

Program Transcripts

For July 2015



IN
SEARCH
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SEARCH PROGRAMS

July 2015

JULY 5 – THE LAW

When you open your Bible, you see the words Old Testament and New Testament. What does that mean? Is there a difference between the Old Testament Law and the law of Christ? Are we under the Old Law?

JULY 12 – WOMEN OF THE CHURCH

What role has God given to women in the worship and the leadership of the church? Are women to be preachers or elders in the Lord's church? Should women feel cheated if they are restricted from leadership roles?

JULY 19 – LEFT BEHIND?

Several books and movies recently talk about the rapture and a sudden disappearance of a mass of people. Does the Bible speak of a rapture and what does it say? What is the kingdom of Christ and when will it begin?

JULY 26 – MARK OF THE BEAST

The book of Revelation speaks of many unbelievers following a beast that opposes the people of God and follows Satan. What is the mark of the beast, and does Revelation have anything to do with twenty-first century America?

"The Law"

When you open your Bible, you see the words Old Testament and New Testament. What does that mean? Today we're going to explore the difference between the old covenant and the new. We're interested in the truth of God's Word and in being good students who are approved of God. We want to serve Him to the best of our ability. We believe that you want to be that kind of servant too, and so you study your Bible diligently.

The Bible is an exciting book, and it reveals sacred history from the very beginning down to the present time. Through the Bible we can understand clearly all the wonderful things that God has done to bless us and give us eternal life through Jesus Christ. When you open the Bible and turn to the Table of Contents at the very front, you'll notice that there is an Old Testament and a New Testament. The Old Testament was specifically written to Israel, while the New Testament was written to both Jews and Gentiles. The Old Testament reveals the will of God for the Jews, while the New Testament reveals God's will for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Paul urged Timothy to "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, King James Version). Paul wanted Timothy to do his best to be an accurate and diligent student who handled the Word of God properly. To do so meant that he would be approved by God. To fail to do so would lead him to be ashamed. We too need to be diligent students who handle the Bible properly by distinguishing what God says and to whom He says it, how He says it, when, and why. Good students recognize that God's laws and teachings apply authoritatively to those to whom they were given.

Our reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Galatians 3:19-27. "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one *party only*; whereas God is *only* one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Paul is saying we're no longer under that tutor, the law.

Sometimes people say, "You folks in the church of Christ don't believe in the Old Testament." If they mean we don't believe the Old Testament is God's inspired word, then nothing could be farther from the truth. We certainly do believe the Old Testament is Scripture and divinely inspired. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." This certainly includes the Old Testament, which is inspired and profitable for us as Christians.

The apostle Paul said, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). There are many inspired truths in the Old Testament necessary for us to know and believe. It's there that we learn about creation, the flood, and God's promise to Abraham. It's there we learn about Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and David. It's there we learn from the prophecies and the prophets about Jesus Christ. More than thirty times Jesus refers back to

the historical events and the lessons that are found in the Old Testament. First Corinthians 10:11 says of the things of the Old Testament happened as an example for us and “were written for our instruction.” So we urge everyone to read and study the Old Testament.

But being a good student of Scripture means understanding the context of what is written. Not every command in Scripture was meant for everyone. While God told Noah to build an ark, He didn't give that instruction to everyone else. While Levites served in the tabernacle and temple, no other Israelite was allowed to serve there. When Moses reviewed the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, he said to all Israel, “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully. The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *with* all those of us alive here today” (Deuteronomy 5:1-3). From this we learn that the Ten Commandments were given to Israel specifically and that its laws were part of a covenant that did not apply to those beforehand.

When we come to the New Testament, the writers clearly state that we're no longer under the Law of Moses given at Mt. Sinai. For instance, Paul says, “Or do you not know, brothers—for I'm speaking to those that know the law—that the law is binding on a person as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies then she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God” (Romans 7:1-4). Christians die to the Law of Moses so they can follow Christ. Paul explained, “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6).

Paul argued “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, Paul says, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Galatians 2:19-21). Christians serve Christ and not the Law because they know Christ can do for them what the Law could never do. Paul told the Jews in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, “Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man [that is, Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39). The Law simply cannot free you the way the blood of Jesus Christ can free you. Let's stay with Jesus!

Some mistakenly make a distinction between the moral law found in the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial law. They think that while the ceremonial law is no longer in force, the Ten Commandment law still is. However, they've missed an important point. The Ten Commandments are part of the covenant that God made with Israel. Exodus 34:27-28 reveals this. “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” Rather than make unwarranted distinctions in the Law, let's understand that all the Law of Moses was part of the covenant that God made with Israel.

What then was God's will for this covenant law? The prophet Jeremiah revealed God's promise to make a new covenant with Israel in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Hebrews 8:6-13 quotes the passage and tells us how God compares the old covenant, which includes the Ten

Commandments, with this new covenant of Christ. Hebrews says, "But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.'" In speaking of a new covenant, "He makes the first one obsolete, and what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."

