

UNDERSTANDING THE REVELATION

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CHAPTER 1) - INTRODUCTION

The Revelation is one of the most exciting books of the Bible, because it is written in symbols and pictures which challenge our imagination. To try to understand it brings a special blessing (ch1v 3).

There have been several attempts to explain the book. Some have it as a warning for the Jews before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Others place all the action at the time of the end. The approach in this book is the traditional one, followed by Christadelphians and others before them for the last two hundred years

Revelation was the last book to be written. It was a special vision given by Jesus to the apostle John (ch1 v 1), to show him 'things which must shortly come to pass'. In other words, it was a prophecy of future events commencing soon after the period in which it was given.

John was in exile in the Greek island of Patmos (v 9), probably put there by the Emperor Domitian, who violently persecuted the Christians around AD 96. As the last surviving apostle, John would be an obvious target for his attentions. In this case the date of writing would be at the end of the First Century.

John is told to send the book to seven congregations (churches) in what we call Turkey today, all quite close to each other, and perhaps the area of John's ministry (v 4). But as with all Bible prophecy, it is relevant to all generations.



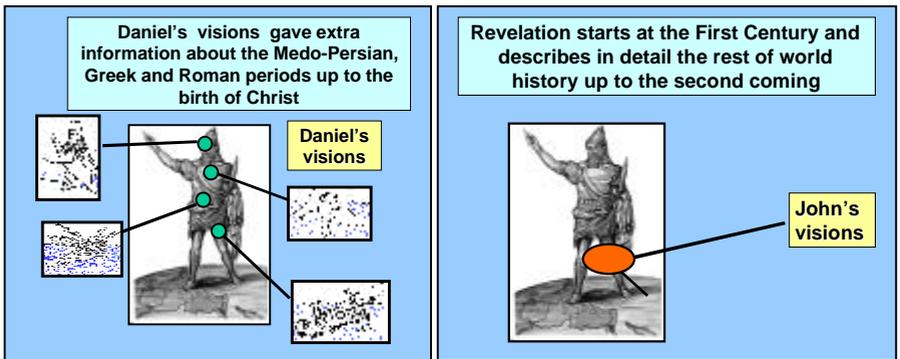
KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK

There are several helpful points which provide keys to understanding the book.

KEY NO. 1 – JOHN CONTINUES WHERE DANIEL ENDS

The Revelation is a prophecy. It has close links with Daniel's visions of four strange beasts, which covered in detail the period from his day to the coming of Christ. Revelation continues where Daniel left off, outlining the events of history from the First Century to the Second Coming of Christ. As Daniel's visions filled in the top half of Nebuchadnezzar's dream image, so John's fill in the bottom half.

FIRST KEY TO THE BOOK



KEY NO 2. – REVELATION DRAWS ITS PICTURES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

At every turn, the images and allusions in this book are drawn from the earlier scriptures, mainly the Old Testament, but also the New Testament. Older prophecies are re-cycled to describe similar, but new, situations. So, to understand Revelation, you need to be familiar with the rest of the Bible.

SECOND KEY TO THE BOOK

Revelation is based firmly on the Old Testament. It takes ideas from the earlier scriptures to prophesy new but similar situations

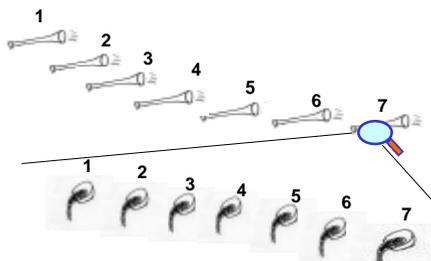
For example, the real Jezebel who taught Israel to worship Baal is used to portray those who taught First Century Christians it is permissible to worship idols

To illustrate this point further - the Revelation is based on SEVEN, the perfect number. It is divided into sets of seven symbols - 7 letters, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls. But the seventh in each series also encloses the next seven. This idea comes from the fall of Jericho - on the seventh day the Israelites went round it seven times!

7 Letters, 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets and 7 Altar bowls



The last of each 7 contains the next 7, giving more information, as Daniel's beasts amplify Nebuchadnezzar's image



KEY NO. 3 – MORE THAN ONE APPLICATION

Like many earlier prophecies, the visions of Revelation can sometimes be applied to more than one period. History tends to repeat itself. In the time of Cyrus, the Jews returned from captivity in Babylon with great rejoicing. This is portrayed in Isaiah ch 52. But Paul applies Isaiah 52 to a different kind of deliverance - from King Sin, by the work of Jesus in the First Century. In the Old Testament, often the 'local' fulfilment sounds like the coming of the Kingdom of God. So it is in Revelation. Perhaps God wrote it this way to give encouragement to generations of saints under pressure, and boost their faith.

THIRD KEY TO THE BOOK

Like earlier prophecies, it can describe two periods at the same time - the age of the reader and the time of the end

Like earlier Bible prophecies, Revelation concludes each section with a Kingdom picture - to encourage God's saints.

KEY NO. 4 – TWO WOMEN, TWO CITIES

A central theme is the conflict between two women – the Virgin Bride of Christ, and the Harlot who has turned from Him to follow the world (like Israel did in the Old Testament). The same conflict is there between Jerusalem, God's holy city, and Rome, that persecutes and tramples her underfoot. John cannot write directly about Rome, for political reasons – he was a prisoner of Rome - so he uses a code word, Babylon, the Old Testament enemy of Jerusalem.

FOURTH KEY TO THE BOOK



V.



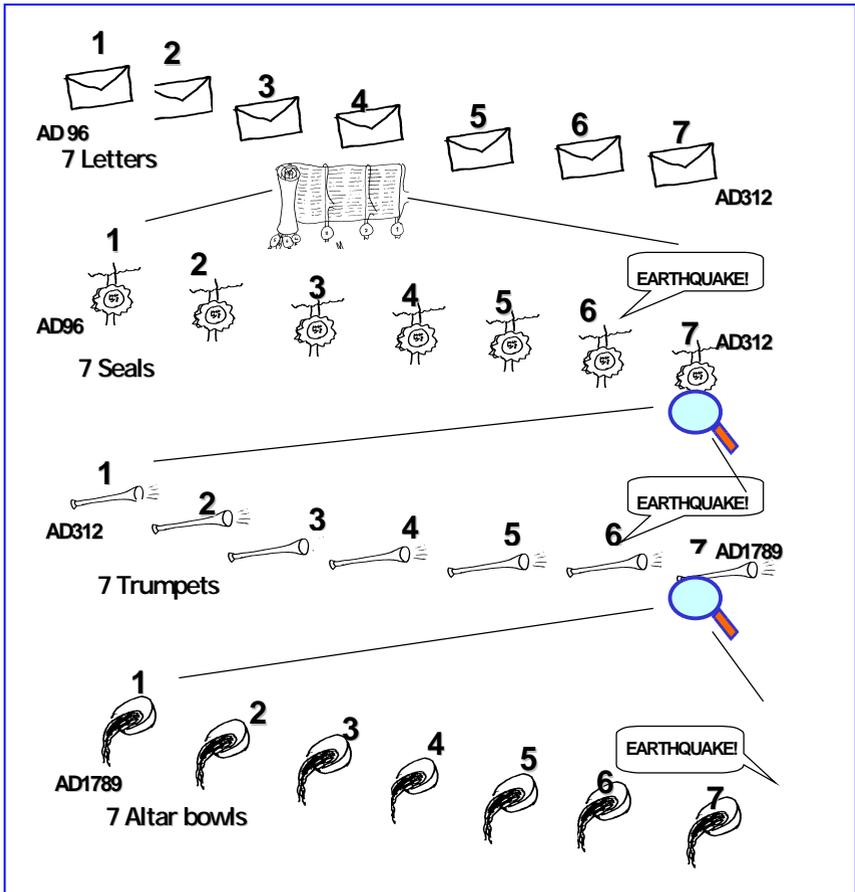
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- The conflict between the 2 women and the 2 cities is woven around the main theme - the judgments of God that would fall on unrepentant men and women.

