

REVELATION

Start Here.

Apocalypse is a Greek word that means “uncovering” or “disclosure” or “revealing” (from which we get our English word revelation). 2,000 years ago, near the end of the first century, a man named John was on the Mediterranean island of Patmos on a Sunday when he received an apocalyptic vision that he later wrote down and circulated among the churches of the wealthy Roman province of Asia Minor (the western part of modern-day Turkey).

The book of Revelation is that letter.

Revelation is a notoriously difficult book of the Bible, and its difficulty comes from the fact that John is writing as a Jewish-Christian prophet and sees his vision as the culmination of the entire tradition of biblical prophecy; this means his vision is replete with allusions to and images from the Old Testament, allusions and images with which we are not familiar.

The good news is that once you take the time to understand how John’s vision connects to the Old Testament, and once you pay attention to how the vision is structured, Revelation actually begins to make sense!

Revelation is powerful not just because of the amazing information it provides, but also because of the *way* it provides that information. Revelation is an invitation *to see reality differently*; to borrow a phrase from a recent movie, it is a “red pill” that John has given us, and if we take it, nothing will be the same afterward.

So, though the swirling images John gives us can be difficult to understand without studied reflection, be aware that John wants us to *experience* them just as much as *understand* them, so that through the experience, we might be changed.

When Dorothy gets back from Oz, Kansas is never the same.

Reading Revelation is like entering Oz. (Except that it’s not make-believe.)

Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we say:

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

The question Revelation is concerned with is:

“How will this happen? How will the Kingdom come?”

And, along with it, John’s vision will give us insight into this question:

“What is the church’s role in the bringing in of the Kingdom?”

Revelation is difficult not only because of its obscure imagery, but also because of the form John’s vision takes: sometimes it moves linearly, and sometimes it moves cyclically, circling back to show you the same thing from a different angle or with more information revealed.

In other words, sometimes the vision proceeds like this:

$A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$, etc.

But other times it moves like this:

$A \rightarrow B^1 \rightarrow C \rightarrow B^2 \rightarrow D \rightarrow B^3$

Where B^1 , B^2 , and B^3 are all different ways of expressing the same reality.

(This is the case, for example, with the sequences of 7 judgments: the 7 seals, the 7 trumpets, and the 7 bowls are all about the same thing—God’s judgment—but John’s vision gives us different insight each time it circles back to the topic of judgment.)

I tell you this to encourage you to pay close attention to the details of the vision, because the vision contains clues and markers to help us find our way and understand what we’re being told. Expect switchbacks and turns and recaps along the way!

Like the rest of the Bible (only maybe more so), Revelation reveals through repeated, attentive reading. Accordingly, I’ve parceled out the readings at a slow pace; each particular day’s passage is short and very manageable and it is my hope therefore that you’ll have time to go back and re-read a previous day or days and see how it all connects. (Aside from January 1, the readings are assigned on weekdays only—all the more reason to take your time and read and re-read on the weekends.)

Each day I’ve written some commentary to go with the reading; the commentary is NOT the point—John’s words are the point—but I offer the commentary to help you get something out of what you’ve read each day. Some days I’ve interspersed the commentary in the midst of the reading, and some days the reading is given in its entirety all at once.

There is much more to say about Revelation than I could fit in this little reading guide; I will be preaching through Revelation from January to Easter 2023, and also teaching a series of Bible studies in that same period on the following Wednesdays:

January 4
January 18
February 1
February 15
March 1
March 22.

The Bible studies will be held at 6:30 PM in the Sanctuary of Asbury Church and are for all-ages. (They will also be livestreamed at www.asburytulsa.org.)

Revelation is the last book of the Bible, and it is the capstone of the entire biblical story. It's a beautiful, dazzling, piercing book, and if you're willing to work through it, I'm going to make two bold promises:

1. You will come to understand and *love it*;
2. You won't ever be the same.

Let's go.



✝ Andrew Forrest
Asbury Church

P.S. Want to receive these daily readings and commentary each weekday morning in your inbox? Sign up on my website: www.andrewforrest.org

ORDER FOR DAILY PRAYER

Have a group or class that meets in the morning?
Feel free to use the order below to provide some structure.

1. GREETING

This is the day that the Lord has made!

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:24

2. THE INVITATORY

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

O God, make speed to save us;

O Lord, make haste to help us;

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

3. OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you, no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

4. SCRIPTURE LESSON

The day's scripture is read and briefly expounded.

5. PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory

For ever and ever. Amen

6A. MORNING PRAYER

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day, and we ask that you drive far from

us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

6B. EVENING PRAYER

O God, the life of all who live, the light of the faithful, the strength of those who labor, and the repose of the dead: We thank you for the blessings of the day that is past, and humbly ask for your protection through the coming night and so thereby bring us in safety to the morning hours. Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all this we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

7. CLOSING BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace;
And now may the blessing of God Almighty,
The Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
Be with us and remain with us now and forever. Amen.

OCCASIONAL PRAYERS

I have included below some occasional prayers that you may find helpful. Often at a birth or a death I find myself fumbling for the right words to say, and these occasional prayers have been a help to me. (I'd suggest copying to your phone the ones that seem most useful to you, so you can easily text them to others when the need arises.)

A GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

or

Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the Universe, for you give us food to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR JOY IN GOD'S CREATION

O heavenly Father, you have filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works; that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR OUR NATION

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure conduct. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom, in thy Name, we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all of which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A BIRTHDAY

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servant *N.* as *he* begins another year. Grant that *he* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *his* trust in your goodness all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A CHILD, OR FOR A BIRTHDAY

Watch over your child *N.*, O Lord, as *his* days increase; bless *him* and guide *him*, and keep *him* unspotted from the world. Strengthen *him* when *he* stands; comfort *him* when discouraged or sorrowful; raise *him* up if *he* falls; and in *his* heart may your peace which passes understanding abide all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A MARRIAGE OR ANNIVERSARY

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send your blessing upon these your servants [as they begin another year], that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

ON SUNDAYS

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side. We thank you for setting us at tasks that demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments that satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he conquered death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom. Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.

FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH

We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers; for the wonder of your creatures, large and small; and for all the loveliness that surrounds us. We praise you for these good gifts, and pray that we may safeguard them for our posterity. Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honor and glory of your Name, now and for ever. Amen.

FOR OUR ENEMIES

O God, the Creator of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you in Jesus Christ; in whose Name we pray. Amen.

FOR THE RECOVERY OF A SICK PERSON

O God, the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers: Mercifully accept our prayers, and grant to your servant *N.* the help of your power, that *his* sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

AT THE TIME OF DEATH

Rest eternal grant to *N.*, O Lord; and may *his* soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection. Amen.

FOR DESIRING GOD

O God, grant that we may desire you, and desiring you seek you, and seeking you find you, and finding you be satisfied in you forever. Amen.

LET'S GO!

We are going to ease our way into Revelation by working through some preparatory readings this first week. It's going to be great. Let's go!

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1 PSALM 1

- ¹ Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.
- ³ He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
- ⁴ The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
- ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶ for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.
-

Psalm 1 says that the person who reads the Bible over and over and thinks about it constantly will be blessed.

Today is the day to make a clean break with the past—on the first day of the year, anything is possible.

What is your plan to become a Bible reader? Where will you sit each morning?

Make a plan now to get the most out of these coming months. Reading Revelation is a challenge, but if you just *read it*, slowly and deliberately, you will get much more out of it than you put into it.

P.S. If you don't have Psalm 1 memorized, now's the time to start. If you do, take time today to write it out by hand.

MONDAY, JANUARY 2
ISAIAH 6:1-6

6 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

John—the author of Revelation—understands himself as the last and culmination of God’s prophets, and a key part of his vision (Revelation 4-5) is when he is taken and shown the heavenly throne room. Isaiah was an Old Testament prophet who lived centuries earlier (around 700 BC), but he also was given a vision of the heavenly throne room. In his vision there are strange spiritual beings constantly praising God, and when Isaiah hears the voice of God, he feels utterly unworthy and afraid.

One of the messages of Revelation is how heaven will come to earth, how the Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

It’s easy to get caught up in today’s headlines and controversies and to forget that we don’t see the whole picture. What would it mean for you to see things from God’s perspective? That’s what the great prophetic visions give us.

That’s the perspective that the great prophetic visions give us.

Don’t be discouraged today. The bad things don’t win in the end.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 3
EZEKIEL 2

2 And he said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.”² And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. ³ And he said to me, “Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. ⁴ The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ ⁵ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them. ⁶ And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions. Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. ⁷ And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house.

⁸ “But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.” ⁹ And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. ¹⁰ And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

Ezekiel was another Old Testament prophet whose life and work influenced John of Revelation. In Revelation 10, John will be given a scroll to eat, and the contents of that scroll will be the message of Revelation. Here, Ezekiel is given a spiritual vision that he is supposed to share with Israel, and though there are hard parts to the message, he is supposed to share the entire message, regardless of how it is received.

One of the themes of Revelation is the importance of truth, and how God’s people must be committed to truth no matter what.

What would it look like for you to live no lies today?

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4

DANIEL 7:1-14

7 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. **2** Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. **3** And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. **4** The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. **5** And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' **6** After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. **7** After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. **8** I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS REIGNS

⁹ "As I looked,

thrones were placed,

and the Ancient of Days took his seat;

his clothing was white as snow,

and the hair of his head like pure wool;

his throne was fiery flames;

its wheels were burning fire.

¹⁰ A stream of fire issued

and came out from before him;

a thousand thousands served him,

and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;

the court sat in judgment,

and the books were opened.

¹¹ "I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

THE SON OF MAN IS GIVEN DOMINION

¹³ "I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

Daniel is another Old Testament prophet whose vision was important to John. Yes, it's strange for us to read today, but the overall message isn't that difficult to understand:

- There are rival governments and powers that are like beasts;
- God is on his throne and will judge the earth;
- And a mysterious person called "The Son of Man" will come on the clouds and will assume his place next to God, and he will have dominion over all creation.

Daniel goes on to wonder about the vision and ask questions about it, but he's told that the secret part of God's plan isn't for him to know:

⁸ I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" ⁹ He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end." [Daniel 12:8-9]

Good news! With Revelation, the time has come and God's plan has been revealed.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 5

ZECHARIAH 4

A VISION OF A GOLDEN LAMPSTAND

4 And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. ² And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. ³ And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” ⁴ And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” ⁵ Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” ⁶ Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. ⁷ Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”

⁸ Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ⁹ “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. ¹⁰ For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

“These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.” ¹¹ Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” ¹² And a second time I answered and said to him, “What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?” ¹³ He said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” ¹⁴ Then he said, “These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”

Zechariah is yet another Old Testament prophet whose work is important to John. (We’ll see this especially in Revelation 11.) He prophesied around the time when the exiles from Babylon were returning to rebuild Jerusalem. Today, I just want you to notice 2 things:

1. Make a note of the imagery of the lampstands and the olive trees and the anointed ones. It will be important later!
2. Note that the Lord tells Zechariah that it won't be through military might or political power that God's purposes will be realized, but through the strength of the Spirit!

Don't be discouraged at the headlines today—God's way wins in the end.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 6
EZEKIEL 47:1-12

47 Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. ² Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side.

³ Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. ⁴ Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. ⁵ Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. ⁶ And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?"

