

2. Empire

1. Empire is when a society, often led by a strong, charismatic leader (dictator) focuses only on itself. Empire puts itself at the center of reality at the expense of all those around it.
2. Empire seeks one thing: self-preservation in lavish luxury.
3. Empire takes all it can get through war, oppression, brutal violence, and exploitation. It truly believes that the gods of the universe have called them to live this way, at the expense of the countries around it or anywhere else in the world, so that the empire may plunder these countries for their people as slaves and resources as capital.
4. The empire in the Book of Revelation is the Roman Empire.
5. **I want to suggest that the empire of the United States of America is busyness where we base our identity on doing rather than being.**

3. Apocalyptic book

1. The word “apocalypse” or “apocalyptic” means “revelation,” “to reveal” or “to remove the veil.”
2. **In an apocalyptic book, the oppressed people who are faithful to God or Jesus Christ in the case of Revelation, cry out to God, asking when God will vindicate them. When will God bring justice?**
3. The bulk of the Book of Revelation (4:1 – 20:15) is the story of creation and salvation. It is the story of God as the Creator and what God has done and will do to any society that puts itself in the place of God or thinks that it is divine.
4. In Revelation, God pulling back the veil on the Roman Empire that uses deceit, noise, and violence to paint itself as a powerful empire, just like Nazi Germany – the Third Reich, which is another empire that God crushed and left in ruins despite its delusions of grandeur.

4. How does God fight in the Book of Revelation? What is Armageddon?

1. **In Revelation, just as in the entire New Testament, the victim, Jesus Christ, is the victor.**
2. The great final battle to which Revelation alludes is, many biblical scholars argue, the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Paschal Mystery.
3. God wins by losing. The way that God fights and the followers of God in Revelation (and the entire New Testament) is through the cross, through nonviolent love. The early

church embraced nonviolence as a way of life until the Emperor Constantine around 311 AD began to change the Christian Church, turning the cross into a sword, a weapon.

4. The followers of the Lamb fight by “washing their robes white in the blood of the lamb” (Rev. 7:14). This is witnessing to Jesus Christ – the word “martyr” in Greek means witness – and it brings life through death, because of the faithful witness of the Lamb and the Lamb’s followers.

- **Outline of the Book of Revelation**

- a. Prologue and Greeting 1:1-8
- b. Letters to the Seven Churches 1:9 – 3:22
- c. Liturgy in Praise of Creation & the Creator 4:1-11
- d. Liturgy in Praise of Redemption & the Lamb 5:1-14
- e. The Seven Seals, Trumpets, & Plagues with Interludes 6:1-16:21 (this is what John refers to as “what must happen soon” in Rev. 1:1. I suggest it is the wages of sin which is suffering and death).
- f. The Punishment of Babylon (Rome) & the Destruction of the Pagan Nations 17:1 – 20:15
- g. The New Jerusalem, The New Creation 21:1 – 22:5
- h. Epilogue 22:6-21

- **Revelation 4 – A Liturgy Celebrating Creation & the Creator - God**

- a. What is happening in this chapter? What is the purpose of it? It follows the seven letters to the churches that often call out the churches for idolatry – making something in creation to be God that only enslaves us – which is wrong worship. Now the heavenly voice will show John and all the hearers/readers of this letter what right worship is about.
- b. This is a new vision in heaven (and for the rest of the book) that differs from Rev. 2-3 that was on earth.
- c. This is a liturgy in praise of creation. The liturgy worships God the Creator that this chapter uses many images from the Old Testament to describe God.
- d. 4:2, “...on the throne sat One...” occurs 12 times in Revelation. The jewels of jasper, carnelian and emerald give off the brilliant radiance of God. John is taking a direct shot at the emperor who sits on the throne in Rome, saying, real authority belongs to God.
- e. Note that there is no direct vision of God (Ezekiel 1:26-28) only the effects of looking at the One seated on the throne. There are no details describing God with human features. The brilliance of the One on the throne shows and conceals God’s being in mystery.
- f. 4:3, “halo” can also be translated as a “rainbow” recalling God’s covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:12-17) about God as judge mindful of his mercy.