The old covenant could not do what the new covenant can do. The new covenant is a better covenant enacted on better promises. Hebrews 10:4 says of the sacrificial system of the old covenant, "For it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." The sacrifices of the old covenant were incapable of removing our sins. So Jesus Christ, our Lord, stepped in to give His own body as a sacrifice for our sins. Hebrews 10:8-9 explains, "When he said, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings,' (these are offered according to the law), and then he added, 'Behold, I have come to do your will.' And He does away with the first in order to establish the second." The Lord Jesus did away with the first covenant and its laws so that He might establish the new covenant. We now have the better covenant enacted on better promises. The old is obsolete. If you have any relationship with God at all today, it will be through the new covenant ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ. There's no need to go back to the old covenant as a law for how we are to serve God; it's obsolete and will not grant you forgiveness.

The Law of Moses was for the Jews, but the gospel is for all people. Jesus wanted to break down a barrier for Gentiles found in the Law, so that all people could come to God. The Bible says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off [that is Gentiles] have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both into one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity" (Ephesians 2:13-16). As long as the Law stood, there would be a barrier between the Jew and the Gentile. The cross of Christ broke down that barrier and established a whole new relationship to God for both Jew and Gentile.

The authoritative standard for Christians today is not the Law of Moses, but the Words of Jesus Christ and His apostles. The Lord Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). According to Jesus in Matthew 7:24-27, those who are spiritually wise hear His Words and do them. Those who are foolish may hear His Words but they do not do them. The foolish do as they please. The Lord Jesus said clearly, that "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). Whether in matters of morality or matters relating to the church, we must turn to the Words of Jesus found in the New Testament to know what God desires from us. Jesus is Lord!

If we'd be true disciples of the Lord Jesus, let's remain in His Words and not deviate from them either to popular opinions today or to the old covenant written to the Jews. The Lord Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). If Jesus is our Lord, let's follow Him and not get sidetracked by human traditions; let's not get sidetracked by the creeds of men, or by the instructions that God gave to the Jews in that old covenant, that old covenant which is now obsolete. Just as we Americans today are no longer under British rule, so we as Christians today are no longer under the rule of ancient Israel. The cross of Christ set us free. Let's continue in the truth so we might be true disciples and remain free. That's the will of the Lord Jesus, and we should make it our will to please Him always. The new covenant is such a great covenant; it's one built upon better promises, one that is mediated by a better mediator, and that's Jesus Himself. So we can rely on that new covenant to give us the forgiveness of our sins, to give us freedom from sin, and to bless us with the truth and the hope that we have for eternal life. That's why, when you open up your Bible, and you see the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, remember that the Old Testament was written to the Jews, and written to them with words that were helpful to them in their setting and in their time. But the New Testament contains the Words of Jesus that were not only for His day but for all time. Jesus made the point that, "heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). That's why we can have confidence in the Words of Jesus; why we can go to them and know that they are not only for the first century but for the twenty-first century. Won't you come to Jesus; won't you live for Him; won't you study His Word, and find out the things which he teaches.

What does it mean to us today that we're under the new covenant found in the New Testament rather than under the old covenant found in the Old Testament? When the church began on the Day of Pentecost it continually devoted itself to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42). We too need to turn to the pages of the New Testament to learn about the apostles teaching and to learn how to please the Lord Jesus. We should strive to please Him in every aspect of our lives.

Since Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins, we should follow Him out of love. Jesus purchased the church with His blood because the church was His focus. He is the head of the church and the Savior of the body; we need to follow Him (Acts 5:23). If the church means so much to Him, it ought to be utterly important to us. We should look to the New Testament for our morals, for how we worship, for how the church is to function, and for our spiritual lives. We must never, never settle for second best or something less than the truth. This is why we pattern ourselves after the New Testament and not the Old. That's why we meet each Lord's Day, the first day of the week; that's why we sing without instruments; why we pray; why we study; and why we take the Lord's Supper; that's why we give of our means as freewill offerings, not tithes, because that's what the New Testament church did to please the Lord. So we hope that you'll follow the Lord and put Him first.

To become a Christian, The Bible asks that you believe in the Lord Jesus, that you repent of your sins, that you confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized the Lord will wash away your sins; He'll add you to His church, the family of God. Today is the best day to be obedient to the Lord!

"Women in the Church"

In the beginning God created us male and female. He made us in His image and in His likeness. But does God give the same role to women that He gives to men? Today we're going to explore the role of women in the church. God said, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.'" (Isaiah 55:8-9). God's ways are not always our ways, but God's ways are always right. We may not understand God's ways or even agree with them, but God's wisdom far exceeds our own; and through time, God's wisdom proves right every time. So we follow the One who is utterly trustworthy. Psalm 19:9 says, "The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether."

