



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Revelation, Part 2

Theme: Spiritual War

Overview: Many metaphors describe the Christian life—e.g. a race (2 Timothy 4:7), fishing (Mark 1:17), a parade (2 Corinthians 2:14), and even war (Ephesians 6:10-12). We cringe when we think that being in union with Christ is like a war because the physical nuances of war are so horrid. In its path war leaves violence, death, economic need, homelessness, emotional stress, and a host of other atrocities. Even if certain wars can be viewed as “just” (Augustine), the thought of war, for believers, is a bitter pill to swallow. Yet war describes the Christian’s plight since believers are not to love the world or the things of the world (1 John 2:15) and anyone who is a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4). The book of Revelation makes it abundantly clear that Christians are at war—and this is true whether that war is with pagan governments or with the seduction of culture. Revelation 6-11 describes the horror of the judgments of God on a pagan culture. Revelation 11-12 tells who is behind this war. Students will learn who the war heroes are, what war casualties result, what war strategies are necessary to win the battle, and what war wounds remain.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

INTRODUCTION

Author and Audience

The New Testament book of Revelation stands as Scripture's final word—both a culmination of God's redemptive story and a pastoral letter to believers living between Christ's ascension and his return. Written by the apostle John, exiled on the island of Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," Revelation was addressed to seven real congregations in Asia Minor. These churches faced pressures familiar to every generation of Christians: cultural compromise, spiritual fatigue, persecution, and the temptation to lose heart. John writes as a shepherd apostle, strengthening believers to endure faithfully in a world that often opposes the reign of Christ.

Date

Most conservative scholars date the book around AD 95 during the reign of Domitian, a period marked by increasing hostility toward Christians.

Setting

Yet Revelation's setting is not merely historical; it is cosmic. John is invited to see earthly events from heaven's vantage point. What appears chaotic on the ground is revealed to be ordered under the sovereign rule of the risen Lamb. The book's visions unveil the true nature of

the age between Christ's first and second comings—a time in which the church is called to patient endurance while Christ advances his kingdom.

Theme

The central theme of Revelation is the victory of Jesus Christ. The Lamb who was slain now reigns, and his triumph shapes the entire book. Evil is real, but it is not ultimate. The church suffers, but it is never abandoned. History moves not in circles but toward a consummation in which God dwells with his people and makes all things new. Revelation portrays this present age as the arena of spiritual conflict and gospel advance, culminating in Christ's visible return and the final judgment.

Why Study Revelation?

Because it grounds weary believers in hope. It reminds us that the church's story is anchored not in fear, speculation, or political turmoil but in the unshakable reign of Christ. Revelation trains us to see our world truthfully—to recognize both the deceptive allure of Babylon and the quiet, steady victory of the Lamb. It calls us to worship, to perseverance, and to confidence that God's purposes will stand. Far from being a book to avoid, Revelation is a gift to the church: a promise that no matter how dark the night, the morning of new creation is certain.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Revelation 6:1-12; 7:9-17

WEEK 2: Revelation 8:6-13; 9:1-4, 13--15, 20-21

WEEK 3: Revelation 12:1-17

WEEK 4: Revelation 13:1-18

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Wash your robe white in the blood of the Lamb.**

STUDY: Revelation, Part 2

THEME: Spiritual War

LESSON TEXT: Revelation 6:1-12; 7:9-17

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Leviticus 8:30; Isaiah 53:12; Acts 22:16; Ephesians 5:25-27

WAR HEROES

BY MARK SCOTT

Robert Lowry was skilled at playing various instruments at age 17. By age 22 he had entered the ministry. In 1876 he wrote, "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." In the physical world blood does not wash garments clean; it stains. But in the spiritual world blood washes lives as white as snow. The real war heroes in the Book of Revelation made their robes *white in the blood of the Lamb*.

We leave the mountain of glory in the worship of God and Jesus (chapters 4-5) and move to the valley of despair in the judgments of God on earth (chapter 6). The contrast is sharp. The Lamb (Jesus) had taken the scroll from God (5:7). The scroll was sealed with seven seals. In the breaking of those seals, so that the message on the scroll could be read, we begin to understand the judgments of God on a sinful humanity. The vision took place in heaven, but the judgments happened on earth. William Hendriksen has identified the structure of Revelation as progressive parallelism (i.e. the visions dealing with these judgments of God progress and are parallel so that they tell the same story over and over). So the seals, trumpets, and bowls of wrath move slowly toward the end of time but are parallel. These judgments of God are separated by some interludes (chapters 7 and 14 in particular) which show God's care for his struggling saints.

