

The Most  
**EMBARRASSING**  
Book in the  
Bible

Understanding the Book of  
**Revelation**

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*The Most Embarrassing  
Book In The Bible:*

*Understanding the Book of*  
**REVELATION**

by

Dr. Andrew Corbett

*Understanding the Book of Revelation*

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# ***THE MOST EMBARRASSING BOOK IN THE BIBLE***

## **Understanding the Book of Revelation**

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*When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

*Matthew 10:23*

*Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.*

*Matthew 16:28*

*Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*

*Matthew 24:34*

*But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”<sup>62</sup> Jesus said, “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”*

*Mark 14:61-62*

*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.*

*Revelation 1:3*

*Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.*

*1 Corinthians 10:11*

*for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

*Hebrews 9:26*

# End Times Poem

by Donna Maree Hill

Did you hear that Jesus is coming again?  
We must let everyone know!  
The best possible way of sharing the news,  
Is to make a scary video!

Sorry? You don't thinking scaring people,  
Is really God's loving way?  
Well, I think it's time He talked with me,  
Listened to what I had to say!

I'm "right up" with end times prophecy,  
With the help of my favourite book,  
No, of course it's not the bible!  
To the latest author I usually look.

Have you seen the current end times book?  
It's really a good read!  
Does it line up with what the bible says?  
What is your point? Indeed!

Shred your bank cards, big brother's tracking you,  
Every cent you spend!  
Don't buy anything with a barcode,  
On this your soul may well depend!

I heard you must convert your cash,  
To the currency of “religious gold”!  
What? Aurora won’t accept a nugget?  
Well, just rug up in the cold!

Going on holiday to Europe?  
Please take lots of care!  
Stay well away from Brussels,  
I heard the beast lives there!

I want to know the date for sure.  
Pre-trib, post-trib, when will it really be?  
Before the tribulation is important!  
No suffering for me!

Before the 70’s, 80’s, no, 90’s end,  
It’s definite Christ will appear.  
Have I checked a calendar?  
Um, surely before 2010. Oh dear!

There’s a world-wide government conspiracy,  
So give up your jobs, live underground!  
But I’m worried - will we be able,  
To hear the final trumpet sound?

Someone tried to tell me,  
To read the Bible, trust God and pray,  
But I’m too concerned that I might miss,  
That final rapture day.

# INTRODUCTION



## *Chapter 1*

# **Introduction to Understanding the Book of Revelation**

---

I sat across the table from a very seasoned American missionary and his wife. My colleague and I had travelled half way around the world to enjoy this lunch. Being somewhat cut off from the outside world, they asked my colleague what world events were currently fulfilling Bible prophecy. The question hung in the air until my colleague, who had borne the brunt of my recent discoveries into Revelation, said boldly, “*You should ask Andrew that. He’s been doing a lot of research into that lately.*” Knowing just how radical my views would seem, I was (to say the least) reluctant to share anything on the subject. “You don’t want to hear my views on end times!” I said. “Yes we do.” “No you don’t” I insisted. They thought I was being coy to gain their interest. I wasn’t. I have seen how unreasonably hostile believers have become with each other over the topic of Bible prophecy. I was a guest at this table in their adopted country and I had no intention of starting a hostile theological debate.

But I succumbed after reassurances that they would not martyr me if I upset or disagreed with their existing end-time views. I shared with them my journey of being a *rapture-waiting-no-way-am-I-going-to-be-left-behind-type* believer to becoming someone who realised that Scripture neither taught a rapture, a One World last days’ government, a future seven year tribulation, or a reconstructed Temple- to then becoming someone who realised that when Jesus said in Matthew 24:34 that all of the signs of the end of the age would take place within the generation which witnessed Him.

As the implication of this one verse dawned on me it drove me back to the Bible to search out what it really was saying about eschatology (end times). At the conclusion of the lunchtime conversation my hosts said, “*That makes more sense than anything else we’ve ever heard!*” I was relieved.

And it has generally been with great trepidation that I have shared with anyone what I have discovered. But at the end of every presentation (so far) I have had unanimous endorsement. This is not to say that it hasn’t provoked questions! What you are about to read is a major challenge to much of what is taught in Baptist, Charismatic and Pentecostal churches today. Just as those to whom I have already made this presentation have generally come from a Dispensational viewpoint and immediately recognised the impossibility of this theology, it is my humble hope that those who read this presentation will similarly be challenged to re-examine their views in the light of Scripture.

I don’t profess to have all the answers. But I trust that I can create some of the right questions. Neither do I claim to have made an enthralling presentation in this book. Some of this work might seem tedious to read, but I believe that if you take the time to wade your way through it you will be richly profited since that is the promise of the Book itself.

*Rather than assuming that a Biblical prophecy is yet to be fulfilled, the Preterist investigates whether it has already been fulfilled.*

*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.*

Revelation 1:3

---

The Book of Revelation is placed last in the Bible for good reason! It should be the last book of the Bible that anyone seeks to become an expert on. The reason for this is simple. Without a thorough understanding of the rest of Scripture most of Revelation will neither make sense nor be appropriately appreciated. Most of the Book of Revelation is saturated in Old Testament imagery. Its language is highly symbolic and to be regarded as apocalyptic (revealing the future). It has clear echoes from the Books of Daniel and Zechariah where we also find similar apocalyptic passages.

## Different Schools Of Interpretation

Throughout the history of the church there have been several main schools of interpretation in regard to the Book of Revelation.

The *Historical School* regards most of Revelation describing events beginning chronologically close to its date of origin but extending through history to the end of time.

The *Futurist School* regards most of the Book of Revelation, from chapter 4 on, as applying to events far removed from the original readers. Futurists view the prophetic contents of Revelation as taking place near the end of time over a relatively short and compact period.

The third predominant school of interpretation regarding Revelation, which is once again enjoying resurgence in popularity, is the *Preterist School*. “Preterist” simply means *to look back into the past*. This view regards Revelation in the same way as we would view Ephesians or First Corinthians, or any other Book of the Bible. Rather than assuming that a Biblical prophecy is yet to be fulfilled, the Preterist investigates whether it has *already* been fulfilled. Preterists argue that the contents of Revelation need to be viewed from the context of the original recipients with consideration then given to how it can be applied to readers of any era.

I may be regarded as a *Partial Preterist* since I see the Preterist School as clearly the most Biblically responsible of Eschatological (End Times) Schools. Unlike Full-Preterists, I regard Scripture as describing the consummation of this age when Christ will hand over His kingdom to His Father (1Corinthians 15:26; noting Ephesians 1:10) whereupon there will a general resurrection (the Second Resurrection) and the final Judgment. I believe all this is described in Revelation, and does not conflict with any of the Church’s ancient creeds.

In this School of interpretation there are several important principles of interpretation that I believe must be adhered to for sound interpretation of any Scripture:

1. No Scripture should be interpreted outside of its textual, cultural, or historical context. This encompasses the principle of original audience.
2. No single verse of Scripture should be interpreted as contradicting the overall message of Scripture.
3. No verse should be interpreted as having multiple meanings or fulfilments, unless the passage itself clearly states that this is the case.

Therefore to adequately interpret the Book of Revelation the first of these Hermeneutical principles needs to be honoured. Understanding the *textual* context of the Book of Revelation will help us to realise that when it uses the number *seven*, unless it defines itself as a literal quantity of seven, it is also to be understood as having symbolic meaning. Taking into consideration John’s other writings, especially his Gospel, the textual context reveals that “seven” represents

*complete, finished, all.* Thus, when we read that the Lamb has seven horns, the text is actually telling us something other than what on the surface of it appears to be quite grotesque. Understanding that the literary use of the word “horn” frequently symbolised ‘*strength*’ in the Old Testament, we see that a Lamb with seven horns speaks of Christ who has *all strength* (He is therefore “Almighty”).

Understanding the cultural context we would consider that most of the original readers were either from a Jewish background or thoroughly familiar with it. So when it speaks of seals being opened the original readers would have harkened back to the Lord’s words to Daniel to “seal up” these words until the end and realised that the Lord was now saying the latter days were near (refer also to 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 9:26). The use of trumpets was also highly significant in the Old Testament. They announced to the camp of Israel that a significant and often triumphant time for the community had commenced and that they should gather together in response to the trumpet sound.

