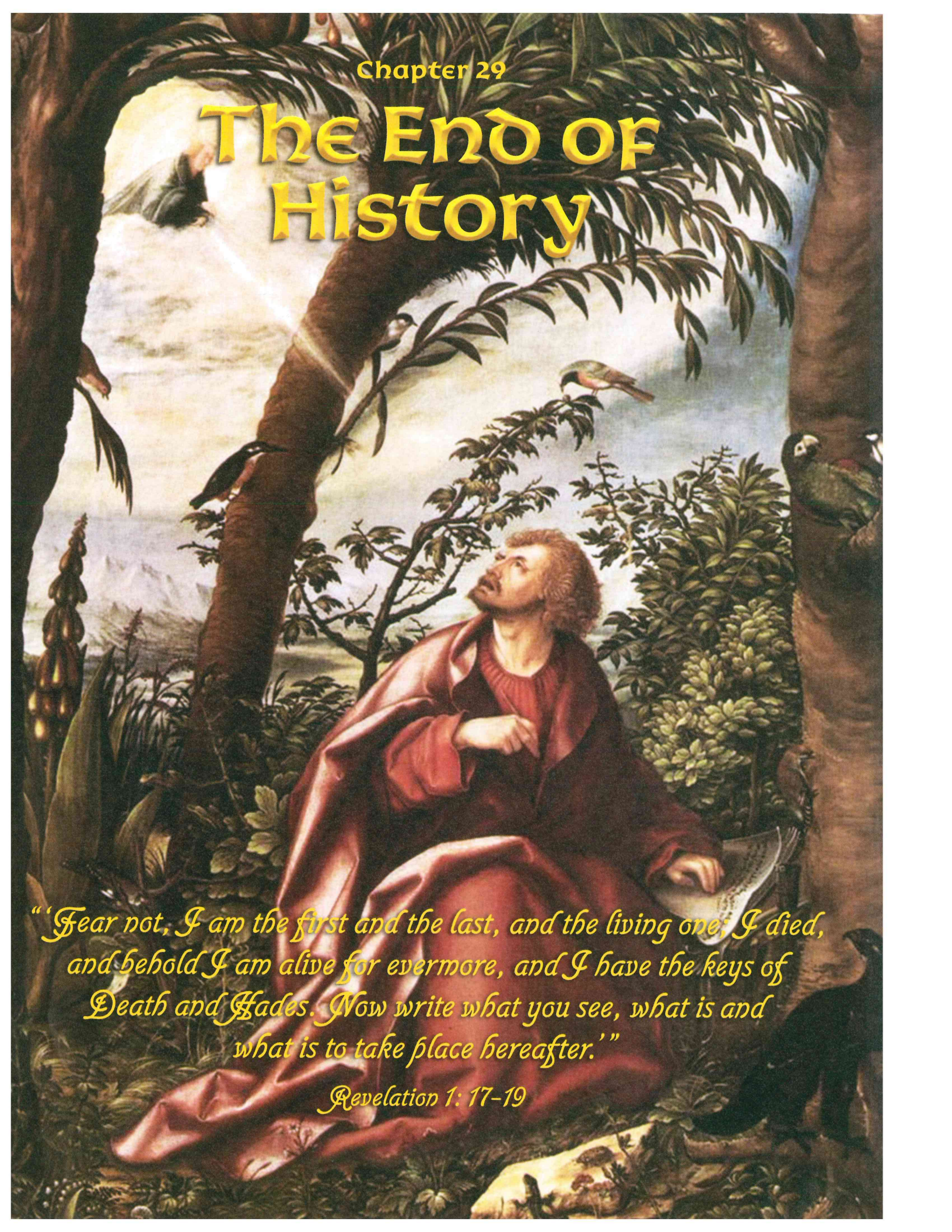


The End of History



“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter.”