Trouble on Earth (6:1-12)

God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of people (Romans 1:18). Some of this wrath is built into the fabric of the universe. The living creatures, who worshiped God and Jesus in chapters 4-5, assist (i.e. invite) the four horsemen (i.e. symbols of God's punishments) in revealing this wrath by commanding them to *Come!* Some suggest that God starts the fight. The rider of a white horse in 19:11 is Jesus. But should we assume the same here? Context suggests otherwise. These horses represent battle (white), bloodshed and murder (red), famine (black), and death (pale). All four affect one-fourth of the earth (i.e. a portion). People and creation were still in need of being tamed (note the mention of *wild beasts*).

The fifth and sixth seals are different than the first four. The seventh seal is delayed until after the interlude of chapter seven (8:1). The ugliness of the first four seals being broken leads God's people to ask, "How long...?"

When will the world's madness end, and when will the martyrs' faith be honored? That won't happen until the sixth seal is broken (symbolic of the end of time). The earthquake, the sun turning black, and the moon becoming blood red can be used figuratively for the downfall of nations at times, but here it signals the end of the world. God's people must be patient and allow their *white robes* to remind them of their cleansing by Christ.

Triumph in Heaven (7:9-17)

John's vision in heaven allowed him to witness these destructive forces on earth. But when he fixed his gaze back on the heavenly worship scene, he saw the real war heroes. Were they the martyrs who gave their lives for the cause? Yes. Were they the 144,000 mentioned in 7:1-8 (i.e., a symbolic number which constitutes the new Israel)? Yes. But then John looked through the wide-angle lens and saw even a larger picture in heaven. A *great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language* stood before the throne of God and pushed praise for God to a thousand decibels. Heaven will be a very full place, and it will be quite loud. No one will have laryngitis there.

The great multitude joined the elders and the four living creatures in shouting praise to God. They wore their white robes (honoring the Lord with their purity), and they held palm branches (think triumphal entry). These war heroes had come from the *tribulations* ("pressed down" places multitudinous in number) on earth. But they *washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb* (7:14). The people of the earth had blood on their hands. The people in heaven had blood on their sin-washed robes.

What else could these heroes shout but salvation, praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power, and strength to God? Their service to God, *day and night*, was not forgotten. The Lamb who would be *their shepherd* would shelter, provide, protect, enliven, and comfort them. God would give to these faithful people a heroes' welcome.

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APPLICATION

WITH BOTH HANDS

BY DAVID FAUST

The book, *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus*, examines Jesus' words in light of their Jewish context. In a chapter called "Thinking With Both Hands," author Dr. Lois Tverberg explains how the Jews would debate two sides of an issue by first making a point and then saying, "On the other hand . . ." She writes, "Some of the most important truths of the Bible are paradoxical. Jesus is both fully human and fully God. God is loving and in control, yet he allows tragedy and injustice to take place."

Dr. Tverberg contends we should read the Bible with "both hands." Biblical ideas like "the first shall be last" and "to save your life you must lose it" are paradoxical but not contradictory.

The Judgment of the Lamb

The expression "Lamb of God" appears 26 times in the book of Revelation. Salvation comes by grace, through the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Paradoxically, the saints in heaven get their robes clean and white by having them washed in the Lamb's crimson blood (Revelation 7:13-14).

On the other hand, in Revelation chapter 6 the Lamb initiates six judgments so devastating that people try to hide "from the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:16). If you picture lambs as soft and wooly, the concept of a wrathful lamb is an unexpected twist.

Some modern theologians try to amputate one of the Lord's "hands," but his holy wrath doesn't contradict his love. Like two sides of the same coin, God is both merciful and mighty, full of grace and truth. He has made himself accessible and approachable, but the holy Lord acts justly, deserves obedience, and demands accountability.

The Peace-Giving Warrior

The Prince of Peace promises to give his followers *shalom* that transcends anything the world can give (Isaiah 9:6; John 14:27; Philippians 4:7). "He himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14).

On the other hand, the book of Revelation also portrays Christ as a mighty warrior who "judges and wages war," rules with an iron scepter, and "treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (Revelation 19:11-15). We shouldn't take him lightly and view him as a soft, benign figure who winks passively at wrongdoing and refuses to hold people accountable for their actions. Don't mistake meekness for weakness. Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16).

General Douglas MacArthur stated, "The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war." The Prince of Peace brought *shalom* to this fallen world, but it came at the price of the Mighty Warrior's own shed blood.

The Lamb Who Shepherds the Flock

In another paradoxical word-picture, Revelation 7:17 says, "the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd." What a vivid way to describe Jesus Christ!

He is the good shepherd, but he knows how it feels to be a lamb—a member of the flock. He leads us to green pastures and still waters, for he knows what it's like to be hungry and thirsty. He accompanies us through the valley of the shadow of death after walking through that valley himself.

Christ loves us with both hands. He leads the flock while empathizing with the sheep.