- g. 4:4, 24 elders could be the 24 classes of OT priests in 1 Chr 24:1-19. They could be the 12 tribes of Israel plus the 12 apostles of Jesus. The elders have the cultic role of worship, of praising God. They are also kings or queens (we are not told their gender) because they wear crowns. They represent the “royal house of priests” (1:6) on earth who are all the baptized Christians. After their “Amen, Hallelujah” in 19:4, they disappear because all the Christians will enter the New Jerusalem.
- h. 4:5, the thunder and lightning remind us of God revealing God’s self to the People of Israel in Exodus 19:6. The thunder and lightning are symbols of God’s glory. The prophet Ezekiel has a similar vision in Eze 1:13-14.
- i. 4:6, the sea of glass like crystal may be the waters above the firmament in Gen. 1:8 and Psalm 104:3. The sea was always feared by the Hebrew people because it often flooded them and killed many people. God was the only one who could control the rising waters. For the sea to be like glass means that God has controlled it and is keeping it at bay from the people. This is the same sea of glass mingled with fire in Rev. 15:2.
- j. 4:6-9, The four living creatures
1. Notice that they are in the center of and around the throne, so they are angels in the form of these creatures.
 2. These are the same four creatures in Ezekiel’s vision in Ezekiel chapter 1.
 3. Many Catholics (originating with Irenaeus in the second century) believe that these four creatures represent the four Gospel evangelists or writers.
 4. Rather, a better suggestion is that they represent all of creation in the following manner:
 - (a) The lion represents the wild beasts.
 - (b) The calf or ox represents domestic animals.
 - (c) The human represents humankind.
 - (d) The eagle represents the birds.
 5. They have one role day and night: to praise God which is the vocation of all the creatures that God made – to praise God. To quote St. Augustine, “The vocation of the creature is to praise the Creator.” We all praise God by being the creatures that has destined us to be.
 6. The six wings probably allude to the angels in Isaiah 6:2.
 7. The holy, holy, holy probably alludes to Isaiah 6:3. It is the song of nature praising its creator – see Psalm 19:1-6.
- a. 4:9, glory and honor probably allude to Psalms 29:1 and 96:7.
- b. 4:9, who lives for ever and ever probably alludes to Daniel 4:31 and 12:7.
- c. 4:10, the 24 elders fall down (their cultic role) before God and throw down their crowns (vassal kings literally threw down their crowns when entering the presence of a greater King establishing that their crown and glory comes from God alone), when the four creatures praise God which is 24/7, exclaiming, “Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things; because of your will they came to be and were created.”

- d. 4:11, Lord our God -> may be a retort to alleged form of address to the Emperor Domitian, “Dominus et deus noster” in Latin. The point: to fall down and worship a human being is idolatry – or leading a life where I believe that all providence is from an economic system, my job, country, or a person like the Christians in Laodicea were living – and sinful because I am worshipping and living as if something that is not God is truly God and that is slavery that takes life. Only God is worthy of this.
- e. Chapter 4 of Revelation is showing the seven churches and us, rather than telling us, what true worship is about. The letters in chapters 2-3 have been going after one thing: idolatry that is worshipping a false god, even if I am not bowing down to it; rather, I am living as if this god gives me all that I need. Only God the Creator can do that.