Revelation 1: 17-19

Chapter 29

The End of History



Read

Matthew
24:1 - 44

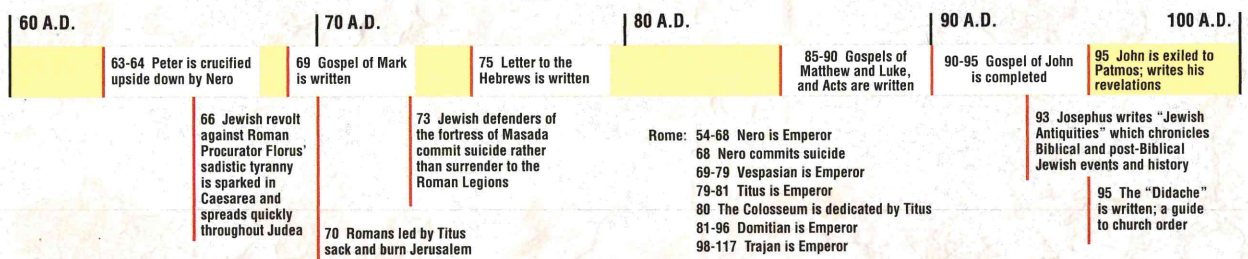
Revelation
12:1 - 12
21:1 - 8
21:22 - 22:8

In all the books of the New Testament, it often seems that the earliest Christians were expecting the end of the world to come very soon—within their own lifetimes, in fact.

What Jesus Taught About The End Of History

“Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom,” Jesus says in Matthew 16: 28. And later, in the middle of a long discourse on the “tribulation” to come, Jesus tells his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place.”¹

As it turned out, the earliest Christians were right. The earth itself was not destroyed entirely, but the whole world of the Old Covenant came to a sudden and catastrophic end.



But because God's promises are often fulfilled in ever-increasing ways throughout history, we can also see the end of the world of the Old Covenant as a preview of the end of our world. For Christians, the end of the world is a promise, not a threat. For the persecutors and the unjust, and for all who look for their reward in this world, the end of the world is a terrible prospect. But Christians look forward to the return of the glorious Christ who will come at the end of time to judge the living and the dead. Then, he will reveal the secret disposition of hearts and will render to each man according to his works and according to his acceptance or refusal of grace. It will be the time of the new heaven and the new earth, where pain and trouble will be no more, and where we will all live in eternal joy with God the Father and our brother Jesus Christ.

Some Christians suppose that they can use the Revelation to John and other prophecies to predict exactly the course of future earthly events. People who think they can tell when the world will end or what will happen in the course of human history tread on very dangerous ground.

*The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism (cf. DS 3839), especially the "intrinsically perverse" political form of a secular messianism (Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris*, condemning the "false mysticism" of this "counterfeit of the redemption of the lowly"; cf. GS 20-21). (CCC 676)*

The book of Revelation is full of strange visions and symbols, and at first glance it seems hard to understand. But a few keys will open it up. And the first of those keys is an understanding of the historical setting of Revelation.

The End Of The Old Covenant

- **A Judean revolt against Rome led to civil war.**
- **The Christians of Jerusalem fled to the mountains and were saved.**
- **Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D., and the Temple was destroyed.**
- **With the Temple went the whole world of the Old Covenant.**

The end of the world began in 67 A.D., when the mad emperor Nero sent a wicked wastrel named Florus to be governor of Judea. Florus celebrated the beginning of his term by massacring hundreds of innocent people in Jerusalem. Soon the province was on the verge of open revolt.

Florus believed that floggings and massacres were the way to keep order. Some people began to suspect that Florus was deliberately trying to provoke a revolt. Whether he wanted it or not, Florus soon had a revolt on his hands—a revolt with all the horrors of a civil war. Judean fanatics murdered anyone suspected of collaborating with the Romans. The Romans retaliated by murdering anyone suspected of being a Judean fanatic. The cities were filled with dead bodies.

For a while, the Judean side had the upper hand. They managed to defeat the Romans in important battles. So the Romans sent Vespasian, their best general, to put down the Jewish revolt. He was remarkably successful; but before he could finish the job, Nero had committed suicide. Vespasian was proclaimed Emperor by the army, and he had to run back to Rome. He left the Judean problem in the hands of his son Titus.

Meanwhile, the early Christian community in Jerusalem had remembered Jesus' advice: "So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."² (Daniel's prophecy warns that "Forces from him



The Sack of the Temple of Jerusalem by Titus' Troops by Poussin

shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.”³) Early historians also say that the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem had been warned by the Holy Spirit to leave the city. So the Christians of Jerusalem moved to a little town called Pella, in the mountains across the Jordan, before the war began. From there they could watch the end of the world.

When the Romans eventually besieged Jerusalem, the people there suffered horrors we can hardly imagine. Jerusalem was already a crowded city. Now it was jammed with many times its normal population, as refugees fled into the city for protection from the Romans. They were all starving, killing each other for scraps of food, and even resorting to cannibalism. They died by the thousands every day; there were too many to bury. Titus, himself, seeing the mounds of corpses thrown into the valleys outside the city, was horrified, and called his gods to witness that he was not to blame.