Personal Challenge:

Does it surprise or unsettle you to read about the "wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:16)? Discuss with a trusted friend or mentor how Revelation chapters 6 and 7 impact your view of the Lord.

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Who can you think of (living or dead) who might be identified as a war hero? What characteristics and actions define an individual as a war hero?

Ask two people to read aloud **Revelation 6:1-12 and 7:9-17**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Throughout Revelation 6, John records that the Lamb (Jesus) opened the seals on the scroll that allowed God's judgments to begin. What significance do you see in the fact that Jesus opens these seals?
3. John notes that the four horses released with the opening of the seals were white, red, black, and pale. Do you think the colors of these horses have any significance to the unfolding events of judgment? Explain.
4. The martyred souls under the altar asked, "How long ... until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then they were given a white robe and told to patiently wait (6:9-11).
 - Why do you think they asked about their blood being avenged at this particular time amid the opening of the seals? What comfort can we find in knowing that the Lord will avenge the evils done to his people?
 - What does it mean that they were given a white robe and why were they told to be patient and wait? Do these actions have implications for us today?
5. What does Revelation 6:12-17 tell us about the awe-inspiring natures of God and Jesus? Why do you think John used the imagery of a Lamb's wrath (generally a timid animal) as the source of judgment?
6. John describes the "great multitude" before the throne and the Lamb from "every nation, tribe, people and language" and their actions in heaven (7:9-12).
 - What do you think it will be like to be a part of this great multitude as they worship God and the Lamb?
 - Do you think John's description of this multitude ("from every nation, tribe, people and Language") offers an implication for Christians today?
7. John's description of heaven (7:15-17) may be one of the most comforting passages in Scripture. Review the items in John's list and discuss the significance of them. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Revelation 8:6-13; 9:1-4, 13-15, 20-21**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Repent of wrongdoing.**

STUDY: Revelation, Part 2

THEME: Spiritual War

LESSON TEXT: Revelation 8:6-13; 9:1-4, 13--15, 20-21

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Ezekiel 18:21-23; Mark 6:12; Acts 3:19; 2
Corinthians 7:8-12

WAR CASUALTIES

BY MARK SCOTT

Trumpets (probably ram's horns) served several purposes in the Bible. They could indicate God's powerful presence (Exodus 19:16). They could announce the encampments and journeys of Israel (Numbers 10:2). They summoned soldiers for battle (1 Samuel 13:3). They announced key faith festivals (Psalm 81:3). And they will be used to announce the end of time (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). In Revelation they announce more of the judgments of God on unrepentant humanity.

War makes casualties—of earth, sky, and sea; of sun, moon, and stars; and worst of all, of people. The key to avoiding the casualties in this war is repentance. People's repentance even affects other aspects of creation. The way to avoid these war casualties is repentance.

Casualties of Creation (8:6-11)

Ultimately salvation is the healing of all creation. When things went upside down in the Garden of Eden due to Adam's and Eve's sin, creation itself experienced casualties. The trumpets, which follow the seals and precede the bowls of wrath, announce these casualties. The earth, sea, and rivers were all affected. The math in Revelation is funny math. If one added how much of the earth would be burned up or destroyed, through the various trumpets/judgments, it would amount to more than 100 percent. So the numbers themselves become symbolic of partial or full destruction.

When the first trumpet sounded, *hail and fire mixed with blood was hurled down on the earth*. This was reminiscent of the seventh plague in Egypt (Exodus 9:13-26). When the second trumpet sounded, *a huge mountain was thrown into the sea*. The result was the waters turning to blood and a third of the ships were burned. This was reminiscent of the first plague (Exodus 7:14-21). When the third trumpet sounded, a great star named *Wormwood* (bitterness) was thrown into the rivers. The waters became bitter, and people died. This was reminiscent of Israel drinking water from the destroyed golden calf (Exodus 32:20). The earth became the whipping post of God's wrath.

Casualties Beyond the Atmosphere (8:12-13)

The atmosphere and stratosphere are the layers of gases that surround the earth and protect it. But the fourth trumpet describe judgments of God that go higher than the atmosphere. They encompass the quasars and galaxies. When the fourth trumpet sounded, sun, moon, and stars

were altered. These brilliant lights turned dark. Imagine the strangeness and the immediate coolness. The darkness was reminiscent of the ninth plague of Egypt (Exodus 10:21-29).

A brief interlude occurs next. A talking eagle appears and pronounces the "woes" on the earth that the remaining trumpets will bring. These trumpets are played by the angels of course. Creation beyond that which is on the earth is affected by these trumpet blasts and the judgments that come after them.