## The Date Of Revelation’s Authorship

It would be remiss of any serious student of Revelation not to at least do a cursory examination of the historical context to which Revelation is back-dropped. The first point of reference would have to be to determine when Revelation was written. Most scholars regard there being only two possible dates. Dr. Leon Morris explores this adequately in his Tyndale Commentary series volume on Revelation, and I recommend that this widely available commentary be read. In the case of most books of the Bible, determining the date of its authorship, while certainly important, is not necessarily crucial to its interpretation. But this is absolutely not the case with the Book of Revelation. Some tradition has up until recent times regarded the date Revelation’s authorship to be around 95AD. This has been based almost entirely on one vague statement by the second century Church Father, Irenaeus.

But the recent doctoral work by Kenneth L. Gentry on dating Revelation has concluded that it must have been written in the “mid to late 60s” rather than in 95AD -

*There are suggestive evidences within the book to date it in the mid- to late-60s of the first century. In fact, the evidence is persuasive enough that it convinced such notable scholars Moses Stuart, F. J. A. Hort, B. F. Westcott, and F. W. Farrar in the last century, and J. A. T. Robinson, R. A. Torrey, Albert A. Bell, and C. F. D. Moule in our own day.*

*Two leading indicators of the early date are: (1) The "temple" in the "holy city" is still standing as John writes, though it is being threatened with devastation (Rev. 11: 1-2). We know as a matter of historical fact that the Jewish temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, and has never been rebuilt. (2) The sixth "king" is presently ruling from the "seven mountains" and will do so until a king comes who will reign a "short time" (Rev. 17:9-10). The preterist takes this to be a clear enough allusion to Nero Caesar. According to the enumeration*

*found in Josephus' Antiquities (18:2:2,6, 10) and Suetonius' Lives of the Twelve Caesars, Nero is Rome's sixth emperor, following Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius. The next reigning emperor, Galba, reigned but six months, the shortest reigning emperor until that time.*

*Sourced from- <http://www.kennethgentry.com/Merchant2/apocalypse.htm>  
by Dr. Kenneth Gentry Jr.*

## Historical Context

It was a dark time for the Church. Since the death of Stephen in Acts 7, the Jewish Temple authorities had been waging a violent war against the Church. This continued up until the time of Jerusalem's destruction in 70AD. Empire sanctioned persecution against the Church was being intensified since 64AD when Nero had ordered Christians to be put to death (usually by beheading). He declared that everyone in the Empire must acknowledge that *he* was Lord and King. Christians were publicly humiliated, ostracized and martyred throughout the Empire by both Jews and the Romans as they refused to declare that Caesar was either their Lord or their King (titles they exclusively reserved for Christ) or that the Old Covenant had any hold on them. Added to this was the rise in false doctrine, an increase in spiritual routine and therefore a decline in authentic passionate love for Jesus.

The Lord reveals through John that the wave of persecution against the Church was driven by the Dragon, no longer would his initial readers be lulled into thinking that they were engaged in some mere politico-ideological war- but a life-and-death *spiritual* war.

## Consistency

Some fanciful interpretations of the Book of Revelation have seen computer chips predicted within its pages and other things equally amazing. But when we refuse to take one verse out of context or let one verse contradict the overall message of Scripture, it is very difficult to give such interpretations any credibility.

Still others have invented a system of interpretation that says a prophecy can have multiple fulfilments. This makes prophetic Bible passages totally arbitrary (subject to change according to a person's whims). The problems with this kind of interpretation are obvious. How does a serious student of the Bible determine when a prophetic passage should be interpreted as having multiple fulfilment options? What about prophecies that we all assumed only had one possible fulfilment (such as the virgin birth of Christ), but which someone else claims will be fulfilled again? Unless the particular prophetic Scripture states that it will have multiple or staggered fulfilment it is hermeneutically perilous to devise multiple

fulfilments otherwise. One writer even bases his concept of the “Law of Double Reference” on what he calls an ‘*ancient rabbinic principle of interpretation*’. Supposedly these are the same rabbis who denied that Jesus was the Messiah or that He fulfilled any Old Testament prophecy (?).

Too often the symbols in Revelation are interpreted as meaning something contrary to how Revelation interprets itself. One such example of this is to interpret the Dragon of chapter 12 as referring to Communist China. The passage goes on to clearly define the Dragon as Satan (Revelation 20:2).

The Preterist view of Revelation regards this as the glorious culmination to the Bible. Study of this Book will strengthen the believer’s confidence in both Christ and His Word. There is much to be learned, applied, and drawn from this Book for your life today. It is my hope that I can prove this to you.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "A. Corbett". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Andrew Corbett,

November 2004

# THE THEME



## *Chapter 2*

# Understanding the Theme of the Book of Revelation

---

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants; things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,*

*Revelation 1:1*

**W**hen I grew up as a young Pentecostal boy in the 1970s and into the 1980s I often heard “End Times” teachers preach. These preachers had elaborate diagrams painted on bed-sheet-like material supposedly based on the Books of Revelation and Daniel. I felt the terror of those who would miss out on the secret rapture and have to endure the wrath of the Anti-Christ in the Great Tribulation. The evangelist would then appeal to his hearers to commit their lives to Christ so they too could avoid the agony of living through the Great Tribulation, which may start tomorrow!

To back up his presentation he would point out how the Book of Revelation accurately predicted the rise of Adolf Hitler and World War 2, Henry Kissinger, the formation of the European Economic Union, a one world government, a super-computer containing the details of every human being on the face of the planet (!), and a global cashless money system (of which “Bankcard” was a pre-cursor since it had a symbol which consisted of three bs which looked suspiciously like “666” mentioned in Revelation 13).

But as I grew older and the my own teaching gift was sharpened through personal study, listening to hundreds of quality international Bible teachers, reading many books, talking with senior men of God, and my formal ministerial training, I realised that this teaching which I had received as a young man was seriously flawed!

For instance, I was told that the thrust of Revelation was for the very last days of our time. That is, I was told that what it prophesies about relates to events far removed from the lives of the original recipients since it so obviously relates to the times that *we* now live in or are at least to be fulfilled within *our* lifetimes. But this is contradicted by the plain message within Revelation itself -

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants; things **which must shortly** take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,*

Revelation 1:1

*It is not just a revelation about the future, although it revealed details about the future. It is ultimately a revelation about Christ!*

*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; **for the time is near.***

Revelation 1:3

*"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else **I will come to you quickly** and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent.*

Revelation 2:5

*'Repent, or else **I will come to you quickly** and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.*

Revelation 2:16

*"Behold, **I am coming quickly!** Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.*

Revelation 3:11

*"Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because **he knows that he has a short time.**"*

Revelation 12:12

*Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the **things which must shortly take place.***

Revelation 22:6

*"Behold, **I am coming quickly!** Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."*

Revelation 22:7

*And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, **for the time is at hand.***

Revelation 22:10

*He who testifies to these things says, "**Surely I am coming quickly.**" Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

Revelation 22:20

For centuries some scholars have tried to make these verses mean something other than what they plainly say. How could these words be intended to comfort and encourage the original recipients during their endurance of massive persecution if the thrust of the Book exclusively related to events to take place

some 2,000 years after them, especially when the Book so unmistakably gives the time frame as “*at hand*”? Surely the words of Revelation 1:3 would then have to be considered some cruel sadistic joke if this was the case.

*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.*

*Revelation 1:3*

So if the Book of Revelation is not necessarily filled with detailed and titillating predictions about the future of a world filled with super-computers, high-tech commerce, and “big-brotherish” governments, then just what is its theme? We have too long craved for *Christian* soothsayers and their confident fortune telling who look not into a crystal ball, but into the pages of Bible. The surfeit of speculative paperback Christian books on end times teaching is testament to this. Often when I have presented an exegesis of Revelation and Matthew 24 I have been asked, “*Well, what does the Bible say is going to happen then?*” My response is to direct our attention back to the Word of God itself, and to guard against going beyond what it clearly says. Because of this desire, I have felt the need to write this commentary on Revelation.

If we take careful note of the opening verse we read the intended theme for the whole Book.