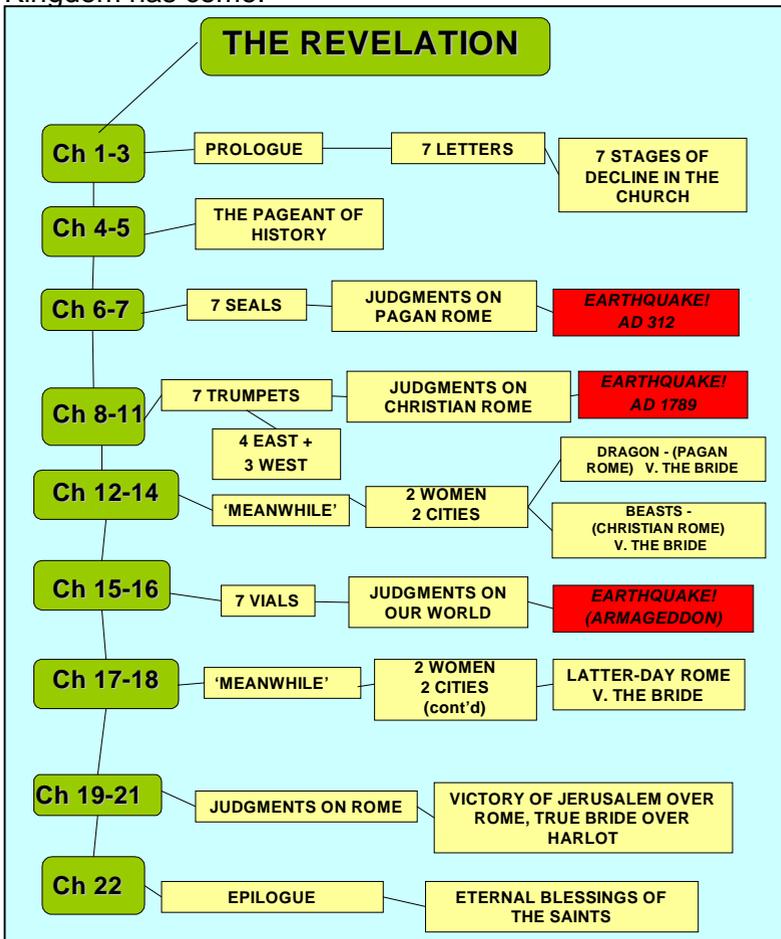
CHAPTER 2 - THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is laid out as 7 Letters, 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets and 7 Bowls (Vials).



The seven Letters view the seven ecclesias in Asia through the eyes of Jesus, from strong, zealous Ephesus to weak, dying Laodicea. But at the same time the letters portray seven stages

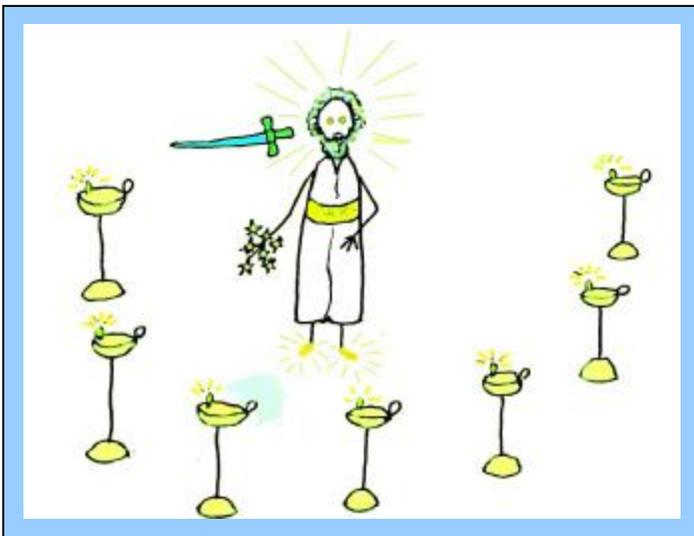
of decline in spiritual health, from the enthusiasm of the First Century believers to the watery worldliness of the Fourth Century. The Seals and Trumpets turn away from the Church to look at the world. They bring God's judgments on Roman society as it became depraved and corrupt. Then the spotlight returns to the Church, checking where it has got to, meanwhile. It goes over the same period of history as the Seals and Trumpets, but focuses on the conflict between the two women – the Virgin, the true believers, and the Church that came to hate and oppress her. Once again in the seven Bowls (vials) the focus swings back to the secular world, taking us through the last centuries until the Second Coming. Finally, we reach the climax, and the Virgin triumphs over the Harlot, and Jerusalem over Rome. The Kingdom has come.



CHAPTER 3 - THE SEVEN LETTERS

In chapter 1, John sees Jesus in his glory (as he was when he was transfigured). He looks like the Son of Man (v 13), but he is dazzling white (v 14, 16). John hears him speak comforting words about his conquest of death (v 18).

Jesus stood in a circle of 7 lampstands. These are explained in v 20, as the 7 congregations (churches) in Asia. Jesus still walks among the 'ecclesias' (the Greek word used) today.



THE SEVEN LETTERS

Each letter has the same pattern. Like all Greek letters, there is first the recipient's name, then the writer's name, next a greeting, then the message, and finally a promise.

Ephesus

The name of the writer is given (2 v 1) in a code taken from chapter 1 – ‘the one with 7 stars’. There follows the commendation (1 v 2) - the Ephesians had rejected false apostles. But they needed to improve (v 5). The promise (v 7) goes back to Genesis 3 - the Tree of Life, forbidden to disobedient Adam.

Smyrna

The writer is – ‘the first and last’ (v 8). The Smyrnans were to be persecuted (v 10), but Jesus promises them ‘no second death’.

Pergamos

The letter comes from ‘the man with the sword’ (v 12). They lived where Satan's seat is (Satan means the adversary - Pergamos had a huge altar to Zeus). Balaam (v 14) was a clever enemy of Israel who tempted God's people to immorality. They must resist such false teaching (v 15). The promise (v 17), was the hidden manna (hidden inside the ark in the Tabernacle), and a white stone ('not guilty' at a trial).

Thyatira

This letter was from ‘the eyes that burn’ through our defences - Jesus sees our hearts (v 18). They had a good record, but tolerated someone like the Jezebel in the Old Testament (she introduced to Israel the worship of Baal). This person or group, like Jezebel, claimed immorality does not matter. Jesus sees even into our private lives (v 23). The promise (v 26, 27) is taken this time from Psalm 2 - to share the ruling of Jesus' Kingdom.