- **Revelation 5 – A Liturgy Celebrating Redemption & the Redeemer, Jesus Christ.**

- a. What is happening in this chapter? What is its purpose?
- b. 5:1, the One who sits on the throne holds the scroll in his right hand – the hand of authority. This scroll could be the Book of Life but it is probably God’s preordained plan for the world to be carried out by the Lamb and his followers.
- c. A scroll is what Jewish people use/used to proclaim the word of God from.
- d. 5:2, the angel announces the question to which there is no answer: who is worthy to open this scroll?
- e. 5:3, quite reminiscent of Paul’s hymn in Philippians 2:10, there is no one in heaven, on earth, or under the earth who can open the scroll.
- f. 5:4-5, John sheds tears because there is no one to open this scroll. Yet, an elder in heaven tells him to not weep because the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (a Davidic warrior image – see Gen. 49:9-10) has triumphed enabling him to open the scroll. The book of Revelation gives us the impression that a figure like King David is about to appear.
- g. 5:6-7, Instead, we get the opposite: a Lamb standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and elders that seemed to have been slain. This was God’s preordained plan all along. The Lamb “triumphed” by surrendering to the cross. From now on in Revelation, John’s title for Jesus is the Lamb. The key is that the Lamb was slain like the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12). The Lamb has seven horns – which are symbols of power of the victorious Christ won on the cross. The seven eyes may represent the fullness of knowledge for he sees all things with his fiery eyes (1:14).
- h. John is looking at the place where the Lamb is supposed to appear. Instead, he gets a profound reversal when the Lamb appears.

- i. 5:8-10, When the slain Lamb takes the scroll from the right hand of the One on the throne, it is a transfer of power and this is no small detail. For the One who sits on the throne to transfer power and authority to the Lamb, it reveals the heart of God's plan: the world would come to know the One on the throne through the slain Lamb, the Son, the Word of God.
- j. Because of this, the living creatures and the elders – who represent all of creation – now worship the Lamb, following on the heels of their worshipping the One on the throne who created all things. From this point forward, the Lamb and the One on the throne will be more closely linked.
- k. The elders who are also priests offer the prayers of the “holy ones” the faithful “saints” of God. These elders take on the priestly role asking God to intercede for the holy ones. This role in Judaism belonged to the archangels before the throne.
- l. 5:9, they sing a new song that speaks of the new life for all from the slain Lamb. “Newness” is a recurring theme in Revelation: new name (2:17; 3:12), new heaven and earth (21:1), and the New Jerusalem (22:10).
- m. 5:9, the Lamb purchased/bought for God peoples of all tribes, tongues, and nation through his blood. To “buy” or “ransom” is a Pauline word (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Gal 3:13; 4:5) that is used similarly in Revelation.
- n. 5:13, The paralleling of God and the Lamb in Rev. 4 & 5 conveys in subtle but unmistakable manner that creation and redemption are the center pieces of God's work, that is, of God's liturgy: the public work that God does on behalf of all creation.
- o. The same worship offered to God is offered to the Lamb that makes a powerful statement: if the same worship offered to God is given to the Lamb, what does that say about the Lamb? See Rev. 7:10; 21:22; 22:1, 3.
- p. Redemption is almighty God manifests his power on the cross. In the cross, the blood of the Lamb, God offers forgiveness and holds out salvation to all people of the world.
- q. The coupling of these two liturgies in Rev. 4 & 5, including the way that redemption is described in Rev. 5, asks the question, could the author of Revelation be a disciple of Paul? There are strong Pauline themes of redemption – the Lamb purchasing freedom from the captivity of sin – in Revelation.
- r. Paul would be fine with the Lamb receiving the same praise as God the Father because he won the victory by becoming the victim.

Note: From here forward in the Book of Revelation

- ✚ Please note that these visions are in the coded symbols of a Eucharistic liturgy – of Mass.
- ✚ This is highly intentional on the part of the author, seeking to point out with a neon sign what is important: faithfulness to God as the slain Lamb was faithful unto death.