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷ As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. ⁸ And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. ⁹ And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. ¹⁰ Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. ¹¹ But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. ¹² And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their

leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”

We begin Revelation on Monday! Take time this weekend to prepare by reading back over the passages from this past week and making a plan to begin each day next week with the First15—silence, prayer, and scripture.

In his vision, Ezekiel sees the Jerusalem Temple as the source of a river, a river that begins as a trickle but becomes deeper and wider and greater until even the desert itself becomes flooded. The River brings life wherever it goes, and the trees that grow alongside it bring healing.

John sees something similar in his vision (we’ll read it in Revelation 22, the last chapter); both visions relate something remarkable—God’s plan for the world is one of healing and restoration.

It’s not the end yet. If things are difficult today, take heart—one day everything broken will be healed.

MONDAY, JANUARY 9 - REVELATION BEGINS! REVELATION 1:1-3

PROLOGUE

I The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

“Apocalypse.” The first word of the book we call Revelation tells us something important: it is about an unveiling, a revealing (this is where we get our word “Revelation”) of the truth of reality. Truth will be one of the central themes of the book, because the enemy’s main weapon is deceit.

Truth requires that God’s people bear witness to what they have heard and seen—John says that when people bear faithful witness to the truth of Jesus, they will be blessed.

In a large or small way today, how can you commit to the truth?

Live no lies.

P.S. Note the chain of transmission (it will be important later): God gives the revelation to Jesus who gives it to his angel (angel is the Greek word for messenger), who gives it to John, who has written it down for us:

God→Jesus→Angel→John→Church

TUESDAY, JANUARY 10

REVELATION 1:4-8

GREETING TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. ⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

The number 7 signifies completeness, and so the seven churches that are in Asia (present-day Turkey) represent the entire Church—this letter is for every church. What we learn here is that death of Jesus has freed his people and made them into both kings and priests:

Kings, because they rule with him;

Priests, because they live in his presence.

How can you use your free will to reign with God today, and how can you go about your daily life in his presence?

P.S. Note that v. 7 says that “he is coming on the clouds.” Does that remind you of the vision in Daniel 7? (See the reading for Wednesday, 1/4.)

P.P.S. Did you catch the way John refers to God in a way that is strange to us, and yet still trinitarian?: “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.”

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11

REVELATION 1:9-20

VISION OF THE SON OF MAN

⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Revelation is an account of a vision that a man named John was given by the Holy Spirit. John has then given us a *written* account of what he *saw* and *experienced*—Revelation is the result of much subsequent reflection on those experiences. If you’ve ever tried to explain a dream to someone else, you know how hard it is to convey into simple words the immediacy and emotion of the experience. The imagery of Revelation is vivid and at first obscure; one of the keys to understanding it is to simply read the book over and over, and see how images explain images.

As the vision opens, John sees Jesus in the midst of seven golden lampstands, which we shortly learn are the seven churches. (The image of the lampstand will be important later, in chapter 11. And note how it draws on what Zechariah saw in Zechariah 4 [see the reading for 1/5].)

John is afraid, but Jesus graciously puts his hand on John’s shoulder and tells him not to be afraid and that his task is to write down the content of the vision and share it with the seven churches in Asia.

Note that Jesus is in the midst of his churches. He will subsequently give John a message for each of the seven churches individually (chapters 2-3), messages he is able to give because he is *right there with them*. The fact of his presence is both challenging and comforting.

Jesus’s presence is **challenging** because Jesus knows the truth about us. One of the central themes of Revelation is *truth*, and nothing is hidden from God.

But Jesus’s presences with his churches is also **comforting**, because he knows the truth about our situation and wants to encourage us to keep going—to hang on until the end and to persevere.

If you are headed in the wrong direction, repent! (Repent means nothing more than “turn around.”) If you are doing the right thing, keep going! The Lord is with you.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12
REVELATION 2:1-7

TO THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS

2 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

2 “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. ⁶ Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

The entire text of Revelation is a circular letter that was to be shared among seven churches located in separate cities in the Roman province of Asia Minor (which is modern-day western Turkey).

But at the beginning of the letter there is a specific message from Jesus to each of the seven churches in turn. Imagine Jesus handwriting a brief note at the top of the letter to each addressee respectively.

Today we begin with the message to Ephesus. And that message is: **Beware lest you become a zombie church.**

Ephesus was the greatest city in the Roman province of Asia, and one of the places Paul lived during his apostolic ministry.

The one with the seven stars and seven lampstands is Jesus (see chapter 1). He is walking among the churches (we learn in chapter 1 that the lampstands represent churches), which means he knows them intimately, both their good and their bad.

One of the major themes of Revelation is truth, and Jesus commends the Ephesians for their hard work and their commitment to truth. Apparently, there were people who claimed to be apostles but were charlatans, and the Ephesians correctly identified them as such. The way one discerns between true and false teachers in the church hasn't changed: true teachers teach in accordance with the faith that's been delivered to us from the true apostles; false teachers invent new teachings and doctrines. Always test everything you hear in church by comparing it with the vast, ancient body of Christian teaching. (And the same goes for this commentary!)

Though the Ephesians are courageously bearing witness for Christ in a hostile culture, nevertheless they have ceased to love God and each other in the way they did at first.

Truth is important, but true doctrines are nothing if they are not joined with loving hearts. To love is to will the good of the other.

What does it mean for the Lord to remove the lampstand of the Ephesian church if they don't repent? I think it means that they would become a **zombie church**. In other words, they might not literally cease to exist as an organization, but because of their unfaithfulness, the life-giving Spirit would leave.

How many churches do you know that fit that description?

I'll say more about the Nicolaitans in later commentary. As to what it means to "conquer", this is actually the central message of Revelation to the churches—what it will look like for them to "win". We're getting ahead of ourselves, but let me just say that to conquer in Revelation means bearing true witness to the truth of Jesus.

