is only about the honor of God. In that honor also lies the blessing of man. That honor the Lord Jesus always sought, and what a blessing came to men as a result!

V10. After the worship of the living creatures comes that of the elders. The cause of their worship is certainly also God’s holiness and omnipotence. They also give thanks for the crowns that they have received from Him as a reward for their faithfulness on earth. They have the deep consciousness that their faithfulness was finally the result of what His grace has worked in them. Therefore they will also cast their crowns with much gratitude before the throne and express their admiration for Him.

V11. In their tribute the elders address Him directly, while the angels speak *about* Him, not *to* Him. They begin by saying to Him: “Worthy are You.” That involves His Person. He personally is worthy. His personal glory is evidenced here by His works. In the next chapter it is said once again that He is worthy (Rev 5:9). There it happens because of the greatness of His work of redemption. Here you see that the Object of worship is both the triune God Who sits on the throne and the Son Who because of His work on the cross has been given all power.

When the elders speak about what God is worthy of to receive, it does not mean that something is given to God which He does not have yet. Their desire is that what He has will be seen and admired by the whole creation

and that this will be spoken out to Him. All things have been created by Him. All things exist because He wanted that and because He has carried out His will and actually created all things.

You may now already tell Him that you see His glory, honor and power in His works and that you admire Him for it. Then you will now already be doing what you see the elders doing here and what you will also be doing soon in heaven. Isn't it great to say this to God and the Lord Jesus?

Now read Revelation 4:8-11 again.

Reflection: What will you soon be able to offer before the throne of the Lord Jesus?

## Revelation 5

### Rev 5:1-5 | The Scroll

*1 I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" 3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. 4 Then I [began] to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; 5 and one of the elders \*said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."*

V1. In this new chapter your eye is focused on "a book" which is "in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne". In the previous verses you've seen that all power is in the hands of the Lord Jesus. In the scene you see now, the way in which the Lord Jesus will take control is presented. He already has the power since His work on the cross (Mt 28:18), but here we have the moment that He openly accepts His power. Therefore it is an impressive moment.

The book is a scroll. Normally in a scroll there is writing only "inside", but this one there is also writing "on the back", or on the outside. It is fully written, with no room to add anything. Nor is there anything to add, for the book contains the property rights of Christ (cf. Jer 32:6-16; Lev 25:23-25). From this book it appears that He is authorized to execute judgments needed to purify the earth and then to fulfill the counsels of God with regard to creation.

The judgments are described in Revelation 6-19. In the chapters that follow the consummation of all God's plans follows with blessing for both the old and the new creation. That all this has been documented in a book means that it is immutably fixed and verifiably executed as described. The book contains the history of the future. Only God is able to write history beforehand.

The book is “sealed up with seven seals”. This means, in order to open the book, the seals must first be broken. So the first acts of judgment are seen when in Revelation 6 the seals are broken one by one.

V2. But first the question arises who is worthy to open the book and break its seals. This question comes from the mouth of “a strong angel” and it sounds through the universe, through heaven and over the earth. The question is who the owner is of the inheritance described in it, which is creation. Also, the question is who has the right to redeem the inheritance. That question must be answered, because the inheritance has fallen into the hands of an unlawful owner, the devil, caused by the guilt of man.

A strong angel is asking the question, but he himself is not the answer to the question, however powerful he may be. It must be someone who is *worthy* to do it and who is *able* to do it, who has the power. The right on the inheritance is therefore about the personal *dignity* of the heir and about the personal *strength* to execute the content of it. He Who meets both conditions, dignity and strength, is the Son of Man (Jn 5:27).

V3. The voice of the angel is heard everywhere, but no answer comes from anywhere:

1. not from “heaven”, the dwelling place of the chosen angels,
2. not from “the earth”, the dwelling place of men and
3. not from “under the earth”, the residence of other intelligent creatures.

The universe, in all its components (cf. Phil 2:10), does not contain one single creature that can deal with the book. No one is able to do that, no one has the suitable ability (Psa 49:7).

V4. When John sees that there is no response to the question of the angel, he bursts into tears and weeps intensely. He weeps, not because he had been looking forward to the judgments, but which now do not pass, as once Jonah was displeased with that (Jona 4:1). No, he weeps, because he cannot bear the thought that evil will reign forever and will not be punished.

Countless people have sought to open the book and bring about the time of blessing. That is still the effort of man. But man himself is part of evil

and therefore completely unfit and also incapable to deal with evil in a way that is pleasing to God. Is there really no one who is able to do it? Yes, there is a Man Who meets all God's holy requirements regarding evil.

V5. John is weeping greatly, but not for long. An elder – a glorified believer who has insight in the ways and the counsels of God – says to him not to weep. For there is Someone Who is able to open the book and its seven seals. It is “the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah” about Whom Jacob has prophesied (Gen 49:9-11). As the Lion He is the Ruler. He is also “the Root of David”. He belongs to the royal descendants, He is the true Son of David and has the legal right to reign. He is none other than the Lord Jesus.

He gained His dignity and right by His victory on the cross. There He regained the ownership of creation. There He crushed the head of satan, who by wiles and craftiness has illegally taken possession of creation. He has paid the full ransom and repurchased the whole creation for God. He has the right to open the seals, which is the right of redeeming the earth, in order to purify it from all injustice. He has overcome on the cross and will give shape to that victory in all that He does.

Now read Revelation 5:1-5 again.

Reflection: Have you ever felt that evil is in control and that it seems as if it will never change? When is that? How do you do then?

**Rev 5:6-14 | The Lamb**

6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. 7 And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. 8 When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they \*sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 "You have made them [to be] a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." 13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, [be] blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." 14 And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

V6. John has heard that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed and is entitled to creation. You can imagine that he is now expecting to see the impressive stature of the king of beasts. But what does he see? A Lamb, or, as it originally says, a little Lamb, a word that appears almost thirty times in this book. The diminutive makes the nullity feel all the stronger. A lamb is completely defenseless, it doesn't reflect any power; on the contrary, there is hardly anything weaker than that. And that picture of weakness is even more amplified when you see the Lamb there "standing, as if slain".

Here you see in which way the Lord Jesus has overcome, namely by being slain. The Lamb stands there as an animal of which the throat has just been cut through. That is, the remembrance of Golgotha is preserved in heaven. But the Lord Jesus is not on the cross nor in the grave anymore; He is "between the throne" or "in the midst of the throne" (Darby Translation)

of God, that is, in glory. The work is accomplished! At the same time you read that the Lamb is 'standing'. That indicates that He is ready to come into action. The time of sitting is over (Rev 3:21; Psa 110:1).

The Lamb stands in the "midst". He is the center "of the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders". Everything that has to do with government and insight, has its center in Him. He rules and acts. He does that as Lamb, but not as a defenseless Lamb. He has "seven horns". 'Horns' symbolize strength (1Sam 2:10; Lk 1:69), here especially royal strength. 'Seven' horns means perfect and absolute strength.

However, the Lord is not only *omnipotent*, but He is also *omniscient*. He has perfect insight into all things that happen on earth. That's what the "seven eyes" indicates as a representation of "the seven Spirits of God". Here the number 'seven' symbolizes again the perfection of the Spirit through Whom He works (Isa 11:2). These seven Spirits are "sent out into all the earth". That symbolizes that He is *omnipresent*. He takes perfect notice of everything that happens. Nothing escapes His all-seeing eyes (2Chr 16:9; Zec 3:9; 4:10).

V7. Then the Lamb walks to the throne. It must have been an awesome moment for John and all who at that moment are in heaven. What is happening now in heaven is a unique event. Everyone must be breathlessly watching this scene. The Lamb comes and takes the book out of the right hand of Him Who sits on the throne. Now He has the book in His hands. Without saying a word to each other, the Lamb, once slain, is given the full entitlement by the One Who sits on the throne, the triune God, to take back the stolen property.

The action is as calm as it is grant and lofty, full of majesty. The description is without any human addition in language or action, that would only impair this unparalleled moment. You should just take a moment to allow what is happening here to sink in.

V8. The time of waiting is over, the time of acting has come. The tension has been broken. After the Lamb took the book, heaven comes into action to worship the Lamb. Heaven is aware of the enormous importance of tak-

ing the book. It means that the judgment on the world is near and the age to come is about to start.

Both the representatives of God's kingdom – the four living creatures – and the representatives of all believers who are in heaven, express their admiration for the Lamb. He is worthy and He has all power to do whatever is needed to perfectly carry out God's plan to the end. They all have "a harp" for expressing their admiration. The harp is an instrument of praise and worship and is sometime mentioned in reference to the millennial kingdom of peace (Psa 33:2; 150:3).

Beside a harp they also all have "golden bowls full of incense". The meaning of the incense is written right behind it: it represents "the prayers of the saints" (cf. Psa 141:2). Beside worshipers there are also intercessors on behalf of the believers who are on earth at that time. Those who are in heaven are aware of their relation to those who are in need on earth. Possibly these bowls also contain the prayers of all saints that were prayed through the ages. In those days many were not saved and died as martyrs; but now those prayers will be answered. No prayer that has ever been sincerely prayed to God by a believer will remain unanswered.

V9. These worshipers and intercessors themselves are not in need and are free from sufferings. For them, the time to sing has come. "They sang a new song." It is a song that the earth has not known yet, neither Moses (cf. Rev 15:3), nor David, though he also speaks of a 'new song' (Psa 33:3; 96:1). Only those who were bought by the blood of the Lamb are able to sing it.

When the redeemed people were on earth, they sang songs of deliverance, songs that were looking forward to the time of victory and the kingdom of glory. Those were songs of hope. But when the book is taken and opened, the songs will change into songs of victory and celebration of the peace that dawns. Above all, they will sing to Him Who has worked all things.

In this new song they answer the question that was asked in verse 2 by the strong angel. They sing to the Lamb: "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals." *He* is the content of the song and not the believer or what he has received. They also sing why He is worthy of it: the great work of redemption and atonement which He has accomplished in the offering

of Himself. He was slain. In that way His blood was shed as the purchase price. In that way He has purchased, and He did it “for God”.

The purchased ones come from all parts of the world population. It is not only the church (Mt 13:44), but they are all believers from all ages. He is the true Redeemer of the Old Testament, the true Boaz. He not only bought the believers. He has acquired the believers as a special property (1Cor 6:20). But He bought the whole earth including the unbelievers (2Pet 2:1; cf. Jn 17:2; Mt 13:38,44).

V10. The elders praise God not for what they themselves are, but for what He has made of the believers, the redeemed on earth. Therefore they speak about “them” in their song. It indeed refers to themselves, but they do not want to put themselves forward as the subject of the new song. It is all about the Lord Jesus to them. All light must fall on Him.

He made them to be “a kingdom and priests”. What an awesome transformation for men who once were in bondage of sin and worshipers of satan. They are now ‘kings’ of a kingdom where the Lord Jesus has all authority. They are allowed to serve Him there. As subjects of that kingdom they now find themselves already under His blessed reign, a reign that will soon be established on earth.

They are also as priests of God in His presence to worship Him. In that way man has come at the highest level of God’s purpose with him (Mt 4:10).

As an added favor, they are also allowed to “reign upon the earth” together with the Lord Jesus. They are given a position of government on the earth where they were once persecuted and despised. Now they are given a position of dominion to spread blessing there (1Cor 6:2-3).

V11. John sees and hears others joining in the praise. It is the voice of an enormous number of angels. The numbers that are mentioned indicate that it is about innumerable millions of angels. They form a circle around the throne and the living creatures and the elders, in the midst of which the Lamb is standing (verse 6). The angels have no personal part in the redemption. Therefore they are standing at a greater distance of the Lamb.

But they certainly have great admiration for Him Who has accomplished the work of redemption.

V12. The angels also worship Him as the Lamb That was slain. They see the effect of it and know that the cause of it lies in Him and His work. Everything they mention has always been used through the ages by man to magnify himself. Now the time has come that all these things will be used by the true Man to magnify God. He is the Owner of it all, but it will become visible by His acts. And everything that becomes visible of Him prompts everyone who sees it to exclamations of admiration.

1. It begins with “power”. The power man has used to corrupt his way on earth, is used by Him in judgment and then in blessing.
2. All “riches” of the universe is His and will no more be misused, but will expose Him in His multifaceted brilliance.
3. He is the “wisdom” and will make that visible in all His ways and works.
4. He has the “might” that enables Him to carry out what He has decided to do.
5. He is worthy of all “honor” and that will openly be given to Him.
6. Everything that becomes visible of Him, is pure “glory”, splendor and magnificence.
7. “Blessing” is ascribed to Him, Who was once so reviled.

V13. The circle of worshipers expands even further. The whole creation, everything that has been created, rejoices in God and the Lamb. Then the curse is taken away from creation. This praise will never come to an end.

V14. The executors of God’s judgment agree with the praise. All that remains for the elders is to fall down without words and worship.

Now read Revelation 5:6-14 again.

Reflection: Tell the Lamb what is in your heart for Him.

## Revelation 6

### Rev 6:1-8 | The First Four Seals

*1 Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." 2 I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. 3 When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." 4 And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that [men] would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him. 5 When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. 6 And I heard [something] like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine." 7 When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." 8 I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.*

Before we start with Revelation 6 I will give you a brief summary of the upcoming chapters. Then you will have a rough idea of what is going to happen.

1. In Revelation 6 the first six seals are broken. Those six seals describe the first six trials that will come over the earth after the rapture of the church.
2. Revelation 7 is a parenthesis between the sixth and the seventh seal, in which God shows that a great number of believers are preserved through the judgments until the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth. They enter the kingdom of peace as the living.
3. In Revelation 8:1-5 the seventh seal is opened. That causes a silence of half an hour in heaven, after which seven trumpets, blown by angels, give the sign for new judgments.

4. In Revelation 8:6-9:21 six trumpet judgments are described.
5. The section of Revelation 10:1-11:13 forms a new parenthesis.
6. Then in Revelation 11:14-18 the seventh trumpet is blown.
7. In Revelation 12-14 some events of the forgoing period are more precisely described.
8. In Revelation 15-16 you read about the seven angels with seven bowl judgments. These are the concluding and also most severe judgments.
9. The Revelation 17-18 are specially dedicated to the judgment over the great Babylon, the false church.
10. Then in Revelation 19 the wedding of the Lamb with the true church takes place.
11. Up till Revelation 21:8 it is described in chronological order what still more is to happen until eternity begins.
12. From Revelation 21:9 you have a description of the new Jerusalem in the kingdom of peace.
13. The book ends with information on the coming of Christ and His promise that He will come soon.

V1. Here you see, with John, the Lord Jesus as the Lamb, opening the first seal. As it is said, it is one of the seals of the book in which God has written His counsels and judgments regarding the earth. You can call the judgments that come on the earth with the opening of each of the seals, the preliminary judgments. They are not yet the actual, ultimate judgments with the effect of the purification of the earth and the redemption of it, but they prepare the way to it. The seal judgments announce the beginning of the end, that is, that God will fulfill His will by preparing the earth for the reign of Christ.

The command “come” is not addressed to John and still less to Christ. It comes from one of the living creatures that are connected to the execution of judgment and is addressed to the horse as a symbol of the judgment. Here it is still about judgments in providence. That means that those are judgments which by unbelievers are ascribed to natural elements or to

political or other circumstances, while in reality they are directed by God. They still do not recognize God's hand in these plagues.

V2. Here horses represent authorities that God in His providence uses for judgment (cf. Zec 1:8-10; Rev 19:11,14). The colors of the horses associated with the first four seals represent successively: white for victory, fiery red for blood, black for mourning and ashen as the corpse color of death (cf. Zec 1:8; 6:2-8).

The white horse with its rider who goes out conquering is not a representation of the coming of Christ. Christ will come down from heaven only in Revelation 19. It has been suggested that this is a prince who works and maintains the cohesion of the Roman empire. I remind you that we have here the first events on earth that will take place right after the rapture of the church.

When the church has been caught up it will for a moment seem that all human efforts have been successful in order to achieve a sustainable peace. It is a short period of apparent peace and prosperity with a sense of security. God will allow it, while man in his arrogance will see it as his own success (1Thes 5:3). About peace with God and about what He considers righteous, he does not think about that.

The "bow", without an arrow, may probably indicate that there is no arms race at that very moment, but that the disarmament regarding the mass destruction which could be effected at a great distance, has been realized for a great deal. It is also possible that there is such an amount of long distance weapons that the threat is enough to win people over without direct bloodshed. That this process will probably be taking place peacefully can be derived from the white color.

"A crown was given" to the conqueror. That indicates that he conquers under the approval of God because it fits into His plans. It does not mean that God approves of all his acts and motives, but that He allows the performance.

V3-4. When "the second seal" is opened by the Lamb, John hears the second living creature saying: "Come!" Because in verse 1 it is not said 'the first living creature', but "one of the four living creatures", the order

of speaking of the living creatures cannot be determined on the basis of Revelation 4 (Rev 4:7). The horse that goes out has a red color. Shortly after the rider of the white horse had established a peaceful period, the rider of the red horse brutally makes an end to it.

After a period of peace during the first seal, a spirit of discontentment is now working which instigates war, possibly a civil war. Here you do not see a bow, like with the first seal, but “a great sword” for the fight of man against man. It is a ‘great sword’, which indicates that the slaughter is great. Here it becomes apparent that the disarmament is not complete. People remain deceitful. Peace wrought by men does not last. Only God can give lasting peace (Psa 147:14). Peace is a result of the subjection of man to the government of God.

V5. When the Lamb opens “the third seal” the “the third living creature” says: “Come!” John sees “a black horse” and “he who sits on it”. He also sees that the rider has “a pair of scales in his hand”. We don’t need to guess what the black color represents. Black doesn’t evoke pleasant thoughts, but has to do with mourning and lamenting (Psa 38:7; 42:10; 43:2; Jer 8:21; Lam 4:8; Mal 3:14). The pair of scales indicates an accurate measurement of what is available. The general prosperity is over and done with.

V6. You can imagine that because of the war under the second seal, an economic chaos arises. The most necessary provisions will be enormously scarce and therefore expensive. This situation is emphatically associated with a judgment that comes from God. It says for a reason that something “like a voice in the center of the four living creatures” announces this scarcity.

Especially the common population will suffer under this crisis. “A quart of wheat” will cost “a denarius”, which is equal to a day’s pay (Mt 20:2). Common man can only have one meal a day. The word ‘quart’ doesn’t evoke the thought that there is much choice. It is scarce, just enough to stay alive. All the money that has been earned will be used for that. There is no more money to spend on anything else.

“The oil and the wine” must be spared. These products are presented as affluent goods, for which we are warned not to put our heart on them (Pro

21:17). If these things must be spared it may indicate that the rich people are still prospering. They can always maintain themselves for a longer period of time. But they will surely have to face the shortage. Maybe not in material sense, but surely in spiritual sense (verse 15). It is also possible when considering oil and wine to think of medicines (Lk 10:34). Then we see in the sparing of oil and wine God's compassion, which despite the severe trials which come over the earth, will not be completely taken away.

V7-8. When the Lamb breaks "the fourth seal" John hears "the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come."" Now all four living creatures have spoken. The horse you see now is "ashen". The rider of this horse has a name called "Death" and his follower is called "Hades". Here you can find no trace of compassion. It is all darkness. That cannot be otherwise, for wherever God is denied as the source of life, death enters.

The territory where this judgment takes place is "a fourth of the earth". That is a smaller part than 'a third', which embraces the Roman empire (Rev 12:4). The judgment is therefore still of a relatively small size.

The famine under the previous seal will be followed by death which makes its victims in various ways. Hades follows death because hades is the place where the victims of death end up. Death deals with the living and hades with the dead. Together they make victims with "sword" (wars), "famine" (hunger), "pestilence" and "the wild beasts of the earth" (Jer 14:12; 15:2; Eze 5:12,17; 14:21; 33:27). Wild beasts probably represent unscrupulous people who terrorize their fellow men.

Now read Revelation 6:1-8 again.

Reflection: Try to summarize in few words the characteristic of each of the first four seals.

**Rev 6:9-17 | The Fifth and Sixth Seal**

9 When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11 And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until [the number of] their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. 12 I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth [made] of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14 The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they \*said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

V9. When the Lamb opens "the fifth seal" the consequence is different from the previous seals. There several horses with riders appeared and did certain things. After the establishment of a false peace, several actions followed that result in death and misery. With this fifth seal you see nothing happen, but you get a behind-the-scenes look of death. You see and hear individuals who cry for revenge.

This seal is not a direct judgment, but it is actually the preparation for the judgments that will follow hereafter under the remaining seals. Those are not the same kind of judgments as those of the previous seals. There things happened on earth that are a plague for men. They are things that seem to stem from their own wrong actions, although God directs them. The judgments yet to come are judgments in which men are forced to recognize more directly the hand of God.

Those who cry for revenge are “underneath the altar”. The altar is a place of offering. That appears from the description that follows. “The souls” are “of those who had been slain”. They were slain by the enemies of God. They are ‘underneath the altar’ because they offered their lives as an offering for the sake of “the word of God”, like the blood of a sacrificial animal – in the blood is the soul – was poured out at the foot of the altar (Exo 29:12; Lev 4:7,18,30,34). God considers their death as an offering pleasing to Him.

Here you read about ‘souls’, because these believers have not yet been raised. Their bodies are still in the grave. At the same time this makes clear that they do not belong to the church, for the bodies of those who belong to the church, will be raised at the coming of the Lord Jesus. The believers that we are talking about here, died during the time when the seals are opened, when the gospel was also proclaimed, that is, the gospel of the kingdom (Mt 24:14). They will remain in that condition till the return of Christ (Rev 20:4).

They did not die a natural death or because of an illness. No, they were killed “because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained”. They remained faithful to the truth of God’s Word and also testified to it. They had to pay with their lives for it and they were willing to pay that price. That’s why they were “slain”, which is the same word that is used for the Lord Jesus as “a Lamb standing, as if slain” (Rev 5:6). What men did to the Lord Jesus, they also do to those who are faithful to Him (Jn 15:18-20). These souls are the first martyrs. Many of their brothers will follow in even more terrible times (Rev 12:17; 13:7).

V10. The words they cry out are words of revenge. That also makes clear that we do not find ourselves on Christian ground. It is the language of the Old Testament (cf. Psa 79:10-13; 137:7-9). The believers of the church do not pray for revenge on their persecutors, but for grace (Acts 7:60). After the rapture of the church this will be a prayer that is fitting to be prayed. What matters then is that God will assert His right on earth, and that can only be done through judgment. When the believers then will be persecuted they will not be delivered by taking them out of the persecution, as with the church, but by judging the enemies. Those enemies are the people “who

dwell on the earth". They do not want to have anything to do with God and do not want to be confronted with Him.

The souls underneath the altar cry out to God as "Lord, holy and true". They long for justice for the injustice that was done to them. Thereby they appeal to God, Who understands this. After all He is holy and hates unholiness. He is also true and hates injustice. They have no doubt that He will act against evil and will thereby show His absolute sovereignty as Ruler. They only wonder how long they have to wait for that (Psa 94:3; Hab 1:2). At the same time this question indicates that they know that the persecution of the faithful will come to an end.

V11. As an answer to their call the martyrs receive "a white robe". It is about a symbolic robe, for souls cannot be clothed. In the same sentence it is said of God Who is Spirit, that He is clothed (Psa 104:2; Isa 6:1). In that way they receive, as it were, a high award for being righteous and overcomers. It underscores their dignity.

It is also said to them that they will have to rest a little while longer. It is about "a little while", which is the time of the great tribulation. The group that is talking here is the first group of martyrs after the rapture of the church. There will be more martyrs joining them, namely, those who will be killed during the great tribulation (Rev 20:4b). Those are "their fellow servants", for they serve the same Lord, and "their brethren", for they belong to the same family of those who did the will of God (Mt 12:49-50). When they are killed the number of the martyrs will be complete and then the Lord will come to meet their request for revenge.

V12. After this brief conversation, the Lamb opens "the sixth seal". What then happens is, as it were, an 'advance' of the answer to the prayer under the previous seal. An enormous earthquake will occur which turns the earth into a chaos. This demonstration of power makes of man a completely insignificant, void creature. Above the earth it becomes black and red. All of creation turns into a terrifying backdrop. It is possible that what is described here will literally happen. It is also possible, which seems to me to be the first meaning, that it is a symbolic representation.

Symbolically the “great earthquake” represents an enormous revolution through which everything that has given man firmness and support falls away from him. It concerns social, political and religious order, things that give support in life. Normally the ground under the feet is the most secure thing in life. Sun, moon and stars can be seen as symbols for rulers (cf. Gen 1:16). When these celestial objects lose their shine and become black and red, it means that these rulers, given by God to protect order and life, are now causing darkness and death.

V13. These stars seem surely to be a symbolic presentation of rulers. If it would be literally true that the stars fall on the earth, then nothing will be left of the earth. That they “fell to the earth”, means that they lose their original function. What they were meant for, as an orientation for man, has disappeared. They now show their true nature. They used to be kept somewhat in check by certain Christian values and norms. Their own righteousness comes under the control of powers which they are not able to resist. Evil power will take over the control.

V14. God, as it were, takes His hands off His creation. The thoughts of heaven, that is of God, are obscured, without possibility of being informed about them anymore. After all, you cannot read a ‘scroll that is rolled up’. There is no more light from above, only moral darkness, making one blind to any Divine guidance. The result is that “every mountain and island were moved out of their places”. In connection with the previous verses it seems that this also has to be considered symbolically. Mountains represent immense, immoveable powers and islands are images of commercial powers. They also lose their usual functions and become disoriented.

V15. You may take the description in this verse literally. In the sevenfold description you can see all of humanity, from king to slave. They are all so astonished and helpless by the elimination of any human government, that they want to hide themselves. Every difference in prosperity, wealth, riches and social positions disappears. None of the economic, social or political benefits gives any protection against these judgments. They will all hide themselves “in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains” (cf. Isa 2:19).

V16. While they are there, they will still not feel safe from “the wrath of the Lamb”. They have come to realize through the disasters under the previous seal that they are dealing with God and the Lamb. They begin to think of God and even the Lamb (Pro 10:24a). It is the proof that also the unbelieving man is inwardly aware that he is dealing with God as Judge. He also knows of the Lamb and His wrath. This indicates that we are in what has been a Christian part of the world.

But how fearful they may be, they refuse to repent! They do not want to accept what they always have denied and what they are now forced to acknowledge. They do not want to bow down before the Lamb. They prefer that the mountains and rocks fall on them. They probably think that if only they die, they will be able to escape from God and the wrath of the Lamb. That also will appear to be a tragic and fatal mistake when they will be called to come before the great white throne (Rev 20:12-13).

V17. People who refuse to repent are always mistaken. These people claim that “the great day” of the wrath of God and of the Lamb has come. But that is not true. It is yet the beginning of birth pangs (Mt 24:8). That great day will have come only when Christ appears.

Now read Revelation 6:9-17 again.

Reflection: Mention some differences between what the souls underneath the altar ask of God and what you as a Christian ask of God.

## Revelation 7

### Rev 7:1-8 | The Sealed of Israel

*1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 5 from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand [were] sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand [were] sealed.*

Here begins what can be called a parenthesis before the seventh seal is opened. In this parenthesis, which consists of the whole of Revelation 7, you hear what the believers experience during the time of the sixth seal. You will also read how they are preserved by God during this terrible time. It beautifully illustrates that God remembers in wrath mercy (Hab 3:2).

This chapter is, as it were, an answer to the question that was asked at the end of the previous chapter: 'Who is able to stand?' (Rev 6:17). The answer is: A great number of saints, both from Israel (verses 1-8) and from the nations (verses 9-17), is able to stand before God and the Lamb. Both groups of believers will go through the great tribulation. They will not die like the martyrs, but they will enter the kingdom of peace alive. The first group will be sealed before they enter the great tribulation, the second group is presented as coming out of the great tribulation.

V1. That the scene which John gets to see now follows the preceding one is evident from the words “after this”. After having seen the Lamb That opens the seals, John now sees “four angels”. When the trumpet judgments break loose in Revelation 8, the sounding of the trumpets happens by angels (Rev 8:2,6). Here you also see angels. Angels are used by the Lamb to do His work. That work consists of protecting the saints (Heb 1:14) and judging evil in accordance to the purity of heaven, the dwelling place of the angels.

The four angels are “standing at the four corners of the earth”. That means that the whole earth is their work territory (cf. Isa 11:12). The number ‘four’ that appears three times in this verse speaks of what is general, universal. While they are standing there they are “holding back the four winds of the earth”, so that these winds cannot cause destruction. The sealing of the chosen of God happens in silence.

When the four winds start to blow, animals as symbols of rulers of world empires will come up from the sea of nations. You read about that in Daniel 7 (Dan 7:2-3; cf. Jer 49:36). Here they are still hold back. God determines the time of their coming up, but also of their curbing for the benefit of His own (Psa 105:15). They are ‘held’ as they try to tear themselves away. But it is impossible to extricate oneself from the grasp of the Almighty.

V2. Then John sees “another angel ascending”. He comes from the east, from the side where the sun rises. When the sun rises, a new day dawns. This speaks of the rising of “the sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2), which is Christ, Who expels the darkness and causes the dawning of the day. This ‘other angel’ is not a picture of Christ. In the next verse he places himself on the same level with the four angels when he speaks about ‘we’ and ‘our God’.

The angel has “the seal of the living God”. A seal is a mark of ownership. ‘The seal of the living God’ makes clear that he who has it, belongs to Him and is known by Him (cf. 2Tim 2:19). Therefore the seal also means safety at the same time (cf. Eze 9:4). It is the seal of the *living God*, which means that whoever has it is untouchable from death.

When God is called ‘the living God, then it is also to emphasize the contrast between Him and the dead idols (1Thes 1:9). This is how He is called

also in connection with Israel in the days of Joshua and Hezekiah (Jos 3:10; 2Kgs 19:4,16), which is at the beginning (Joshua) and at the end (Hezekiah) of its history in the land. As He intervened in the days of Joshua and Hezekiah for the benefit of His people, so He will in the time of the great tribulation. During that time, He will lead and preserve His people through the general idolatrous worship of the antichrist and the beast.

The angel gives a command on behalf of God to the four angels who have power over the winds. The winds want to harm but they cannot, because they are held back by the angels. Only when the angels let them loose they will be able to do their damaging work. That means that it is not the winds that have the power to harm the earth and the sea, but the angels are the ones that have the power. In the same way angels have power over fire (Rev 14:18) and over water (Rev 16:5). However, they do not act on their own, but they are under the authority of God.

V3. Those who are sealed are “the bond-servants of our God”. They are the chosen ones from the twelve tribes of Israel (verse 4) who serve God. Their service seems to consist of the proclamation of His Name, the preaching of the living God, while everything around them has no regard for Him. They will preach both in Israel and in the whole world and they will continue their service with which the twelve apostles have started when the Lord Jesus sent them out (Mt 10:23; 24:14). It seems that the result of their preaching is ‘the multitude’ which the second part of this chapter is dealing with.

It does not say what this seal exactly is. Possibly it is the name of God and the Lamb which they get on their forehead (cf. Rev 14:1; 22:4; 3:12). There is something to be said for that when you consider that the wicked have the name of the beast on their foreheads (Rev 13:16; 14:9,11; 20:4). They are sealed “on their foreheads”. In that way it is a clearly observable mark to everyone that they have focused their thoughts on God and that God acknowledges them as His own (cf. Rev 13:16). They openly testify of His Name in each part of the world wherever they are scattered. The angel confirms that the sealing is the reason why the winds were held back.

V4. The number of the ones who are sealed is communicated. It is one hundred and forty-four thousand. It is also mentioned who they are. They are “the sons of Israel”. It is also said that they come from every tribe. The

further announcements show that from each tribe comes the same number of the sealed: twelve thousand.

The numbers have a symbolic meaning, not excluding the possibility that they should be taken literally. It is possible that in the time of the great tribulation one hundred and forty-four thousand servants of God will go out in Israel and in the whole world to proclaim His Name. But the symbolic meaning is important. The number twelve, which also in the multiples of one hundred and forty-four and twelve thousand stands at the forefront, is in the Bible always the number of perfect reign and government.

This number is especially connected with Israel. At the beginning of the history of this people are the twelve patriarchs. This nation consists of twelve tribes. The breastplate of the high priest had twelve stones which represented the whole nation. Out of this nation twelve apostles were called. The twelve thousand from each tribe of Israel indicate a worldwide government, for the territory of their service is the world.

V5-8. In the Bible we find almost thirty lists of names of the sons of Jacob, with the order of the names not always the same and sometimes a single name being replaced by another. This list that John gives, is headed by Judah. Not Rueben, the firstborn, comes first, but Judah, the royal tribe. That is also understandable, for Judah is the tribe from which the King of kings, Christ, came forth after the flesh (Rev 5:5; Gen 49:9).

The tribe of Dan is not mentioned. The reason for that is not said. It is possible that it is because Dan has introduced the idolatry in Israel (Jdg 18:30-31). That does not mean that Dan loses his place in the land, for he will have his part of inheritance in the millennial kingdom of peace (Eze 48:1-2). The important thing is that God cannot use anyone from his tribe to testify to Him as one of His sealed people when the idolatry is general. Manasseh, the son of Joseph, takes the place of Dan.

Now read Revelation 7:1-8 again.

Reflection: How can you show your 'seal', meaning: how can you show that you are of the living God?

## Rev 7:9-17 | The Great Multitude From the Nations

*9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and [all] tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches [were] in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and [around] the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, [be] to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."*

V9. As mentioned at the beginning of the previous section, this chapter deals with two groups of believers. The group that you paid attention to in the previous section consists of believers from Israel. The distinction between that group and the group that you now have before you is the multitude from every nation and not from Israel. It is also a group that no one can number, while the one from Israel is numbered. Another difference is that the first group gets the seal before the great tribulation begins, while the second group comes forward when the great tribulation is over (verse 14).

The fact that the first and second group of believers is presented distinctively, is also a proof that the time of the church is over, for in the church is no distinction between Jew and Greek (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Another remarkable fact is that it is not about resurrected believers, but about believers on earth who are alive. There are neither indications that they have

died nor that they have glorified bodies. They also stand before the throne on earth and do not sit on the thrones.

They are clothed with “white robes” and have “palm branches in their hands”. The white robes speak of purity which they have gained through the blood of the Lamb (verse 14). That’s how they have been made acceptable to God. The palm branches in their hands are the picture of the triumph that they have achieved over all resistance to which they were exposed. The white clothes were *given* to them, the palm branches are what they have *deserved*.

V10. They give all honor to God and the Lamb for their salvation, because They have guided them through the great tribulation and protected them against all hostility. As a result, they now enter the full “salvation”, which is the salvation of the millennial kingdom of peace, as living ones. They are aware that they owe everything to God and the Lamb, and they express it.

V11-12. The praise of those who were preserved during the great tribulation, finds resonance in heaven with all the angels. Angels were used by God in that time as the executors of His judgments, but they are also the protectors of those who inherit salvation (Heb 1:14). They are standing “around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures”. The elders have made their praise heard in chapter 5 (Rev 5:9-10) and the four living creatures in chapter 4 (Rev 4:8). Here the angels are doing it, as also in chapter 5 (Rev 5:11-12).

Their praise begins with “amen” and also ends with it. They agree with the praise of the countless multitude. They also confirm their own praise by that, because He has brought everything to a good end. Their praise is sevenfold, as in Revelation 5 (Rev 5:12). Everything they say belongs to God and they ascribe all to Him. All these features or characteristics have become public in His acts, in the fulfillment of His plans. Let this sevenfold expression sink in and say to God with each aspect: ‘This belongs to You!’

V13. Possibly surprise came on John’s face at the sight of this scene. He does not know what he should think of it. What kind of people are they and where do they come from? One of the elders noticed it and responds. He puts into words what occupies John’s mind. It is also good for us to pay

attention on someone's face when we tell something about God's Word that he may be hearing for the first time.