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants; things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,*

*Revelation 1:1*

“*The revelation of Jesus Christ*” is clearly stated as the central theme to this Book. It is not a revelation about Heaven, although it tells us things about this glorious place. It is not a revelation about the Devil although it reveals much about him. It is not just a revelation about the future, although it reveals details about the future. It is ultimately a revelation about Christ!

The whole point to this Book is to see Jesus for who He really is and to realise the implications of this revelation. This Revelation of Christ shows *Him* to be the Supreme Ruler of the universe, not Caesar, not the Jewish High Priest nor any other human ruler. It reveals that Christ is Lord over eternity and history despite the apparent upper hand that despotic rulers seemingly exercised over God’s people during the time of its writing. And just when it seemed that injustice against God’s people would go unchallenged, this Book reveals that *nothing* has gone unnoticed and that *all* will be brought to justice and remain so for all eternity as God does away with time as we know it.

It is not just a revelation about the immediate future, but it is largely a Revelation of *why* the future was to unfold this way based on *who* Christ truly is.

For John, the penman of this remarkable Book, Jesus was the One. Throughout His earthly ministry no one was as close to Christ as John was. At the last supper it was John who lent across the breast of Christ. At the Cross, it was John and no other disciple who remained to support Jesus in His agony. After the resurrection it was John who was seemingly publicly honoured above the other disciples by Christ (John 21:20-24). This was a man who knew Christ! More than any of the other disciples he seemed to grasp the message of love, which Jesus brought to the world. This is the predominant theme of his epistles. Yet we read this astounding statement in the opening chapter of Revelation -

*I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,*

*Revelation 1:12*

John did not recognise the voice of Jesus when he heard it on the Isle of Patmos! Amazing! What this tells us immediately is that the Jesus who walked the shores of Galilee, of whom John was intimately familiar and had even seen a glimpse of His transfigured glory, was now being revealed in a way previously unknown to John. The unfolding description of Christ paints a truly awesome picture of the glorified Christ. In John 17:5 Christ prayed that He would once again have His glory reinstated upon the completion of the Father's business. And Revelation gives us a fleeting glimpse of that reinstatement. For John, this glimpse was enough to completely overwhelm him (Rev. 1:17). And it begs the question that if the great apostle was overwhelmed by his revelation of Christ, do we truly understand the theme of this Book if we too fail to catch a glimpse through its pages of this same glorified Christ?

It is my great aim through the pages of commentary to help you to receive a "Christ-glory-glimpse".

## Contrasting Themes

The Book of Revelation has an interesting symmetry of contrasts. It starts off on a barren Isle and finishes in Paradise. It glorifies the Lamb but condemns the beasts. It condemns the city which killed our Lord (Rev. 11:8), along with His apostles and prophets (Rev. 16:6; 18:20, 24), but honours the Heavenly New Jerusalem. It describes a succession of earthly kings (Rev. 6) but finishes with the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). It condemns the harlot but commends the bride (Rev. 21:2).

There are two very distinct judgment events which are described in Revelation. The first involves judgment upon the unholy alliance between Judaism and Rome (the two beasts of Revelation 13) where Jerusalem (symbolic of Judaism) sits in the lap of the ungodly Roman Empire (described as the harlot sitting on seven hills). The second involves everyone. We will all be judged. For those who have committed their lives to Christ they escape the judgment of condemnation and enter into eternal life now –

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*

*John 5:24*

But those who have not committed their lives to Christ the warnings of this Book should terrify them. And for good reason! I want to show you that the first part of this Book has been accurately fulfilled and that we can therefore know that the remaining three chapters of Revelation will certainly be fulfilled. This is a truth no one can ignore.

Please enjoy this labour of love and consider carefully what you are about to read.



# THE SEVEN CHURCHES



## *Chapter 3*

# Understanding the Seven Churches of Revelation

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*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, <sup>11</sup>saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."*

*Revelation 1:10-11*

**S**ome Bible teachers regard the seven churches of Revelation to be a prediction of what would happen throughout the Church's unfolding history. There are several problems with this interpretation though.

Firstly, the conditions described in each of these churches have been present in nearly every era of the Church's history. To view this as a chronological forecast of the global Church is grossly over simplistic, and unsustainable from a Church history.



Secondly, it makes no sense for the Lord to command John to write to what we know were seven actual churches and cryptically invent scenarios that didn't actually pertain to them! If this had been the case, this epistle from John would have been immediately dismissed as uninspired and thereby rejected from the Canon of Scripture. But it wasn't. This seems to suggest that the initial recipients acknowledged it as being truly insightful into their church's condition and presumably responded accordingly. This initial acceptance by these seven churches of what we know as the first three chapters of the Revelation would have also given added credibility to the remainder of the Book. Indeed, since it was readily accepted as integral to the Canon very early in the formation of the Canon we could also surmise that what appears to be very enigmatic to the modern reader may not have been so to the first readers.

In seeking to understand Christ's message to the seven churches we should consider the overall theme. Something apocalyptic was about to happen. Christ was about to do away with the vestiges of the Old Covenant and judge Israel. How Christ describes Himself to these churches is often overlooked by those more interested in speculating about what it might say about the Church far removed from the condition of these seven churches.



Church:	Revelation of Christ:
<b>Ephesus</b>	2:1 ~ Christ relates to His churches through God ordained authority (stars). He is One who has authority and relates to His Church through His appointed authority. This does not mean that Christ is 'authoritarian' and thereby aloof, rather, He is authoritative and imminent (close) to His Church – He “walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.”
<b>Smyrna</b>	2:8 ~ Christ is in absolute control of the universe. He is First. While this world was against the Church through futile efforts to destroy it and it may at times look like the Church will not survive the barrage of unreasonableness, Christ is there at the Last, and so will His Church be also. While the Devil thought that he had conquered Christ when Jesus died on the Cross, it turned out to be his greatest humiliation (Col. 2:15). So too when believers die for their faith the world erroneously considers it a victory for their cause, but ironically the victory is ours! Thus Christ was dead, but is now alive forevermore.
<b>Pergamos</b>	2:12 ~ Christ is a Just Lord- He will execute judgment on His enemies- He has a two-edged sword in His mouth. Unlike mortal rulers, Christ's words are more powerful than any human weaponry. Never underestimate the words of Christ!
<b>Thyatira</b>	2:18 ~ Christ sees all and will hold the guilty to account. Fire nearly always represents judgment in Scripture and Christ's eyes are described as being like fire. Only He is qualified to judge since He Himself has been judged and found innocent- He has feet like burnished bronze (brass). Burnished bronze in the Old Testament spoke of that which withstands judgment (hence it is burnished). One such example of this is found in Numbers 16:39-40.
<b>Sardis</b>	3:1 ~ Christ loves His Church deeply. He is the One who gives His Church the Anointing – the Seven Spirits of God - (1John 2:20), and anointed ones – Stars - (Eph. 4:11).
<b>Philadelphia</b>	3:7 ~ Christ is without compromise: He is holy and true.
<b>Laodicea</b>	3:14 ~ Christ fulfils the Word of His Father- He is the Amen, Faithful and True. He is the beginning and source of all that has been created, He therefore has the right to judge the earth.

It's actually quite refreshing to avoid speculating about whether the Lord's messages to these churches are some cryptic predictions about the Church throughout the Ages. Instead, as we try to look over the shoulder of the original readers we can see how this revelation of Christ would have given them so much strength and courage. Imagine living during a time when becoming a Christian could cost you your life because you were seen as a threat to the stability of the Empire who would mercilessly deal with such threats. Imagine living during a time when being a Christian meant that you would be ostracized by your family, friends, and community. They also might ruthlessly slander you for your faith in Christ. Imagine also living at a time when you had been told that there was only a

short time before Christ would return and bring all of creation under subjection to His authority, yet the longer you believed the less likely it seemed. Imagine how it must have felt to the first century Christians who witnessed some of their brothers and sisters being publicly martyred, and to see others openly forsaking their faith in Christ.

But what about how John the apostle must have been feeling? He had oversight over at least seven churches. He knew that some of these churches were struggling in the midst of all this pressure. Some of them had resorted to trying to gain political approval by accumulating wealth and a corresponding prestige (Rev. 3:17). Others had just grown complacent thereby losing their zealous passion for Christ and His cause (Rev. 2:4). Still others had downright succumbed to an immorality-is-tolerated attitude (Rev. 2:20), which was destroying them in the process. John must have been tempted to despair. Everything looked like it was going awry.