Where in the world would any of us be without the women in our lives? They are indeed precious in so many ways and a blessing to the church. I've been blessed with a godly mother who has passed and has gone to be with the Lord; I now have a faithful and loving wife for more than forty years, with four precious daughters who are all well-educated and very talented. I also have eleven delightful granddaughters. Do I care about all the females in my life? Of course I do! I want every good thing for them and want them to serve God and to go to heaven.

The best thing that you can do is to love and serve God faithfully and to help others to love and serve God. Obeying God is an act of love. The Lord Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). If you want to bless your family, lead them in loving the Lord. Lead them to love the Lord in every way. Don't pick which laws you like and ignore the others. We are to "observe all things" that Jesus commands us. And this touches every aspect of our lives.

Our reading today comes from 1 Corinthians 14:33-37. "For God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth? Or has it come to you only? If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment." Let's pray together. Father we're so grateful that You have given us Your love, and that You've given us Your word so that we might know truth from error. And Father we pray that you will bless our study. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

When God created Adam and Eve, He created the male first and the female later. God created her to be a "helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18). First Corinthians 11:9 says, "for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake." The distinctive roles the Scriptures place on men and women are not cultural traditions of bygone eras but God's plan for humans made in His image.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God said to the woman, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, and in pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). This declaration from the beginning applies to God's order in the home and in the church. This is God's declaration for all time.

God's Word, thousands of years later, says, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (I Corinthians 11:3). Some have assumed that because man is the head of woman that this makes women inferior to men. The relationship, however, between Christ and the Father is like the relationship of woman to man; consequently, being in subjection does not mean being less than equal. Paul said the Lord

Jesus was equal with the Father but took the form of a servant in the book of Philippians 2:5-8. Just because a woman is to be in subjection to a man does not make her less than him. Any man who treats women with disrespect is failing as a Christian.

When the Lord chose people to lead and teach the church, Christ chose men. The twelve apostles were all men, not six men and six women. The seven servants chosen to feed the Grecian widows in Acts 6 were all men. When the Scripture lays down the qualifications for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1-14, they are required to be husbands. The absence of females in this matter is no accident.

Scripture gives women in the New Testament various, praiseworthy roles of teaching and service. Women may evangelize privately as Priscilla and Aquilla did with Apollos in Acts 18:26; and in Philippians 4:2-3 that describes Euodia and Syntyche as fellow-laborers with Paul in the gospel. Paul instructed older women in Titus 2:3-4 to teach and to train the younger women to love their husbands and their children. Acts 9:36 describes Dorcas as a woman “full of good works and acts of charity (or kindness).” Some women had spiritual gifts; Acts 21:9 says that Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied. Women were the first at the tomb of Jesus, and the Lord sent them to tell the apostles of His resurrection. Women often traveled with Jesus and His disciples and supported His ministry.

Faithful Christian men should treat their wives with honor and respect. First Peter 3:7 says, “You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.” When men treat women with disrespect it’s clear that this behavior hinders their prayers to God. Godly men honor women; ungodly men mistreat them.

The New Testament, however, limits the roles women may play in the assembled church and in the leadership of the church. The Bible says, “as in all the churches of the saints. The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (1 Corinthians 14:33-37). It is clear women are not to speak to the whole church to impart teaching.

Paul gives four reasons for this restriction on women. First, the Law says this. This may refer to Genesis 3:16 as we noted a minute ago, or it could be that the female’s subordination is due to the sin in the garden. It possibly could come from man’s priority in the creation: the Bible says “Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man, He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:22). Numbers 30:3-12 also notes that a woman’s vow must be approved either by her father or by her husband, and if he opposes the vow, then her pledge will not stand.

Second, “it is shameful for women (not just wives) to speak in church” (1 Corinthians 14:35). “Church” here refers to the assembled body as in I Corinthians 11:18. Paul calls the act of a woman speaking in church “shameful” or “disgraceful.” While some hold that culture is the source of the shame; it likely means this shame instead arises from God and His Law. In fact, the pagan cults of both Corinth and Ephesus had women as their high priestesses and teachers, according to Bruce Morton in his book, *Deceiving Winds*. The Lord’s commandment was actually counter to the pagan culture of Corinth! God’s teaching came to change the world; and we must not let the world change the church.

Third, “Let your women keep silent in the churches.” Note the plural. This practice was not merely to be kept in Corinth, but in all of the churches of Christ across the way. They were to

“keep silent.” This phrase “keep silent” is from the Greek word *sigao*, which means to hold one's peace and say nothing. The instruction to “keep silent” is given three times in this chapter. First, a tongue speaker (even if he was a male) is to “keep silent” when no interpreter is present (verse 28). Second, if one prophet is speaking and another receives a revelation, “the first one must keep silent” (verses 29-30). Third, he says “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak” (verse 34). “Speaking” here is a general term which would apply to public talk: that is leading prayer, preaching, prophesying, and tongue-speaking or interpreting; they were not to do that.

