

Jews whom God has protected and the great multitude of believers who have been martyred (**Rev 7**). After the six trumpets (**Rev 8-9**), we are told of the two witnesses who prophesied for God for the first 3.5 years of the tribulation before they were killed and resurrected (**Rev 11**). We also learn about the evil trinity and their efforts to destroy Israel and other believers (**Rev 12**). The evil trinity consists of the dragon/Satan (an angelic being), the beast who is the Antichrist (a human king who imitates Jesus), and the second beast/false prophet (who supports the Antichrist in a manner similar to the way the Holy Spirit serves Jesus; **Rev 13**).

In **chapter 14**, three angels announce what is coming in chapters 15-19. The first angel commands all men to worship God because “the hour of his judgment has come”—this judgment is fulfilled in the seven bowls of **chapters 15–16**. The second angel declares that Babylon has fallen, an explanation of which is given in **chapters 17–18**. The third angel describes the eternal wrath of God which is fulfilled when Jesus returns and casts the enemies into the lake of fire in **chapter 19**.

Three evil spirits come from the evil trinity to gather to Armageddon the kings of the earth for “the battle on the great day of God Almighty” (Rev 16:14). This attack is what is described in Zechariah 14 where the armies of the world attempt to destroy Jerusalem. At this time the Lord Jesus descends to the Mount of Olives, defeats his enemies, and becomes king over the whole earth. The Antichrist and False Prophet are thrown into the lake of fire, but Satan is bound for a thousand years during which time Jesus rules with his saints over the earth. Upon Satan’s release, his short-lived rebellion leads to the final judgment of the wicked (**Rev 20**). Then God creates a new universe in which he lives with those he has made righteous for all of eternity (**Rev 21–22**).

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Revelation in light of the OT (especially Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zephaniah, Zechariah). What can you understand in Revelation from the OT that would otherwise be veiled?

REVELATION: THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD’S PROMISES

PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read the book of Revelation, considering how God fulfills all of his promises. Think about how Revelation brings a glorious climax to everything we’ve read in the Bible.

OUR HOPE: A PHYSICAL BODY

Because of some misunderstandings, some Christians do not have a high view of the physical body. This may be in part to a wrong idea of what the “flesh” is that Paul describes (“flesh” is not our physical body but “the human person in contrast to God” [Moo]). It may also be related to some anti-materialistic views that exalt the spirit but denigrate the body. In addition, because we look forward to being in heaven with Jesus, some incorrectly assume that a physical body is unnecessary or undesirable.

Paul addresses this issue directly in his letters to the Corinthians. In 2 Cor 5, he describes three states: his greatest desire is to be clothed with his heavenly body; the worst situation is to be in the present “earthly tent” that is mortal. Between those two states is a third: being “unclothed” (a spirit without a body) but in the Lord’s presence. At death our body goes into the ground and our spirit goes to be with the Lord. At the first resurrection (the rapture), our body is raised from the dead and united with our soul (1 Thess 4:16; Rev 20:4-6). God designed man as a united body and soul. Only death (not part of God’s design) separates body and soul. Our future hope is body and soul without the possibility of separation.

OUR HOPE: AN EARTHLY HOME

Along with the previous misunderstanding, some also conceive of their future as in a spiritual (non-physical) heaven that is radically different from our present existence on earth. Some of this error stems from a misunderstanding of what the “kingdom of heaven” is (it is God’s kingdom come down to earth *from* heaven). Some of it comes from misunderstanding passages such as “this earth is not

our home” (Heb 13:14, NLT) and “we are strangers on the earth” (Heb 11:13).

But God created this earth and he called it “good.” Though corrupted and cursed in the Fall, God intends to redeem the earth and accomplish his original purpose of his image-bearers ruling over it for his glory (cf. Rom 8:21). We were not created for heaven and our destiny is not heaven, though we will spend some time there while waiting for the redemption of all things. Passages that speak of believers being strangers on this earth are addressing the evil world system that is now under the control of Satan. “Our citizenship is in heaven” because we serve a Lord who is now in heaven but who will return to earth to “bring everything under his control” (Phil 3:20-21).

There are two future destructions of the earth. The first is graphically described in Isaiah 24 and Revelation 6–18 and may be characterized as God’s judgment of evil on this earth. After the “winter” of this destruction, the earth is revitalized with new life, a new King, and the removal of (most of) the curse throughout the millennial kingdom. At the end of the thousand years, God creates a new earth with a new Jerusalem (Rev 21). It seems appropriate to see some measure of *continuity* of the old earth with the new earth, just as there is with our mortal body and our eternal body (“to each kind of seed [God] gives its own [new] body”; 1 Cor 15:38).

THE ARGUMENT OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation is appropriately named because what John sees is the “revealing” of Jesus as Lord over the earth. The book was written to churches (congregations of believers) who were enduring persecution and needed the hope of Jesus’ return to help them to persevere. The **first chapter** introduces Jesus as the eternal God with authority over death and Hades. He is the primary character throughout the book. In **chapters 2 and 3**, Jesus addresses believers in their present-day situations, warning them of dangers and encouraging them to overcome.

In **chapter 4** readers are taken to the heavenly courtroom where John sees future events. A scroll sealed seven times must be opened, but when no one in all of creation is found worthy to open it, John is emotionally devastated. But then Jesus rises to take the scroll and he is found worthy to open it because he was slain and with his blood he purchased people for God from every tribe and tongue (**Rev 5**). Most of the rest of the book (chapters 6–19) is concerned with the opening of this scroll, so it is clearly of supreme importance.

What is written on the scroll? It is not the judgments, for those occur *prior* to the scroll being opened (all seven seals must be broken in order for the scroll to be read). The scroll must then be related to what occurs after the judgments. Some believe that the scroll is Christ’s “title-deed” to the world, and this makes sense given that he has the right to it by virtue of his lineage (“the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David”) and his sacrificial death. Similarly, the scroll may contain God’s good plan for the world which is fulfilled in Jesus’ earthly reign over it.

That judgments precede the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth is expected, for the earth has been under the control of the evil one since Genesis 3. The process of opening the scroll by Jesus’ breaking of seven seals unleashes death, famine, and destruction upon the earth yet the hardness of men’s hearts precludes their repentance (**Rev 6**). There is some debate over how to understand the relationship of the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Some believe they are describing the same seven judgments in three ways (“recapitulation”). A preferable view is that they are “telescopic”: the seventh seal consists of seven trumpets; the seventh trumpet consists of seven bowls. All are an expression of God’s long-delayed wrath against his image-bearers who despise and defy him.

Though the book proceeds in a generally chronological order, there are several interludes that provide the reader with background information. Thus after the six seals, we learn about the 144,000