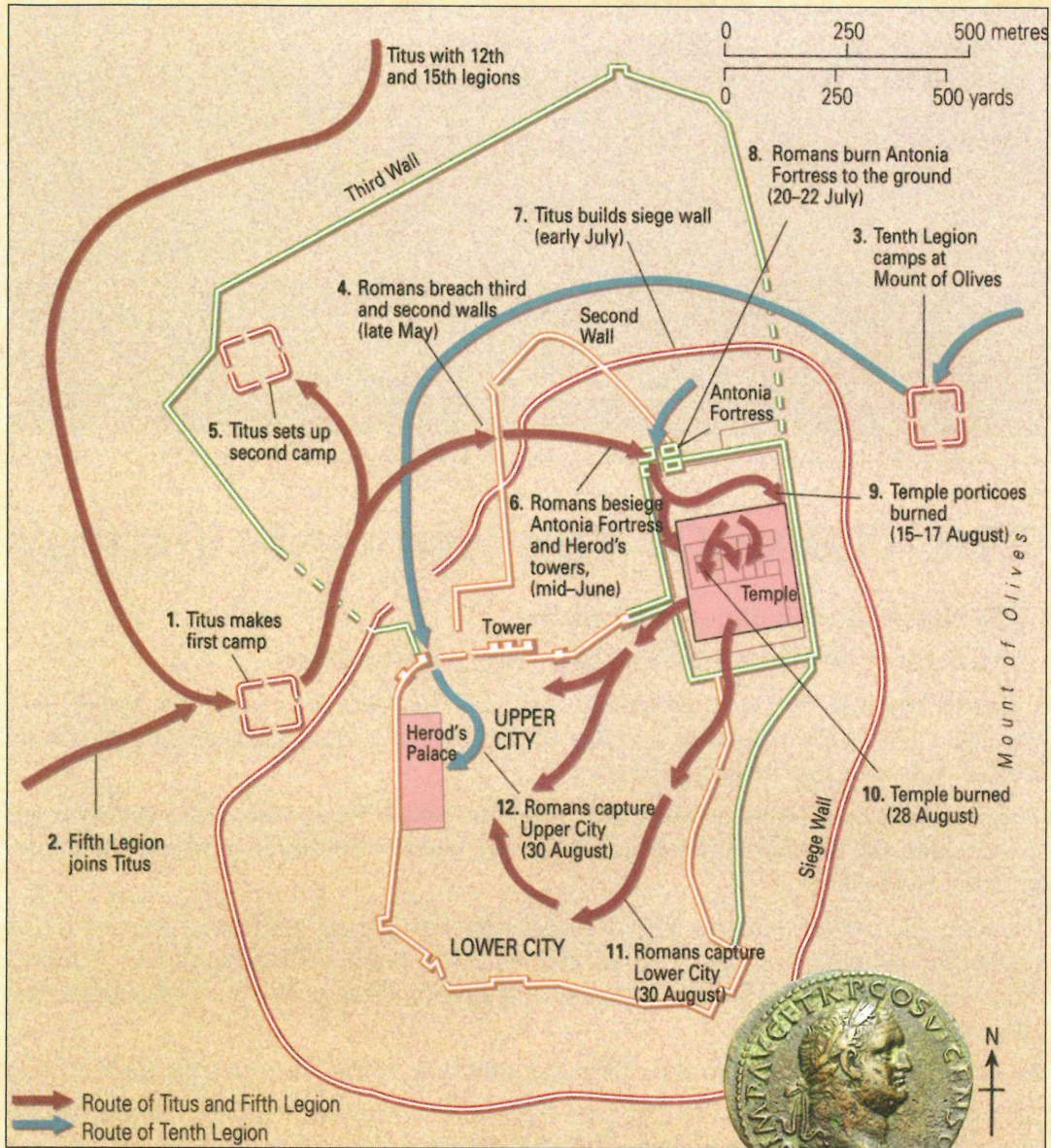
At last the city was taken in the year 70. More than a million Judeans had died in battle or in the famine. Most of the rest were sold as slaves or thrown to the lions in the arena. It was the worst disaster that had ever happened to Jerusalem, a city that was used to disasters. The whole city was destroyed—all but a few straggly houses and the little building where the Upper Room was, the room where Jesus had celebrated the Last Supper.