Casualties of People (7:11; 9:1-4, 13-15, 20-21)

The prize of creation was people. People were to have dominion over birds, beasts, and sea creatures. And people were not to worship sun, moon, or stars. But lack of repentance would cause God's judgments to fall on people too. When the waters turned bitter, people died. When the fifth angel sounded the trumpet, a star fell *from the sky to the earth*. But then the star was given *the key to the shaft of the Abyss*. How could a star hold a key? The star was probably an angelic figure. The angel opened the Abyss and smoke poured out. The smoke was so thick that it became dark. Out of the smoke came *locusts*. This reminds one of the eighth plague (Exodus 10:1-20; and the book of Joel). The locusts had power given to them to destroy, but not in such a way as to destroy all the grass. They were only "allowed" (i.e., God was still in control) to harm those not sealed (i.e., the believers from chapter 7). Revelation 9:7-12 gave a description of the locusts.

The sixth angel sounded the trumpet. The voice of God told the sixth angel to release the angels who were bound at the Euphrates River. Once released, these angels were allowed to kill *a third of mankind*. People, who are precious in the sight of God, are casualties of this war.

One would think that these judgments would cause the people left to repent immediately. But not so. Some people are so bent on evil that even seeing these casualties would not turn to God. They kept worshiping demons and idols, they stayed to their *magic arts, their sexual immorality, or their thefts*. Repentance keeps God's judgments at bay and the war casualties to a minimum.

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DON'T FALL FOR SPIRITUAL SCAMS

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you ever receive a call from an unfamiliar number that your cellphone identified as "Scam Likely"? Sometimes I glance at my phone and joke, "Yep, it's another call from my friend 'Scam.'" But of course, it's not really a friend.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, Americans lost more than \$10 billion to fraud in 2023. Impostors use e-mail, phone calls, text messages, and social media to steal from consumers, enticing them with fake deals, nonexistent prizes, and phony investments or job opportunities. "Digital tools are making it easier than ever to target hard-working Americans," said Samuel Levine, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. Altogether, the FTC received fraud reports from 2.6 million consumers last year, and many more incidents go unreported.

Recognizing the Danger

Financial swindles aren't the only problem. Spiritual scams abound as well, and though modern technology makes them easier to spread, they are nothing new. They might look appealing at first, but they are deadly in the long run. "Go ahead and eat the forbidden fruit," the devil tempted Eve. "It looks and tastes good, and it will make you smarter." (See Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7.) How can you keep from falling for Satan's scams? What are the marks of a faith-related hoax?

Spiritual scams sound reasonable on the surface, but closer scrutiny unveils their fallacies. Satan tried to plant doubts about God's instructions, whispering seductively to Eve, "Did God really say . . .?"

Spiritual scams are enticing, but deceptive. "You will not certainly die," the serpent insisted, directly contradicting God's words. Satan is a counterfeiter. He misinterprets Scripture and makes deceptive promises, appealing to our lust and pride (see 1 John 2:16). He twists the truth to make lies sound plausible.

Spiritual scams make foolish ideas appear smart, popular, and trendy. In Revelation 17 and 18, Babylon represents blasphemy against God, the spread of evil, and the persecution of God's people. In the Old Testament, Babylon enjoyed great success for

a time, but eventually it was destroyed because of its arrogance, idolatry, and lust for power and wealth. Like a prostitute, the bewitching beauty of self-serving governments, businesses, and man-made religions intoxicates the earth's inhabitants (including its rulers, "the kings") so they get in bed with her (Revelation 17:1-2, 18:3).

Steering Away

To avoid falling prey to spiritual scams, we must be honest about the danger. We live in a time when sin isn't taken seriously. By minimizing the consequences of sin, we become more vulnerable to Satan's scams. We should recognize sin for what it is:

- an arrogant, prideful attitude
- rebellion and disobedience toward our Creator
- denial of the truth
- choosing darkness instead of light
- missing the mark and transgressing God's law
- loving self above the Lord and others
- blame-shifting to avoid accountability
- embracing what God disapproves and neglecting what he desires.

Satan's scams entice his victims to make foolish and costly decisions. His scams should stir revulsion, not attraction. It takes faith, discernment, and determination to resist Babylon's seductive ways. John heard a voice from heaven exhort, "'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues'" (Revelation 18:4).

When we're exposed to ideas that contradict God's Word, a warning sign should flash in our hearts that says, "Scam Likely."

Personal Challenge:

What spiritual scams do you recognize in our culture right now? What steps are you taking to guard your heart against them? How can you help others resist the devil's lies?

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you knew you were mistaken and should have admitted it, but you found it difficult to make that admission? Discuss the reasons it's sometimes difficult to admit being wrong or mistaken.

