

Christ in Prophecy

Revelation 2: Chapters 4-7

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: The book of Revelation says that during the first three and a half years of the Tribulation, one-half of humanity will die. Why would a loving God allow such carnage? Stay tuned.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings to all of you in the name of Jesus our Blessed hope. I'm Dave Reagan, Senior Evangelist for Lamb & Lion Ministries. And I am blessed to have two great colleagues with me today Dennis Pollock, my teaching and preaching associate, and Don McGee, the founder, director and evangelist of Crown and Sickle Ministries in Amite, Louisiana. Now last week we began a journey through the book of Revelation, covering it chapter by chapter.

Dennis Pollock: We looked at the first three chapters and saw that, contrary to what most people think, it is possible for any Christian to understand the book of Revelation. As Dave said last week, "The book of Revelation is not difficult to understand; it is difficult to believe." If you will believe it for its plain sense meaning, you will understand it.

Don McGee: We also saw that the basic purpose of the first three chapters was to encourage the Church, then and now, to persevere and remain faithful to God's Word while waiting expectantly for the Lord's return.

Dennis Pollock: Let's go now to Dave's video program, "Revelation Revealed," and watch his overview of chapters 4 through 7. We will then return here for a discussion of issues raised in those chapters.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: With chapter 4 the focus shifts from the church to God the Almighty one. A door opens in the heavens and John is suddenly transported "in the spirit" from earth to heaven where he is ushered into the Throne Room of God. I believe John's catching up to heaven is a symbolic type of the rapture of the church. Notice verse 1: "After these things, I looked and behold, a door standing open in the heavens, and the first voice which I heard, like the sound of

a trumpet speaking with me, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.'" A door opens in the heavens, and John is taken up to heaven from earth. The door opens again in Revelation 19:11 and through it comes Jesus on a white horse returning to earth, and behind Him comes His bride, the Church. The clear implication is that the Church will be in Heaven with Jesus during the Tribulation. In this regard, I think it is significant that the church, which is the focus of chapters 2 and 3, is not mentioned again by name in the book until Revelation 22, verse 16. There is mention of "saints," but I believe these are the people who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior during the Tribulation.

The blessing John was given of seeing the throne room of God is a very special one that few other people have enjoyed. In fact, only five other persons are reported in the scriptures as having seen God's throne. They are the oral prophet Micaiah, the major prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, and of course, the apostle Paul. What John saw was similar to the reports given by these other men.

He sees blazing light emanating from the throne. There is a rainbow encircling the throne, testifying to the faithfulness of God in keeping His promises. He sees seven lamps of fire before the throne, which he says represent the seven-fold nature of the Holy Spirit. He also sees 24 mysterious elders kneeling before the throne, clothed in white garments. They have golden crowns which they are presenting to the Lord. They could very well be representatives of the redeemed, 12 representing the Old Testament saints, perhaps the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 representing New Testament saints, perhaps the 12 apostles. He also sees "four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind." Each has a different face, one is like a lion, another like a calf, the third like a man, the fourth like an eagle. These are probably the seraphim which Isaiah saw in his vision of the heavenly throne room. These appear to be representatives of God's creation, and their role appears to be guardians of the throne and they appear to be worship leaders.

Everyone John sees around God's throne appears to be caught up in worshiping the father. They are singing praises to God. Consider the song recorded in verse 8: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the almighty, who was and is and who is to come." Notice the three attributes of God that are emphasized in this song; His holiness, His power, and His eternal nature. The purpose is to encourage the Church during any time it is caught up in suffering and persecution. It is intended to remind the church that God is on his throne, still hears prayers, still answers prayers, and that he still performs miracles. In short, God is in control, and He has the wisdom and the power to orchestrate all the evil of man and Satan to the triumph of Jesus Christ. What a comforting thought!

As chapter 5 opens, the focus shifts back to Jesus. He appears as the Worthy Lamb.

In the midst of the glorious scene of worship, which John describes in chapter 4, he suddenly notices a little scroll in the right hand of God, a scroll that is sealed with seven seals. A mighty angel asks, "Who is worthy to open it?" John is very concerned about that scroll because he knows what it is. It is the title deed of the earth. That title deed is important because this earth was created for man. God gave man dominion over it, but mankind lost that dominion to Satan when Adam and Eve sinned against God.