Rev 6 – The Six Seals

The First Four Seals – Rev. 6:1-8

- a. The breaking of the seals is ONLY work that the slain Lamb may accomplish. It means that what is seen in the vision by John will come to pass.
- b. **This is the vision of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse** that comes out of Zechariah 1:8-11 where God sends this horsemen out to patrol the Earth.
- c. Their dispatch by none other than God and revealed by the Lamb in breaking the seals means God is judging the nations, the imperial nations for their idolatrous behavior.
- d. God is also saying to the seven churches – and all followers of the slain Lamb – whose side are you on amidst this? How you choose will determine your fate.
 1. The white horse, which is a horse of victory, probably represents the Parthians who bordered the Roman Empire on the East and they had mastered the bow and arrow. Thus, they were the only group that could defeat the Romans in battle. John, the author, sees this horse as evidence sent by God that the Parthians will defeat the Romans in battle one day, spelling the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire.
 2. The blood red horse is the horse of war of slaughter sent out by God to oppose all those who oppressing God’s holy ones.
 3. The black horse is the horse of famine who holds a scale in his hands where the prices of wheat and barley are that of famine prices. For an empire to be an empire, it must have perpetual war to take resources from other countries and its own people. This creates great instability in food prices. Famine is a result of imperial war.
 - (a) Rev. 6:6 about not touching the olive oil or the wine may reference the 92 AD edict of Domitian requiring that half of the vineyards be cut down in favor of growing grain to feed his imperial armies.
 4. The pale horse represents pestilence, in this case, a translation of the Greek word “thanatos” which also means death, because pestilence means death in these times. That is why the horse is “pale” or “sickly green.”
- e. All four of these horses represent war and its intrinsic evils – which means great suffering and death for everyone. Thus, God is basically saying to the people of the Roman Empire, “You reap what you sow! Do you really want to sow the deadly fruits of war?”
- f. **For the followers of the slain Lamb, the only acceptable response to God is to fight as the Lamb fights: by embracing the cross.** Yes, it could lead to death but it will save you from the second death of a judgment sending you into eternal damnation, which the empires of the world and all those who accommodate to them will not escape.
 1. In no way is the Book of Revelation glorifying war. Rather, it unmasks the ugliness of it.
 2. God does not “permit” human folly and perversity. Rather, God wholly respects human freedom to do good and evil. Subsequently, God greatly grieves human sinfulness that thinks it can bring peace to the earth through war.

The Fifth Seal – Rev. 6:9-11

- a. This is a powerful image of what “apocalyptic” means: a group of persecuted and martyred followers of the Lamb who are crying out for God to vindicate them for their faithfulness, that is, for God to reveal himself.
- b. The martyrs whose souls literally live under the altar – or in the altar like the bone chips of martyrs in all Catholic altars and this is why the priest kisses the altar as he bows to it in the opening processional, because he is literally kissing Christ’s martyred body – cries out to

God, saying, “How long God will it be until you act to vindicate us!?” You can hear and feel their pain and hope of faithfulness.