Anyway, I think the idea of the Spirit being removed from an unfaithful church is a convicting idea. Such a church would have "the form of religion, but none of the power." A **zombie church**, in other words: one that looks alive, but is actually dead.

Lord, save us from such a fate.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13
REVELATION 2:8-11

TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

⁹ “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.”

Jesus introduces and identifies himself in a different way in each of the short messages to the seven churches. **Here’s the key to understanding the point of each respective message: use the description of Jesus to underscore the point he is making.**

So here, Jesus stresses his Resurrection. As we’ll see, the message to the church in Smyrna is: be faithful, even if it costs you your life.

The early Christians were all Jews; in fact, the early Christians thought of themselves as Jews who followed Jesus as Messiah. There were synagogues in many of the cities around the Mediterranean, and in Smyrna it seems that the non-Christian Jews had collaborated with the Roman authorities to persecute the followers of Jesus. That’s why John calls them “Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” John saw these Jews as doing the work of Satan.

At this time, the Christians in Smyrna were a tiny, poor minority without social standing or power. Over the centuries, of course, Christians would become the dominant force in Europe, and we all are aware of the ugly and shameful history of European Christian antisemitism. Here, however, that description doesn’t apply.

The church in Smyrna is poor and persecuted, but Jesus is pleased with

them and encourages them not to give up. In fact, the way they will “conquer” is precisely by not giving in, even if it costs them their lives. In the same way, that’s how *we* will conquer: by remaining faithful even to the point of death. What looks like losing—martyrdom and weakness—is actually the way of victory because of the Resurrection

Don’t be afraid today—every courageous, faithful step you take is a step toward victory, *no matter what it looks like from an earthly perspective.*

MONDAY, JANUARY 16

REVELATION 2:12-17

TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

¹² “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

¹³ “I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.¹⁶ Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

¹⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

In both Pergamum and Thyatira, Jesus warns the churches to stop having contact with false teachers, whom he calls “Balaam” in Pergamum and “Jezebel” in Thyatira.

Balaam was an enemy prophet of Israel who tried to lead the Children of Israel astray as they made their way into the Promised Land. The connection with the Old Testament makes the warning obvious, but if you don’t know those Old Testament stories, you’ll miss the point.

The entire rest of Revelation does the same thing constantly—uses Old Testament imagery to “reveal” the truth about history.

A few more points:

“Satan’s throne” in Pergamum refers to the pagan worship that was happening there, either of the imperial cult (worship of the emperor) or of Greek religion (worship of Zeus the Savior).

We don’t know who the Nicolaitans are, other than some kind of false sect. And the sword in Jesus’s mouth? It is the sword of truth.

Remember, one of the primary themes of Revelation is that the Church stay committed to the truth, no matter what.

Live no lies today.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17

REVELATION 2:18-29

TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

¹⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

¹⁹ “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. ²⁴ But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. ²⁸ And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Jezebel was a wicked pagan queen of an Israelite king who had God's prophets murdered. The reference is meant to show the Christians in Thyatira that the woman they are listening to is a false teacher.

In the Old Testament, idolatry is often described as sexual immorality—committing adultery on God. So, it's not clear in Thyatira if "Jezebel" is literally encouraging sexual immorality or just figuratively doing so because she is enjoining idolatry. Either way, it's a problem. The punishment that Jesus is sending on her and her followers is some kind of sickness or pestilence.

This is a harsh message *because the truth matters*. But, it is also an opportunity for repentance and an invitation of grace—it's not too late for the wayward Christians in Thyatira to turn back.

The same goes for every one of us, and every one one we'll see today—as long as we are breathing, it's not too late for any of us.

What falsehood do you need to turn from today?

How can you help someone else turn from falsehood today?

**BIBLE STUDY TONIGHT (1/18) | 6:30 PM | SANCTUARY
LIVESTREAM: asburytulsa.online.church**

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18

REVELATION 3:1-6

TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

3 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

³ Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. ⁴ Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. ⁶ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Unlike some of the other churches Jesus addresses in Revelation, the church in Sardis appears to have been relatively well-off and accepted in that city. Unfortunately, they were also (almost) spiritually dead.

That's the way it so often is in this world, isn't it? Wealth and comfort make us think (erroneously) that we are self-sufficient, that we don't need God. And that way lies spiritual death.

I mean that literally—I think Hell is made up of folks who are too proud to admit that they need God's mercy.

Problems and poverty and persecution can bring out the best in us, though no one actually wants those things in his or her life. Still, problems can cause us to turn to God and admit that we can't make it on our own.

Today, when you face a problem, consider it an opportunity to humbly ask for God's help.

P.S. We will see later in Revelation chapters 17-18 that one of the ways Babylon has corrupted people is through wealth. What we see in the letters to the seven churches is that the churches are facing *internally* the same sins and temptations that the *external* world is also facing. Things are still the same today.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19

REVELATION 3:7-13

TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

⁷ “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

⁸ “I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ¹² The one who conquers, I will

make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

As we will see as we continue to read through Revelation, the message of Jesus to the churches is that, if they just hold on, he will win the victory for them. And though to the Christians in Philadelphia the world’s power might seem insurmountable, nevertheless Jesus reminds them that what he wants to happen, *will* happen. Therefore, they should “hold fast.”

In light of that truth, how will you react today to the inevitable problems that come across your path?

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20

REVELATION 3:14-22

TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

¹⁴ “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.

¹⁵ “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

“Laodicea lacked its own water supply, having no direct access to the cold water of the mountains or the hot water of the nearby springs in Hierapolis

to the north. In contrast to its claims of self-sufficiency (3:17), it had to pipe in its water.... This water had grown lukewarm by the time of its arrival. "The point of lukewarm water is simply that it is disgusting.... "Jesus thus finds the church in Laodicea to be other than what he desires. In today's English, he is telling the self-satisfied church in Laodicea: 'I want water that will refresh me, but you remind me instead of the water you always complain about. You make me want to puke.'"
—Craig Keener, *Revelation*

Let us not make the mistake of being prideful or thinking we are self-sufficient today.