V14. John does not try to hide his ignorance by attempting to formulate an answer. By speaking out the words "my lord, you know" he acknowledges the insight of the elder with due respect. He takes the place of a pupil. That is the right attitude and mind to receive teaching and to understand it. In his reply, the elder deals first with his last question, which is the question where they come from. He says that it concerns people "who come out of the great tribulation" and who came to faith in that time through the testimony of the 'brothers of the Lord' (Mt 25:31-40). He speaks about the great tribulation. The article "the" makes it clear that this is not some indefinite tribulation, but about the known tribulation, the time of distress (Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; cf. Mt 24:21).

Then the elder answers the question who they are. He does that by pointing at their robes and what had happened to those robes. They have long, full-body covering robes. These robes are purified and made white. The means through which it happened is "the blood of the Lamb". Robes or clothes represent your conduct, it is what people see of you. By your conduct you reveal who you are. The conduct of the unbeliever is sinful. As a believer you are a new creation and your environment will see that by your conduct.

That this multitude has washed its robes in the blood of the Lamb implies an important truth. That truth implies that the blood not only purifies the believers of the church from their sins, but that the blood is the only way for purification of any sin from any believer of any time. Everyone who is saved is so on the basis of the shed blood of the Lamb, whether Old Testament or the New Testament believers or believers after the rapture of the church. That the blessings connected to it are different, is not the point here.

V15. Because of their cleansing by the blood of the Lamb they are able to appear before the throne of God and to serve Him. In their white robes they are made suitable to be in His presence. They are not there by their own achievements, but by grace. That grace also makes willing to serve God. Serving God happens in the temple of God on earth, by both Jews

(Eze 40-47; Lk 2:37) and Gentiles (Isa 56:6; Isa 2:2; Zec 14:16). They will exercise this service without interruption, "day and night" (cf. Lk 2:36-38). What a privilege!

In His turn the Lord Jesus will serve them. He is in the first place the Ruler, then the One Whom they worship and then He is their Protector and Benefactor. He will make them enjoy His presence and protection (Isa 4:5-6). By spreading His tabernacle over them they will always be in the secret place of His tabernacle (Psa 27:5). In that tabernacle they sought their refuge in the day of trouble and now they may dwell in it always in peace and quiet. That also goes for you. Your relationship with the Lord in the perfection will not be different from now. Only the circumstances are different, He is not. Everything will be perfect and will be uninterruptedly enjoyed.

V16. After the great tribulation in which they have suffered great shortage (Rev 13:17), a time comes in which they will lack nothing. Through the mercy of God an end will come to all hunger, thirst and heat which they have suffered (Isa 49:10).

V17. This change in their situation is the result of the reign of the Lamb. All blessings begin with the throne (verse 15) and go back to the throne, because the Lamb is there. He is the Shepherd Who shepherds His sheep. He makes sure that they have no lack of anything. For this He "will guide them to the springs of the water of life". That speaks of an abundance of life that is freely available. In that way an abundant refreshment is available which makes life a great joy.

That refreshment you can now already find in the Word of God which is a fountain full of living water, for it is all about Him, Who is the living water. To the last page of this book He invites you to come to Him and drink (Rev 22:17). That invitation applies to the unconverted man, but applies to the believer as well. If you drink from Him, you can have an unspeakable joy in your heart, although you are still in a world full of sorrow (2Cor 6:10; 1Pet 1:8).

Every hardship has disappeared from the life of this multitude. No more thought is given to it (Isa 65:17). The remembrance of it will be erased by God Himself. He does that as it were with His own hand. He does not do

that with a big swing. No, He pays attention to “every tear”. Every tear that is shed by one on His children in His sight, will be known by Him and will be taken away by Him with His own hand (Psa 56:8). The time of sorrow is over, the ‘time of singing’ has arrived (Song 2:12).

Only then will all misery for believers have come to an end. This is one of the many indications that a gospel which proclaims ‘Prosperity NOW’, the so-called ‘prosperity gospel’, is a false gospel.

Now read Revelation 7:9-17 again.

Reflection: Which blessings are the portion of the great multitude and which of them are your portion as well? Thank God for them.

## Revelation 8

### **Rev 8:1-7 | The Seventh Seal and the First Trumpet**

*1 When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. 6 And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. 7 The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.*

V1. With the breaking of “the seventh seal” the book is fully open. That means that the time of the end has come, for it was said to Daniel of this book that he had to seal it until the end time (Dan 12:4,9). That means that the time has come that many prophetically announced events will be fulfilled. With a view to that a dead silence arises in heaven. It is the calm before the storm, a silence in which everything and everyone holds their breath in anticipation of what is about to happen.

That there is mention of “about half an hour” seems to be a symbolic indication for a very short period of time. It is presumably the period in which happens what John sees in the verses 2-4. In the following verses the first trumpet judgments are executed.

It is also possible that the “silence in heaven” of half an hour shows something of the mercy of God. God is slow to anger. He doesn't like to judge, it is an unusual act of His (Isa 28:21; Lam 3:33). The judgments under the sixth seal have not led to repentance. Following that, another half hour is

waited. When there is no sign of repentance to be noticed, God must act, which implies that the judgments burst forth under the trumpets.

V2. While there is, most likely, a dead silence in heaven, during that silence preparations are made for the trumpet judgments. John sees “the seven angels stand before God”. That seems to indicate that it is about seven specific angels, the seven angels, who are in an exceptionally privileged position, before God. These seven angels with their seven trumpets form together the judgment of the seventh seal.

Each of them receives a trumpet. No one else than the Lord Jesus will have given them those trumpets. That there is mention of “trumpets” here, means that God speaks with a loud voice through the judgments which are being poured out at the sounding of each trumpet. A trumpet which is sounded is a command for attention.

V3. Then “another angel” comes. That again is no one but the Lord Jesus (cf. Rev 10:1; 18:1), for only He is able to give strength to the prayers of the saints. He came and “stood at the altar”. An altar is an offering place where offerings are brought to God. At the end of this verse it is said that it is a “golden altar” and that it is “before the throne”. The offering place bears the mark of Divine glory, of which the gold speaks. The offering which is offered here to God, is not a bloody offering, but consists of “the prayers of all the saints”. Of prayers, you read that they are compared to incense (Psa 141:2). Each sincere prayer is pleasing to God and will be answered by Him.

Because it is about the prayers of ‘all’ the saints, it is nice to consider that at that very moment the prayers will be answered which through the ages have been sent up to heaven by all the saints. It concerns the prayers of the believers who do not belong to the church. That becomes clear from the fact that these prayers are not connected with the throne of grace, but with the throne of judgment.

In the time of the great tribulation the saints cry out to the ‘God of vengeance’ (Psa 94:1) to come into action. They ask of Him to judge the wicked, from which they will be redeemed. This is again a proof that the church

is not on earth anymore, for we are told to pray for those who persecute us and to bless them and not to curse them (Mt 5:44; Acts 7:60).

Each prayer only gets its full value to God because the Lord Jesus has a golden censer with much incense in it. The purpose of it is also described: "That he might add it to the prayers of all the saints." No one but He is able to give strength to the prayers of all the saints (cf. Rev 5:8). He is the true High Priest. Everything you offer to God is only pleasing to God through Him (Heb 13:15; 1Pet 2:5).

'Incense' represents the personal glories of the Lord Jesus, which became visible in His life on earth and His dying on the cross. Thinking especially of prayer, you read of Him that His whole life on earth was 'prayer' (Psa 109:4b). His life was also thereby a sweet incense to God.

V4. Everything the Lord Jesus is as a Man to God ascends together with the prayers of the saints to God. It says so characteristically "before God out the angel's hand". In this way the involvement of the Lord Jesus with the prayer of the saints is presented greater than when the incense would ascend to heaven from the altar.

V5. When the censer is empty, when the prayers have reached their destination, the Angel returns to the altar with the empty censer. He fills the censer with the fire of the altar which He then throws to the earth. Here you see that the Lord Jesus gives, as it were, the starting signal for the judgments. When fire is thrown to the earth, we observe impressive accompanying signals occur.

1. The "peals of thunders" make clear that God speaks through the judgments.
2. "Sounds" are no rumbling noises at a distance, but terrible deafening blows that make everything shake.
3. "Flashes of lightning" put everything in the light and are blinding.
4. "An earthquake" causes that the earth suddenly is ripped open under the feet and every hold is taken away.

The fire is taken from the burnt offering altar on which it burns ceaselessly. The burnt offering altar is the place where the burnt offering is consumed

by fire, for the benefit of those who are reconciled and sanctified by it. That same fire is also used to consume those who have no part in the burnt offering. That the fire is put into the censer first, indicates that the following judgments are connected with the prayers of the saints and in that way are the answers to those prayers. It is all symbolic language to make clear the exercise of these judgments.

V6. Then it is the angels' turn to carry out their duty. They prepare themselves to sound the trumpets that were given to them. A trumpet announces judgment, but it also serves as a warning signal, so that people will flee the announced judgment (Eze 33:2-4). The destruction and siege of Jericho was also preceded by the blowing of trumpets (Jos 6:4). This will also happen when the judgments and the taking possession of the earth will come to pass.

As is often the case, here also the number seven can be divided into four and three. Just as the first four seals form a whole, so do the first four trumpets. These four relate to creation, divided according to the four major domains: 1. the earth, 2. the sea, 3. the rivers and springs of waters, and 4. the sun, the moon and the stars. However, it does not yet concern the whole world, for there is constant mention of "the third part" in the following verses.

V7. When the first angel sounds, "hail and fire, mixed with blood ... were thrown to the earth". "Hail" is a judging power that comes from heaven (Rev 11:19; 16:21; Exo 9:23-24; Isa 28:2; Eze 38:22). "Fire" is God's consuming judgment (Rev 20:10; Lk 16:24). "Blood", separated from the body, speaks of death (Rev 16:3). The fact that hail and fire are mingled with blood therefore means that those judgments will result in death.

The fire does its work and consumes the world wherever there is still a certain order of government, that is "the earth". Arrogant powers, represented by "the trees" (Dan 4:19-27), will be consumed, as is all prosperity, represented by "all the green grass" (Isa 15:6). Grass represents both Israel (Isa 40:7) and all of humanity (1Pet 1:24). That it mentions the *green* grass, seems to emphasize that it concerns man in his prosperity.

In this verse “burned up” occurs three times. It is a verb that indicates ‘completely burned up’. It is about being burned to the ground. Although I prefer a symbolic explanation of this trumpet judgment, it is not unthinkable that this judgment is to be taken literally. It seems difficult to me to consider a literal event in connection to each trumpet judgment. I would like you to ponder on that yourself, without letting your fantasy run free. Of course that also applies to me. Therefore you need to read even more carefully what I propose to you as a possible explanation.

“A third part of the earth” means that the judgments will strike a limited territory and not the whole earth. It has all the appearances that this “third part” regards to the nominal Christian part, the false Christianity, which probably refers to the restored Roman empire or the united Europe. That is my opinion, because in this part of the world the light of the gospel has shone most clearly. That makes the responsibility of the people who live here greater than that of other people. And God always begins with His judgment with those who are most responsible (cf. 1Pet 4:17; Lev 10:3).

Now read Revelation 8:1-7 again.

Reflection: What does the power that the Angel gives to the prayers of the saints consist of?

### Rev 8:8-13 | The Second, Third and Fourth Trumpet

*8 The second angel sounded, and [something] like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, 9 and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed. 10 The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. 11 The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter. 12 The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way. 13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"*

V8. When the second angel sounds the trumpet, something like "a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea". After the earth also the sea will be the object of judgment. The sea represents the disordered world (Isa 17:12; 57:20), countries where revolution and anarchy are in control, in contrast to the earth of verse 7. Great powers go down in it, while other powers come out of it.

The great mountain, or anyway something which reminds us of that, is a symbol of a strong worldly power (Jer 51:25; Isa 2:2; Dan 2:35; cf. Psa 46:2). This is not the restored Roman empire, for that will not go down in the sea of nations, but will arise from it (Rev 13:1). Some interpreters refer to the United States. This great power is burning with fire. It is an object of God's wrath.

V9. The fall of this burning, great power sows death and destruction in the midst of a third part of the nations. The third part of the inhabitants of these nations will die. The fall of the great power also causes the destruction of "the third of the ships". That may mean that parts of trade and communication will be paralyzed, preventing, for example, relief supplies from more distant countries.

V10. At the sounding of the third angel “a great star fell from heaven”. As with the first two trumpets, there is fire. Only it is not that much about a consuming fire here, but about something that burns “like a torch”. The effect is also similar to the previous trumpets, for here too many die (verse 11). However, there is still a difference. The cause of death is not fire, but wormwood caused by this star.

The star is a symbol of a ruler that must radiate heavenly light (Rev 1:20). You may think of a great person with authority or a religious powerful system, probably someone who or something that impresses people, in the expectation that he or it will supply religious leadership to the (western) world. This star is not *thrown* as it was in the previous verses, but *falls* from heaven (Isa 14:12). It will burn like a torch and in that way it is an imitation of the seven Spirits of God (Rev 4:5). That leads to the thought that with this star it is about a spiritual power. The Spirit of God spreads the truth; this star spreads lies and destruction, doctrines of demons (1Tim 4:1).

The star falls on “a third of the rivers and on the springs of water”. “Rivers” represent the normal life of a nation which is characterized by certain principles. “Springs” refer more to the influences that are based on the principles. In the symbolism of this description you may say that this star causes the destruction of spiritual springs instead of giving wholesome heavenly light.

After the two domains of life (earth and sea) are struck by the previous trumpets, now the springs of life that determine the quality of life are struck. You recognize this if you for instance look at marriage and family. Marriage and family are given by God as a spring of happiness. When this is separated from God, it becomes a spring of unhappiness. Or: the womb is a spring of life, but separated from God life is being killed there, so that it is now a great place of murder. That’s what makes life bitter.

V11. Wormwood represents bitterness (Pro 5:4). That’s what this ruler causes to those who are within his reach. All who think they can lavish themselves on him will find that they have drunk death. The water is not only bitter, but it also appears to be poisonous. Dying is not the bodily death, but the moral death, that is, that there is no connection anymore with what God has given concerning the good things in creation. There-

fore there is no possibility to enjoy those things anymore. Life becomes all bitterness and embitterment. As a believer, then, you must be very careful not to become embittered from whatever cause (Heb 12:15). Embitterment strangles life in yourself and also in others.

V12. The trumpet judgments step by step deprive people of life and deliver them to the powers and forces of death. The fourth angel sounds. Thereby the celestial bodies are affected which are set to give light on the earth (Gen 1:14-19). The punishment of this judgment is the removal of light. In that way another spring of life is struck, for without light life cannot grow and flourish.

Of sun and moon it is said that they 'rule' (Gen 1:16). Stars serve to give us orientation. These celestial bodies refer to the whole system of government in all its parts, from the highest authority to its lowest forms. These light bearers, authority figures in different layers, will be partly, "a third", clothed in darkness. That takes any orientation they might provide away from them, both in daytime and during the night.

V13. After the fourth trumpet has sounded John sees and hears "an eagle flying in midheaven". An eagle is the symbol of the speed with which the judgment is exercised. It sees its prey from a far distance and dives at a high speed to catch it. The eagle flies "in midheaven", so that it can be seen and heard by everyone on earth. It announces the judgment of the remaining three trumpets.

Because of fierceness of these three trumpets the eagle cries out a threefold "woe". This threefold 'woe' corresponds to the fifth, sixth and seventh trumpet. As a result, the last three trumpets also form a whole. The three coming trumpet judgments or woes do not so much affect the circumstances in which people are, as has been often the case up to now, but they now strike the people themselves. They are no longer indirect judgments.

These people are referred to as "those who dwell on the earth". In the book of Revelation this expression always refers those who feel themselves at home on earth and live only for that. For them, nothing else exists. God has no place in their thinking and life. Therefore they will be judged with the earth, which they love that much and to which they attached their fate.

Believers do not 'dwell' on the earth, but they are pilgrims there. Their home is heaven (Phil 3:20).

The judgments that follow are terrible, with those of the third woe, which includes the seven bowls, being the very worst. The first 'woe' comes on the unsealed Jews, the second 'woe' afflicts Christless Christianity.

Now read Revelation 8:8-13 again.

Reflection: What is all affected by judgments in this section?

## Revelation 9

### Rev 9:1-12 | The Fifth Trumpet

*1 Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. 2 He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. 3 Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. 6 And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them. 7 The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. 8 They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like [the teeth] of lions. 9 They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. 10 They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. 11 They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon. 12 The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.*

V1. The star John sees when the fifth angel sounds is already on the earth. He does not see that star falling from heaven, but he knows that it has fallen to earth from it. Both in Revelation 8 and in this verse it is about a star from heaven on the earth. In both cases you see a power that once had been a recognized person of authority with a religious character, but now has fallen and has been degraded. It acts whether under satanic influence (Rev 8:10) or as satan himself (Rev 9:1).

The star is given “the key of the bottomless pit”. The possession of a key means the possession of power over a territory to which the key gives access (Rev 1:18; 3:7). Here it is about “the bottomless pit”. The star has

power over the dark forces of the bottomless pit. The star therefore seems to be a symbolic presentation of satan. The dark forces of the bottomless pit have satan as king (verse 11). The bottomless pit is the place where at this moment the evil is still being kept in control. When satan gets the keys he will let loose these evil forces, as the next verses show. When God has achieved His purpose with this loosening He will lock up all evil forces, including satan, for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-3).

V2. The star opens up the bottomless pit. The bottomless pit is the lowest, most depraved source of evil, from where the worst danger emanates. Up to this moment that pit had been closed, for the worst evil could not manifest itself yet. But once the pit has been opened, swarms of evil spirits are released and flood the earth. They wrap themselves in a “smoke” like “the smoke of a great furnace”.

It is a black, dense smoke that causes an eclipse of the sun. Besides the light the smoke also takes away the warmth. The smoke works like a suffocating blanket and takes away all the oxygen. The smoke takes away everything that supplies light and warmth (the sun) and it defiles the spiritual atmosphere of the human society (the air). A spiritual darkness descends upon men, depriving them of all sight and insight of a healthy society.

V3. That it is not about a usual smoke, even it is extremely dense and black, appears also from what comes out of it. The smoke that arises from the pit appears to be a means of transport of “locusts”. The locusts represent satanic powers (Exo 10:12-20; Joel 1:4-7). These insects destroy everything they come across.

The atmosphere of the thick smoke of the previous verse is a resort for powers that like locusts destroy all life and like scorpions hurt people. Someone who has been stung by a scorpion will be completely restless and driven to total insanity, as long as the poison is active. This will happen to the Jews as a result of their rejection of God in their Messiah (Deu 28:28,65; Mt 12:43-45).

V4. The powers of darkness will be released. They rise in swarms from the bottomless pit to do the only thing they can do: spread death and destruction. Yet they cannot go about their business undisturbed. They only

can and are permitted to do what God wants to use them for. Therefore a limitation is imposed on them. The limitation is to such a great extent that only one purpose is left for them. They are allowed to carry out their pernicious work to “the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads”.

This indication seems to show that this very judgment of the fifth trumpet, specifically strikes the wicked mass of the Jewish people. You have seen in Revelation 7 that out of Israel one hundred and forty-four thousand people were sealed. Now you see the purpose of it. It is a warranty against the deceptive and pernicious spirits from the bottomless pit. The apostate Jews are the object of the judgment because they have had more knowledge of God than other people, but have rejected that knowledge by their rejection of God’s Messiah.

V5. Besides a limitation of the territory over which they can assert their wicked power, also a limitation is imposed on these spiritual forces for the practice of causing pain and for the duration of the practice of their power. This pain is extremely severe. It will make people desire to die. The duration is relatively short, namely five months. But you may know from experience how long a relatively short time can be when you are suffering extreme pains from moment to moment. It is remarkable that this duration is the same as the normal lifetime of the locusts, which is also five months.

By the way, you can see a proof of God’s mercy in the fact that the apostates are not immediately killed. Due to this ‘delay’ the individual still gets the chance to repent. The fact that this chance is not taken shows how much man has hardened his heart. However severe the pain of the scorpion’s sting may be, man refuses to consider going to God and to beg Him for mercy (verse 20; Rev 16:9).

V6. The sting of the scorpion is not a literal sting, just as the scorpion is not literal. Also the locusts are not literal locusts. It is about symbols of creatures that will operate in an extremely sadistic way. They have a satanic pleasure, according to their nature, in tormenting people in a way that these people will seek to die, for they think that in that way they can escape the tormenting pains. But death, the last weapon of satan, withdraws itself from them, so that the torments remain.

The torment that is caused consists of hellish teachings that will torment people in their heart and conscience from which they cannot escape. The control of demonic influences is a result of having opened themselves for occultism, spiritualism, sorcery and fortune-telling. These movements find more and more followers. People who surrender themselves to it will be struck with insanity. They will try to commit suicide to escape, but they will not succeed.

V7. Then a description of these demonic powers follows. From this description it appears that they love war and are aggressive. Horses are a good symbol for that. In some countries locusts are called 'little horses' because of the similarity of their head to that of a horse (cf. Job 39:23). They are also unstoppable, but they move on triumphantly, which you can derive from what you see on their heads on which something "appeared to be crowns like gold". It also indicates that they claim royal dignity.

That "their faces were like the faces of men", means that they operate with insight. This insight they gained through many centuries of dealing with people. They present their pernicious, unbearable pain-inducing teachings plausibly, humanly, as human rights, rights of the child, right to privacy, but it is to dethrone God. Behind this 'human face' demonic powers are hidden who cover their true nature.

V8. Another characteristic of them is that they have "hair like the hair of women". There is no doubt that it is about long hair. The 'material' is, after all, not different from that of man. If you look at what is written about the long hair of the woman in 1 Corinthians 11 (1Cor 11:4-16), you can discover in relation to this remark two aspects in the performance of these creatures.

In the first place their performance is charming, attractive, as long hair is the woman's adornment, her attractiveness. In the second place about it shows that they are not independent powers, operating on their own, but that they are in reality subject to their superior, satan. That they are subject to satan, is expressed by "their teeth were like [the teeth] of lions", which indicates that their performance has the savage, cruel and tearing power of lions.

V9. In their relentless cruelty, they are also untouchable to any resistance. Their iron harness shows their invulnerability. It also shows their insensitiveness, their heartlessness, the total absence of mercy. A conscience they do not have or it is seared. The noise of their appearance is frightening (Joel 2:4-6). Their goal is war without compassion. They are whipped up by satan, while causing terror and fear to their victims.

V10. The description closes with indicating once again that the main thing for them is to harm people and that they have a limited period of time for that. The sting is in the tail. That is evident here. The tail represents false teachings (Isa 9:15). They cause spiritual damage by spreading false teachings, which cause an enormous torment. The sting comes from the pit. Dogmas, doctrines and principles that come from the bottomless pit are accepted by the apostate part of Israel and cause unbearable agonies in their souls and consciences.

V11. This verse shows that they are under a leader and do not act independently and at their own discretion. "The angel of the abyss" is their "king". They are under his dominion. He is the controlling intelligence and the hidden organizer of these pernicious battle orders. His name is written in both Hebrew and Greek. Possibly his Hebrew name points to the antichrist's connection with the apostate Jewish people and his Greek to the antichrist's connection with apostate Christianity.

The names have the same meaning: Abaddon means 'destruction' and refers more to the result of his work. Apollyon means 'destroyer' and refers more to the person himself. No one else than satan can be meant here (Jn 8:44). He is the angel of the bottomless pit, represented in the star (cf. Isa 14:12) which fell down from heaven (verse 1). The antichrist and the beast are animated by him.

V12. An end has come to the first woe, the fifth trumpet. Actually, the disasters that were caused by the locusts from the bottomless pit would last for just five months. It is possible that there is a short break before the next 'woe' sounds. Thereafter a third 'woe' must come. That only happens in Revelation 11 when the seventh angel sounds the trumpet (Rev 11:15-18).

With the exclamation “behold” attention is drawn to the two more ‘woes’ after this. How terrible the first ‘woe’ has been, both other woes are yet coming. The second ‘woe’ is the sixth trumpet and again refers to the Roman empire, which is connected to the second (the Greek) name of the previous verse. After the judgment on the apostate Jews under the first ‘woe’ follows the judgment under the second ‘woe’ on the apostate Christians.

Now read Revelation 9:1-12 again.

Reflection: Do you already observe the destructive influences in your environment? How can you recognize them?

### Rev 9:13-21 | The Sixth Trumpet

*13 Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. 17 And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: [the riders] had breastplates [the color] of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. 18 A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm. 20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21 and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.*

V13. The sixth trumpet is sounded by the sixth angel. The result is that John hears a voice. That may be the voice of God or of the Lord Jesus. That voice comes "from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God". That gives the impression that this judgment is the result of the prayers of the saints who had prayed for revenge and redemption (Rev 6:9-11; cf. Rev 8:3). The four horns show that the judgment is full of power (horns) and that it is also general (the number four).

V14. Here you read about something that had not happened with any of the previous angels. Namely, an order is given to the angel that has sounded the trumpet. In this way this angel becomes involved himself in the judgment he announces. He is ordered to release the four angels who are bound at the Euphrates river. The Euphrates river is always the border between Israel in the broadest sense (Gen 15:18) and the eastern powers, especially Assyria. It was also the most eastern border of the Roman empire.

These four bound angels must not be confused with the four angels that are 'holding back' in chapter 7 (Rev 7:1-3). Here we have the release of powers and there the powers are held back. There we have the good angels who are preventing the outbreak of the evil a little bit longer, here we have the evil angels who are about to cause destruction. The fact that they must be released proves that they are evil angels.

V15. It is remarkably written that the four angels "had been prepared" to be released at an exactly mentioned moment. It confirms the providence of God. He arranges everything in advance that everything may happen at the right moment. He determines the means and the time. God has prepared these angels for a long time already. He has everything in control and makes it come to pass just as it fits in His plan and serves His goal. That also goes for all destroying powers. They are released to "kill a third of mankind".

V16. With the release of the angels a huge army looms up. It seems that the four evil angels activate these armies. All armies, consisting of horses with horsemen, together form an army of two hundred million horsemen. John hears their number, for it was impossible for him to count. The number is mentioned to give an impression of the enormous mass that has been prepared to wage war.

It is possible that this number should be taken literally. It is also possible that the demonic powers that control this army should be included in this number. These powers come from the east. Perhaps when you see these armies you can think of the great influence of Islam, which is asserting itself more and more strongly in the world.

V17. John tells us that he sees everything in a vision. It is not actually present yet, but he sees with his spiritual eye what will take place. He not only sees events and the scene where it will happen, but he also sees the actors. These are frightening appearances. However, there is no fear with John. That should be the same with you. After all, they are creatures that are in God's hand. He determines their actions and their way.

The characteristics of these armies are those of hell; they wear the armor of hell. Fire and brimstone are the consuming elements which are used ju-

ditionally (Gen 19:24). They are also symbols of the everlasting torment (Rev 20:10). Their breastplates again refer to their complete insensitiveness. The heads of lions is a picture of their superiority. What comes out of their mouth comes from their heart (Mt 15:18-19; 12:34; Rev 16:13), which makes clear that their heart is in connection with hell. Their eruptions consume and suffocate everything that is alive and lead into darkness and deception, with no way out.

V18. Hellish means, “the fire and the smoke and the brimstone”, are used in this war to kill people. These armies harvest for death. The means to kill are mentioned twice in these verses and proceed out of their mouths, which is also mentioned twice. “Their mouths” indicate their voraciousness, that is, people are devoured by them. It is also possible that they approach people with an unprecedented eloquence, which causes those people to be captured and in that way become a prey to these armies. In this way they are killed, which in a spiritual sense means that any connection with God, in case there should still be a connection, is erased.

V19. Again the devouring and deceptive nature of this army force is emphasized. The mouth indicates devouring. That the tails with heads indicate guile and treachery is evident from the comparison to serpents. The horsemen appear to have no role here, for there is only mention of horses.

It is remarkable that ‘mouth’ is written here in singular – while before ‘mouths’ was twice mentioned, plural – and ‘tails’ in plural. That shows that on the one hand they are all animated by one spirit and that they act out of that one particular spirit, while the tails indicate the manifold teachings and lies of satan. That the tails have heads indicates that their wicked influence is guided by intelligence.

V20. After the horses have done their pernicious work, a lot of people remain. They will see the massive slaughter wrought by this overwhelming army, but there is no movement among them toward the living God to turn to Him. They have abandoned Him and no trace of any thought arises in them to allow Him to enter their lives.

These people have fallen prey to all kinds of idolatry, demonic powers of violence and destruction. They worship their cultural, technical and med-

ical products, the achievements they have made, without any thanks to God Who enabled them to do so. The different values of the materials that are mentioned indicate that all layers of society, the rich and the poor have surrendered themselves to idolatry. Everyone makes himself an own idol to worship with the means that are available to him. That kind of idol that is worshiped is consistent with the behavior of the worshiper and shows what character he has. You see that in the next verse.

Thereby you should consider that the people who are concerned here are the nominal Christians of Western Europe. It is the part of the world where the light of the gospel has been shining the clearest. But the gospel has degenerated into a social talk of humanitarianism, in which there is no longer any place for God in His holiness. That's why the light has become darkness. When light becomes darkness, that darkness is the greatest possible darkness (Mt 6:23).

They did not repent of their idols, which means as it is written here, that they "did not repent of the works of their hands". Their whole life, all of their daily routines was connected with idolatry in such a way that they were totally blind to the fact that they were practicing idolatry. About the idols it is again described that they are totally unable to come into any action. God's Spirit mocks with that, as you read that also in Isaiah 44 (Isa 44:9-20).

V21. It is remarked once more that they did not repent. In the previous verse you have seen a sketch of the decay of professing Christianity. The works of human hands have become objects of worship. But this fact does not stand by itself. This worship of idols goes hand in hand with an inner depravity which is exposed in the most horrendous way. A borderless selfishness toward other people becomes clear.

A total spiritual degeneration, such as the world has never known before, manifests itself. In worshiping his idols, man also follows the lusts of his corrupted nature without any reservation. In the deeds of man it will become clear that both characteristics of satan, lies and murder, will completely control man in the end time.

It is not about incidents, but murder, sorcery, fornication and thefts are the order of the day. The things that are mentioned show the absolute selfishness of man and the total lack of respect for what belongs to someone else. Any intercourse forbidden by God is eagerly embraced by these people. Where the bond with God is not present ties in society become increasingly loose and respect for the rights and the possessions of others disappear. It's every man for himself.

1. "Murders" indicates the lack of respect for life. You see that today in the legalization of abortion – murder at the very beginning of life – and euthanasia – murder at the end of life. In between are the countless other violent murders.

2. In "sorceries" you see the illicit dealings with demonic spirits to be able to predict future (1Sam 28:7).

3. "Immorality" is a trampling on the marriage instituted by God and a disdain for the rights associated with it (1Thes 4:6).

4. "Thefts" are committed with the greatest naturalness, as if there is a right to another one's possession. Morality has sunk so deeply that there is no longer any sense of sincerity and honesty.

Now read Revelation 9:13-21 again.

Reflection: Which forms of idolatry do you recognize around you? Do you also see in yourself the danger to worship an idol?

## Revelation 10

### Rev 10:1-11 | The Opened Little Book

*1 I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; 2 and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; 3 and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. 4 When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them." 5 Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, 6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there will be delay no longer, 7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets. 8 Then the voice which I heard from heaven, [I heard] again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." 9 So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he \*said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." 10 I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. 11 And they \*said to me, "You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."*

A new parenthesis begins here between the sixth and seventh trumpet that runs from Revelation 10:1-11:13. In this parenthesis your eye is directed to a particular part of the earth, Jerusalem. That is because all important decisions will be made there. There the feet of the Lord Jesus will stand on the Mount of Olives when He comes from heaven. In the first part of the parenthesis, which is chapter 10, a clear light beam breaks through between the dark clouds of the judgments, as a consolation.

V1. Again John sees “another angel”. That you also read in Revelation 7 (Rev 7:2) and Revelation 8 (Rev 8:3). In Revelation 8:3 the Angel is the Lord Jesus. It is also a “strong” angel. You read that too in Revelation 5 (Rev 5:2) and in Revelation 18 (Rev 18:21). There it is an ordinary angel. When you read what the characteristics are of this ‘other strong Angel’ there is much to be said that it is the Lord here.

He comes down “out of heaven”, His dwelling place. Here He, as it were, makes a first step in the direction of the earth. He is “clothed with a cloud”, the symbol of God’s glory. “The rainbow ... upon His head” indicates that God will fulfill His covenant with the earth through Him (Gen 9:16). “His face was like the sun” reminds us that God shows all of His glory and sovereign authority in this Person. “His feet like pillars of fire” indicate that the way He operates is the path of holy judgment on sin.

V2. The Lord Jesus has “a little book which was open” in His hand. It is a different book from the one you have seen in Revelation 5, which was closed, sealed with seven seals which have been broken in the meantime. In that book the counsels of God are written regarding the whole creation. This book is smaller. It seems to contain God’s plan with the city of Jerusalem. That will be made clear in the next chapter.

This little book is not closed. It doesn’t need to be opened like the book in chapter 5. Regarding Jerusalem, there are no sealed events. What the future of Jerusalem will be, has been told to us in the Old Testament prophecies. Nevertheless the future of Jerusalem is connected with the taking into possession of the whole earth by the Lord Jesus. That is symbolically presented in placing “his right foot on the sea and his left on the land” (cf. Jos 1:3).

V3. When He has taken His place on the land and on the sea He cries out “with a loud voice”. The crying out of His voice sounds like the roaring of a lion. He is the Lion from the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5). His roaring is a sign that He is ready to claim His right on the earth (Jer 25:30-31; Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2). In response to that the seven thunders let their voices be heard. They express heaven’s assent to His rights and that He will claim through judgment.

V4. When the voices of the seven thunders died away, John is about to write what he has heard. But then he hears a voice from heaven saying not to do that. That is an exception for what he had done up to now, for he wrote everything down each time he had seen or heard something. It is not said why in this case he was not allowed to do that.

V5. Then John sees how the Angel Who was standing on the sea and on the earth lifts up His right hand to heaven. This is the usual gesture when someone swears an oath (Deu 32:40; Dan 12:7; cf. Gen 14:22).

V6. John could hear how the Lord Jesus is swearing by God as the Everlasting and Creator. He Himself is living forever and ever and the Creator, but He is seen here as Man. God has created the three territories – heaven, earth and sea – with everything in it and on it, but which all got into the enemy’s hands. Included in this description is the entire material universe, from the farthest galaxies to the unobserved inhabitants of the deepest sea. Everything comes from God’s hand and not by the way of development, evolution.

The Lord Jesus swears that He will restore all things to the honor of God. He has created everything by His power and by His power He will bring everything to the destination determined by Him. The end of this evil age will not be delayed any longer; the evil age will last only a short time. All things will be accomplished soon. Only one trumpet is left. It will come in the next verse. When that one sounds the waiting time will be over.

V7. The seventh trumpet announces the last judgments, which are judgments that herald the coming of the Lord without further delay. Then the mystery of God is finished. A mystery is something that has not been manifested for a certain time and therefore could not be known in that time. The people of God learn to know that mystery when God reveals it, while it remains a mystery for the world. Only when the mystery is finished does the world come to know it.

Here the mystery consists of the ways that God goes in His government with the world and that no man can fathom. In that government God sometimes allows the evil to flourish and the punishment may take a long time, while believers are persecuted and receive no reward. This hidden

government of God is nearly over. Then He will reveal how and why He has operated in that way.

To God's "servants the prophets", who know this government, it is 'good news', as the word translated with "preached" literally indicates. They have heard it from God and have passed it on. The believers have accepted their prophecy in faith and it has given their life direction and strength. To the people of the world it is still a mystery. But when Christ appears the mysteries of God will be revealed by Him. It will be visible for them and they will acknowledge it (Rev 1:7; 2Thes 1:9-10).

V8. John is called upon to do something. He must take the book out of the hand of the Angel. In this way he becomes from being a spectator to someone who is involved. It is an example for you not only to be engaged with the future as a subject of study, but that what you read and learn about the future also has an effect in your life.