1. “How long” is found in the Old Testament in many places: Psalms 6:3; 13:1-2; 35:17; 74:9-10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 94:3-4, and in Isaiah 6:11, Zechariah 1:12, and Jeremiah 47:6.
- c. This striking imagery of blood being poured out by the martyrs – sacrifice of love being offered – from Leviticus 4:7, “...the rest of the bull's blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar for burnt offerings which is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.”
- d. All Jews would know this image quite well. It tells us that the souls of the martyrs are where their “life-blood” is found – under the altar of sacrificial love.
- e. The “inhabitants of the earth” are the ones who are oppressing and killing God’s holy ones – the followers of the Lamb. This phrase is used in Revelation a number of times: 3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2, 8.
 1. This would apply to all the people who benefit from Empire and do nothing to help those oppressed. This would apply to the inhabitants of Nazi Germany who did nothing about the Holocaust but were silent.
 2. It would also apply to all of the citizens of the USA who did nothing about the internment of Japanese American citizens in World War II where they lost all of their property and were kept in concentration camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Upon release, they did not get their original property back. Why didn’t we intern German American citizens?
 3. It would also apply to all those who did nothing with the genocide of Native Americans that included forcible removal from their lands and the breaking of every treaty established between the US government and the Native Americans.
 4. **There is no middle ground in the Book of Revelation: either we are with God suffering with the slain Lamb on the cross or we are not.**
 5. **I might say, “Well, this is hard to live!” Yes, it is hard to live but it does not give us the right to water down the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that is what Jesus fears in Revelation: his Gospel, his way of life, which is the way of the cross, is being watered down where being a part of the Empire and being a part of the Church can go hand in hand. To Jesus in Revelation, this is madness.**
- f. The “white robe” is a symbol of baptism and moreover of martyrdom where God is not looking for a more numbers but sharing that the death of the martyrs is the means by which God is to win his victory over the powers of evil, and only total victory can bring about the consummation of God’s purpose.
- g. See Mark 15:39 where Jesus is most fully the Messiah when he is dead on the cross and the Roman soldier, who led his execution, states, “And when the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" This is the only time in Mark’s Gospel where a human being calls Jesus the Son of God and Jesus is dead on the cross.
 1. There are many affinities between the Book of Revelation and Mark’s Gospel.
- h. **Regardless of our longing for God to act violently to vindicate the oppressed and the martyrs, nothing will spur God to violent action against evil. God has already taken the action that underwrites the total rout of evil: the crucifixion and death of God’s Son, the slain Lamb.**

The Sixth Seal – Rev. 6:12-17

- a. A great earthquake is a prominent feature of the traditional apocalyptic vision found in Ezekiel 38:19 and Isaiah 2:19. The earth quakes when Jesus dies in Matthew 27:51. The One who made the heavens and the earth (see Revelation chapter 4) is now making the earth quake because God is acting in a definitive manner.
- b. What happens with the sun, moon, and stars is a direct allusion to Joel 3:4-5, “⁴The sun will darken, the moon turn blood-red, Before the day of the LORD arrives, that great and terrible day. ⁵Then everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD will escape harm.” Isaiah 13:10 notes the same description about the Day of the Lord when God reveals God’s self. This is the same day that Paul talks about as the Day of the Lord.
- c. Judgment has been given to the Lamb (see Matthew 25:31-46) who is the only one who open this scroll with its seals.
- d. Thus, God coming to judge (Rev. 6) and the Lamb riding his white horse (Rev. 19:11-21 where he fights with the sword of his mouth) reveals that God has won the victory on the cross. God has routed evil and death by embracing and surrendering to evil and death.
- e. This causes the kings of the earth, nobles, military officers, the rich, powerful and every slave and free person – who are not followers of the Lamb – to hide in caves where they cry out for death, rather than face the living God.
- f. In the movies “The Omen” how does Jesus defeat evil? He defeats evil by revealing his self-sacrificing love from his bleeding heart. When he does this in the film The Omen, the devil, who cannot face the love of Jesus in his heart, simply fades into nothingness, into annihilation.
- g. **The martyrs call out for vindication in 6:10 and God has subsequently unleashed God’s wrath. God is not and never could be a violent, vindictive God like the rulers and members of empire who know nothing of forgiveness. God is, however, not aloof to human suffering and injustice. God deals with it in God’s own way: his answer is the Lamb, the slain Lamb. His “wrath” is written on the cross in the form of his dead Son, Jesus Christ.**
- h. **We are called to read this message and act accordingly: to act for peace and justice in the world in God’s manner of dealing with evil, that is, through the “wrath” of the Lamb, which is cross and resurrection.**

Rev 7 – The Sealing (Signing) of the God’s Faithful Witnesses

a. Rev. 7:1-8 The 144,000

1. Jesus foretells this happening in Matthew 24:31, “And he will send out his angels with a trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

