

Understanding

the Bible

Part 9

# The Book of Revelation

Bishop Alexander (Mileant)

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## The significance of the Apocalypse and the interest in It

**T**he Apocalypse ("apocalupsis" in Greek, means revelation) of St. John the Theologian is the only prophetic book of the New Testament. It foretells the impending fate of mankind, the end of the world, and the beginning of eternal life, and it is, therefore, naturally placed at the end of the Holy Scripture.

The Apocalypse is a book of mystery, and its comprehension is difficult. At the same time, it is the very mysterious character of this book that draws to it the interest of believing Christians, as well as that of simply inquisitive thinkers, striving to resolve the meaning and significance of the visions described therein. There are a great number of books about the Apocalypse, among which are found quite a few absurd publications, especially those which are associated with contemporary sectarian literature.

Notwithstanding the difficulty in understanding this book, spiritually enlightened Fathers and Teachers of the Church have always treated it with great reverence as a book which had been inspired by God. Thus, St. Dionysius of Alexandria writes: "The darkness of this book does not prevent one from being astonished at it. And even if I do not understand everything in it, that is only because of my incapability. I cannot be a judge of the truths which are contained in it or measure them with the poverty of my mind, being guided more by faith than by understanding. I find them only surpassing my understanding." The Blessed Jerome expresses himself in the same manner regarding the Apocalypse: "In it there are as many mysteries as words. But what am I saying? Every praise of this book will be beneath its worth."

The Apocalypse is not read during the Liturgy because in ancient times the reading of Holy Scripture at the Liturgy was always followed by an explanation of it, whereas the Apocalypse is quite complex to explain.

## The author

**T**he author of the Apocalypse refers to himself as John (Rev. 1:1, 4 and 9, and 22:8). In the opinion of all the Holy Fathers of the Church, he was the Apostle John, the beloved disciple of Christ, who had received the distinctive name "*Theologian*" because of the extent of his studies regarding the Word of God. His authorship of the Apocalypse is substantiated in factual basis in the Apocalypse itself, as well as by many internal and external signs. To the inspired pen of John the Theologian belongs one of the Gospels and also three Epistles to the churches. The author of the Apocalypse states that he was on the island of Patmos "*for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ*" (Rev. 1:9). It is known from Church history that of all the Apostles, only St. John the Theologian was subjected to incarceration on this island.

The proof of authorship of the Apocalypse by St. John the Theologian is in the similarity of this book with his Gospel and the Epistles, similarity not only in spirit, but also in the writing style, and especially in certain characteristic expressions. Thus, for example, the Apostolic sermon is referred to here as "*witnessing*" or "*testimony*" (Rev. 1:2-9; 20:4; also see John 1:7; 3:11; 21:24; 1 John 5:9-11). The Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as "*the Word*" (Rev. 19:13 and John 1:1-14 and 1 John 1:1) and "*the Lamb*" (Rev. 5:6 and 17:14; also see John 1:36). The prophetic words of Zechariah, "*Then they will look on Me Whom they have pierced*" (Zech. 12:10), both in the Gospel and in the Apocalypse are quoted in the same manner, according to the Greek translation of the "Seventy" (Rev. 1:7 and John 19:37, Septuagint translation). Some differences can be seen in the language between the Apocalypse and other writings by the Holy Apostle John. They are explained as being differences in context as well as in circumstances of origin of the Holy Apostle's writings. St. John, being a Jew by birth and, although having a command of the Greek language, finding himself incarcerated and away from living, spoken Greek, naturally imprinted on the Apocalypse the influence of his native tongue. It is evident to the unbiased reader of the Apocalypse that its total content bears the mark of the Apostle's great spirit of love and contemplation.

St. John's disciple St. Papias of Hierapolis refers to the writer of the Apocalypse as "John the Elder," just as the Apostle refers to himself in his Epistles (2 John 1:1 and 3 John 1:1). Of great importance is also the opinion of St. Justin Martyr, who lived in Ephesus prior to his conversion to Christianity, where the Apostle John had also lived many years before him. Many Holy Fathers of the second and third centuries quote from the Apocalypse, as from a God-inspired

book written by St. John the Theologian. One of them was St. Hippolytus, a Roman pope and student of Irenaeus of Lyons, who wrote an apologia on the Apocalypse. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen also acknowledge St. John as the author of the Apocalypse. Other, later Fathers of the Church are equally convinced in this: Sts. Ephraem the Syrian, Epiphanius, Basil the Great, Hillary, Athanasius the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Didymus, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine the Blessed, and Jerome the Blessed. The thirty-third canon of the Council of Carthage, by attributing the Apocalypse to St. John the Theologian, places it in the ranks of other canonical books of Holy Scripture. Especially of great value is the attestation of Irenaeus of Lyons regarding the authorship as being that of St. John the Theologian because St. Irenaeus was a student of St. Polycarp of Smyrna, who in turn was a student of St. John the Theologian, heading, under his Apostolic guidance, the Church of Smyrna.

## The time, place, and intent of writing the Apocalypse

**A**ncient tradition places the writing of the Apocalypse toward the end of the first century. For example, St. Irenaeus writes as follows: "The Apocalypse appeared not long before this and almost in our time, at the end of the rule by Domitian." The historian Eusebius (at the beginning of the fourth century) informs us that pagan writers contemporary to his time mention the exile of St. John to Patmos for witnessing to the Word of God, placing this event at the fifteenth year of Domitian's rule (81-96 A.D.).

Thus, the Apocalypse was written at the end of the first century, when each of the seven churches of Asia Minor to whom St. John directed his letters already had its own history and in one way or another had determined the direction of its religious life. Christianity among them was already not in its original state of purity and truth, and pseudo-Christianity was attempting to compete with the true one. Evidently, the activities of St. John, who had spent a long time preaching in Ephesus, were a matter of the distant past. Church writers of the first three centuries concur in the designation of the place where the Apocalypse was written, which they acknowledge to be the island of Patmos, mentioned by the Apostle himself as the place where he received the Revelation (Rev. 1:9-11). Patmos is located in the Aegean Sea to the south of the city of Ephesus and during ancient times was a place of exile.

In the first lines of the Apocalypse, St. John indicates the purpose of the Revelation: to foretell the fate of Christ's Church and of the whole world. The mission of Christ's Church was to revive the world with Christian sermons, to plant in men's souls a true faith in God, to teach them to live righteously, and to show them the way to the Heavenly Kingdom. However, not all received Christian teachings with good will. Already during the first days after Pentecost, the Church encountered hostility and a conscious opposition to Christianity, at first from Jewish priests and scribes, and later from the unbelieving Jews and pagans.

Even during the first year of Christianity, there started a bloody persecution of the preachers of the Gospel. Slowly these persecutions began to take on an organized and systematic form. Jerusalem turned out to be the first center of the fight with Christianity. Beginning with the middle of the first century, Rome, with Emperor Nero (54-68 A.D.) as its leader, joined the hostile camp. The persecutions then began in Rome, where the blood of many Christians was spilled, including that of the pre-eminent Apostles Peter and Paul. From the end of the first century, the persecution of Christians intensified. Emperor Domitian decreed the systematic persecution of Christians, at first in Asia Minor and then in other parts of the Roman Empire. St. John the Theologian, having been summoned to Rome, was there thrown into a kettle of

boiling oil and remained unscathed. Domitian then exiled St. John to the island of Patmos, where the Apostle received the Revelation regarding the fate of the Church and the whole world. With but a few interruptions, the bloody persecutions of the Church continued to the year 313, when Emperor Constantine proclaimed the Edict of Milan, allowing the free practice of religion.

In view of the beginning of the persecutions, the Apocalypse was written for Christians in order to console, teach, and strengthen them. It uncovers the secret intentions of the enemies of the Church, whom it personifies in the beast emerging from the sea (as the representative of the hostile secular power) and in the beast emerging from the earth, the false prophet (as the representative of the hostile pseudo-religious power). It discloses the main overseer of the fight against the Church, the devil. This ancient dragon amasses the godless forces of mankind and directs them against the Church. However, the sufferings of the faithful are not in vain. Through their loyalty to Christ and their patience, they receive their earned reward in Heaven. At a time designated by God, the hostile forces against the Church shall be delivered to judgment and punishment. After the Last Judgment and the punishment of the impious, an eternal blessed life shall begin.

The purpose of writing the Apocalypse was to portray the forthcoming battle of the Church against the forces of evil; to show the means by which the devil, with the cooperation of his slaves, wages war against goodness and truth; to give guidance to the faithful on how to overcome temptations; to portray the perdition of the enemies of the Church; and to show the final triumph of Christ over evil.

## **The contents, plan, and symbolism of the Apocalypse**

**T**he Apocalypse always drew the attention of Christians to itself, especially at a time in which various calamities and temptations of singular strength began to disrupt the community and Church life. In addition, the imagery and the mysteries of this book make it extremely difficult to understand and, therefore, always pose a risk for imprudent interpreters in deviating outside the parameters of truth toward impossible hopes and beliefs. For example, the literal understanding of the images in this book provided the motive for, and even now continues to give rise to, the false teaching of so-called "chiliasm," the thousand-year reign of the Kingdom of Christ on earth. Already in the first century, some Christians, interpreting the lucidity of the Apocalypse while experiencing the horrors of persecution, held to the belief that the "Last Days" were at hand and that the Second Coming of Christ was close.