Fourth, Paul says this is “the commandment of the Lord” (chapter 14:37). Some gifted Christians likely objected to Paul's instructions, so Paul boldly declares the source of this “commandment” is the Lord himself. There's nothing cultural or temporary about the Lord's command to the churches.

Some object, “Well what about the women who were praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:4-5?” The primary subject of chapter 11 has to do with wearing veils and not the speaking in church. The “custom” or practice of the day was for women to have long hair and wear a veil. Breaking this custom was, in that day, “disgraceful” and against nature. Some gifted women may have thought that their spiritual gifts gave them the right to speak in the assembled church. If the women were speaking in the assembled church in chapter 11, Paul eventually tells them to stop it in chapter 14. Women likely spoke in other settings than the assembled church, such as gatherings of women or in private. Whatever the case, the command of the Lord was to end the practice of women speaking in the assembled churches as a whole.

We have this teaching confirmed in 1 Timothy 2. Paul said, “I desire then that in every place, (that is in every place of worship), the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” (1 Timothy 2:8). Paul chose “men (adult males) in every place to pray.” The phrase “in every place” is a specific term, a technical term speaking of the place where congregations assembled to worship. 1 Corinthians 1:2 uses the term to describe the place where the church assembled. Clearly, God wanted males to take the lead in prayer and worship.

If women are not permitted to lead prayer, surely they are also forbidden to preach. Women are to learn in quietness, and not teach! First Timothy 2:11-12 says, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” Asserting his apostolic authority, Paul did not permit women to be public teachers of men or to exercise authority over a man at church. She cannot rule or subjugate men to her will at church. Paul does not permit her to take these roles; even if elders, preachers, and other men allow it, God does not. No person has a right to ask or to permit any female to do what is contrary to God's instructions.

To be quiet or silent (it's the Greek word *hesuchia*) here means to be at rest, a spirit and an attitude of tranquility arising from within so that she causes no disturbance. They were to focus on learning, not teaching, and to remain quiet, to say nothing. This learning was to take place with “entire submissiveness.” “Entire submissiveness,” is a complete, voluntary surrender of one's rights or will. It is to give precedence to others; she is to “subordinate herself in every respect.” This is not speaking merely of subjection to her husband; this is speaking broadly of women subjecting themselves to the leadership of men in the functions of the church. “Submission” does not mean that one is inferior, or has inferior value or worth, but rather that one recognizes one's role in a relationship. As we noted, Jesus was not inferior to God according to Philippians 2:5-8, but He willfully subjected Himself to his Father.

The theological basis for saying women cannot preach arises from the beginning with Adam and Eve, not a cultural bias from Paul himself. “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And

Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (I Timothy 2:13-14). This teaching reveals God’s order of life, God’s way. According to historian Everett Ferguson, the writers in the early church history gave evidence that “Women were not appointed as elders, nor did they take public speaking roles in the assembly as prophets, teachers, or leaders in the assembly. Where women did take these roles in some of the heretical and schismatic groups, this practice was a basis for objection to these groups.” While times change and cultures change, God’s word, God’s Bible does not change.

We should use our talents for the Lord, but we shouldn’t assume that talents permit us to engage in activities and roles that God never meant for us. King Saul was not a priest and he sinned when he presumptuously made a burnt offering at Gilgal, rather than waiting for the high priest Samuel to come (1 Samuel 13:8-14). Even though he was king, Saul had no right to make this sacrifice. By presuming that he could act without authority, Saul lost his place with God. King Uzziah also became proud and transgressed against the LORD by “entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense” (2 Chronicles 26:16). Uzziah was not a Levite, so Azariah the priest and eighty others rightly withstood him. God punished Uzziah for his sin. God will not let an unmarried or childless man be an elder either. So it’s not a matter of gender; it’s a matter of qualifications.

Even Jesus, as the Son of God, could not serve as a Levitical priest in the temple because He was from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). Jesus didn’t feel cheated because he couldn’t function as a Levitical priest in the temple. Giftedness does not grant the right to overrule God’s laws. The Scriptures demand that anyone who leads must meet the qualifications. Rather than feeling cheated over what we aren’t permitted to do, we should focus on the things that we can and should do to serve God. And so with joy and thanksgiving let’s follow His will and not our own. Let’s pray together. Oh Father, may each of us find our place in service toward You. And may Your will be done on earth even as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Someone objects, “Well isn’t being limited unfair to women?” The answer to that question is no. God has given women marvelous roles in virtually every other area than in the leadership of the church. God has given women some roles that men will never be able to fill. Should men object and feel cheated? The answer is no! Our task is to pursue the work that God has given us to the best of our ability rather than envy what God has given to someone else. In God’s eyes, every member of the body, that is the church, is valuable though they have different functions.