V9. John does what is said to him. He goes to the Angel and tells to Him to give him the little book. It looks a bit strange that John is giving an order here to the Lord Jesus. But John does nothing more than the voice from heaven had said to him. The answer of the Lord Jesus also shows that He is not a subordinate of John. It is not simply said that He gives the little book, but He orders John to take the little book.

Then He gives him the order to eat it and says also what will happen to him when he does. By taking the little book and eating it, it becomes a part of John himself, of his inner feelings (Eze 2:8-10; 3:1-3). In that way he will receive strength for the work still to be done by him. The Lord Jesus also tells John how the little book will taste. When he eats it, it will be both bitter and sweet, bitter in his stomach and sweet in his mouth. The tastes bitter and sweet characterize the acts of God. In history, first comes the bitter and then the sweet.

V10. It happens as the Lord Jesus has said. Only, here the sweet taste in the mouth is mentioned first and then the bitter in his stomach. In the experience of John the sweet taste comes first and then the bitter. If you read and study the Scripture you first get the sweet taste of all God's plans.

But when you let those portions sink in your heart you also experience the bitterness of the way God's plans are being realized.

In other words: when you learn about God's ultimate goal with creation, you will first of all experience the sweetness (Psa 119:103; Jer 15:16). But the ways of government which lead to that goal are not sweet, but bitter, because of the resistance of man. Reading about all God's wonderful plans with Israel gives a sweet foretaste of the millennial kingdom of peace. But when you see what sufferings these people will have to go through, it gives a bitter taste.

The same goes for the coming of the Lord Jesus. When you consider that He is coming soon and that you will meet Him in the air it is sweet for the faith. At the same time it also gives a bitter taste when you consider what the coming of the Lord Jesus means for everyone who has refused and rejected Him. It means that they perish forever.

V11. John may think that the end has now come. But he must continue passing on the future events that will touch all nations of the world. By eating the little book he has been made suitable for that (cf. 1Kgs 19:8). Each service that the Lord asks of you has to be preceded by eating His Word. Before that He cannot use you.

Now read Revelation 10:1-11 again.

Reflection: Why is it important and necessary to 'eat' the Word? What do you experience as 'sweet' and what as 'bitter'?

## Revelation 11

### Rev 11:1-8 | The Two Witnesses

*1 Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff, and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. 2 Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months. 3 And I will grant [authority] to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. 6 These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. 7 When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. 8 And their dead bodies [will lie] in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.*

V1. Although it is not said in plain words, it seems that this chapter tells about the contents of the little book from the previous chapter. The scene is Jerusalem with the temple of God. The temple is called "the temple of God", because God takes into consideration the true worshipers who draw near to Him there. But in reality it is the temple of the antichrist, which was built in unbelief and where the antichrist will place an image of the beast from the sea during the three and a half years of the great tribulation (Rev 13:14-15; 2Thes 2:4).

It is most likely that this image will be placed in the court of the temple and not in the building itself. The court is also allowed for the people to enter. Because of the image of an idol that is placed there, the court is not measured.

This temple is next to the last temple of all temples that have been built in the course of time on earth. We read in Scripture about five earthly temples:

1. the temple of Solomon (1 Kings 7; was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC);
2. the temple of Zerubbabel (Ezra 3; 6; was robbed later and consecrated to Jupiter by Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 and 170 BC);
3. the temple that was built by Herod (Jn 2:20; its construction was started in 17 BC and it was destroyed by the Romans in 70); this temple is by the way not a completely new temple, but an enlargement of the temple of Zerubbabel;
4. the temple built for the antichrist (2Thes 2:4) and
5. the temple of Christ (Ezekiel 40-48).

For the sake of completeness I point out that the New Testament still speaks of three *spiritual* temples: the body of the Lord Jesus (Jn 2:21), the body of the believer (1Cor 6:19), and the church (1Cor 3:16). Finally, we read in Revelation 11 about a temple of God in heaven (Rev 11:19) and in Revelation 21 that God Himself and the Lamb is called the temple of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:22).

As with eating the little book John must also actively participate in the events here. He is ordered to get up and measure some matters. Therefore “a measuring rod like a staff” is given him. This ‘measuring rod’ is to define the border of what especially belongs to God; it defines His ownership (cf. Psa 16:6; Zec 2:1-5; Rev 21:15-17). The temple is His, the altar is His and those who worship Him in the temple are His. The measuring rod like a staff represents the support, which faith finds in the thought that God also in times of darkness makes clear what is His and who belong to Him.

V2. John is not allowed to measure the court. He even has to reject it. That is, because the court does not belong to God. He has no connection with it, for the nations have got access to it, because the antichrist has made a covenant with them (Dan 9:26-27). With “the holy city” Jerusalem is meant.

During a period of forty-two months – that is three and a half years, the duration of the great tribulation – Jerusalem will be in the hands of these

unholy allies. They will trample underfoot and profane the city in such a way that in the (court of the) temple which is built for the antichrist, a gruesome idol of the Roman emperor will be placed.

V3. Despite the domination of the pagans and the pressure of the antichrist, God will conceive a powerful testimony in Jerusalem. Many will have fled from Judea, that is the region around Jerusalem, to the mountains (Mt 24:16), but in the city itself there will be a remnant of worshipers (Zep 3:12). In the midst of it God will raise up two witnesses whom He calls "My two witnesses". That it is two witnesses means it is reliable and acceptable testimony (Deu 19:15; 2Cor 13:1). Many will repent through their testimony (Dan 12:10).

They will pass through the city "clothed in sackcloth". The sackcloth is a sign of mourning because of the miserable situation the people are in (cf. Joel 1:13; Jer 4:8). It also supports the seriousness of the message which is an appeal for repentance. They will warn and point out to the people who want to enter the temple to worship the image of the beast that Christ is coming soon. You also see with John the baptist that his clothing was fitting to the seriousness of his preaching (Mt 3:4) and how he finally had to pay with his life for this preaching (Mt 14:5,10).

The duration of their preaching is indicated in days, probably to make clear and to emphasize that their preaching is heard every day. This indication also makes clear how valuable each day is to God that a testimony of Him is given on earth. Another thought attached to that is that these twelve hundred and sixty days are again the same period of the great tribulation. Twelve hundred and sixty days is three and a half years. Because the testimony is given under the greatest possible tribulation, it is counted in days. God counts the days of His tested and persecuted witnesses. Because He has given power to His two witnesses the enemies cannot do anything until God allows them to.

V4. The witnesses are compared with "the two olive trees and the two lampstands" (Zec 4:1-14). As 'the two olive trees' they show the full power of the Holy Spirit, of Whom oil is a picture, and as 'the two lampstands' they spread Divine light as a testimony in the darkness that then prevails on earth.. They stand "before the Lord of the earth" (Psa 24:1), that is, their

testimony concerns the Lord Who stands on the earth and on the sea and Who will soon assert His right over it.

V5. As long as they have to testify, no one can harm them. Every attack will be paid with the lives of the attackers because the witnesses have the fire of God at their disposal. That fire comes out of their mouth and it consumes every enemy that wants to harm them to eliminate them and gag them so that they no longer testify.

This course of action makes clear that it is a totally different time than the time in which we now live. Instead of consuming our enemies who want to harm us when we testify to our Lord, we should bless them. The Lord rebukes John and James when they suggest to Him to command fire to come down from heaven to consume the village of the Samaritans because He is not welcome there (Lk 9:53-56).

V6. The witnesses have even more power. As often as they desire they can shut heaven, they can turn water to blood and they can strike the earth with all kinds of plagues. If you know anything of the Old Testament history, particularly the histories in which Moses and Elijah play a role, you will recognize them in these plagues. These manifestations of power you find in particular with these two greatest prophets of the Old Testament. "The power to shut the sky" you find with Elijah (1Kgs 17:1) and the "power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague" you find with Moses (Exo 7:14-25; Exodus 8-10). Elijah testified before God's people who had become apostate. Moses testified before the enemy of God's people, namely Egypt.

Elijah and Moses are more often mentioned together. In that sense you find them both with the Lord on the mountain of transfiguration, where they, as it were, get a foretaste of the millennial kingdom of peace (Mt 17:3). Also Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, speaks about Moses and Elijah as persons who in the last days will perform once more (Mal 4:4-6; cf. Mt 11:14; 17:11-12; Lk 1:17). That is not so much about their performance in person, but a performance that highlights the characteristics of their services.

V7. When the time of their testimony determined by God, is over, they are killed. This also happened to the Lord Jesus, Who was delivered only when His time had come, not one hour earlier. They are killed by the beast. About the beast you will be informed in detail in Revelation 13.

It may look strange that the beast will make war with two men. But there are more examples that an army was sent out to capture one single man. You see this for example with Elijah being besieged several times by a small army (2Kgs 1:8-14), with Elisha in Dothan (2Kgs 6:11-14) and even more with the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt 26:47). The witnesses have shown their power and that makes clear to the beast that he is dealing with very dangerous individuals.

V8. When the two witnesses are killed, their dead bodies will lie "in the street of the great city". From the addition "where also their Lord was crucified" it becomes clear that it is about Jerusalem. But that name is not mentioned. The names that are mentioned indicate the spiritual decay of the city, where the city spiritually has landed. It has become similar to Sodom and Egypt. Jerusalem is 'Sodom' because of its corruptness and 'Egypt' because of its oppressing God's people. This total wickedness has shown its pinnacle in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.

The two witnesses are killed, after bearing their testimony, in the same place where their Lord bore His testimony and was killed. They suffer His fate and share in it.

Now read Revelation 11:1-8 again.

Reflection: What does God allow His two witnesses to perform?

**Rev 11:9-19 | The Seventh Trumpet**

9 Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations [will] look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. 10 And those who dwell on the earth [will] rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. 11 But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. 12 And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13 And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14 The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly. 15 Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become [the kingdom] of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." 16 And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. 18 And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time [came] for the dead to be judged, and [the time] to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth." 19 And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

V9. The two witnesses are killed. The 'successful' performance of the beast is shown to the whole world. The dead bodies are shown to the world through the internet, television and satellite connection by the assembled large crowds of journalists. Today you can imagine well how this news will be spread worldwide, while also images are shown of the defeated 'enemies'. As a matter of fact, the mass media play a major role in the formation of human thinking. Just like someone said: Today you see a generation growing up that is not raised by parents, but by the media.

The dead bodies of these 'enemies' are not worthy of a funeral. He who would like to buried them will not get permission to do so (Psa 79:1-3). The dead bodies remain as a victory trophy, a reminder of the victory the beast has achieved and a proof of his power. This altogether serves for the glory of the dictator who has 'redeemed' the world from these people. This is also a warning that this is the fate of everyone who resists the beast.

V10. When this very annoying testimony has come to an end the world population will celebrate as if in a victory frenzy. To celebrate the victory they send gifts to one another (cf. Est 9:19,22). They congratulate one another on the death of these miserable prophets who have tormented them so badly. They have not opened themselves for the message of God that was proclaimed by them. The inflicted torment did not drive them out to God. That was God's purpose with His two witnesses.

Not only will the unbelieving mass in Israel find joy in their death. Just as Jews and Gentiles together rejected the Lord Jesus, here also the whole world shares in the devilish joy of the apostate Jews over the death of the Lord's witnesses.

V11. Their joy, however, will be short-lived. After three and a half days they will see something that will fill them with great fear. The witnesses stand on their feet! That is caused by the "the breath of life from God" that "came into them". But the spectators have no idea of that. Just as the world witnessed their death, they also witness their resurrection. Because of this, they have to acknowledge that God is stronger than His enemies.

V12. When the two witnesses are standing on their feet they receive the command from heaven to come up there. The testimony of their life, death and resurrection is over. They are now called to come up to heaven. Such an enormous strength comes out from that voice that they go up to heaven in a cloud. It seems that this cloud is the symbol of God's presence. God takes them into His presence. They have glorified Him and now He glorifies them.

All their enemies "watched" them. The ascension of the Lord Jesus was not seen by unbelievers nor will the rapture of the church be seen by unbelievers. The resurrection and the ascension of the two witnesses differ from

that. They are not only seen, but they are 'watched'. The spectators are watching these events, which they dismissed as impossible, with complete amazement. They cannot believe what they are seeing. But despite the fact that they cannot deny it and that these miracles take place right before their eyes, it has no effect on their conscience before God.

V13. Therefore, nothing can remain but judgment. After the two witnesses are taken into heaven "a great earthquake" follows. Jerusalem is shaken by a mighty hand, destroying "a tenth of a city" costing the lives of "seven thousand people". The Dutch Bible translation says "seven thousand names of people", that is, God knows the names of all those people who were killed. He knows the names of those who have bowed to the beast, just as He knows the names of the seven thousand who in the time of Elijah *did not* bow the knees to Baal (1Kgs 19:18). God does not count in numbers; He is not concerned with statistics, but He but with people.

"The rest", those who were not struck by the judgment, become afraid. They also give "glory to the God of heaven". That does not mean that they repent, but that they acknowledge God's hand in this event. When the Lord Jesus in mercy was on earth and acted in mercy, God was also honored for that by the people. But then also there was no mention of true repentance. You may intellectually be convinced that God is in action without being moved in your heart and conscience.

V14. With the passing of "the second woe" the parenthesis that runs from chapter 10:1-11:13, has ended. We have now come to the seventh and last final judgment trumpet, which is also called "the third woe". The last three trumpets are called 'woe', because they are worse than the first four ones. The first 'woe' comes from the bottomless pit (Rev 9:1-12), the second 'woe' comes from the Euphrates river (Rev 9:13-21) and the third 'woe' comes from heaven, from the Lord Jesus Himself.

V15. The sounding of the seventh trumpet does bring the kingdom close, but it is not quite yet established. Yet the kingdom is already so close that heaven announces that it "has come". That is what the voices cry out from heaven. But other judgments are yet to come. These are described in Revelation 15-16. However, these judgments are of short duration. Those judgments make up the seventh trumpet.

The kingdom that is considered as having come, is an undivided kingdom which extends over the whole world. This is only possible because the Lord and His Christ take control of authority. He will reign justly and mercifully. Once He reigns it will never come to an end, as long as sun, moon and earth endure (Psa 72:5,7,17). He Who “will reign forever and ever” is the Lord God and He reigns in the Person of His Christ, the Son of Man, Who is God Himself. Our Lord and His Christ are one and the very same Person and still two Persons. This is and remains the wonder of eternity.

V16. When this awesome news has sounded, the twenty-four elders respond. Through the Spirit they understand what is happening and what will happen. They are aware of the grandeur of the events and they even more realize the grandeur of Him Who makes all these things come to pass. Therefore they cannot remain seated on their thrones, but fell on their faces and worship God (Rev 4:10; 5:9).

V17. While they are worshipping they give thanks to God. They address Him with several names. They first call Him “Lord”, which is Yahweh, the God of the covenant. He does what He Himself has promised to do. Then they call Him “God, the Almighty”. That is God in His creating power, Who as the Almighty maintains and leads to His goal everything that He has created.

They say furthermore of Him that He is the One “who are and who were”. ‘Who are to come’ is not added. ‘Who are’ indicates His eternal existence and ‘Who were’ indicates His relation to the past. ‘Who are to come’ is not necessary to mention anymore, because He is considered here to have come already and that He has accepted His kingdom.

He did that because He has taken His “great power”. He has always had that great power, but now He is intervening with power in the events of the world. And what He has taken, He never hands over again and will never be able to be taken out of His hands. His great power is the guarantee for that.

V18. The elders also talk about the wrath of God. They do that in connection with the enragement of the nations, which is the whole human race. The nations have always been rebelling against God over the past ages

and have been opposed to Him. But it is over now with their enragement, because God makes an end to it in His wrath. We see how meaningless the enragement of man is opposed to the wrath of the almighty God. You also see these two sides in Psalms 2 (Psa 2:1-6), where the distinction between the uproar of the nations and how God responds, is shown even stronger.

With the coming of the kingdom the time has come that God will judge the dead, although that judgment will only be executed *after* the millennial kingdom of peace (Rev 20:12). But to hand out the reward the time has come. That reward is for those who as true “bond-servants” in obedience to God and as true “prophets” have spoken His words to those to whom they were sent. That brought them rejection and mockery, but now they receive their reward. This reward is given *in* the millennial kingdom of peace (Rev 22:12). Although it has not come that far yet, it can be spoken of that way because the kingdom is in the hands of the Lord Jesus.

Also “the saints”, those who have lived separated for Him in a corrupted world, will now receive their reward. They thus lived out of respect for His Name and each person according to the extent of his responsibility, which is expressed in “small and great”.

Finally, God’s time has also come “to destroy those who destroy the earth”. This refers to the three beasts from Revelation 12-13 – the dragon, the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth – and all their followers. This is another category than the dead that were mentioned earlier in this verse.

In this way, all is removed that has always stood in the way of the kingdom of peace and those are rewarded who lived by faith in the Prince of peace and in His coming.

V19. With this verse a new parenthesis begins, which runs to Revelation 15:4. From Revelation 15:5 the seven bowl judgments are described. In the parenthesis the Holy Spirit shows the origin of the leading actors of Revelation 8-11. There you see: the dragon, that is satan, and the first beast and the second beast. Other leading actors are: the woman, that is Israel, the Son, that is Christ, Michael and the great harlot Babylon. In total seven leading persons pass by.

The starting point of the parenthesis is “the temple of God in heaven” and “the ark of His covenant”. The temple is God’s dwelling place in the midst of His people. The ark of the covenant reminds us of God’s faithfulness with regard to His people. It is a sharp contrast to what is taking place in the temple on earth. That temple is profaned in a terrible way by the antichrist. God is deeply displeased by what is happening on earth. The “flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm” express that in a very impressive way.

Now read Revelation 11:9-19 again.

Reflection: Which similarities do you see between the two witnesses and the Lord Jesus? What can you learn for your testimony from the two witnesses?

## Revelation 12

### **Rev 12:1-6 | The Dragon, the Woman and the Child**

*1 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; 2 and she was with child; and she \*cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads [were] seven diadems. 4 And his tail \*swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. 5 And she gave birth to a son, a male [child], who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. 6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she \*had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.*

V1. After the temple of God and the ark of His covenant (Rev 11:19) “a great sign appeared in heaven”. This sign connects to the temple and the ark. The temple and the ark are the center of God’s earthly people Israel. The great sign in heaven refers to Israel. The sign is ‘in heaven’, for it represents God’s plan with Israel according to His counsel (Rom 11:29) and is therefore something that is fixed in His heavenly counsel.

The woman represents in several places in this book a company of people or a system. In this way there is mention of Jezebel (Rev 2:20), which is papacy, the great harlot (Rev 17:1-6), and also professing Christianity which is closely connected to papacy. In that way, there is also mention of the bride (Revelation 19-22), which is the glorified church. Here the woman represents Israel. You can derive that from the characteristics. She is presented as God purposes her to be. In the time of the birth of the Child, which is the subject of the following verses, this was not so, for then Israel was under the yoke of Rome.

Israel is “clothed with the sun”. The sun is a picture of the highest authority on earth (cf. Psa 104:2a). It has always been God’s purpose to make

Israel head of all nations (Deu 28:1). That is emphasized by “the moon under her feet”. You can derive from that, that all earthly powers in the millennial kingdom of peace acknowledge the authority of Israel. Also the “crown of twelve stars” she is wearing, testifies to her glory. It is very well possible that the twelve stars represent the twelve tribes as channels through which the blessing of God in the millennial kingdom will flow to all parts of the earth.

V2. After this glorious perspective for the future something curious about the woman is noticed: “She was with child.” Moreover, her pregnancy has come to the stage of giving birth: “She cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.”.

This description gives a look back to the past and looks forward to the future. On the one hand you go back in time, namely, to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the people of Israel (Isa 9:6; Mic 5:2). On the other hand you go to the future, for the labor pains, which refer to the time of the great tribulation (Mt 24:15-21), are still to come. Nevertheless, the labor pains announce new life. This new life refers to the coming of the Lord Jesus, His second coming of course. That coming is seen as a new birth.

This is why, for example, it says so remarkably in another place that He will come from – and not: to – Zion (Rom 11:26). It is as if the people have given birth to Him only then. That is the moment that God “again brings the firstborn into the world” (Heb 1:6). He will not come again as a defenseless Babe Who is rejected, but as the Ruler.

To understand this representation of matters well, it is important to see that the intervening age of the church is not taken into account. Here at one time you switch from the past, where so many promises are made, to the future for the fulfillment of those promises. In the past the promises could not be fulfilled because of the unfaithfulness of Israel and the rejection of the Lord Jesus. In the future those promises will all be fulfilled on the basis of the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus. In this chapter you see how that will come to pass.

V3. After the sign of Israel you see that “another sign appeared in heaven”. This other sign is the “dragon” or satan. His color is “red”, which

represents the color of the blood of his many victims. It indicates the murderous activities of this enemy of God.

He has also “seven heads” with a crown on each head and “ten horns”. You can find the explanation of that later in Revelation 13 and 17 (Rev 13:1; 17:3,7-12). These chapters deal with the Roman empire. In the description here the emphasis is on the satanic power that is hidden behind this empire. The heads represent both extraordinary intelligence and power. The crowns on the head point to the royal position claimed by the dragon. The horns refer to power and strength.

V4. As has already been shown, the tail represent lies and false teachings (Rev 9:10; Isa 9:14). These false teachings are spread by the dragon through the antichrist, the false prophet. “A third of the stars of heaven” that are dragged by his false teachings can refer to those who have a leading position in the Roman empire. They may be light bearers who will bring what is called Christian teaching after the rapture of the church.

After you have seen the dragon in his devouring and deceptive work you see him standing before the woman who is about to give birth. His intention is to devour the Child Whom she will give birth to, as soon as It has been born. Here you see what you read in the Gospel according to Matthew about the attempt of Herod to kill the Lord Jesus when he hears about His birth (Mt 2:13-16).

V5. Here the birth of the Lord Jesus is first described and then the purpose of His birth: His government over all nations. But because He is hated and rejected, God takes away His Son, to Himself and to His throne. That has taken place at the ascension.

V6. You read nothing in this chapter about the time of the church. The church is not a subject of the prophecy. The Christian period is skipped. We suddenly find ourselves in verse 6 in the time of the great tribulation, which is in the second half of the seventieth week of Daniel 9 (Dan 9:24-27). Therefore, the next action of God is linked to the flight of the woman, lest she fall prey to the dragon. Here the woman represents the people of Israel, but particularly that part of Israel that is connected to God, which is the believing remnant.

God protects the woman against the persecutor by providing her with a hiding place. In that place he nourishes her for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, which is three and a half years (one month has thirty days). The fact that there is mention of “days” indicates the daily care of God for His own. They will pray the prayer “give us this day our daily bread” (Mt 6:11) in the truest sense of the word. It seems much like Moab is the place where they experience His care and sustenance every day (Psa 60:8; 108:9; Isa 16:4).

Now read Revelation 12:1-6 again.

Reflection: What could you learn from this section, regarding your personal faith life?

**Rev 12:7-17 | Satan Thrown Down to the Earth**

*7 And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, 8 and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. 11 And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. 12 For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has [only] a short time." 13 And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male [child]. 14 But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she \*was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. 15 And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. 16 But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. 17 So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*

V7. Now the explanation of why the woman has to flee to the wilderness is given. That's because satan is thrown out of heaven to the earth, which is the result of a war that arises in heaven. It could be the case that satan thinks that he has a chance to seize power in heaven, now that the beast and the antichrist have full control on earth. It may also be a last-ditch effort to prevent the upcoming final judgments.

In the outbreak of the war two superpowers stand against each other, two captains with an army led by them. The one party is Michael with his angels, which are the chosen angels. The other party is the dragon, which

is satan with his angels, which are the fallen angels. With heaven, the territory where the war is waged, is meant here the firmament of the heavenly places. It is not the place where God dwells and to which satan has access. There he is unable to unfold his power in opposition, but is completely in the power of God.

V8. In this war, the dragon and his angels face Michael and his angels. The fight is fierce, but satan suffers defeat. He and his angels are removed from heaven, where they up to that moment had access. It is important to see that it is not a war between the Lord Jesus and satan. That wouldn't be a war between two more or less equivalent superpowers, for the Lord Jesus is God Almighty and satan is His creature.

V9. It is comprehensively made clear here that the great dragon is satan. The great dragon is "the serpent of old" from Genesis 3 (Gen 3:1). The name 'serpent of old' is a reminder of his great power that is in his deception. The name "devil" is derived from the Greek 'diabolos' and means 'accuser' or 'slanderer'. His work consists of speaking evil and accusing, distorting the truth. The name "Satan" means 'adversary'. He is the archenemy of God and His Christ. He is the liar and murderer of men from the beginning (Jn 8:44). He is relentlessly and unchangeably active in deceiving the whole world, all people and in particular to take God's children, to keep or drag them away from God and Christ.

After his humiliation because of his rebellion against God Who removed him from the holy mountain of God (Eze 28:14-16; Isa 14:12-15), he still had access to God. You see that in Job 1-2 (Job 1:6; 2:1). But it is over now. He is thrown down to the earth to be further humiliated later. That happens when he will be locked up in the abyss for a thousand years. When he is released from there for a short time, he will get his deepest and final humiliation when he is thrown into hell forever and ever (Rev 20:3,10). The Lord Jesus has seen and foretold his fall (Lk 10:18).

V10. The great dragon and his angels are removed from heaven and thrown down to the earth. After satan is thrown out from heaven a voice in heaven speaks about "the salvation" that has come. That refers to the millennial kingdom of peace. It is the salvation of the whole creation from the power

of satan and the coming of the wonderful time of peace and righteousness over the whole earth. Then the kingdom has come with power.

The voice in heaven John hears, speaks about “the kingdom of our God”. It is the great victory of the God with Whom they have come into relationship by putting their trust in Him in the sacrifice that He has given in His Son for them and their sins. That Son is His Christ to Whose authority they have subjected themselves in faith and Who now will exercise that power over all creation. They know that they are connected to others, “our brethren”, who have also in faith entrusted themselves to God and the power of His Christ.

Their brethren who at that moment are on earth have nothing to fear anymore of a satan in heaven who accuses them before God (Zec 3:1). Satan, “the accuser ... has been thrown down”, who relentlessly “accuses” the believers “before our God day and night”. The time of accusing is over. The beginning of the fall of satan is the harbinger of the ultimate victory.

V11. The fall of satan will have devastating consequences on earth. But for those who believe in the blood of the Lamb the victory is certain. Their testimony which they gave by their word is also a victory over satan. They have not bowed before him, but defeated him by the word of their testimony, even though it has cost them their life. At the same time they had the assurance that they could not lose life because they believed in the power of the blood of the Lamb. The body can be killed, but not the soul. It seems that these are the martyrs of Revelation 6 (Rev 6:9). “They did not love their life”, but they gave life in death in their persistent witness for the Lamb.

V12. Now that the accuser has been removed from heaven there can be joy there. But for “the earth and the sea”, upon which the devil was been thrown down, the consequences are terrible, even though these consequences will not last long. With ‘the earth’ Israel is meant in particular, while by ‘the sea’ we must think primarily of the restored Roman empire.

When satan is thrown down on the earth and the sea the great tribulation will begin, which will last for three and a half years. His great wrath knows no bounds, but his time fortunately does (Mt 24:22,24). The devil,

“knowing that he has [only] a short time”, will make every effort to cause a persecution that is unprecedented in history.

V13. You have read in verse 6 about the flight of the woman. In verses 7-12 you saw why that was necessary: it has to do with the throwing down of satan on the earth. Now your attention is drawn again to the flight of the woman and you learn further details related to her fight. The wrath of satan is now directed primarily at the faithful remnant of Israel, represented by “the woman who gave birth to the male [child]”. Out of this people was born the Christ Who will fulfill God’s plans with His people and the world.

Satan is called “the dragon” because he seeks to devour cruelly and without any compassion. Here satan takes off his mask. First he showed a friendly face in the monstrous covenant that he caused to be made between the Roman empire and the apostate Israel (Dan 9:27). That is in the period of the first half of the last year week – a period of seven years – Daniel writes about. The temple service, for example, was still allowed to take place. But that changes when satan will be thrown down on the earth. Then he will do everything possible and will use all the means he has at his disposal to eradicate everything that has to do with God.

V14. God provides the woman with “two wings of the great eagle”. The wings enable her to escape from the anger of the dragon (cf. Exo 19:4; Deu 32:11; Isa 40:31). Those wings also enable her to fly “to her place”. God has a place for her where she will be kept safe from the dragon and where He will take care of her during the time the dragon can perform his atrocities on earth (Mt 24:15-16).

With “a time and times and half a time” again the three and a half year of the great tribulation is meant. ‘A time’ is for a year, ‘times’ is for two years and ‘half a time’ is for half a year. In her hiding place “the serpent” with his deceptions cannot reach her.

V15. When you think of the serpent being the deceiver, the water coming out of his mouth like a river could be a huge flood of deceptions. The intent of all kinds of deceiving miracles and signs is to take hold of the elect as well. The deception will be phenomenal and part of the great tribulation.

When there is an enormous threat, there is a great danger to give in to all kinds of miracles and signs that come out of the mouth of the deceiver (2Thes 2:9-10). If those days had not been cut short, then even the elect would fall prey to it. But they will be cut short precisely for their sake (Mt 24:22).

V16. God will supernaturally intervene to make the attempts of the serpent, again called the dragon here, fail. He has His instruments on earth that will help His people in that time of the greatest need. These are probably people who stand up for the persecuted ones and take care of them. God makes sure that His people will not perish. He makes a hedge around them (cf. Job 1:10). He does not yet act openly in the favor of His people, but He protects them in a hidden way against total destruction.

V17. When the dragon sees that his attempts to eliminate the remnant as a whole have failed, he looks for other victims to manifest his wrath against them. There is still “the rest of her children”. It seems that these are the believers who stayed behind in Jerusalem (Zep 3:12). Because the dragon was focused on the majority, he did not pay attention to the few believers in Jerusalem. God knows those as the ones who keep His commandments. They are focused on Him. That makes them “hold to the testimony of Jesus”. They are identified with Him.

Now read Revelation 12:7-18 again.

Reflection: What are the consequences when satan is thrown out to the earth?

## Revelation 13

### Rev 13:1-4 | The Beast Coming Up Out of the Sea

*1 And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns [were] ten diadems, and on his heads [were] blasphemous names. 2 And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like [those] of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. 3 [I saw] one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed [and followed] after the beast; 4 they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"*

The two beasts that are described in this chapter represent the two human and at the same time monstrous instruments, which will be used by satan in the end time. The first beast comes up out of the sea, the well-known picture of the nations (Rev 17:15; Isa 17:12; cf. Dan 7:2-3). This beast is therefore also a pagan ruler over a pagan kingdom. The second beast comes up out of the earth. The earth represents Israel. The second beast is the antichrist who will reign over apostate Israel. In these two beasts both characteristics of satan – violence and lie – are exposed (Jn 8:44). The first beast is more characterized by violence, the second by lies.

V1. Because of his plan to wage war against the rest of her offspring, the dragon stands on the sand of the seashore. Then “a beast coming up out of the sea” is described. Before the eyes of John – and through his description before your eyes too – it rises up from the sea. He sees a ruler rising up from the middle of the turbulent and unmanageable nations, out of that great mass of people. It is the same person as the person that comes up out of the abyss (Rev 11:7; 17:8). His coming up out of the abyss indicates his demonic origin. This is no one else than the dictator of the restored Roman empire, the united Western Europe.

That it is him we are talking about, will become clear from what you see further. 'Horns' are a picture of power. The form of that power can be derived from the 'crowns' that he has on his horns. This indicates that this beast has authority over royal rulers. In connection with the horns and crowns the number 'ten' is mentioned. By that you know that it is about ten kings (Rev 17:12; Dan 7:24). They are subjected to the rule of the beast.

John also mentions that this monster has "seven heads". Of these heads it is said in Revelation 17: "The seven heads are seven mountains" (Rev 17:9). The question now is what the mountains represent. It is a historical fact that in the ancient days the city of Rome was known as 'the city with the seven hills'. This makes clear that Rome is the political center of this monstrous ruler.

The seven heads, however, are not only an indication of the location where the power is seated. They also represent seven kings (Rev 17:10). That is an indication of seven forms of government by which the Roman empire has been ruled consecutively. Verse 3 expands further on that. What John also sees, is that this political power is against God and resists Him. He sees "a blasphemous name" on his heads. The beast adorns himself with blasphemous names, probably names that belong only to God.

V2. The description of the beast is not yet finished. John has more to tell. In this beast he recognizes traits of three different animals. He mentions "a leopard", "a bear" and "a lion". If you put Daniel 7 next to that (Dan 7:4-6), you will read that Daniel sees the same animals. Only, he sees them in reverse order. Daniel sees a lion first, then a bear and third he sees a panther or leopard. That's because Daniel looks forward, while John looks back.

These animals represent empires. Daniel lived in the time of the Babylonian empire, represented by a lion. That empire was destroyed because the Medes and the Persians conquered the world empire. Because of the brutality with which they operated, that empire is represented by a bear. But also their government came to an end. Greece, under the leadership of Alexander the Great, conquered the empire of the Medes and Persians with overwhelming speed. Hence, the leopard is the appropriate symbol.

Daniel also speaks about a fourth beast. He says of it that it is a "dreadful and terrible and extremely strong" beast (Dan 7:7-8). Historically this beast

represents the Roman empire that conquered world domination from the Greeks. Prophetically we see this empire back in the beast that John is seeing here. The beast is both the restored Roman empire and the head of that empire. This empire and this head possess all cruel characteristics of the fourth animal, in which John sees all cruel characteristics of the three animals mentioned.

Can you picture it? The beast comes up out of the sea, which means that the dictator floats to the surface. The ten kings, the rulers of different countries that together form the Western Roman empire, are inseparably connected to him. This dictator has power over them, which he exercises from Rome as his center of power. He manifests himself blasphemously and with a cruelty symbolized by the three tearing beasts described.

And who is hiding behind this, who makes sure that he becomes that mighty? The dragon, which is the devil (Rev 12:9). Here the devil grants direct authority to someone who takes this out of his hand. Of course these things can only happen, because God allows them to. And He allows them to happen because they fit into His plan. But the point is that the dragon is the inspirer of the beast. The beast has power, he reigns and has great authority because the devil has given this to him.

Here you see a great contrast between the beast and the Lord Jesus. Once satan offered the Lord Jesus all kingdoms to take them out of his hand (Mt 4:8-9). But the Lord refused it. He did not want to anticipate God's time to become King. He wanted to receive the kingdom and the power out of God's hand (Dan 7:13-14; Psa 2:8). For Him, that meant humiliation and the death on the cross. It is important for you too not to seek any favor in the world. Satan loves to give that to you. In that way you can escape suffering. If satan approaches you with such temptations, then respond like the Lord Jesus (Mt 4:10).

V3. Then John sees that one of the heads of the beast was as if it had been slain. This is to indicate that the Roman empire has perished and disappeared. From history we know that in the year 476 the Western Roman empire at that time was inflicted with a fatal blow. Rome was then conquered by barbarian Germanic tribes. What John saw at the moment he was watching – he saw it around the end of the first century – was still future. It would happen in a few centuries.

But to God the future has no secrets. He informs us about things happening in the future as far as He considers them to be of importance for us to know. He does not do that to satisfy our curiosity, but that we may live our lives accordingly (2Pet 3:11-12). Therefore God shows to John, and to you, what more is going to happen.

Then John sees that the fatal wound was healed. To John that was in the nearby future, but in the distant future. It's what we see happening in our days! To us it is the nearby future. A restoration of the Western Roman empire is taking place before our eyes. But watch carefully: this happens by the power of satan! This restoration does not happen through a new conquest with violence, but through diabolic inspiration and deliberation. John sees how this restoration stirs up admiration and adoration from the world.

V4. People will be aware that the dragon, which is satan, has given this empire its power. They hate God that much, they have been alienated from Him in such a way, that they worship the dragon as their god in an open, general and limitless admiration. They will also worship the beast. They provoke and blaspheme God by crying out statements about the beast that belong to God alone (cf. Exo 15:11; Mic 7:18). To them, no one compares to the beast and no one can compete against the beast to defeat him. That will be the result when Europe becomes one whole.