Sardis

(3 v 1) The author is ‘the one with the 7 stars’. Sardis was now weak (v 2). They needed to be ready for Jesus' coming. We also have to watch, for no-one knows when Jesus will come. The promise (v 5) is to wear white clothes (like the priests in the Old Testament), a symbol of holiness. Jesus will read out the victors' names from the Book of Life on the Day of Judgment.

Philadelphia

(v 7) The Lord is 'the one with the Key of David' (this comes from Isaiah 24 - the huge key to the city gate). These brethren were weak (v 8), and had enemies, a group claiming to be God's people (v 9), who opposed them. Jesus promised them they would be pillars in God's temple (based on Jachin and Boaz, the pillars in Solomons Temple). They would live with God for ever.

Laodicea

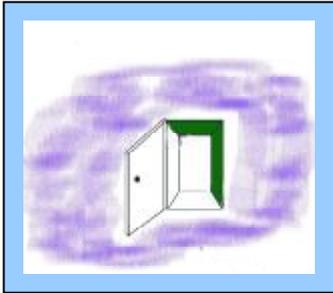
(v 14) Jesus write as 'the Amen' (this means "let it come to pass"). Jesus ensures God's plans come to pass. These people (v 15) were only warm. They made him feel sick. They were wealthy (v 17) but they lacked treasure in heaven, in God's bank. They thought they could see, but needed eye ointment to see the truth about themselves (v 18). They wore fine clothes, but needed the white clothes that only Jesus sells, to cover their nakedness. We may not be rich, in money and clothes, but in God's bank we can be millionaires, if we invest in his son, Jesus! The promise is that Jesus will be our friend (v 20) if we open the door to him. We can even sit down on his throne (v 2). However far we have declined from God's way, we can repent and be restored to him.

So Jesus had warning and encouragement for all. We can imagine what it would have been like for the first hearers, as the Secretary of each congregation stood up to read an individual letter from none other than Jesus himself, and they learned what he really thought of them. But we too can read his letters and learn from them, even though the original people they were sent to have been sleeping for centuries in the dust of the earth.

CHAPTER 4) – JOHN IS TAKEN INTO THE ROYAL BOX

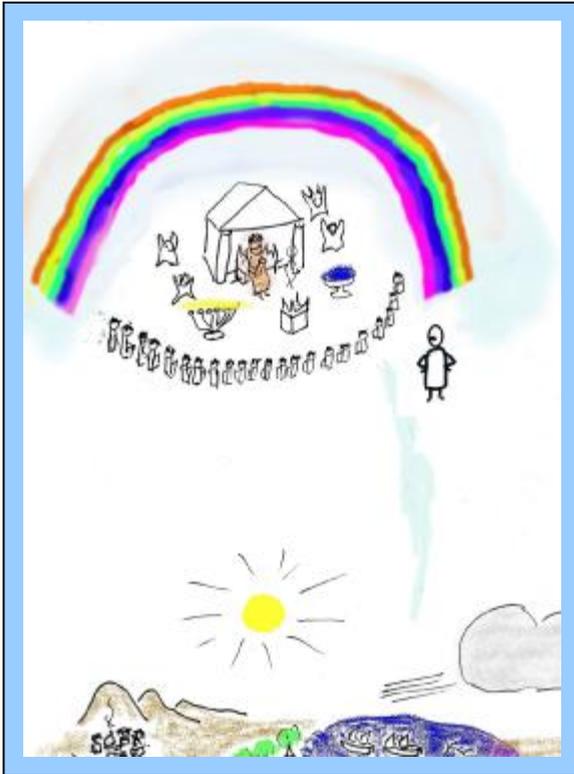
In chapter 4 of Revelation, John is taken up into heaven, to watch future history unfold before his eyes. The history is illustrated in the form of series of scenes or acts in a play. It is as if John is at the theatre or ballet, and is asked to step up into the Royal Box to view the performance. The 'box' is described as if it were the Tabernacle or Temple in the Old Testament, and the 'stage' below is the sea, the earth and the sky.

Ch 4 v 1 JOHN IS ASKED UPSTAIRS



**A door opens
in heaven**

John passes through the door, where he sees a wonderful vision of God in his glory, like many Old Testament prophets did before they began their ministry. The vision is based mainly on Isaiah 11, where the prophet also sees the Lord seated in the Temple. It contains features from Ezekiel ch 1, too – the winged cherubim with eyes. Look out for the altar, the sea, the lampstand, the incense altar – they keep popping up in the Revelation.



John looks
down from the
royal box

Ch 4v 2 THE THRONE OF GOD

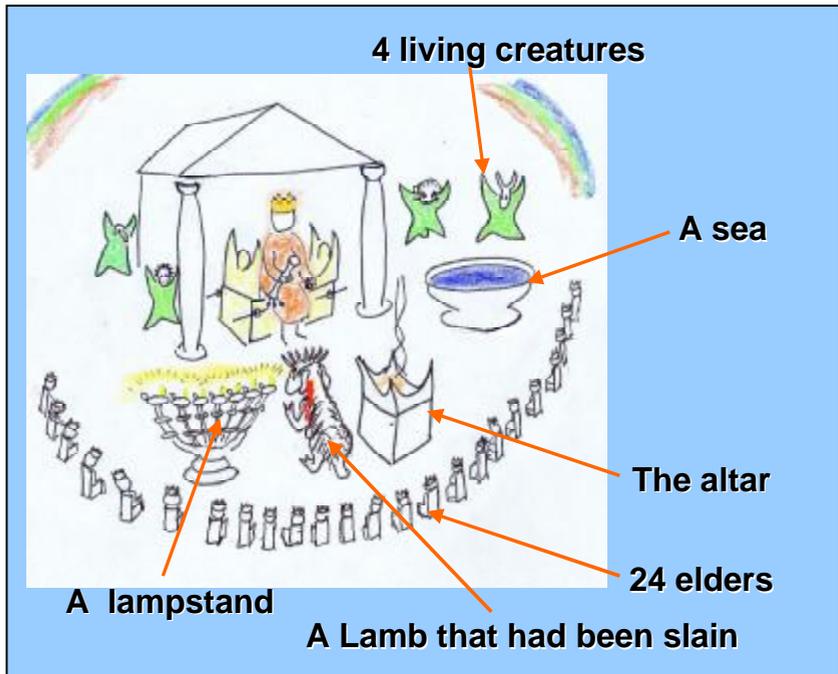
In v 2 John sees God in a throne. God is a great king. But in Old Testament times His angel representative was enthroned between the cherubims above the mercy seat on the ark (see 1 Chronicles 13 v 6 – in Hebrew, 'seat' is 'throne')



(v 4) 24 elders sit round the throne on 24 little thrones (the same word in the Greek as in v2). There were 24 orders of priests in Solomon's Temple (1 Chronicles ch 24, 25, etc). These are not just priests (white clothes), but also kings (crowns).