During the past twenty centuries, there has been a multitude of the most varied types of interpretations of the Apocalypse. All these interpretations can be categorized into four classes. The first ascribes the visions and symbols of the Apocalypse to the "Last Days," the end of the world, the emanation of the antichrist and the Second Coming of Christ. The second attributes to the Apocalypse a purely historical meaning and confines its visions to historical events of the first century: persecution of the Christians by the pagan emperors. The third tries to find the realization of Apocalyptic predictions in the historical events of the time. In one such interpretation, for instance, the pope of Rome is the antichrist and all the Apocalyptic calamities in reality emanate against the Church of Rome, and so on. Finally, the fourth sees the Apocalypse only as allegory, holding that the described visions therein do not have so much a prophetic as a moral sense. As we shall see, these points of view on the Apocalypse do not exclude but rather supplement each other.

The Apocalypse can be properly understood only in the context of all of Holy Scripture. The principle of uniting several historical events in one vision shows itself as a special characteristic of many prophetic visions, both of the Old and New Testaments. In other words, spiritually related events, separated one from the other by many centuries and even by millennia, merge into one prophetic picture, uniting within itself the elements of various historical epochs.

As an example of such a synthesis of events, one can refer to the prophetic discussion of the Savior about the end of the world. In it, the Lord talks simultaneously about the destruction of Jerusalem, which would occur some thirty-five years later, and about the time preceding His Second Coming (Matt. ch. 24, Mark ch. 13, Luke ch. 21). The reason for such a unification of events consists in that the first illustrates and explains the second. In not a few instances, Old Testament prophecies speak simultaneously about the beneficial changes in human societies during the time of the New Testament and about the new life in the Heavenly Kingdom. In this case the first acts as the source for the second (Is. 4:2-6, 11:1-10, chs. 26, 60 and 65; Jer. 23:5-6, 33:6-11; Hab. 2:14; Zeph. 3:9-20). The Old Testament prophecies regarding the destruction of Chaldean Babylon speak simultaneously also of the annihilation during the reign of the antichrist (Is. ch. 13-14, and ch. 21; Jer. chs. 50-51). There are many similar examples of the merging of events into one prophecy. Such a method of merging events by signs of their inner unity is used in order to help the believer **understand the essence** of the events on the basis of what is already well known to him, leaving aside secondary details and historical details that explain nothing.

As we shall see, the Apocalypse consists of a number of compositionally multi-layered visions. The Seer presents the future in a perspective of the past and of the present. Thus, for instance, the many-headed beast in chapters 13-19 is the antichrist himself and his predecessors, Antiochus Epiphanes (vividly described by the prophet Daniel and in the books of the Maccabees) and the Roman emperors Nero and Domitian (who persecuted Christ's Apostles), and subsequent enemies of the Church.

The two witnesses for Christ in chapter 11, possibly Enoch and Elijah, are the accusers of the antichrist, as are their prototypes, the Apostles Peter and Paul, and all other preachers of the Gospel fulfilling their mission in a world hostile to Christianity. The false prophet in chapter 13 is the personification of all the propagators of false religions (Gnosticism, heresy, Islam, materialism, Hinduism, etc.) among which the most vivid representative will be the false prophet in the time of the antichrist. In order to understand why the Apocalypse united different events and various people in one image, one must take into account the fact that it was written not only for contemporaries but also for Christians of all times, who were to endure similar persecutions and sorrows. St. John discloses the common methods of seduction and shows the true way to avoid them in order to be true to Christ until death.

In a similar manner, the judgment by God, which the Apocalypse mentions repeatedly, is the Last Judgment of God, as well as all separate judgments of God over different nations and individuals. Included in this is the judgment of all mankind during the time of Noah and the judgment of the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah during the time of Abraham and the judgment of Egypt during the time of Moses and the twice-repeated judgment of Judea (600 B.C. and again during the seventh decade A.D.) and the judgment of Nineveh, Babylon, the Roman Empire, Byzantium, and, somewhat recently, of Russia. The reasons that evoked God's righteous punishment were always the same: people's lawlessness and lack of faith.

In the Apocalypse there is a noticeable specific non-synchronization of events: being above time or beyond time. This is due to the fact that St. John contemplated the fate of mankind not from the earthly but from a Heavenly perspective, to which God's Spirit had elevated him. In the ideal world, the flow of time stops at the throne of the Almighty and the Spiritual Gaze encompasses simultaneously the present, past, and future. Evidently, this is the reason that the author of the Apocalypse describes some future events as those of the past and those past as in the present. For instance, the war of the angels in the Heavens and the expulsion of the devil from there, events which had occurred prior to the creation of the world, are described by St.

John as though they had happened at the dawn of Christianity (Rev. ch. 12). However, the resurrection of the martyrs and their reign in Heaven, which encompasses the whole of the New Testament epoch, is placed by him after the judgment of the antichrist and the false prophet (Rev. ch. 20). Thus, the participator in the mysterious disclosures does not narrate according to the chronological sequence of events, but rather reveals the essence of that great war of good versus evil, which is ongoing simultaneously on several fronts and touches upon the material as well as the angelic world.

Undoubtedly some of the Apocalyptic prophecies have already come to pass (for example, the fate of the seven Churches of Asia Minor). Fulfilled prophecies should help us understand the remaining ones that must yet be fulfilled. However, in applying the Apocalyptic visions to those or other specific events, one must take into account that such visions contain within themselves elements of various epochs. It is only with the conclusion of all of the fates of the world and with the punishment of the last of God's foes that all the details of the Apocalyptic visions will be realized.

The Apocalypse was written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Mankind's departure from faith and true Christian life leads it toward dulling of the mind and a total loss of spiritual outlook, thereby making very difficult any correct understanding of the Apocalypse. Contemporary man's total devotion to sinful passions serves as the reason why some contemporary interpreters of the Apocalypse want to see in it only allegory and even begin to teach a metaphoric (rather than actual) understanding of the Second Coming of Christ. Historical events and individuals convince us that to see allegory alone in the Apocalypse is to be spiritually blind, for so much of what is happening today reminds us of the terrifying images and visions of the Apocalypse.

The method of interpretation of the Apocalypse is shown in the accompanying diagram. As one can see in it, the Apostle simultaneously opens several spheres of existence. To the highest sphere belongs the angelic world, the triumphant Church in Heaven, and the persecuted Church on earth. Heading and directing this sphere of goodness is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of men. Below is found the sphere of wickedness, the unbelieving world, sinners, false prophets, those who consciously fight against God (Theomachists), and devils. Directing all of these is the dragon, the fallen angel. Throughout all of the existence of mankind, these spheres have been at war with each other. St. John, through his visions, gradually discloses to the reader the various facets of the battle between good and evil and discloses the process of the spiritual self-realization of mankind, as a result of which some stand on the side of good, while others go on the side of evil. During the development of world conflict, the judgment by God constantly takes place over individuals and nations. By the end of the world, evil will increase tremendously, and the Church on earth will be extremely weakened and diminished. Then the Lord Jesus Christ will come to earth, all people will be resurrected, and the world will experience God's Last Judgment. The devil and his cohorts will be condemned to eternal torture, but the righteous will begin eternal blessed life in Paradise.

The reading of the Apocalypse in sequence can be divided into the following parts:

1. The introductory picture of the Lord Jesus Christ made manifest, instructing John to write the Revelation for the seven churches of Asia Minor (ch. 1).
2. The letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor (chs. 2 and 3), in which, simultaneously with instructions to these churches, there are outlines of the fate of Christ's Church from the time of the Apostles up until the end of the world.
3. The vision of God enthroned, the Lamb of God and the Heavenly Divine Liturgy (chs. 4 and 5). This Heavenly Divine Liturgy is supplemented by visions in the succeeding chapters.
4. From the sixth chapter on, there begins the revelation of the fate awaiting mankind. The breaking of the seven seals of the mysterious scroll by Christ, the Lamb of God, serves as the beginning of the description of the various phases of war between good

and evil, between the Church and Satan. This war, which begins in the soul of man and spreads to all aspects of man's life, becomes greater and increasingly frightening (up to ch. 20).

5. The blast of the angels' seven trumpets (chs. 7-10) heralds the beginning of the calamities which must befall mankind for its unbelief and sins. The damage to nature and the manifestation of evil forces in the world are described. Before the onset of these misfortunes, the faithful will receive upon their brows (the forehead) a blessed mark, saving them from moral evil and from the fate of the impious.
6. The vision of the seven signs (chs. 11-14) depicts mankind divided into two opposing and irreconcilable camps of good and evil. The good forces are concentrated within the Church of Christ, represented here in the form of a Woman clothed with the sun (ch. 12), and the evil forces - in the kingdom of the beast, the antichrist. The beast rising from the sea is a symbol of evil secular rule, and the beast rising from the earth is a symbol of the deteriorating religious power. In this part of the Apocalypse, a global evil being, i.e., the dragon-devil who organizes and directs the war against the Church, is clearly shown for the first time. The two witnesses of Christ symbolize here the preachers of the Gospel who battle with the beast.
7. The visions of the seven chalices (chs. 15-17) paint a dire picture of global moral decay. The war against the Church becomes extremely tense (Rev. 16:16), with unbearably difficult trials. This war is referred to as Armageddon. The image of Babylon the harlot represents mankind, which has forsaken God and which is concentrated on residing in the capital of the kingdom of the beast, the antichrist. The evil force spreads its influence into all areas of life of sinful mankind, after which begins God's judgment against the forces of evil (here God's judgment against Babylon is described in generalities, as a form of introduction).
8. In the following chapters (18 and 19), the judgment of Babylon is described in detail. Here is shown the perdition of those guilty of causing evil among men - the antichrist and the false prophet, representatives of civil and heretical anti-Christian authorities.
9. The twentieth chapter is a summation of the whole spiritual war and world history. It tells of the devil's being defeated twice and of the reign of the martyrs. Having suffered physically, they were victorious spiritually and are already blissful in Heaven. Here, beginning with Apostolic times, the whole period of existence of the Church is encompassed. Gog and Magog personify the union of all forces fighting against God, both earthly and those of the nether regions, who throughout Christian history fought against the Church (Jerusalem). They are exterminated by the Second Coming of Christ. Finally, it speaks of the eternal punishment of the devil, this ancient serpent, who began all the lawlessness, lies, and sufferings in the Universe. The end of the twentieth chapter is a description of the universal resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment, and the punishment of the unfaithful. This short description summarizes the Last Judgment of mankind and of the fallen angels and sums up the whole drama of the universal war between good and evil.
10. The final two chapters (21 and 22) describe the New Heaven, the New Earth, and the blessed life of the saved. These are the most joyous and glorious chapters of the Bible.