But what made the destruction of Jerusalem the end of the world was this: the Temple, the architectural sign of the Old Covenant, was destroyed, never to be rebuilt—just as Jesus had predicted. The world of the Old Covenant was gone.

All that happened when many of Jesus’ original followers were still alive. They must have remembered what Jesus had told them: “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”⁴

In the Greek, the word “generation” refers to a period of about forty years. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple happened almost exactly forty years after Jesus’ prediction.

The Siege of Jerusalem 70 A.D.



"The Burnt House" is a seven room residence excavated by archaeologists in Jerusalem. Burned to the ground in 70 A.D. by the Romans, this house belonged to a member of the priestly caste.



"JUDAEA CAPTA"

This coin, minted in 77 A.D., commemorates Titus' destruction of Jerusalem. One side shows Titus as Caesar and the reverse shows a female slave with the words "Captive Judea."



Apostle John was banished to the island of Patmos by Emperor Domitian in 95 A.D. On this island, John wrote the last book of the New Testament.

The Vision Of The Heavenly Liturgy

- **The Mass is literally heaven on earth.**
- **The book of Revelation follows the pattern of the Mass.**

The second key that opens up Revelation for us is the Mass, or the Divine Liturgy as Eastern Christians call it. John's vision is a vision of the heavenly liturgy, and the liturgy we celebrate here on earth is part of that heavenly liturgy.

Liturgy is an "action" of the *whole Christ (Christus totus)*. Those who even now celebrate it without signs are already in the heavenly liturgy, where celebration is wholly communion and feast. (CCC 1136)

John describes the heavenly liturgy in terms of things we can see, hear, smell, feel, and taste. Until we reach heaven ourselves, the real truth of the heavenly liturgy is far beyond our comprehension. But John's vision and the liturgy we celebrate in church both give us a way of understanding it in terms of things we already know.

The structure of Revelation is very much like the structure of the Mass we celebrate in church.

There are two parts to our Mass. The first part, called the Liturgy of the Word, includes the Scripture readings and the homily. The second part, the Eucharist, is where we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. That division comes from the earliest tradition of the Christian Church.

In the same way, Revelation falls into two parts, with the division almost exactly in the middle:

<p>Revelation 1: 1 to 11: 18: Readings of letters to the seven churches (a call to repentance). The scroll sealed with seven seals.</p>	<p>The Liturgy of the Word</p>
<p>Revelation 11: 19 to 22: 21: Pouring out of the chalices. The marriage supper of the Lamb.</p>	<p>The Eucharist</p>

In other words, the whole book itself is like a Mass, and everything that happens in it—even the destruction, the plagues, and the battles—is somehow part of the liturgy.

*The Revelation of “what must soon take place,” the *Apocalypse*, is borne along by the songs of the heavenly liturgy (cf. Rv 4: 8-11; 5: 9-14; 7: 10-12) but also by the intercession of the “witnesses” (martyrs) (Rv 6: 10). The prophets and the saints, all those who were slain on earth for their witness to Jesus, the vast throng of those who, having come through the great tribulation, have gone before us into the Kingdom, all sing the praise and glory of him who sits on the throne, and of the Lamb (cf. Rv 18: 24; 19: 1-8). In communion with them, the Church on earth also sings these songs with faith in the midst of trial. By means of petition and intercession, faith hopes against all hope and gives thanks to the “Father of lights,” from whom “every perfect gift” comes down (Jas 1: 17). Thus faith is pure praise. (CCC 2642)*

The Liturgy Of The Word

Revelation begins with a vision of heaven. “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,” John says, “and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches...’”⁵ The Lord’s day is Sunday. John saw his vision on the day when Christians everywhere were celebrating the Divine Liturgy.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. (Rv 1: 12-16)

“One like a son of man” means one who looked human, but “Son of man” was also the way Christ had always referred to himself during his ministry. It echoes Daniel 7: 13-14, in which “one like a son of man” is given power to rule all the nations forever. As the figure himself explained, this is Jesus Christ in his heavenly glory.

John’s vision was terrifying, and we aren’t surprised at his reaction: “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.” But the man in the vision told John not to be afraid:

Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter. As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. (Rv 1: 17-20)

Then Christ dictated seven letters, one to each of the seven churches. The letters reflect what was going on in those churches at the time. But seven is also a symbolically complete number—the most important number in Revelation, especially, where almost everything seems to come in sevens. So the letters must also be addressed to the whole Church. They call the churches to turn back to Christ, and promise that heaven will protect all the faithful who repent.