Ask two people to read aloud **Revelation 8:6-13; 9:1-4, 13-15, and 20-21**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Our lesson writer, Mark Scott, says creation itself was a casualty of the sin of Adam and Eve. In what ways does creation suffer from the fall? (See Genesis 3:11-19.)
3. How do the first three trumpet sounds represent God's judgment against the earth? Why do you think each of the first three trumpet sounds seem to be accompanied by fire?
4. The fourth trumpet blast (8:12) brought judgment upon the celestial regions of creation (sun, moon, and stars).
 - Why do you think God's final judgment extends beyond the earth and into the celestial realm of creation?
 - John seems to repeatedly describe the judgments in thirds (a third of the sun, a third of the moon, a third of the stars, etc.). Do you think this was meant to be a literal number? Discuss why John may have used a third in his descriptions.
5. As John watched the unfolding events, he says he "heard an eagle" (8:12) warning humanity about the next three trumpet blasts. Do you think there's any symbolism that accompanies the eagle, or is it merely a prelude to the coming acts of judgment?
6. John's description of the fifth and sixth trumpets appears to bring judgment directly upon humanity.
 - How do the judgments of the fifth and sixth trumpet sounds differ from one another? (see 9:5-6 and 9:15).
 - Why do you think the judgments associated with each trumpet blast appear in the order they've been arranged? Does each trumpet offer humanity an opportunity for repentance?
7. After all that had taken place through God's judgments up to this point, people still refused to repent (9:20-21). How could these people refuse repentance after all of this?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Revelation 12:1-17**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Overcome the devil by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony.**

STUDY: Revelation, Part 2

THEME: Spiritual War

LESSON TEXT: Revelation 12:1-17

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Luke 10:17-19; Ephesians 6:10-17; Hebrews 2:14-18; James 4:7; Revelation 2:13

WAR STRATEGIES

BY MARK SCOTT

In any war, all sides have strategies. In the war in Revelation 12 there is heaven's strategy and earth's strategy. Heaven's strategy is waged by Michael and his angels. Earth's strategy is waged by Satan and his angels (now having been disposed from heaven). The vision of Revelation 12 is about a battle between God and Satan.

As we come to Revelation 12, we realize why all the judgments of God (evident in the seals and the trumpets thus far) took place. An evil one and his minions have waged war against the woman, the Messiah, and the overcomers (i.e. those who overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimonies—the believers). What we are not told in the vision is when this war took place. Was it before the world began when Satan was cast out of heaven? Was it when Jesus came to earth and set out to destroy the works of the devil (Luke 10:17-19)? Was it when the apostles evangelized the Roman Empire (Colossians 1:6)? Does it await some future time (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10)? Because to God all things live (Luke 20:38), this battle in heaven, which took place outside the realm of time, pictures realities that were true, are true, and will forever be true.

Heaven's War (1-9)

The *sign* that appeared and the *war* that broke out did so *in heaven*. There are things that took place beyond the realm of the seen. John saw a *woman*. This woman was celestially dazzling (described with connections to the sun, moon, and stars). She was also pregnant and having birth pangs. The question is, "Who is she?" The quick (and maybe correct) answer is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Who else gave birth to the one who would *rule all the nations with an iron scepter*? Yet, this woman, who experienced God's protection, fled into the wilderness, was given wings for further protection, and gave birth to other offspring. Could the woman be a symbol of Israel? God's people are described in both testaments as his bride. Or does she represent some other connection (Eve, the church, Jerusalem, the Apollo Myth—i.e., some kind of goddess)? [See Christopher Davis's *The College Press NIV Commentary*, 250-254.]

The antagonist in the vision is an enormous *red dragon*. Many questions arise about who the woman is, but there is no question about who the dragon is. He is the devil or Satan, *who leads the whole world astray*. He obviously had power (seven heads, ten horns, seven crowns, and a powerful tail—but cf. Daniel 7-8). He wanted to eat the

child from the woman. But God came to the child's rescue. He was taken to God's throne, and the woman escaped to the wilderness (cf. Matthew 2:1-12). She was taken care of for an incomplete amount of time (3.5 years). This dragon could not accept defeat, so he fought on against Michael and his angels. But he was *hurled down* to earth along with his angels. Again, we are not told when this happened. Perhaps before Genesis 1?

Heaven's Music (10-12)

The defeat of the devil brought heaven to its feet. Music and praise for God broke out. God is praised for the defeat of the dragon, the ancient *accuser* of the brethren. Not only God, but also God's people would triumph over him by virtue of their being covered by the blood of Christ and by the *word of their testimony*. They knew what martyrdom was about, so they joyfully accepted it when necessary. Heaven was ecstatic.

But heaven's music would be difficult to hear on earth because the devil was thrown down there. He knew that *his time is short* and therefore was *furios*. He was defeated by the incarnation of the Messiah and his atoning death on the cross. So he will make life hellish for God's people.