In case you may be excited about the one Europe, I hope that, because of what God's Word says here, this turns into cold shivers running down your spine. You will now be well aware that satan is the origin of it and that it ends up in worshiping satan! That with the referendum about the European constitution on June 1, 2005, many Christians in the Netherlands have voted 'against', does not necessarily reflect their opinion of Europe. The argument that mattered most to vote 'against' was that in that constitution no reference to God and the Jewish Christian roots of the European Union had been written down. In case that had happened, then the Christians probably would have plainly voted 'for'! That is staggering.

Now read Revelation 13:1-4 again.

Reflection: What is astonishing about the beast?

**Rev 13:5-10 | Mouth and Deeds of the Beast Out of the Sea**

*5 There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. 6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, [that is,] those who dwell in heaven. 7 It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. 8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, [everyone] whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. 9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10 If anyone [is destined] for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.*

V5. Just as satan has given to the beast ‘his power and his throne and great power’ (verse 2b), he also gives the beast “a mouth”. He, so to speak, makes the beast his mouthpiece. Therefore, what the beast says is only bragging and blasphemous language. His bragging language has no limit. He boasts about himself to the people and prides himself that all improvement is because of him. To God he balls his fists and taunts and curses Him.

But a limit is placed on the performance of the beast. He is given “forty-two months”. That is the period that you have already come across earlier (Rev 11:2) and that you have learnt to know as the period of the great tribulation of three and a half years. During that time he will rage uninhibitedly (cf. Dan 8:24) both against God and those who dwell in heaven and to the saints on earth.

V6. It is not only that the beast lacks the appropriate reverence to God. Whenever the beast opens his mouth against God, it is to rage against Him and to express his contempt for Him. He can only insult and sneer about the Name of God. He despises God to the depth of his being. The words he uses are not mentioned. I think that the words you sometimes hear around you and which fill you with disgust are dwarfed by what the beast will spew out.

And not only God and the Name of God are the target of his blasphemous language. He also directs his evil mudslinging against “His tabernacle”.

By this the church is meant, in which God as in a tabernacle will dwell among people on earth forever and ever (Rev 21:2-3).

Finally, he directs his slander against the rest of the citizens of heaven. You can think of all believers who do not belong to the church.

And don't think that the beast speaks out this slanderous talk in a back room. His blasphemous expressions which he slings at God and the citizens of heaven will happen publicly and serve as an entertainment. With intense pleasure, people will observe his performance and his audacious language through television and the Internet. Everything he says and does is to propagandize his program. The intention of this program is nothing more than to turn people against God, to throw God off His throne. Time will tell that his propaganda will succeed, and that his program will have a dramatic ending.

V7. The beast, inspired by satan, can do nothing against all who dwell in heaven but open his mouth to spew out his hatred against them. But there are also some "saints" on earth. On them he can vent his diabolical killing intent, having given air to all pent-up feelings of hatred by hurling them to heaven. He is given the opportunity to make war with those who out of faithfulness toward God did not hoot along with the apostate mass as in a carnival procession.

The saints are not only saints by name, but also in practice. A saint or holy one is one set apart for God. That there is mention of 'making war', means that he takes this fight very seriously, as if the faithful saints are the most dangerous enemies of the nation that have great power. He uses everything at his disposal, because he wants to eliminate them root and branch, to the last man. And he seems to be successful. He overcomes them. This victory grants him international authority. Countries outside the restored Roman empire, i.e. the united Europe, will open themselves for his ideas and advices.

In his blind insanity, he does not know that this victory involves only the body. The saints were strengthened by the words of the Lord Jesus concerning that. He told them that they did not need to fear (for the beast), for only the body can be killed (Mt 10:28). In Revelation 20 you see them

again. They sit on thrones and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 20:4). In that way you will certainly be encouraged by the words of the Lord Jesus and by what you will share in the future, to endure the suffering that you experience sometimes.

V8. Because of all the accomplishments of the beast, all who dwell on the earth will worship him. The admiration for the beast will have no limits. The expression “who dwell on the earth”, indicates that it refers to people who have deliberately settled with heaven. Their lives have, like the lives of animals and the beast, no broader horizon than the earth and is totally and exclusively connected to the earth.

Of these people, another particular qualification is given. Their names are not written “in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain”. The absence of their name in that book has dramatic consequences. The short time of their praise of the beast will be followed by an everlasting weeping and gnashing of the teeth because of the pains caused by the flames of eternal fire.

Noteworthy still is the expression “from the foundation of the world”. You may remember the expression “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). That expression is used for those who belong to the church. They were chosen even before the creation of the world. That is because the church is of heavenly and eternal origin. But there are also believers who do not belong to the church. They are believers from Israel and the nations in the periods before and after the stay of the church on earth. They connected with the earth and in that way with God’s plans *from* creation (Mt 13:35; 25:34).

There is a great contrast between those who dwell on the earth and the book of life. Those who live on earth are attached to the earth with heart and soul. The earth is their life. With them there isn’t any thought of God and heaven. That makes them living dead (Eph 2:1-2). If they do not repent they will be in the second death forever and ever (Rev 21:8).

The opposite is the book of life. That book is connected to the Lamb That was slain, which indicates that the Lamb was in death. The Lamb had entered death to give life to all who believe in Him. The name of everyone who believes in Him is in the book of life. The book is His, He keeps it. The names of all worshipers of the Lamb are in it, not one is missing. The names of all worshipers of the beast are removed from it, not one appears in the it.

V9. I hope you have an ear to hear and let yourself be warned. You have just watched together with John the beast coming up. You have heard his blasphemous language and seen his murderous occupations. The mass hysteria that will be caused by his appearance and performance among all people that dwell on earth has been clearly presented to you. You have been a witness of the rise of the world government and the world religion. It is not about something that might happen at a time in the distant future, but about events that increasingly recognizable today. You wouldn't want to say that this is a 'far from my bed show', would you? It is extremely topical for you as well. Don't be fooled.

V10. The description of this beast concludes with pointing at the principle of repayment (cf. 2Thes 1:6-7). This should serve as a consolation for the saints and stimulate them to persevere. They may know that the one who throws them in prison will end up in the prison himself; and he who kills them with the sword will also be killed with the sword (Jer 15:2; 43:11). God will make sure that every crime that has been done to His saints will be repaid righteously. Until that moment comes, the saints must persevere in their faith. They can trust that God, Who then has not visibly intervened, will soon do so.

The saints see in faith the good outcome for themselves and the repayment for the oppressors. They cannot answer the brute violence of the beast with violence. By themselves they are defenseless and helpless. But they have a source of power that works totally differently. The source of their power is the faith in God that He will make an end to the authority and power of the beast.

In that awareness they persevere in their faithfulness to God, even if it may cost them their freedom or even their life. Their life is not in the hand of the beast, but in the hand of the almighty and faithful God. That goes also for you when you face resistance in your bearing witness for the Lord. If you have that trust you will not give up your testimony, but persevere in it.

Now read Revelation 13:5-10 again.

Reflection: What aspects of the beast's exercise of power do you already recognize in society?

## Rev 13:11-18 | The Beast Coming Up Out of the Earth

*11 Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. 12 He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. 13 He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. 14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who \*had the wound of the sword and has come to life. 15 And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. 16 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, 17 and [he provides] that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, [either] the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.*

V11. Then before the eyes of John a second beast appears. It is not a twin brother of the first beast, but another beast. It looks different and it does different things. But you will see that these two beasts get along very well. This beast does not come up out of the sea, like the first one, but “coming up out of the earth”. With ‘the earth’ is meant, in contrast to the sea, a more or less ordered society. It seems to be about Israel.

I think so because the description of this beast shows that it is an imitator of the Lord Jesus. When John sees the horns he must think of a lamb. In the book of Revelation the Lamb is always the Lord Jesus. And who is the great imitator of the Lord Jesus other than the antichrist? He it is of whom the Lord Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews that someone would come in his own name and that they will receive him (Jn 5:43). This also means that the antichrist will be a Jew. Israel will never receive a stranger, a person who does not belong to the Jewish people, as their king. It must be someone from among their own people.

Because of his horns this false messiah makes one think of a lamb. But he speaks “as a dragon”. His language reveals him. Therefore the sheep that belong to the Lord Jesus will certainly not follow the antichrist. The sheep do not listen to the voice of the stranger (Jn 10:5). They know the voice of the good Shepherd and therefore they will follow Him (Jn 10:4). This is also a touchstone for you. If you hear a voice that you do not recognize as the voice of the Lord Jesus, you must not to listen to it.

V12. There is a great closeness between the two beasts. But that closeness is not one of equality. In fact, the second beast is walks on the leash by the first beast. When the second beast exercises his power the first beast is obviously present. The second beast, the antichrist, has control by the grace of the first beast. He is not able to operate on his own, but is dependent on the first beast. The first beast, the dictator of the restored Western Roman empire, the united Europe, determines and ensures the way in which the antichrist exercises his power. This is the result of the covenant that apostate Israel under the leadership of the antichrist, the false messiah, will make with the first beast. Isaiah calls it ‘a covenant with death’ (Isa 28:15; Dan 9:27).

The second beast, like all earthlings, also has a limitless admiration for the first beast. That admiration is so great that he makes every effort to ensure that everything and everyone on earth will worship the first beast. The cause of worship is the healing of the deadly wound of the first beast. In the description of the first beast you have learnt that this healing refers to the restoration of the Western Roman empire, that has become visible in the united Europe. With this compulsion to worship the first beast, the second beast makes himself known as a spiritual leader both of apostate Judaism and of apostate Christianity. It is his goal to make an end to all worship of the Father and the Son.

V13. His strategy is that of lying, deception and imitation. He performs all kinds of impressive signs. What you see is not to be denied. At least, that is what many people will believe. But mind you that images may be manipulated. Another deceptive factor is that you do not get to see the whole story. When two people have seen something and make a report of it, you can still get two totally different reports. The devil is the great ma-

nipulator and a master in telling half-truths. Therefore do not let yourself be dragged by stories and movies of so called great signs that are ascribed to God.

It is a characteristic of the end time that spectacular things happen. The origin of that is not God, but the devil (2Thes 2:9). Here you see that the beast even “makes fire come down out of heaven”. Everyone sees that it comes from heaven, from God ... it seems. But it is a trick of the devil who tries to give the impression through this false prophet that a true prophet is at work here. His performance is an imitation of what Elijah did several times (1Kgs 18:38; 2Kgs 1:10,12). The word “even” indicates that it could possibly be his most deceptive craftiness. With him making an appeal to the Bible people would say that a person who could ‘even’ do that, must surely be the true Messiah.

V14. You see how people who do not want to have anything to do with the Bible, who only live for the earth, are a prey of his supernatural manifestations. The religious feeling of man is a perfect work place for demons. People who live without God will link themselves to something that is beneficial for them, whether in a financial sense, or in the sense of a spiritual boost. They admire others for their own benefit. They are not aware of them delivering themselves directly to the instruments of satan. Satan gives the antichrist the ability to perform deceptive signs. Those signs happen in the presence of the (first) beast. They happen to his glory and honor.

The religious influence gained by the antichrist through his signs is now so great that he considers the time ripe to erect an idol to the first beast. Therefore he gives the order to make such an idol. Here is mention of the erection of “the abomination of desolation” (Mt 24:15; Dan 9:27; 12:11). Again, reference is made to his revival after the mortal wound. That must be enormously impressive. That is something you are observing more and more already now, as Europe becomes more and more one empire.

V15. The deceitful power of the antichrist is so great that it seems as if he brings the image to life. Satan enables him to give breath to the image. But breath doesn’t mean life. Only God can give life. The impression that the image is alive, arises because it speaks. The voice is of course that of

a demon that perfectly imitates a human voice. This speaking makes the deception complete.

The apostate Jews may think that they have to do with an image of the true God. They have always been taught that idols do not speak (Psa 115:3,5,7; 135:17). A speaking image, therefore, they believe in their foolish blindness, cannot be an idol. Masses of people will fall down to worship the beast. Worship of the beast determines life or death. He who does not worship will be killed (cf. Dan 3:5-6).

V16. Although the people have been deceived, they have voluntarily bowed down before the beast. They have chosen for the beast. But with their choice for the beast they lose their freedom at the same time. They have fallen under the spell of a power from which they cannot free themselves. The beast empowers his control over the people and brings them to an absolute connectedness and subjection to himself. No one escapes from that. It does not make any difference whether you are a small citizen or a great minister, for he is the big chief. It also does not matter whether you are rich or poor, for you cannot buy it off. Nor does it matter whether you are a free man or a slave, for you have lost your freedom.

Everyone is forced to visibly express his loyalty to the beast. To this end, the beast will give a perceptible mark "on their right hand or on their forehead". The 'right hand' refers to deeds. In that way the beast confiscates everything that each person does. Everything will contribute to the power and glory of the beast and his empire. The 'forehead' is the center of the thoughts. Through indoctrination, all people will serve the cause of the beast out of full conviction.

With the development of technology, applying the mark will be a simple operation. We are on the threshold of the era that will be ruled by the beast. If not God's Word and His thoughts revealed in it govern your hand and your thinking, sin and finally the antichrist will do it. Let this warning sink in carefully.

V17. Through this mark, the beast controls the entire economy. Whoever does not surrender himself with skin and hair to the beast is economically a pariah, an outcast from society. To this test the faithful will be exposed

in all severity. Because of their refusal to have the name or the number of the beast applied on their body, they will not be able “to buy or to sell”. Starvation is imminent.

V18. Due to the crafty and deceptive character of the beast, his proposals for applying the mark will be presented credible. People who accept the mark being applied, think that in that way they act wisely. But they act foolishly. The faithful, on the contrary, receives wisdom from God to unmask the beast. To do that he has to use his understanding, which is the insight given by God. In that way he will be able to calculate the number of the beast.

A lot of attempts have made to calculate the number, but all of them have a different outcome. That proves that we are not able to calculate it today. That is not necessary yet, because that time has not come yet. Only when the church has been raptured, that time has come. In that time the wise men and those who have understanding will be able to calculate the number. It is anyway clear that six is the number of man. That is called here in threefold form, 666, the number of the beast. Man has become equal to the beast here, the absolute nadir of the degeneration of man.

Now read Revelation 13:11-18 again.

Reflection: Mention the characteristics of the antichrist.

## Revelation 14

### **Rev 14:1-6 | The Song of the One Hundred and Forty-four Thousand**

*1 Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb [was] standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard [was] like [the sound] of harpists playing on their harps. 3 And they \*sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. 4 These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These [are] the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. 5 And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless. 6 And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;*

V1. A new scene is shown to John and he invites you with the regularly reoccurring “behold”, to watch together with him. He taps, as it were, on your shoulder and points with his finger to a certain direction and says: Look at that! If you are still thinking about the horrible developments of the previous chapter, you immediately come to rest here. Both beasts with their slanderous, murderous and deceitful actions, give way to “the Lamb” and His righteous and benevolent performance. In the Lamb you see how God is beyond all rages of hatred, violence and lie and calmly does His own work in those who are His.

For the first time in the book of Revelation you do not see the Lamb in heaven, but on earth, “on Mount Zion”, and particularly in connection with the remnant from the two tribes. Zion is the mountain in Jerusalem that God has chosen to place His sanctuary there (Psa 78:68). He will also establish the throne of the kingdom of David there. That mountain represents the grace in contrast to Mount Sinai that represents the law (Heb 12:22; Psa 125:1; 126:1).

With the Lord Jesus you see one hundred and forty-four thousand people standing. This number symbolically indicates fullness. In Revelation 7 this number is also mentioned (Rev 7:4-8). There it refers to a fullness of people from all twelve tribes and they are seen before the great tribulation (Rev 7:1-3). Here it is about a fullness of the two tribes in the land, although with this hundred and forty-four thousand there are certainly also some believers from the ten tribes, who however as a whole are still in the dispersion. This group comes from the great tribulation. They have remained faithful to the Lord. They have refused the mark of the beast on their forehead. Now on their forehead is written, as a special distinction, the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father.

V2. While the Lamb is standing on Mount Zion with the faithful remnant, John hears “a voice from heaven”. It is a mighty, awesome voice. At the same time it is also a lovely and melodic voice. What a contrast to the bragging and boasting of the beast. This voice and this music are purposed for the faithful remnant that has gone through so much suffering. It is heavenly music, played by heavenly saints for the saints on earth. Heaven and earth are brought into harmony.

V3. John does not hear just music, but he also hears something that sounds like “a new song”. It is sung by people in heaven. These singers are not the elders, the believers of the Old Testament and that of the church (Rev 4:4). The song is not sung by them, but for them. It is also sung “before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders”. It is a song heard with approval by the symbols of the kingdom of God, that is the throne and the living creatures. The singers of the song are believers who after the rapture of the church were killed because of their faithfulness to the Lord and who share in the first resurrection (Rev 20:4-6).

They teach those who are on earth to sing the song. The saints in heaven and the saints on earth from Israel are clearly related to each other. The saints on earth are further referred to as “who had been purchased from the earth” which indicates the contrast to ‘those who dwell on the earth’. They do not stand beside the Lamb on Mount Zion on the basis of their own merits, but on the basis of the redemption work of the Lamb. The same goes for those who are in heaven. They too do not owe it to them-

selves that they have come there, but also because of what the Lamb has accomplished on the cross of Golgotha.

The Lamb is on earth, but the Lamb is also in heaven. From heaven, where the Lamb stands as if slain (Rev 5:6), the new song is being taught. Can that new song have a different content than the Lamb? In heaven and on earth it is sung what the Lamb has accomplished. The connection between heaven and earth becomes possible only because of the Lamb and His work on the cross.

V4. A further description of the one hundred and forty-four thousand follows. Some features or characteristics of them are mentioned. The first is that these faithful ones are “chaste”, which is applied to both men and women. It means that they granted their love not to another, but only to Him. They have not let themselves be seduced by enticing people or ideas to become unfaithful to Him.

During the time of the great tribulation, a time that is full of temptations, they have kept themselves clean from literal and spiritual fornication (cf. 2Cor 11:2). It is the time in which the roman-catholic church will expose herself as the great harlot (Rev 17:1-6). It will take a huge effort to remain clean, because the world is full of uncleanness. It is already the case, but then it will be more abundant.

The second characteristic is that they “follow the Lamb” right through the great tribulation “wherever He goes”. Here you also have the secret by which they kept themselves chaste: their eyes are continuously focused on the Lamb. This is a great example of how you can keep yourself clean. Loving the Lamb determines where they go and what they do. Where He goes and is, there they go and are. That is rewarded by the Lamb. They were with Him in the tribulation, now they are allowed to be with Him in His glory. This reward is also waiting for you if you stay with the Lamb.

The third characteristic is their advanced position. They are “first fruits to God and to the Lamb”. ‘First fruits’ have got to do with the harvest. First fruits are the first collection, while the great harvest is yet to be gathered. This is the case with this company. Together with many others they have been purchased from among men by the blood of the Lamb. Among those

who are purchased, these one hundred and forty-four thousand are the first fruits that are allowed to share in the blessings of the kingdom of peace. Shortly after that a great harvest will follow, both from Israel and from the nations (cf. 1Cor 15:23; Jam 1:18).

V5. The last characteristic mentioned is that “no lie was found in their mouth” (Zep 3:13; cf. 1Pet 2:22b). Humanly speaking they have delivered a supernatural performance in this way. They could do that only because of their attachment to Christ as the truth (Jn 14:6). They lived in a time that was full of lies and deceit. It was not possible to survive without lying and deceiving. But they kept standing and did not allow themselves to be dragged by the gushing floods of lies that were poured out over the world by the beast and his henchmen.

The biggest lie is the denial of the Father and the Son (1Jn 2:21-23). But they have testified uncompromisingly of the truth concerning the Father and the Son. It is the joy of the Spirit to testify of them that “they are blameless”.

V6. In verses 1-5 we watched the scene from after the great tribulation. Now we turn back to the time of the great tribulation. Several scenes of that time are highlighted in the rest of this chapter. In total there are six angels connected to those scenes. The last angel you have seen was the seventh and last trumpet angel (Rev 11:15). The first angel here is not a new trumpet angel, but “another angel”, the first of a new group of angels.

This angel is flying in midheaven. In that position, he can be seen and heard by everyone on earth. He has a special assignment and that is to preach the “everlasting gospel”. This shows how great the love and grace of God are. Also in that particularly serious time God allows the good news – for that is the meaning of the word ‘gospel’ – to be proclaimed.

The everlasting gospel is a gospel that is not connected to a certain period. It is valid at all times and for everyone. It comes to “those who live on the earth” for the last time, whatever group they belong to, so that they may repent before God’s judgments break loose. An angel has no part in the redemption, but he can surely pass on a good news of general scope (cf. Lk 2:10).

When it comes to the gospel of grace, an angel must step back. You see that in the history of Philip and the Ethiopian. An angel led Philip to the Ethiopian, but it was Philip who preached the gospel of grace to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26,35).

Now read Revelation 14:1-6 again.

Reflection: Which characteristics of those who follow the Lamb can be applied to you?

### Rev 14:7-13 | Messages From Three Angels

*7 and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters." 8 And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality." 9 Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." 12 Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. 13 And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."*

V7. The everlasting gospel is not muttered unintelligibly, but it is preached "with a loud voice". It goes beyond all noise on the earth. The content of this everlasting gospel is simply: fear God, give Him glory and worship Him. The necessity of this gospel is just as simple, namely, because the hour of God's judgment has come. Repentance begins with the fear of God (Lk 23:40). God is an awesome God Who will punish every sin, disobedience and rebellion.

As soon as a person realizes that he has sinned against God, he becomes afraid, for he then discovers that God is a wrathful God. Then the soul that is convicted of his sins will give glory to God. He will certainly acknowledge that God would be righteous if He would condemn him to hell and if He would visit the world in its entirety with disasters and plagues. Each person who acknowledges that will not be condemned, but he will pass out death into life (Jn 5:24). Finally, such a person becomes a worshiper of God Who gave him such a great grace.

God is presented here as the Creator. As the Creator He has the right to the worship of His creatures. That worship will be claimed by the beast in that time on earth. But God will never give up His rights. He appeals to us to respect those rights, though without coercion (yet).

V8. Then “another angel, a second one”, appears. Because in verse 9 there is mention of “a third one”, it indicates that there is a ranking in the events. What this angel announces emphasizes the necessity to heed the call of the first angel. The hour of God’s judgment is heralded with the judgment on Babylon. It is “Babylon the great”, because it had great thoughts about itself and also because it had great influence on the nations. But God brings an end to that. Judgment on Babylon is described in detail in Revelation 17-18.

In the words “fallen, fallen” you hear the echo of the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa 21:9). The cry of the angel means a warning of the judgment to come, the result of which is communicated here. God never judges without warning. It should keep people from throwing themselves in the arms of “the mother of harlots” (Rev 17:5) and to be overwhelmed by her tempting religious beauty and splendor.

The overwhelming wealth and worldly charm have made Babylon a desired partner of all nations. World leaders eagerly make contact with the Vatican. They like to drink a sip with her from the wine of her harlotry. They thought they were enriching themselves in getting close with this harlot. It was a harlot whom you did not have to pay, but who paid herself for the harlotry that she committed.

But they will have to pay a high price for their flirtations. They do not realize that by drinking of the wine of the passion of her immorality they expose themselves to the wrath of God (Rev 16:19; 17:2; Jer 51:7-8). As they have wanted to share in her opulence, so they will share in her fall. Everyone who does not withdraw from the great Babylon will receive of her plagues (Rev 18:3-4).

V9. “Then another angel, a third one” appears. He announces with a loud voice a message to those who have connected themselves with the beast by worshiping him and by receiving the mark of his name on their fore-

head or hand. You have come across these people in Revelation 13 (Rev 13:12,16). Here, people who have not yet had that done are given a last chance to repent. The warning is, not to be marked. This means that they must face the great pressure of expulsion from the social life.

V10. Whoever, despite this last appeal, sticks to his choice for the beast chooses for an indescribable and endless torment. There will be no softening of God's wrath for those who are attached to the beast. The torment will happen "in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (cf. Lk 16:23-26), for they have been horribly provoked by these inventors and executors of the greatest wickedness. This will not work up feelings of gloating with the holy angels and the Lamb.

Whoever has lived in rebellion against heaven will, beside the bodily torment "with fire and brimstone", be tormented by something else. While suffering those hellish pains, the remorse that he could have been in the atmosphere of the heavenly angels and in the presence of the Lamb, will continually gnaw at him.

V11. To the unspeakably bodily and mental torment another torment is added of which the gravity cannot be expressed in words. This torment is that there will never come an end to it. Also the absence of any moment of rest, a short respite in that torment is an indescribable increase of this horrible and unchangeable situation. Beside the deep seriousness that this verse contains, it is also a simple and adequate proof that the universal atonement is a harsh lie.

V12. The impressive previous warnings addressed to the unbelievers, are an exhortation for the saints to persevere. It will ensure them that it is better to be temporarily tormented *by* the beast than to be eternally tormented *with* the beast. Instead of joining in the general worship of the beast they live in obedience to "the commandments of God". They also keep "the faith in Jesus", that is the trust in Him Who was once on earth the Rejected. The authority of the Word of God and the love for the Son determine their life in the midst of the circumstances controlled by satan.

There is mention of 'Jesus' and not of 'the Lord Jesus' or 'Jesus Christ'. 'Jesus' is the name that recalls the life of the Lord in humiliation on earth.

These saints draw strength from the example of His life on earth. He has suffered under the predecessors of both the political and the religious beast. You recognize the representative of the Roman empire in Pilate and that of the apostate Judaism in Herod (Lk 23:12). By fixing their eyes on Jesus they will be able to suffer the greatest trials with perseverance and not succumb (Heb 12:1-3; Mt 24:13).

V13. God orders John to write that the saints who have lost their life because of the murderousness of beast, will lose nothing of the blessing that is promised to them. The earth considered that they deserved nothing but death. Heaven, in contrast, calls them blessed.

They died “in the Lord”. They have acknowledged and served Him Who was rejected on earth, as their Lord. In that way they have given Him the place that God has already given to Him with His return to heaven after the accomplishment of the work of redemption (Acts 2:36; Phil 2:11). Their tribute to Him for which they had to pay with their life, is rewarded by God by giving them a place with Him. The expression “from now on” makes clear that it is about believers who were killed because of their testimony.

With an emphatic “yes” the Spirit confirms what John must write concerning the blessing of those who died in the Lord. The voice from heaven is the voice of the Spirit, Who is also God. At that time, the Spirit does not dwell on earth anymore, for with the rapture of the church the Spirit also left the earth. Wherever the church dwells the Spirit also dwells (Jn 14:16; 1Cor 3:16; 2Thes 2:7b). The situation will then be like it was before the church was on earth. Then the Spirit did not dwell on earth, but He was working on earth.

After His confirmation, the Spirit points to the consequences of their death: “They may rest.” After they have gone through all uproar and persecution, they now experience a beneficial rest. What a contrast to the endless restlessness of those who are in never ending torment (verse 11)! Just a little, and then the slain saints will also be rewarded for their deeds.

Their deeds of faith are not left behind on earth, but “follow with them”. The deeds of all who have been killed after the rapture will be remembered by God. Nothing will be forgotten. They will receive the reward out of the

hand of the Lord Jesus. It consists of being allowed to reign with Him in the kingdom of peace. For that reason it sounds: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." They are blessed indeed. Aren't they?

Now read Revelation 14:7-13 again.

Reflection: What individuals or groups of individuals are addressed here?

## Rev 14:14-20 | The Two Harvests of the Earth

*14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud [was] one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped. 17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. 18 Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe." 19 So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered [the clusters from] the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. 20 And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.*

In this section we see two scenes that both deal with judgment. Both scenes represent the judgment in the picture of a harvest. The first scene (verses 14-16) shows the judgment in the metaphor of a wheat harvest. The second scene (verses 17-20) shows the judgment in the metaphor of a wine harvest. That two metaphors are used means that the judgment has different aspects. Both scenes are related to the coming of the Lord Jesus.

V14. Together with John we look at the first metaphor. He sees "a white cloud". 'White' speaks of cleanness, purity. Elsewhere is mention of a white horse (Rev 19:11) and a great white throne (Rev 20:11). The cloud makes us think of the glory in which God was in the midst of His people Israel. That cloud led the people through the wilderness and dwelled in the tabernacle and later in the temple (Exo 40:35; 1Kgs 8:10-11; cf. Mt 17:5).

Then John sees a person, One like "a son of man" (Rev 1:13; Dan 7:13). That is the Lord Jesus. He sits on the white cloud as He sits on the white horse and on the great white throne. Absolute purity is one of His characteristics in the exercise of judgment. He appears in Divine, royal glory, presented in the "golden crown" He has "on His head". What a contrast to the crown of thorns that He once had on His head on earth. "In His hand" He has "a

sharp sickle". The instrument for the harvest has been sharpened, ready to cut the harvest in one smooth movement.

V15. The picture of the Lord Jesus on the cloud radiates rest. He waits for the time to act. Authority to execute judgment is given to Him because He is the Son of Man (Jn 5:27). Then another angel comes out of God's holy presence to announce that the hour to judge has come. This is the hour which the Lord Jesus did not know of as Man, an hour that was only known by the Father (Mk 13:32).

The reason for judgment is also given and is clear. An end has come to all patience, for "the harvest of the earth is ripe". 'Ripe' possibly has the meaning of 'rot', which therefore indicates the incorrigible corrupt moral condition of the earth, so that the judgment that will be executed will be fully justified. 'Ripe' also indicates that God has shown an excess of patience before He makes that judgment to be executed.

V16. When it has been announced that the hour has come, the Lord Jesus comes into action. He swings His sickle over the earth and reaps the earth. Now what's going on here? In order to get a better picture of it you should take a look at the parable of the weeds (or tares) among the wheat in the Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 13:24-30,36-43). There you see that with the wheat harvest a distinction is made between tares (a weed that looks very much like wheat) and wheat. When the harvest time has come – which is the moment that the Lord Jesus swings His sickle over the earth – the Son of Man says to His angels that they must gather all stumbling blocs, and those who commit lawlessness, and throw them into the furnace of fire.

In the parable you see some things that clarify the scene of the reaping of the earth. The Lord Jesus executes judgment, but He does so through His angels. The wheat harvest is a picture of the separation between good and evil (cf. Mt 3:12), but here the emphasis is on the judgment on the evil. In the end time the judgments are not executed at the same time, but they take place during the entire three and a half year period of the great tribulation. During all those different judgments the angels go out to reap away the unbelievers through judgment. They gather the weeds

(the unbelievers who are judged) in bundles. The great Director, He Who directs everything, is the Man Jesus Christ.

V17. After these actions you become a witness of another scene that deals with the execution of judgment. You can see that by the “sharp sickle” which, as in the previous scene, also plays a major role here. As the har-binger of this judgment another angel comes out “of the temple which is in heaven”, that is, from the holy presence of God. Here it is not the Lord Jesus Who has the sharp sickle, but the angel. Just like the Son of Man he waits for a command to act. That command comes from another angel who comes after him.

V18. The second angel who appears in this scene does not come out of the temple, but “from the altar”. That makes the altar to be the starting point of this judgment. The thought of judgment is empowered because it is said of this angel that he “has power over fire”. Fire has to do with the exercise of judgment. You have come across the altar already. In Revelation 6 you have seen under the altar the souls of martyrs and you have heard them calling for vengeance (Rev 6:9-10). Their cry for vengeance is answered now. Also in Revelation 8 you have seen the altar in connection with judgment (Rev 8:5).

The altar in the Old Testament is the place where the sacrifices were brought as a picture of the true sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. The fire consumed the sacrifice. In this way the Lord Jesus has been in the fire of God’s judgment for each who believes in Him. However, he who rejects His sacrifice will have to undergo the fire of God’s judgment himself (Jn 3:36).

The angel from the altar with power over fire commands the angel with the sharp sickle to carry out the harvesting of “the clusters from the vine of the earth”. God presents His people Israel in the Old Testament amongst other things as a vine (Psa 80:8,14-15; Isa 5:2-7; Jer 2:21). In this picture He shows that He expected of His people that they would testify of Him in a way that He would receive fruit from them. That fruit would consist of the joy, of which the wine is a picture, that He would find in His people.

He did everything that could cause the people to deliver that fruit. But His people have used the fruit for themselves. They have thought only of their

own joy and not of what God expected of them. They even rejected and killed the Owner (Mt 21:33-39).

When the Lord Jesus came to earth, He as the true vine (Jn 15:1) took the place of this depraved vine. He was rejected by His people. After He was rejected a new testimony was established, Christianity. The purpose of this new testimony was also that it should deliver fruit for God, that God would find His joy in it. All who are connected to the true vine, the Lord Jesus, and have life from Him, bear fruit for God.

There are also some who are connected with Him, but do not bear fruit, because they have no life from Him (Jn 15:2a,6). Their connection with Him is an apparent connection. They confess to be God's witness on earth and confess to give Him fruit, but it is an illusion, untrue, false. They bring forth stinking fruits, just as did Israel in the past.

When the church is raptured, there is only a false Christian testimony on earth. This false Christian testimony will be cut off from the earth by the sharp sickle together with the apostate Jewish testimony. The Lord Jesus will judge every false confession when the false confessor has fully shown his apostasy.

V19. This judgment is different from the judgment that is represented by the picture of the wheat harvest. Here, there is no distinction. The whole harvest is thrown into the great wine press. The severity of this judgment is even more emphasized by the addition "the wrath of God". Especially what is in name connected to Him, but in reality denies Him (2Tim 3:5), arouses His wrath. There is nothing else that God hates so much as hypocrisy. Therefore, He doesn't wait until the grapes are overripe as with the wheat harvest. If the harvest is ripe, judgment comes.

The wickedness of the apostate testimony is great (Joel 3:13). This is why the place of judgment, where God will unleash His fierce wrath (Isa 63:1-6), is called "the great wine press". This great wine press is Har-Magedon (Rev 16:16), where the nations are gathered to fight against God and His Anointed (Psa 2:2).

V20. The wine press is "outside the city". That is, judgment takes place outside Jerusalem. To give you an impression of how terrible that judg-

ment is, it is said how high the blood comes and how far it reaches. The blood of those who are killed will splash up to the bridles of the horses. The blood of those who are killed fills the whole land. The “distance of two hundred miles”, which is approximately three hundred kilometers, is the length of the land Israel from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south.

This judgment is also the fulfillment of the cry: “His blood shall be on us and on our children” (Mt 27:25). At the same time this judgment means the purification of the land of the blood of the Lord Jesus Who was killed by them (Num 35:33). God fulfills His Word, both where it concerns His promises and where it concerns the prediction of judgment.

Now read Revelation 14:14-20 again.

Reflection: What are the differences between both harvests?

## Revelation 15

### Rev 15:1-8 | The Sea of Glass and the Seven Angels

*1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, [which are] the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished. 2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. 3 And they \*sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! 4 "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED." 5 After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, 6 and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean [and] bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes. 7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. 8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.*

V1. John sees "another sign in heaven". A sign means more than an event. It is an event with a message, an event with a signal. He has already seen two times earlier a sign in heaven. In the first sign Israel was centered and the Child That would come from it, that is the Lord Jesus (Rev 12:1-2). The second sign showed the dragon and his furious attempts to kill the Child (Rev 12:3-17).

Both signs tell us about the history of Israel and what will happen to this people in the time of the great tribulation. The sign that John sees now tells us about the events that the rest of the human race will be facing. And it is not just any sign. It is "great", which means that it is a comprehensive sign. It is also "marvelous", for it will exceed the comprehension of everyone who will have to do with it.

The sign consists of “seven angels who had seven plaques, [which are] the last”. You have already been a witness of the seven seal judgments and of the seven trumpet judgments. Now the seven bowl judgments follow. After these seven plagues there are no more plagues. With these seven plagues the wrath God is finished and His righteous wrath has become completely silenced. But what you will see in these plagues defies every imagination. They are of unprecedented size and fierceness and they follow one another at a fast and irrepressible speed.