So this whole first section is a call to repentance, very much like the Penitential Rite that begins our Mass. It ends with one of the best-known images of Christ:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (Rv 3: 20)



"Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man,..."
(Rev 1: 12-13)

Jesus Christ comes to every one of us. But we have to open the door for him ourselves.

With that preparation, John is ready for the next part of his vision.

After this I looked, and lo, in heaven an open door! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this." (Rv 4:1)

Now John sees a vision of heaven, and God is enthroned with all the heavenly beings forever worshipping him. Every detail would have reminded the original hearers of the Temple in Jerusalem. The words they sing sound very familiar to anyone who goes to Mass regularly:

**Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come! (Rv 4:8)**

**Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for thou didst create all things,
and by thy will they existed and were created. (Rv 4:11)**

Next John sees a scroll sealed with seven seals. No one on earth or in heaven is able to open the scroll, but then John hears that the Lion of Judah (a symbol of Christ) has been found worthy to open it. But instead of a lion, what he sees is a lamb—a lamb that appears to have been slaughtered for a sacrifice. Yet the scroll is given to the lamb. Somehow the Lion of Judah is a lamb! The heavenly host sings words that once again sound very familiar:

**Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing! (Rv 5:12)**

Now the Lamb begins to open the seven seals on the scroll. With the opening of the first come four riders on four horses. The first one rides out to conquer; the other three bring war, famine, and death. These are the things the people of Judea suffered in the Jewish War, as the revolt against Rome was called.

As each of the remaining seals is opened, frightening portents appear in earth and heaven. The people of the earth hide in the caves and mountains and tremble.

But God will not leave his people unprotected. Before any harm can come to the earth, all the true people of God—a perfect 12,000 from each of the scattered tribes of Israel—will be marked on their foreheads with the seal of the servants of God. The vision recalls Ezekiel 9, in which Ezekiel is prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem.

And the LORD said to him, "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it." (Ez 9:4)

Those people with the mark on their foreheads would be saved when destruction came to Jerusalem. The word translated "mark" is the Hebrew word *tau*, a letter of the Hebrew alphabet which is shaped like a cross. When Christians are baptized, they receive the mark of the cross on their foreheads.

In the historic context of Revelation, those 144,000 are the Jewish Christians who fled to the mountains across the Jordan. The comforting message John has for them is that, no matter how many disasters befall Judea, they will not be harmed. The message is also for us: the perfect number 144,000 means that not one of us has been left out. All the faithful baptized Christians will be saved.

Finally, the seventh seal is broken, and there is silence in heaven. Then seven angels blow seven trumpets, and with each of the first six trumpets another plague is released over the earth. The plagues recall the plagues that Egypt suffered before the Exodus. And just like Pharaoh, the wicked people who have suffered the plagues refuse to repent.



The ruins of Pella. Christians fled to this small town and escaped the Roman massacre in Jerusalem.

All this emphasis on the scrolls must remind us of the Liturgy of the Word in which the Word of God is proclaimed to the people, even though the first half of Revelation is filled with plagues. After the last of the plagues, an angel declares, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

The Heavenly Eucharist

Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. (Rv 11: 19)

It is hard for us to imagine how shocking this vision—right in the middle of the book—must have been to the people who first heard it. The Ark of the Covenant appeared! It had been missing since the exile, and everyone knew that it would not reappear until all Israel was gathered together again.

It was also in the writing that the prophet [Jeremiah], having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense, and he sealed up the entrance. Some of those who followed him came up to mark the way, but could not find it. When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: “The place shall be unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. And then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated.” (2 Mc 2: 4-8)

Here it was in John’s vision: the Ark of the Covenant, and “the glory of the Lord and the cloud.” From that we should know instantly that this is the time when “God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy.”

The appearance of the Ark, then, would have grabbed the attention of John’s audience and filled their minds with visions of the lost Ark of the Covenant. Then immediately we hear:

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. (Rv 12: 1-2)

We were expecting—almost begging for—more about the Ark of the Covenant. But instead we get a “woman clothed with the sun.”

And another portent appeared in heaven: behold a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. (Rv 12: 3-6)

The woman’s child will rule the nations, and he is taken up to the throne of God. The “rod of iron” comes from Psalm 2: 9, one of the psalms most often quoted as a prophecy of the Messiah.