One of the reasons Jesus died on the cross was to restore the earth to the children of God. That's what He meant in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, "The meek shall inherit the earth." He was quoting a promise made in the Old Testament in Psalm 37 Jesus paid the price on the cross to redeem this promise. It will be fulfilled when He returns. So John is concerned about the earth's title deed, especially because no one in heaven seems worthy to open the scroll. But he is suddenly told that his concern is unfounded because there is one who is worthy, He is the "Lion of the tribe of Judah." John turns to look at the lion, and what does he see? A little bloody lamb! Of course what he sees is Jesus Christ who is both the Lamb and the Lion. He came the first time as the lamb to be sacrificed for the sins of the world, He is going to return as the Lion of Judah to pour out the wrath of God upon those who have rejected the grace, mercy and love of God. When Jesus steps up to the throne and he takes that scroll, all of heaven breaks forth in a mighty song: "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. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." Notice the promise that the redeemed, "will reign upon the earth."

Those who deny a future reign of Jesus try to argue that He is reigning now through his saints, the Church. But if that is true, then He is doing a very poor job, because all the nations of the world are in revolt against Him, and the Church is caught up in apostasy. Furthermore, the Word says that when Jesus reigns, "The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." And no such condition exists today. The heavenly host is clearly singing about a time yet future when the redeemed will reign with Jesus upon the earth. Again, this is the reiteration of an Old Testament promise found in Daniel chapter 7. In that chapter Daniel tells us that he saw a night vision in which the Son of Man was presented to God the Father and was given dominion over "all the peoples, nations, and men of every language." He then adds that "The saints of the highest one will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever."

Chapter 6 begins with the Lamb opening the first seal of the little scroll. This action launches the first series of judgments from God's throne, the seal judgments. And from this point to chapter 19, the book is dedicated to describing a seven-year period of time called the Tribulation. Throughout these 13 chapters, Jesus is the wrathful one, pouring out the wrath of God on those who have rejected God's love, grace and mercy. As chapter 6 opens, the Tribulation period

begins, and we get a foretaste of what it's going to be like, a period of absolutely unparalleled horror. Four horsemen go forth. The one on the white horse is the Antichrist who appears as an imitator of Jesus who will return at the end of the Tribulation, also riding on a white horse. The Antichrist goes forth to conquer the world.

The other four horses represent war, famine, and death. One-fourth of the earth dies in this initial pouring out of the seal judgments. That's one and a half billion people in today's terms! Many of those who die are those who are converted to Jesus during this tribulation period. They are martyred for Jesus Christ, and these spirits are portrayed as being in heaven under an altar crying out to God, "How long O Lord, holy and true, will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

With the opening of the sixth seal, we come across our first flash-forward to the end of the tribulation. It's as if God is answering these martyrs by assuring them that He is going to pour out His wrath and that the evil people of this earth will ultimately be destroyed. And so we get a flash-forward to the end of the Tribulation, and we begin to see how terrible that Day of the Lord will be when Jesus returns. The stars fall from the sky; the sky is split apart like a scroll; and the greatest earthquake in all of history occurs. The political leaders of the earth crawl into caves and cry out for the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them because the wrath of the Lamb of God is so terribly great.

Chapter 6 ends with a question: "Who is able to stand" before the wrath of the Lamb? Chapter 7 begins by answering that question. Before we get to the answer, let me note that chapter 7 is the first of several parenthetical passages. These are passages that interrupt the action in order to insert a word of encouragement to the reader. Chapter 7 assures the reader that there are two groups, a group of Jews and a group of Gentiles, who will be able to endure the Wrath of the lamb.

The first is a group of 144,000 born again Jewish servants who are sealed of God. They are probably going to be converted at the very beginning of the Tribulation by the Lord's supernatural destruction of the Russian army upon the hills of Israel, an event that is described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. It says here in verse 3 that they will be "bond-servants" of God. I think that means they will go forth as messengers of God and will preach the entire period of the Tribulation as God's missionaries to the world. You see, the purpose of the Tribulation is not primarily punishment. The purpose is to bring people to repentance. According to 2nd Peter 3:9, God does not wish that any should perish, but that all should be brought to repentance. There is going to be a great harvest of souls during the Tribulation.