V2. But before these last judgments will break loose you first see again the “sea of glass” which you also saw in Revelation 4 (Rev 4:6). There the sea is like crystal. Here the sea is “mixed with fire”. A group of people is standing on the sea of glass. That is, the sea is the basis of their presence in heaven. These people are transparent like glass, they have become known in public. Everything in them responds to God’s holy presence; there is not a single dark stain of sin present. Therefore, they no longer need the water of purification and the sea is no longer liquid. They have also endured the test of their faith and now they are to the praise and glory and honor of Jesus Christ (1Pet 1:7).

Their faith has been tested in a way that we can hardly imagine. But I hope that their faithfulness to the Lord will encourage you and me to also remain faithful to the Lord in our trials which are so much less heavy. They have stood eye to eye with the beast in his tearing death threat, but they have gained victory over the beast.

It is a multiple victory. In the first place they overcame “the beast” himself by not bowing to him, no matter how he threatened them. With their head up, looking to heaven (cf. Acts 7:55,59), they died the martyr’s death. In the second place they have triumphed over “his image”, the image of the beast, by not heeding the deceiving appeal to worship this idol. In the third place they have overcome “the number of his name” by not selling their soul to take part of social life in that way (Rev 13:15-17). Not this group but the beast is the great loser.

The result of their victory is that you see them standing here, raised from the dead, alive and singing. The harps they hold are “harps of God”. The harps were given to them by God, destined to glorify Him Who has given

the power to remain standing. Their death was indeed the end of their existence on earth, but not the end of their existence for God.

V3. And what do they sing? They sing two songs: “the song of Moses” and “the song of the Lamb”. Moses is here called “the bond-servant of God”. The company that sings his song consists of people who, like him, have been faithful servants of God. Only if you are obedient you can sing a song of deliverance. Moses sang his song with the Israelites immediately after they were delivered from Egypt (Exo 15:1-18). It is the first song in the Bible. In that song they sing about the *power* of God Who has triumphed over the power of Pharaoh and his horsemen. It is a song that fits in the mouth of overcomers of the beast. This is the last time in the Bible that something is said about a song.

They also sing the song of the Lamb. They owe this song to the Lamb. It’s because of Him that they can sing this song, because He has delivered them. In the song of the Lamb they give praise to the *Person* of the Lamb. Through the Lamb the Israelites were delivered (Exo 12:1-13), through the Lamb all the believers of all ages have been delivered (Rev 5:9).

In the songs the “works” and the “ways” of God are sung (Psa 103:7). The works are extensive and impressive (verse 1). They are ascribed to the “Lord God, the Almighty”. ‘Lord’ is His name as Master, Owner. He is the Owner of the entire creation. In this book He asserts His right over creation. As ‘God, the Almighty’ He is working to regain possession of His creation. He does not need any help from anyone. The judgments that are abundantly exercised in this book are an expression of His almighty works. Just as almighty He is in keeping His own.

As “King of the nations” (cf. Jer 10:7) He advances toward His goal by various ways. How hard the nations may try to stop Him in His ways, it will all appear to be useless attempts. In majesty, authority and power He exceeds far beyond them. In His dealings with them He is “righteous and true”. His ways have a *righteous* foundation. The different judgments that pave the way to His goal are deserved. The believers of that time understand that. They agree with it and look forward to Him (Isa 26:8-9). In exercising judgments, He is *true*. There is no deception in it. He judges because He is displeased about evil and not out of gloating.

V4. The overcomers are impressed about God's works and ways. Can you imagine yourself or other people not fearing and glorifying the Lord if you let yourself become aware of God's omnipotence and kingship? That's no question for the overcomers. They see Him, they see His deeds and His goal. They also see the rebellion of the beast and his followers and the foolishness of their works and ways. In opposition to the unholiness prevailing on earth, they praise the Lord as the only Holy One. He alone is fully separated from the evil.

His "acts", which are His righteous acts (cf. Rev 19:11) that "have been revealed" in His judgments, coerce the nations to draw near to Him and bow down before Him (Psa 72:11). They will have to acknowledge that no one else is God, but He alone. The general worship of the beast gives way to the general worship of God Who alone is worthy of worship.

Pay attention that the overcomers do not sing about their *own* experiences, about *their* perseverance and *their* victory over the beast. They are much more occupied with the power of God, with what He has done. They are full of His righteousness and holiness. Isn't that an indication for you to think in your thanksgiving especially of what *God* has done in the Lord Jesus?

V5. With John you now get to see the preparations for the last plagues. "The temple ... in heaven was opened." You're looking into the temple, the dwelling place of God's holiness. This dwelling place is here closely connected to the tabernacle which is here called "the tabernacle of testimony" (Exo 25:22; Num 10:11). The tabernacle was God's transportable house during the journey of Israel through the wilderness. In the interior of the tabernacle was the ark and in the ark the two tablets of stone were placed. The two tablets of stone are 'the testimony'. You're looking here at the deepest inner, the heart of heaven.

The place from which the following acts are done is connected to the holiness of God (temple), as described on the tablets of stone (tabernacle of the testimony). According to those tablets, the law, God will not only judge His people, but also the world. On those tablets the demands of His righteousness and holiness are written. God has no other standard according to which He judges than the standard which He has established in the law.

For those who feel the need to 'check' God, receive the material here. It always becomes apparent that God is justified in His words and when He prevails when He is judged (Rom 3:4).

V6. The temple has been opened in the sight of John. Then it is not the high priest or priests whom he sees coming out of it, as you may be expecting. No, he sees "seven angels" coming out. These angels do not come from that sanctuary with blessing, but with judgment. They have "the seven plagues", of which you have read in verse 1 that those are the last plagues.

The appearance of the angels fills people with respect. They are "clothed in pure bright linen", which shows that they represent God in His holiness. Wherever they act in judgment, their purity will sharply contrast to the filthiness of the objects they judge. By this contrast the righteousness of the judgment is emphasized.

They also have the "golden sashes" girded around their chests. Their chests refer to their inner being, their heart, their feelings. Angels also have feelings. They are not insensitive machines that are executing what they were ordered to do without any feeling. The feelings of these angels are guided by the glories of God of which the gold speaks. Glories of God are all His attributes having become visible. Also in judgment glories of Him become visible, like holiness and righteousness. Everything that does not respond to those glories, represented in those golden sashes, is judged by them. In this they resemble the Lord Jesus (Rev 1:13).

V7. Then "one of the four living creatures" comes forward. The living creatures are closely connected to the throne of God (Rev 4:6-7), the place where justice is spoken. One of them gives each of the angels a golden bowl. Each bowl is "full of the wrath of God". The seven bowls together make clear that it is about a full wrath. The bowls are wide, shallow bowls of which the contents can easily and quickly be poured out.

When these bowls are emptied there will be nothing left over which God's wrath has yet to come. What you see here is therefore a particular solemn but also terrible moment. The seven most terrible plagues from the history of earth are about to break loose. These plagues will be causing death and destruction. They will make an end to everything that is alive. In that way

there comes an end to any form of life that had been lived without God. In God alone there is life. He “lives forever and ever”. Everything that does not draw life from Him will be tormented forever by the pains of death.

V8. After the bowls have been distributed “the temple was filled with smoke”. This time it is not the smoke of God’s glory in which He was clothed when He came to dwell with His people in the tabernacle and in the temple on earth (Exo 40:34, 35; 1Kgs 8:10-12; cf. Isa 6:4). This time it is about God’s glory that is exhibited in judgment and in which His power becomes visible. The smoke indicates that it is no longer possible to enter the temple for intercession (cf. Lam 3:44). The time of intercession is over.

There is no more delay, the judgments are inevitable and concluding. Only when the judgments have been fully executed and when everything that is in contrast to God has been removed, the temple can be entered again.

Now read Revelation 15:1-8 again.

Reflection: What are the characteristics of the company on the sea of glass? What are the characteristics of the seven angels?

## Revelation 16

### Rev 16:1-4 | The First, Second and Third Bowl

*1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." 2 So the first [angel] went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. 3 The second [angel] poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like [that] of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died. 4 Then the third [angel] poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood.*

V1. John hears how out of the smoke-filled temple "a loud voice" sounds. 'Loud voice' is literally 'great voice'. In this chapter the word 'great' occurs often (verses 9,12,14,18,19,21). The unrighteousness is great and God's wrath is great. Great and extensive is the area of the unrighteousness, great and severe are therefore the means of God's wrath.

The loud voice commands "the seven angels" to act. They must go, each of them to the territory on earth that was assigned to them. There they must pour out "the seven bowls of the wrath of God". 'To pour out' is a sudden and complete effusion of the content on the objects of God's wrath. The wrath of God does not consist here, so to speak, of a tap with a stick to correct wrong action, but of a complete overpowering and striking down of evil.

Bowl after bowl is emptied with a single move. The plagues follow one another in a great pace. Probably these judgments that spare nothing and no one, will be finished within a few days. They are not announced, as it happened with the two previous series of plagues – seals and trumpets. They happen without any warning because God has already warned enough (Pro 29:1).

V2. The first four bowls are much like the first four trumpets in Revelation 8. The plagues of the first four bowls strike the same areas as the first four trumpets did. However, the difference is that the trumpet plagues struck a

limited part of the earth, a third part, while the bowl plagues doesn't have that limitation.

To emphasize the speed of action, it is not said 'and the first angel went', but "so the first went". You find that also in each of the next cases. The first pours out his bowl on the earth. That is not the earth in the broad sense of verse 1, but in the limited sense of 'the dry land', because in the following there is also mention of other areas on earth, such as the sea and the rivers.

When the angel has poured out his bowl the consequences immediately become visible. The people who are connected to the beast and worship his image, get a loathsome and malignant sore as a mark. This couldn't be just a small sore that you can put a plaster on, but it is an enormous, striking sore that cannot be treated. A sore is an outburst of inner uncleanness that goes together with pain and that changes the outer beauty into repulsiveness.

For people who sacrifice everything for a perfect body, both in terms of health and shape, this is a disaster of unprecedented proportions. They have done everything to keep their body in top condition and now by one act of God's wrath their body turns into a wreck, a pitiful example of misery and pain. Such as satan once struck Job with loathsome sores (Job 2:7), God now strikes the followers of the beast with them (cf. Exo 9:10; Deu 28:27,35).

V3. Without a renewed command from heaven – the command in verse 1 is one command for all seven angels – the second angel empties his bowl. The area that was given to him is "the sea". The emptying of his bowl has the direct result that the sea becomes "blood". However, it is not blood that flows, in which movement is possible, but it is blood that is clotted. The blood in a dead person is not running anymore. The sea turns into a clotted mass. Everything that lives in it cannot move anymore and dies immediately on its spot. The stench of the whole will be terrible and unbearable (cf. Exo 7:19-21).

Spiritually applied the sea is a symbol for all nations where things are disordered, in contrast to the earth as a symbol of an ordered whole. Everyone lives for himself, authority is not acknowledged. At the emptying

of the second bowl this conduct will become a plague. In this way each individual will be left to his own, that it will be no more possible for him to be reached or to reach another person. As a result of utter mental numbing, all communication is dead. Loneliness prevails. As dead as they already were in the spiritual sense concerning their relationship with God, now death has also entered in their relationships with their neighbor.

V4. In case there might still be any hope that fresh water can run to the sea from the rivers, which may cause it to live again, then this hope is erased by the third angel. The bowl that he pours out, strikes “the rivers” that they become blood. This also happens to the stand-alone “springs of water”. No water can be drawn for one’s own refreshment or to bring refreshment elsewhere.

All the water has turned into blood. Every possibility to bring life where death is, is cut off. When man is cut off from God and from his neighbor, he is utterly subject to the influence of death, without any alternative.

Now read Revelation 16:1-4 again.

Reflection: What do you find poignant in the description of these bowl judgments?

**Rev 16:5-11 | Testimony, the Fourth and Fifth Bowl**

*5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; 6 for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it." 7 And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." 8 The fourth [angel] poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. 9 Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory. 10 Then the fifth [angel] poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, 11 and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.*

V5. After the third had emptied his bowl and before the fourth empties his bowl, the voice of another angel sounds. He is furthermore indicated as "the angel of the waters". The waters seem to be the area that is given to him by God to act there (cf. Rev 7:1; 14:18). Because of this, he will connect in a special way with the second angel and the third angel. The angel speaks to God and says to Him that His judgments show that He is "righteous". The angel agrees with its righteousness.

He also recognizes that God's judgments show that He is Who He has always been, the Holy One. God's judgments on the world at the end of history are no different from His judgments at the beginning of the world, such as the flood on the earth and the plagues on Egypt. He is not an unsteady ruler with changing standards all the time. In His judgments He is perfectly consistent.

V6. In the bowl judgments, God acts according to the principle of "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Exo 21:24). You may also say that man reaps what he has sown (Gal 6:7). The angel expresses this by stating that those who have shed blood also have had to drink blood in both previous judgments. Just as they have shed blood, just like that blood came out of the bowls which caused their death.

The words "they deserve it" are sometimes used in a positive sense (Rev 3:4; Lk 20:35), but also in a negative sense. A person also receives judgment

that he 'deserves'. He who has shed "the blood of saints and prophets" has clearly shown that he hates everything that belongs to God (His 'saints') and what reminds him of Him (His 'prophets'). In that way he has got rid of every blessing that God was still giving through His saints and prophets. In that way you make yourself due to the judgment yourself.

In a spiritual sense God provided His people with His blessing by His prophets. But these 'rivers' are rejected by them, which caused them to change to blood. Also now all 'rivers' are rejected and therefore they are changed into rivers of blood. God's Word and His institutions were given to be a blessing. But people got rid of them.

We can see the consequences in the dramatic changes in people's thinking and behavior:

- selflessness turns into self-assertion,
- the submissiveness of children to their parents turns into rebellion,
- the exclusive love of the husband for his wife in marriage is oppressive and people start to live in alternative forms such as co-habitation and homosexual relationships;
- submission of the woman is slavery against which feminism opposes;
- euthanasia becomes a form of respect toward older people;
- abortion is committed out of respect toward life;
- obedience to authorities and submission of employees are answered by rights.

All virtues of God are an abomination to modern, autonomous man. God will judge him accordingly.

V7. After the angel of the waters John also hears how even the altar agrees with a "yes" to the truthfulness and the righteousness of God's judgments. The altar addresses the Lord Jesus to Whom all judgment has been given (Jn 5:22-23) and Who at the same time is God, the Almighty. This altar refers to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and the redemption of all believers. God's righteousness has never been shown more clearly than in the

sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. He underwent judgment for the sins of all who believe in Him.

Therefore, they are free from the judgments that pass over the earth like a scourge. But all who have rejected His sacrifice will be struck by the scourge and perish. From the altar emanates the serious proclamation that God's judgment on persistent unbelievers is as true and just as the judgment that the Lord Jesus struck for those who believe in Him.

V8. Then the wrath of God is directed at "the sun", when "the fourth" angel pours his bowl over it. As a result, the sun burns so hot that its rays become a fire that burns people (cf. Mal 4:1). No sunscreen will help against this, even if the protection factor is so high. This fire is a harbinger of hell.

Spiritually applied, the sun represents great rulers. The "men" are the unbelievers. During the great tribulation, those rulers are hostile to God. While the people thought these rulers were pursuing their interests, the fourth scale will transform these rulers into merciless rulers who will turn against their subjects and persecute and consume them with satanic pleasure. They did not want the gentle yoke of Him Who said that He is meek and humble of heart. Now an iron yoke is imposed on them that oppresses them without compassion (cf. Deu 28:48).

V9. The heat will cause tremendous pain. They know that the plagues come from God and they will no longer try to find a natural explanation for them, as happens today with all natural disasters. Men, however, refuse to admit that God speaks clearly to them in these natural disasters that they may repent. Enormous bodily pains or severe inner torments or both will drive them out to God. However, they do not come to God to confess their sins, but to blaspheme Him. Against their better judgment they blame Him for all misfortune.

Their aversion to God comes out in all their intensity in those dramatic circumstances. They have been indoctrinated and brainwashed by the beast in such a way that it doesn't occur to them to give God glory. The propaganda of the beast (Rev 13:6) has done its disastrous work in his followers. They have never wanted to repent and they still do not want to now. The future propaganda of the beast casts its shadows ahead. Through the

newspaper, radio, television and the Internet more and more expressions and programs appear in which the aversion to God is woven. Whoever preaches the biblical gospel, experiences that people become more and more harsh and unreachable. This is especially true in the Western world, where the light of the gospel has shone brightest and people still boast of their 'Christian roots'.

V10. "The fifth" angel pours out "his bowl on the throne of the beast", that is, on the center of his power. The result is a darkness that extends itself from this center over his whole kingdom. The darkness is reminiscent of the darkness in Egypt, the ninth and second-last plague (Exo 10:21-22). In complete darkness, it is impossible to take a step, because there is no orientation and communication. In that darkness man is fully delivered to himself. He doesn't know where he is, doesn't see any outcome and can go nowhere for help.

In this darkness people have no distraction of the pains that torment them. In great despair and at the same time with undiminished hatred they "gnawed their tongues because of pain". Earlier they were saying with arrogance who was able to wage war with the beast (Rev 13:4; 19:19). Here is God's response.

The beast received his throne from the dragon, that is satan (Rev 13:2). It seemed that with the super high intelligence of the beast, his knowledge and insight, the light on the world and the economy had begun to shine brightly again. All oppressive Christian truths have been rejected as darkness. But now here the moment has come that all the bragging about higher light and higher knowledge is not only put into the shadow by God, but it is fully covered in darkness.

When God brings truth to light, it means darkness for all who have banished Him. He makes the light that has been rejected to become darkness (Mt 6:23). They won't know where they are or where go to. They will not even see any neighbor anymore. In this total isolation the soul is alone with himself and eats himself up in hatred, envy, bitterness and wormwood.

V11. "Their pains and their sores" are a reason for the people to blaspheme God. They blame Him for it. Instead of repenting they persevere in their

sinful deeds. Psychologists and politicians may draw people's attention through conferences to explain their reactions. Every explanation, how illogical it may be, is better than acknowledging that you are a sinner and that you need to repent. They refuse to give up anything of their debauched life and they rather choose to perish with the beast than to bow their knees under these final plagues of God.

Now read Revelation 16:5-11 again.

Reflection: Why do the people refuse to repent, although they are being so severely tormented by the judgments of God?

## Rev 16:12-21 | The Sixth and Seventh Bowl

*12 The sixth [angel] poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east. 13 And I saw [coming] out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; 14 for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. 15 ("Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.") 16 And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon. 17 Then the seventh [angel] poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done." 18 And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake [was it, and] so mighty. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, \*came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague \*was extremely severe.*

V12. It is "the sixth" angel's turn to pour out his bowl. The target of the content of his bowl is "the great river, the Euphrates". The Euphrates river is the natural border between the east and the west. This plague caused the Euphrates river to dry up. This in turn paves the way for the eastern powers – "the kings from the east" – to attack the restored Roman empire. You can think of countries like India, Indonesia, China and Japan. This is about the situation in which the Western-European armies have come to help Israel because Israel is threatened by the king of the North.

V13. At this point, John gets a glimpse into the secret dealings of the trinity of the ungodliness, "the dragon ... the beast and ... the false prophet". "Out of the mouth" of each of them comes an unclean spirit. These "unclean spirits" look "like frogs". 'Out of the mouth' means that propaganda is being spread. The content of the propaganda is unclean. The symbol,

the frog, is very fitting, for it is an unclean animal (Lev 11:10,41). Only one more time frogs are mentioned in the Scripture, namely, in connection with the second plague on Egypt (Exo 8:2-14; Psa 78:45; 105:30). They come from the swamp and are most audible in the darkness of the night, which also fits with this symbol for the demonically inspired propaganda.

Uncleanness has become a trademark. Hands full of money is made with uncleanness. The many millions (!) of pornographic internet sites of which the number daily increases, prove the sensitivity of man to particularly this kind of propaganda. The advertising industry is full of it. That the unholy trinity chooses this form of propaganda makes it very clear how much man has degenerated into a creature that lives only for the satisfaction of his lusts.

V14. Promise people uninhibited freedoms and they are won to the cause against God and His Christ. With this message the “spirits of demons” – for the unclean spirits are demons – go out and get to work. They will perform “signs”, making their message to be accepted easier. Their mission is to persuade “the kings of the whole world” to support their intention. That intention is to wage war against God and His Christ. But as crafty and deceptive as demons have always been, they will surely present their plan otherwise, perhaps as a peace-mission. After all, peace is necessary in the Middle-East, right?

V15. The dark scene is interrupted by a word of the Lord Jesus for the believers who are fleeing from the beast. This statement is meant to encourage them in those turbulent times to continue to expect the Lord and to be vigilant. They must not let themselves be deceived by all events and especially not by the deceiving speech. For those who are not prepared for His return the Lord will come like a thief, which means unexpectedly and undesired.

For the third time in this book the word “blessed” sounds. It is meant as a consolation and encouragement for the living saints. While under the influence of the ‘frogs’ the people will dress and behave themselves more and more shameless, the saints will distinguish themselves by dressing and behaving themselves honorably. The spiritual application is that the people of the world are walking naked, that is, that everyone sees what the

flesh is capable of. Believers have received the garments of salvation by which the flesh can be kept in the death.

V16. With the word “and” the thread is picked up again with verse 14, the gathering of the armies. Here you see that in reality *God* gathers the hostile armies and not the spirits of demons of verse 14 that think that they have organized it themselves through their deception. The place where these armies are gathered is called by its Hebrew name. “Har-Magedon” means ‘the mountain where troops gather’. In that place the Western-European armies will be defeated by the Lord Jesus. The report of that battle, or better said, judgment, is described in Revelation 19 (Rev 19:19-21).

V17. Finally it is “the seventh” and last angel’s turn. Under the previous bowl judgments the whole society has been already destroyed in all its parts. But there is one territory left and that is “the air”. The last bowl is poured out on it. The air the people breathe will be suffocating. Breathing will be heavy and stuffy.

Spiritually applied the air is the atmosphere that is ruled by satan (Eph 2:2). The spiritual air that people breathe will then totally be under the judgment of God. All human relationships that the most wicked person needs to have a meaningful life, such as family, friends and colleagues, will be gone. Nothing is left but desperate loneliness in a hopeless environment, without any prospects. This too is, as it were, a foretaste of hell.

With this, the judgments of God have come to an end. A loud voice announces that God’s holiness (the voice comes from the temple) and God’s righteousness (the voice comes from the throne) have been fully satisfied. With the cry “it is done!” it is indicated that all God’s purposes with His judgments have been fulfilled. There is nothing left to come under judgment.

V18. What follows is a description of the accompanying phenomena to the seventh bowl and the consequences of pouring it out. “Flashes of lightning” underline that the judgment comes from heaven and that it will come suddenly and will be unstoppable. The flashes of lightning go together with all kinds of noises or “sounds” and with “peals of thunder”. Thunder indicate the powerful speaking of God in judgment.

This impressive speaking from heaven is echoed on earth in an earthquake of a magnitude that dwarfs all previous earthquakes (Hag 2:6). This last earthquake will bring a radical end to everything that still gave man any hold.

V19. The earthquake will strike all habitats where there may be people. First “the great city” is mentioned. It is not quite clear which city is meant by that. According to some interpreters it is about political Rome and according to others it refers to Jerusalem (Zec 13:8-9). There are two indications that, in my opinion, speak for thinking primarily of Jerusalem. The first is that Jerusalem earlier is called so (Rev 11:8). The second is that it is said here that the city is divided “into three parts”, which means that the city is not totally destroyed, but is partly spared (Zec 1:17).

“The cities of the nations” are all cities outside Israel. These are the living communities of people. In the past such cities have always been reconstructed after disasters. That will not be the case here. All rebellion of human civilization against the government of heaven has seemed meaningless. Finally, every living community completely collapses.

As final city “Babylon the great” is mentioned. Here we have religious Rome, the spiritual power, the system that has been delivering religion to an ungodly whole. That system is remembered before God separately as a special object on which His wrath is focused. Babylon, the roman-catholic system, has arrogated itself to be God’s representative on the earth and in this way has most dishonored God’s Name.

V20. Also the places where people have fled to escape all the disasters, perish in the earthquake. No more shelter will be found. All those still alive, probably on their way to an island or a mountain to seek a safe place, will be directly exposed to the concluding part of the final plague.

V21. The final consequence of the seventh bowl are deadly “huge hailstones ... from heaven” (cf. Job 38:22-23). The weight of the hailstones is mentioned. Converted, the weight of a hailstone is about fifty kilos. The last drops from the last bowl take the form of these enormous hailstones that come down on the people with great speed and crushing gravity.

The only response of hardened man who is

tormented by sores,

burned by the sun,

clothed in darkness,

deprived of every hold by the great earthquake and

struck by an unprecedented hail

is that he blasphemes God. Here it is no longer said that the people did not repent (verses 9,11). With cursing they ball their fist to heaven and sink down into death.

Now read Revelation 16:12-21 again.

Reflection: What warnings do the two last bowl judgments contain for you?

## Revelation 17

### **Rev 17:1-4 | The Great Harlot**

*1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed [acts of] immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality." 3 And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality,*

V1. In the previous chapter you were a witness of the final judgments on the earth, executed by seven angels by the means of seven bowls. In this way the wrath of God was finished (Rev 15:1). In the description of the judgments in just one verse only of the previous chapter there was mention of the judgment on Babylon the great (Rev 16:19). In the Revelation 17-18 John, and we with him, gets a detailed explanation of this judgment. That explanation he gets from one of the seven bowl angels, one who is involved, someone who knows what he's talking about.

But it is not only an oral explanation. John also gets to see something. The angel invites John to join him to go to a place where he wants to show him how Babylon the great will come to her end.

Before they arrive there the angel informs John about what he gets to see. He will become an eye witness of the judgment on the city that is presented as "the great harlot" (verse 18; cf. Isa 1:21). From the description that follows it appears that this is an indication of the roman-catholic church. He sees further that the harlot "sits on many waters". What those many waters represent is written in verse 15. They represent the peoples of the earth and particularly the nations that belong to the restored Roman empire, which appears from verse 16.

The harlot is the church which is Christian in name and which pretends to represent Christ, but in practice has fully allied itself with the world, the "many waters". John sees the roman-catholic church in the connection she has established with the kings of the earth. Her unfaithfulness therefore appears from her love expressions to the governments of the world.

The fact that she 'sits' on it indicates that she has control over many governments. You see that in particular in the countries where the roman-catholic church has many followers. In her corruptness she dominates the governments. She acts as if she is defending a good cause, but in reality she is out for power.

Like no other church the roman-catholic church has pretended to be the true church and the true bride of Christ. She has also, like no other church in its history, demonstrated thoroughly worldly, demonic, practices in the most heinous ways. It is a real anti-church that in this and in the following chapter is shown and judged in her true nature.

Everything that is said of this false church will make clear that the title of 'great harlot' is totally justified. She acts as if she is the bride of Christ, but she is a harlot. And not just a harlot, no, she is the 'great' harlot. There is no greater contrast imaginable with a God-given marriage relationship.

To think through still deeper this enormous contrast between the true church and the false church you should compare the verses 1-5 of this chapter with Revelation 21 (Rev 21:9-11), where the true church is presented.

V2. "The kings of the earth", the world leaders, have sought rapprochement to her. They have accepted her invitation. Of course they have done that out of purely selfish reasons. The roman-catholic church is rich, powerful and influential. Therefore they accepted and drank with greed from "the wine of her immorality". They even got "drunk" by it. Through their dealings with her, they came under her influence and became intoxicated by it. They do not see through her true intentions. Once those intentions become clear to them, they will turn in hatred against the harlot and kill her (verse 16).

The kings of the earth represent the inhabitants of the countries they rule. In their dealings with the great harlot they drag all their subjects with them, which are all “those who dwell on the earth”. When the pope visits a place today, it attracts masses of people. Everyone tries to catch a glimpse of him. In his position he is the radiation of the power of the church. The mass is blind for his pretense to be the substitute of Christ. To them he is the Christ. He is visible and influential and he is surrounded by mysticism. That’s what the mass likes.

V3. It seems that the angel is showing John a vision. In that vision he sees himself carried away in spirit “into a wilderness”. A wilderness is a territory where death rules. In a wilderness life and the possibility for life there are totally missing. In that wilderness John sees “a woman”, the great harlot of the previous verse. The territory of death seems to be the residence of the harlot. This residence is a good reflection of her spiritual condition. She is full of death. There is no life out of God and with God there.

John also sees that this woman is sitting “on a scarlet beast”. Earlier in Revelation 13 (Rev 13:1-8) you have already come across the description of this beast. There you saw that this beast represents the restored Roman empire. In what John sees here, it seems that the roman-catholic church is sitting on the beast, that is, she rides it and controls it.

This scene symbolizes what is known from church history. There have been periods that the pope had absolute power over the kings of Europe. In the end time the political and the religious power of the roman-catholic church will be great again. You will see this increase of power in the increasingly explicit involvements of the pope with the events in the world. He receives world leaders and they receive him.

You also hear increasingly clear calls from the pope to world leaders on a variety of topics related to life on earth. With such calls the roman-catholic church gives the impression of wanting to stand up for a righteous and tolerant, peaceful society. She also gives the impression of wanting to accomplish that with the world leaders. But she does not worry about the fact that the beast is “full of blasphemous names”, which means that all different forms of blasphemy are present in this beast. The only thing that she wants is to have control over the “seven heads and ten horns”. You

have seen what is meant by the seven heads and ten horns when discussing Revelation 13:1.

V4. Now follows a more detailed description of the woman. It shows that hideous creature represents the roman-catholic church:

1. You see that in her dressing (verse 4), which indicates her attachment to worldly luxury.
2. Furthermore she is drunk with the blood of the saints (verse 6), which indicates that she has persecuted the true believers by fire and sword.
3. In this context also the seven heads are clearly a representation of the seven mountains (verse 9) on which Rome lies and of which it is said that the woman is sitting on it.
4. Finally it is said in plain language that the woman is the great city (verse 18).

The luxury in which she bathes makes her connection to the world undeniable. She is adorned with all earthly splendor and in that way she competes with the worldly leaders. As the beast has a scarlet color (verse 3), she clothes herself with the same colors. Her luxury is so great that the worldly leaders even derive their luxury from hers (Rev 18:3b). Her influence is therefore not only political and religious. Also economically she has a lot to offer and she participates in it by offering her merchandise. As long as it brings profit, either in hard currency or in prestige and influence.

The cup that she has in her hand is “full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality”. ‘Abominations’ means idolatry. The roman-catholic church has introduced idolatry in the Christian church with great craftiness, determination and persistence. The most striking proof is the adoration of Mary and many other people canonized by her.

Recently I read a message which is quite interesting to tell in this context. It confirms that saint worship is still rampant:

Italian Catholics hoping for the support of a saint no longer have to carry a portrait of him or her. They can also download the saint’s portrait on their cell phone. Not every roman catholic leader is happy with the new service, saying it is crude and too commercial. ‘We discovered

a gap in the market and filled it', says Barbara Labate of the company offering the saints on the cell phones. In many taxicabs, passenger cars and trucks in Italy you find a santino (a portrait of a saint) hanging on the dashboard. Millions of Italians carry a santino in their purse or bag. [End of message.]

Of the cup it is also said that it is full of "the unclean things of her immorality This indicates her connection to the elements of the world. You can observe that everywhere in pagan countries where the roman-catholic church has gained a foothold. There she has made the pagan customs to become Christian customs instead of abolishing them. She has provided very cunningly the idolatry ceremonial service, which formerly characterized these nations, with a Christian coating.

Whatever you find in the Bible about Babylon is connected to idolatry. The first reference of Babel in Genesis 11 (Gen 11:1-9) in the history of the tower building of Babel, already shows that connection. The sinful striving for unity and power came from the will of man to be like God. The will to be like God is idolatry in its essence. God is not written off, but He is deprived of His true place. Man puts himself in the place of God and decides for himself how to serve God. Idolatry is born.

That goes together with ascribing spiritual value to something that is visible and tangible and which serves to satisfy the spiritual feelings of man. Also here is mention of an abominable mixture of worldly elements with religion, turning this religion into harlotry. The roman-catholic church is full of these elements. Just think of crucifix, altar and wafer, to name a few.

Now read Revelation 17:1-4 again.

Reflection: What elements of idolatry do you know of in the roman-catholic church?

## Rev 17:5-10 | The Mystery Explained

*5 and on her forehead a name [was] written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." 6 And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. 7 And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. 8 "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. 9 Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, 10 and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.*

V5. The religious feelings which are propagated by the adulterous church and which are expressed, are received with devilish gratitude by demons. Scripture makes clear that satan is hidden behind idolatry (1Cor 10:20). Any admiration for what is visible and tangible ends up with him. Babylon is called for a reason "mystery". Although she displays her name for all "on her forehead", her true nature is still hidden for all who are under her control. 'Mystery' means that insight is necessary to get to know the true nature of Babylon. That true nature is that she is "the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth".

A (Bible book as) Revelation is necessary to see through her true nature. The rapprochement of the protestant churches to the roman-catholic church shows that it is still a mystery to many. By the way, this rapprochement is also more and more found with evangelical Christians. In the light of the rapprochement of protestant and evangelical churches and groups, also her other name, 'the mother of harlots', is significant. This name indicates that the roman-catholic church has children who follow her in her connection with the world. She is the mother of daughters who have the same traits as her.

It can be recognized in all those churches that are connected to the world council of churches, including many protestant churches. You also see it in the state churches that emerged from the roman-catholic church. With them certain characteristics of spiritual harlotry are visible which are also visible in the roman-catholic church. As a result, they should morally be labeled as 'daughters'. That she is also 'the mother of the abominations of the earth' means that she has brought forth idolatry, that she is its origin. Look again at the explanation of the previous verse.

The blindness of the mass for the true nature of the roman-catholic church is also caused by the lack of personal Bible study. And in case people read in the Bible, then it is often because they want to have a 'practical' benefit of it or to have some kind of emotion. It must feel good. Roman-catholicism, with all her rituals and icons, fits in perfectly with this. That is why its appeal is so great and why these things are finding more and more followers. That there is a warning written in large letters on her forehead does not penetrate.

V6. John sees how the woman completely indulges in killing of believers. These "saints" are not the saints that are canonized by the roman-catholic church, but they are the true saints in the sight of God. Such saints arouse her bloodthirstiness. Her bloodthirstiness is also aroused by "the witnesses of Jesus". These believers do not testify of the roman-catholic church as the only true church, but of Jesus. Jesus is the name of the Lord that refers to the time that He was on earth in humiliation, in complete poverty and insignificance. That is in huge contrast to the lavish opulence in which the roman-catholic church bathes.

The blood that the woman sheds makes her drunk. With devilish pleasure she sucks up the blood until she is excessively saturated by it. The sight of it makes that John "wondered greatly". Such massacres and the lascivious and devilish pleasure that go together with it would not have marveled him if they were attributed to the Roman empire. This is why we too should not be amazed when the world hates us. What marvels John is the cruel nature of the woman who claims to be the substitute and representative of Christ. Instead of being a protector of God's people she persecutes

and murders the very ones who belong to Christ. That is the cause of his great amazement.

V7. In response to John's amazement the angel says that the fact that the woman reveals herself like that, must not wonder him that much. Nor do we have to be very wondered. After all, man is capable of anything. Is it not exactly religious people who killed the Lord Jesus, the Son of God? And how did that come about? Because in Him they saw a threat to their position. This is why every religious system wants to cast out or resist everyone who even has any doubt about their right to exist. What is according to the flesh always persecutes what is according to the Spirit (Gal 4:29).

The angel is going to reveal the mystery. In verse 5 the mystery only concerns the woman, but here he adds the mystery "of the beast" and his characteristics. This mystery is opposite a mystery of a totally different character. That is the mystery of Christ and the church (Eph 5:32). While that mystery is associated with complete purity, holiness and unity in the good, this mystery speaks of darkness, destruction and deception.