Every new part of the Apocalypse usually begins with the words "And I saw," and ends with a description of God's Judgment. This description depicts the end of the previous topic and the beginning of a new one. Between the main parts of the Apocalypse, the Seer sometimes interjects some intermediate observations that act as a binding link between them. The diagram used here vividly shows the plan and divisions of the Apocalypse. For the sake of brevity we combined the intermediate observations together with the main ones. Moving horizontally through the diagram, we see that gradually and more fully the following segments are revealed: the Heavenly World, the Church (persecuted on earth), the sinful and

God-fighting world, the nether regions, the war between them, and God's Judgment.

**The significance of the symbols and numbers.** Symbols and allegories enable the Seer to speak of the essence of earthly events on a very high level of generalization; therefore, they are extensively used. Thus, as an example, the eyes symbolize knowledge, and many eyes symbolize perfect knowledge. A horn is the symbol of power or might. Long attire denotes the clergy; a crown, imperial worthiness; and whiteness, cleanliness or purity. The city of Jerusalem, the temple, and Israel are symbols of the Church. The numbers also have a symbolic meaning: three symbolizes the Trinity; four is the symbol for the world and order in the world; seven denotes completion and perfection; twelve denotes God's people and fruition of the Church (the numbers derived from 12, such as 24 and 144,000 have the same meaning). One-third denotes some relatively small part; three and a half years, the time of persecutions. The number 666 will be specifically dealt with below.

Events during the New Testament are often portrayed in the framework of comparable Old Testament events. Thus, for instance, the persecution of the Church is described in the framework of the sufferings of the Israelites in Egypt, the temptations at the time of the prophet Balaam, persecution on the part of Queen Jezebel, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. The saving of believers from the devil is depicted in the framework of the saving of the Israelites from the pharaoh during the time of the prophet Moses. The rule of the godless is presented in the imagery of Babylon and Egypt. The punishment of the forces fighting against God is presented in the language of ten Egyptian executions, and the devil is identified as the serpent who had tempted Adam and Eve. The future Paradisical blessing is depicted as the Garden of Eden and the tree of life.

The main task of the Apocalypse consists of showing the way the forces of evil work and who organizes them and directs them in the fight against the Church and of teaching and strengthening the faithful in their loyalty to Christ, portraying the complete defeat of the devil and his servants and the beginning of Paradisical Bliss.

For all the symbolism and mystery of the Apocalypse, the religious truths contained therein are revealed in an extremely clear way. Thus, for example, the Apocalypse points to the devil as being the culprit for all the temptations and tribulations of mankind. The tools with which he tries to lay waste to mankind are always the same: unbelief, disobedience to God, pride, sinful desires, lies, fear, doubt, etc. In spite of all his cunning and experience, the devil is not able to lay waste to those people who are devoted to God with all their heart because God protects them by His blessings. The devil enslaves to himself more and more sinners and those who have withdrawn from God and thrusts them into various abominable acts and crimes. He directs them against the Church and through them causes all violence and wars in the world. The Apocalypse clearly shows that in the end the devil and his servants will be vanquished and punished and that Christ's truth will triumph and that in the renewed world there will begin a blessed life, which will be endless.

Having thus made a cursory review of the contents and symbolism of the Apocalypse, we shall now consider some of its most important parts.

## Letters to the Seven Churches

(Chs. 2-3)

**T**he Seven Churches - those of Ephesus (2:1-7), Smyrna (2:8-11), Pergamos (2:12-17), Thyatira (2:18-29), Sardis (3:1-6), Philadelphia (3:7-13), and Laodicia (3:14-22) - were located in the southwestern part of Asia Minor, today's Turkey. They were founded by the Apostle Paul in the fourth decade of the first century. After St. Paul's martyric death in Rome around the

year 67 A.D., St. John the Theologian took over the care of those churches and ministered to them for a period of about forty years. Having become incarcerated on the Island of Patmos, St. John wrote letters from there to these churches in order to prepare Christians for the oncoming persecutions. The letters are addressed to the "angels" of these churches, i.e., to the bishops.

A careful study of the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor brings to mind that in them are outlined the fate of Christ's Church, from the Apostolic period up to the time of the end of the world. Included is the imminent path of the New Testament Church, this "New Israel," which is depicted against the background of the most important events during the existence of Old Testament Israel, beginning with the fall in Paradise and ending with the times of the Pharisees and Sadducees during the days of the Lord Jesus Christ. St. John writes of events of the Old Testament in the form of examples for the fate of the New Testament Church. Thus, the three following elements are interwoven in the letters to the seven churches: a) the prevailing conditions current in the author's days and the future of each Church of Asia Minor, b) a new and more in-depth interpretation of Old Testament history, and c) the forthcoming fate of the Church. The combination of these three elements in the letters to the seven churches are summarized here in the diagram.

**Note:** The Church of Ephesus was the most populous and had the status of being the Metropolitan See in relation to the other neighboring Asia Minor Churches. In 431 A.D. the Third Ecumenical Council took place in Ephesus. Just as St. John predicted, the light of Christianity in the Church of Ephesus gradually died. Pergamos was the political center of the western part of Asia Minor. It was dominated by paganism with an elaborate cult of deified pagan emperors. On a hill close to Pergamos towered a magnificent pagan sacrificial monument that is mentioned in the Apocalypse as "*Satan's throne*" (Rev. 2:13-17). The Nicolaitans were ancient heretic-Gnostics. Gnosticism became a dangerous temptation for the Church in the early centuries of Christianity. The syncretic culture of the time came to be a favorable ground for the development of Gnostic ideas. It evolved within the empire of Alexander of Macedonia (Alexander the Great), which amalgamated the East and the West. The religious perceptions of the world in the East, with its belief in the eternal battle between good and evil, spirit and matter, body and soul, light and darkness, along with a speculative method of Greek philosophy, fermented various Gnostic systems, which characteristically taught that everything in the world emanates from the "Absolute," and that there is a multitude of subsequent steps in creation, uniting the world with the "Absolute." It is only natural that with the spread of Christianity in the Hellenistic world there arose a perilous threat of its interpretation in Gnostic terms and the transformation of Christian teachings into one of the religious-philosophical Gnostic thought systems. Jesus Christ was perceived by the Gnostics as one of the intermediaries (channelers) between the Absolute and the world.

One of the first to spread Gnosticism among the Christians was a certain Nicolai (Nicholas), hence the name Nicolaitans in the Apocalypse. (It is thought that this was the Nicolai who was among the six men chosen and ordained by the Apostles into the rank of deacon; see Acts 6:5.) In distorting the Christian faith, the Gnostics encouraged a moral decadence. Starting with the beginning of the first century, several Gnostic sects flourished in Asia Minor. The Apostles Peter, Paul, and Jude admonished Christians not to be ensnared by these heretic debauchers. Prominent representatives of Gnosticism were the heretics Valentinus, Marcio, and Basilides, against whom the apostolic learned men and early Fathers of the Church spoke out.

The ancient Gnostic sects have long disappeared, but Gnosticism as an amalgamation of heterogeneous philosopho-religious schools still exists in our time in theosophy, cabala, freemasonry, contemporary Hinduism, yoga, and various other cults.

## The vision of the Heavenly Liturgy

(Chs. 4-5)

**S**t. John received the Revelation on "The Lord's Day," that is, on Sunday. One must surmise

that on that day, as was the Apostles' custom, he performed "the breaking of bread," i.e., the Divine Liturgy, received Communion and therefore "was in a state of Grace," meaning he was in a special state of inspiration (Rev. 1:10). And so, the first thing that is revealed to him is the continuation of the Liturgy just performed by him, the Heavenly Divine Liturgy. It is this Heavenly Divine Liturgy that St. John describes in the fourth and fifth chapters of the Apocalypse. An Orthodox Christian recognizes here the familiar traits of the Sunday Liturgy and the most important attributes of the altar: the Holy of Holies, the seven-branched candelabrum, the censer with smoking incense, the golden chalice, etc. (These items were shown to Moses on Mount Sinai and were also used in the temple of the Old Testament.) The Sacrificial Lamb of God, as seen by the Apostle, reminds the faithful of Communion in the form of bread laid on the altar. The souls of those martyred for the Word of God, under the heavenly altar evoke the antimins, the special cloth placed in the middle of the altar and into which are sewn relics of the holy martyrs. The elders clad in white garments with golden crowns upon their heads are like an assembly of the clergy con-celebrating the Divine Liturgy. It should be noted that the very proclamations and prayers heard by the Apostle in Heaven express the quintessence of the exclamations and prayers which the clergy and the choir recite during the main part of the Liturgy - the Eucharistic Canon. The whitening of the garments of the pious by the "*blood of the Lamb*" (Ch. 7) alludes to the consecration of the souls of the faithful through the Sacrament of Communion. In this manner the Apostle begins the revelation of the fate of mankind with the description of the Heavenly Divine Liturgy by which he stresses the spiritual meaning of this Liturgy and the necessity of the saints' prayers for us.

