

Rev 25-12-21a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the final Sunday before Christmas this year. This is the 21st of December, 2025.

We're continuing our study in the book of the Revelation. We have come to chapter six. We're going to quickly take an overview of the first five chapters as we have seen them, primarily looking for their function as the introduction, setting the stage, providing the context for the meat of this eschatological presentation, this prophetic narrative that is to follow.

It is very obvious that the unfolding of the judgments of God begin with the seals, are depicted in the seals and the trumpets. There is the mention of the thunders, and then there are the bulls of God's judgment, moving all the way up to Revelation chapter 19 with the second coming of the Lord Jesus, chapter 20, the great white throne judgment, chapters 21 and 22, the new heavens and the new earth, the new Jerusalem, and so on. But there is a major shift here when having been called to heaven at the beginning of chapter four, and having been given two chapters of perspective in the heavenly realm, we then move into this time of Jacob's trouble.

Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study, and we'll begin. Father, we are so grateful for this time of fellowship, this time of encouragement, to offer prayer and support for one another as we face our opportunities, challenges, our testing and our blessings, and recognizing that sometimes our blessings can be as much a test as the trials, to ensure that we preserve our focus, that we maintain our foremost love for the Lord Jesus and through Him for you, our heavenly Father. We thank you for your creative power.

We thank you for your provision for us in assigning us this remarkable place in history as a special gift to the Lord Jesus, as His body, as His special people, zealous for good works. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, the Holy Spirit will minister to us, help us not just to observe it, but to see how it should change the way we think, the way we talk, and the way we live in the days ahead. We thank you for this occasion that we celebrate of the birth of the Lord Jesus, His coming to earth to be our Savior and Redeemer.

We pray that we can be worthy of His name as we represent Him before friends and family at this time of gathering and celebration. We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified. We pray it in His name, amen.

Think about the commission that John receives in chapter one. We just want to quickly remind ourselves of the background before we plunge into the cracking of the seals, the sounding of the trumpets, and the pouring out of the bowls, and the interleaved material, as you will recall, and as you know from past experience, there will be six seals, and then there is an interlude. We will see the blowing of six trumpets, and then there is quite an extensive interlude.

Then there is the pouring out of the bowls of judgment. And in each case, there is six, followed

by a seventh. And in the seventh, there is a consummation, there is a revelation, there is an expression that is very fulsome and final of God's judgment.

And I would like to encourage all of us to keep that pattern in mind, even prospectively. We don't have to pretend that we don't know anything about what's coming. As we look at this commission that John receives in chapter one, what did Jesus tell John to do? You remember in chapter one, verse 11, what you see, write in a book, send it to the seven churches, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

We have seen that these churches represent for us aspects of our lives, areas of challenge. We are not living in one period or another. There are not any of these that we can safely ignore and set aside and pretend that it has no relevance or pertinence for us.

They are all relevant. They are all pertinent. They are all challenges to our faith, to our perspective, our goals and values and priorities as we expend each day like a denarius a day's wage given to us by God.

It comes once, never to come again. We are gathered here for fellowship and instruction in the word of God, celebration of the Lord Jesus, encouragement, participation in that which the Holy Spirit does in us individually and collectively, that is today. We have days upcoming.

We don't know how many. This could be our last day. We could have dozens, hundreds, even thousands of days left or not.

Every day counts. And these words of the Lord Jesus of approval, of correction, of opportunity, of promise are always pertinent and they define us. We are called by his name.

We belong to him. We represent him. We have a mission and a purpose in this life.

It is so easy to forget because we just want to try to navigate the day and accomplish the things required of us, do a few things that please us and entertain us and rest us and give us the joy de vive, the happiness in our life. These are legitimate. We are built to participate in various things, both challenging and satisfying.

But we can't forget that that itself is background for our spiritual identity. We are only here because the Lord Jesus died and rose again to give us a relationship with his father in heaven that is eternal. And we are preparing to meet the father and to dwell in the eternal future with the father and to understand him through what he has done, what he is doing and what he's going to do.

That may sound familiar because both God the father and the Lord Jesus are described in terms of having existed in the past, existing in the present and existing into the eternal future, the one who is and was and is to come. And the Lord Jesus specifically is defined and defines himself in terms of having been dead and become alive. We were dead in trespasses and sins, but we have been made alive in him.

And this is something we see throughout the scripture. I was having a fruitful conversation as always with people in my periphery yesterday and reviewing the nature of prophecy, of the biblical category of revelation that we call in theology, eschatology. Eschaton is the last, the end, the finality, the consummation.