Some people will undoubtedly come to the Lord in response to the Rapture. Others will repent and accept the Lord in response to the terror of the Tribulation

judgments. Others will be brought to the Lord by the preaching of the 144,000. Others will respond to the message of the two special witnesses of God that we will read about in chapter 11. And finally, in chapter 14 we are told there's going to be an angel who will be sent out to preach the Gospel at the end of the Tribulation to every creature on the face of the earth. Most men will reject the Gospel, but many will be saved, and most of those will be martyred. So the second group we see in chapter 7, beginning with verse 9, is a great host of people from every nation, all tribes, all peoples, all tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes. John asks who they are, and he is told in verse 14, "These are the ones who come out of the great Tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." I believe these are the ones who are converted by the preaching of the 144,000. They are murdered by the Antichrist and by his agents.

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: Well gentlemen, let's get into a discussion of these particular chapters, 4-7, and I'd like to start it off by asking you about what you think the fundamental purpose of chapters 4 and 5 are, those chapters that picture John in heaven.

Don McGee: I think its important Dave I think that this is a preface for everything that's gonna happen beginning in chapter 6 and following. The readers of that day and I think the readers of today need to understand that this is not a cosmic explosion out of control. What's gonna happen? I think people need to understand that God is still in control of this situation, He's still on his throne in Heaven and He's still overruling the affairs of earth. Now, that doesn't mean that he's picking and choosing details, things that people are going to do on the face of the earth, but it does mean that He orchestrates that he overrules and that He channels things to bring about the accomplishment of His will. A lot of people back in that day, if they did not understand what's in these chapters, would have thought that this was a world amuck. That God was not in control that the old saying is that the animals were running the zoo kind of thing, the prisoners were in charge of the prison.

Dr. Reagan: Well not only back in those days but I believe today, you know the book of Revelation is relevant to people in all ages and often today I have to go back and read this to assure myself when I see what looks like the bad guys winning in the world. I have to go back and realize God has the wisdom and power to orchestrate all the evil of mankind to the triumph of Jesus Christ.

Don McGee: That's right, and the kind of work we do, we get questions like that all the time. What's going on in the world today? After 9/11 and some of the other things, what is happening? And the answer to that is that God is overruling in the affairs of man, and people need to understand that. Without that there is no

hope. If we had the hope in the United Nations and any other government to make things right on this earth, then we would be hopeless people. It would be difficult to sleep at night.

Dr. Reagan: Any other point you see in chapters 4 and 5.

Don McGee: Yes, and I think one of the greatest things that we can see out of this is that this whole epicenter is the earth. This battle is not about something that is in some cosmic place out there out in space. This is happening on this earth and that's important. Salvation, Dave, when Jesus redeemed this world it wasn't just the souls of men. Jesus came and He died for the souls of men, certainly, but He also came so that he might redeem this earth. This earth is under a curse and God did not intend it to be that.

Dr. Reagan: Well, originally, He intended for man to have dominion, and when Man sinned, Satan stole that dominion, and right now there's a cosmic battle over that dominion. And Jesus won it back on the cross, but He has not yet taken it which He will do when He returns.

Don McGee: And that gives me a lot of hope to know that this thing is not only just a spiritual thing, but it also has reference and application to the physical world, this planet on which we live.

Dr. Reagan: What about you Dennis?

Dennis Pollock: Well, you know, when I read 4 and 5, one of the things it reminds me of is a trip I had to the Six Flags Amusement Park some time ago. Now you probably don't have any clue why I would say that.

Dr. Reagan: No I don't, I don't have a clue Dennis.

Don McGee: Your kids took you right?

Dennis Pollock: Well, yes as a matter of fact, but let me tell you about it. We went on a ride that took us high above the whole amusement park and it's one of those slow rides where you sit in it kind of like a ski lift and you just ride above everything. And as we went over an arena that had at that time the Batman Show, we were able to see the whole thing, we were able to see the front where Batman and his cohorts and Joker and all those guys are having it out, but we were able to look behind the scenes and we were able to see the crew and all the little stuff they were doing to make this thing happen. We had a behind the scenes view and it was fascinating just to watch how they were making it all happen. That's what Revelation 4 and 5 is really doing for us, it's taking us behind the scenes. What the world is gonna see is perhaps nuclear war and all kind of death and destruction, plagues and misery. Behind the scenes, there's a lot going on in Heaven and we're seeing that. One of the things we see behind

the scenes is worship. In fact this is a theme that runs all through the book of Revelation. It is a tremendous book of worship. So you have this incredible dichotomy, where on the earth there's destruction there's misery there's death there's judgment. In heaven there's peace, there's worship, there's praise, and they're saying, "Oh God you are worthy to be worshiped because your judgments are being manifested." So this is an incredible chapter and Revelation does this it takes us from the earth to heaven back to the earth, to heaven, and we're seeing what has to happen at the beginning, that the first things before the Tribulation actually kicks off.