V8. John receives a more detailed explanation of things that have been earlier described or to which is already briefly referred (Rev 11:7; 12:4; 13:1-9). Then the angel starts to tell him what the images represent. He starts with the beast.

He first mentions four periods in the history of the beast, which is the Roman empire. These periods are described in this verse as follows: "was", then "is not" and then "is about to come up out of the abyss". The fourth and last period is "go to destruction".

1. The first period, "was", starts when Rome is established in 753 BC. Since then, it has undergone a steady and great development, culminating in the acquisition of world domination in about 168 BC. The Roman empire possessed world domination indisputably for several centuries until in the fourth and fifth centuries AD a decline starts which finally resulted in the fall of Rome in 476.

2. Then the second period begins, which is the period in which the empire does not exist, "is not". This is the period in which we still are since the fall

of Rome. At this moment, the Roman empire does not exist. During this period many have tried to establish this empire, such as Charlemagne and Napoleon). This period has had its longest time.

3. The time is coming when the beast will “come up out of the abyss”. That will be the third period. Here the restoration is indicated of the Roman empire that was considered to be lost and that this restoration has a particular source. Never before has an empire risen from the abyss. It is not an empire given by God, but by satan and his demons. It is of demonic origin.

This origin is new. Until now there had been no authority but from God (Rom 13:1-6; cf. Dan 2:37; 5:18). The beast receives his authority not from God, but from the dragon. The abyss is the territory of demons (Rev 9:1-11). The restoration of this empire will provoke admiration all over the world (Rev 13:3). You have already seen these aspects in Revelation 13.

4. The fourth period of this empire is that of destruction, “and go to destruction”. His government will come to an end and that happens through the judgment that will be executed by the Lord Jesus (verse 14). That is described in more detail in Revelation 19 and we will pay attention to it later.

V9. To understand these things you need “the mind which has wisdom”. The angel explains it further. The “seven heads” represent the “seven mountains” on which Rome lies. That makes clear that Rome is the political center of the empire. Rome is also the center of the church, represented by “the woman” that sits on the seven mountains.

V10. But there is second meaning of the seven heads. The seven heads do not only represent seven mountains, but they also represent “seven kings”. How does that reconcile with the ten horns of which we know that they also represent kings (verse 12; Dan 7:24)? The explanation is that the seven heads are seven kings or governments that have exercised power *one after the other*. That appears from this verse.

We read about “five” kings or forms of government that have taken place, “the one” that is now – the imperial form, at the time of John –, and “the other” that is to come. Of the ten kings or rulers, however, we read in verse 12 that they received authority for one hour as kings *together with* the beast,

which means *at the same time*. What in verse 12 is called a period of "one hour", is here called "a little while". From Revelation 13 you know that it is about the relatively short time of three and a half years.

At the time of John there have already been five forms of government. It cannot exactly be determined which forms are concerned here. To mention some possibilities we may think of forms as kings and consuls. In any case, in the days of John the sixth form existed, which is the imperial form.

Now read Revelation 17:5-10 again.

Reflection: What is the explanation of the mystery?

**Rev 17:11-18 | The Kings and the Beast Hate the Harlot**

*11 The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is [one] of the seven, and he goes to destruction. 12 The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. 13 These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. 14 These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him [are the] called and chosen and faithful." 15 And he \*said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. 16 And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. 17 For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. 18 The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."*

V11. In the days of John the sixth form of government exists, which is the imperial form. The seventh form is still to come, for today we still live in the period that is indicated as "and is not". There is a great chance that this seventh form is the form in which the ten kings will freely join and will together give their power to the beast, the head of the empire. Here the empire is identified with his eighth and last form of government, which is the restored Roman empire with its demonic dictator. The beast represents both the empire and its head.

The seventh form is the covenant of the ten kings and the eighth is the dictator. Of this last form we read that it is "of the seven". That is, it is a form that was earlier known and it will therefore not be a new one. It may well therefore be the imperial one. Here also it is not possible to definitely indicate the kind of form. But looking at the data we have, the most plausible form is the imperial one. In any case, it is a dictatorial form.

V12. The "ten horns" are not on the head of the beast, but are to be distinguished from the beast. Those are the "ten kings" that receive power together with the beast that is seen here as the last ruler over the empire. The fact that the beast comes into power at the expense of three of the

kings, is mentioned in Daniel 7 (Dan 7:24-25), but not here. When the beast rules, the kings are also in power. They rule together “with the beast”.

V13. But the real power is in the hands of the beast, the dictator. The cause of it is that the ten kings join to become a state union or the united states of Western-Europe. They will freely – although probably due to their own incapability to face all problems – give up “their power and authority” to put it in the hands of the beast.

V14. The monstrous alliance of united Europe culminates in man’s revolt against the Lamb. The Lamb is called “Lord of lords and King of kings”. These names reflect His majesty and superiority above every power and authority on earth. In a few words the outcome is mentioned of the war that the kings in their arrogance dared to wage against the Lamb. The result is beyond doubt. “The Lamb”, together with all who are already with Him in heaven and who follow Him from heaven, “will overcome them”. That is described in Revelation 19 (Rev 19:11-16).

The Lord Jesus will not come alone, but together with those who are “called and chosen and faithful”. No one can be with the Lamb except he is ‘called’ (1Cor 1:9; 2Tim 1:9). And he who heeds the call of God has done that because he has been “chosen” (Rom 8:29-30) by God. As for their life on earth, those who are called and chosen are identified by their ‘faithfulness’, by the trust they have had in Him and by which they have made certain their calling and their being chosen (2Pet 1:10).

V15. After the angel has shown John what the beast, the seven heads and the ten horns represent and what will happen to them, he explains the end of the other person in the mystery (verse 7). He briefly refers to what John has seen of the harlot and recalls the great influence of the woman, that is the influence that the roman-catholic church has worldwide.

V16. But her religious domination will at a certain moment no longer be tolerated by the dictator and the ten kings that reign with him. Every form of religion, even if it is in the corrupted form of roman-catholicism, is a suppression for the dictator and his companions, from which they will get rid.

The kings and the beast will make an end to Babylon, to her harlotry. She who wanted to exercise her manipulating power over the world, is made

“desolate and naked” by that same world. She will have no more followers and she will be robbed from her power and splendor. What she possesses of earthly wealth, the kings will “eat”, that is, will appropriate.

Finally they “will burn her up with fire”. Nothing remains of all her religious pretensions. Her spiritually corrupted teachings and her earthly possessions can in no way offer her protection. She is consumed by the fire of the judgment that God has executed over her by the means of those with whom she has had such intimate relationships and over whom she had exercised power in such an unjustified way.

Burning with fire is the appropriate judgment. It is in accordance with the law that a daughter of a priest who commits harlotry must be burned with fire (Lev 21:9). Here we find the fulfillment of the seventh bowl by which an end is put to Babylon (Rev 16:19; cf. Eze 23:25-29; 2Kgs 9:30-37).

The world leaders “will hate the harlot”, the harlot, not the city that benefits them so much. What happens here is always true. The political and economic powers despise a church that commits harlotry and that seeks to have influence and favor, because they see through her hypocrisy. By the way, their hatred is only fed by purely selfish motives. With even more hatred they wage war against the Lamb. They do not tolerate any power above them.

V17. God knows how to use everything for His purpose. He uses the hatred of the beast and the kings against every religiosity to judge the false church. He puts it in their hearts to destroy her. In which the kings are of one mind, is given in their heart by God (cf. Jdg 9:23), for His purpose is executed by them. This will be the end of the religious power of Rome, but not yet the end of the political, economic and cultural power of Rome.

V18. Babylon as a harlot is judged. But she still has another character which is that of the city. This indicates the political and economic interest of the roman-catholic church. Religiously, her role is over, but she must also be judged as a political and economic stronghold. Papacy has come to its end. Vatican City is still to be judged. We find the description of it in the next chapter.

Now read Revelation 17:11-18 again.

Reflection: Why do the kings and the beast hate the harlot?

## Revelation 18

### Rev 18:1-10 | Come Out of Her, My People

*1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. 2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. 3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed [acts of] immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality." 4 I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; 5 for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6 Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back [to her] double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. 7 To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT [as] A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.' 8 For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong. 9 "And the kings of the earth, who committed [acts of] immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, 10 standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'*

V1. After the presentation of Babylon as a *woman* (harlot) and the judgment on her, Babylon is presented in this chapter as a *city* and we also see the judgment on it. Babylon is presented as a religious system under the symbol of a woman. The aspect of 'harlot' connects to this her unfaithfulness to and apostasy from God. Under the symbol of a city Babylon is presented as a political, cultural and economic power and that's what this chapter deals with.

With the words “after these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven” a new period is ushered in, which we from the words “after these things”, with the announcement of a new judgment by “another angel”. The impressiveness of his appearance is given added force by the addition “having great authority”. By the way, it seems that it is not just an angel. It may be that this angel is a hidden manifestation of the Lord Jesus, given the accompanying phenomena. Of whom else could it be said that his glory illumined the earth (cf. Eze 43:2)?

V2. This verse describes the condition of Babylon after Babylon as a false church is robbed from her religious power (Rev 17:16) and both beasts are in charge of the ‘Christian’ Western world. The angel speaks with a powerful voice about the fall of Babylon. Everyone should know. With a repeated “fallen” the angel tells the world that the great, impressive Babylon is no longer standing, but has fallen from her pedestal.

The word ‘fallen’ indicates a sudden and instant fall and that it is once and for all (cf. Isa 21:9). She will never rise again. How great and rich she may have been, she has fallen. Nothing was able to prevent or stop her fall.

The perfect tense of the word ‘fallen’ shows the absolute assurance of the prophecy. The moment that John is watching this, there is nothing visible yet of a fall of Babylon. But to God, the future is present, or as here, even already happened, so past tense.

“Bird” here is called, as it happens more often, in an unfavorable sense (Mt 13:32; Isa 34:11-15; Jer 5:27; Dan 4:12). The word for “dwelling” used here, appear only in Ephesians 2 once more where it refers to the dwelling of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:22). Here it concerns the dwelling place of the spirit of the enemy of God. Besides a dwelling place it is also “a prison”. If the demons and all kinds of uncleanness have a dwelling place there, this system must be thoroughly evil. How evil it is, is further demonstrated in the next verse.

V3. There is, as you have seen before, not only mention of religious harlotry, but there is also an economic connection with the world. Babylon is not only a false religious system, but it is also a great politic and economic power in the world. This enticed the nations to drink from the wine she

offered. The wine is here associated with “passion” and “immorality”. It is the cunning deception of the harlot who pretends that trading with her gives benefit and joy, while in reality she has wicked intentions.

The nations failed to see through her treacherous purpose and have eagerly accepted the trade she offered. As a result, the leaders of the nations committed themselves to her in a reprehensible way. She did not disguise her nature of harlot, but the merchants gladly attached themselves to her. Great might emanated from her wealth. The merchants of the world have seen the big money in her and wanted to profit from it as much as possible.

Babylon (or Rome) has gained her wealth largely by offering for sale the redemption of the soul. Many billions have been paid to the roman-catholic church by people who believed that they could buy their beloved ones into heaven. Dave Hunt writes in his book ‘A woman Rides the Beast’ about many more scandals than the shameful distortions of the gospel that has deceived many hundreds of millions of people. He reports of corrupt financial transactions, money laundering from drug trafficking, trafficking with forged securities and cooperation with the mafia (documented in police reports) that for a long period of time have received their orders across the globe from the Vatican.

Also the value of the art treasures that are in the possession of Rome, cannot be estimated. The roman-catholic church is by far the richest institution of the world. And then to think that Christ and His disciples were living in poverty. Christ has told His disciples not to store up for themselves treasures on earth (Mt 6:19). The roman-catholic church does not care about that, but it has stored up for itself a fullness of wealth which is unmatched and over which the pope has the highest management and the greatest access.

V4. This ungodly system which is corrupted to the very core can in no way be a dwelling place of God’s people. How kindly the pope or his subordinates may speak, those are voices from the abyss. To God’s people there comes a voice from heaven that calls to come out of this system. It is not possible to stay there without participating in her sins. Staying there also means participating in the plagues that will strike her. It is the last appeal in the Scripture to come out of what will soon be judged because the peo-

ple have not given the Christ of the Scriptures His true place. The reason for coming out of her is to be a pure bride for the Lord.

Here every believer is reminded of the necessity to separate himself from every religious system that maintains an impure relationship with the wicked world. Literally the order to come out had come in the past to Judah, that was in exile in Babylon (Isa 48:20; 52:11; Jer 50:8; 51:6,9). Separation from the evil has been necessary for the believers at all times and that will remain so, also after the rapture of the church, like here. For us it is about separation in a spiritual sense and specifically in three relations. We are called to separate ourselves from the world (2Cor 6:17), from Judaism that rejects Christ (Heb 13:13) and from the false Christians (2Tim 2:19-22).

In the time in which the fall of Babylon will take place, the church is already caught up to heaven. That does not mean that there will be no believers of the false church that will still exist. God's people who are called here to come out of her, are believers who have repented after the rapture of the church by the sovereignty of God's Spirit. But staying there is absolutely not possible. God cannot be there and He will judge the system. Even though a person may possibly have no part in the prevailing evil in that system, he will defile himself by staying there. That happens by staying in such a system, because it means contributing to the maintenance and in that way to the promotion of evil (2Jn 1:11).

V5. The plagues that will strike the Vatican are so rightly deserved that it may be considered a miracle that God has tolerated it that long. But God judges only when the measure of unrighteousness has been completed (cf. Gen 15:16). In the case of the Vatican, with all her treasures obtained by shady practices, the judgment will come when her sins "have piled up as high as heaven". 'Have piled up' literally means 'glued together or cemented together like bricks in a building'. God remembers her iniquities when her sins have reached that height and that gravity. That does not mean that God has forgotten them for a while, but it means that He proceeds to act.

V6. The double measure of payback is in accordance with her own double action. Her deeds were characterized by horrible wickedness. Her double action is shown therein that she pretended to be righteous and faithful, but she was unrighteous and unfaithful. She was hypocritical in every way.

Her cup which she offered was therefore “the cup which she has mixed”. She mixed the truth with lies, benefit with greed. She presented heaven but she made it a financial source of profit. This very mixing makes her so hated by God. God hates every sin, but He especially hates sins that are committed under the appearance of Godliness.

V7. With all her charms and calls to the world to treat one another peacefully, she has only been seeking to glorify herself. Whatever she has preached of the truth, its purpose was not the glorification of God but the glorification of herself. When the pope writes a book about Jesus, a book that is praised by theologians, even by orthodox theologians, it is a trick of satan. It strengthens the position of the pope even more.

He may theologially write many right things about Jesus, but if he does not condemn his position and the system that he represents, he has not written the whole truth of God about Jesus. He remains to go on with his luxurious life. If he stays there, he will receive the plagues and will share in the torment and mourning that will strike the Vatican. At the moment every thought of mourning is strange to him. After all, he expects to possess the world domination. In his heart he holds on to his position of government. He also holds on to his claim that the roman-catholic church is the bride of Christ. And what to say about the arrogance that he is called ‘substitute of Christ and shepherd over the whole church’.

V8. “In one day her plagues will come”, fast and inevitable. The ten kings will give her a devastating blow in full force, for they are used by God for this judgment, as you have seen at the end of the previous chapter. Nothing can soften the judgment that strikes her. It will be merciless, without compassion. She has to do with the Ruler of the universe, with the almighty God under Whose avenging hand all her pretense turns into “pestilence and mourning and famine”. She gave the impression that she could give life, happiness and saturation in exchange for money and goods. Now she receives what she has done to numerous defenseless victims. She has fallen through the mighty Lord and God against Whom every thought of resistance is plainly ridiculous.

In His glory and excellence He throws this widow down, whereby He uses the means which He in His sovereignty chooses for that purpose as the

most suitable. Through the use of this means, namely the ten kings, the plagues come over her in the most terrible way. She had never expected that the beast on which she was riding, would turn itself against her. But the political, economic and cultural power of Babylon will be judged in a way according to God's will. Therefore it is a definite judgment. She will "be burned up with fire". There will be nothing left of her on earth than her ashes. It will be impossible for her to rise up again from the ashes, for her everlasting fate is the eternal fire in which she will end up and which will rule over her forever and ever.

V9. The ten kings that were ruled by Rome, but which turned against her and through whom God judged her, are not the only kings. There are also "kings of the earth" who have particularly profited from her. They have had intimate relationships with her and have bathed in the wealth it brought. Because of the judgment on Babylon all that falls away. That saddens them greatly.

It is not a sadness because of what happened to her, but because of what they have lost by it. The kings see the judgment, but they have no compassion with her. Their selfishness is the cause of the tears over their cheeks and of their lamentation. When they "see the smoke of her burning", they realize it is over and done.

V10. The kings do not try to help her, but they remain at a distance. Besides the selfish sorrow there is also fear, for they notice that the city is being tormented. They stay away from her. They rather stand "at a distance", than go and see what is left of Babylon. They can see from a distance that nothing is left of that great, mighty, economic stronghold. The fierceness, the speed and the suddenness of the judgment that has struck her, makes clear to them that a greater power is at work.

Now read Revelation 18:1-10 again.

Revelation: Why is it necessary to separate from evil?

## Rev 18:11-24 | The Wealth of Babylon Destroyed

11 *“And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more — 12 cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every [kind of] citron wood and every article of ivory and every article [made] from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, 13 and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and [cargoes] of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. 14 The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and [men] will no longer find them. 15 The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, 16 saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; 17 for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!’ And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, 18 and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What [city] is like the great city?’ 19 And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!’ 20 Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.” 21 Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. 22 And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; 23 and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.”*

V11. The economic world has become dependent on her in such a way that with her collapse all prosperity disappears. From all over the earth mer-

chants have traded with her. "The merchants of the earth" may include top executives of international companies. They owe their riches also to their merchandize with the Vatican.

V12-13. The fabulous riches of the Vatican have been gained through a fabulous extent of cargoes or merchandize. A summary of twenty eight kinds of cargoes follows that are roughly to be divided in seven market areas:

1. mineral resources as a basis of all securities = the market for investments;
2. fine clothing materials = the textile market;
3. precious objects of wood, metal and stone = the (luxurious) housing market;
4. spices and incenses = the market of luxurious goods;
5. drinks and food = the food market;
6. means of transport = the transport market
7. slaves and human lives = the labor market.

In the summary "slaves and human lives" are mentioned the last. That is typical for the value that men had in the eyes of Rome. They were considered to be less than all previous merchandize. With the merchandize in "human lives" we can think of the selling of indulgences.

V14. Of Rome itself there is nothing left, but also of any other thing she owned nothing is left. Everything her soul was desiring, "the fruit you long for" has gone from her. She has lost control over it, she cannot grasp it anymore. She has also lost everything in which her eyes found pleasure, "all things that were luxurious and splendid", she no longer sees it. Any effort, if there could be one, to find it back, will be in vain, "[men] will no longer find them". It has all been evaporated, vanished, uncollectable.

Everything she had longed for and what she has enjoyed has been taken away from her. She has lost everything, forever. This is what happens with all riches of a person who uses these riches for his own pleasure and honor. We may think of private aircrafts, luxurious yachts, large villas, expensive cars.

V15. With “the merchants” we may think of the directors and supervisory boards of the multinationals who had the monopoly “of these things”. The reaction of these folks is like that of the kings (verse 9). Even their sorrow, “weeping and mourning”, is purely selfish (verse 10). From the judgment on Babylon comes fear. They no longer dare to approach her because they realize that it is not a natural disaster, but an intervention from on High.

V16. The merchants cry out a double “woe”, because they absolutely have not expected it. After all, it was “the great city”. They thought that nothing could go wrong with it. She survived every economic recession. Her supplies seemed inexhaustible. The city was not only great and mighty, but she was also attractive. Her total appearance was glamorous. Now everything has turned into ashes. All of a sudden everything has disappeared, the riches have made themselves wings (Pro 23:5) and those who have profited from it are the losers.

V17. They are amazed that everything happened so fast. There had been no time to prepare an assistance plan. Unlike the judgment on the harlot, which happens in stages (Rev 17:16), the judgment on the city happens at once, in one hour. The merchants are very sorry that the great city has been destroyed, but only because of the downfall of “such great wealth”.

There are still other categories that were struck by the collapse of the city. Not only the merchants, but also all transportation companies of the materials of the city see their profit disappear. The consequences of God’s judgment on the city will be noticed to the ends of the earth.

V18. Despite the fact that these merchants see the result of the judgment, they cry out their uncovered admiration for the city (cf. Eze 27:32). The profits that this city has brought them are not to be compared with any other city. Harbors like Rotterdam and New York are in the shadow of the Vatican as an economic power center.

V19. They express their despair in the old habit of throwing dust on the head (Job 2:12; Lam 2:10; Eze 27:30). The symbolic meaning of dust is death. And that is indeed the only thing that has left for them. The cause of their mourning does not go further than mourning about the loss of profit and riches. They speak about “her wealth”, which means that this city had

the most precious things that the world may harbor. They are also amazed about the rapid and radical judgment that has struck the city.

From the mourning the great power becomes apparent of this degenerated Christian system in the present world. Kings (verse 9), merchants (verse 11) and sailors (verse 17) from all over the world have had relations with her.

V20. It is not said who is talking in this verse. It is plausible that Christ Himself makes this call to burst forth into joy. In contrast to the lamentation over the destruction of the city by those who have profited from her, is the joy of those who suffered from her. They see that God has done justice. The exercise of justice is God's business, not ours (Rom 12:19). God's right will one day appear for all those saints who have suffered injustice on earth (Rev 17:6). That happens here.

The "prophets" are the New Testament prophets. Apostles and prophets are the founders of the church (Eph 2:20). In that way all who have been built up together as church by their teachings in the Scripture and have behaved as strangers on earth, have thereby incurred the wrath of Rome. They have kept distance from her pursuit of riches and therefore did not contribute to it. Therefore Rome raged against them.

V21. For the third time you read about "a strong angel". The first time it is in relation to the book with the seven seals (Rev 5:2). There it is about the judgment on the Roman empire. The second time is in relation to the little book (Rev 10:1). There it is about the judgment on Israel. This third time it is about the definite judgment on the great Babylon (Jer 51:58,61-64).

Babylon is compared to "a great millstone". That reminds us of a warning of the Lord addressed to someone who causes a little child to stumble in his faith. He says that it would be better for such a person to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea (Mt 18:6). Babylon has caused a lot of people to stumble in their faith by threatening and murdering those who tried to escape her control by faith in the Lord Jesus. Her deceiving practices are definitely over by this judgment that is being executed with violence.

V22. With the downfall of the city all elements of culture and merchandize, which have made the residence in the city so pleasant, have definitely dis-

appeared. In that place of entertainment and noise a dead silence has risen that will never be broken. There will never ever be seen a sign of life again, no such system of wickedness will never arise again. The music has been brought to silence. Once a descendant of Cain introduced music into the world to make the world a pleasant place without God (Gen 4:21). It has become an industry, the entertainment industry, where big money was made.

The artists or craftsmen have decorated Rome and have made it a magnificent and attractive system. The sound of a mill is that of a hand mill used to grind grain to bake bread. But even that sound is not and never be heard again. There will no longer be any household activity.

These consequences of the judgment on Babylon are also the consequences of the judgment that will strike the unfaithful Jerusalem (Jer 25:10-11).

V23. Beside dead silence there is also pitch black darkness. The light will never shine there again, for Babylon is shrouded in darkness forever. Neither will there be any mention of marriage ceremonies she held nor the joy that went together with it. She has always falsely represented marriage as the relation that she herself had with Christ. But an end is made to this appearance with the false joy that was included.

The merchants are here called "your merchants". She got involved with the bank directors, with those who controlled over the financial markets and in that way steered the economy and exerted her deceiving influence on it. In that way she has ruled in and over the world that has the hallmark of having rejected Christ and living in rebellion against Him. To exercise her influence she even made use of occultism by consulting demons.

V24. This verse gives once again the clear ground for her judgment. In her judgment her history will be visible for all. All the crimes that she has committed will then be found in her, will be brought to the surface and be exposed. Up to that moment she has exercised through the ages her murderous practices under a Christian mask. Then the blood will be revealed that she has shed of those who have been slain by her.

Now read Revelation 18:11-24 again.

Reflection: What lessons can you draw from the destruction of the wealth of the city of Babylon?

## Revelation 19

### Rev 19:1-8 | The Marriage of the Lamb

1 After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; 2 BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER." 3 And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER." 4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" 5 And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great." 6 Then I heard [something] like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride [literally: wife] has made herself ready." 8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright [and] clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

V1. The first words, "after these things", introduce a new section, which at the same time directly connects to what is previously said. When the judgment on Babylon is fully executed, there is an enormous reaction in heaven. All who are in heaven form a great choir and express as out of one mouth their great joy about God and His judgment on Babylon. The first word that John hears is "hallelujah!" For the first time in this book and in the whole New Testament you hear this word sounding. It is used sparingly.

The word means 'praise Yahweh'. It is a call to worship God. Worship always has a cause. When you come to know something of Who God is, of His works and of His ways, and you come impressed by that, it touches your heart, it causes you to worship Him. This is what happens, for example, with Abraham when God told him about His plans with him and

Sarah (Gen 17:17). Worship is not the experience of lofty feelings through music with ecstatic expressions.

The word appears four times in verses 1-6 and no further. In the Old Testament the word appears more often and especially in the book of Psalms. There it is always spoken out on the earth, while here it is said in heaven. The first time you find it in Psalm 104 (Psa 104:35). Psalm 104 speaks prophetically about the millennial kingdom. Here in Revelation 19 the time has come that the millennial kingdom is established and a visible content is given to 'hallelujah'.

God is honored and praised as the One to Whom "salvation" belongs. The point here is the coming of the ultimate and full salvation of everything that He Himself had planned to save (1Pet 1:5). In that salvation His "glory" and His "power" become visible. This is the salvation He has worked with the power that belongs to Him.

V2. There is no doubt that His judgments are "true" and "righteous". This is true for all judgments, but these characteristics are specifically praised in view of the judgment on "the great harlot". The word 'harlot' emphasizes again her unfaithfulness which was great and deep. His truthfulness and righteousness become clear in the judgment on her who has sinned in such a general and specifically horrible way.

She "was corrupting the earth" as a whole, all men on it, "with her immorality" and she has made especially God's "bond-servants" a target of her wickedness. She deserves the judgment in all areas. With the judgment because of her abuse of God's bond-servants, God answers the supplication of the martyrs in Revelation 6 (Rev 6:10), who asked Him to avenge their blood. The day of vengeance has come (Isa 61:2).

V3. For the second time God is praised, this time because the judgment remains "forever and ever" and there will never again be a repetition of the performance of the great harlot. "Her smoke" is the smoke of the great harlot. The rising up of the smoke indicates that this judgment is a permanent remembrance (cf. Isa 34:8-10). A smoke that rises up to God speaks of the satisfaction that God's love and holiness find in judgment. You see this

in the sacrifices that speak of Christ. With regard to the judgment on the wicked, only an eternal punishment answers to God's holiness.

V4. The elders and the living creatures are mentioned here for the last time. In Revelation 4, they are mentioned for the first time (Rev 4:4,6). They fall down before God to worship Him as Judge. They have also fallen down before Him as Creator (Rev 4:4) and as Savior (Rev 5:14). The judgment on Babylon is the cause to express themselves in an "Amen. Hallelujah!" (cf. Psa 106:48). 'Amen' is a confirmation of the judgments, an underlining of them. 'Hallelujah' draws the attention again to God as the One Who is worthy of praise.

V5. Then "a voice came from the throne". All judgments have always come from the throne. With the judgment on the great harlot a point has been reached that the throne can call for to praise God. Everything God does will be to the glory and praise of His Name. Everything that He says and does reflects His glorious characteristics. And everything that is visible of God causes all who hear Him to praise Him. That also goes for His judgments. His judgments prove His righteousness, one of His many impressive characteristics.

The throne, the symbol of God's government, calls "all ... His bond-servants" to praise Him. It is a call to all who have served Him faithfully on earth, regardless of whether they have been 'small or great' therein. They have served Him with the fear of God. This fear is not being afraid of God, but reverence.

V6. For the third time John hears a voice. It is the voice that reminds him of three things: "a great multitude ... many waters and ... mighty peals of thunder". It is not an unordered mixture of sounds, like a busy market place with screaming people and honking cars. There is harmony in the 'great multitude'. The 'many waters' indicate an impressive and irresistible power. The 'mighty peals of thunder' are the all drowning out messengers that accompany the acceptance by God of His kingship.

The great multitude here includes all heavenly citizens, apart from the church which is mentioned in the next verse. For the last time, the "hal-

lelujah” sounds and this time in relation to the acceptance by God of His kingship. He has begun to reign, which He does through His Son.

V7. The mighty choir of voices with a multiple sound cries out to itself to be happy and to rejoice and to give God glory. The reason is that “the marriage of the Lamb has come”. This happy event is now on God’s program. Now the false bride, the great harlot, has been judged, the time has come for the wedding of His Son.

Before the millennial kingdom of peace public comes, the wedding has to take place first. Then the bride can publicly follow the Bridegroom on His side to reign with Him. That is God’s purpose. What is remarkable, however, is that it is His wedding. At every wedding on earth, the attention is drawn to the bride. Here it is different. All attention is focused on Him.

The bride is here called “His wife”. Yet she remains the bride forever (Rev 21:2). She is wife and bride (Rev 21:9). That she is forever bride means that she will forever keep the glory as bride for the heart of the Lord Jesus. She will never put off her wedding robe. She is arrayed in it and “has made herself ready” to be His wife. The next verse describes what her robe consists of.

V8. The robe consists of “the righteous acts of the saints”. There is nothing unrighteous on that robe. But, you may say, the saints have also committed unrighteous deeds, not only righteous ones, haven’t they? Exactly because of that the judgment seat of Christ is so important (Rom 14:10; 2Cor 5:10). As soon as the church has been caught up, your life, and the life of every believer, will be judged in all its particularities in God’s light. You will appear there in a glorified body. Therefore, it can have nothing to do with eternal judgment. The Judge is none other than your Savior, Who gave His life for you. How then could you still perish?

To purpose of the revelation before the judgment seat is to show you God’s judgment of your life. You will then know fully as you have been fully known (1Cor 13:12). You first need to know how you have been judged by the Lord to be able to judge or reign over other people. Everything you have done in the body, will be revealed, even all the motives of your heart (1Cor 4:5). You will only love Him more as a result (cf. Lk 7:47).

Maybe you will see righteous acts in the robe of which you did not think they were righteous acts. Conversely, things may be absent of which you thought them to be an important contribution to the robe. The question for you and me is now: To what extent do I contribute to the beauty of that robe? Will there probably be acts that will be consumed by the fire (1Cor 3:15), which will cause that there will be nothing left for the robe?

If we speak about our righteous acts, then we speak about the side of our responsibility. Through our deeds we may or may not contribute to the robe. But there is also the other side, which is the side of God's grace that has worked in us, so that we may do good deeds. In a song it is written: 'Whatever good that we have done, it was all achieved through Your grace.' That reflects well what is written here, that the robe has been "given" to her. That determines you that everything you have contributed to that robe is ultimately the work of God's grace.

When the bride appears on the scene, her brilliance will be great. What she wears is given to her by God. What she shows are the purity and cleanness of God Himself (cf. Eze 16:14). "Fine linen" is a precious textile, more precious than the linen with which the angels are clothed (Rev 15:6). Mind the contrast with the robe of the great harlot (Rev 17:4; 18:16).

Now read Revelation 19:1-8 again.

Reflection: In which way do you contribute to the wedding robe?

## Rev 19:9-15 | Heaven Opened

9 Then he *said to me*, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he *said to me*, "These are true words of God." 10 Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he *said to me*, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." 11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it [is] called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes [are] a flame of fire, and on His head [are] many diadems; and He has a name written [on Him] which no one knows except Himself. 13 [He is] clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white [and] clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

V9. For the fourth time (out of seven times) John is ordered to write "blessed" (Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 20:6; 22:7,14). This 'blessed' is related to those who are invited to partake of "the marriage of the Lamb". The only element of the wedding that is mentioned here is the marriage supper.

The invitees cannot possibly be unbelievers. Neither are they the believers from after the rapture of the church, for they haven't got their glorified bodies yet. Their resurrection will only take place after the appearance of the Lord (Rev 20:4). Nor can they be the bride. A bride is not invited.

The invitees can be none other than the Old Testament believers, the friends of the Bridegroom (Jn 3:29; Mt 9:15). Among the invitees are people like John the baptist, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Deborah, Elijah, Daniel, all together men and women of God for whom we have deep respect. Isn't it an unimaginable and inconceivable grace of God that you and I are allowed to be a part of the bride when you compare yourself to such people?!

Then John receives a confirmation that everything is true. It seems like it's too good to be true. He can hardly believe his eyes. It seems as if that's the reason why it is told to him once more as an explicit emphasis that they

are nothing but the “true words of God”. There need not be any doubt that he sees or hears right.

V10. John is so impressed by the scene that he falls down to worship the heavenly messenger. The angel corrects John immediately and says that he must not worship him, but God. God alone is worthy of worship. That is what the Lord Jesus also said to the devil during the temptations in the wilderness (Mt 4:10).

John forgets for a moment that the angel also is a creature. But the angel does not forget it. Good angels do not want honor for themselves, nor do committed disciples (Acts 10:25-26). Only evil angels, and also evil people, want people to honor them (Col 2:18). The angel puts himself on the level of John, not as an apostle, but as “fellow servant”. And he is not only a fellow servant of John, but also of all the “brethren” of John. Like him, these brethren have “the testimony of Jesus”. The brethren of John are believers from both the Old and the New Testament. The testimony of Jesus unites them.

‘The testimony of Jesus’ can mean the testimony ‘concerning’ Jesus, the testimony of which He is the substance. It can also mean the testimony ‘that comes from’ or ‘that goes out of’ Jesus, the testimony that He gave when He was on earth and which He continues to give, but through His servants. Whether it is about Him personally or about what He has said, everyone who has this testimony, that is, has accepted it, has life of God.

In the phrase “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” a significant characteristic of prophecy is given. Prophecy is not just foretelling the future. To know all kinds of things about the future may be food for your intellect, but it really is not food for your heart. Real benefit from a study of the future which the Bible tells us, is only the case if you see that in prophecy it is about the Lord Jesus.

Prophecy bears witness to Jesus. In prophecy it is all about Him. The name ‘Jesus’ indicates that He is the humiliated One. Prophecy shows that He Who was once on earth in humiliation and was rejected, will reign in glory. But it is the same Person. In prophecy it is all about Him and Him alone and not about knowledge of events.

V11. After a long parenthesis, running from Revelation 17:1-19:10, the historical thread is picked up here. In the parenthesis you have seen together with John the judgment on the great harlot and the great Babylon, followed by a description of the true bride and the marriage of the Lamb.

The section that now follows connects to Revelation 16:13-16, where the nations are gathered at Armageddon for battle. These nations return later in verse 19. The battle itself is described in verses 19-20 (cf. Rev 17:14), while in verses 17-18 the result of the battle is already given in advance. The rest of the verses (verses 11-16) are focused on Him Who as the only One fights, although there are armies that follow Him on His march against the gathered enemies.

To show John this interesting scene, heaven opens. The opening of heaven mocks all materialistic and rationalistic dogmas that assume that there is nothing beyond the visible. When heaven opens and Christ appears, clothed in war attire, there is no more denial of a super-terrestrial reality. God enters out of His world into the world of man (Mic 1:3). The Lord Jesus comes in majesty to the earth where He was once rejected to take His rightful place.

In the New Testament there is mention of an opened heaven five times (Mt 3:16; Lk 3:21; Jn 1:51; Acts 7:56; Rev 19:11), each time in connection with Christ. When heaven is opened before the face of John, he sees "a white horse" (cf. Rev 6:2), the sign of victory. On the horse he sees Someone Who is characterized by the names that He has. Those names indicate how He will operate. The work He does is to judge and wage war in righteousness.