MONDAY, JANUARY 23

REVELATION 4:1-6a

THE THRONE IN HEAVEN

4 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.³ And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

In Revelation 1, John explains how he was given his vision.

In Revelation 2-3, John reports what Jesus has to say to each of the seven churches, respectively—it's like a little note that Jesus has attached at the top of the main message of the vision.

In Revelation 4 (today's reading), the vision proper begins. Let's look at it.

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

An apocalypse is an unveiling or a revealing, and here we have it happening: a door opens into heaven.

² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

In his vision, John is taken into the heavenly throne room. Heaven is where God's rule is perfectly realized. It is not yet like that on earth, and so the vision will explain how "the Kingdom will come on earth, as it is in heaven."

³ And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

John describes how the glory around God shines and shimmers like precious stones, but never describes God himself.

⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

Around God's throne are the thrones of "twenty-four elders". Who are they? They are some kind of angelic rulers—the divine council—whom God created to rule over parts of Creation. One of the major themes of the Bible is how God delegates authority. Even you and I have authority—we call it free will, and no one but I can use mine, nor can anyone but you use yours. These angels are created beings to whom God has given authority. (We don't really know much more than that.)

⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,^{6a} and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

All throughout the Bible, when people have an experience of God—the fancy word is a "theophany"—there is always thunder and lightning, and it's not different here.

The number seven means fullness or completeness; the "seven spirits of God" is another way of saying the fullness of God's Spirit, i.e., the Holy Spirit.

The glass sea reflects God's glory. In the Biblical imagination the sea is the symbol of chaos and entropy, and in heaven it's been turned into something beautiful that enhances the glory of God.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 24
REVELATION 4:6b-11

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!”

⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

¹¹ “Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.”

*And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,
“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!”*

These mysterious four living creatures are found in Old Testament heavenly visions (e.g., Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1). They are some kind of heavenly creature that just praises God, and all the eyes around them mean that, from a heavenly perspective, there is nothing hidden.

*⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,
¹¹ “Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.”*

How cool is that? These heavenly rulers—over what they are reigning the Bible doesn't tell us (solar systems? universes? time? light?)—these angelic heavenly rulers are immensely powerful. In fact, later in the book, John will twice make the mistake of trying to worship an angelic messenger. These are powerful, glorious creatures. And yet that's the point—they are creatures, not the Creator. And they get off their thrones and cast their crowns before the throne to show that any authority and glory they have is merely given to them by God. They are creatures, and so they worship the Creator.

We'll see as the vision unfolds that one of the marks of the Beast is that it claims worship for itself, but only God is worthy of worship. This is one of the reasons John knows the Beast is evil.

The question, however, is this:

John has come from earth into heaven, and in heaven he sees God's will perfectly realized—it is a place of beauty and peace and joy. But earth isn't like that. **How will the Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven?**

We have to read on to find out.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25
REVELATION 5:1-5

THE SCROLL AND THE LAMB

5 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Revelation is a vision given to a man named John, in which he is given the gift of seeing reality from a heavenly perspective. He is taken to the heavenly throne room (chapter 4) where he sees God’s will perfectly enacted. But John has come from earth, where things seem very far from perfect.

The question Revelation will answer is, How will the Kingdom come?

The answer will be given on a special scroll, a scroll that has been sealed up forever.

(See Daniel 12:8-9, for example:

⁸ I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, “O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?” ⁹ He said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.”)

Who can open the scroll?

John begins to weep because it seems *no one* can open the scroll, which means the Kingdom will *never* come, and wrongs will *never* be made right.

And in the midst of his despair, one of the heavenly rulers says, “Don’t cry—here is the one who can open the scroll.”

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26
REVELATION 5:6-10

⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”

This is a great place to point out an important part of John’s vision, namely the contrast between what he hears and what he sees.

In 5:5 he has *heard*

“Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

But in 5:6 what he *sees* is

“a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.”

The one who is worthy to open the scroll, the one by whom the Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven, is a Lion who looks like a Lamb, and a Lamb who is in actuality a Lion.

That’s a paradox worth pondering today.

P.S. The only one worthy to open the scroll—the one by whom the Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven, is the Lamb. In simple language, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus enables him to bring heaven to earth.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 27
REVELATION 5:11-14

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,¹² saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!”

¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

John here has a “now and not yet” moment in the vision. In heaven, “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them” is giving praise to the Lamb. All of Creation, in other words. But, on earth, that reality has not yet been realized. It is as if heaven exists outside of time; the rest of the vision will explain how earth will come to match what is already true in heaven.

MONDAY JANUARY 30
REVELATION 6:1-8

THE SEVEN SEALS

6 Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!”² And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

³ When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!”⁴ And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

⁵ When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. **6** And I heard what seemed to be a voice in

the midst of the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!”

⁷ When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” ⁸ And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

Remember, John is in the heavenly throne room and has seen the Lamb take the scroll with the seven seals. The scroll is God’s plan for history. The opening of the scroll and the breaking of the seals is NOT the message of the scroll—we won’t get to that until chapter 11. Rather, what happens as the seals are broken and the scroll is opened is meant to prepare us to understand the message of the scroll.

“6:1 Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!”

The seals on the scroll have to be broken before the scroll’s contents can be read. The breaking of each seal brings judgment on the earth.

Judgment is meant to cause rebellious humanity to repent. Think of the Egyptian plagues—their purpose is to convince Pharaoh to turn back from his destructive path before it is too late. Unfortunately, Pharaoh chooses to ignore the warnings, and the same thing happens here: the cataclysmic effects of the opening of each seal in turn does not bring humanity back to God.