*If there is no  
love in the  
church for  
Christ there is  
no need for it to  
exist-*

Christ's last words before His ascension stated His lordship over everything- but there was little visible evidence of it. Christ's last commission was to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth and make disciples of all nations- but all the nations were rejecting the Church and killing its servants. Christ said He would return soon- but time was dragging on and there was no sign of His coming.

Some of these issues are addressed in this Revelation. But the focal point of the Book of Revelation is not to make fanciful predictions about the future, but to point the reader back to Christ! The message contained in Revelation is a message that spoke straight into the hearts of the first hearers and still speaks with special power today.

## **The Message To The Seven Churches And Today's Application**

### *Ephesus*

Christ commended the Ephesian church for their hard work. They were a church which cared for elderly widows (1 Timothy 5:3), preached the Gospel in the midst of opposition, and sought to be diligent to the Lord's instructions (we draw these conclusions from Paul's epistles to the Ephesians, I & II Timothy, and Acts 20).

Today we should understand that Christian service requires diligence and hard work. They did not tolerate those who were evil. Today we should guard what we put aside in the name of "grace" and ensure that our grace does not become "disgrace" because we accept or tolerate what is evil. They tested those claiming to be apostles and found many of them to be liars. This implies that the apostolic

ministry was not limited to the original disciples of Christ but is a ministry gift given by Christ to the Church to bring it to maturity. Apparently there were many who were claiming apostolicity (that they were apostles), but neither had the gifts nor the character to substantiate their claims. Today we should be very careful about both claiming to be an apostle and recognising someone as having an apostolic ministry when we have not tested their claims first.

The Ephesian church had lost its first love for Christ. Today it is possible to become distracted with so much administration and gadgetry that we can almost leave Christ out of the Christian equation. Love is the only appropriate response to Christ at any time. If there is no love in the church for Christ there is no need for it to exist- hence Christ says He would remove their lampstand (Rev. 2:5, which is symbolic of their witness as a church). In gracious conclusion Christ commends the Ephesians for being against the Nicolaitans who taught that there was a priestly class within Christianity. Today we should be especially on guard against teaching that contradicts the priesthood of all believers.

*Today we must guard against elitism and understand the New Testament teaching on the priesthood of all believers.*

### ***Smyrna***

The church at Smyrna was also commended for the hard work. May we gain an understanding that ‘success’ in the church (which is measured by our obedience to Christ) actually demands work. “Work” may best be described as toiling under a certain degree of duress. In other words, work is doing what you have to do, even when you may not want to do it. Even as enjoyable as a job might be, there will always be moments when it really becomes “work”. It’s the same in a church. There are some things that have to be done under a certain degree of duress! Elders who labour in preparation to preach may feel that their efforts go unnoticed and unappreciated. Deacons who spend hours stocking the church’s pantry to show hospitality to others who take for granted what they enjoy (food and drink and service) may feel that their efforts go unnoticed and unappreciated. The worship musician who spends hours learning a worship song so that they can be liberated from the sheet music to truly worship may feel that their efforts go unnoticed and unappreciated. But the work done by these servants is noticed and is appreciated! Even though there may not be any human accolades, the Lord Jesus Christ sees the work that was done. And He regards it as work done for Him!

The church at Smyrna was experiencing tribulation. Today we must be prepared to endure the discomfort that comes from standing up boldly for Christ. While the church at Smyrna felt inadequate due to their lack of resources, it actually resulted in them having to depend upon the Lord which in turn made them “rich” in the eyes of the Lord. As wealthy and as well as we may be resourced, if we become self-reliant we quite possibly could become spiritually bankrupt! We need to live dependant upon the Lord.

*Excise all the references to heaven from the New Testament and you have very little left. Saint Teresa said, 'In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth, a life full of the most atrocious tortures on earth, will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel.'*

*Saint Teresa, cited in THE CASE FOR FAITH, Strobel, page 65*

As also said to the church at Ephesus, Christ makes reference to “overcoming”. For the Ephesians Christ said that overcoming would qualify them to eat from the tree of life in the Paradise of God (Rev. 2:7). For those in Smyrna Christ said that overcoming the pressure to abandon Him would shield them from the second death.

### ***Pergamos***

Christ’s statement confirming that He knew the works of the church at Pergamos is encouraging. What we do for Christ is not unnoticed. Unlike the other two churches already addressed, Christ says that He was also aware that the church at Pergamos was physically located in a very difficult area. He described Pergamos as where Satan’s throne was. Interestingly He gave them no command, instruction, or edict to confront Satan in what many today pass off as “spiritual warfare”. (For more on this issue please refer to my book on *An Examination of Spiritual Warfare*.) In the midst of much spiritual opposition they had held fast to the Lordship of Christ even to the point of laying down their lives in martyrdom (verse 13). Christ’s restatement that this was where Satan dwells seems to give the insight that the martyrdom of Antipas was not the mere machinations of flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12), but a deliberate plot of Satan designed to destroy the church.

But Christ had some disappointments with the church at Pergamos. They had some people in the church who held to a false doctrine which endorsed a form of idolatry and sexual compromise. This is referred to as the teaching of Balaam. Today we must guard what doctrines are tolerated in the church. Wise pastors know how to gently correct the erring but teachable. But it is vital to also know how to confront and address those who hold to dangerous doctrines because their beliefs will eventually harm themselves and others! If we could believe anything then Christ would not address these two subtle doctrinal errors.

The second doctrinal error is that they had some who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. No one can be sure at this stage (perhaps some manuscripts or archaeological data is yet to be discovered) exactly what this meant. But there is good reason to believe that this doctrine was the beginning of a teaching which drew a line of distinction between those who had received holy orders (*cleros* from where the word clergy comes from) and laity (ordinary). Hence it is speculated that the term Nicolaitans meant nico – over, laitan – ordinary; the doctrine of a priestly class of believers lording it over ordinary believers. Christ said that He hated this doctrine of the Nicolaitans. His instructions for dealing

with this doctrine are short: repent. And His warning for not doing so is severe: *I will fight against them with the sword of My mouth*. Today we must guard against elitism in the church. We must also understand the New Testament teaching on the priesthood of all believers which negates the possibility of a New Testament priestly class.

Whenever the expression he who has ears let him hear is used it demands that the reader look beyond the natural implications of what has been said (note Isa. 6:10; 42:20; Jer. 5:21; 6:10; Ezek. 12:2; Matt. 11:15; 13:16). This necessitates that we understand that Christ is saying something that goes beyond what it immediately may sound like. We all (generally) have ears, but Christ is referring to understanding something that may not be immediately obvious. He makes this statement to each of the seven churches and it is still true today.

### ***Thyatira***

Christ commended the church at Thyatira for increasing their good works (2:19). But Christ condemned them for tolerating sexual immorality. One disturbing New Testament Manuscript describes this Jezebel as “*your wife Jezebel*” (refer to the translator’s footnote in the NKJV). If this was the case, then it makes the charge all that more serious. Since this was addressed to the star of Thyatira, which we regard as the leader of (messenger to) the church, then that particular manuscript suggests that this corruption was coming from very close to the top. The Lord said that He was going to cast this woman onto a sickbed (vs 22) and bring great tribulation on those who had committed adultery with her. This reference to a woman does not appear to be symbolic language. It has all the hallmarks of talking about a real character and situation in the church at Thyatira. But we can draw legitimate lessons from this for today in regard to tolerating immorality within the church.

***People often fail to understand that while God is absolutely gracious, He remains absolutely just.***

The Lord also warned those who followed this woman. Christ warns that they were in danger of “great tribulation”. We know that Caesar (Titus) Vespasian launched a campaign of terror against the Jews throughout the Empire around 70AD in which some Christians suffered as well. These followers of the woman Jezebel are called her children (vs. 23). John also referred to his disciples as his children (1 John 2:1; 3:7). We should be on guard against any teaching that says that the Lord punishes children for the sins of their parents.

*Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.*

*Deuteronomy 24:16*

To interpret this verse as saying that the Lord Jesus would kill this woman's children is an error. Clearly the reference to children is to her followers. To be killed with "death" (verse 23) is akin to dying of pestilence- a wasting death brought about by disease.

*I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.*

Revelation 2:23

The purpose for the Lord in dealing with these people so severely was to establish a clear message to all the churches that He would not tolerate sin in His Church. People often fail to understand that while God is absolutely gracious, He remains absolutely just. God did not stop being just in the New Testament! He was, is, and always will be just. He "searches the minds and hearts" is a timely reminder to us just as it was to the original recipients that Christ will judge our actions and motives (refer to Matthew 5:28).

But not everyone in Thyatira had fallen prey to the corruption of false doctrine and immorality though. For these believers, it must have been tough to remain loyal and faithful in the midst of so much opposition. Graciously, the Lord Jesus says to these battered believers that He would lay no further burden on them vs. 24. Perhaps you have felt overwhelmed by life and your spirituality has suffered as a result. This can often lead to a downward spiral of guilt and condemnation. Take heart. Remain faithful to Christ and He lays no burden further on you.

As a pastor I have had to counsel people with the Word of God through some tough periods in their life. They have confessed to me that they have felt ashamed because they weren't able to read their Bible as much as they had been used to, or prayed with the reverence they had previously grown to enjoy, or serve in the church with the diligence they knew was deserved. During these tough times, my pastoral counsel has often reflected Christ's words to these battered believers.

### ***Sardis***

Some scholars have noted that there seems to be a progression of deteriorating conditions in the seven churches listed. As I've previously stated, there is no Scriptural or logical reason for doing this. These Historicist scholars regard the church at Sardis as representing the Church at the point of the Reformation (early 1500s) because this church was "dead" and their works were no longer perfect (Rev. 3:1). That's how the Reformers regarded the (Roman Catholic) Church of their day. They also felt that their reforming work was ushering the Church into the Philadelphian Age. This is reading too much into the text when we consider that the hermeneutical principle of audience relevance demands that we regard Christ's words to the leader of the church of Sardis as pertaining immediately to them.

Each of these messages to the seven churches is primarily addressed to the “angel” of the church. The Greek word translated into English as “angel” is the word *angelos* which literally means messenger. It is used in the New Testament of both earthly and heavenly messengers. Since Christ is giving this message to the leader of the church at Sardis we note that he had ceased to “watch” and grown weak in good works and thus affected the whole church.

The term “watch” is an Old Testament term. In the Old Testament it was the watchmen who were responsible to hear from God and deliver His Word, but they had failed to do so.

*Also, I set watchmen over you, saying,  
Listen to the sound of the trumpet  
But they said, “We will not listen.”*

*Jeremiah 6:17*

The church at Sardis had failed to watch. The correlation between the leader of a church and the spiritual depth of a church is now well established. Many people who move into a new area, and look for a new church home, make the mistake of basing their evaluation of a new church purely upon what the church offers them and their family rather than on who might be leading them. The leader of a local church has the privilege of setting the spiritual pace and tone of a church, and those who align themselves with a church will be influenced by the spiritual depth of the leader.

To this leader, and church, Christ commands that they remember what they heard and return to it (repent). They are then told to watch. To “watch” demands prayerfulness, prophetic proclamation and heeding the word of God. Today we should also be watchful by giving ourselves to prayerfulness, obedience and boldness in proclaiming God’s Word. For the church at Sardis this was apparently their last opportunity to do so.

Even in this church which looked alive, but was dead (Rev. 3:1), there were some who had not “defiled” their “garments”. This expression generally related to sexual morality.

*Moreover you shall not lie carnally with your neighbour’s wife, to  
defile yourself with her.*

*Leviticus 18:20*

Christ promised those who had not defiled their garments that they would be clothed in white. This is an expression that is used several times in Revelation and speaks of the believer’s resurrection with ‘garments’ of righteousness (Rev. 4:4; 7:9).

*And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright,  
for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

*Revelation 19:8*

## ***Philadelphia***

The Reformers believed that they were ushering in the Philadelphian Age of Church history. They believed that they were bringing the Church back to true brotherly love, which is what Phila (love) Delphia (brotherly) means. To this actual church Christ stated that He had “the key of David”. This is very significant considering the tone of Christ’s message to this church. What ‘key’ did David have? Some regard the key to David’s success as his genuine love for others. He had an incredible ability to win people over. Christ has this same ability. Still other scholars regard this as an expression which affirms Christ’s messiah-hood. He had the key of David to the true City of David- the New/Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 3:12). In the context of this view Christ was affirming the Philadelphian church as being the rightful continuation as the people of God rather than the apostate Jews of the local synagogue. This makes sense considering Revelation 3:9 -

***There is a growing number of scholars who acknowledge that this period occurred during the time leading up to 70AD.***

*Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie; indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.*

*Revelation 3:9*

The reference to “the hour of trial” in Revelation 3:10 is regarded by Futurists as referring to a future “Great Tribulation”. If this “Great Tribulation” was yet another 2,000 years away from the recipients of this message, then Christ’s promise to “keep you from” it, is absurd. There is a growing number of scholars who acknowledge that this period occurred during the time leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. Interestingly, the New Testament uses three Greek words which are translated “world”. One of those Greek words is “oikoumene” which refers to the Roman Empire (note the use of this word in Luke 2:1, Romans 10:18, and refer to the note on page 127). That is the word used here.

Based on verse 11, something was very imminent: the coming of Christ to judge. It is ridiculous to make this mean anything other than what it plainly says therefore negating an interpretation which demands thousands of years of waiting in order to be fulfilled.

The irony of verse 12 is that while Christ was about to do away with the last vestiges of the Older Covenant by the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, He promised to make the overcoming Philadelphian Christians “pillars” in the real Temple in the real Jerusalem (the Heavenly one).

### **Laodicea**

Historicists regard this church as depicting the last age of the Church. Their view of the future Church was affected by their belief in a great falling away of Christians (2 Thessalonians 2:3), a great betrayal (Matthew 24:10), and a growing cold of the love of many for the things of God (Matthew 24:12). But these references relate to the time described in the Olivet Discourse (the teaching of Christ in Matthew 24 and Luke 21). These events were related to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and Christ's judgment on those who had rejected Him. Jesus said that all the events of Matthew 24 would take place within the lifetime of His disciples (Matthew 24:34, refer to Appendix 3 page 149). The references to apostasy and betrayal are recorded in the New Testament as being fulfilled (NB. 2 Timothy 1:15).

Also from a purely historic point of view the facts of Christianity's growth today flies in the face of this age being considered the "Laodicean Age". Never before in the history of Christianity have so many people been converting to Christ. This is taking place in both the Western world, the East, and the Middle Eastern world.

The statements about this church are used to support a late date for the writing of Revelation. In 62AD Laodicea experienced a major earthquake. Because the church is described as being wealthy, some scholars have used this as internal evidence that Revelation must have been written toward the end of the first century so that the Laodicean church would have had time to become wealthy. But this assumes, perhaps wrongly, that because there was a destructive earthquake in Laodicea that the church would have been financially or materially depleted. We know from historical documents that Laodicea rebuilt itself within a couple of years and was restored to being a prosperous city within that time. So either way, this is a poor assumption for the late date of the writing of Revelation. Interestingly, we note Paul's prayer for the Laodiceans recorded in Colossians 2 –

*For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, <sup>2</sup>that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, <sup>3</sup>in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Colossians 2:1-3

Revelation's reference to the Laodicean church being wealthy makes Paul's prayer somewhat ironic. While the Laodicean church was materially wealthy, or perhaps in particular the Laodicean church's leader, they were spiritually poor. Today, while we may make financial security our goal, it is actually a dangerous thing to be in a situation where we need nothing (vs. 17) because we think we can live without God's daily bread!

Laodicea was famous for four things. Firstly its water was lukewarm. Secondly, it produced eye ointment. Thirdly it produced coloured garments. Fourthly, it was a very wealthy city. Christ said to them that He wanted them hot or cold, but not lukewarm like their water. Secondly He said to them that they should use His eye salve (ointment). Thirdly He told them to wear white garments from Him. Fourthly He told them to buy true gold from Him which had been refined by fire (vs 18).