**Note:** The words "*Judah is a lion's whelp*" refer to the Lord Jesus Christ and remind us of the prophecy of the Patriarch Jacob regarding the Messiah (Gen. 49:9-10). The "*Seven Spirits of God*" refer to the plenitude of God's blessed gifts of the Holy Spirit (Is. 11:2 and Zech. ch. 4). A multitude of eyes symbolizes omniscience. The twenty-four elders correspond to the twenty-four priestly successions established by King David for service in the temples, having two intercessors for each generation of the New Israel (1 Chron. 24:1-18). The four mysterious creatures surrounding the throne are similar to the creatures seen in a vision of the prophet Ezekiel (Ez. 1:5-19). They evidently are the creatures closest to God. These images are of a man, a lion, a calf, and an eagle, taken by the Church as symbols for the four Evangelists.

In the later description of the heavenly world, we encounter many things that are incomprehensible to us. In the Apocalypse we learn that the angelic world is extremely vast. The bodiless spirits, the angels, are created as man is by the wise Creator, possessing an intellect and a free will, although their spiritual capabilities far exceed ours. The angels are completely devoted to God and serve Him by prayer and fulfillment of His will. Thus, for example, they carry to the altar of God the prayers of the saints (Rev. 8:3), they assist the righteous in attaining salvation (Rev. 7:3, 14:6-10, 19:9), they sympathize with those who are suffering and with the persecuted (Rev. 8:13, 12:12), and following God's commands, they punish sinners (Rev. 8:7, 9:15, 15:6, 16:1). They are endowed with power and have sovereignty over nature and its elements (Rev. 10:1, 18:1). They wage war with Satan and his demons (Rev. 12:7-10, 19:19, 20:2-3), and they take part in the judgment of God's enemies (Rev. 19:4).

The teaching of the Apocalypse regarding the angelic world basically pulls out by its roots the teaching of the ancient Gnostics, who accepted the presence of intermediaries (channelers) between the Absolute and the material world who were completely self-reliant and independent of Him who ruled the world.

Among the **saints** whom St. John sees in Heaven, two groups, or two "images," stand out. These are the **martyrs** and the **virgins**. Historically, martyrdom is the first order of holiness, and that is why the Apostle begins with the martyrs (Rev. 6:9-11). He sees their souls beneath the Heavenly Sacrificial Altar, which symbolizes the redemptive meaning of their suffering and death, by which they participate in Christ's sufferings and somehow complement them. The blood of the martyrs can be compared to the blood of the victims in the Old Testament that flowed under the sacrificial altar in the temple of Jerusalem. The history of Christianity testifies to the fact that the sufferings of the ancient martyrs served as a moral rejuvenation of the apathetic pagan world. The ancient writer Tertullian wrote that the blood of the martyrs serves as seed for new Christians. The persecution of the faithful will sometimes wane and sometimes flourish during the subsequent existence of the Church, which was the reason that it was revealed to the Seer that new martyrs will supplement the number of the early ones.

Later St. John sees an innumerable throng of people in Heaven, a number that no one is able to count, from all the tribes, generations, nations, and tongues. They stood in white garments holding palm branches (Rev. 7:9-17) in their hands. The common factor of this innumerable assembly of the righteous was that "*they all came from great afflictions.*" For all these people the path to Paradise is the same - through sorrows. Christ is the first Sufferer, who took upon Himself the sins of the world as the Lamb of God. The palm branches are symbols of victory over the devil.

In a special vision the Seer describes the virgins, i.e., those people who denied themselves the solace of conjugal life for the sake of complete service to Christ. They are the voluntary "*eunuchs*" for the sake of the Heavenly Kingdom (Matt. 19:12, Rev. 14:1-5). In the Church this feat was usually achieved by following the monastic way of life. The Seer sees written upon the foreheads of the virgins the "*name of the Father,*" which points to their moral beauty, reflecting the perfection of the Creator. The "*new hymn*" that they sing and that no one could repeat expresses the spiritual elevation that they attained through the feats of fasting, prayer, and chastity. This purity is unattainable to those living a worldly way of life.

The song of Moses that is sung by the pious in the next vision (Rev. 15:2-8) calls to mind the hymn of gratitude sung by the Israelites when, after crossing the Red Sea, they were saved from Egyptian bondage (Exodus, ch. 15). Likewise, the Israel of the New Testament is delivered from the rule and influence of the devil, having passed over into a state of grace by means of the Sacrament of Baptism. In the following visions, the Seer again describes the saints several times. The precious white flaxen garment that they wore is a symbol of their righteousness. In the nineteenth chapter of the Apocalypse the wedding song of the saved tells of the nearing of the "*marriage*" between the Lamb and the saints - of the coming of the closest communion between God and the righteous (Rev. 19:1-9, 21:3-4). The book of Revelation ends with the description of the blessed life of the saved peoples (Rev. 21:24-27, 22:12-14 and 17). These are the most glorious and joyful pages of the Bible, showing the Church triumphant in the Kingdom of Glory.

Thus, by gradual disclosure of the fate of the world, St. John's Apocalypse slowly directs the spiritual attention of the faithful towards the Heavenly Kingdom - to the ultimate goal of our earthly wanderings. He speaks of the gloomy events in the sinful world as if he is obliged to do so, and with unwillingness.

## The Removal of the seven seals the vision of the four horsemen

(Ch. 6)

**T**he vision of the seven seals acts as an **introduction** to the subsequent revelations of the Apocalypse. The removal of the first four seals presents the four horsemen, who symbolize four factors characterizing the complete history of mankind. The first two appear as a reason, and the second two, as a consequence. The crowned rider on the white horse "*emerged in order to be victorious.*" He personifies those good beginnings, innate and blessed, with which the Creator endowed mankind: the image of God, moral purity and innocence, aspiration toward goodness and perfection, the ability to believe and to love, and individual "talents" with which man is born, as well as the blessed gifts of the Holy Spirit which man receives in the Church. In the Creator's plan, these good beginnings should have been victorious; they should have been able to define a happy future for humanity. However, already in Eden, man had fallen prey to the Tempter. His nature, corrupted by sin, was passed on to his descendants; that is why

already from a very young age people are inclined to sin. Through repeated sinfulness, bad tendencies are reinforced. Thus, man, instead of growing spiritually and perfecting himself, falls under the ruinous influence of his own passions, succumbs to various sinful desires, and begins to envy and to show enmity. All of the crimes in the world arise from the internal strife within man (violence, war, and every sort of misfortune).

The ruinous actions of the passions are symbolized by the **fiery red** horse and rider, who took "*peace away from man.*" Succumbing to his disorderly sinful desires, man squanders all his God-given talents, and he becomes impoverished in body and soul. Within the life of society, enmity and wars lead to a weakening and a breakdown of the community and to the loss of its spiritual and material resources. This internal and external impoverishment of mankind is symbolized by the **black** horse and rider, who holds a pair of scales in his hand. Finally, the complete loss of God's blessings leads toward a spiritual death and as a final consequence of enmity and wars comes the ruin of society and the death of mankind. This sorrowful destiny of mankind is symbolized by the **pale** horse.

The four horsemen of the Apocalypse depict in the simplest way the history of mankind. At first, the blessed life in Eden of our forefathers, called upon to "rule" over nature (the white horse); then their fall from grace (the fiery red horse); after which the lives of their descendants were filled with various sorrows and mutual annihilation (the black and the pale horses). The horses of the Apocalypse also symbolize the life of the various individual kingdoms, with their periods of prosperity and decline. Here also is the path of the life of each man: his childhood purity and innocence, his big potential possibilities, which are obscured by a tempestuous youthfulness in which a man dissipates his vigor and health, and in the end he dies. Here is the history of the Church: the spiritual persecution of Christians during the Apostolic times and the efforts of the Church to renew human society. However, in the Church itself there arise heresies and schisms, and the pagan community forces upon it its persecutions. The Church weakens and retreats into the catacombs, and some of the local churches totally disappear. Thus, the vision of the four horsemen sums up the factors which characterize the life of sinning mankind. This subject will be developed more fully in further chapters. By the removal of the fifth seal, the Seer shows the brighter side of mankind's calamities. Christians who have suffered physically were victorious spiritually: they are now in Paradise (Rev. 6:9-11)! Their feats bring them eternal rewards and they rule with Christ, as described in the twentieth chapter. The transition to a more detailed description of the hardships of the Church and the fortification of the godless is symbolized by the removal of the seventh seal.

## **The seven trumpets, the marking of the chosen, and beginning of calamities**

(Chs. 7-11)

**T**he trumpets of the angels foretell mankind's calamities, both physical and spiritual. But before the beginning of these, St. John sees an angel conferring a mark upon the foreheads of the sons of the New Israel (Rev. 7:1-8). "*Israel*" is the Church of the New Testament here. The marks symbolize selection and blessed protection. This vision brings to mind the Sacrament of Chrismation, during which the "mark of the gift of the Holy Spirit" is conferred upon the brow of the newly baptized. It brings to mind the sign of the cross, which protects "against the foes." People who are not protected by the blessed mark suffer harm from the "*locust*" that has

emanated from the bottomless pit, i.e., from the devil's power (Rev. 9:4). The prophet Ezekiel describes the same imprint on the righteous citizens of ancient Jerusalem before it was taken by the Chaldean forces. Then, as well as now, the mysterious mark was placed with the purpose of saving the just from the fate of the impure (Ezek. 9:4). At the counting by name of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. ch. 7), the tribe of Dan was purposely omitted. Some see in this the indication that the antichrist came from this tribe. This thought is based on the enigmatic words of the Patriarch Jacob regarding the future descendants of Dan: "*a serpent on the way, a viper by the path*" (Gen. 49:17).