I will tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to me, “You are my son,
today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron,
and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”
(Ps 2: 7-9)

The child is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One. If the child is Christ, then his mother must be Mary. But the crown of twelve stars also identifies her as something more. There are twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve apostles to rule them. The woman is the Church—that is, God’s faithful people throughout history, from whom the Christ came under the Old Covenant, and whom God protects in the wilderness of Pella under the New Covenant.



“Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated...” (Rv 12: 7-8)

But what happened to the Ark of the Covenant? Why isn't John saying more about it?

The Ark of the Covenant contained the Word of God on stone—the law given to Moses on Sinai. Christ is the Word of God in flesh, as we know from the beginning of John's Gospel. The Ark of the Covenant also contained some of the bread from heaven, the manna, that kept the Israelites alive in the wilderness. Christ is the Bread of Life. Finally, the ark held Aaron's rod. Christ rules the nations with a rod of iron.

The Word, the bread, the rod: those are the things that the Ark holds. In other words, the woman who bore the Christ is herself the Ark of the Covenant! That's why John doesn't mention the Ark again: he's showing us the Ark personified. John has come to the same conclusion Luke did at the beginning of his Gospel. Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant.

But the woman here, who represents Mary, also represents the faithful people of God throughout the ages, the Church before and after the Incarnation. The Church—the faithful of Israel—brings forth the Christ, and then Christ protects her from harm. The Church is also the Ark of the New Covenant. The woman is attacked by a dragon, but the woman is protected in the wilderness—just as the early Church in Jerusalem was protected in the wilderness while the world of the Old Covenant was being destroyed. The Dragon represents Satan.

What we are witnessing is the undoing of sin itself. The serpent—that horrible ancient dragon—tempted Eve and Adam, and they were conquered by temptation. But the woman and her son—the new Eve and the new Adam—overcome the dragon. Adam and Eve were formed without sin; the woman and her son also were formed without sin. Sin attacked humanity through the woman; sin is overcome through the woman's consent. Adam and Eve brought a curse on all humanity; the new Adam and the new Eve bring a blessing on all humanity. The woman's child is the promised seed who would at last crush the serpent's head.

The Beasts

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads.... One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder. (Rv 13:1, 3)

The horns are symbols of power, and the diadems are symbols of royal authority. The beast would have reminded John's first readers of the Roman Empire, or of the dynasty of Herods who infested Palestine. But it also represents any corrupt government, persecuting the followers of the Word.

The people of the earth worship the beast, or the dragon (Satan) who gives the beast his power—just as people do today when they decide to compromise their faith to get on the government's good side.

The second beast is even more disturbing.

Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men... This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six. (Rv 13:11-13, 18)

Many interpretations have been given for that number. Some point out that the name Nero Caesar, spelled in Hebrew, adds up to 666 (in the same way that we saw David added up to 14). Others point out that Solomon brought in 666 talents of gold a year, so that the beast would represent the corruption of the kingdom of Israel.



For almost two thousand years, Christians have been seeing current world leaders in the descriptions of the beasts. Was one of the beasts Napoleon, Bismarck, Hitler, or Stalin? The answer is yes: although the symbols had meaning for the particular time in which John lived, they also have universal significance. Whenever we see corrupt government leading the people astray, we see the beasts working for their master, Satan.

The New Jerusalem

If Revelation were filled with nothing but plagues and tribulations, we would feel hopeless. But the real message of Revelation is consolation and hope. Though Christians suffer plagues and tribulations, we know that the end is triumph for Christ and his Church.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." (Rv 21:1-5)

At the end of time, the faithful people of God will dwell with him in the new Jerusalem, and the old world of sin and death will be replaced by a new world where we live in joy and worship forever. It will be a great marriage feast, with Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church, the new Jerusalem, as the Bride.

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. (Rv 21:22-26)

At last all the promises of the prophets are fulfilled. Jerusalem is the light of the nations, and all the kings of the earth bring their glory into it.

But we don't really have to wait for the end of time. All through the book, John has shown us that the worship in heaven is the same as the worship on earth. When we are at Mass, we really are in the new Jerusalem, participating in the heavenly liturgy. That's true whether we worship in a great cathedral with stained glass or in a dim basement with fluorescent lights, whether the priest is a great preacher or a monotonous bore, whether the music is inspiring or insipid. The Mass is heaven on earth.