2. The seal on the foreheads of God's servants does protect them from tribulation and death. Rather, it sustains your faithfulness amidst tribulation. This is the cross. It is similar to the blood at Passover smeared on the door post as the angel of death passes over, and the other plagues that God inflicted on the Egyptians – the Israelites were immune to them.
3. One thousand in Hebrew is a ton of people. Thus, the actual number could come from 12 tribes x 12 apostles x 1000 = 144,000. Or, it could be 12 tribes squared x 1000 = 144,000. The point is that it is an unimaginable amount of people.
4. This is the 12 tribes of Israel continuing as the faithful church. This is found in the New Testament in Romans 9-11, Galatians 6:16, Ephesians 2:11-22, and 1 Peter 2:9. It holds the idea that salvation flows from the Jewish people.
5. Divine concern will not mean that God's elect, God's chose, God's sealed will not be caught up in a rapture. Rather, they will be caught up in the tribulation that is their response of the cross to empire demanding that it worship a god other than the God of Israel and the God of Jesus Christ.
6. The only miracle here is, not God sending angels to save people; rather, the miracle is God's abiding love and care.

b. Rev. 7:9-17 - The Song of Victory of the Uncountable Throng of People

1. The 144,000 were the faithful ones before the great tribulation.
2. The throng in this section are the faithful ones after the great tribulation and this time, there is no counting them. And, where the ones in 7:1-8 came from the 12 tribes of Israel, these come from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues who now stand before the throne One who sits on the throne and the Lamb.
3. The point: Christian salvation is available to all peoples of the earth and this diverse group of uncountable people now stand before the throne and the Lamb in heaven with palm branches just like the throngs who held palm branches on Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem.
4. So after the great tribulation – which is cross and resurrection images as imminent persecution (see Rev. 2-3, the letters to the churches asking them to preserve amidst what is to come) that takes the lives of many of Jesus' followers – those who have "washed their robes white in the blood of the lamb" have eternal salvation. Why? They were faithful to God by embracing the cross just like the slain Lamb.
 - (a) This is a great paradox: "washing their robes **white** in the **blood** of the Lamb." If I wash anything in blood, it does not come out white.
 - (b) This is not a passive victory for there is nothing passive about the cross.
 - (c) By the shedding of their blood, they have joined their sacrifice to that of the Lamb.
 - (d) Ultimately, it is their association with the Lamb's death that has won their victory.
5. Notice in 8:15-17, we receive a vision of heaven, of the New Jerusalem coming in Rev. 21 where there is no more hunger, thirst, nor will the sun or scorching heat (persecution, suffering, and death) afflict them. God will also wipe away any tears from their eyes.
6. 8:17, the Lamb, who will shepherd them guiding them to the springs of the water of life (Psalm 23, John 4), is now, in some way, one with the One who sits on the throne. An image of the Triune God begins to emerge.

7. This heavenly scene is the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles where God provides for his people while they wander for 40 years in the desert. The paradox here is that while God provides for them, God is also killing off all those who left the land of Egypt because of their unfaithfulness. Only Joshua and Caleb leave Egypt and enter the land flowing with milk and honey.
8. Notice that the only entity worshipped in this heavenly scene is God. This is contrary to the “inhabitants of the earth” and some Christians who offer incense to the Roman Emperor which is imaged through playing the harlot and by eating meat sacrificed to idols. These Christians were led by the figurative “Jezebel” to do this (Rev. 2:20). Offering incense to Caesar, playing the harlot, or eating meat sacrificed to idols is living in any fashion that claims that Caesar or the Roman Empire is god, and my behavior demonstrates that.
9. What about us today? John, the author of Revelation, saw through the empire of his day that had seduced many Christians into following it rather than the Lamb through its distorted values of focusing on self-preservation. We Christians in the Western world have become so much a part of our contemporary empire. Who are we following? That question is often found in how we answer the following: what does my behavior seek? To live in self-preservation for my family and me or to live in self-sacrificing love for my family and me?