Earth's War (13-17)

The vision that John saw shifted to the earth. The devil went after the woman who had been providentially cared for by God. But God was once again caring for her. He gave her *wings of a great eagle*. This allowed her to fly into the wilderness (a symbol of the place of God's provision for his people) and be protected from the *serpent's reach*.

The serpent still refused to accept defeat, so he *spewed* out water to sweep the woman away. But the earth, which God controlled, opened up and swallowed the water (cf. Numbers 16:31-35). Like a defeated and angry dog on a long leash, the devil went off to make war on the rest of the children of the woman (clearly a reference to the church). Heaven's war becomes earth's war until heaven and earth are one (Revelation 11:15-19; chapters 21-22).

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DON'T CLOSE YOURSELF OFF

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you take the devil seriously? Many people don't. According to a 2023 Gallup poll, only 58 percent of Americans believe Satan exists (down from 70 percent two decades ago). Maybe they disbelieve in the devil because they think of him in childish, cartoonish terms. The Bible pictures him as a cunning adversary who twists the truth and tries to deceive, divide, and discourage us. Too clever to be obvious, he's a wolf in sheep's clothing who "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

The book of Revelation takes the devil seriously. A single verse calls him "that ancient serpent," "the devil," "Satan," and the one "who leads the whole world astray" (Revelation 12:9). The next verse calls him "the accuser." Satan is a hateful, lying smack-talker who denounces Jesus' followers and "accuses them before our God day and night" (v. 10). The word *devil* means "slanderer." Bible commentators call him "the malevolent critic" and "the cynical libeler."

The Greek word translated "accuser," *kategor* (the root of our word "category"), originally meant to "talk down" or "speak against"—to declaim, harangue, or assert in a public place. The New Testament uses the same root word to describe false accusations made at the trials of Jesus (Luke 23:2, 10, 14) and the apostle Paul (Acts 24:2, 8, 13, 19). First-century Christians understood what it was like to be falsely accused, tortured, and killed as martyrs for the faith. According to Dr. Lewis Foster, "The most loathsome person in Roman society was the paid informer who profited by accusing people before the Roman authorities. Satan operates in a similar way for his own advantage and pleasure. He accuses and slanders [us] before God as he did in the case of Job."

Don't Heed the Devil's Words

Today many news commentaries, social media debates, and personal conversations contain half-truths, misinformation, disinformation, and useless information. We must be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16) to distinguish between fact and fiction, good and evil. Scripture provides guidance about how to handle legitimate legal or moral concerns. For exam-

ple, accusations brought against church leaders must be credibly established by the testimony of multiple witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19-20). Rumor spreading, vicious name calling, and groundless accusations are the devil's game-plan, not the Lord's.

Don't Do the Devil's Work

Gossip and slander are serious sins. "A scoundrel plots evil, and on their lips it is like a scorching fire. A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends" (Proverbs 16:27-28). Malicious liars do the devil's work.

Don't Think the Devil Wins

Revelation chapter 12 paints a dramatic picture of Satan's fury and God's protection, complete with signs in the heavens and war between good and bad angels. Amid all the drama, twice the chapter describes the devil as being "hurled to the earth" (vv. 9-10).

The devil is real, and his influence is obvious when we view the world realistically and biblically. But Revelation leaves no doubt about another point: *The devil is a loser*.

Revelation 12:11 says God's people "triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." How can we overcome the devil? Not by becoming slanderers ourselves, but by relying on, and faithfully testifying about, what Christ has done to redeem us.

Personal Challenge:

Do you participate in malicious talk and pointless quarrels? Do you give credence to false or misleading accusations about others? Commit yourself to obey Ephesians 4:29, which says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How do you read a mystery novel? Do you focus on the small details of the story, the big-picture details, or do you just skip to the end of the book? Discuss which approach you think is best for understanding the symbolism of the book of Revelation?

Ask two people to read aloud **Revelation 12:1-17**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. Why is the pregnant woman "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head?" (12:1-2). Who or what do you think the woman represents?
3. How would you interpret the dragon trying to devour the woman's child, the child being caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman's protection from God in the wilderness? (12:4-6).
4. Revelation 12:7-9 says a "war arose in heaven" and the dragon was defeated and "thrown down to the earth."
 - Discuss what you think it means that the devil has been thrown down to the earth? How do you see the devil's influence on the earth?
 - Does it cause fear or concern to know that the devil is active on the earth?
5. We are told that God's people conquered the devil "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (12:11). What does this mean for us today in our battle against Satan?
6. Our lesson writer, Mark Scott, notes that we are not told when the vision took place and gives several options. Which of these times do you think is most probable?
 - Before the world began when Satan was cast out of heaven (before Genesis 1)?
 - When Jesus came to earth and set out to destroy the works of the devil (Luke 10:17-19)?
 - When the apostles evangelized the Roman Empire (Colossians 1:6)?
 - At some future time (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10)?
7. When the devil was defeated, there was rejoicing in heaven. But the devil was cast down to the earth with "great wrath" because his time is short (12:12). What does this mean for us today? How should this influence how we live as followers of Jesus?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Revelation 13:1-18**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Patiently endure this world's opposition to your faithfulness.**