“2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.”

The first seal is broken, and the judgment that comes is the first of the so-called Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

The first horseman brings war.

“³ When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” ⁴ And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.”

The second seal is opened, and the judgment that comes is the bright red horse (the color of blood).

The second horseman brings bloodshed, which makes sense, since bloodshed follows war.

“⁵ When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. ⁶ And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!”

The Lamb opens the third seal, and the black horse and its rider bring the judgment of economic disruption and famine. The scales in the rider’s hand would have been used in the marketplace, but the prices for basic staples—wheat and barley—are many times too expensive for the working class. Luxury goods, however—oil and wine—are still available for the wealthy.

Economic disruption and famine follow after war and bloodshed.

“⁷ When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” ⁸ And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.”

The breaking of the fourth seal brings a sickly pale horse and its rider Death, closely followed by Hades. Death follows after war and bloodshed and famine.

Again, note that judgment does not bring forth repentance. What will? What will cause the rebellious world to repent?

TUESDAY, JANUARY 31
REVELATION 6:9-11

⁹ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. ¹⁰ They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” ¹¹ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

As the Lamb opens the fifth seal, John’s perspective changes from earth back into heaven and he sees the martyrs crowded under the heavenly altar, where, in the Old Testament sacrificial system, the blood of the sacrifice would have been. The martyrs cry out for vengeance, but they are told that the story isn’t yet over.

God has a plan to vindicate the faithful, but its time has not yet come.

If judgment doesn’t bring about repentance, then what will?
This is what the message of the scroll will explain. Keep reading.

BIBLE STUDY TONIGHT (2/1) | 6:30 PM | SANCTUARY
LIVESTREAM: asburytulsa.online.church

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1
REVELATION 6:12-17

¹² When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. ¹⁴ The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

The opening of the sixth seal brings with it the beginning of the final judgment—the End. We can see this because the world itself is shaken; even the very stars begin to fall.

Still, humanity does not repent and turn toward God but merely wants to be protected from God’s judgment.

The message of the seals is that rebellious humanity is so hard-hearted that even death and cataclysm will not be enough to have people turn back to God.

Is John describing what has happened or what will happen?
I think the answer is “Yes.”

Since the time of Jesus, there have been war and violence and pestilence on the earth, and yet humanity has not turned back to God. There will be more and greater judgments in the future, and they will have the same result.

What, then, will cause the world to turn back to God?

The seventh seal is the final judgment, but before we get to it, John relates an interlude that will begin to answer the question. Keep reading.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2

REVELATION 7:1-8

THE 144,000 OF ISRAEL SEALED

7 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. ² Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³ saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” ⁴ And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

⁵ 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed,
12,000 from the tribe of Reuben,

12,000 from the tribe of Gad,
⁶ 12,000 from the tribe of Asher,
12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali,
12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,
⁷ 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon,
12,000 from the tribe of Levi,
12,000 from the tribe of Issachar,
⁸ 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun,
12,000 from the tribe of Joseph,
12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

Revelation 7 is an interlude between the breaking of the sixth and the seventh seals in John's vision. John is allowed to see God's plan to involve his people in the fight between good and evil.

The judgments seem overwhelming, but God has a role for his people in the midst of the judgments, and John sees that God's people—the Church—will not be overcome by the judgments; they are protected so that they can fulfill their role.

The 144,000? It's a holy army waging holy war; it is the church's role in the outworking of history. Let me explain.

7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.

The four angels mean that God is sovereign over the four corners of the earth.

² Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ³ "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

God holds back the judgments until his servants are set apart. But, who are the servants?

⁴ Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

⁵ From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Reuben 12,000,

from the tribe of Gad 12,000,
⁶ from the tribe of Asher 12,000,
from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000,
from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,

⁷ from the tribe of Simeon 12,000,
from the tribe of Levi 12,000,
from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,

⁸ from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000,
from the tribe of Joseph 12,000,
from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

John hears the identity of God's servants: 144,000. (12 squared times 10 cubed—a number that shows the fullness of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.)

In the Old Testament, every time a census is taken it is for military purposes. The 12,000 that are listed come from each of the 12 tribes (though the list is slightly peculiar, a detail I do not have space to discuss at the moment).

The 144,000 are a holy army, ready for holy war.

BUT...

(Keep reading!)

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3 REVELATION 7:9-17

A GREAT MULTITUDE FROM EVERY NATION

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on

their faces before the throne and worshiped God,¹² saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” ¹⁴ I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵ “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

John hears about 144,000 from Israel, but he sees an uncountable number from every nation. In Revelation, the contrast between what John hears and sees is important. In 5:5, he hears of the “Lion of Judah”—a Messianic, conquering image; in 5:6, however, he sees “a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.” The same contrast is at work here. What John sees reinterprets what he hears: the Messianic holy army of Israel is actually an uncountable number from every ethnicity.

The white robes and the palm branches are the sign of military victory. (Think of Palm Sunday—the Jewish pilgrims are using a Maccabean sign of victory.)

¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne,

and to the Lamb.”

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying:

“Amen!

*Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!”*

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

¹⁴ I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Therefore,

*“they are before the throne of God
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne
will shelter them with his presence.*

*¹⁶ ‘Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.*

*The sun will not beat down on them,’
nor any scorching heat.*

*¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne
will be their shepherd;*

‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’

‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

As with 5:13, the future has come into the present, and time has collapsed—John, in heaven, sees the victory of God’s army as complete. This is a victory celebration.

How did they win the victory? The rest of Revelation will explain in greater detail, but here the angel explains it to John:

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

¹⁴ I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

They have conquered by their faithful witness to Jesus, in whose sacrificial and triumphant death they participate by their faithfulness, even to the point of death.

In other words, God is creating a holy army—the Church—which will win victory not by killing but by martyrdom.