First Corinthians 12:14-19 says, “For the body (that is the church) is not one member, but many. And if the foot says, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,’ it’s not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,’ it’s not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be?” Yes, God has a place and a purpose for every single one!

Please let Jesus be Lord of your life. Trust His ways; they are higher than our ways. Believe in the Lord Jesus, turn from sin and selfishness to serve Him, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And when you’re baptized, God washes away your sins and makes you His child. Oh, become a Christian today!

Left Behind?

Several recent books and movies talk about the rapture and a sudden disappearance of a mass of people. Does the Bible speak of a rapture and what does it say? We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. Moses wrote, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). God doesn't tell us everything, but what He does tell us is sufficient to lead us into an eternal relationship of joy and peace. God's Word is also sufficient to help us distinguish between the imaginary and the real, the true and the false. We're interested in what the Bible actually teaches rather than in speculating about the future.

Perhaps you've read books or seen movies about the end times. Words like "rapture" and phrases like "mark of the beast" and things like "left behind" have been sensationalized by Hollywood and popular religion. Scenes of sudden, mass disappearances and disasters challenge the imagination, but they mislead people about the second coming of the Lord. They say that He will first come invisibly, take away the righteous or rapture them, and seven years later come a third time visibly. According to them, this rapture will begin a seven year tribulation, and then the Lord will set up a thousand year kingdom.

They believe Jesus Christ will reign over the earth for a thousand years from a throne in Jerusalem and re-establish temple worship. At the beginning of the thousand years or millennium, the devil and his angels will be bound and peace will exist on the entire earth. At the end of the 1000 years, Satan will be released in order to raise an army against Jesus, but the Lord Jesus will destroy them. They say only then will the final judgment take place.

Our reading today comes from the words of Jesus found in The Gospel According To John 14:1-6. "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.' Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'" Aren't you grateful that we have a way to the Father through Jesus.

What does the Bible say will happen when Jesus comes again? When Jesus comes again on the last day, everyone will know it; there'll be no doubt about it! He will appear in the sky; He will raise the dead (that is, both the good and evil); He will take us all to the Judgment Seat; He'll destroy the earth and all its works; and He'll reward the righteous and condemn the unbelievers and ungodly. There are no seven years of tribulation or thousand year reign of Christ on earth from Jerusalem. When Jesus comes again, we'll be raised to face Him in the judgment! Let's look at each of these events.

First, when Jesus comes again, everybody will know it. Jesus' coming will be visible. Revelation 1:7 says, "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen." Not only will it be visible, it will also be announced by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. First Thessalonians 4:16 says, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." Those who have rejected Him will be surprised to find out that they were wrong. They will mourn that they had failed to serve Him and must face His wrath.

Second, when Jesus comes again, He will raise the dead. Some believe that there is a resurrection of the righteous dead at the rapture and then a thousand years later a resurrection of the wicked. But the Bible doesn't teach that there will be two earthly resurrections. The Lord Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, and those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). The Lord Jesus clearly states that everyone who is in the tomb will be raised, both the good and the evil, at the same hour! To put a thousand year period between these resurrections is misleading. When he was on trial, the apostle Paul made it clear that "there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked" (Acts 24:15). On that day, all who are in the tomb shall rise!

Third, Jesus does not have to wait until He comes again to set up His kingdom. His kingdom is already here on earth today. It is the church! The Lord Jesus said, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19). Jesus promised to build His church and to give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. We know Jesus did indeed build His church, and we see its existence in the book of Acts. One must wonder why Jesus built one thing and gave keys to another, unless the church and the kingdom of heaven are the same thing.

When Jesus died upon the cross, He died to purchase the church (Acts 20:28). It wasn't a substitute until the kingdom came, like some have suggested. Someone says, "Well Phil, how do you know that?" Let's think together. In Acts 20:28, Paul spoke of the church, "which He purchased with His own blood." Jesus shed His blood in order to purchase the church. In Revelation 5:9-10, the elders sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." The same blood of Christ that purchased the church also purchased the kingdom. The fact is the church that Jesus purchased when He died on the cross is the kingdom of God today! There's no future kingdom to be established one day; we are in the kingdom now!

How do we know that? Colossians 1:13-14 says, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us (both are in past tense) to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." The kingdom that grants us redemption and the forgiveness of sins is the church.

The apostle John also said that he was in the kingdom. Revelation 1:9 says, "I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Just as John was at that time suffering tribulation, he was at that time in the kingdom of God.

In fact, John wrote, "To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and has made us (past tense) to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5-6). The Lord who released us from our sins made us to be a kingdom (not kings as some versions say) but a "kingdom." And 1 Peter 2:9 says that we are a "royal priesthood." If we are not in a kingdom, how can we

be a “royal priesthood”? In Acts 2:30, Peter quoted God’s promise to David that He would seat one of his (that is David’s descendants) upon his throne and said that the resurrected Jesus Christ fulfilled that promise. He concluded in verse 36, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.” To be Christ, that is to be the Messiah, the son of David, He is to be the king of God’s people. To say there is no kingdom today is to say that Jesus is not yet king, but Peter said the resurrected Christ is sitting on His throne at the right hand of God.