So eschatology is things to come. That was the title of a book by J. Dwight Pentecost, wonderful DTS professor, a must have book on your shelf. If you only had a handful of books, if you had one foot of space on the shelf, things to come ought to be one of them.

If you have any interest at all in understanding the prophetic scriptures, that is your guide. There is nothing better, nothing has surpassed it. It's probably 50 odd years old now, maybe as many as 70 years old, but it is unequaled, it is unsurpassed.

I recommend it without hesitation. You will learn, you will be fascinated by what is in things to come by Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost. But eschatology, his title is the translation of that word.

I was listening to something by, some of you have heard of a Naval Academy graduate, an ardent student of the word of God named Chuck Missler. And he's a fun guy to listen to. He's enthusiastic.

He is dedicated to a high view of scripture, it's inspiration. If you could take your belief in inspiration to an extreme, Chuck is your man. He believes in so many symbolic things.

For example, he has noted that up to this point in our study of revelation, when you get up to chapter six, the Lord Jesus has been described by 24 titles, just like the 24 elders. And I think the 24 wings of the cherubim that surround God's throne, 24 is the priestly number, going back to 1 Chronicles 24, where David established leadership for worship in Israel. But Chuck counts everything.

And he has counted the titles up to this point. And according to him, there are 24. But I appreciated another insight that he expressed.

And I think it is worth noting that when it comes, and he, of course, we all stand on the shoulders of others and he got this, he named whoever he got it from. But when something rings true, it doesn't matter who had that solid gold coin before you. When they hand it to you and you look at it and you say, you know, this is not counterfeit.

I can bite this, this is gold. Talking about the area of systematic theology, which as most of you know, that was my major in seminary was systematic theology. What are theologies? The categories under which we try to organize our understanding of scripture.

We have bibliology that the scripture itself is inspired and is the word of God. And it was designed to communicate God's truth to us in understandable terms. Bibliology, theology proper, the understanding of God himself.

Christology, study of Christ. Soteriology, the study of sin and salvation. Ecclesiology, the study of the church and so on.

The one thing that is missing, and I have noted this without formally expressing it, but you think how important it is to understand the church. And we've got a whole subject called ecclesiology, the study of the church. One thing we don't have, and you can look at almost any systematic theology you want to check.

And of all of these categories, Glenn Carnegie in Tulsa even had one called paterology, the study of the father. But what you never find, ecclesiology is the study of the church. Christology, study of Christ.

Pneumatology, study of the Holy Spirit. You do not find Israelology. And Israel, understanding Israel as God's first people, His first covenant group is essential.

And Dr. Lewis Barry Chafer, Hodge, anybody you want to check, don't have a separate category for Israel. You will find them distinguished under ecclesiology and those who think that the church is the new Israel and those who don't, but they ought to have their own category. Here's the point.

Our Old Testament, the 39 books of the Old Testament in the English Bible, depict for us history from the creation through the beginning of the intertestamental period, a couple of hundred years before the first coming of the Lord Jesus. Most of that is occupied with God's covenant people, Israel, their origins in the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the 12 sons of Jacob, 13, if you look at the adoption of both Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons. And in this collection of writings from Israel, they were the custodians, to them belong the scriptures up to the New Testament.

A lot of that is anticipatory. It looks forward. It is predictive.

It is eschatology. It looks ahead. Some of it is near term and is fulfilled within the narrative.

Other is further. But here's the thing about prophecy. And if you don't remember anything else from my 15-minute introduction here, here's the point.

We tend to think of prophecy as prediction. I predict that the S&P 500 is going to gain 53 points Monday. It may or may not happen.

I'm not actually predicting that, by the way. It's an example, hypothetical. We predict a thing.

I predict who's going to win the Super Bowl. I predict some event. And our Western mind thinks of looking ahead in terms of will it happen or will it not? That is not the nature of Old Testament prophecy.

It isn't the nature of God's prophetic communication to us. It is not prediction. It is pattern.

Pattern. This will be so helpful as you think about prophecy, Old Testament and new, and this book of revelation of what is to come. God deals in patterns.

There is no more expressive communication of this truth than God's instruction to Moses in Sinai when he gave him the blueprints for the tabernacle. And there are those who say when Moses came down from Sinai, he had the tablets of the law in one hand and he had the blueprints for the tabernacle in the other. But what did God specifically tell Moses when he commissioned him to construct the tabernacle? Make these things according to the pattern shown to you in the mount.