*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

*Revelation 3:19*

Christ was rebuking the Laodiceans. Rebuking is rarely regarded as an act of love. Perhaps this is both indicative of how we both rebuke and love today. Jesus could rebuke with both sternness and compassion so that His hearers could recognise His deep concern for them. May God grant us, especially those of us who are charged with the oversight of the church, to be able to rebuke because we love – just like Christ.

Christ's appeal to the Laodiceans was not forceful, but rather an appeal to their volition (free will choice). Thus, He says to them that He was standing at the door and knocking, awaiting for the occupants to open up to Him and invite Him in to dine with them (Rev. 3:20). The same is true today. Christ does not force Himself on anyone. It is up to us to invite Christ in to the dining room of our hearts and welcome Him into intimate fellowship with us.

To each of the churches Christ challenges them to overcome and hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. These churches had to overcome the mounting temptation to revert back to Judaism or simply abandon Christ. What made the temptation all the more enticing was the hardship that went with being Christian caused by the constant threat from Judaizers which often meant being stoned and clubbed for blasphemy (as was James the brother of Christ, and author of the Book of James, around this time).

## Overcoming And Hearing

*[A]t the instigation of the younger Ananus, the high priest, of the sect of the Sadducees, whom he calls "the most unmerciful of all the Jews in the execution of judgment," stoned to death with some others, as "breakers of the law," i.e. Christians, in the interval between the procuratorship of Festus and that of Albinus, that is, in the year 63. The Jewish historian adds that this act of injustice created great indignation among those most devoted to the law (the Pharisees), and that they induced Albinus and King Agrippa to depose Ananus (a son of the Annas mentioned in Luke 3:2; John 18:13).*

*Philip Schaff, citing - Josephus: ANTIQUITIES. XX. 9, 1*

*Hegesippus, a Jewish Christian historian about A.D. 170, puts the martyrdom a few years later, shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem (69). He relates that James was first thrown down from the pinnacle of the temple by the Jews and then stoned to death. His last prayer was an echo of that of his brother and Lord on the cross: "God, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."*

*Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Volume I. Apostolic Christianity*

This Jewish persecution against Christians at this time should not be underestimated. If James was brutally martyred in 62 or 69 AD it shows that the hostility experienced by the Church in the early chapters of Acts had not abated even forty years later! Added to this was the edict of Caesar Nero in 64AD that Christians should be killed, and this was a time when these Christians had some very real challenges to overcome. But this wasn't all. Within the Church there was a growing tolerance of immorality and idolatry. So we note the promises of Christ to those in these churches who overcame:

**Ephesus** - I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. (Rev. 2:7)

**Smyrna** - I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it. (Rev. 2:17)

**Thyatira** - and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations. (Rev. 2:26)

**Sardis** - shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (Rev. 3:5)

**Philadelphia** - I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. (Rev. 3:12)

**Laodicea** - I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (Rev. 3:21)



# THE THRONE ROOM



## *Chapter 4*

# Understanding The Throne Room of Revelation

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*After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."*

*Revelation 4:1*

**T**rumpets announce the impending presence of God (Exodus 19; 20:18; Joshua 6:8; Judges 7:22; 1 Chronicles 15:24; 2 Chronicles 5:13; Psalm 47:5; Isaiah 27:13; Hosea 8:1; Joel 2:1; Amos 2:2; Zechariah 9:14; Hebrews 12:18-19; Revelation 1:10). Trumpets were also blown to commence battles (Numbers 10:9). But more often than not they symbolically announce God's impending presence to judge.

*God has gone up with a shout,  
The LORD with the sound of a trumpet.*

*Psalm 47:5*

*Set the trumpet to your mouth!  
He shall come like an eagle against the house of the LORD,  
Because they have transgressed My covenant  
And rebelled against My law.*

*Hosea 8:1*

Because *trumpets* in Scripture often announce the impending presence of God to judge, we know that judgment was imminent in Revelation 4. We know this because of the principles upon which the Word of God is to be soundly interpreted. Firstly, the immediate context says so –

*The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,  
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,  
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints,  
And those who fear Your name, small and great,  
And should destroy those who destroy the earth."*

Revelation 11:18

The context of the whole scene is one of judgment about to commence. Back in the days of the first century AD Roman Empire it was ultimately the King who *judged* (note Christ before Herod – Luke 23:8; Paul’s appeal to Caesar - Acts 25:11). These earthly kings are contrasted with the heavenly King since *He is worthy* to judge because only He has been judged and found completely innocent.

***It is highly likely  
that when John  
was directed to  
measure the  
Temple in  
Jerusalem, it was  
still standing!***

*Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"*

Revelation 5:2

*And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation..."*

Revelation 5:9

The scroll mentioned here is a judgment scroll which is sealed seven times. This scroll will set the stage for the next set of visions that John describes.

## **A Door Open In Heaven**

*After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."*

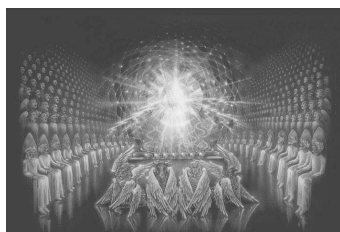
Revelation 4:1

We are now taken into what can be described as John’s second set of visions. “*After these things*” is different to the expressions used to show continuity in the visions which are used in the remainder of this Book. This may legitimately indicate an unspecified lapse of time between the visions of chapters 1 – 3 and chapter 4. Quite possibly John may not have received the remainder of these visions while on Patmos since he is told in chapter 11 to measure the temple in Jerusalem. Some scholars, however, regard this command to be reminiscent of what God told Ezekiel to do in Ezekiel 40.

*In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was captured, on the very same day the hand of the LORD was upon me; and He took me there. <sup>2</sup>In the visions of God He took me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain; on it toward the south was something like the structure of a city. <sup>3</sup>He took me there, and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway.*

Ezekiel 40:1 - 3

But there are notable differences. In Ezekiel's account he saw a vision of the temple and of someone else measuring it. It wouldn't have been possible for Ezekiel to have physically seen the temple since the Babylonians had already destroyed it. But allowing for the growing body of data which is now mounting regarding Revelation's pre-70AD authorship it is highly likely that when John was directed to measure the Temple in Jerusalem, it was still standing, and he had the capacity to obey.



In many respects what is now revealed in these next two chapters (4 and 5) is the penultimate focus of the revelation. It marks the first of two royal judgment settings (note the use of the word "thrones"). The other occurs in Revelation 20 and occurs after the "1,000" year reign of the Lamb's Kingdom.

The expression "*a door open in heaven*" is very insightful since it reveals that there is an unseen realm that is intimately involved with the affairs of earth that is generally not perceived by most. A *door* grants an entrance into a different perspective. Jesus said that He was the Door (John 10:9) through which all who would seek salvation must enter. The writer to the Hebrews describes in Hebrews 4:10-13 that Christ has now made an entrance into the promised rest. This rest is salvation. Poignantly, John is now shown what lies beyond this door:

*Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.*

Revelation 4:2

The Biblical commentator, (Bishop) John Lightfoot lived from 1602 to 1675. He became a Presbyterian minister and was jointly responsible for formulating the *Westminster Confession*. One of his most significant works was *A Commentary of the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* (written in 1658). He adopted the view that Revelation 1:7 speaks of "*Christ's taking vengeance on that exceeding wicked nation*" of Israel (Volume 2, pages 319 and 422). There he interpreted Christ's coming as a providential judgment upon "*those who pierced him*" (the Jews) from among "*all the tribes of the land literally*" (Israel). He suggested that Revelation's overall theme is Israel's judgment, which is the Preterist view.



*“I may further add, that perhaps this observation might not a little help (if my eyes fail me not) in discovering the method of the author of the Book of the Revelation”*

Lightfoot 3:210

***We must recognise that we are called to be salt and light to our society. We are called to be the major influence in our societies.***

This led him to conclude that the judiciary scene set up in Revelation 4 and 5 speaks of “*the throne of glory*” and “*is to be understood of the judgment of Christ to be brought upon the treacherous, rebellious, wicked, Jewish people. We meet with very frequent mention of the coming of Christ in his glory in this sense*” (2:266). I believe that Bishop Lightfoot has given us a not-so-axiomatic insight into understanding the Book of Revelation. The events leading up and culminating in 70AD form the crux of Revelation’s contents and chapters 4 and 5 set it up.