We need to understand that Jesus already is sitting on the throne and already has full authority. After His resurrection Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). Jesus doesn’t lack any authority. Ephesians 1:20-21 says that God “raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” Jesus already has authority, and is already on His throne! Revelation 17:14 and Revelation 19:16 proclaim that He is now “King of kings” and “Lord of lords.” We don’t have to wait for the future to see Jesus reigning; He overcame Satan at the cross and has been sitting on His throne ever since.

Fourth, when Jesus comes again, He will destroy this world with intense heat. There is no seven year tribulation or thousand year kingdom afterward. Second Peter 3:7 says, “But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” It is misleading to say that Jesus will stay here longer. The Day of Judgment will see the complete destruction of this present world. Peter explains in verses 10 to 12, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. And since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements, (that is, the fundamental things of this earth), will melt with intense heat!” The same day that Jesus comes, the day of the Lord, is the day that the heavens and earth will be destroyed by burning and melt with intense heat.

Fifth, some say that when Jesus returns He’ll restore Old Testament temple worship and sacrifices to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ. The Lord’s Supper already commemorates the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We’re already remembering His body and His blood. There is no need for restoring Old Testament worship. That covenant and its ordinances came to an end according to Hebrews 10:1-10. There isn’t any need for a temple made with hands. Paul told the church in Corinth, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). The church is the temple of God today! Paul told the church at Ephesus, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22). God dwells in His people today, not in some physical building made with stones.

Sixth, some teach there is a 1000-year gap between the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment. But this is not what the Bible teaches. Second Thessalonians 1:7-9 teaches that “the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing

out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” When Jesus returns, there will be a judgment that very day! There is no gap between a supposed limited rapture and the second coming!

Seventh and last, we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. God makes it clear in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” We will all be judged by the Word of God found written in the books according to Revelation 20:11-12. God will judge us by our works. Those who have lived faithfully will enter heaven, and those who did not live faithfully, those who would not believe in Jesus, those who would not obey the gospel, those folks will be lost.

Someone says, “Well, Phil, haven't you read Revelation 20?” Oh yes, indeed I have. Revelation 20 says nothing about a rapture; you can read the whole chapter and it's not there. Revelation 20 says nothing about a bodily resurrection; it does talk about those in heaven who were resurrected, but nothing about a bodily resurrection. Here he talks about a unique resurrection at the throne of God. More than that, this chapter says nothing about Jerusalem being the new capital, not one thing in Revelation 20 about a new Jerusalem. Nor is there anything about a literal throne on earth, not one thing. There's not one thing in Revelation 20 about rebuilding the temple. In fact, no Scripture in the New Testament says that Christ will ever set foot on earth again, not a one. First Thessalonians 4:17 says that we will “meet the Lord in the air, and so shall always be with the Lord.” My question is this, are you ready to meet Him? Are you right with the Lord, or will you be lost on that day because you were disobedient or unbelieving? Oh, I hope you'll come to the Lord and get right with Him today.

Throughout history, many have made predictions as to the exact date of the return of Jesus Christ. Supposed prophets have suggested date after date. The Bible teaches Christ's kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day (that is, the day that heaven and earth pass) at that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Matthew 24:35-36). Later the Lord said to His disciples concerning His Second Coming: “It's not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His authority” (Acts 1:7). Both Peter and Paul make it clear that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (2 Peter 3:10 and 1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Even if we don't know when Jesus will return, we know that He'll fulfill His promise to return and judge us. Shouldn't we be prepared? Peter said, “Since all these things are to be destroyed (that is, the earth and all it's works) in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?” (2 Peter 3:11). If the Lord Jesus came today would He open the gates of heaven to you or would He reject you?

If there's any sin barrier between God and you, don't let another day pass until you've made it right with God. To become a Christian, believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Your faith and your love will lead you to repent of sin and turn to righteousness. Repentance corrects our behavior and our thinking. A penitent believer is willing to confess the Lord Jesus Christ before others and to be baptized, immersed in water. The Lord Jesus Himself said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). You can enter God's kingdom and be born again when you are in the waters of baptism. So we ask that you respond to God's love today. Won't you?

“Mark of the Beast”

Have you ever wondered what the Bible says about the mark of the beast? Today we're going to explore the book of Revelation and what it says about the mark of the beast. The Bible is a marvelous book with many wonderful promises. It teaches us everything that we need to know about God; and it does it through the law, through narratives, through poetry, through epistles, and through prophecy. The Bible is a wonderful library of books with many types of literature. The book of Revelation is prophetic, but it's written in a style called apocalyptic literature. Understanding the nature of the book helps answer many questions about its symbols.