STUDY: Revelation, Part 2

THEME: Spiritual War

LESSON TEXT: Revelation 13:1-18

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Genesis 3:1-4; Hebrews 11:32-38; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 3:9-17; 4:12-16, 19

WAR WOUNDS

BY MARK SCOTT

Disney made famous the movie “Beauty and the Beast.” But the apostle John wrote about “Beauty and the Beasts” (i.e. the beauty of the Bride of Christ in dealing with beasts of this world.) We all know of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), but in the Book of Revelation there is also a trinity of the evil one (the dragon). They are the beast out of the sea (similar to Leviathan in Job), the beast out of the earth (similar to Behemoth in Job), and the harlot that sits on seven hills.

The great accuser of Christians (Satan) strives to counterfeit all the good works of God. The devil attempts to mock God or do a parody on God’s work. Jesus was crucified but then resurrected. According to Revelation 13 one of the evil Caesars received a *fatal wound*, but then, supposedly, that fatal wound was healed. Mockery. The believers were sealed with the mark of God on them (Revelation 7:3-4). But if anyone did not have the mark of the beast on them, they could not *buy or sell* (13:17). Believers are not exempt from wounds in this war.

The Beast Out of the Sea: Enduring Governmental Evil (1-10)

Christians are told to obey the authorities (Romans 13:1-2; 1 Peter 2:13-14). But left to their own, governments can become beasts. In fact, a word study on “beasts” in the Bible reveals that “beast” is often a symbol of an evil power. Since the dragon could not defeat the woman or her male child (chapter 12), he decided to change tactics and work through other means to destroy God’s redemptive work. The dragon (devil) *stood on the shore of the sea*. “Sea” in the Book of Revelation is a symbol for the source of evil (cf. Revelation 21:1—the source of evil is gone).

The devil brought out of the sea a powerful beast (noted by ten horns, seven heads, and ten crowns). Blasphemy came from the beast’s mouth. The beast must have been ugly (having parts like that of a leopard, bear, and lion). The beast, described in this way, makes one think of those beasts in Daniel 7-8. The devil was behind everything the beast did. The devil gave power to the beast. If the horns represent evil individual governmental leaders, then the rumor must have been that the leader had died and came back to life (such was the legend about wicked Caesar Nero—i.e., the fatal wound had been healed).

People were undone by the beast’s power. They felt like the beast’s power was unlimited. He seemed, at least for a limited time of 42 months, to get away with pride and slander God’s name. God’s permissive will allowed the beast to seemingly triumph over the Christians in every *tribe, people, language, and nation*. But those whose names had been written in the *Lamb’s book of life* were called to endure. The exhortation to Christians was to be faithful—even if it meant captivity or martyrdom.

The Beast Out of the Earth: Religious Evil (11-18)

The beast that arose from the earth was like a vice-president—not as powerful, but the main promoter of the beast out of the sea. This beast only had *two horns*. It was not similar to a leopard, bear, or lion. Rather, in another mockery, it was similar to a *lamb*. It spoke with the authority of and in promotion of the beast out of the sea. It occupied the role of a false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). This beast made everyone worship the first beast, particularly Caesar Nero (the fatally wounded one).

This beast did counterfeit miracles (fire coming down from the heavens and could even perform some levels of ventriloquism—the power of breath to appear to make the first beast say things). These false signs allowed the second beast to deceive *the inhabitants of the earth*. The second beast led the people into greater idolatry by causing them to worship the first beast. There was even a second “marking” (again a mockery) for people who listened to this second beast. Their foreheads or right hands were marked so that they could not sell or buy goods and services.

Christians would need to have wisdom from God to abstain from being deceived. The beast had a number, namely 666. It was *man’s number* (just short of 777). The ancient practice of gematria is probably at play here (where letters in the alphabet had assigned numeric value). The numeric value of Caesar Nero’s name comes to 666. This was some kind of reference to the Imperial Cult (Emperor Worship). Governmental evil and religious evil can create wounds for God’s soldiers. That is why they need endurance and wisdom.