As we move through the revelation, we're going to see that there is an ark of the covenant in heaven. The throne that we have seen in chapter four and chapter five here is the truth behind the pattern of the mercy seat. God is enthroned in the holy of holies of the tabernacle and later the temple between the cherubim.

And their wings are mentioned and they are depicted in a statue-like form. And we see two of them on the lid of the ark of the covenant. The mercy seat and the ark of the covenant, as you know, are two separate items of tabernacle furniture in the same way that the showbread sits on top of the table of showbread and the bread represents one thing and the table represents someone else.

It is also true that the ark of the covenant, what is inside that ark? Do you remember? Little pop quiz. At one time, what were the contents? It didn't always contain these, but when it was full, what did it have? Aaron's rod that budded, manna, and what else? Tablets of the law. Tablets of the law.

The law representing God's communication of his will. The manna representing the sustenance by which you could fill it out. And Aaron's rod that budded, which is God's plan and purpose as carried out.

The rod doesn't do anything unless someone carries it, unless someone stretches it out in accordance with God's command and God's will. But these things were all constructed. Every part of the tabernacle was an echo, a shadow of the pattern that was shown to Moses in the mount.

And we're gonna see the ark of the covenant in heaven, which isn't the one Moses had constructed. It is the one that provided the pattern. Prophecy is pattern.

This is why, and when you think about it, as we look at Daniel, you can look at David, you can look at Joseph, you can look at others whose lives, whose experience, whose commission from God as it is carried out, reflect various aspects of the Lord Jesus, not predictively, but as a pattern, a pattern of faith, a pattern of obedience. And this is why in Daniel, especially, we have seen that there will be prophecy that describes the movement of leaders and armies. And you say, well, that's Antiochus Epiphanes, that's Alexander the Great.

But as we've described it in the past, it seems as though at some point, this is an airliner traveling down the runway for takeoff and the wheels leave the ground and there are aspects toward the end of those descriptions that do not fit the historical figures. And we say, well, if this was a prediction, it was only partially fulfilled and then the prediction failed. No, it is a pattern.

And individuals and nations can fit the pattern up to a point, but the pattern will apply several different times and places throughout history. This is why when the Lord Jesus comes the first time, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet, out of Egypt I have called my son. There is a pattern of going to Egypt.

How many times have we seen it? Just in Genesis alone and then in Exodus and then with the Lord Jesus, the story of the wise men. And Joseph is warned to leave so that when Herod purges children two years old and under, the Lord Jesus is safely out of Herod's jurisdiction. He will, that it might be fulfilled that was spoken, he shall be called a Nazarene.

Netzer, root, root shoot from the stump of Jesse. And there's a word play there of Netzereth or Nazareth and Netzer. And you kind of have to be looking under the surface a little bit.

There's a bump in the rug. And when you peel it back, his residency and those who say Jesus of Nazareth, it is an allusion somewhat tricky to find that he is a root shoot from the stump of Jesse and so on. And the Hebrew word is Netzer.

And you find this at his birth and in the movement from Egypt through Judea and all the way up to Nazareth where Mary and Joseph will reside. You also find it at the end. Think about this.

What is Pilate's signage above the head of the Lord Jesus as he performs his sacrificial atoning work on the cross? What does the sign say? Every Catholic knows this. It's on crucifixes. And when I was a little Protestant boy looking at these crucifixes in shops and things, and it said, Inri.

And I thought, who's Inri? I-N-R-I, what is that? And we all know Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Was there one line that communicated this on that sign? Another little review. How many languages is that inscription expressed in? You remember? How many languages? Three, it is in Hebrew, it is in Greek, and it is in Latin.

What is especially fun to think about is the Hebrew version. Think about this, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. What is Jesus' name in Hebrew? Joshua or Yeshua? What is the first letter of that? Now, if you're taking notes, write down Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

And underneath it, write a Y for Yeshua under Jesus. When you call someone a Nazarene in Hebrew, he is Yeshua Ha Nazarene, Ha Nazarene. And the articles in Hebrew attached to the word, the article is part of the word.

So what is the second letter? Yeshua Ha Nazarene, Ha Nazarene. Right? So the next letter is an

H. King is the, and, that's a W, the Melech, Ha Yudayon. If you translate those down, and you got to do it backwards because Hebrew is right to left, Y-H-W-H.

This is perhaps why the Jewish leadership went to Pilate and said, you've got to change the sign. You've got to make the sign say, he said he was King of the Jews, because the first letters spell out the Tetragrammaton, Y-H-W-H. Pattern, there are patterns, and pattern detection is central to modern computing, modern artificial intelligence, modern weapon systems, self-driving cars, and so on.