Thus, the present vision serves as an introduction to the subsequent description of the persecution of the Church. The measuring of the temple of God in the eleventh chapter has the same meaning as the marking of the sons of Israel: the preservation of the children of the Church from evil. The temple of God, like the Woman clothed in sunshine, and the city of Jerusalem are different symbols of the Church of Christ. The basic thought of these visions is that the Church is Holy and is dear to God. God allows the persecutions for the sake of achieving moral perfection of the faithful but protects them from enslavement by evil and from the same fate as the godless.

Before the removal of the seventh seal there is a silence "*for approximately a half hour*" (Rev. 8:1). This is the calm before the storm that will rock the world during the time of the antichrist. (Does not the current process of disarmament resulting from the break-up of communism appear to be an intermission, which is given to mankind for his conversion toward God?) Before the onset of calamities St. John sees the saints ardently praying for mercy upon mankind (Rev. 8:3-5).

**Calamities of nature.** Following this, the sound of the trumpets reverberates from each of the seven angels, after which various calamities begin. At first, a third of the vegetation dies, then, a third of all the fish and other marine creatures, which is followed by the poisoning of rivers and water sources. There will be a falling upon earth of hail and fire, a flaming mountain, and a glowing star. This seems to point allegorically, in other words, to the vast dimensions of these calamities. Does this not appear as a prophecy of the global contamination and the destruction of nature that we are observing in our time? If so, then the ecological catastrophe foretells the coming of the antichrist. By further defiling within themselves the image of God, mankind ceases to value and love God's beautiful world. With mankind's own refuse it pollutes the lakes, rivers, and seas. With oil spills it jeopardizes vast expanses of shoreline. It destroys forests and jungles, and it annihilates many species of animals, fish, and birds. In poisoning nature the perpetrators become ill and perish from their own actions, as do the innocent victims of their cruel greed. The words "*the name of the third star is Wormwood . . . and many perished from the water because it became bitter*" remind us of the catastrophe at Chernobyl because "Chernobyl" means "Wormwood." But what does the damage of a third of the sun and of the stars and their eclipse mean (Rev. 8:11-12)? Evidently this is a discourse regarding the pollution of the air to such an extent that the light of the sun and stars reaching the earth appears less bright. (For instance, due to air pollution in Los Angeles, the sky appears to be of a dirty-brown color, and sometimes at night, with the exception of the brightest, the stars are hardly visible.)

The narrative of the locusts (the fifth trumpet, Rev. 9:1-11), which emanated from the bottomless pit, talks of the strengthening of demonic powers among people. Heading it is "*Apollyon*" which means "the destroyer," referring to the devil. To the degree to which man by his non-belief and sins depletes God's blessings, a spiritual void forms within him, which is filled more and more by demonic strength, which in turn torments him with doubts and various passions.

**The Apocalyptic wars.** The trumpet of the sixth angel brings into motion a great army beyond the Euphrates River due to which a third of mankind is lost (Rev. 9:13-21). In Biblical representation, the river Euphrates denotes the boundary beyond which the nations hostile to God are concentrated, threatening war and annihilation to Jerusalem. For the Roman Empire, the Euphrates River served as a rampart against attack from eastern peoples. The ninth

chapter of the Apocalypse is written against the backdrop of the cruel and bloody Judeo-Roman war of 66-70 AD that was still fresh in the memory St. John. This war had three phases (Rev. 8:13). The first phase of the war in which Gaius Flor headed the Roman forces lasted five months, from May to September of 66 (five months of the locusts, Rev. 9:5 and 10). Soon the second phase of the war began, from October to November of the 66th year, in which the Syrian governor Cestius headed four Roman legions (four angels by the Euphrates River, Rev. 9:14). This phase of the war was especially ruinous for the Jews. The third phase of the war under the command of Flavius Flavianus lasted three and a half years, from April, 67 A.D., to September, 70 A.D., and ended with the fall of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple, and the scattering of captive Jews throughout the Roman Empire. This blood-letting Judeo-Roman war became the prototype of the terrible wars of later years, which the Savior pointed out in His sermon on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24:7). In the attributes of hell's locusts and the Euphrates' hordes, one can recognize contemporary weapons of mass extermination, tanks, cannons, fighter planes, and nuclear missiles. The following chapters of the Apocalypse graphically describe the increasingly larger wars of recent times (Rev. 11:7, 16:12-16, 17:14, 19:11-19, and 20:7-8). The words "*the waters of the Euphrates River dried up, so that the way of the kings from the East might be prepared*" (Rev. 16:12) may point to peril from further east in Asia. In conjunction with this, one must consider that the description of the Apocalyptic wars bears the characteristics of real wars, but in the final summation it refers to a spiritual war, and the proper names and dates have an allegorical meaning. Thus St. Paul explains: "*For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 6:12).

The name *Armageddon* is composed of two words: "Ar" (meaning level ground in Hebrew) and "Megiddo" (an area in the North of the Holy Land, near Mt. Carmel, where in ancient times Barrack defeated the armies commanded by Sisera and the prophet Elijah executed more than five hundred priests of Baal) (Rev. 16:16, 17:14; Judges 4:2-16; 1 Kings 18:40). In light of these biblical events, Armageddon symbolizes Christ defeating the godless powers. The names Gog and Magog in chapter 20 remind us of the prophesy of Ezekiel regarding the invasion of Jerusalem by an indeterminate number of regiments under the leadership of Gog from the land of Magog (south of the Caspian sea; Ezek. chs. 38 and 39; Rev. 20:7-8). Ezekiel attributes this prophecy to the times of the Messiah. In the Apocalypse, the siege of "*the camp of the saints and the beloved city [the Church]*" by the regiments of Gog and Magog and the destruction of these regiments by the Heavenly fire must be understood in the sense of the total defeat of the godless forces, both human and demonic, by the Second Coming of Christ.

Concerning the physical calamities and the punishment of sinners that are often mentioned in the Apocalypse, the Seer himself explains that God allows them as a lesson in order to bring sinners to repentance (Rev. 9:21). However, the Apostle mentions sorrowfully that mankind does not heed God's call, continues to sin, and serves the demons. As if having taken "*the bit in their mouths,*" people are rushing toward their own perdition.

**The vision of the two witnesses** (Rev. 11:2-12). The tenth and eleventh chapters occupy an intermediary place between the visions of the seven trumpets and the seven signs. In the two witnesses of God, some Holy Fathers see the Old Testament righteous ones Enoch and Elijah, who will come to earth before the end of the world in order to disclose the falsity of the antichrist and to call mankind toward loyalty to God. Or the two might be Moses and Elijah. It is known that both Enoch and Elijah were taken up alive to Heaven (Gen. 5:24, 2 Kings 2:11). The capital punishment that these witnesses will impose on mankind brings to mind the miracles performed by the prophets Moses, Aaron, and Elijah (Exo. chs. 7-12, 1 Kings 17:1, 2 Kings 1:10) The Apostles Peter and Paul, who had recently suffered in Rome under Nero, could have served as examples (prototypes) of the two witnesses for St. John. Evidently, the two witnesses in the Apocalypse are a symbol for other witnesses of Christ who spread the Gospel in a hostile pagan world and often seal their preaching with a martyr's death. The words "*Sodom and Egypt, where even our Lord is crucified,*" point to the city of Jerusalem, in which our Lord Jesus Christ suffered, as well as many prophets and the first Christians.

# The seven signs, the Church, and the kingdom of the beast

(Chs. 12-14)

**T**he further one reads, the more precisely the Revelation to the Seer divides humanity into two opposing camps - the Church and the kingdom of the beast. The preceding chapters began to acquaint the reader with the Church, speaking about the marks, the temple of Jerusalem, and the two witnesses. The twelfth chapter shows the Church in all its Heavenly glory and simultaneously discloses its greatest foe, the dragon-devil. The vision of the Woman dressed in the sun and of the dragon makes it obvious that the war between good and evil goes beyond the borders of the material world and extends into the world of angels. The Apostle describes the existence of a cognizant evil being in the incorporeal world, who in desperation wages war against those who are committed to God, both angels and men. This war between good and evil, which seeps into the very essence of mankind, already began in the angelic world before the creation of the material one. As we have stated, the Seer describes this war in various parts of the Apocalypse, not in chronological sequence but in various bits and pieces.

The vision of the Woman reminds the reader of God's promise to Adam and Eve about the Messiah (the Seed of the Woman) Who will bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). It could have been assumed that the reference to the Woman in the twelfth chapter refers to the Virgin Mary. However, from further references in which the distant descendents of the Woman (Christians) are discussed, it is evident that here the Woman must be considered to be the Church. The radiance of the sun surrounding the Woman symbolizes the moral perfection of the saints and the blessed illumination of the Church through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The twelve stars symbolize the twelve tribes of the New Israel - that is, the unity of the Christian peoples. The agony of the Woman during labor symbolizes the exploits, deprivations, and suffering of the servants of God (the prophets, apostles, and their successors) borne by them during the spreading of the Gospel throughout the world and during the confirmation of Christian virtues among its spiritual children (those who were baptized). St. Paul called the Galatian Christians: "*My children, for whom I painfully labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you*" (Gal. 4:19).