## The Twenty Four Elders

*Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.*

Revelation 4:4

Numbers in Biblical literature often carry symbolic meaning. The number 12 speaks of *redeemed people*. When God established Israel as His redeemed people He established *twelve* patriarchs then *twelve* tribes. When Christ was establishing New Covenant redemption (salvation) He selected *twelve* apostles. The twenty four elders represent the redeemed of both covenants. They epitomize what redeemed people do. Firstly, they are seated on *thrones*. Thrones are *positions of influence*.

*...and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

Ephesians 2:6

We must recognise that we are called to be salt and light to our society. We are called to be *the* major influence in our societies. Our Great Commission includes teaching our communities everything Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:19). When our Governments legislate statutes that are contrary to the teachings of Christ we have the divine right and responsibility to protest in the Spirit of Christ. That is, not with hatred or maliciousness, but with meekness and love.

*Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*

Revelation 5:8



Secondly, they *bow down*, and carry *harps* (note Rev. 5:14; 11:16; 19:4). They continually worship Christ. It's one thing to sing the praises of Christ; it's another to lay our lives down before him. To *bow down* is to surrender. And Christ deserves nothing less!

Thirdly, they carry bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints. God wants His people to be in intimate fellowship with Him. This is the essence of prayer. All redeemed people need to know that our prayers are precious before God and are regarded like incense infiltrating the fragrance of heaven.

## **The Seven Lamps Of Fire**

*And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

*Revelation 5:6*

Biblically, the number seven often symbolises *complete, perfect*. In Revelation 4-5 Christ is described as having seven horns (complete or perfect strength), and seven eyes because He has the Sevenfold Spirit of God. In Revelation 4:5 the Holy Spirit is described as *seven lamps of fire*, and *the seven Spirits of God*. He is God. And this glimpse of the Throne of God gives us a powerful picture of the Trinity. The Father is on the Throne (Rev. 4:2). The Holy Spirit surrounds the Throne of the Father (Rev. 4:5). And God the Son is described as the Lamb who is worthy of worship (Rev. 5:8).

## **The Four Living Creatures**

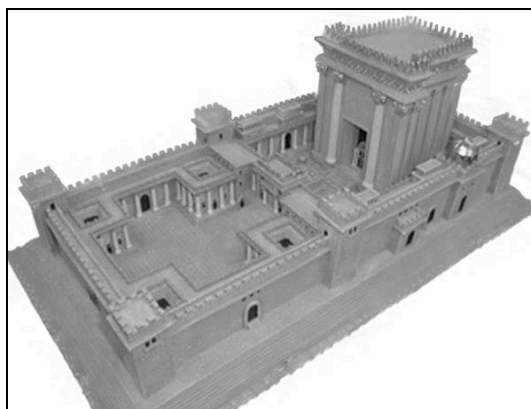
*Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.*

*Revelation 4:6*

These four living creatures seem to guard the Throne of God and simultaneously lead all of heaven in worship. These creatures were also seen by Ezekiel when he was also shown the Throne of God (Ezekiel 1:10; 10:14). When Isaiah saw the Throne of God in heaven he described creatures with six wings over and before the Throne of God doing the same thing as these four creatures. Isaiah called these creatures *seraphim* (Isaiah 6:2, 6). Other Scriptures describe these creatures as *cherubs* or *cherubim*. When the Ark of the Covenant was made, which was a shadow of the heavenly throne of God; Moses was instructed to include two gold cherubim hovering over the Throne (Mercy Seat).

*<sup>18</sup>And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. <sup>19</sup>Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. <sup>20</sup>And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat.*

Exodus 25:18 – 20



The Old Testament gives us a typological glimpse into the Heavenly presence of God, but the Book of Revelation peels back the veils of mystery and gives us the fullest view of Heaven available in Scripture. But we would be mistaken if we thought Revelation was simply a treatise on Heaven. Far from it. It actually is one of the most powerful revelations anyone could ever receive about why the earth is the way it is. The scene described in Revelation 4-5 shows the Crucified, Risen, Saviour and Lord taking His rightful position as Judge of the earth. His programme of Judgment begins with the Household of God first, in this case- the now apostate nation of Israel. The next fourteen chapters describe His judgment upon Israel and Rome and their unholy alliance. It also describes how His plans can not be thwarted, and thus reveals the Word of God as absolutely true.

We will discover that with the judging of Judaism the Old Covenant was brought to a close and the Kingdom of Christ commenced. What you are about to read could well revolutionise your walk with God!

# SEVEN SEALS



## *Chapter 5*

# Understanding The Seven Seals of Revelation

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*Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see."*

*Revelation 6:1*

**H**aving been introduced to the seven churches of Asia who were all battling in some way both internally (with false doctrine and immorality) and externally (with persecution), then with the throne-room of the universe where judgment was about to be executed we are now about to unfold the judgment seals of God.

## The Four Horsemen

This is where many commentators on the Book of Revelation commence to speculate. Historicist commentators see in the first four seals (the Four Horsemen) world leaders who have arisen down through the ages. Dispensational futurists regard the Four Horsemen as yet to come events. The Preterist attempts to avoid these interpretations by firstly looking to the time of the original recipients of this Epistle to determine how they would have understood its message. Employing the sound principle of “intended meaning” means that a prophetic statement can only logically have one fulfilment, or *intended meaning*. So whatever or whoever these Four Horsemen are, it is absurd to suggest that they could have multiple yet diverse intended meanings.

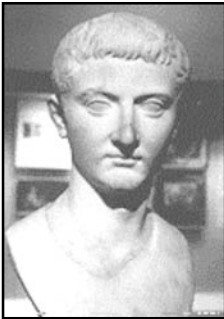


*And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.*

Revelation 6:2

### **The First Seal**

How would the original recipients have understood this verse? Who had been given a crown? To understand this, we perhaps have to understand who was reigning during the time of the writing of this Epistle. The whole world at this time was under the reign of the Romans. Which Roman Emperor was reigning at the time of the birth of Christ? Interestingly it was Caesar Augustus who was given a crown unlike any Emperor before him since he was the first to receive the title *Pontifex Maximus* in 12AD. He also introduced the *Pax Romana* in 11BC. This Roman Emperor was mentioned in Luke 2:1 -



*And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.*

Luke 2:1

Caesar Augustus (depicted left) is referred to as the rider of the first horse and is described as the result of the opening of the first seal. He literally went out to conquer the world and extend the Roman Empire.

### **The Second Seal**

*When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." <sup>4</sup>Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.*

Revelation 6:3-4

The second seal is described as revealing an emperor who rode a red horse and wielded a great sword. The Caesar immediately following Caesar Augustus was Caesar Tiberius -

*Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,*

Luke 3:1



Caesar Tiberius (statue pictured above) reigned from 14AD to 37AD.

### **The Third Seal**

*When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. <sup>6</sup>And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."*

Revelation 6:5-6



The third seal is the rider third horse which, in this case, is black. The next emperor in the succession of emperors is Caesar Caligula (Gaius) who reigned from 37AD to 41AD. The rider of the Black Horse carries a pair of scales which speaks of injustice and in particular, economic injustice since it describes basic grocery items being charged at exorbitant prices yet luxury items still being available.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica notes that Caesar Gaius Caligula was extraordinarily cruel and financially inept (which aptly fits the description of him as the rider of the black horse):

*In 38 he executed Naevius Sutorius Macro, prefect of the Praetorian Guard, to whose support he owed his accession, and Tiberius Gemellus, grandson of Tiberius, whom he had supplanted in the succession. He made pretensions to divinity...After his accession Caligula quickly squandered the vast sums Tiberius had accumulated in the state treasury. To procure the revenues needed to finance his extravagances, he then resorted to the extortion of prominent Roman citizens and the confiscation of their estates.*

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### **The Fourth Seal**

*When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." <sup>8</sup>So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.*

Revelation 6:7-8

The fourth seal is the rider of the ashen (pale) horse who brings cruel death, and hunger (famine). The next emperor in the succession of Roman Caesars was Caesar Claudius who reigned from 41 – 54 AD. He is noted in Acts 11:28 as reigning during a time of widespread famine.

*Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.*

Acts 11:28

Claudius (statue pictured right) used the military might of Rome and extended Roman rule in North Africa and made Britain a province. From what we know of Claudius, and what happened during his reign, the description of him being the rider of the fourth horse is again apt. His reign also corresponds to what Christ said would happen at this time in Matthew 24:7 –



*For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.*

Matthew 24:7

## The Fifth Seal

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. <sup>10</sup>And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" <sup>11</sup>Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

Revelation 6:9—11

***His war against the Church lasted until his mysterious death in 68AD, a period of 42 months.***

The first four seals corresponded to the Roman Emperors from the time of the birth of Christ. The fifth seal however is not the rider of a horse. In this sense the fifth emperor since Christ was not a noble military ruler who personally led his troops into battle as did the other Emperors. Yet, it is this Emperor represented by the fifth seal who carries out the most devastating attack upon the Church. Revelation 6:9 introduces not him, but the result of his wicked work: *souls who had been slain for the Word of God*. It was Caesar Nero who in 64AD officially launched a State campaign of eradication of Christians. On July 19<sup>th</sup> 64AD he blamed Christians for the arson of a major part of Rome. His war against the Church lasted until his mysterious death in 68AD, a period of 42 months. Writing during the early nineteenth century, George Olford said of Nero in his book *The Destruction of Jerusalem* –

*Emperor Nero, "who," says Tacitus, "inflicted upon the Christians punishments exquisitely painful ;" multitudes suffered a cruel martyrdom, amidst derision and insults, and among the rest the venerable Apostles St Peter and St. Paul.*



One web site author noted about Nero -

*Under Caesar Nero, AD 54 - AD 68, Paul was beheaded and Peter crucified. As things escalated, Christians were fed to the lions, fighting gladiators to the death for sport, wrapped in animal carcasses and hunted by dogs. At one point, Nero had them wrapped in robes soaked in oil and set afire to become human torches for his court yard. He would ride among them dressed as a charioteer. They had a giant griddle type setup where they would fry them alive. They skinned them alive and placed them in dung heaps, in order that they might die from terrible diseases and pain from the incredible infections they contracted. It is said that he fashioned a large slide with cutting knife blades. If one did not renounce Christ, they were pushed down the slide, being cut to pieces before they reached the bottom. One catacomb was found to have 350,000 skeletal remains in it. It is estimated that millions died during the reign of Nero.*

## **The Sixth Seal**

*I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. <sup>13</sup> And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. <sup>14</sup> Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. <sup>15</sup> And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup> and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! <sup>17</sup> "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"*

The first five seals represented significant people who each bore some historical significance. But the sixth seal is not a person but an event which presumably is linked to the person behind the fifth seal since he is not yet replaced. Within two years of declaring war on Christians, Nero responded violently to the Jewish revolt in Jerusalem by ordering its destruction in 66AD. Citing the records of Josephus, George Holford notes what precipitated the Jewish revolt, and what response came from Caesar Nero –

*At length Eleazer, son of the High Priest, persuaded those who officiated in the temple to reject the sacrifices of foreigners, and no longer to offer up prayers for them. Thus an insult was thrown upon Caesar, his sacrifice rejected, and the foundation of the Roman war laid.*

*The disturbances among the Jews still continuing, Cestius Gallus, president of Syria, marched an army into Judea, in order to quell them, and his career was every where marked with blood and desolation. As he proceeded, he plundered and burnt the beautiful city of Zabulon, Joppa, and all the villages which lay in his way. At Joppa he slew of the inhabitants eight thousand four hundred. He laid waste the district of Narbatene, and, sending an army into Galilee, slew there two thousand of the seditious Jews. He then burnt the city of Lydda; and after having repulsed the Jews, who made a desperate sally upon him, encamped, at length, at the distance of about one mile from Jerusalem.*

Several historians of the day note that Nero had ordered General Cestius from Syria to attack Jerusalem. Christians at this time understood the invasion of Cestius and his setting up of the Roman insignia in the Holy Place as the fulfilment of Christ's prophecy in Matthew 24:15-20 and fled the city during the surprising withdrawal of Cestius for three days (which gave all the resident Jewish Christians of Jerusalem time to flee). The sixth seal is also time of unprecedented earthquakes. Again we note from historical records of this time -

*In the reign of Nero there was an earthquake at Laodicea. Tacitus records this also. It is likewise mentioned by Eusebius and Orosius, who add that Hieropolis and Colosse, as well as Laodicea, were*

*overthrown by an earthquake. There was also one in Campania in this reign (of this both Tacitus and Seneca speak)... "A heavy storm (says Josephus) burst on them during the night violent winds arose, accompanied with the most excessive rains, with constant lightnings, most tremendous thunders, and with dreadful roarings of earthquakes. It seemed (continues he) as if the system of the world had been confounded for the destruction of mankind; and one might well conjecture that these were signs of no common events."*

George Peter Holford, "The Destruction of Jerusalem", written 1805

The expression *sun moon and stars* is used on three significant occasions in various forms throughout the Book of Revelation. It apocalyptically refers to the nation of Israel. We first find this metaphor for Israel used in Genesis 37:9 when Joseph dreamed of his family (the progenitors of Israel). It is an expression which is also apocalyptically employed to speak of Israel throughout the Old Testament as well (note Joel 3:15-16). When the sun is darkened and the moon is turned to blood or stars are falling, it refers to Israel's unfaithfulness toward God.



An artist's impression of the destruction of Jerusalem

*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

Matthew 24:29

The apocalyptic language used in the opening of the sixth seal is descriptive of the destruction of Jerusalem around 70AD but instigated by Nero in 66AD. The "fig tree being shaken" speaks of Israel being judged, and the passage of the sixth seal speaks apocalyptically of God's wrath about to be poured out on Israel. While it might look as if the Romans were the perpetrators of wrath against Jerusalem, they were just the pawns of the Lamb in the same way that the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar were the pawns of Yahweh to judge Israel of old. In the following verse, Nebuchadnezzar, the violent king of Babylon, is called the *servant* of the Lord.

*'behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the LORD, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against*

*these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations.*

*Jeremiah 25:9*

Just as the Hebrews of old had betrayed the LORD which brought about God's wrath through the Babylonians, so the Jews of the generation of Christ had committed the ultimate betrayal and were about to experience the wrath of the Lamb.

*But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"*

*John 19:15*

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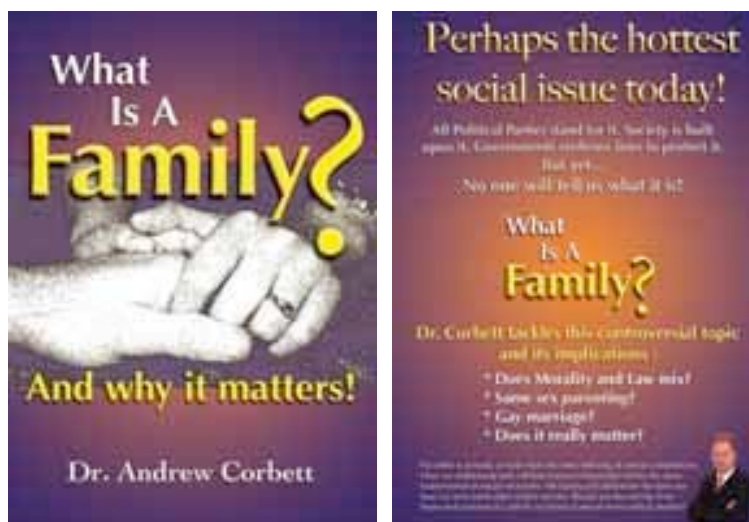
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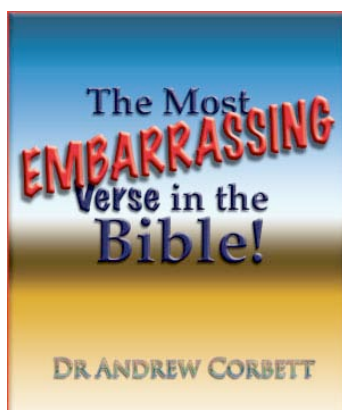
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