Apocalyptic literature grew out of a need for the Jews to encourage one another during very difficult times. It usually tells the story of how things will go from bad to worse for the people of God, but how God intervenes to deliver his people. These are messages of hope for hard times that included a prophecy of persecution and sometimes death. On the surface they appear innocent and sometimes fanciful, but underneath they contain a valuable and meaningful message of hope.

The book of Revelation also tells of God's ultimate victory over the enemies of the church. Revelation 17:14 says, “They will make war on the Lamb (that is, Jesus), and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” As we study the book of Revelation, we find references to a dragon and to beasts that are symbolic references to the enemies of Jesus.

Our reading today comes from the book of Revelation, the revelation of Jesus Christ to John, chapter 1, verses 1 through 3. “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”

The use of apocalyptic literature was actually common among Jews in the centuries prior to the writing of the book of Revelation. Some believe there is some deep, dark secret behind every detail. Frankly, those who hold the futurist interpretation of Revelation have fostered this notion by associating hard-to-understand passages with twenty-first century events. Using the book to predict the events of this century shows little attention to what the book has to say for itself. Many who hold to the futurist view of Revelation have never investigated the background of the book itself. Your study of the background will bring great encouragement from this book.

Apocalyptic literature uses symbols. At the beginning of Revelation, the Bible says that the Lord Jesus “communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.” The Greek word for “communicated” means to make a message known by some sort of sign or figure, and that shows the symbolic character of the book. This should warn the reader not to expect a literal presentation of future history but a symbolic portrayal of that which “must soon take place.”

Verse 4 says the book of Revelation addressed and spoke specifically to the needs of the seven churches of Asia in the first century. He told them what they faced, things which “must soon take place” (verse 1); “for the time is at hand” (verse 3). This helps us to understand what the book would have meant to them at that time. To interpret the book futuristically, saying it is addressing twenty-first century America, robs us of being able to understand the book as the Lord delivered it. Unfortunately, much of what futurists today are saying the book of Revelation teaches is simply their fanciful speculations.

Why is the book of Revelation symbolic? Apocalyptic literature uses “code” language. In difficult times of war or persecution, the Jews used figurative codes to communicate things that they understood among themselves but the enemy or persecutors couldn’t understand. John, as a Jewish Christian, used this means to communicate to his brethren in the seven churches of Asia. If the persecutors found the apocalyptic message, they wouldn’t be able to understand it. This would help ensure safety for the people of God.

Objects and numbers in apocalyptic literature are often symbolic, not literal. Revelation itself gives us a clue to many of these symbols: stars are angels; lamps are spirits; the dragon is Satan; horns are kings or powers; heads are mountains, and the Woman is the Great City. One is the number of unity, two of strength, three of deity, four of the world, five of perfection (five fingers and toes), six of sin, seven of perfection, ten of completeness, and twelve of the organized people of God. Multiples indicate intensity; and since ten refers to completeness, the number thousand encompasses all. A myriad was an unlimited number. These symbols help us to see how the book should be understood figuratively, and not always literally.

In chapter twelve, Revelation introduces us to the devil who hates the people of God and wants to destroy them. In chapter thirteen, we’re introduced to the beast who has power from the dragon (the devil) to make war on Christians. Revelation 13:4-8 says, “And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’” The beast was given a mouth, uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also, it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. Authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.

What is this about? Rome was not only the center of government and wealth in its day, it was also a headquarters for religion. Most of the people believed in the existence of pagan gods; but their confidence was shaken when their gods failed to help them, so paganism was breaking down. Christianity, on the other hand, at the latter part of the first century was growing fast. This was a challenge to Rome because Roman law said the emperor was divine. Domitian, who reigned from 81 to 96 AD, was the Roman emperor when the book of Revelation was written. He demanded to be worshipped and to be called “Lord and God.” He was very power hungry to control the Senate, and the people, and the army.

For Christians, worshipping a man was idolatrous and a denial of their faith in Christ Jesus. To the Romans, the refusal to worship the emperor was an act of treason. Emperor worship was forced on Christians as a test of their loyalty to the State. Christians were called upon to perform the ceremonies of loyal service and worship to the emperor—the placing of a pinch of incense upon the altar. To refuse was treason; to agree was to prove that one was not a Christian. Some Christians saw this act as meaningless, so they performed it to escape punishment; but they were denying their faith. As the demand for emperor worship grew, Christians became guilty as criminals.

The emperor appointed an official body known as the praefectus urbi to enforce worship in each town. These were responsible for punishing people in various cities over a province. The group with the greatest authority was the concilia, composed of deputies sent from the various towns or divisions of a province. Their duty was to build images of the emperor and sponsor the state

religion. They forced the people to worship the emperor. When people refused to worship the emperor, they were identified and punished in various ways.