We'll have to read on to see exactly how this will work.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6

REVELATION 8:1-5

THE SEVENTH SEAL AND THE GOLDEN CENSER

8 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, ⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Revelation chapter 8 begins with an arresting verse:

8:1 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

I think the simplest meaning here is probably the most likely: there is silent awe in heaven at God's judgment, and at what is going to happen next.

² Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, ⁴ and the smoke of the

incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

John sees into what is a heavenly temple—the censer and the altar are the key images. The smoke of the incense in heaven are the prayers of God’s people, billowing from the censer the angel holds in its hand. Look what happens next!

⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

The prayers of God’s people—many of them the anguished prayers of the martyrs—result in judgment on earth!

Prayer changes things!

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7

REVELATION 8:6-13

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

⁶ Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

⁷ The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

⁸ The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. ⁹ A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

¹⁰ The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. ¹¹ The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

¹² The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

¹³ Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”

There is a series of 3 sets of 7 judgments in Revelation:

1. 7 seals;
2. 7 trumpets;
3. 7 bowls.

Each series brings judgment on the earth. Most commentators (and I agree) believe that John’s vision is moving in a circle at this point, with each set of 7 telling the same account in a different (and increasingly intense) way.

1st seal=1st trumpet=1st bowl
2nd seal=2nd trumpet=2nd bowl
etc.

Each time John’s vision circles back to the 7 judgments, they are explained in a new way that gives more information about God’s plan to bring heaven to earth.

Here, the 7 trumpets (or at least the first 4 trumpets in the series, which are all that chapter 8 contains) lead to judgments on earth that are modeled on the Egyptian plagues: hail, blood, darkness, etc.

Just as with the seals, the judgments of the trumpets raise an important question:

If these cataclysmic judgments do not cause humanity to repent, then what *will* cause humanity to repent?

Read on, dear reader.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8
REVELATION 9:1-12

9 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. ² He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. ⁴ They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵ They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. ⁶ And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

⁷ In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸ their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹ they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰ They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. ¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

¹² The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

Revelation chapter 9 is what most folks think of when they think of the book of Revelation—violent, wild imagery—and it is terrifying.

The Jews thought of the Abyss as the place where the rebellious spiritual beings were kept, and when the fifth angel blows his trumpet, an army of locusts is allowed to invade the earth from the Abyss. Invasion is the key theme of the fifth and sixth trumpets.

Whether the army is meant to be a human army that is exaggerated with demonic features or an actual demonic army with human features is not relevant—the point is that God has permitted violent invasion as a warning judgment on the earth.

The people of the eastern Roman Empire in John's day feared invasion from the wild and violent Parthians from beyond the Euphrates, and the sixth trumpet plays on this fear, in the same way that Americans in the 80s feared invasion from the Soviets, *à la* Red Dawn.

The overwhelming picture is one of terror and violence.

And yet look at how the chapter closes....

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9 REVELATION 9:13-21

¹³ Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, ¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶ The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. ¹⁷ And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. ¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. ¹⁹ For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The plagues here are meant to also invoke ideas of the Egyptian plagues, and just as with Pharaoh, the people here do not repent even after seeing God's judgment firsthand.

Terrifying and so obviously true. Warning judgments don't cause most people to repent.

What will lead people to repentance, then?

Keep reading....

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10 REVELATION 10:1-7

THE ANGEL AND THE LITTLE SCROLL

IO Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. ² He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, ³ and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. ⁴ And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." ⁵ And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven ⁶ and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, ⁷ but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

I have become convinced that the interpretative key to Revelation is what happens in Revelation 10. I need to make today's commentary longer than usual so as to explain the AMAZING importance of chapter 10. I'm not writing this for my health, but for you, dear reader, so you better read it!

In the very first sentence of the book, John tells us what we need to know about his vision:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.... [Revelation 1:1]

Did you catch that?

It is the *apocalypse* of Jesus which was given to him by God.

Jesus has made the apocalypse known by sending it via angel to John.

God → Jesus → angel → John → us.

Chapters 2-3 are short messages from Jesus to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. They are the equivalent of a scribbled message on the top of the rest of the vision meant to draw the churches' attention to particular issues of importance to Jesus in their respective contexts.

John's vision proper begins in chapter 4:

¹ After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.³ And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. [Revelation 4:1-3]

John has been taken into the heavenly throne room, and he reports what he sees there: worship.

In the Lord's prayer we pray, "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." John sees that God's will is already perfectly realized in heaven; on earth it is not so.

How will God's will be done on earth? What's God's plan to make it happen?

John notices that the one on the throne (God), has something in his hand:

1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" 3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the

earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, 4 and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. [Revelation 5:1-4]

The scroll is some secret part of God's plan for history—the way his Kingdom will come on earth as it already is in heaven. When it looks as if it will remain secret, John begins to sob hysterically because *if the scroll isn't opened, the Kingdom will never come, and wrongs will never be righted.*

However, one of the angelic beings tells John not to cry:

⁵And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." [Revelation 5:5]

And then John sees something that ought to catch our attention:

⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [Revelation 5:6-7]

Did you catch that? God gives the scroll to Jesus to open.
Remember Revelation 1:1? God → Jesus → angel → John → us.

We're halfway to seeing that chain of transmission of the apocalypse. Now we just need to see an angel give a message to John....

Chapters 6-9 give us important information about what happens when the seals around the scroll are broken. We see how the opening of the seals brings warning judgments on earth. The warning judgments, however, do not cause people to repent:

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. [Revelation 9:20-21]

If warning judgments won't cause people to repent and turn back to God, then what will?

What is God's secret plan to bring his kingdom to earth as it already is in heaven?

Revelation 10 begins to give us the answer.

After telling us that the inhabitants of the earth have refused to repent (9:20-21), this is what happens next.