He is called "Faithful and True". These names characterize Him in the execution of God's plan with the world (cf. Rev 3:14, where Christ is called by these names, in contrast to unfaithful Christianity). Judgment and war are the first acts with which He is going to execute God's plan, but He will do that in a totally different way than man acts. He is the righteous Judge and "in righteousness He judges and wages war".

V12. The description reminds of a description which you have come across at the beginning of this book (Rev 1:14). The Lord Jesus is described there in His assessment of the church for her unfaithfulness. He is described

here as the One Who judges the unbelievers, namely the beast and the false prophet. The “many diadems” that He has on His head, go far beyond the ten crowns of the beast (Rev 13:1) and the seven of the dragon (Rev 12:3). With His royal dignity, no other can be compared. These many diadems show a dignity and glory that will be visible to all and will command admiration.

In addition He has “a name written” which will be readable by all, but of which He alone knows the profound meaning. Whatever will be seen and admired of Him, there will nevertheless be aspects of His Person that remain hidden for us, creatures. These are aspects that only He Himself and the Father know (Mt 11:27).

V13. His robe being “dipped in blood”, indicates that He will come to exercise revenge (Rev 14:20; Isa 63:1-4). The blood is that of His enemies, not of the martyrs and less of His own. Then you hear His name. That name is “the Word of God”. This name you also find in another writing of John (Jn 1:1,14). It means that He is the full and perfect revelation of God, in both His life on earth and in His eternal existence. He alone reveals both God’s love and God’s holiness and righteousness. He also judges as the Word. He does everything in accordance with God’s Word, because He Himself is the Word of God.

V14. The Lord Jesus will not appear alone. There will be armies that follow Him. These armies consist of all the glorified saints (Zec 14:5; Jude 1:14; Col 3:4; 1Thes 3:13). You can derive that from the description of their clothes (verse 8). Also angels will accompany Him (2Thes 1:7; Mt 25:31). The air-space is filled with a huge, dazzling army. What to John is an impressive spectacle, will be terrifying to everyone on earth.

V15. He will strike down the nations with “a sharp sword” that comes “from His mouth”. He alone has a sword, the armies do not. With this sword He will execute judgment and He, Who is the Lamb, will pour out His wrath on His enemies (Rev 6:17). There is no mention of a fierce battle, there is no mention of any opposition. How could that be when the Lord of hosts appears in full armor and acts in power and majesty. His arm grants Him power and He does not need anyone’s help (Isa 59:16b-18; 63:3).

Although the armies are with Him He personally executes the judgment. After the execution of the judgment He will reign and they will also reign with Him. He does that like a shepherd herds his flock. The judgment is general and it spares nothing and no one, which is indicated by the treading of the "winepress".

Now read Revelation 19:9-15 again.

Reflection: Mention some differences between the bride and the invitees.

## Rev 19:16-21 | The Beast and the Antichrist Are Judged

*16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." 17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great." 19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. 20 And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.*

V16. Once more a reference is made to a written name of the Lord Jesus and also to the place where that name is written. His name is written "on His robe", which refers to His outward appearance. Clothes are what people see of one another. Clothes represent the conduct a person shows and which others observe. With Him, His name can be read from His deeds.

His name is also written "on His thigh". The thigh is the place of power and strength. He who is struck on the thigh, is struck in his strength and will be limping (Gen 32:25,31). His name is the title that God also has (1Tim 6:15), yet another proof that the Lord Jesus is God. He is the "King" par excellence, the supreme Ruler. He is also the "Lord" par excellence, the supreme Lord.

V17. Even before the war has started – the war is described only in verse 19 –, the outcome is already announced. This result is announced by an angel standing in the sun. The sun forms the decoration, the background of his words. This decoration gives his words the power of the glory of Christ Himself, Who soon will shine like the Sun in the kingdom of peace.

All the birds of heaven are allowed to feast on the victims of the war. They are invited for this "great supper" God has prepared for them. This supper

is in huge contrast to the marriage supper of the Lamb (verse 7). In the one supper you see a delicious supper in heaven, in the other supper you see a horrible supper on earth.

V18. The flesh that the birds is given to eat is mainly human flesh. There is furthermore only mention of “flesh of horses”. The emphasis of the word ‘flesh’ – this word is repeated five times – reminds that all human and natural strength can do nothing against God, for “all flesh is like grass” (1Pet 1:24-25). During their lifetime, these people were distinguished from one another by all kinds of ranks and positions. There is no such distinction in death. The birds only see corpses which means food for them. By being given as food to the birds means that they will have no burial. And having no burial means that these enemies will be given up to lasting disgrace (Rev 11:9; 1Sam 17:46).

The angel mentions the different categories to make clear that this supper has been effected by the judgment of God that He has executed without discrimination. His judgment has come on all these different ranks and classes and the horses of which they made use, because everything was in the service of sin. By the way, there will be another judgment where distinction will be made and where every person will be judged according to his deeds. That is the judgment before the great white throne (Rev 20:12).

V19. John sees how the beast and his followers with their armies are preparing for war against Christ and His own. Christ is the Captain, He is at the front. Their battle is mainly focused on Him. But also those who are with Him are the target of their hatred. They think in their arrogance that they are ready for war against the Lamb and His followers. In their audacity they fool themselves to be unconquerable and are blind for His almighty power.

V20. Without a single action of war, the two hostile captains are caught and thrown in hell, without them having died the bodily death. The beast, who is the political leader of antichristian Western-Europe, and the false prophet, who is the religious leader of apostate Israel, have no defense at all. In their lives they were closely connected and so they are in the judgment that Christ executes on them. The false prophet was the cunning

henchman of the beast to deceive people to receive the mark of the beast and to worship his image.

It all seemed successful, but here all their bragging and every impression of invincibility (Rev 13:4) are utterly destroyed in one act full of impressive power. They form an exception to all other unbelievers. They are thrown into the lake of fire without any form of trial, while other unbelievers will first be sentenced before the great white throne. An opposite exception, in the circle of the believers, are Enoch and Elijah who as the only ones were caught up to heaven without dying.

V21. The enemy armies suffer a different fate than their two captains. The Lord Jesus kills them “with the sword”, that is His Word, that goes out of His mouth. By His Word He creates (Psa 33:6) and by His Word He shatters (Jer 23:29). After this judgment, the event happens what the angel called for in verse 17. There is so much to eat that all the birds are filled.

Now read Revelation 19:16-21 again.

Reflection: Which people are being judged in this portion and what is their judgment?

## Revelation 20

### **Rev 20:1-3 | Satan Thrown Into the Abyss**

*1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he threw him into the abyss, and shut [it] and sealed [it] over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.*

V1. The great henchmen of satan – the beast and the false prophet – are seized and thrown into hell. Their leader, satan, still roams freely, but he is laid hold on. This happens by an angel coming down from heaven. Because satan has been cast to the earth since Revelation 12 (Rev 12:9), it is necessary that an angel “comes down from heaven” to bind him. This angel holds “the key of the abyss” to shut the abyss. In Revelation 9 (Rev 9:1) the key is used to open abyss to release the demons from there. Then the beast also comes up out of the abyss (Rev 11:7; 17:8). The angel has also “a great chain in his hand”. What he will do with that chain is told in the next verse.

V2. This is an historic moment. There have been several historic moments, but this one is indeed a specially memorable event. The angel lays hold on him who is the cause of all misery of people because he has brought sin into the world. Then he binds him with the chain that he brought with him, so that satan will not be able to move for a thousand years. Every opportunity to deceive men with his craftiness and to drag them into destruction will be taken away from him. He will no longer be the prince of the world and the god of this age (Jn 12:31; 2Cor 4:4). His rule over man is over.

That he as a person with his fourfold expression – “the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan” – will be bound and shut up, indicates that he in all his variations of wickedness will be shut up and cannot manifest himself in any way. With the judgment on satan the judgments that introduced the kingdom of peace of Christ are finished. Now Christ can

exercise His beneficial kingdom of peace and righteousness for man and creation. The number 'thousand', which appears six times in verses 2-7 and is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture, indicates the duration of the Messianic empire. Otherwise we would not have known the duration of this empire. That's why the expression 'millennial' kingdom is used.

Here, for the second time, the four names for the great deceiver and enemy of God are used (Rev 12:9). He is called "the dragon" because of his horribly violent and relentless performance. He is also called "the serpent of old". That indicates the deadly cunning nature of this monster that winds itself around its prey to suffocate it and devour it. As the "devil" he is the tempter, the deceiver of men. As "Satan" he is the adversary of God. Both these characteristics – violence and lie – are the main characteristics of sin.

V3. Satan is mighty, but not almighty. Nor is he mightier than the angel that approaches him with the authority of God, seizes him and throws him into the abyss. There is no mention of a fight, as it was the case when he was thrown out of heaven (Rev 12:7).

The angel works in a thorough way. After he has thrown satan into the abyss, he shuts it over him. There is no connection for satan anymore with the world above him. As an extra security the angel seals the abyss over satan. Satan will in no way be able to exercise any destructive influence on people.

"The nations" here are the citizens, for the armies of these nations are killed in Har-Magedon. The sheep from these nations will enter the millennial kingdom of peace (Mt 25:32-34).

It will be a time of unprecedented peace and safety, although the heart of man will not be changed, as will become apparent when satan is released for a short time. Righteousness then *reigns* on earth, but does not yet *dwell* there. That will only be so in the eternal state (2Pet 3:13), when sin has been taken away of the world (Jn 1:29). Men can and will still sin in the kingdom of peace, but at that time it will immediately be judged (Psa 101:8; Isa 65:11,20; Zep 3:5).

Those who will be born in the kingdom of peace and will not be born again at the end of it, will rebel against God. The wickedness of their heart will

be exposed at the release of satan. To that end, this release “must” happen. This ‘must’ shows a Divine necessity. This happens “after these things”, which is after the thousand years have come to an end and not one day earlier. It is also “for a short time”, which means that he is allowed to operate as long as God determines it.

It is incomprehensible that people can think that satan is now already bound and doesn’t deceive the nations any longer. There are indeed angels now already bound with chains (2Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6), but that is a totally different category.

Now read Revelation 20:1-3 again.

Reflection: Why will satan be bound for a thousand years?

**Rev 20:4-9 | Thousand Years Peace and the Last Rebellion**

*4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I [saw] the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. 7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. 9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.*

V4. In verses 4-6 the actual kingdom of peace is described, the reigning with the Lord mentioned twice. That implies that Christ Himself is reigning. This is described here very briefly. From Revelation 21:9 it is described more extensively. The Old Testament is full of details about this kingdom. That it is about ruling is evident from the end of the verse and also from the thrones John sees. He also sees that “they”, i.e. the twenty-four elders, sit on those thrones. Daniel has also seen thrones, but he saw no one sitting on them (Dan 7:9). John sees how judgment is given to those who sit on the thrones, which means that authority is given to them to reign.

The thrones John sees are on earth, for Christ reigns on earth, where His throne also is. Earlier you have already seen thrones on which twenty-four elders are sitting, but there they are standing in heaven (Rev 4:4). Here they stand on earth and are sitting on their thrones to reign with Christ for a thousand years. He has promised this to His disciples in connection with the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30). And Paul says to the believers of the church that they will judge the world (1Cor 6:2). The twenty-four elders represent the believers of the Old Testament and of the New Testament.

Then John sees two other groups of believers. These second and third group are believers that came to faith after the rapture of the church and died the martyr's death for the sake of their faith. The second group consists of believers that were killed *before* the great tribulation, 'the souls under the altar' (Rev 6:9). Because of the testimony they gave of the Lord Jesus and their faithfulness to the Word of God, they were beheaded.

When they cry for revenge, they hear that they must wait until the other group, which is mentioned here, will also be killed (Rev 6:10-11). This third group is killed *during* the great tribulation. This group suffered from the beast, but they did not bow to him or to his image. It cost them their life, but now they get the reward.

Both groups have been killed by their enemies who thought that by killing these witnesses they got rid of that hated Jesus. In the same way the enemies of the Lord Jesus thought to have got rid of Him when He hung dead on the cross. But just as the Lord Jesus came to life, so too these martyrs come to life.

To come to live means to rise bodily. It is becoming alive from the dead. Only after this becoming alive there is mention of a reigning with Christ. This is all the more a proof that now in our days, there cannot be mention of a millennial kingdom of peace where Christ reigns and in which all share who are connected with Him.

"They came to life and reigned." Man now finally gets his actual destination. In Genesis 1 he was already called to reign over creation (Gen 1:26) and in Genesis 2 he received life from God (Gen 2:7). But man has forfeited both through his sin. Through Christ he gets back what he has lost and that in an even more glorious way. He actually reigns with Christ and indeed as a resurrected saint and not as a subject. Faithfulness to God will never cause loss of any blessing, but in fact only a richer enjoyment of it, richer than we have ever been able to enjoy on earth (Rom 8:18; 2Cor 4:17).

Here all who were once humbled are exalted at the proper time, His time (1Pet 5:6). They all once stepped down from their own throne and have bowed before God and may now sit on their throne, a throne given to them.

V5. "The rest of the dead" are the unbelievers, for all believing dead have been raised. They do not rise at the beginning of the millennial kingdom of peace, but they will remain in the grave, in Hades, the place of torment (Lk 16:23). From the moment that the Lord Jesus reigns, no believer will ever die anymore (cf. Isa 65:22). With the coming to life of the believers of the previous verse "the first resurrection" has been fulfilled.

The first resurrection will happen in phases:

1. First, Christ rises (He has already risen);
2. then all who are of Christ will rise at His coming (1Cor 15:23).

Also the coming of Christ will happen in phases:

1. He will come first to take up the church and all Old Testament believers in the air to be with Him (1Thes 4:15-18). On this occasion the believers who are dead will be raised and the believers who are alive will be changed.
2. Then the marriage of the Lamb will take place, as you have seen in chapter 19 (Rev 19:7).
3. Then the Lord Jesus will come from heaven for the second time, this time together with the church and the other believers to defeat His enemies and to establish His kingdom. That is the moment that the martyrs of verse 4 will rise to participate also in the government of Christ.

Then the first resurrection is complete.

The unbelievers will become alive only after the kingdom of peace and will be judged before the great white throne where only unbelievers will stand. The body of the unbelievers will be made alive, but the spirit will remain spiritually dead. With this body they will be in hell forever and also be dead. They will stand as the dead before the great white throne.

So there are two resurrections:

1. a resurrection of the righteous, or the first resurrection, and
2. a resurrection of the wicked (Lk 14:14; Acts 24:15).

Between both resurrections is a period of a thousand years. The two resurrections are mentioned by John in his Gospel (Jn 5:29):

1. the resurrection of life and
2. the resurrection of judgment.

V6. It is an extraordinary privilege to partake of the first resurrection. He who partakes of that is fully unreachable for the power of the second death, which is hell. The first death is bodily and temporary; the second death is bodily and eternal. By the way, death and life are concepts that must be read in their context to understand their meaning. You may encounter, for instance, that it is said of the bodily dead that they live (Mt 22:32) and of the bodily living it is said that they are dead (Eph 2:1).

All who partakes of the first resurrection are priests “of God and of Christ” and not ‘for’ God and ‘for’ Christ. They distribute the priestly blessing on behalf of God and on behalf of Christ to the creation over which they will reign with Christ. ‘Reign’ literally means ‘reign as kings’. They come from heaven to be priests on earth. They are not priests who represent people before God, but priests who represent God before men. In this, they resemble again the Lord Jesus as the King-Priest (Zec 6:13; Gen 14:18).

V7. The word “completed” doesn’t only mean that the thousand years have passed and are ‘over’, but it also implies that they have been ‘fulfilled’, in the sense that an established goal has been achieved. The earth has had its sabbath’s rest.

Now before the peace of the kingdom of peace culminates in the peace of eternity, it is necessary that humanity be subjected to a final test. For this purpose what was already announced at the end of verse 3 will happen, namely that satan must be “released” for a short time “from his prison”.

V8. The nature of satan has not changed by his stay in the abyss, nor has the nature of man. Satan is unchangeably wicked. When he is released he immediately acts just as he always did. He will go out over the whole earth, to all its four corners (cf. Isa 11:12; Eze 7:2) with the purpose to deceive the nations. The corners of the earth literally means that these people find themselves far from the center of blessing, Jerusalem.

From the deception by satan it also appears that sinful flesh of man has not changed under the greatest blessing. Many have pretended to be obedient to the Lord Jesus (Psa 18:44; 66:3; Mic 7:17). They pretended to acknowl-

edge Him as Lord, but they only did so because they (justly) feared judgment. But the flesh always remains hostile toward God (Rom 8:7), even if it pretends submission. In this way, man loses the argument of always blaming satan to justify himself (cf. Gen 3:13). There can be no question of that now. Also without the devil the heart of man will not change for the better.

The Gog and Magog that John mentions should not be confused with Gog in the land of Magog that Ezekiel mentions (Eze 38:1-6; 39:1-2). The army that Ezekiel refers to comes from a certain area, the far north. When the Lord Jesus has already taken his seat on the throne in Jerusalem, Gog will march against Israel and be defeated on the mountains of Israel. The Gog that John mentions comes from everywhere. John uses this name because of the great demonical similarities between both attacks.

Satan has great success in the recruitment of men for his army. A huge, uncountable army is emerging.

V9. Under the influence of satan, this vast army comes up on the broad plain of the earth. The destiny is the camp of the saints and Jerusalem, which is here called "the beloved city" (Psa 78:68; 87:2), the center of the earth. The beloved city is also the place where the saints camp, where they have rest. They are separated from the pagans that find themselves at the corners of the earth.

This enormous army is as blind for the power of the Lord Jesus as the armies were, that went to Jerusalem before the kingdom of peace (Rev 19:19-20). God sends His consuming fire from heaven and there is no enemy left. The description of this war is even shorter than the one in the previous chapter.

Now read Revelation 20:4-9 again.

Reflection: What groups of people may reign with the Lord Jesus?

## Rev 20:10-15 | The Great White Throne – the Lake of Fire

*10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is [the book] of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one [of them] according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

V10. The devil gets a special treatment. He is the instigator of the mass rebellion, but this is the last time he is able to do his diabolic work. His eternal destiny is “the lake of fire and brimstone” into which he is “thrown”. In that way he receives the absolute, unchangeable lowest point of his fall which has been executed in four phases.

1. First he has fallen into sin by his pride (1Tim 3:6). As the liar and the father of lies (Jn 8:44) he has spread deceptions and committed his murderer's work from the beginning of creation. This is how he has been occupied for thousands of years.
2. But you have noticed that at a certain moment he is thrown down to the earth (Rev 12:9), where he with the greatest wrath causes death and destruction because he knows that he has got only a little while.
3. After a course of three and a half years God makes an end to his rage and has him thrown into the abyss to be shut up there for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-3). From there he will be released
4. to make his definite fall to end up in hell, that has been prepared for him and his angels (Mt 25:41).

There he meets his two vassals who were thrown down there before him (Rev 19:20). They will not be able to help one another, but will have enough of their own pains and torments they will suffer endlessly.

V11. The defeated rebels will be in Hades for only a short time because immediately after them being consumed by God's fire, the judgment follows before the "great white throne". That they have been consumed by God's fire does not mean that they have stopped to exist.

John sees a great white throne. It is a 'great' throne because He Who sits on it is great in majesty and great in authority. It is a 'white' throne because He Who sits on it is perfectly pure. His throne as a symbol of His kingdom and His Person are perfectly in agreement with one another. The Judge is perfectly pure in His judgment. He judges perfectly righteous. In His judgment there is not a single impure element. He is incorruptible. Every investigation of His trustworthiness on earth has ended in a testimony of His perfect honesty.

No one can oppose the judgment that He sentences and executes. He will convince everyone who appears before His throne of the righteousness of His judgment and everyone will agree. Every mouth that is still braggingly opened to heaven will then be stopped. The pure whiteness of the throne is the reflection of the glory of God Who is light and in Whom is no darkness at all (1Jn 1:5).

In the Scripture there is mention of three court sessions held by the Lord Jesus:

1. The first one takes place in heaven, right after the rapture of the believers. When the believers are in heaven, they will first appear before "the judgment seat of Christ" or "the judgment seat of God" (2Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10). Every believer will get to see there what he has done in the body during his life on earth and see whether he has done that for the Lord's sake or for his own sake. He will be rewarded for the good.

2. The second court session will take place when the Lord Jesus returns to earth with the believers to judge the evil and establish the kingdom of peace on earth (Mt 25:31). Before that judgment seat, the "throne of His glory", the nations that will be living on earth will appear. They will be

judged according to the attitude they adopted toward the messengers of the Lord Jesus during the great tribulation.

3. The third court session will take place at the border between time and eternity. Only unbelievers will appear before the “great white throne”. They will be judged by what is written of them in the books.

When the moment of this third court session has come, “earth and heaven” flee away. That concerns the old earth and heaven. With the court session and the judgment attached to it, the entire old state of affairs has come to an end. The old heaven and the old earth flee away to give way to the new heaven and the new earth. They flee away, not so much from the throne, but from the face of Him Who sits on it. The Lord Jesus, Who as the Son of Man has received all the judgment from the Father, sits on the throne (Jn 5:22,27; cf. 2Tim 4:1).

V12. John sees the dead. It is the ‘the rest of the dead’ from verse 5. They do not stand on the earth, for it has gone. But even though the earth has gone, man remains to answer to God for all his rebellious deeds and to receive the deserved wages. Through the power of the Almighty they stand before the throne.

John sees great and small dead people. That is not so much about the size of the body, but more the extent of the crimes they have committed. There are the mass murderers, but also the petty criminals. There are the bragging politicians that have spoken great words, but also the unremarkable family father who took good care of his family. They have one thing in common: they have never judged themselves as sinners in the light of God and have all died in their sins. To whatever extent they have been sinners, the judgment will be justified.

The proofs that form the basis for the judgment come from the books. All of their deeds are presented to them again. The gravity of their judgment is determined according to the severity of their crimes and the extent of their responsibility (Lk 12:47). No one will have a rebuttal. Everyone will be convinced that God is righteous in His judgments. Another compelling proof of their judgment is the absence of their names in the book of life. This means it is absolutely right that they will be thrown into hell.

V13. The dead will be called to come out of the places where they have ended up after their death. In the first place the sea is mentioned. The sea will have to return all the dead that it has swallowed like a great monster. The sea is put in the same line like "death and Hades" of which is also said that they "gave up the dead which were in them".

A person who has died is bodily dead. For that state of bodily death it doesn't matter whether the dead body is on earth or in the sea. That the sea is mentioned as an abode of the dead, will have to do with the untraceable state of a body that has had a seaman's grave. It can also be said of people who have been torn to pieces by, for example, wild beasts, that their bodies are untraceable. But the point is the general thought.

The dead come from death and Hades. You may say that death is the *condition* in which man is and Hades is the *place* where man is. The body that was in death is united with the soul, which was in Hades, which is the realm of the dead, and with the spirit. God knows how to make every dead person alive and to bring him to justice. Every call to appear before Him will be answered by His mighty arm.

Although it is said that they come to life (Rev 20:5), they are still called "the dead". They have no life of God; there is no connection at all with the living God. When they were born they received their life from God. However, they chose to live their own life, without considering God Who gave it to them. That caused them to be already dead when they were still living on earth, because they lived in trespasses and sins, without connection with the living God (Eph 2:1; Col 2:13; Jn 5:25). Now they have come to life again, nothing has changed in their spiritual condition. They stand as dead persons before the great white throne to be judged, "every one [of them] according to their deeds".

That each dead is judged according to his deeds implies that babies that die and children that die in the womb or are murdered, will not appear before the great white throne as dead persons. They have after all, not been able to do deeds according to which they should be judged. All who die in the womb or as a baby will be forever with Him in heaven by virtue of the work of the Lord Jesus.

V14. Then you see the final result of the work of Christ and His resurrection, through which He has conquered the death. Now the last enemy is destroyed (1Cor 15:26; Rev 21:4). Death finds its end here; this is the end of death, as it was foretold in the Old Testament (Isa 25:8; Hos 13:14). After this very last judgment, there will be no more bodily death and the abode of the souls of the dead will no longer exist.

Death and Hades are presented here as persons who are thrown into hell. All evil and all who have served evil will be shut up forever in hell. This is "the second death". The first death is the bodily death and the abode in the realm of the dead. The second death is the bodily existence of man without life of God in the place where the judgment of God prevails forever.

V15. Now it becomes apparent why in verse 12 the book of life had to be opened. Their evil deeds have been written down in the other book (verse 12b). They were judged according to that. Those deeds have never been removed from it, because they have refused the sacrifice of Christ. This is why their names are not "in the book of life". The compelling evidence has been provided. The fate which is their part is terrible and horrifying. It should stimulate us, because we know the fear of the Lord, to persuade people to accept the gospel (2Cor 5:11)!

Now read Revelation 20:10-15 again.

Reflection: Where does the great white throne stand? Who sits on it as Judge? Who are standing before the throne? What is their judgment?

## Revelation 21

### Rev 21:1-4 | A New Heaven and a New Earth

*1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer [any] sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be [any] death; there will no longer be [any] mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."*

V1. When all evil and all evil doers have got their everlasting unchangeable, terrible destiny, the attention of John is drawn to a completely new heaven and a completely new earth. "The first heaven and the first earth" have had their time, they have fled away (Rev 20:11) and have been destroyed by burning (2Pet 3:7,12). In that way room has been made for "a new heaven and a new earth".

The great difference from the first earth is that the sea, which is still there in the kingdom of peace (Eze 47:20; Zep 2:6; Zec 9:10; 14:8) is no longer there in eternity. Also the turbulent, rebellious nations represented by the sea, and the wicked who are like the tossing sea (Isa 57:20) are no longer there. There is an atmosphere of constant, complete rest. The true theocracy has come. God rules, or better said, governs, for here it is more about God Who dwells in rest, while there is nothing more to be restrained, there is nothing left that can rebel. Then righteousness dwells on earth (2Pet 3:13) and not merely *rules* as in the kingdom of peace. Everything corresponds inwardly and outwardly to God's Being.

The old creation is perishable (Psa 102:26; Mt 24:35; 1Cor 7:31; 1Jn 2:17) and therefore transient. The new creation is completely new and of permanent, everlasting nature. The new is not a replacement through renewing and improving of the old, but the new heaven and the new earth have

never been there earlier. The second is not only different from the first, but also better than the first. In the same way, is what God has wrought in the redemption different from and better than what man has lost as a consequence of sin. God has not only solved the problem of sin, but given something far more wonderful instead.

With God the second always has preference over the first. You find often in Scripture that the second or later born is given preference over the first-born. Just look, for example, at Abel being given preference over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Ephraim over Manasseh, David over his older brothers (cf. also Job 42:12; 1Cor 15:47; Heb 8:6).

V2. After the wonderful total picture of the new heaven and the new earth, John sees a city. This city is the center of the whole new scene. Also in the new order of matters where there is no longer sin, there is room for holiness. The city is “the holy city”. Holy means separated. Separation has not always to do with separation from evil. When God, for example, sanctifies the seventh day, it means that He has given this day a separate place compared to the other days (Gen 2:3). In that way, this city occupies a distinct place in the whole new order.

This city is the “new Jerusalem” which indicates the contrast with the old Jerusalem. It is a movable city. It comes “down out of heaven”, for heaven is the land where it belongs. It comes “from God”, for the beginning of the city is in God, in His counsel. The new Jerusalem comes down without coming to earth to form a link, as it were, between heaven and earth, to connect them.

The city looks “as a bride adorned for her husband”. This description makes clear that this new Jerusalem is the church. After a thousand years she still has the same radiant beauty she had at her marriage (Rev 19:7). The ravages of time have not affected her beauty at all. For all eternity, she will possess that beauty.

The city is ‘holy’ and is compared with ‘a bride’. That means that God, Who is light – holiness has to do with God as light – and love, is seen in that city. Here the church is perfectly fit to be connected to Him because it

perfectly corresponds to His Being. In this way she also completely meets His desires, she fits Him, is like Him (Eph 5:31-32; 1Jn 3:3).

This *new* Jerusalem must be distinguished from the *heavenly* Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). With the heavenly Jerusalem is meant the dwelling place of all heavenly saints. The heavenly Jerusalem is the heavenly capital from where the kingdom of peace is ruled. It is the center of rule in which believers from the Old Testament and the New Testament have their place and task. The new Jerusalem consists of only those who are the church of the living God, the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Also when there is mention of 'the Jerusalem above' (Gal 4:26), it is something different than what is called here the 'new Jerusalem'. The Jerusalem 'above' is not that much of a city with reigning characteristics, but rather indicates a sphere in which believers live. That sphere is a sphere of freedom that stands opposite to the law. The Jerusalem above is therefore contrasted with the earthly Jerusalem, which represents the sphere of the law.

V3. After John has seen these wonderful and extensive new things, he hears a loud voice. That voice comes with a declaration from the throne, the seat of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has reached its final destination; it has achieved its purpose. The explanation says that God dwells among men. He does so in "the tabernacle", which refers to the church, for that is the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:22).

There are more names used for God's dwelling place, like a temple and a house. That particularly here it is spoken of "the tabernacle" as a dwelling place, refers to the mobility of the dwelling place, like the tabernacle during the journey in the wilderness of the people of Israel.

It is also nice to consider that the word 'tabernacle' is also seen in what you read about the dwelling of the Lord Jesus among us. When you read "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14), it literally says 'the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us', meaning 'dwelt in a tent'.

The tabernacle speaks about the way in which God dwells among His people. The tabernacle in the Old Testament is a picture of God's dwelling place. The true dwelling place of God you see in the Lord Jesus and in the church.

A remarkable thing is that it says that God will dwell “among men”. That it is a special joy for God to dwell with men, can be seen by the fact that it is mentioned three times in this one verse. All these men together are His people. There is no more mention of separate nations. Nations originated because of sin, but all consequences of sin have been removed. Therefore, there is no longer any difference between Israel and the nations. Israel will no longer occupy a privileged place.

Israel had to do with God’s counsels *from* the foundation of the world (Mt 13:35; 25:34) and had an earthly and temporary existence. All earthly and temporary things will no longer be there. There are only people, believers from all times, without distinction. The only distinction that will remain concerns the new Jerusalem, the church, which exists from *before* the foundation of the world.

The verse ends with an expression of special intimacy between God and His people. “God Himself”, without any intermediary, as, for example, Moses or Elijah or a high priest has been, “will be among them”. There is no longer anyone through whom God has a relationship with His people. He is the God of that one great people. And that one great people have and know no one but Him alone as their God.

V4. When that wonderful situation has come, every memory of sorrow, which was inseparable from the first things, will be removed. The description of the glory of eternity is still best done for us by saying what is not there. We cannot yet grasp the glory of what is there (cf. 2Cor 12:4). But we can indeed understand that there will no longer be there what often makes our life on earth now so difficult and laborious and what makes us yearn for heaven. Therefore this description is in itself a great encouragement already. The five words that say what will no longer be there, now mark the whole world event and the whole world history since the fall of man into sin.

In Revelation 7 it was already announced that God will wipe away every tear from the eyes, like a mother wipes away the tears from the face of her child (Rev 7:17). He wipes away “every tear”, after which never another tear will well up. Everything that causes tears now will then be gone forever. Then every man will live in perfect harmony with God, perfectly

in agreement with God and perfectly unanimous with every other man. When sin is no longer there, there is also no longer death, nor anything associated with death as pain and sorrow, of which tears are the expression. It will never come back, for “the first things have passed away” forever.

Now read Revelation 21:1-4 again.

Reflection: What make you most long for the new heaven and the new earth?

## Rev 21:5-10 | All Things New

*5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He \*said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." 6 Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. 7 He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. 8 But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part [will be] in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." 9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,*

V5. Now speaks "He who sat on the throne". Sitting on the throne means that He has all power and governs all things according to His will and thus comes to His purpose. We cannot imagine how what is new will look like. You can compare that with a grain of wheat. If you look at it you cannot imagine that an ear of wheat will grow out of it. Or when you look at a caterpillar, you cannot imagine that a butterfly will come out of it. Paul uses a number of pictures to make clear the difference between earthly and heavenly things (1Cor 15:35-49), but our comprehension is too small to imagine all of it. However, we do know that all sad things are gone and "all things" will be new.

It is not new in contrast to old, but new in the sense of something that has never existed, for nothing and no one will ever grow old in the new creation. Everything for which man has ever made efforts will then be established by God. Man is not able to make an end to death and things that are connected to it, because sin dwells in him. To man that situation remains an idle dream, but for faith it is the great reality.

After this wonderful promise that He will make all things new, John is commanded for the third time to write (Rev 14:13; 19:9). By writing it down, it is fixed (Isa 30:8). When we sometimes forget these things, we can

read it again. To remove any uncertainty, it is added as a confirmation that these words are “faithful and true”.

V6. Then as a mighty conclusion the exclamation sounds: “It is done!” At that moment, all things have become new. Then the full result is seen of the work of Him Who once cried: “It is finished!” (Jn 19:30). The rest, the peace and the harmony founded on that work will be enjoyed without interruption all eternity by God and those with whom He dwells.

He Who has said it, is the eternal God, “the Alpha and the Omega”. He fulfills from A to Z – “Alpha” is the first letter and “Omega” the last letter of the Greek alphabet – what He has said. It means that He will fulfill His Word down to the smallest letter. He is also “the beginning and the end”, that is, He is at the beginning of all things, and at the end of all things He is still there. There is nothing before Him and nothing after Him. All things are held in connection with Him from eternity to eternity. There is eternity, because He is the Eternal.

At this breathtaking moment, where time and everything attached to it, has disappeared, an invitation, as it were, spontaneously goes out to everyone who does not partake of it yet. If there are readers to whom this applies, it cannot be otherwise but a desire arises to partake of it. It is possible! If there is a thirst for the living God (Psa 42:2), He will quench that thirst, just as the thirst of the Samaritan woman was quenched by the Lord Jesus (Jn 4:14).

V7. Besides thirst, there is also a fight needed to partake of that glory. For there is opposition in the form of persons or teachings that stand in the way of gaining that glory. But there are powerful weapons available that secure the victory. The inheritance of these things is given to those who have overcome the world through the faith (1Jn 5:4). They have overcome by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11). They overwhelmingly conquer through Him Who loved them (Rom 8:37).

The overcomers will be faithful to the end, until the wonderful inheritance can be taken into possession. Then the new creation will be experienced in the closest connection with God and to the joy of God. This is the only place in the writings of John where there is mention of our position as

sons. It is also a personal relationship. Each person will have his own relationship with God and God with him. He will not disappear in the crowd of people with whom God dwells (verse 3).

V8. After the extensive, but at the same time very limited description of the glory that is the part of the believers, the part of the unbelievers follows. The contrast is enormous and will never be undone. It will exist forever and ever. This is the part of those who are no overcomers and who haven't thirsted for God.

The first category of people of whom is said what their part is, are "the cowardly". The cowardly have never dared to confess the Lord Jesus. They stand on the side of the enemies and will perish with them. Also the other categories will not inherit God's kingdom (1Cor 6:10).

There is mention of "their part". That excludes the destruction of the soul. It also excludes the possibility for them to obtain the blessing after a course of time. The teaching of the universal atonement is a serious attack on the authority of God's Word and damages the gravity and perfection of the work of Christ. The substitutional suffering of Christ would not be necessary if all people will ultimately receive part of the eternal glory. But all who have no part in the work of Christ because they have rejected it, will be in the second death. The result is that they will be definitely cut off of all life, of which they will never partake.

V9. With verse 8 a chronological section has been completed which has ended in eternity. What comes after that cannot be a sequel to it, for after the eternal state there is not something else. Therefore from verse 9 we are taken back to the time immediately preceding the eternal state, the kingdom of peace. A description follows of the glory of the church as the heavenly city, which is as the place from which Christ's reign over the earth takes place.