The Warning And The Promise

The children of our holy mother the Church rightly hope for *the grace of final perseverance and the recompense* of God their Father for the good works accomplished with his grace in communion with Jesus (cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1576). Keeping the same rule of life, believers share the "blessed hope" of those whom the divine mercy gathers into the "holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rv 21:2). (CCC 2016)

What do we know about the end of our world?

First, we know from Christ himself that it is impossible to know when it will happen. For two thousand years, Christians have tried to set a date for the end of the world. When the date has come and gone, the world is still here. That is exactly what we should have expected from what Jesus told his disciples:

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. (Mt 24:36)



An icon of the Last Judgment. In Latin, the *Dies irae*, the "Day of Wrath"; in Russian, the *Strashnyj sud*, the "terrifying judgment."

Watch, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Mt 24: 42-44)

Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Mt 25:13)

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. (Jn 5: 28-29)

The disciples would not know exactly when Jerusalem would be destroyed, and we do not know when the end of our world will come.

We do know, however, that Revelation is a warning as well as a promise. The defeat of Jerusalem was not something for Christians to celebrate. It was an example for them to fear.

If we needed any more warning, we can look at the list of “the seven churches that are in Asia”:

1. Ephesus
2. Smyrna
3. Pergamum
4. Thyatira
5. Sardis
6. Philadelphia
7. Laodicea

Those were all cities in the Roman province of Asia. Some, like Ephesus (to which Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians) were great and prosperous cities that already had large Christian communities. Others were smaller towns where the Church was struggling to get on its feet.

John had warnings from Christ to give to those churches: “Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.”⁶ We know from Revelation 1:20 that the seven lampstands in heaven represented the seven churches.

The warning is clear: unless they repented, the Church itself would disappear from Ephesus—just as the Temple was destroyed in Jerusalem.

Not one of those seven churches in Asia is left today. The entire province is part of Turkey now. Since the late Middle Ages, that whole area has been under Muslim rulers, who conquered it in a long series of bloody wars that left most of the cities desolate. In the 1920's, the last of the Greek Christians were expelled from Turkey, except for a small pocket in Constantinople, and since then all the churches mentioned in Revelation have been extinct.

So that list of churches is itself a warning to us. If we turn away from our faith, if we refuse to turn back to Christ, we can suffer the same catastrophe that came to Jerusalem.

Revelation is a warning as well as a promise. We can be sure that God invites his faithful people to the marriage supper of the Lamb. But will we be among the faithful who accept the invitation?

Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.
(Rv 22: 12-13)

Christian Churches and Communities 100 A.D.



*"Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."
(Rev 2: 5)*



Smyrna



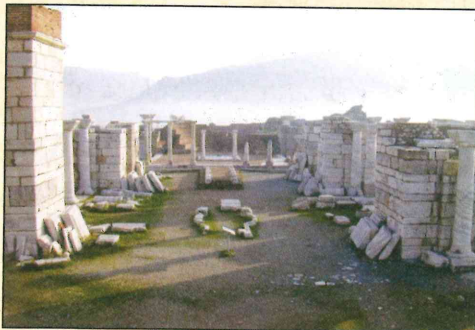
Sardis



Pergamum



Philadelphia



Ephesus



Thyatira



Laodicea

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Eusebius, *History of the Church*, Book 3

2. His words are as follows: "Woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day. For there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

3. The historian [Josephus], reckoning the whole number of the slain, says that eleven hundred thousand persons perished by famine and sword, and that the rest of the rioters and robbers, being betrayed by each other after the taking of the city, were slain. But the tallest of the youths and those that were distinguished for beauty were preserved for the triumph. Of the rest of the multitude, those that were over seventeen years of age were sent as prisoners to labor in the works of Egypt, while still more were scattered through the provinces to meet their death in the theaters by the sword and by beasts. Those under seventeen years of age were carried away to be sold as slaves, and of these alone the number reached ninety thousand.

4. These things took place in this manner in the second year of the reign of Vespasian, in accordance with the prophecies of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who by divine power saw them beforehand as if they were already

present, and wept and mourned according to the statement of the holy evangelists, who give the very words which he uttered, when, as if addressing Jerusalem herself, he said:

5. "If thou hadst known, even thou, in this day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a rampart about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee and thy children even with the ground."

6. And then, as if speaking concerning the people, he says, "For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." And again: "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh."