Dr. Reagan: That's a great illustration Dennis and I appreciate it. Now, you mentioned about the kicking off of the Tribulation. Well, this is preparing us for us. It starts in chapter six and suddenly we are told that one fourth of humanity dies in the initial plagues, in today's terms that would be one and a half billion people, in this initial episode. Now, why would a loving God allow such carnage? How do you explain to somebody?

Don McGee: I don't think that He's a...God is not the orchestrator of this carnage, He's allowing it.

Dr. Reagan: Yes.

Don McGee: And what He's doing is He is allowing mankind to come to full fruition in its independence and its rebellion against God.

Dr. Reagan: In effect, He just takes his restraining hand off and says, okay, let sin multiply.

Don McGee: You guys wanted it, it's yours.

Dennis Pollock: But I think you have to be careful because one thing you do see throughout Revelation is that God is very much directing the carnage. He may not be causing it, but you see an angel blowing the shofar, a trumpet, and judgment falls. An angel taking a bowl of wrath and pouring it out on the earth and terrible destruction happens. Jesus Christ the Lamb of God unrolling a scroll and breaking a seal and a terrible judgment happens. So, it's not like God is up there ringing His hands saying, "Oh what terrible things are happening, I wish I could do something." He's very much involved, and in a sense He's like a band director, even though it's done through His allowing it, He's still controlling it, He's still directing it.

Dr. Reagan: And what is the purpose of it?

Dennis Pollock: Well, I think there are a number of purposes I think one of the purposes is to bring as many people to repentance as He can. I mean, that's ultimately God's great desire, is to bring people to Christ. You know, as I teach

on Revelation, one of things I say is that we see the love of God in this book and some people say, "Well where do you see the love of God?" Well John sees this huge multitude of people so large you can't even count them.

Dr. Reagan: A multitude that's been saved.

Dennis Pollock: Yeah, he's asking who are these people? And he says I don't know who are they? Well these are the ones who've washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. But they've come out of the great Tribulation, so even in the midst of all this carnage and misery, the Holy Spirit is still wooing people to Christ and I think that's a big part of it.

Dr. Reagan: To me that's the fundamental purpose of the whole Tribulation, it's not just for God to punish those who have rebelled against Him and rejected His grace, mercy and love, but for him to bring people to the end of themselves so that they will receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. I think even when God pours out His wrath the fundamental purpose is for salvation.

Don McGee: This points out one of the major characteristics of God anyway. Grace is not something that is associated only with Matthew through Revelation. Grace is something that is associated with Genesis right on through Revelation. God has been a God of grace all through the Bible and it doesn't stop when He pours out his wrath. He is a God of grace even then allowing people to repent, those who would.

Dennis Pollock: Yeah and there's a Scripture that says in wrath remember mercy and that's what's happening, in the midst of all the wrath He is still remembering mercy, He is drawing people to himself.

Dr. Reagan: What a God, what an awesome God we serve, that's wonderful. One other thing and that is that in this particular section of Scripture we have one of the most intriguing and abused of all passages and that is in Revelation chapter 7:1-8, where we have the mention of the 144,000. Now the Jehovah's witnesses claim to be the 144,000, the Moonies claim to be the 144,000, everybody and his dog claims to be the 144,000. Who is the 144,000?

Dennis Pollock: Well, I think its Texas preachers, actually.

Don McGee: Well, the Jehovah's witnesses ran into a problem whenever their group got to be over a 144,000.

Dennis Pollock: Yeah, they went over didn't they?

Don McGee: They generate theology is what they do, but the answer to that is very simple. It's what God says they are, they're the Jews, 12,000 from each tribe, 144,000. You do not have to be a heavy theologian to figure this one out.

Dr. Reagan: You know Don I went through all of the commentaries I could find one time on the book of Revelation and looked at this passage. And I found that about 80% of them said this is talking about the Church. And I thought, "What would God have to do to convince us he's talking about 144,000 Jews? He names them by tribe, I mean, He says they're Jews. What do you have to do to convince somebody he's talking about Jews?"