The First Born of the Woman "*For Whom it was meant to rule all nations with a rod of iron*" is the Lord Jesus Christ (Psalms 2:9, Rev. 12:5 and 19:15). He is the New Adam, having become the Head of the Church. The "*rapture*" of the child obviously points to the ascension of Christ into Heaven, where He took his place at the "*right hand of God*" and since which time He governs the fate of the world.

"*The dragon with its tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth*" (Rev. 12:4). Scholars understand the stars to be angels whom Daystar, the devil in his pride, incited to rebellion against God, as a result of which war erupted in Heaven. (This was the first revolution in the universe!) The Archangel Michael stepped forth as the head of the good angels. The angels revolting against God experienced losses and could not hold on to staying in Heaven. Having fallen away from God, they turned from good angels into demons. Their kingdom is the nether regions, known as the bottomless pit or hell, which became a place of darkness and suffering. In accordance with the opinion of the Holy Fathers, the war described by St. John occurred in the angelic world before the creation of the material world. This is introduced here to the reader in order to explain that the "*dragon*" that will persecute the Church in subsequent visions of the Apocalypse is the fallen "*Daystar*" ("Lucifer") - God's foe from time immemorial.

Thus, having suffered defeat in Heaven, the dragon with all its raging fury arms itself against the Woman (the Church). Its weapons are the various temptations which it directs at the Woman that resemble a wild river. However, she saves herself from temptation by fleeing to the desert; that is, by a voluntary refusal of life's benefits and comforts, which the dragon tries to use to charm her. The two wings of the Woman are prayer and fasting, with which Christians become spiritual and become immune to the entrapments of the dragon, who goes crawling about the world as a snake (Gen. 3:14; also see Mk. 9:29). It behooves us to recall that many zealous Christians from the first centuries onward had already literally migrated into the desert, leaving the noisy towns that were full of temptations. In remote caves, in hermitages and monasteries, they gave all their time to prayer and thoughts of God and were able to attain spiritual heights that modern Christians cannot fathom. Monasticism flourished in the East during the fourth through the seventh centuries, when in the desert regions of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor many hermitages and monasteries were formed, numbering some hundreds and thousands of monks and nuns. From the Near East, monasticism overflowed into Athos, and from there into Russia, where in pre-Revolutionary time there were many thousands of monasteries and hermitages.

**Note:** the expression "*times, time and half a time*" - 1260 days and 42 months (Rev. 12:6-15) - corresponds to three and a half years and symbolically means the period of persecutions. The public ministry of Christ continued for three and a half years. The persecutions took approximately the same length of time during the reign of King Antiochus Epiphanes and Emperors Nero and Domitian. Nevertheless, the dates of the Apocalypse must be understood allegorically (see above).

The **beast who came from the sea** and the **beast who came out of the earth** (Rev. chs. 13-14). The majority of the Holy Fathers understand "*the beast from the sea*" to be the antichrist and "*the beast from the earth*" to be the false prophet. The sea symbolizes the unbelieving mass of humanity, which is always restless and turbulent with passions. From further narrative about the beast and from a parallel narrative of the prophet Daniel (Dan. chs. 7-8), it follows that the beast is the whole godless empire of the antichrist. In their outer appearance the dragon-devil and the beast coming from the sea, to whom the dragon passed on its rule, resemble each other. Their external attributes denote their slyness, cruelty, and moral indecency. The heads and the horns of the beast symbolize the godless states that comprise the empire of antichrist, as well as their rulers (kings). The revelation of the mortal wounding of one of the heads of the beast and of its healing is enigmatic. In their time the events themselves will shed light on the meaning of these words. The historical basis for this allegory might be provided by the conviction of many contemporaries of St. John that the slain Nero came back to life and that he would soon return with the Parthian forces which were to be found beyond the Euphrates River (Rev. 9:14 and 16:12) in order to take revenge upon his enemies. It could be that here is an indication of the partial defeat of godless paganism by the Christian faith and an indication of the rebirth of paganism during the period of general apostasy from Christianity. (Refer to details about this in our booklet "End of the World and Eternal Life").

**Note:** there are common traits between the beast of the Apocalypse and the four beasts of the prophet Daniel that personified the four ancient pagan empires (Daniel ch. 7). The fourth beast referred to the Roman Empire, and the tenth horn of the last beast symbolized the Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes - as a prototype of the forthcoming antichrist, whom the Archangel Gabriel called the "contemptible one" (Dan. 11:21). The characteristics and the deeds of the apocalyptic beast have much in common with the prophet Daniel's tenth horn (Dan. 7:8-12, 20-25, 8:10-26, 11:21-45). The first two books of the Maccabees serve as a vivid illustration of the times before the end of the world.

Subsequently, the Seer describes the beast that had come from the earth and that he later calls the false prophet. Here, the earth symbolizes the total absence of spirituality in the teachings of the false prophet, which are completely permeated with materialism and the gratification of pleasure-loving flesh. The false prophet seduces people with false miracles and forces them to bow down to the first beast. "*He had two horns like a lamb, and spoke like a dragon,*" (Rev. 13:11); that is, he appeared to be meek and peaceful but his speeches were filled with flattery and lies.

As in the eleventh chapter, the two witnesses symbolize all the servants of Christ. It is evident that the two beasts in the thirteenth chapter symbolize the union of all who hated Christianity. The beast from the sea symbolizes the civilian godless authorities and the beast from the earth

means the union of the false prophets and all the deviant Church authorities.

As during the time of the Savior's life on earth, both of these powers - the civil and the religious, in the persons of Pilate and the Jewish high priests - united in sentencing Christ to be crucified, so throughout all of the history of mankind, these two powers often unite in their fight against faith and in the persecution of believers. Examples are the prophet Balaam and the Moabite king, Queen Jezebel and her priests, the false prophets and princes before the destruction of Israel and later Judea, "apostates of the Holy Covenant," king Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8:23, 1 Macc. and 2 Macc. ch. 9), and finally the followers of the law of Moses and the Roman administrators during the time of the Apostles. During the early centuries of Christianity, heretics and false teachers undermined the Church with their schisms and thus aided in the successful conquests by the Arabs and Turks who flooded and ruined the Orthodox Christian East. Russian free-thinkers and populists paved the way for the revolution, and contemporary pseudo-prophets corrupt unsteady Christians into various sects and cults. They all manifest themselves as false prophets collaborating for the success of the powers fighting against God. The Apocalypse vividly discloses the mutual support between the dragon-devil and both beasts. Each one here is full of his own selfish plans: the devil thirsts for obeisance to him; the antichrist seeks power; and the false-prophet seeks his material gain. As the Church calls on people to have faith in God and to fortify their virtues, the Church becomes an obstacle to them and they fight together against her.

**The seal of the beast** (Rev. 13:16-17, 14:9-11, 15:2, 16:2, 19:20, 20:4). In the language of Holy Scripture, to bear upon oneself a seal (or a mark) denotes belonging to or being subordinate to someone. We have already mentioned that the mark (or the name of God) on the forehead of the faithful denotes their being chosen by God and consequently having God's protection over them (Rev. 3:12; 7:2-3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4). The activity of the false prophet, which was described in the thirteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, convinces us that the kingdom of the beast will be of a religious-political nature. In creating the union of various governments, it will simultaneously propagate a new religion instead of the Christian faith. Therefore, the submission of oneself to the antichrist (allegorically speaking, by taking upon one's forehead or right hand the mark of the beast) will be tantamount to renunciation of Christ, which will result in the forfeiture of the Kingdom of Heaven. (The symbol of the mark is drawn from ancient customs, according to which warriors burned upon their arms or their foreheads the name of their commander, and slaves, either voluntarily or by force, were branded with the seal of their master's name. Pagans devoted to some deity often bore upon themselves the tattoos of that particular divinity.)

It is quite possible that during the time of the antichrist a perfected computerized registration system will be introduced which would be similar to modern bank credit cards. This state-of-the-art registration will have an invisible computerized code imprinted not on a plastic card as it is now, but directly on the body of the individuals. This code, read by an electronic or a magnetic "eye," will be transmitted to a central computer that will contain all pertinent personal and financial information regarding that person. Thus, the imprinting of personal codes directly on individuals will replace the need for money, passports, visas, tickets, checks, credit cards and other personal documents. Thanks to individual encoding, all monetary operations such as payment of salaries and payment of debts can be performed directly in the computer. In the absence of money, robbers will have nothing to take. It will be pre-eminently easier for the government to control crime because people's movements will be known thanks to the central computer. It appears that the positive aspects of this system of personal encoding will be used to introduce the system. In practice, however, it will also be used for religious-political control over people "*when no one shall be able to buy or sell, except those who have such an imprint*" (Rev. 13:17).

Of course the idea of stamping codes on people is speculation. The essence is not in electromagnetic markings but in fidelity to Christ or our betrayal of him! Throughout the history of Christianity, pressure on believers from antichristian authorities has taken on the most varied of forms: the bringing of a formal sacrifice to an idol, the acceptance of Islam, the joining of a godless or an anti-Christian organization. In the language of the Apocalypse, this

acceptance of *"the seal of the beast,"* is the acquiring of temporary advantages at the price of the renunciation of Christ.