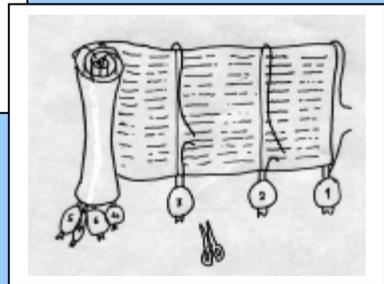
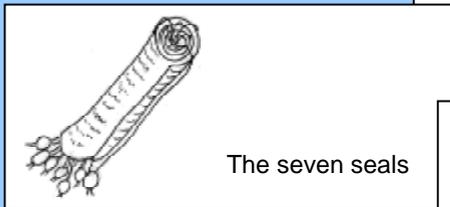
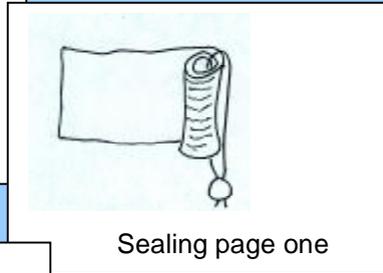
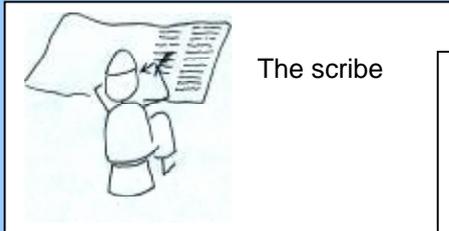
(v 5) John sees seven lamps of fire (Abraham saw lamps of fire when God appeared to him in Genesis 15)

(v 6) Four "living creatures" with four heads and six wings appear – a combination of the cherubim seen by Ezekiel and the seraphim of Isaiah 11. The four faces probably correspond to the 4 flags on the four sides of Israel camped in the wilderness. Who are the living creatures and the 24 elders? We are told precisely (ch 5 v 8, 9) - they are God's saints, redeemed by the blood of Jesus out of all nations, who will share God's kingdom on the earth (v 10). They will teach and mediate (priests) and rule with Christ (kings). We can be part of that glorious assembly!



CHAPTER 5) – THE LION-LAMB

As John watches (5 v 1), a scroll appears in the hand of the one on the throne. It was prophesying God's judgments on men (like the one Ezekiel received in ch 2 v 8-10). It had seven columns (pages). As each page was written it had been rolled up and made secret with a seal (based on Daniel ch 12). Only someone with authority could cut the strings to read the scroll (v 3).



Jesus was worthy (v 5). He is the King, the Lion of Judah. John turns to look at him and sees, not a lion, but a lamb, once dead, but now alive again. The Lamb was presented with the scroll (v 7). He has authority to control the events of history, for all power

is given to him in heaven and in earth (echoes here of Daniel ch 7 v 9-14). The whole assembly, including countless angels, sings praise to him (v 13).

CHAPTER 6) – THE UNROLLING OF THE SCROLL

THE FIRST SEAL

Remember, the visions of Revelation were to show John “things that must shortly come to pass”. So the Seals, opened one by one, correspond to periods of history from AD96 onwards. This is the period of PAGAN ROME, i.e. when the Emperors supported the worship of the gods of Greece and Rome (Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, Diana, Neptune, etc.).

As Jesus broke the first seal (6 v 2) a bowman on a white horse galloped across the stage, going forth to victory. This is the period AD96-180, when the Empire was at peace. Christians were allowed to preach without opposition, and spread westwards to Spain, Germany, Africa and north to Constantinople and the Balkans.



1

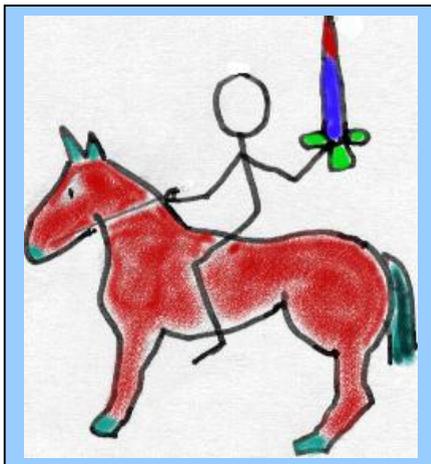


THE SECOND SEAL

A Red horse shoots across the stage (6 v 3) ridden by a man with a sword or 'dagger' (Greek). Red means blood – it was to be a period of bloodshed. Around 183AD Rome was engulfed in civil war as three men fought to be Emperor. War led to famine.



2

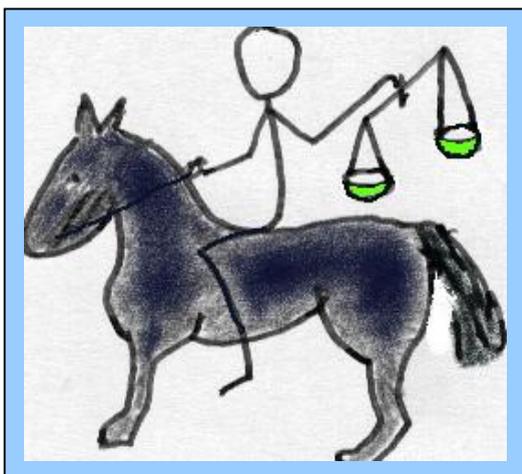


THE THIRD SEAL

A Black horse stands for trouble and distress, and the rider holds balances, and weighs out food, sold at high prices (v 5, 6). The emperors were now wicked men. Caracalla is infamous for his life of evil and violence. He oppressed the people with heavy taxes, and food became expensive.



3



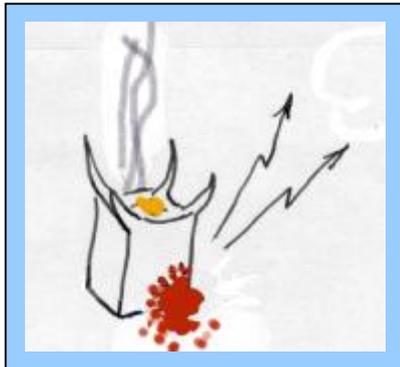
THE FOURTH SEAL

Now comes a horse the colour of death (v 8) with Death as his rider. 1/4 of the earth is subject to war, famine and disease. By 235AD, there were 39 emperors in 70 years. The Empire by this time was divided into 4 parts, each called a prefecture. The Italian prefecture was the one affected this time. From 250-268, plague swept the country; 5000 a day died in Rome.



THE FIFTH SEAL

In this seal (6 v 9) John sees an altar splashed with blood (under the Law of Moses, sacrifices had their blood poured out at the foot of the altar). This blood came from Christians (v 9) - it cried to God for vengeance (like Abel's blood, Genesis 4 v 10). This fits a terrible persecution by Diocletian, 298 - 303 AD.

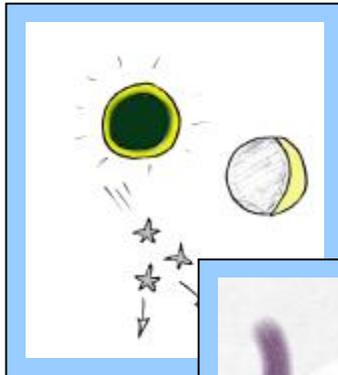


THE SIXTH SEAL

At the opening of the sixth seal there were mighty sound effects. A GREAT EARTHQUAKE shook the stage (v 12) and the sun, moon and stars were darkened and the heavens rolled up. This is the first of three earthquakes in the Revelation. In the Bible, heaven stands for the rulers, and earth for the people being ruled (see Genesis 1 v 16). An earthquake means a great, permanent political change (the language used in verses 14 to 16 is taken from Isaiah's visions of the final Day of Judgement in ch 34 and ch 2). For our brethren who were being persecuted, this change brought relief from their sufferings. Around AD312, Constantine the Great came to power. He befriended the Christians, stopped all persecution of them, and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. This period marks the end of PAGAN ROME. From now on, the empire would be CHRISTIAN.