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APPLICATION

END-TIME PRINCIPLES CHRISTIANS CAN AGREE ON

BY DAVID FAUST

Few aspects of Christian theology generate as much debate as eschatology—the study of last things. Believers who love the Lord and trust the inspired Scriptures sometimes arrive at different conclusions about important questions, like when and how Christ will return, the role of Israel in end-time prophecy, and the identity of the beast described in Revelation chapter 13. Sincere Bible students disagree about whether key aspects of the book of Revelation should be understood literally or figuratively, and they debate whether Christians will live through a coming time of intense tribulation on earth.

Diverse eschatological views—premillennial, amillennial, preterist, and variations of the

above—are found among individual believers, congregations, colleges, and seminaries of the Restoration Movement. Romans 14:1 cautions against “quarreling over disputable matters,” and because we try to allow liberty in matters of opinion, people in our tribe generally manage to get along despite holding various perspectives about the end-times.

We shouldn’t avoid biblical prophecy because we find it controversial and difficult to understand. The book of Revelation is meant to be read, heard, and taken to heart (Revelation 1:3), so we should take it seriously and teach it carefully—but with considerable humility. (Somewhere I read, “The strength of your opinion should match the depth of your study.”) The heavenly Father knows the time of Christ’s return; we don’t (Matthew 24:36). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can eagerly await the Lord’s return and spread the gospel with united voices even if we don’t know exactly how God’s plans will unfold (see Acts 1:7-8).

This application segment of the 1717 Studies explores how the Bible applies to life, including sections of Scripture that are difficult to interpret. Revelation 13 is a challenging chapter, but it contains straightforward, relevant principles Christians can agree about even if they hold different eschatological views. Key application points begin with the words, “*This calls for . . .*”

Patient Endurance and Faithfulness

The book of Revelation echoes the words of Jesus, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Paul predicted, “There will be terrible times in the last days,” and “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:1, 12-13).

How should Christians conduct ourselves in times of intensifying evil, deception, and persecution? “*This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people*” (Revelation 13:10).

Wisdom

Bible students puzzle over Revelation 13:18, which mentions “the number of the beast” (666)—a number that represents amplified evil. The verse starts by saying, “*This calls for wisdom.*”

The book of Revelation isn’t a quick, easy read. It requires us to invest time and deep thought to investigate and ponder its meaning. Revelation is a puzzling book, but it’s also a practical book—and it doesn’t have to be divisive.

For over 1,900 years, the book of Revelation has called God’s people to be faithful to the Lord in perilous times. Let’s study it earnestly and ask God for wisdom to understand it; but while we wrestle with the book’s mysteries, let’s be gracious with each other and preserve our unity in the faith. Every reader of Revelation can join other believers and pray, “Deliver us from evil” and “*Marana tha* (Come, O Lord).”

Personal Challenge:

Based on the plain words of the Bible (not mere human opinions), how would you summarize your personal beliefs about the end-times? How do those beliefs impact your daily life?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. The topics of religion and politics are often very polarizing. Without taking positions or being judgmental, discuss both the importance of these subjects and why they are so divisive.

Ask two people to read aloud **Revelation 13:1-18**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. Our lesson writer, Mark Scott, identifies the beast from the sea (13:1-10) as an evil government and the beast from the earth (13:11-18) as an evil religion. When the dragon was unable to destroy the woman and her child (Revelation 12), why do you think his attack on God's people changed to using an evil government and an evil religion?
3. What do you think about as you read the stories of these two beasts? What can we learn from the following descriptions?
 - The first beast (evil government) is like a leopard, bear and lion (13:2), but the second beast (evil religion) is like a lamb.
 - The first beast had a "mortal wound" that was healed and "the whole earth marveled" (13:3), and the second beast "performs great signs ... in front of people" (13:13).
 - The first beast made "war on the saints" and conquered them (13:7), and the second beast caused "those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain" (13:15).
4. John seems to take a pause in his story for an important appeal to those who follow Christ. What's the significance of John's statement in verses 9-10?
5. John points out that the second beast "deceives those who dwell on the earth" (13:14). As followers of Christ, what should we take away from that statement?
6. The "mark of the beast" (13:16-18) has been used again and again by end-time schemers as a sign of the world's impending demise.
 - In describing this "mark" or "number," why do you think John wrote "This calls for wisdom" (12:18)?
 - The number 7 is generally a symbol of perfection in Revelation. What do you think John meant when he wrote, "the number of the beast . . . is the number of a man, and his number is 666? (12:18)"
 - How do you think non-believers respond to Christians incorrectly identifying one person after another (e.g. Napoleon, Lenin, Hitler, etc.) as the beast and trying to connect them to the "mark of the beast"?
7. Some well-intended believers want to compare the headlines in the daily news with the events described in the book of Revelation. What problems emerge from making these comparisons? Is there a better approach to the Christian life than repeatedly trying to identify the beast and the end-time events? Explain.
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: This week's lesson bring this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional **"1717: Your Word Is Truth"** studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.