**The number of the beast is 666** (Rev. 13:18). The meaning of this number remains a mystery to this day. Evidently, it will be deciphered when circumstances enable us to do so. Some scholars see the number 666 as a diminution of the number 777, which in its own right designates threefold perfection or completeness. In the context of this understanding of the symbolism of the number, the antichrist, who strives in every way possible to show his superiority over Christ, in reality will be imperfect in every way. In ancient times the numeric count of a name was founded on the idea that all letters of the alphabet had a numerical meaning. For instance, in the Greek language (and in Church Slavonic), "A" is equal to 1, "B" to 2, "G" to 3, and so on. Similar numeric meanings of the letters of the alphabet exist in Latin and Hebrew. Each name could be mathematically totalled up by the addition of the numeric values of the letters. For instance, the name Jesus written in Greek equals 888 (possibly denoting the highest perfection). There are a number of proper names that in the sum of their letters translated into digits equal the number 666. An example of this is the name of Nero Caesarius written in Hebrew. In that case, if the proper name of the antichrist were known, then calculating his numerical meaning would not require any special wisdom. Perhaps one must look for the solution to the puzzle in the area of method, although it is not clear in which direction that is to be done. The beast of the Apocalypse refers to both the antichrist and his kingdom. Could it be that in the time of the antichrist there will be the introduction of initials designating a new global movement? By the will of God the proper name of the antichrist remains hidden from idle curiosity until its time. When the time comes, those who should do so will decipher it.

**The talking image of the beast.** It is difficult to understand the meaning of the words about the false prophet that *"He was granted power to instill the spirit into it, to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would both speak and act so as to have killed each one not worshipping the image of the beast"* (Rev. 13:15). A motive for this could have been Antiochus Epyphanes' demanding that the Jews bow to the statue of Jupiter that he had erected in the temple at Jerusalem. Later on, the Emperor Domitian demanded that all citizens of the Roman Empire bow down to his own image. Domitian was the first emperor who demanded for himself a godly reverence even during his lifetime and demanded that he be addressed as "our lord and god." Sometimes, for greater effect, priests would hide behind the statues of the emperor and prophesy in his name. It was decreed that all Christians who did not bow down to the image of Domitian were to be executed, while others who obeyed were to be rewarded. It may be that in the prophecy of the Apocalypse the discourse deals with some apparatus similar to a television set that would transmit the image of the antichrist and simultaneously watch how the people react to it. In any case, at the present time movies and television are widely used to propagate antichristian ideas in order to accustom people to cruelty and banality. Daily, indiscriminate watching of television kills the goodness and holiness in man. Is television not the forerunner of the speaking image of the beast?

**Seven bowls,  
the strengthening of the godless powers,  
and the judgment of the sinners**

(Chs. 15-17)

**I**n this part of the Apocalypse, the Seer describes the kingdom of the beast, who has reached the apogee of his power and his control over the lives of mankind. Abandonment of the true faith spreads throughout almost all of mankind, and the Church drops to the edge of exhaustion: *"it was granted to him to do battle with the saints and to be victorious over them"* (Rev. 13:7). In order to encourage the believers who remained faithful to Christ, St. John directs their vision toward the heavenly world and shows them the great multitude of the Righteous Ones, who, like the Israelites who were saved from Pharaoh during the time of Moses, sing the song of victory (Exodus chs. 14-15).

However, just as Pharaoh's rule came to an end, so the days of the antichrist's rule will be terminated. The following chapters (16-20) paint God's judgment against the godless with brilliant strokes. The destruction of nature in the sixteenth chapter is similar to the description in the eighth chapter; however, here it reaches global proportions and makes a horrifying impression. Evidently, as before, the destruction of nature is brought about by mankind itself through wars and industrial waste. Increased suffering may be linked to the destruction of the ozone layer in the stratosphere and to the increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. According to the prophecy of the Savior, during the last year before the end of the world, conditions for life will be so unbearable that *"if God had not shortened those days, no flesh would have been saved"* (Matt. 24:22).

The description of the judgment and the punishment in chapters 16-20 of the Apocalypse follows the pattern of successively **increasing guilt** of God's enemies. The first to be subjected to punishment are those guilty people who had accepted the mark of the beast and the capital city of the antichristian empire ("Babylon"), then the antichrist and the false prophet, and finally the devil himself.

The narrative regarding the fall of Babylon is given twice: at first in general terms at the end of the sixteenth chapter, and then in more detail in chapters 18-19. Babylon is depicted as a harlot sitting on the beast. The name Babylon brings to mind the Chaldean Babylon, in which godless power was concentrated in ancient times. (It was the Chaldean forces that destroyed the ancient city of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.) In describing the lavish extravagance of the "harlot," St. John imagined rich Rome with its harbor city. However, many traits attributed to Apocalyptic Babylon are not applicable to ancient Rome and evidently refer to the capital of the antichrist.

The angel's detailed explanation at the end of the seventeenth chapter regarding the "secret of Babylon" that concerned the antichrist and his kingdom is equally enigmatic. Probably these details will be understood in the future when the proper time comes. Some of the metaphorical expressions are taken from the description of Rome as standing on seven hills and of its godless emperors. *"Five kings (heads of the beast) fell"* refers to the first five Roman emperors, from Julius Caesar to Claudius. The sixth head is Nero and the seventh is Vespasian. *"And the beast which was and which is not now, is the eighth, and (he is) from the number of seven"* speaks of Domitian, the resurrected Nero in people's minds. He is the antichrist of the first century. However, the symbolism in the seventeenth chapter will likely have a new explanation at the time of the last antichrist.

## The judgment against Babylon, antichrist, and the false prophet

(Chs. 18-19)

**T**he seer paints in vivid and brilliant colors the picture of the fall of the capital of the godless kingdom, which he calls Babylon. This description is similar to the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah regarding the fall of Chaldean Babylon in 539 B.C. (Isa. ch. 13-14; 21:9; and Jer. ch. 50-51). There is a lot of similarity between the past and future centers of the world's evil. The punishment of the antichrist (the beast) and the false prophet is described in a special manner. As mentioned before, the beast is a specific personality of the last antagonist of God and simultaneously the general personification of any power that is anti-God. The false prophet is the last false prophet (a helper of the antichrist), who is also the personification of any pseudo-religious or corrupt church power.

It is important to understand that in the narrative of the punishment of Babylon, the antichrist, the false prophet (chs. 17-19), and the devil (ch. 20), St. John does not follow a chronological order but rather uses a method of interpretation according to a principle, that we will now explain.

In its aggregate Holy Scripture teaches that the kingdom that is antagonistic to God will end its existence during the Second Coming of Christ, when the antichrist and the false prophet will perish. God's Last Judgment against the world will take place in the order of increasing guilt of the defendants (*"The time has come for judgment to begin with the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the Gospel of God?"* 1 Peter 4:17; Matt. 25:31-46). At first the faithful will be judged, then the unbelievers and sinners, and then the conscious foes of God, and finally, the main culprits of all the godlessness in the world, the demons and the devil.) In that order, St. John narrates regarding the judgment over God's foes in chapters 17-20. In addition, the description of the judgment of every category of sinner (those fallen away from God, antichrists, false prophets, and finally the devil) is preceded by the Apostle's description of their guilt. Therefore, the impression arises that at first there will come the destruction of Babylon. At some later time there will be the punishment of the antichrist and the false prophet, after which the reign of the saints will come on earth. And only after a very long time the devil will emerge in order to seduce the nations and then will be punished by God. In actuality, however, the discourse in the Apocalypse is describing parallel events. This method of presentation by St. John needs to be taken into account to interpret the twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse (see "The insolvency of Chiliasm" in the booklet about the end of the world).

## **The thousand-year kingdom, the judgment of the devil, the resurrection, and the last judgment**

(Ch. 20)

**T**he twentieth chapter, while speaking about the kingdom of the saints and the twice-occurring defeat of the devil, encompasses the whole period of existence of Christianity. It sums up the drama in the twelfth chapter regarding the pursuit of the Woman-Church by the dragon. The first time the devil was defeated by the Savior's death on the cross. At that time he was deprived of power over the world, *"fettered"* and *"confined to the bottomless pit"* for a thousand years; that is, for a very long time (Rev. 20:3). *"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out,"* so said the Lord before His sufferings (John

12:31). As we know from the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse and from other sources of the Holy Scripture, the devil, even after the Savior's death on the cross, had the ability to seduce the faithful and to set traps for them, although he no longer had power over them. The Lord said to His disciples: "*Behold I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and on all the powers of the enemy*" (Luke 10:19).

Only before the very end of the world, when as a result of mass abandonment of the faith by mankind "the deterrent" would be taken from the midst (2 Thess. 2:7), the devil once again will dominate sinful humanity, but only for a short time. He will then lead the final terrible war against the Church (Jerusalem), directing against her the armies of "Gog and Magog," but he will be defeated by Christ for the second and final time. "*I will build My Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*" (Matt. 16:18). The armies of Gog and Magog symbolize the union of all the godless (theomachistic) forces, both human and those from the nether regions, which the devil will unite in his insane war against Christ. In this way, the ever accelerating war against the Church throughout history ends in the twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse with the total defeat of the devil and his servants. The twentieth chapter summarizes the spiritual aspect of this war and shows its end.

On the bright side of the persecution of the faithful is the fact that although they suffered physically they were victorious over the devil spiritually because they remained loyal to Christ. From the moment of their martyred deaths, they reign with Christ and "judge" the world, participating in the fates of the Church and all of mankind (Rev. 20:4). (This is the reason we turn to them for help, and this is the basis for the veneration of the saints by the Orthodox.) On the glorious participation of the sufferers for the sake of faith, the Lord said: "*he who believes in me, though he may die, he shall come back to life*" (John 11:25). The "first resurrection" in the Apocalypse is the spiritual rebirth that begins with the moment of Baptism of the believer, is strengthened by his Christian deeds, and reaches its highest state at the moment of a martyr's death for Christ's sake. The following promise pertains to those spiritually reborn: "*The time is high and has already come, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and having heard shall be revived.*" The words of the tenth verse of the twentieth chapter are the concluding words: the devil, having deceived mankind, "*is cast into a lake of fire.*" Thus concludes the narrative regarding the condemnation of the godless, the false prophet, the antichrist, and the devil.