It's all about patterns, but it is nowhere more important than in our study of the scripture. And as we move forward, we're going to see these patterns recurring, and they are largely sevenfold patterns. And we have any number of sevenfold patterns in the Old Testament and in the New.

Jesus commissions John, he says, "'Do not be afraid,' in verse 17 of chapter one, verse 19, "'Write the things which you have seen, "'the things which are, "'and the things which will take place after this.'" My belief, this is a speculation on my part, I can't nail it down with proof texts and so on, but it is my firm belief that the first part of that commission is what sparked the writing of the gospel of John. I believe in my heart of hearts that this is the same John for multiple reasons. And when Jesus says, write the things which you have seen, if you had to pick one number that defines revelation, what is it? It's the number seven, right? Seven spirits before the throne, seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bulls, et cetera.

It's the number seven. If you could pick one number that defines the gospel of John, what would it be? It's the number seven. That gospel is organized.

The spine of that account is built on seven signs. Just to give you a taste here, think about the first sign in the gospel of John. You remember this, John chapter two.

John chapter one is an introduction. And what do you see at the very beginning of John's gospel? You have the Lord Jesus in heaven and on earth, right? In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God. If you say, write the things which were, write the things you have seen, it doesn't get better than in the beginning.

That's what I saw. The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory. We beheld it.

We beheld it in his earthly ministry. We beheld it on the Mount of Transfiguration. John saw it and John wrote about it.

And that's chapter one. What is chapter two in the gospel of John? Wedding feast at Cana. A bride and a groom in love, right? Love.

Is it not tragic if love disappears between a bride and a groom? What is the first of the letters to the seven churches? The things which are. You're doing well. You've purified your doctrine.

You've expunged those who teach falsely. You've used the water of washing to sanctify and cleanse yourself like the 12 jugs of water that are at the wedding feast. You've done a good job of getting yourself clean and staying clean.

But what's the problem in Ephesus, the first church? You've lost your foremost love. Change your mind and get back. Love is expressed in actions.

Get back to your foremost love and do the first works. Concentrate, love, and express that love in action as you did at the first. The wedding feast at Cana is water into wine.

The water of washing is essential. That's great. Jesus commends Ephesus for purging out bad teaching and bad teachers.

But if you stop with the water and you don't get to the wine of joy and celebration and appreciation, and what does the head of the feast say at the end? You have saved the best to the end. Saved the best to the end. Now, let me assure you that every sign in the gospel of John does not comport and directly suggest what is happening in the churches.

But the first one really does. And I was thinking about this. I thought, this is John.

He's got sevens in his gospel. He's got these sevens in the revelation given to him by inspiration from God. And so do these seven signs somehow connect to the seven churches? And when you start looking at the wedding feast at Cana and you look at Ephesus, it just smacks you in the head.

Once you see it, you'll not ever forget it. But it does not continue in that vein. So what's going on here? What have we said about prophecy? There is a pattern.

What is the purpose of the signs in the gospel of John? Jesus did many other signs, but these are written, John says. These are written. What did Jesus tell him here in chapter one? Write the things which you have seen.

John says, I have written what I have seen for a purpose. And what is the purpose? That you may believe that Jesus Christ is the living son of God and believing you might have life through his name. These are written that you may understand who Jesus is and that the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose in granting us life and an eternal future is accomplished in and through him.

Now, what is the difference between the signs in the gospel of John and let's say what Jesus says to the seven churches? There is a point of connection, especially in that first one but what is the purpose of the signs? These signs were performed and these are public signs. You remember them. There's the wedding feast at Cana.

There is the healing of the lame man. You can move all the way through those. You eventually get to the feeding of the 5,000 which is kind of at the nexus or the center.

There is a chiastic structure that is suggested there and the center of the chiasm is the feeding of the 5,000. What are you going to eat? What is at the center of the chiasm of the seven churches that we have seen? This woman Jezebel is encouraging you to eat what? Food offered to idols, not the manna from heaven. There are many points of connection but the purpose was to communicate what is wrong in Israel and that the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, the son of the living God is the answer.

Turn to him, receive him, believe on him and you will have life in his name. That purpose is the same in the letters to the churches but the destination audience before whom these signs are performed is Israel, God's Old Testament covenant people and there is a communication to them in each one of those signs, healing of the man born blind in John chapter nine. Are we blind also? Ask the Pharisees.

If you were blind, you would have no sin. What does he say to Laodicea? You do not know that you are poor and miserable and blind and naked. So many points of connection.