Rev 8 – The Seventh Seal & The First Four Trumpets

a. Rev. 8:1-5 The Seventh Seal

1. Please notice the liturgical images from Mass here: silence, the prayers of God’s people, incense, and a censer.
2. The opening of the seventh seal brings silence in heaven that could be a number of things: God’s silence in listening to the prayers of God’s people or God is about to act and all of heaven is utterly silent.
3. The angel with the golden censer is given much incense coupled with the prayers of God’s people and throws the censer from the golden altar in heaven down to earth.
4. This is probably ritual anticipation of the four trumpets that introduce the plagues which allude to the plagues that God uses to afflict upon Egypt seeking to get Pharaoh to let God’s people go. The same hope holds for the Roman Empire persecuting God’s people.
5. Before the plagues are released, an angel appears acting as a priest in the heavenly realm, sent by God who is responding to the prayers of the martyrs in 6:9-10.
6. As we hear in Exodus 3:7, God has heard the cry of his people and is responding to bring about justice.

b. **Rev. 8:6-13 – The First Four Trumpets – The Plagues are Released**

1. **First Trumpet:** hail and fire mixed with blood -> alludes to the seventh plague in Exodus 9:23-26 (the fire is lightning in Exodus).
2. **Second Trumpet:** the sea is turned to blood -> alludes to the first plague in Exodus 7:20-21 where the Nile River is turned to blood, all the fish in it die, and the people cannot drink it.
3. **Third Trumpet:** a great star, Wormwood, falls from the sky on the rivers and springs that makes the water bitter and kills those who drink it -> alludes to the first plague in Exodus 7:20. Wormwood is a metaphor for divine punishment in Jer 9:15; 23:15; Lamentations 3:15, 19 and for disaster in Proverbs 5:4.
4. **Fourth Trumpet:** a third of the sun, moon, and stars are turned dark -> alludes to the ninth plague in Exodus 10:21-23. This is also an allusion, as we saw in Rev 6:12-13, to the great and terrible day of the Lord in Joel 3:1-5.
5. The eagle flying over probably should be translated as a “vulture” which spells doom and death for those whom God does not claim.
6. Woe, woe, woe refers to the remaining three trumpet blasts to come.
7. In this series of plagues, John is not trying to drown us with repetition. Rather, John is building up to the decisive battle between good and evil – which is God’s Son offering his life on the cross out of love where God routs evil by surrendering to it – the great divine paradox.
8. The plagues serve a pastoral purpose of John the prophet, underlining the choice that God and Jesus are trying to get the Christians in the seven churches to realize: “You cannot serve God and Empire” or “You cannot serve God and Mammon” that is the phrase that Jesus uses in the Gospels (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13).
9. In short, Jesus is saying, as he does in Matthew 6:24, “**No one can serve two masters.** He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” **Mammon here is something that replaces God and subsequently becomes an idol, and an idol can never give life but only take life.**
10. **God is sending these plagues upon the people in the seven churches and the inhabitants of the earth who think they are being served by participating in the Roman Empire to open their eyes and see that they cannot serve two masters.**
11. These plagues in Revelation, like those in Exodus, are not God’s primary will but the fruit of the rejection of God’s will.
12. These plagues are not God’s vindictive punishment of God’s will but rather the human rejection of God’s invitation.
13. **The plagues of Egypt were not punishment of Pharaoh; rather, they were designed to procure the liberation of God’s people: “Let my son (Israel) go!”** (Exodus 4:23). This is the heart of liberation theology that Jesus announces in Luke 4:18-19 where he announces his mission in Luke and then goes out and lives it.
14. **God’s will is never the destruction of people whom God has created. God’s will is always salvation for all peoples of the earth.**
15. For an example of this, see the story of God sending Jonah to the people of Nineveh, the Gentile people whom God threatens with punishment if they do not repent. So what do they do? They repent, God affirms his loving care for them, even if they are not the chosen people, and Jonah is quite bent out shape by this.