7. If any one compares the words of our Savior with the other accounts of the historian [Josephus] concerning the whole war, how can one fail to wonder, and to admit that the foreknowledge and the prophecy of our Savior were truly divine and marvelously strange?



"And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Rev 20: 9-10)

VOCABULARY

APOCALYPSE

The book of Revelation.

ESCHATOLOGY

The study of the end of time.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

The first part of the Mass. Within it the Scriptures are read and interpreted by the deacon or priest. It parallels the liturgy of the Jewish synagogues.

LITURGY

The whole mystical body, Christ the head and his members, worships the Father and continues the effects of his death and resurrection by which he accomplished our salvation.

NEW JERUSALEM

The heavenly city, of which all the faithful are citizens.

REVELATION

The name of the last book of the New Testament, so called because it contains the things that were revealed to St. John.

SCROLL

A long roll used for writing made out of papyrus, leather, or parchment. Most books and letters were written on scrolls in the time of the New Testament.

TITUS

The Roman general whose army captured and destroyed Jerusalem. He later became emperor.

TRIBULATION

A time of trial and distress.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When did the early Christians expect the world to end?
2. What did come to an end during their lifetimes?
3. Who was Florus?
4. Who succeeded Vespasian as general against the Israelites?
5. What disaster in 70 A.D. brought the world of the Old Covenant to an end?
6. Where did the Christians flee before the fall of Jerusalem?
7. Why had the Christians fled to Pella before the siege?
8. What two sources can we use to begin to comprehend the heavenly liturgy?
9. How many parts is the book of Revelation divided into, and how do these parts correspond to the Mass?
10. What was John's vision of heaven after he saw the open door?
11. What does the number of 144,000 people represent in Revelation?
12. What happens when the seventh seal of the scroll is broken?
13. In the symbolism of Revelation, who is the Bride of Christ?
14. In the symbolism of Revelation, who is the Ark of the New Covenant in Revelation 12:1-2?
15. Who is the child in Revelation 12?
16. What is the number of the two-horned beast that John sees rise out of the ground?
17. Where will the faithful dwell at the end of time?
18. Why is there no temple in the New Jerusalem?
19. According to the words of Christ, when will the end of the world come?
20. What happened to all the churches listed in Revelation?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. It is has been often said, “hindsight is 20/20.” There are many times in our lives when Jesus “knocks on the door” to our hearts, but we fail to open the door. Take a moment to remember the times that you did not open the door. How has this taught you to be better prepared for when Jesus calls you?

2. The Mass has been revealed to be “heaven on earth.” How has this affected your attitude as you participate in the liturgy? Do you express proper respect in attitude, attentiveness, and dress? What are ways you can more fully experience this wonderful gift with reverence and gratitude?

3. Jesus told his disciples, “Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Mt 25:13). Examine yourself and your life. Are you awaiting the coming of the Lord with vigilance, or taking time for granted? Are you completely satisfied with the way you treat yourself and others? Take time to determine ways you can better prepare yourself for your own death and the end of the world.

FROM THE CATECHISM

1038 The resurrection of all the dead, “of both the just and the unjust” (*Roman Missal*, EP I (Roman Canon) 88), will precede the Last Judgment. This will be “the hour when all who are in the tombs will hear [the Son of man’s] voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (Jn 5:28-29). Then Christ will come “in his glory, and all the angels with him...Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left....And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Mt 25:31, 32, 46).

1138 “Recapitulated in Christ,” these are the ones who take part in the service of the praise of God and the fulfillment of his plan: the heavenly powers, all creation (the four living beings), the servants of the Old and New Covenants (the twenty-four elders), the new People of God (the one hundred and

forty-four thousand) (cf. Rv 4-5; 7:1-8; 14:1; Is 6:2-3), especially the martyrs “slain for the word of God,” and the all-holy Mother of God (the Woman), the Bride of the Lamb (Rv 6:9-11; Rv 21:9; cf. 12), and finally “a great multitude which no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes, and peoples and tongues” (Rv 7:9).

2788 Since the Lord’s Prayer is that of his people in the “endtime,” this “our” also expresses the certitude of our hope in God’s ultimate promise: in the new Jerusalem he will say to the victor, “I will be his God and he shall be my son” (Rv 21:7).

Endnotes

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| 1. Mt 24: 34. | 4. Mt 24: 34-35. |
| 2. Mt 24: 15-16. | 5. Rv 1: 9-11. |
| 3. Dn 11: 31. | 6. Rv 2: 5. |