6



THE SEALING OF THE 1444,000

As chapter 7 opens, John experiences a period of quietness. The winds are not yet allowed to blow (v 1) to cause damage on the earth, because thousands of people are first to be marked in the forehead by God as his own servants, This picture is taken from Cain, whose life was to be preserved by a mark in his forehead, and from Ezekiel ch 9, where God's servants were also marked like this so that they would be recognised and left unharmed when Jerusalem was destroyed. God always looks after his servants, and when the Day of Judgment comes upon our world, we shall be spared if we love Him.

The 144,000 came from an unusual 'Israel'. Dan, which means 'Judgement', is omitted, perhaps to show these people were not literal Jews, but a harvest of believers called by God to be the Seed of Abraham by faith, in a period of peace before judgement fell.



John then sees a wonderful vision (7 v 9) - a great multitude, taken from all nations, and praising God. They are to be blessed for ever in the Kingdom of God, v 16, 17.

The six Seals come to an end with this encouraging picture of the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 7) - THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

Seal number 7 introduces the 7 trumpets. . We have now reached 324-337AD, when there were 15 years of peace (8 v 10).

Under the Seals, the Empire was PAGAN. Now it is Christian, but becoming more and more corrupt. It is time for judgement to be sent against the wicked rulers of CHRISTIAN ROME.

But first John sees an angel in the Temple offering incense on the golden altar before the veil. Incense stands in the Bible for prayer – it was always offered at the morning and evening times for prayer. Perhaps the judgements which were about to begin came in answer to the saints' prayers for God's intervention.



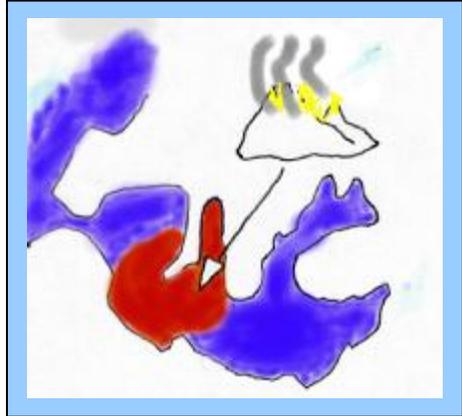
THE FIRST TRUMPET

As the first angel blows his trumpet (8 v 7) the first of the four winds begins to blow (see ch 7 v 1). Hail and fire smite the earth, and the trees are destroyed in one third of the Empire. In 395AD, Alaric and the Goths attacked Italy. By now the Empire was split into 3 parts. The Italian third was invaded and sacked, and Rome was taken after a long siege.



THE SECOND TRUMPET

John now sees a burning mountain fall into the sea, one third of which turns red with blood (like the plague in Egypt). In AD429, Genseric and the Vandals left Spain and attacked Africa with a powerful navy, which swept Rome's ships from the Mediterranean. Hence the Sea is burnt with fire (8 v 8, 9).



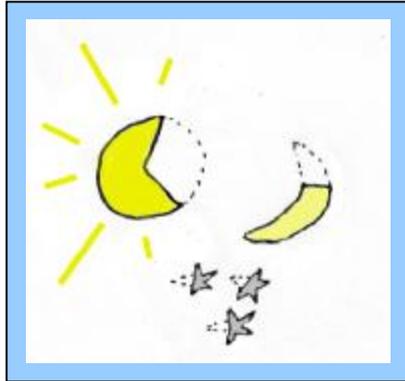
THE THIRD TRUMPET

A meteor flashes across the sky and crashes into the rivers and lakes, poisoning the water. Attila and the Huns began a short, devastating attack on the Western third of the Empire (8 v 10), especially the area of the Alps. Wormwood (v 11) or 'Absinthos' in Greek, is the name of a river in Illyria, where Attila came from. The period is AD 433-453.



THE FOURTH TRUMPET

The last of the "Wind" trumpets (the four winds of ch 7 v 1) knocks out the sun, moon and stars in one third of the empire. This was the work of Odoacer, king of the Goths, who removed the Roman emperor and had himself made king. He was killed in AD423, and his successor, Theodoric turned the western third of the Empire into the Kingdom of the Goths. The Western empire had now ceased to exist.



The next three trumpets represent judgments on the Eastern empire, for now the surviving Emperor was based on Constantinople. They are called the 'Woe' trumpets, because they each start with 'Woe!' like the judgments of Habbakuk in ch 2.

THE FIFTH TRUMPET

John sees another meteorite which falls to earth and opens the exit to the shaft of the bottomless pit (in Greek, Abyss). Locusts swarm out (9 v 1-3), and attack with scorpion stings those not marked in the forehead. They resembled horses, but had long hair (v 8), and lion's teeth. The smoke rising up out of the pit (v 2) is based on the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19 v 28).

The star was Mahomet, and the armies the huge numbers of Arabs who swarmed west through Israel to attack the Mediterranean rim, which they held for 300 years (two times five months of days, v 5 and v 10).



THE SIXTH TRUMPET

In ch 9 v 13 a huge army of horsemen emerges from the river Euphrates. For a period of $365 + 30 + 1$ years (allowing 1 day for a year), they kill one third of men, v 18. This is the work of the Tartars under Togrul Beg, Al Arslan, and Tamurlaine, who for 400 years attached the Eastern third of the Empire, until Constantinople fell in May 1453. The use of gunpowder and cannon in warfare is portrayed in v 18, 19.



John is told to go on prophesying (ch 10 v 11). In fact, we need to search to find the end of the sixth trumpet. It continues on and on through chs 10 and 11, right up to 11 v 15, when the seventh angel finally blows his trumpet.

Meanwhile John sees a vision of a mighty angel standing on earth and sea, and hears the rumble and roll of a voice which came in seven claps of thunder (like the voice of God on Mount Sinai in the Exodus). He is not allowed to reveal the contents of the seven messages, because like Daniel's last vision, they are to be sealed until the time of the end, when with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, God's plan would come to its climax. But before that the sixth trumpet period contains many further visions.

In ch 11 v 1,2 John sees the Holy City and the Temple trodden underfoot for 1260 days (v 1-3). This is based on the saying of Jesus, who said Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Jesus was speaking of the literal Jerusalem, but in Revelation, Jerusalem and the Temple stand for God's saints, the true believers (see 2 Corinthians 6 v 16).

By now Christianity had changed. Many wrong teachings had been introduced, but worse, bishops now ruled in the courts of kings. The Pope had become head of the Church, higher even than kings and emperors. In this period, those Protestants who believed in Bible truth were persecuted and killed by the Roman Church. They are called the Witnesses (v 3). For three and a half years (1260 days), like Elijah, they speak out for the Truth against error. In the Bible, a day stands for a year (see Ezekiel 4 v 6). On this basis, the witnessing could be said to start with the rise of Constantine, AD 312, and end with the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in Europe, AD 1572, when a law was passed in



Europe which meant all Protestants had to be killed.