Rev 9 – The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets

a. Rev. 9:1-12 The Fifth Trumpet – The First Woe

1. The first four trumpets were described briefly. The fifth and sixth receive more details.
2. John alludes to the eighth plague in Exodus 10:12-15 and combines it with an allusion to Joel 1:6-7, 15; 2:1-11 ushering in an Egyptian-style plague of locusts already great embellished by the prophet Joel.
3. Their power to hurt is similar to that of a scorpion, hostile to humans and readily seen as a symbol of evil forces.
4. In Revelation, the abyss is the abode of Satan and fallen angels.
5. Since these are not natural locusts, their targets are not natural vegetation but rather, the inhabitants of the earth who do not bear the seal of God.
6. The goal is that the inhabitants of the earth would repent, because of this torment that is the fruit of their sin.
7. These demonic locusts have a human face. While evil takes many sinister forms, ultimately it needs a human face in the world to act. As Jesus says in Mark 7:15, evil comes from within human beings, “Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.”

b. Rev. 9:13-21 The Sixth Trumpet – The Second Woe

1. Twice 10,000 x 10,000 = 200,000,000. That is an awful lot for this time in history.
2. The four angels who have been held for this very moment will kill one third of humanity who don't have God's mark on them. They are instruments of divine wrath that is God's response to sin and evil: imposing death.
3. The Euphrates river marked the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. John utilizes that paranoid Roman fear of the Parthian threat (the masters of the bow and arrow – see Rev. 6:2) who live just east of the Euphrates river.
4. The reality of the time being determined down to the very hour, day, month, and year reveals that this is clearly God's plan.
5. The colors of the riders' breastplate matches the colors of the fire (red), smoke (blue), and sulphur (yellow) that is breathed out of the horses' mouths.
6. The rest of humankind, the two-thirds of humanity who lack God's mark on them, fail to repent. The sins of empire that grieve God are announced here: gods made by hands; worshipping demons; idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood; murder; sorceries; fornication; and robberies (imperial extortion).

7. God's motivation for the plagues is not vengeance; rather, the plagues are a summons to conversion. Painfully, as with Pharaoh and the Egyptians, God's purpose of repentance is not achieved.

Rev 10 – The Scroll

- a. 10:1, "Then I saw..." John is no longer in heaven or having a vision of heaven. Instead, he is on earth as the mighty angel comes down.
- b. 10:3, "...seven thunders..." is probably the voice of God. See Psalm 29:3, "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders." See Jer 25:30, "The Lord will roar from on high...against all the inhabitants of the earth."
- c. 10:4, the purpose of the sealing of the message of the seven thunders is not clear. It may be to insist that John, though he provides a revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1), is not privy to the whole of divine knowledge.
- d. 10:6, "no more delay" is in conscious contrast to Daniel 12:7, "that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time" before all should be accomplished. There was a delay with the seals and the trumpets, that is, God giving opportunity of repentance.
- e. 10:7, yet now the hidden purpose of God in the seventh trumpet will be accomplished. We will learn this towards the end of Rev. 11:15-19.
- f. 10:8, John is commissioned to eat the scroll and his mission will unfold in Rev. 12-22.
- g. 10:9, inspired by Ezekiel 3:1-3, John's task as a prophet is bittersweet: honey in my mouth and sour in my stomach. This bittersweet experience of the prophet is found in Ezekiel 3:14 and Jeremiah 15:16-18. It is normal for God's word of truth is powerful, yet the prophet gets sick to his/her stomach because the prophet, like Jonah, has to tell a people that they need to change their ways.
- h. This scroll that commissions John in Rev. 10 marks a transition from 1:9-20. Now, John must prophesy again and this time to many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.
- i. God's plan is about to unfold.
- j. To be a prophet is a gift and an enormous burden. It is a privilege to serve God but the cost is high. Everyone who strives to preach and teach the word of God knows at once that it is fulfilling and frustrating.