Revelation chapter 13 speaks of two beasts. The purpose of the second beast was to empower the first beast. Verses 15 to 18 say, “And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both great and small, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand and on the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.”

Many Christians refused to worship the emperor and were beheaded, exiled, or lost all their property. Some were tortured until they confessed “Lord Caesar.” One of the reasons this punishment fell heavy in Asia Minor is because this was a major stronghold of Christianity after 70 AD. All this helps us to better understand and appreciate the encouragement the book of Revelation gives to the seven churches of Asia.

Revelation shows that even so great a power as Rome was doomed to be overthrown. In the end, the kingdom of God would triumph, and Christ will reign supreme. Revelation presents a ringing call to maintain loyalty to the faith at all costs, even in the face of martyrdom. The Lord Jesus told the church at Smyrna, “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

What then, is the mark of the beast? The book of Revelation describes a time when everyone, including Christians, were commanded to worship the Roman emperor, who claimed to be a god. Offering a sacrifice to the emperor and calling him “Lord” were considered patriotic gestures as well as religious ones; and those who refused were suspect, considered disloyal, or even traitors. Undoubtedly, the Romans identified those who had complied with the order. They probably gave those who made the required sacrifice a certificate, and only those who could show the certificate were allowed to buy or sell or conduct business.

The mark is said to be placed “on their right hand and on their foreheads.” Perhaps that only signifies “in a conspicuous place.” Or it may reflect a comparison with the Jewish custom of wearing phylacteries. Moses had commanded concerning the words of the law, “that you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deuteronomy 6:8). Of the Pharisees, Jesus said, “They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments” (Matthew 23:5). So it was fairly common at least for Jews to wear a “mark” that indicated their relationship to God. The “mark of the beast” would stand in contrast to that.

Revelation 13:18 says, “Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six” (666). Many students of Revelation believe this beast is Nero and that 666 is one of the indicators of that. Nero was the first of the Roman emperors known to be involved in persecuting the church. Nero’s persecution seems to have been confined to Rome itself and it is difficult to find evidence that it was extended vigorously into the provinces, such as Asia, to whom Revelation is addressed. Due to its ferocity and violence, however, it continues to be remembered with horror, and the man himself was “bestly” enough for the figure to fit.

There was also a popular myth that Nero would be revived, and that at least another emperor would have his same vindictive spirit. Others believed that he didn’t really die and would later on

return with an army to reestablish his reign. Many see a reference to these popular ideas in the fact that the beast from the sea received a “deadly wound” which “was healed” (Revelation 13:3). They assume, then, that Domitian was the revived Nero, who died many years before. This is a possibility, but by no means certain.

Some interpret the number 666 by counting letters as numbers. They find a word or a person that the letters of their name add up to 666. Greek, like other classical languages, has no symbols for numbers, so letters serve that purpose. Some find that the name Nero, and others find that the name of Caesar would add up to 666. Interpreters through the years have suggested hundreds of names that people interpreted as the beast whose number was 666. We must realize that identifying this number with one individual is highly speculative.

A better approach for understanding 666 lies in the symbolism of the numbers themselves. As we mentioned earlier, seven in Revelation has the symbolic significance of perfection, completeness or even deity. Our text says 666 is the number of the persecuting power, and it’s “the number of a man.” So, seven is the number of deity; but six falls short of seven and refers to the number of humanity.

Seven is the number of perfection; six the number of that which falls short of perfection. Six-hundred-sixty-six may suggest, then, that this beast is not divine and will not successfully complete the task of the destruction of the church. He is not “holy, holy, holy,” as is our God. He is not seven or divine, but six and human. He falls short of being the “god” that he claims to be. He is not worthy of worship and will not endure.

Later chapters in the book of Revelation reveal the fall of Rome and the victory of the Lord Jesus and His saints. Just as the dragon of Revelation 12 was defeated, so Satan and all that follow him will be defeated. The Lord Jesus will overcome because He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Is he your Lord? Whose side are you standing on?

We all face choices. While we do not face persecution as the early Christians did, we do decide whether to follow the powers in this world or to follow the Lord Jesus Christ; that’s a big decision. We don’t have pagan idols or emperor worship, but we still have the challenges of the world. The world still dislikes you and me for loving God. First John 2:15-17 says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

Satan’s ultimate agenda is not just to get you to sin, but to keep you from worshiping and devoting your life to God. Satan will use anything to accomplish his purpose. Those who follow Satan will obey him and they’ll be enslaved by him. God knows those who belong to Him and those who belong to the world. Second Timothy 2:19 says, “But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.’”

The promise of the book of Revelation is that those who hold fast to the Lord Jesus will overcome in the end and be blessed. Are you standing with the Lord or with the world? You are deciding where you will spend eternity. To become a Christian, confess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, repent of every sin and turn to righteousness, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you’re baptized, you leave the domain of this world and you come into the kingdom of God.