During that long period the Truth was kept alive by small groups of Protestants, such as the Valdenses and the Hugenots. As Elijah dried the earth, and Elisha brought fire from heaven, and Moses sent plagues on the earth (v 5, 6) they were protected under the hand of God.

But at length they are overcome. They are brutally killed (v 7), and lie unburied in the street for three and a half days (v 8).



Their enemies rejoice and send presents (as the Philistines did when Samson was taken).

Not until the French Revolution in AD1789 would freedom of speech allow Protestants to preach freely in Europe again.

How do we fit in the three and a half days of their death? We must assume the period represents many years. But it would not make sense for bodies to lie outside for years or even months –

they would decay. Perhaps the time period ingeniously switches to a moon day – the 30 days it takes for the moon to rise and set. Then we would have an interval of 3 and a half times 30, or, allowing a year for a day, 105 years. There was a terrible point in history called the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, when all religious freedom was taken away in Europe. That was in AD1685. 105 years later came the French Revolution.

Now, at this point, John sees the second GREAT EARTHQUAKE (11 v 13). The heavens, the rulers, are once more drastically changed.



Freedom, Equality, and Fraternity was the cry of the Revolutionaries, and it swept across the world. 1789 AD was the date in France. The power of kings and priests, including the Pope in Rome, was broken for ever. The waves of that revolution are still reverberating round the world today as nations seek for independence and freedom of speech and 'human rights'.

It is our turn now to act as witnesses to the Truth of the Bible, in the freedom God has granted us today.



THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

Following the Earthquake, John hears the sound of the Seventh Trumpet, bringing in the third

period of 'woe' on a society that was beginning to deny the very existence of God, and destroy the good earth God had made. (v 18).

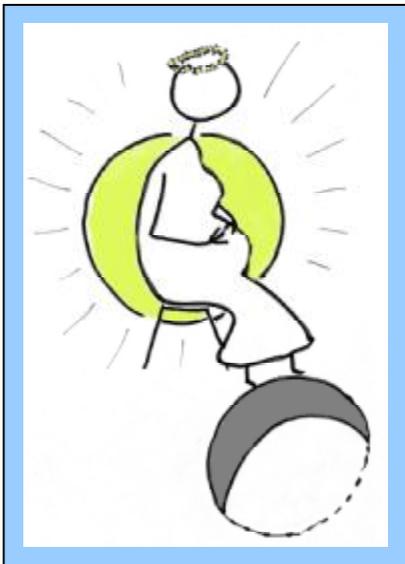
The seventh trumpet introduces the Kingdom of God (11 v 15 – 19), and John hears the persecuted followers of Christ give thanks that the end has come. But he soon learns the coming of the Kingdom has to be preceded by one last series of judgements. Like the seventh Seal, the seventh Trumpet is going to be amplified into the seven Altar Bowls (Vials).

But first John needs to catch up with what has been happening to the Church, and the conflict between the two Women. We must wait until ch 16 to find out about the Vials. For now, we go back in time to the period of Constantine to see the development of the Apostasy, and the bitter sufferings of God's saints. These are portrayed in a series of visions of remarkable Beasts.

CHAPTER 8) – THE BEASTS

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

Chapter 12 begins with a picture of a woman in heaven, clothed with sun, moon and stars, and heavily pregnant. She brings forth a baby boy, which is attacked by a Serpent. The language here is clearly drawn from Genesis ch 3 v 15, and there are similarities with the work of Christ, the true Seed of the Woman, who fought against the Serpent of Sin. But the vision in ch 12 is describing a political and religious situation in history. It is unthinkable that a woman could literally have a baby in heaven. And dragons do

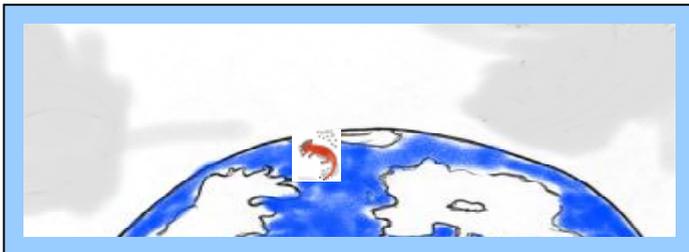


not normally drag one third of the stars with their tails. The pregnant Woman represents the church, the Bride of Christ. She should have remained a virgin, chaste and pure, but she had committed fornication with the world, and was now expecting a child. She was in heaven, in the ruling places, alongside kings and princes (the sun, moon and stars, v 1), when she should have been separate from the State.

The dragon with ten horns has echoes of Daniel's Fourth Beast in Daniel 7 v 7, easily identified with the fourth world empire of Rome. The child represents Constantine the Great, the champion of the church. His father, Constantius, died unexpectedly in England, in York, fighting against the Picts. Constantine was with him at the time, and had to



hurry back to Rome to lay claim to the throne. The Empire at this time was divided into three. He soon defeated his rival Maxentius, which gave him control of Italy and the West. He now set his sights on eliminating the Eastern Emperor, Licinius, who was a firm supporter of Paganism (idol worship). He is represented by the Dragon, carrying one third of the stars in the sweep of its tail (v4). In 324 AD Constantine defeated him, became sole Emperor, and moved his throne to his new capital, Constantinople (Istanbul). Licinius the Dragon was cast out of the ruling places and fell to the earth.



The arrival of Constantine brought peace to the Christians after centuries of persecution by the pagan emperors. The church had become triumphant. In the language of its priests, the Kingdom of God had come on earth (v 10,11). But for God's true saints, the remnant who kept the faith and rejected the new State church with its doctrines of the Trinity and the Immortality of the Soul, further persecution was to come.

THE BEAST OF THE SEA

In ch 13 v 1 John sees a strange animal coming out of the sea. The seven heads and ten horns identify it with Rome, the fourth beast of Daniel. But it also had the features of Daniel's other beasts (v 2) rolled together into one. The power of the old Pagan emperors to persecute and slay is handed on to this new beast, (v 3).



The main feature of this animal is that it speaks blasphemies in God's name (v 5, 6), and persecutes his saints (v 7) all over the world. It is obviously linked with Rome, since it sits in the Dragon's seat. It has a head which is wounded, then healed. What does this mean? The barbarian invasions that brought an end to the original, political, Roman empire, left a vacuum in which arose a similar but religious system, the Roman church, which effectively became another world empire. It claimed to speak in God's name

(blasphemy, v 5), and set itself to eliminate all opposition. The Roman bishop was eventually elevated to head of the world church by the Decree of the Emperor Phocas in 606 AD. From that time his power grew steadily.

THE BEAST OF THE EARTH

In the last part of ch 13, John sees the power of the first beast, the beast of the Mediterranean sea, handed on to a new beast, one that is associated with the earth. It looks like a lamb, and like lambs has two horns (v 12), but its mouth is that of a dragon. It has all the characteristics of the preceding beast, and deceives men (v 13). It sets up a small scale replica of the sea beast, and like Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel ch 3 v 1-6), insists people must worship it (v 14,15).