The twentieth chapter ends with the description of the Last Judgment. Before it is to take place, there must be the universal resurrection of the dead; that is, a physical resurrection, to which the Apostle refers as the "second" resurrection. All people will be physically resurrected, both the righteous ones and the sinners. Following the universal resurrection, "*the books were opened and . . . those dead were judged according to the entries in the books.*" Evidently, it is then, before the throne of the Judge, that the spiritual state of each person will be manifested. All dark deeds, angry words, secret thoughts and desires, all that was carefully hidden and even forgotten, will suddenly be brought to the surface and will become evident to all. It will be a terrifying sight!

As there are two resurrections, so there are two deaths. The "first death" is the state of unbelief and sin in which those who did not accept the Gospel dwelt. The "second death" is to be doomed to eternal estrangement from God. This description is very concise because the Apostle had already spoken previously about the Last Judgment (Rev. 6:12-17, 10:7, 11:15, 14:14-20, 16:17-21, 19:19-21, 20:11-15). Here the Apostle sums up the Last Judgment (the prophet Daniel having touched briefly on this in the beginning of the twelfth chapter). With this brief description, St. John concludes the writing of the history of mankind and moves on to the description of the everlasting life of the righteous.

**The new earth,**

# eternal beatitude

(Chs. 21-22)

The last two chapters of the book of the Apocalypse contain the most glorious and most joyful pages of the Bible. They describe the beatitude of the righteous in the rejuvenated world, where God will dry each tear from the eyes of the sufferers, where there no longer will be death, nor weeping, nor cries, nor sickness. Life, to which there will be no end, will begin.

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Thus, the book of the Apocalypse was written during the time of increased persecution of the Church. Its aim was to strengthen and comfort the faithful in the face of forthcoming strife. It discloses the methods and artifice by which the devil and his servants attempt to destroy the believers. It teaches how one can overcome the temptations. The book of the Apocalypse sends an appeal to the faithful to be attentive to their spiritual state, to have no fear of suffering and death for the sake of Christ. It shows the happy life of the saints in heaven and calls to us to join them. Although believers sometimes have many enemies, they have many more defenders in the form of angels, saints, and especially Christ, the Victor.

The book of the Apocalypse more vividly and more descriptively than any other book of Holy Scripture reveals the drama of the battle between good and evil in the history of mankind and demonstrates more fully the triumph of Good and Life.

## Tables of the letters to the Seven Churches

Church Subject	Ephesus Rev. 2:8-11	Smyrna Rev. 2:12-17	Pergamos Rev. 2:12-17	Thyatira Rev. 2:18-29	Sardis Rev. 3:7-13	Philadelphia Rev.3:7-13	Laodice Rev. 3:14-
<b>Praise</b>	Worked fervently, had patience, repudiated the corrupt.	Bore sorrow and poverty.	Did not renounce faith.	Good works, love, faith. The last greater than the first.	Did not defile your garments.	Although weak, you are true to Christ.	---
<b>Censure</b>	Cooled in love.	---	Allow heretics into your midst.	Allow heretics to sow enticements.	You appear alive, but you are dead.	---	Lukewarm self-confide
<b>Advice</b>	Remember from whence you fell and repent.	Be faithful till death.	Repent.	Protect what you have.	Be alert, for you are close to death. Repent.	Protect your spiritual wealth.	Love to become zealous and percept
<b>What comes</b>	"I shall remove	---	---	---	I shall come unexpectedly.	---	---

	your lamp stand" (I shall reject).						
<b>Reward</b>	You will eat from the tree of life.	You will elude everlasting death.	You will partake of hidden manna and get a new name.	You will subjugate pagans.	You shall receive a white garment.	You will be steadfast. You will bear the name of God.	You shall r with Christ.
<b>Old-Testament period</b>	Life in Eden (Gen. 2:9)	Slavery in Egypt (10 plagues; Ex. ch. 7-12 .)	Wandering in the Sinai desert. Balaam seduces Israel (Num. 25:1, 31:16)	Enticement of paganism during the time of Jezebel (3 Kgs.16: 31, 21: 21-26)	God's judgement over Israel and Judah (Ex. 1:9; 8th-6th cent. B.C.)	Babylonian bondage. Extreme weakening. Emergence from bondage. Restoration of Jerusalem and Temple (Key of David)	Time Phariseeism Utilitarian approach religion.
<b>New-Testament period</b>	Time of Apostles. (1 <sup>st</sup> cent.)	Persecution of Church by Roman emperors. (2-4 cent.)	War with heresies. Ecumenical Councils. Monasticism. (4-7 cent.).	Iconomachism. Christianization of new peoples (Slavs) "Rule over pagans." (7-12 cent. )	Flourishing of Church art. Formalization of religion. The fall of Byzantium. Russian Revolution. (13- 20 cent.)	Pressure from atheism. Church weakness. The conversion of Jews. (20 <sup>th</sup> cent.)	Christianity means happiness. confidence sectarians.
<b>Characteristics of the given periods</b>	At first, spiritual zeal and innocence; then- a cooling.	Cleansing through mourning and sorrow.	War with heresy, mental temptations.	Attainment of spiritual maturity.	Outer ceremonial piety. Punishment.	Loyalty to God under difficult circumstances.	Self-indulge blindness, pride.

### Plan of the Apocalypse

<b>Visions and chapters</b>	<b>Seven seals. Heavenly Adoration. Four horsemen. (4-6)</b>	<b>Seven horns. First calamities. Redemption of the faithful. (7-10)</b>	<b>Seven signs. The Church and the kingdom of the beast. (11-14)</b>	<b>Seven bowls. Judgement of sinners. (15-17).</b>	<b>Judgement of Babylon. Antichrist &amp; false prophet. (18 -19).</b>	<b>1000-year kingdom of the saints. Judgement of the devil and the Last Judgement. (20)</b>
<b>The Church triumphant in Heaven.</b>	Heavenly liturgy (4-5). First Martyrs (6:9-11).	The just of all nations (7:9-17). Strength of Saint's prayers (8:3-6). Adoration of God (11:16-19).	Foretaste of victory by Saints (12:10-12). The innocents (14:1-5).	Hymn of those saved from the beast (15:1- 4).	Preparation for the marriage of the Lamb and the Church. The marriage Hymn of the saints (19:1- 10).	Martyrs did not perish; they reign with Christ (20:4-6).
<b>Persecuted Church on earth.</b>	The imminent suffering of the faithful	Identifying the chosen prior to calamities	Measuring the temple (11:1-2). Deeds of two	Blessed is the courageous (16: 15).	---	---

	(6:11).	(7:1-8).	witnesses (11:3-14). Woman clothed with sun (12:1-6 & 13-18). Patience of the Saints (13:10, 14:12-13).			
<b>The world of sinners and their punishment.</b>	4 horsemen. Passions at war within man. Hence enmity, poverty, & reciprocal extermination (6: 1- 8).	First calamities. Partial obliteration of nature (8:7-13).	Sinners seduced and made subject to the beast. Mark of the beast (13:8 & 16-17).	Greater punishment of sinner. Total destruction of nature (16:1-12).	---	---
<b>Theomachistic world. Antichrist. False prophet.</b>	---	---	Evil increases. Beast from the sea- antichrist (13: 1-10). Beast from the earth-false prophet (13:11-18).	Kingdom of the beast (16:10-12). Harlot of Babylon- center of universal evil (17:1-18).	Casting down of Babylon. Joy in Heaven (18:1-24).	---
<b>The nether regions- devil and demons.</b>	---	Emanation of devilish forces in the world. Devil- the destroyer of souls (9:1-12).	The dragon persecutes the Woman- Church (12:3-4) Plants seeds of temptation (12:10-13 & 12:15-17).	Evil spirits entice people to serve the beast (16:13-14).	Evil force is strengthened in the kingdom of the beast (18:2).	The fountain of all evil-devil. He suffers defeat twice & is punished for eternity (20:1-10).
<b>Physical and spiritual war. Regiments of evil.</b>	World's calamities emanate due to discords within man (6:1-8).	Angels at the river Euphrates. First phase of war (9:13-21).	War in Heaven (12:7-10). Confrontation of the devil with two witnesses (11:7).	Before the final conflict (16:12). Armageddon (16:16). Christ's victory (17:14).	Christ annihilates antichrist & his armies (19:11-21).	Summation of universal wars against the Church. Defeat of Gog & Magog (20:7-9).
<b>Description of the end of the world and Judgment.</b>	Fear of the sinners before the Judge (6:12-17).	Comprehension of God's mystery (10:7).	Kingdom of the world becomes the Kingdom of God (11:15). The harvest (14:14-20).	Judgment of pagans (16:17-21).	Total annihilation of Babylon. Punishment of the beast and false prophet (19:19-21).	Judgment against the devil (20:10). Universal resurrection and Last Judgment (20:11-15).
<b>Main theme.</b>	Introduction. Heavenly Liturgy. Disclosure of reasons for worldly conflicts. Meaning of martyr's suffering.	Growth of Heavenly Church & increase of calamities on earth. God protects the faithful.	Deeds of the witnesses of the church. The devil directs theomachistic forces against the Church.	Kingdom of evil increases, but God brings it to ruin. Judgment begins with the sinning world. The saved exult.	Judgment of theomachists, antichrist, and false prophet. Center of universal evil is abolished.	Summary of the war between good and evil. Devil is twice defeated. Those who died for Christ reign in Paradise. Universal resurrection