It's not an obvious mapping, it is a pattern. It is a pattern of communication and challenge to find life and strength and fulfillment of God's purpose. Whether you are Old Testament Israel or the New Testament church and it is a perfect revelation.

There are seven major signs in John. There are many others. Some people say there's nine or 10 if you wanna count the miraculous draft of fish, if you wanna include or not include Jesus on the cross.

I personally think that Lazarus is number six and the Lord Jesus on the cross is number seven and there is this correspondence of what happens with six and what happens with seven that we're gonna see in the book of Revelation. But it's fascinating. You can look at this, crack open your Bible and just ask yourself the question, not just can I find a way to put a puzzle piece into a missing blank, but there is a God in heaven who is communicating to me on every channel that the TV has got.

When I was a kid, we had 13 channels of VHF and you could go to UHF and you had a few more. God is broadcasting on every channel and it isn't, do I see a signal in every channel? I can flip the dial and there's a picture on every one, but what is the content? What is God telling me? He is communicating to me via direct content, challenges, claims, promises, principles, doctrines and at another level, on another channel, there are these patterns. There is a pattern of God allowing challenge, allowing weakness, allowing a setback, allowing his people to be subject to famine or bad leadership or conquest.

God allows it. In some cases, he causes it. When you look at the last part of 1 Kings, starting at about chapter 17 and you see the introduction of Elijah and there is a drought, you wanna talk about patterns.

Do you remember how long that drought lasts in Israel? Three and a half years. Is that a

significant period of time in the revelation? There's none more so. There is no more described period of time in the entire Bible than the time of Jacob's trouble.

It is the most focused upon period in all of human history as we will see unfold. It's not just in the revelation. It is throughout the prophetic scriptures, there is a pattern, but for three and a half years in Israel, there is no rain, it is a time of drought and you have to go to the New Testament and I'll let you find this on your own if you're interested, but 1 Kings tells us that the drought ended when Elijah prayed.

What you find out if you go to the New Testament is the drought started because Elijah prayed. Elijah causes the drought in a sense and Elijah also is God's means by which it is ended, but we want to watch for these patterns and when we see these patterns, what does it tell us? God is interested in communicating with us and communicating to us for a purpose and that purpose is that we understand who he is, that like these scenes in the heavenly realms, we appreciate him for his creative genius is too small a word. Genius is what we call each other when we do something really clever, but the beauty, the magnificence, the surpassing greatness of God's work in creation and that is just setting the stage for his self-revelation to Israel in the Old Testament through the Lord Jesus in the gospels and in and through and to the church in this age and now we have the conclusion of the church age in these first four chapters, the transition to a heavenly perspective where we see elders with white robes and crowns who represent an innumerable multitude from every kindred and people and tribe and tongue as they are celebrated by those elders in chapter five.

Look at verse nine, "The Lamb is worthy to take the scroll. "You are worthy and to open its seals "for you were slain." John describes this in his writing of what he has seen. "You were slain and you have redeemed." This is completed action in past time.

"You have redeemed us to God." Actually, it's them to God, but this is the church that has been already redeemed by his blood out of every tribe, every tongue, every people, every nation and they have been made. The church has been made a kingdom and priests and they shall reign on the earth. Notice they shall reign.

They're not already reigning. They didn't get to reign as soon as they were redeemed. Redeemed in the past, now in the heavenly realms during this period of John's observation and then we are going to go forward to the tribulation.

So the church was on the earth and got redeemed. They have been made a kingdom and priests in the past. They are now a white robe multitude that we see in heaven and we have yet for the Lord Jesus to open the first seal of the scroll, which is the tribulation, 70th week of Daniel, last seven years of the age of Israel.

Could not be more clear if you have eyes to see and ears to hear that the church was on earth. The Lord Jesus created this blood bought multitude. This is not describing Israel.

They are from every tribe, every tongue, every people, every nation. This is not Israel, but their redemption has been accomplished in the past. They have been made a kingdom.

They have been made priests in the past and they will rule on the earth in the millennial kingdom, which is yet to come. So have confidence. If you are a church age believer, you are going to respond at the call, the voice, the shout, the voice of the archangel, the trump of God, the dead will rise.

Those who are alive and remain will be caught up, our podzo, and taken to be with the Lord Jesus where he is. And where is he in this vision? He is the lamb as it had been slain and he is in heaven. And those that he has redeemed and called by his blood are with him.

So no doubt there. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, having done our review, having seen this idea of patterns, we're now ready for chapter six.

What is going to happen when he who is worthy begins to open these seals?