This phase of religious history covers the development of what has become known as the Holy Roman Empire. It was the work of Charles the Great (Charlemagne), who based his kingdom on Auxerre, at the centre of the great land mass of Europe. This explains why it is called the beast of the earth. He worked hand-in-glove with the Pope to civilise and expand the old Roman empire northwards into Europe. His power was balanced with that of the

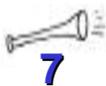
Pope, as equals and co workers. Hence the two horns (v 11). What was the image of the beast? Remarkably, Charlemagne granted the Pope his own kingdom in Italy, a mini Roman Empire where he was king. The spirit of Rome lived on.

The worshippers of the Beast were marked in the forehead, like the 144,000 (ch 7 v 3), but this time with the mark of the Beast, the Roman Catholic system. v 18 gives it the number 666, which represents LATEINOS [the Greek letters of this word have these values : 30 + 1 + 300 + 5 + 10 + 50 + 70 + 200 = 666]. LATEINOS is Greek for Latin, the language of Rome. Our brethren, refusing to conform, suffered exclusion from work and from society.

Fortunately, as chapters 14 and 15 make clear, God was watching over them, and in his good time they would be rewarded. In fact, at this point (ch 14 v 1 onwards) John sees another little Kingdom vision. Those who had been marked with God's mark and died for their faith now triumph, while their enemies, marked with the Beast's mark (v 11), are punished for ever. It is God, turning the tables. They had died in the Lord for their faith, but now they would rest in the Lord (v 13). Babylon, the oppressor of Jerusalem, is cast down, like the Babylon of the Old Testament (v 8), and Jesus, the Son of Man, resolves all wrongs in the Day of Judgement (14 v 14-20).

No doubt our dear brothers hoped the Kingdom would come in their lifetime. As in Isaiah and the other prophets, God mixed sympathy for their sufferings with a picture of the future, so that their faith would be sustained. For each of them, the end of their life was indeed the arrival of the Kingdom, the interval of death being unperceived as they sleep, awaiting the salvation of the Lord.

CHAPTER 9) - THE SEVEN BOWLS

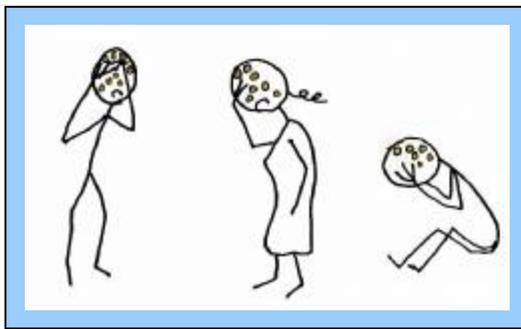


We have now returned to the time of the Seventh Trumpet, which contains the final series of seven - the seven Altar Bowls (15 v 1 and v 7). These bowls were used to pour out blood during

sacrifices, a fitting symbol for judgement. As with the previous series, they represent judgments of God on the world, but this time on the MODERN WORLD, from the French Revolution onwards.

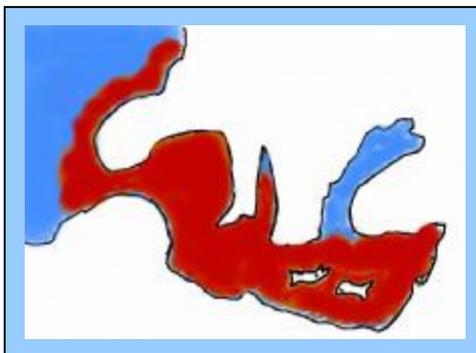
THE FIRST BOWL

The first bowl (16 v 1, 2), falls on those who had the mark of the Beast (see ch 13 v 17). It brings them painful sores (like the plague in Egypt). From 1792 onwards, Napoleon's armies conquered Europe, bringing destruction to all these Roman Catholic countries.



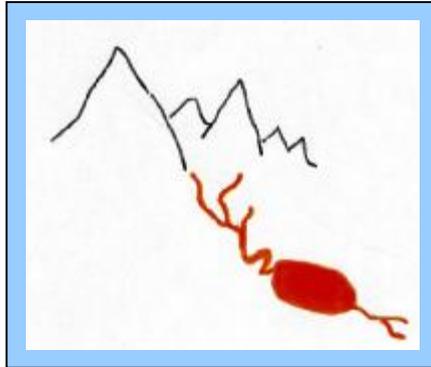
THE SECOND BOWL

The second bowl (v 3) affects the sea. During the 1800's Nelson's British navy swept the French and their Spanish allies from the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. This brought the Continent to ruin, by preventing sea trade in and out of Europe.



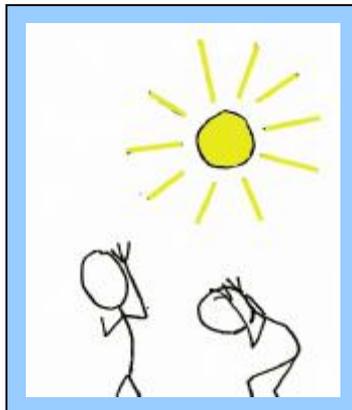
THE THIRD BOWL

John now sees the rivers and fountains of water turned to blood (v 4). Rivers and fountains indicate the region of the Alps. God was avenging the blood of Protestants such as the Valdenses, who had been slain there in their thousands (v 5).



THE FOURTH BOWL

As the next bowl is poured out it affects the sun (v 8). The sun represents the place of rulership. This was sited in Austria, which was attacked by Napoleon in 1806. He brought about the end of the Austrian (German) Empire, which had been in existence since the time of Charlemagne.



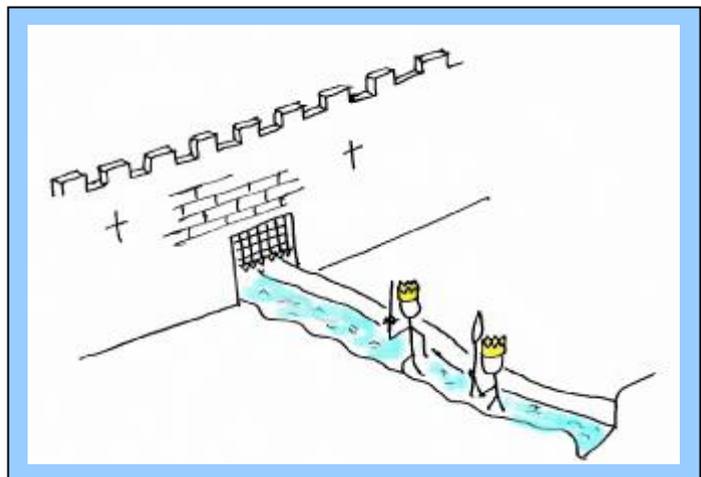
THE FIFTH BOWL

The fifth Bowl finds its mark in the seat of the Beast (v10). This means Rome itself, headquarters of the Catholic system. It was conquered in 1809, and the Pope was taken prisoner to France. The political power of the Pope had been struck a heavy blow, and by 1870 it had disappeared.



THE SIXTH BOWL

Now we are getting closer to the present day, for during the sixth Bowl period Jesus comes back (v 15). This Bowl is poured out on the



Euphrates, drying up the river to prepare for the conquering armies of the Kings of the East. The picture is drawn from the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus king of Persia in BC538, as described by Isaiah in ch 44 v 7 - 45 v 2. He came against Babylon from the east (the sun-rising). According to Herodotus the historian, with great ingenuity he diverted the Euphrates to dry the river bed, and his soldiers marched under the water gates into the city. In a similar way, Babylon of the last days is to be conquered by Christ, the king from the sunrise.