Don McGee: If you believe that God is through with the Jew, then you can make this mean just about anything.

Dr. Reagan: Oh well yeah, then it cannot be Jews.

Don McGee: That's right, that's right.

Dr. Reagan: And this is the viewpoint that has dominated mainline Christendom for 2,000 years. God washed His hands of the Jews, 70 AD, has no purpose left for them, therefore, why would He be doing anything with a 144,000 Jews in the end times. This must be some symbol for something and it's a symbol for the Church.

Don McGee: And in the process of making it a must-be then they have all kind of concoctions that they come up with about who these people are, doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

Dennis Pollock: Well, if your theology precludes you from taking the Scripture at what it says, you better change your theology.

Don McGee: That's right.

Dennis Pollock: It comes down to that.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah, well, you know I grew up in a church that taught over and over that there's not one verse in the Bible that implies that Jesus will ever put His foot on this earth again. And when I found Zechariah 14, when I was about 12 years old, it was very clear, I mean a 12 year old can understand it, it says Jesus coming back to Jerusalem. When His foot touches the Mount of Olives it's gonna split in half, He'll speak a supernatural world, the Antichrist's forces will be destroyed, and verse 9, on that day He'll become King over all the earth. I took that to my pastor and I said, you say there's not a verse that says He'll ever put His foot on the earth again, what about this? And he looked at it and he read it and he read it and read it and finally he looked up at me and he put his finger in my face and he said, son, I don't know what this means, but I'll guarantee you one thing, it doesn't mean what it says. Well that's what you get into when you've got to conform the Scripture to your preconceived ideas.

Don McGee: The term they like to use is apocalyptic, and that is a catch-all phrase for anything either they do not understand or they don't want to believe.

Dennis Pollock: And basically it gets you off the hook because you don't have to try to figure anything out you can just throw it into that big lump category of apocalyptic and say who knows?

Don McGee: And who's gonna question you on it.

Dr. Reagan: That's right, thanks fellows, appreciate your discussion.

Part 4

Dr. Reagan: My friends, when Jesus returns He is going to return either as your blessed hope or your holy terror. That's because the Bible teaches that God deals with sin in one of two ways, either wrath or grace.

Don McGee: Listen to these words from the sermon by John the Baptist taken from John 3:36 "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains on him."

Dennis Pollock: The choice is grace or wrath and the choice is yours. If you've never received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then you're a sinner under the wrath of God. If you'd like to move from wrath to grace, then you need to confess to God that you are a sinner, repent of those sins and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Dr. Reagan: Let me give you an illustration of what Jesus did for you on the cross. Back in pioneer days when the wagon trains were going across the central plains of our nation, there were many things the wagon masters feared. They feared things like dried up water holes, blizzards, plagues, Indian attacks. One particularly fearsome thing was the prairie fire. The grass was often three to four feet high and very dry and it could easily catch fire from a lightning strike. Now if the wagon master saw smoke on the horizon he knew he had only moments to act because the prairie fires often traveled at the rate of 60 miles an hour. But, despite the danger, there is no recorded loss of a wagon trail to one of these fires, that's because there was a sure way of guarding the wagons. Here's what the wagon master would do. He would go to the opposite side of the wagons from where the fire was coming and he would set the grass on fire and let it burn away. When it had burned away sufficiently he would take the wagons and circle them in the burned out area and wait for the prairie fire to arrive. And when it arrived it would of course just simply burn around the wagons and move on. In like manner, when Jesus was hanging on the cross, every sin you and I have ever committed and ever will commit was placed upon Him as our substitute and the wrath we deserve was poured out upon Him.

Don McGee: That means that when you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior you step into the area where the wrath of God has already fallen and you become immune to God's wrath.

Dennis Pollock: Again, let me ask you, are you under wrath or grace? It's a terrible thing to be under the wrath of God but it's a glorious thing to be a subject of His amazing grace. To move from wrath to grace, to step into that area where the wrath has already fallen, confess to God that you're a sinner, repent of those sins, and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Don McGee: And when you do that, be sure to seek out a Bible-believing church where you can witness your faith in Jesus publicly in water baptism.

Dr. Reagan: Well, that's it for this week folks, please be back with us next week as we take a look at chapters eight through twelve of Revelation. Until then, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries saying, "Look up, be watchful, for our redemption is drawing near."

End of Program