Verse 9 starts with nearly the same words you also have read in Revelation 17 (Rev 17:1). Here it also starts, as in Revelation 17:1, with "one of the angels who had the seven bowls", though it is added here that they were "full of the seven last plagues". The full bowls are shown here to make clear that the city could only come after the judgments of God have been

executed over the earth. Furthermore you see that in both sections the description follows of a woman and a city. If you compare both sections with one another, you see a relationship with both a great difference between what you now already have learnt about Babylon and what you will see of the new Jerusalem.

The church is presented here as “bride” and as “wife”. Probably ‘bride’ refers to her glory toward the world and ‘wife’ refers to the intimate relationship toward the Lamb, the Bridegroom. ‘Bride’ can also refer to the first love for that one particular Man Whom she loves above all things and ‘wife’ may refer to the fulfilled desire of the love and its continuance. Both aspects remain forever applicable.

V10. In Revelation 17 John is led into the wilderness (Rev 17:3). Here he finds himself in an exalted position. He may see the bride, the wife of the Lamb from the mountain. But what does he see? He sees a city. That means that the woman who is the church, also has the characteristic of a city. The city is shown to John as God has always seen it from eternity. In that way Moses was also allowed to see the promised land from a mountain (Deu 34:1) and Ezekiel saw the future earthly Jerusalem and the new temple from a high mountain (Eze 40:2).

John’s position is far higher than that of both of them, for he is allowed to see the new heavenly Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from God. As the city in eternity comes down from God (verse 2), so it also comes down in the kingdom of peace.

The church is the dwelling place of God, from which blessing goes to the earth, both in the kingdom of peace and in eternity. Here it is also “the holy city”, the city that God has set apart for Himself to be His city, His dwelling place. It is the city with the name “Jerusalem”, which means ‘foundation of peace’. In and through the church the name of the city will fulfill its meaning. The city is both the dwelling place of God and the place where His throne is. Therefore the city is also the center from which He rules and governs for the blessing of the people.

The last time a city is mentioned in connection with the earth is Babylon. The first city mentioned in connection with the earth is the city that Cain

builds (Gen 4:17). Cities on earth are not built to the honor of God. The city that God builds is heavenly in origin and spreads the honor of God and Christ.

Now read Revelation 21:5-10 again.

Reflection: What does it do to you when you think of the future of the unbelievers?

## Rev 21:11-18 | The Holy City, the New Jerusalem

*11 having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. 12 It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names [were] written on them, which are [the names] of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. 13 [There were] three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them [were] the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. 16 The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. 17 And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, [according to] human measurements, which are [also] angelic [measurements]. 18 The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.*

V11. The city has “the glory of God”. That goes beyond the robe of the bride, which is woven by herself, although the robe is given to her by God. In Christ we see the light of the glory of the knowledge of God (2Cor 4:6) and here the church has that glory. The church is as completely in harmony with God as Christ is. As the glory of God is seen in Christ, so the glory of God is seen in it (cf. Jn 17:22). What has been revealed in the Lord Jesus will also be seen in this city.

Considering that this applies to people who by nature had no part in the glory of God (Rom 3:23), isn't it an indescribable grace? It is indeed nothing but grace through which you have been made partaker of it (2Cor 4:6). Therefore you are now able to boast in the hope on the glory of God (Rom 5:11) that has become a reality in this section.

The glory of God, as it is expressed in Revelation 4 (Rev 4:3), is in all kinds of ways also the part of the church. The jasper stone which is mentioned there, you also find here, and also in verses 18-19. This stone can be compared to the diamond known to us, which can be cut in such a way that the light is reflected in a variety of magnificent colors. The glow of light, which will soon be visible in full unhindered glory, should now already

be radiated by the church (cf. Phil 2:15). That is only possible by the Spirit (Acts 7:55; 2Cor 3:18).

V12. The church is built in a way that it can reflect or transmit the glory of God without anything interrupting or obscuring that glory. This is because she has a wall and gates and foundations. A wall ensures safety (Zec 2:5) and holiness and divides between the holy and the profane (Eze 42:20). In this city all the saints have gathered who have glorified God in their life on earth. The wall makes sure that nothing can enter the city that does not belong there (Psa 122:3), which now is still possible in the church (Gal 2:4; Jude 1:4).

But it is a wall with gates. Gates are related to government. In former days court cases were held in the gates of cities (Rth 4:1). The great emphasis on the gates underscores the significance of the city as a governing body. The gates allow the good to enter and keep the evil outside. A gate also means a secure and controlled access to the temple.

Gates form a connection between the city and the earth during the kingdom of peace. The angels are the servants at the gates, they are the guards. Their task as channels of God's blessing as in the Old Testament is over. That task is for the church (Heb 2:5). The wall with its gates is to the greater glory of God (Isa 60:18).

Names are written on the gates. That has to do with the custom that gates were named after the cities which they were leading to. The Damascus gate, for example, is the gate through which you come on the way to Damascus. The gates with the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel indicate that the blessings of the church will go primarily to Israel.

V13. With the holy city Jerusalem, the tabernacle of God (verse 3), it is the same as with the tabernacle in the wilderness. In each wind direction there were three tribes and the tabernacles was in the center (Num 2:17). All blessing goes out from the center and all worship goes to this center:

1. It begins with the "east", the side where the sun rises. The light of the new day of the kingdom of peace is present.

2. The “north” reminds of the time that God had to judge His people through the means of the nations from the north because of their unfaithfulness, a time that is over.

3. The “south” speaks of the summer warmth, the summer that has come.

4. The “west” is the side where the sun goes down, which shows that there also comes an end to the kingdom of peace.

An application can be made for the proclamation of the gospel in our time and also for the church now. We must try to reach all nations with the gospel and also all age groups and social layers of the population, that is, everyone, without distinction. A church needs to have both a high wall and well-functioning gates. Some churches have so many open gates that there is no longer a wall. The other way around can also be the case. In that case a church has only a high wall and no gate at all. In both cases there is no separation for the Lord.

V14. After the gates, the wall is described in more details. The foundations are not the twelve sons of Israel, but “the twelve apostles of the Lamb”. The twelve sons of Israel have never been connected to the Lamb on earth. The twelve apostles have become the founders of the church (Eph 2:20) after the Holy Spirit came and the church came into existence. The foundation is Christ (1Cor 3:11). This is the city with foundations Abraham looked for (Heb 11:10).

V15. Then John notes that the angel has “a gold measuring rod” in his hand. The rod is of gold and therefore meets the glory of God. The city and its gates and walls must be measured with a Divine measure. Earlier John was ordered to measure the earthly Jerusalem (Rev 11:1). Only, there was no mention of a rod of gold, nor should John measure a certain part.

When God measures something or gives the order to measure, He makes clear that it belongs to Him and that it is recognized by Him (cf. Zec 2:1-2,12; Eze 40:3,5). ‘Measure’ also means to determine the position and the calling of the city, with the boundaries attached to it. It must be established that the city and all that is in it, all that is decided there – of which the gate speaks – is in accordance with the glory of God. The same is true of the holiness of the city, of which the wall speaks.

V16. The city is not only square – which is indicated by the statement “its length is as great as its breadth” –, but also cubical, for its height has the same measurement. That reminds us of the Holy of Holies, which by its measurements was also a cube (cf. 1Kgs 6:20; Eze 41:4). By her length and breadth it stands in connection with the earth and by her height in connection with heaven.

The “fifteen hundred miles” which the angel measures, can be compared to about two thousand two hundred twenty kilometers. That the city has perfectly equal sides says something about the perfect balance in all that God brings about. He gives the right weight to every truth of His Word. We see that in the way He carries them out. He never emphasizes one truth to the expense of another truth.

That the city can be measured indicates that it is limited. That goes for everything that has to do with man. Only God is endless and man is by definition limited. At the same time, the church is perfect in accordance with the eternal counsels of God and the measure cannot be measured (cf. Eph 3:18-19).

V17. With the “seventy-two yards” or “one hundred [and] forty-four cubits” (NKJV) the thickness of the wall is probably meant, which therefore counts between sixty-five and seventy meters. Anyway, it is a full measure – one hundred and forty-four is twelve times twelve. At the same time it also implies that each man can have only a limited imagination of the ‘measures’ of the church. In this measurement “a man” and “an angel” are placed on the same level. Both of them are creatures and therefore limited in fathoming all the glory of God.

V18. In verse 11 you saw that jasper is a picture of the radiance of the glory of God. The wall of the city is of this same material. The glory of God functions as a protecting and dividing wall. The glory of God prohibits and prevents anything unclean entering the city. If the glory of God also manifested itself more among us, much would be held back that does not fit in the light of that glory (Acts 5:13; Gen 28:17).

This is the fourth mention of the wall of the city:

1. In verse 12 the mark of the wall is mentioned: great and high.

2. In verse 14 the foundations of the wall are mentioned.
3. In verse 17 the wall is spoken of in connection with its measure.
4. Finally verse 18 speaks about the building material, the material of which the wall is composed.

The city is “pure gold, like clear glass”, that is, that the city is of transparent gold. In the old creation that is not possible, but it is in the new one creation. It makes clear that the city is made of a material that is fully transparent, without any dark spot, without any blemish or anything unclean. The city is in this characteristic equal to God. How could the city of God have something that is dark or blemished? Everything is transparent and meets the glory of God.

Now read Revelation 21:11-18 again.

Reflection: What aspects of the city are mentioned and what do they represent?

## Rev 21:19-27 | God Almighty and the Lamb Are Its Temple

*19 The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; 20 the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoptase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. 22 I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp [is] the Lamb. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. 25 In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; 26 and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; 27 and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

V19-20. Then the foundation is looked at more closely. The foundation is adorned with all kinds of precious stones, yes, it consist of precious stones. They all together appear to be a foundation of twelve layers. Each layer is a foundation, so that the city lies on twelve foundations. Those foundations are not hidden in the ground, but are visible. The city can be seen in its entirety because it is seen as descending from God from heaven without coming down to earth.

The ranking of the foundations is given:

1. The "first foundation stone", the lowest one, on which all other foundations are laid, is again "jasper", the image of the glory of God. The color is that of a transparent crystal.
2. The "second" foundation stone is "sapphire". The color of sapphire is beautifully blue.
3. "Chalcedony", the precious stone of which the "third" foundation consists, appears only here in the Bible. Its color is green-blue.
4. The color of "emerald", the "fourth" foundation stone, is radiant green.

5. The color of “sardonyx”, the “fifth” foundation stone, may be lightly flamed black, brown, red and white striped.
6. “Sardius”, the “sixth” foundation stone, must have a beautiful red color.
7. “Chrysolite”, the “seventh” foundation stone, is of golden yellow color.
8. The color of “beryl”, the “eighth” foundation stone, can be different. This precious stone has amongst others a red, blue, green, yellow, purple and even a colorless variant.
9. “Topaz”, the “ninth” foundation stone, is deep splendid yellow.
10. “Chrysoprase” the “tenth” foundation stone, is according to the meaning of its name, golden green.
11. The color of “jacinth”, the “eleventh” foundation stone, is not known (to me).
12. “Amethyst”, the “twelfth” foundation stone, has a violet color.

Although the exact color of each precious stone is not known, you nevertheless still have an impression of the overwhelming brilliance and splendor that the colors of the superimposed foundations exude. They blend together and each color enhances the other colors. It must be a pleasure for the eyes to look at that. It is about building materials that never perish and about colors that never fade away. The whole reveals the power and wisdom of the Creator.

You also come across twelve precious stones in Ezekiel 28 (Eze 28:4,13). Those precious stones reflect the glory of creation. You also find twelve precious stones in Exodus 28 (Exo 28:17-21). There they are connected to the breastplate of the high priest and reflect the glory of his service which he does for the sake of the twelve tribes of Israel.

All precious stones are different. We will all be clothed with the glory of God, but it will never be forgotten how the glory of God on earth has been expressed in a unique way in every redeemed person. They altogether form a unique display of the glory of God. Each child of God can show something of God’s glory in his life. In the precious stones gold represent the common glory – the whole city is of gold (verse 18). The precious

stones themselves represent the glory that each individual believer has and which distinguishes him from every other believer, while on the other hand he complements the other believer with it and enhances his glory.

V21. Each of “the twelve gates” consists of a pearl. That reminds one of the value that the church has for the Lord Jesus. The church is a pearl of great value to Him (Mt 13:46). The twelve gates will eternally remind to all sides in creation that He has given Himself for her. If the church is as precious as a pearl to Him, can the fellowship of saints be unimportant or insignificant to us (cf. Heb 10:25) or would we despise the least member of it (Mt 18:10)?

Another special characteristic of the city is that there is only one street. It is impossible to get lost or to walk off the road. All believers there go one way. It is impossible that there will be division. As the city is of pure gold, gold that is like clear glass (verse 18), so the street is also of “pure gold, like transparent glass”. The street refers to your walk in this city. There will be no danger for pollution, for in that city you are in accordance with the golden transparency of the street. At the same time it is an appeal to walk now already as you will do there.

V22. John does not see a temple in the city. This is, because it is not about the earthly Jerusalem that the prophets are speaking about, for there will certainly be a temple there (Ezekiel 40-43). A temple reminds one of sin, for the temple is a separate place in the city. That means also that there is a certain distance between God and His people. The veil in the temple emphasizes the separation between God and His people.

That distance and that separation are not present between the church and God and the Lamb. God dwells in the church and He Himself is its temple as well as the Lamb (cf. Isa 8:14). The church is in the direct, immediate presence of God and the Lamb, without any distance or separation.

V23. The city as a whole is the temple of God. God dwells in the city and in that way the city is the temple. There is no separate temple. Likewise, there is no separate light, the sun or the moon, shining on the city from outside. If God dwell in the city, He is its light. His glory could never be illuminated by something different that would have a greater glory. The brilliance of His glory lies over the whole city.

And wherein is the brilliance of His glory to be seen? In the Lamb. The glory of God will always only reach the city through the Lamb (2Cor 4:6). We know and see the Father only through the Son (Jn 14:6,9). The sun and moon are means to pass on the light in the creation. In Genesis 1 you see that there is first light on the first day and that then on the fourth day the sun and the moon are called by God to show up.

But the city of God is not illuminated by natural, created means. There is a direct illumination coming from God Himself. That the Lamb is the lamp actually indicates that the Lamb is the means, but that doesn't change anything about the fact that God's light is directly present, for the Lamb in Whom this light is visible, is also God.

V24. The church passes on the light of the glory of God, which lies over it by the Lamb, to the earth. The church is like the sun for the nations. Through the light of the Lamb the church gives light in which the nations will walk. The church, which we are, will be the channel through which the blessing is passed on out of heaven to the earth. We ourselves will enjoy in our glorified bodies the blessings that surpass the earthly blessings.

The kings of the earth will bring their earthly glory to it (cf. Psa 72:10-11; Isa 60:3,5-7,9). How exactly we should imagine this is not clear to me. Perhaps we should think of the appearance of heavenly saints to these nations on earth. After all, the church will reign together with Christ as the wife of the Lamb. These heavenly saints represent Christ. By acknowledging them as channels of heavenly blessings, the nations will honor Christ.

V25. Where the light of God rules, there is no darkness. The day will not be followed anymore by the night. The morning without clouds (2Sam 23:4), the day without anything that causes shadow or darkness, has come for the heavenly church. All things are fully transparent. There will be no fear for thieves who would want to enter, for all darkness has disappeared and is gone forever (1Jn 2:8b). The city will be all light and glory.

V26. It is said one more time that the glory and the honor of the nations will be brought into it. It makes clear how much the church is the center of blessings in the kingdom of peace. It is in itself not the source of it, for

all blessings come from God. But it is the means by which God makes His blessings go to the earth.

The nations will respond to that with appropriate gifts. It will not be so much about material gifts, but about the recognition that they in no way have any glory and honor that serve to magnify themselves as if they owe that to themselves. The nations did behave like that in the time of the rejection of Christ. Then the church was not esteemed, but was rejected and persecuted. Now it is exactly the other way around. God makes sure that His church is honored according to the extent that it was dishonored (cf. Rev 3:9).

V27. Into the city can come only what contributes to the glory of it. It is impossible for anything to enter it that could possibly damage the glory of the city. Everything associated with sin, gets no chance to enter the heavenly city. Should there be anything unholy that tries to enter it, or anyone who does wrong things, the light will immediately expose it. Nothing that belongs to darkness will manage to unremarkably enter the city. The light is at the same time its safety.

But there are those who do enter the city. These are believers, people “whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life”. It is not the nations of the earth, for flesh and blood cannot enter it. Neither are they the believers of the church, for they are the city. So which believers are they? They are all the Old Testament believers who died and the martyrs who are killed after the rapture of the church. They are not part of the church, but they do share in all the blessings God has promised to all who have put their trust in Him. They will enjoy those blessings in the heavenly part of the kingdom of peace.

Now read Revelation 21:19-27 again.

Reflection: What is different in the new Jerusalem compared to the old Jerusalem?

## Revelation 22

### **Rev 22:1-7 | A River of the Water of Life**

*1 Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, 2 in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve [kinds of] fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; 4 they will see His face, and His name [will be] on their foreheads. 5 And there will no longer be [any] night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever. 6 And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. 7 "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."*

V1. The words "then he showed me" introduce a new section. Nevertheless, this section forms a whole with the previous one, for it still deals with the city. John gets to see "a river of the water of life". This river is a picture of the Lord Jesus (cf. Rev 21:6). The river also speaks of the eternal life that God's children now already are allowed to enjoy through the Spirit (Jn 7:38).

The water is "clear as crystal". There is no pollution at all; the water is totally pure, without any mixture with something else. That could not happen of course, for the origin of this water is "the throne of God and of the Lamb". The throne speaks of a kingdom, of authority. Wherever God and the Lamb have authority, there comes room for life in wonderful refreshing streams. Death and curse have no chance to disturb the enjoyment of life. Life can be enjoyed to the full.

What John sees makes one think of the scene in Ezekiel 47 (Eze 47:1-12). But there is a great difference. There it is about a literal river in the earthly

Jerusalem, while here it is about the heavenly Jerusalem with a symbolic presentation of matters.

V2. Then the gaze is turned to “the tree of life”. It is “in the middle of its street”, that is the street of the city, and at the same time on either side of the river. It is one tree, though it is on several places at the same time. That cannot be explained logically. Anyway, this tree of life is a picture of the Lord Jesus.

At the very beginning of the Bible you also read about the tree of life (Gen 2:9). God put the tree of life in the middle of the paradise. Next to it He put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You don’t hear anything anymore of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil here. Here we see only the tree of life. Here the Holy Spirit connects the beginning and the end of the Scripture.

In Genesis 2 there is mention of two trees. There a river is also mentioned, which divides and becomes four rivers (Gen 2:10). Here, however, is only one tree and one river. Here there is no mention any more of the responsibility of man. Man cannot be tempted by satan in the kingdom of peace as happened in paradise. After all, satan is bound during the time of the kingdom of peace (Rev 20:1-3). Therefore only the tree of life is here. Man is allowed to eat from it all the time to enjoy the continuous blessing of the kingdom of peace.

It indicates a continuous dependence on the Lord Jesus. He gives power to walk on that one street and He gives refreshment, regardless which side of the river a person lives. The church will be allowed to enjoy Him in a new way “every month” of the thousand years, for the fruits will be for the inhabitants of the city.

The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations on earth. All conflicts and disagreements will be ended by the Lord Jesus. There will no longer be war, all wounds will be healed.

V3. “There will no longer be any curse” in this wonderful situation, for the Lord Jesus reigns. To His reign blessing is attached and no curse. Curse is a result of sin. Everything that has to do with sin will in no way get a chance to exercise its influence in the new Jerusalem. Also the removal of the curse

makes one think of the beginning when the curse entered the world (Gen 3:17). Here it has been removed. In this way the end condition is the counterpart of the start condition in every view. Sin will still be found on earth (Psa 101:8; Isa 65:20). In the city, this will not be the case.

Again the emphasis is put on the throne of God and of the Lamb as the source of blessing. Enjoying the blessing does not mean that no service is being done. The believers who form the new Jerusalem are here called “bond-servants”. That is not a name for oppressed people, but a title for voluntarily obedient people. They want to serve Him out of love *for* Whom they have been bought, God, and *by* Whom they were bought, the Lamb. Serving here also doesn’t mean performing slave labor, but serving in a religious sense, serving as priest in a worship service. This is the greatest privilege of human being.

It is also noticeable that it is written that they will serve “Him” (singular), while it refers to two Persons: God and the Lamb. This indicates that God and the Lamb are one God. You have come across this way of writing about God and the Lord Jesus also in the letters written by John. Sometimes you do not know whether he is talking about God or about the Lord Jesus. That does not matter, for with both Persons it is about God.

V4. Besides being surrounded by blessings and the unlimited possibility to enjoy them, there is an even greater privilege. That privilege is seeing the face of God and of the Lamb. That is, there will be free access to and relationship with God and the Lamb. It is the reward for those who are pure in heart (Mt 5:8). Outwardly His Name will be “on their foreheads”. It is the open proclamation that they are worshipers of God and the Lamb (cf. Rev 13:16; 17:5).

V5. There will no longer be need of natural light sources in the city (Rev 21:23). God Who is light (1Jn 1:5), has driven out all darkness. What John already has announced in his first letter as the principle of the new life – that the believer, regarding the new life he has received, walks in the light (1Jn 1:7) –, has then become reality for the heavenly order of things.

It is not possible for the darkness to return. In the new Jerusalem, which is formed by men who all have the new, eternal life in the Son Who is the

eternal life, it will be day forever. Also after the millennial kingdom of peace that situation will not change. We shall reign with Christ forever. After the kingdom of peace our government with Christ will not cease, but the form of government will change (1Cor 15:24). The kingdom of the Lord Jesus as the Son of Man will last for a thousand years. As the Son of God, He will reign forever, without ceasing to be Man.

V6. John gets the assurance that there is no doubt that what is said is true: "These words are faithful and true." They are indeed because He Who has spoken those words, is faithful and true (Rev 19:11). God's Word is beyond all doubts. It has always been like that of course, but nevertheless, it is emphasized here.

God gives such assurance concerning His Word because He knows that you can be weak in your faith in His Word. Just hold on to what the prophets have spoken about it in a way that mistakes are not possible. The Lord, He Who has authority over all things, is "the God of the spirits of the prophets". That is, He has directed the spirit of the prophet in what he had to write down.

It is about "things which must soon take place". You also encountered these words also at the beginning of this book (Rev 1:1), so that the end of this book closes the circle, so to speak. It is a remembrance of the purpose of the book, which is that you will look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus. There is nothing left that still has to take place before the coming of the Lord Jesus for the church. If that already applied to John and Paul, how much more does that apply to us.

V7. The angel has told John that the events of this book will soon be fulfilled. That makes your desire for the Lord to grow more and more. How wonderful it is then to hear the Lord Himself saying that He is coming quickly. It is as if He wants to focus your eye, concerning the future things, on Himself. His desire is to fulfill everything written in this book. Therefore, you do not look forward to events in the first place, but to a Person.

Until then, "the words of the prophecy of this book" are at your disposal. If you heed them, you are "blessed". Heeding the Word of God has always been a source of blessing. It gives you light on your way and it shows you

what your future is, because your future is connected with Christ. The Lord connects special blessings to the reading of this book, which unfortunately is often considered to be an incomprehensible book and left unread by many believers.

Now read Revelation 22:1-7 again.

Reflection: Mention the blessings that are related to the river of living water.

## Rev 22:8-14 | My Reward Is With Me

*8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. 9 But he \*said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God." 10 And he \*said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 11 Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy." 12 "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward [is] with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.*

V8. What John has heard and seen, impressed him greatly. When he says "I, John", it makes clear that he has personally experienced everything he "heard and saw". It was not just absorbing all kinds of interesting facts, so that he now had an idea about the future. No, he was totally involved with his whole being.

That is very important for you too. Now you have come to the end of this book, you may wonder what impact this book has had on you, just as I must wonder what impact it has had on me. Have you made progress in just factual knowledge or has it deeply moved you inwardly? Do you only find it important that you now know how history will come to pass or has it caused you to desire for the coming of the Lord?

John is so deeply impressed that he worships. But he brings this worship to someone who is not entitled to it. That is also a danger for you. You run the risk to admire God's instrument instead of Him Who is represented to you through that instrument. The Holy Spirit does not want to focus your attention on an angel, or on John, or on whomever, but on the Lord Jesus.

V9. John is called to order by the angel. He had already made this mistake earlier (Rev 19:10). Then also he was called to order by the angel. The fact that he has made this mistake for the second time, shows that it is indeed difficult to give honor to the Lord Jesus alone and not a creature whom we

can sometimes look up to highly. However, how much appreciation we may have for persons who have helped us to learn to know God's truth better, there is only one Person to Whom our worship is due. Everyone has a subordinate place toward the Lord Jesus and an equal position toward one another, keeping in mind the differences the Lord has made.

The angel calls himself "a fellow servant" of John, however much he has served John with the explanation of the future events. The angel also speaks about "the prophets" as "brethren" of John. John and all the prophets of God have spoken about future events. They could only do that because God had shown them what He is planning to do. He made those plans known in His Word to all of His own, particularly in this Bible book.

The angel also calls all the ones, who keep the words of this Bible book, his fellow servants. You have also come across this word 'servant' at the beginning of this book. The book can only be understood by believers who, as a response to what God reveals in His Word, commit their life to Him. That is the true worship of God.

V10. When Daniel came to the end of his book, he learnt that he had to seal up the book until the end of time (Dan 12:4). The reason was that in the time of Daniel the end was yet far away. He lived in another period of time of God's history of salvation. The sealing up of his book meant that the prophecies which are written in it, were made inviolable and kept safe until the fulfillment. Breaking the seal may only be done by the person authorized to do so (cf. Rev 5:5).

However, for us the time is near (cf. Mt 25:6). Everything has been fulfilled since the death of Christ and we have come to the 'last hour' (1Jn 2:18). The end of the ages have come upon us (1Cor 10:11). Therefore John is told that he should not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book. God has revealed everything. The time of the coming of His Son is near to fulfill everything. God is concerned that through this revelation, which is not sealed – by which we know that His Son can come any moment – you will be eagerly looking forward to Him Who is going to fulfill everything.

V11. When all events of this book have come this near, it will work a separation among people. There are only two reactions possible:

1. There are those who reject the Word of God and do not consider what is going to happen soon.
2. There are those who submit themselves to the Word of God and look forward to its fulfillment.

The more the time gets nearer, the more the real character of every man is exposed:

1. The first category of men “does wrong” more and more and therefore one makes himself more and more “filthy”, dirty. You see that in the world and even more and especially in the so-called Christian world. People become more and more unjust and present themselves more and more unashamed with their filthiness.
2. The second category of people dedicate itself more and more to God. They live righteously and “still practice righteousness”, which causes them to become more and more “holy” opposite to the filthiness of the people around them. Their holiness becomes more and more visible, because of the contrast with the growing filthiness of the world. The contrast with the world will become greater and greater.

Thinking about the Lord’s coming will determine the choices we make for our life on earth. In the light of His coming, we see the true value of the purpose of our life.

V12. You may think that it is not simple to live righteous and holy in such a filthy world where the filthiness comes to you from all sides. Therefore, the words of the Lord are a great encouragement. You hear Christ saying that He is coming quickly. That is already encouraging. But then you hear also that He attaches a reward to His soon coming. Christ appreciates every sign of righteousness in your life and He will give you an appropriate reward for that.

If you have made your choice for Him on earth, you have perhaps missed out on much appreciation from men. But the Lord will compensate that abundantly at His coming. The unbelievers have already received their reward on earth (cf. Mt 6:2,5,16). Therefore, they will not find any reward when the Lord comes. On the contrary, they will receive a retribution for their wicked deeds.

V13. For the third and last time you hear that the Lord Jesus is “the Alpha”, the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and the “Omega”, the last letter of the Greek alphabet (Rev 1:8; 21:6). He is the Word of God, the full revelation of God. Everything that God has to say, He has said in Christ. Christ will fulfill everything to the letter, as God has said it (cf. Jos 21:45; Mt 5:17-18).

He Who is beyond the history of creation has entered history. He is “the first and the last” of history (Rev 1:17; 2:8; Isa 44:6; 48:12). He stands at “the beginning” of everything as the First and He stands at “the end” of everything as the Last. He will still be there when everything that was, is over. He is both the origin and the purpose of creation (Col 1:15-17). He Who Himself has no beginning nor end, the eternal God, covers all things. There is nothing outside of Him that He has nothing to do with. Everything owes its beginning to Him and everything will be completed and be brought to fullness in connection with Him. You see how great He is !

V14. For the seventh and last time the word “blessed” is spoken. It concerns those “who wash their robes”. It is remarkable that we read “wash” which indicates an ongoing process of washing. That is different from what you have read elsewhere in this book, where it says “washed” (Rev 7:14). In the latter case it concerns the conversion. That is a one-off happening. When you repented, all your sins were washed away by the blood of the Lamb. But in this verse it is about your responsibility.

You also come across this difference between ‘wash’ and ‘washed’ in John 13. There the Lord speaks about being ‘bathed’, which is being totally washed, and about having one’s ‘feet washed’ (Jn 13:10). The act of being totally washed is a one-off happening at the repentance. The act of having the feet washed ought to happen continually, because living in the world defiles the believer.

Having one’s feet washed, or as it is said here, to wash their robes, is a responsibility of the believer. The robes speak of the outward behavior. You prove that you are washed by the way you walk. Your clothing, that is, your conduct, will then show no spot. As soon as it gets stained by committing sins, there will also be a confession of these sins, which makes the robe to be clean again. In this way you cannot be blamed for anything

concerning your practical way of living, which makes you to have the right to the tree of life. It means that you partake of the enjoyment of it.

You may live in the city of God, in His presence. You partake of the blessings of the tree and the city on the basis of the blood of Christ. That is grace. But everyone who partakes of that grace, will surely want to live accordingly. In that way you show that you have the right to it. It is a right which, concerning you, is based on grace, but it is a grace which is granted by God on the basis of the right that He has through the blood of Christ.

Now read Revelation 22:8-14 again.

Reflection: What can the reward that the Lord Jesus has with Him when He comes consist of?

## Rev 22:15-21 | Yes, I Am Coming Quickly

*15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. 16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." 17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. 18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. 20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.*

V15. The contrast with the previous verse is great and dramatic. "Outside" the city, 'outside' the new world, are all who have no right to the tree and the entering of the city. 'Outside' is more than a geographic location alone. It is a geographic location, but it is especially a place of eternal torment (Rev 21:8). The character of the people who are outside, confirms that it is justified that they are 'outside' the city of all blessings. It indicates that they have surrendered themselves to serving satan.

1. The first thing that marks their character is indicated by the term "dogs". 'Dog' is a name for an evildoer who operates without any feeling (Psa 22:16,20; Isa 56:10; Phil 3:2; cf. Deu 23:18). All categories have this characteristic.
2. "The sorcerers" want to exert power over others.
3. "The immoral persons" seek to fulfill their lust at the expense of others.
4. "The murderers" are taking other people's lives.
5. "The idolaters" deliver themselves passively to demons.

The whole is framed in the lie which they love and tell. Hell will be full of such people.

V16. Here the Lord Jesus is speaking again. He draws attention to Himself with the words "I, Jesus". He is the Almighty, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Creator of the universe and the Sustainer of all things, but He presents Himself here with the name which is typical for His humiliation.

He is also the Commander of the angels. He sends them wherever He wants to with the message He wants to be sent. Through His angel He addresses the churches. Those are the local churches where believers gather and dwell together knowing that they are part of the worldwide church. Such believers desire nothing more than to make true in the local church what is true for the worldwide church.

The Lord adds some aspects of His Person to His messages. He calls Himself "the root and the descendant of David". This He is for Israel, of which He is the shoot (Rev 5:5; Isa 11:1,10) from which, therefore, out the whole people proceeds. For Israel He is also the Offspring, that is, 'Son', of David. He came from this people, so that in Him all promises, which pertain to the kingdom of God, may become reality, with blessings for Israel and the nations.

The Lord is also "the bright morning star". That He is for His church. Israel will never know Him as such. The church will not have to wait until He appears as the Sun of righteousness. He will appear as the Sun of righteousness to Israel (Mal 4:2), but the morning star precedes the rising of the Sun. This means that the morning star has risen already in your heart (2Pet 1:19), that is, you are eagerly looking forward to His coming for the church.

V17. When the Lord has thus made His voice heard and pointed to Himself as the fulfillment of all promises, the Spirit and the bride cannot be silent. The Spirit is on earth, but as a temporary dwelling place. The Spirit dwells here as long as the church, the bride, is here. But He doesn't feel at home, as the bride also does not feel at home in this world. She is still separated from her Bridegroom. But when she hears His voice, her voice sounds fully harmoniously with the voice of the Spirit and she says to her Bridegroom: "Come!"

The bride is the church as a whole. The whole of the church says 'come!', even though not everyone who belongs to the bride longs for the Lord in the same passionate way. Therefore, the call also comes to each individual to say: "Come!" The desire of the one may have a contagious effect on the extinguished desire of the other.

Then a third group is addressed. That group still is not yet part of the bride, but would like to be, because there is thirst. He who thirsts is still invited to take from the water of life and for free (Isa 55:1). This water refers to the refreshment that the Lord wants to give through His Spirit to everyone who is tired of living in sin (Jn 4:10-15; 7:37).

V18. The Lord Jesus warns in powerful words, "I testify", to everyone not to add anything to the content of the words of the prophecy that are written in this Bible book. It is prohibited and not allowed to add anything to all the events that are described (cf. Pro 30:6; Deu 4:2; 12:32). To add something means the arrogation as if God would not have said everything that He had to say. This is the sin to which satan tempted Eve (Gen 3:1-3), which caused that the punishment of death announced to her was added to her.

Satan will still try in every way to keep the prophecy of this book closed to men, or distort it in such a way that it loses its true power. If satan manages to add his lie to the words of the prophecy of this book, words in which his end is displayed, he can drag as many people with him into hell as he possibly could. But the Lord Jesus warns here not to fall into this trap. Adding something to what is perfect, means getting the plagues that are written in this book added to you. Those plagues cannot be more severe than they are described, but they can increase in number.

V19. The order is different from the previous verse. Here it is about the completely finished message of the book as a whole. Nothing can be taken away from it. People may take away something from the Word that they do not understand. The arrogant reason of man rejects God's Word which he considers to be unacceptable. You may think here of Bible criticism. Such an attitude marks the audacity of unbelief.

However, he who deals with God's Word in such a way, God will deal with him. Such a person receives no part of the tree and the city. Because

of his attitude he indicates that he doesn't like it at all to partake of the things that the believer enjoys. Therefore he will never get part of it. It has been presented to him, he has read about it, but he rejects it. He could have got part of it, but he refused. Therefore the part that was offered to him is taken away from him.

Therefore the issue here is absolutely not taking away something to which a believer has received part of. The part of a believer can in no way be taken away from him. Therefore a believer will never take away something of the words of the book of this prophecy. That you as a believer do not understand everything and have questions about it is of a totally different order than rejecting something God has said. The latter is the point here.

V20. The Lord Jesus concludes the book with a final testimony that the book comes from Himself. Christ is the absolute faithful Witness of the things revealed in this book. Following this, He says: "Yes, I am coming quickly!" This is the reply to the call of the Spirit and the bride in verse 17. With His "yes" He confirms that we should not have the slightest doubt about everything that is said. Then He says that He is about to come. There is no fulfillment necessary of any prophecy before He can come for His bride.

The response to the promise of the Lord that He is coming quickly, is: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." This comes out of the mouth of all who love Him. Two times earlier the Lord has said that He is coming quickly (verses 7,12). The response to that is different from the response here. In verse 7 the promise is followed by an exhortation to heed God's Word. In verse 12 the promise is followed by the promise of a reward. In this verse the promise of the Lord is followed by a spontaneous expression of longing for Himself, for His Person. This basically concludes the book.

V21. Still, there follows a wish of blessing from John for "all" saints, which is needed as long as the Lord Jesus has not come yet. Until that moment of His coming all saints can count on His "grace". To this, only an assenting "amen" can follow. A beautiful ending.

Now read Revelation 22:15-21 again.

Reflection: What does the thought of the coming of the Lord mean to you?

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