The next event in the sixth Bowl sounds strange, until we pick up the Old Testament allusion. John sees evil spirits like frogs going forth to gather the nations to Armageddon (v 13 – 16).

This idea is taken from the battle of Ramoth Gilead in 1 Kings 22 v 20-23, when unclean spirits in the mouths of Ahab's



prophets lured him to his death. The frog is the traditional emblem of France. The spirit of the French Revolution, working outwards through the last two centuries, has changed politics for ever. The insistence on freedom and human rights has led to the many independent, self-governing nations of today. One day the

same desire to overthrow restraint will bring a confederation of nations against Jesus, when he commands the kings of the earth to lay down their crowns (see Psalm 2).

One spirit comes from the Dragon (v 13), which in Revelation consistently stands for the Eastern side of the Roman Empire, now the countries of Eastern Europe. The Beast is easily identified with Europe, the E.U. With the resurgence of fundamentalist Islam some have suggested the False Prophet is Mahomet, but in ch 19 v 20 he is said to have deceived those who had the mark of the Beast. This would seem to indicate the Papacy, which gives an appearance, today, of supporting democracy and civil rights.

It is during this time of gathering storm before Armageddon that Jesus suddenly appears (v 15). The allusion here is to the sudden re-appearance of Moses from the clouds of Sinai, when he found the people naked, to their shame. We have to be ready to meet Jesus, and not give up believing he will come back, as the Israelites did with Moses. The warning is taken from Jesus' own words – 'Watch! For you do not know the hour when the thief will come'.

Armageddon is a place in Israel ('the Hebrew tongue"). Megiddo is sited in the Valley of Jezreel, where many great battles have been fought in the past. But this is to be the greatest battle of all time - Jesus versus the kings of the earth!

THE SEVENTH BOWL

The seventh bowl brings us, at long last, to the Kingdom of God (16 v 17, 18). The appearance of Jesus leads to the third, and



greatest, earthquake in the book of Revelation, a change in society that will bring permanent blessing for mankind. As we read in Hebrews, Jesus' kingdom is one that cannot be earthquake - shaken. It will remain for ever (Hebrews 12 v 26 - 28).

CH 10) – THE FINAL CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO WOMEN AND THE TWO CITIES

In the next act of the drama, John sees a woman riding a red beast (17 v 3). Like the earlier beasts, this one has seven heads and ten horns (v 3), which together with the seven hills link it to the old Roman empire (v 9).



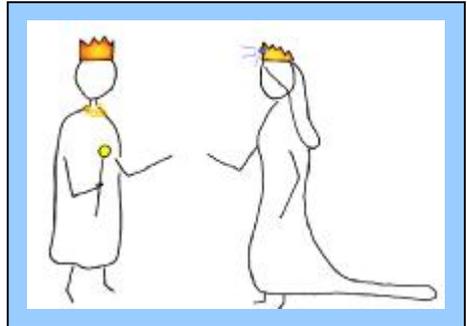
We are told the ten horns represent kingdoms which appear briefly in the last days (v 12) and fight against Jesus when he appears (v 14). The woman is the same impure Bride of Christ, responsible for the death of the Virgin, God's saints (v6).

In this vision we have moved into our future, so we can no longer be so precise in our interpretation. This last phase of the earlier beasts probably represents the European Union, in full expansion. It will be steered by the Pope, as head of the world Church, in a final crusade to destroy Christ, whom he will

persuade them is an imposter. In recent years we have seen such an alliance shaping up, and a growing respect for the Pope as a world leader.

BABYLON IS CAST DOWN

In ch 18 John sees Babylon, the great city that has opposed God's people for so long, cast down (v 20,21) like the stone of Seraiah (Jeremiah 51 v 61-66), or the painted Jezebel from her window. In contrast (19 v 1-8) those who have remained loyal to the Bridegroom are raised from the dead, and brought before him in a dazzling white wedding garment. What a celebration there will be at the Marriage Supper, to which, as those from the highways and byways, we have all been invited (Matthew 22 v 2)!



The vision concludes with Jesus as king of kings (he wears many crowns, 19 v 12) setting off for Armageddon on his white horse. He is on the one side, his garments stained with blood (taken from Genesis 49 v 11 and Isaiah 63 v1). The kings of the earth (v 19) line up on the other. Jesus, of course, is completely victorious, and the graphic language used here comes straight from the destruction of Gog on the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 39 v 4).

THE BRIDE, THE HOLY CITY

For 1000 years, King Sin, the Serpent that has fought through the centuries against the Seed of the Woman, is bound and controlled, (20 v 2). There are echoes here of the fate of Daniel's beasts – the Roman beast was destroyed and the rest allowed to continue for a while (Daniel 7 v 11,12). As ch 20 continues the aged apostle is shown the order of events from the Resurrection to the end of the Millennium, when finally death itself will be put under Jesus' feet, and sin and death (Hell) will disappear for ever.

Chapter 21 opens with a new heavens and earth (from Isaiah 65 v 17). The Old Testament allusions come thick and fast now as we approach the climax of the book - it is thrilling to seek them out, and appreciate the wonderful unity of the word of God. Now is the day of glory for the Bride, the Lamb's wife.

John turns to look at her radiant beauty, but like Ezekiel in ch 40 v 2, he sees a city (v 9,10). It



is the new Jerusalem, no longer down trodden by the Gentiles, but capital of the earth, with the nations coming up with gifts as they did to Solomon in his glory (v 26). It is a perfect cube (v 16), like the Most Holy place in the Temple. The city needs no temple, because it is itself the Most Holy place, and God's people dwell there with Him, in the beautiful House He has been building through many

centuries. But the right to be called a citizen is for those who are undefiled, who have hated lies. They will be chosen to ascend up into the holy hill (Psalm 24 v 3).

CHAPTER 11) – EDEN RESTORED

So we come to the final vision of the Apostle – a picture that would inspire him and his readers to their dying day. Time has come full circle. The last chapter of the Bible takes us back to the first. The Creation week has ended, and it is time for rest.

In ch 22 he sees Paradise restored, with trees of life watered by the rivers that once flowed through Eden, or like those in Ezekiel's city with its streams that healed the Sea of Death (ch 47

v 7,8). Those who have kept Christ's commandments are given authority to enter the Paradise, and eat the fruit of the tree of life (v 13). For them, cleansed by the blood of Christ, the Curse is taken away (v 3), and they behold the face of God (v 4), as Adam did when he once walked amidst the trees.



Jesus warns us three times in this last chapter that he comes quickly or suddenly (v 7, v 12 and v 20). He tells us we have to be ready to meet him. It will be too late to rush out for oil when the Bridegroom appears. He will find us as we are on that day – unjust or righteous, filthy or clad in holiness (v 11).

The final words of Scripture come to a close (v 17) with the beautiful invitation of Isaiah 55. The water of life is there for the asking. Jesus gives it free – he has already paid for it, with his own life. We now, as members of the Bride, invite others to share in the Hope of the gospel. God has been good to us, so we must pass on the message to them, until the Lord appears, and the Book of Life is closed.

EVEN SO, COME LORD JESUS!