Allow me to quote Revelation chapter 10 in its entirety:

IO *Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire.² He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land,³ and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded.⁴ And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down."⁵ And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven⁶ and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay,⁷ but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.*

⁸ *Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."⁹ So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey."¹⁰ And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.¹¹ And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings." [Revelation 10:1-11]*

John sees a "mighty angel"—described like no other angel in Revelation—who comes to John with a "little scroll" in his hand.

Remember what we learned in the first sentence of the book? John tells us that the document we are about to read is:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.... [Revelation 1:1]

God → Jesus → angel → John → us.

In Revelation 10 we finally see John receive THE APOCALYPSE that he told us about. This means that the previous chapters are NOT the point, strictly speaking, but rather they are important information we need to understand the point.

P.S. ABOUT THE 7 THUNDERS....

John hears 7 thunders called from heaven by the angel, but then is told not to write them down. The 7 thunders are yet another series of warning judgments that God chooses not to send. Instead, God's ultimate plan is about to be revealed.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13

REVELATION 10:8-11

⁸ Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." ⁹ So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." ¹⁰ And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. ¹¹ And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

After the angel comes to John, he gives him the scroll and tells John to eat it. (The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel began his prophetic ministry in the same way—see Ezekiel 3.)

It's like he is supposed to internalize the message before sharing it. And when he eats it, John tells us that it was sweet like honey at first, but bitter in his stomach—it's good, but contains hardship.

And what is the message? It is how
the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets. [Revelation 10:7]

The scroll that John has been given is God's secret plan for history, now being revealed by Jesus, via the angel, to John. The scroll is the point of the book of Revelation.

What does the scroll say?
We'll have to read on to find out....

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

REVELATION 11:1-14

THE TWO WITNESSES

II Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, ² but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. ³ And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. ⁶ They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. ⁷ And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, ⁸ and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. ⁹ For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, ¹⁰ and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹² Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. ¹³ And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

¹⁴ The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

In chapter 10, John receives the unrolled scroll that is God's secret plan to bring heaven to earth—"on earth as it is in heaven." It is the scroll that only the Lamb is able to open. What is the scroll? It is the mystery of God's plan to redeem history, a plan that even the Old Testament prophets were never able to see. (See the ending of the book of Daniel, 12:8-9, e.g.)

In Revelation 11, John begins to explain the message of that scroll.

JOHN'S SYMBOLIC PROPHETIC ACTION (11:1-2)

Immediately after John eats the scroll, he is told by the angel:

And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings." [Revelation 10:11]

And this is what happens next:

11 Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, 2 but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. [Revelation 11:1-2]

A key principle to interpreting Revelation is to notice that John often tells of the same thing multiple times; each time he revisits that thing he uses different symbolic language and provides different details.

So, 11:1-2 is a brief summary of the scroll; 11:3-14 is a further explanation of the scroll; and as we'll see, chapters 12-15 again explain the message of the scroll; each time the central point is made with different imagery and detail.

Here, just as with the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel when he receives his prophetic message (Ezekiel 3-4), John is asked to act out a symbolic prophetic action by figuratively measuring the sanctuary of the Temple and not measuring the outer court. The reason, he's told, is that the interior of the sanctuary is protected, but the exterior court will be "trampled" by the nations.

This little symbolic action is based on an Old Testament passage (Zechariah 2:1-2, 5), which indicates that the “measuring” means that the inner, spiritual reality of God’s temple is protected, even while the outer, visible reality is seemingly defeated by his enemies.

Revelation 11:1-2 means that, though it may seem as if evil is conquering God’s people, in fact they will be kept spiritually safe throughout the period of persecution.

EXCURSUS: 42 MONTHS/1260 DAYS/A TIME, TIMES, AND HALF A TIME

Numbers are always symbolic in John’s vision. Repeated phrases are also important, as a way of linking passages together. The same period—described in different ways—will be said to be “42 months” or “1,260 days”, or a “time, times, and half a time”

That last phrase comes from the ending of the book of Daniel, when Daniel—in an apocalyptic vision—is confused about what he’s seeing:

⁵ Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank of the stream and one on that bank of the stream. ⁶ And someone said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, “How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?” ⁷ And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished. ⁸ I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, “O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?” ⁹ He said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.”
[Daniel 12:5-9]

Daniel is told that the period in which God’s people are persecuted and opposed (“the shattering of the power of the holy people”) will be “a time, times, and half a time”. The rabbis understood this to mean 3 and 1/2:

- one time+two times+one half a time = three and one half
- to put it another way: $1+2+0.5=3.5$

So, 3.5 came to be an important apocalyptic number.

If you take 30 days as the average number of days in a month, then 3.5 years is 1,260 days or 42 months. Each time John uses “42 months” or “a time, times, and half a time” or “1,260 days”, that’s a clue that he’s talking about the same thing, but in a different way.

Please don’t try to interpret the numbers literally—they are symbolic, and tied to Old Testament prophecy. In essence this period of 42 months/1,260 days/a time, times, and half a time are all a shorthand way of saying “the period during which God’s people are persecuted and opposed until the Second Coming.”

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO WITNESSES (11:3-13)

The next section of Revelation is a prophetic parable that dramatizes the church’s role in God’s secret plan.

Right away, we learn something important:

³ *And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.*

⁴ *These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.*

The two witnesses will prophesy for **1,260 days**, which means we’re looking at the same point being made as above in vv. 1-2 and the symbolic prophetic action, but with different imagery.

The two witnesses will be dressed in sackcloth. Sackcloth is the clothing of repentance—in other words, the message of the two witnesses will be about repentance.

Who are the two witnesses? John tells us—they are “lampstands.” In Revelation chapter 1, we learn that lampstands are a symbol for the Church. **The two witnesses represent the Church.**

Why two? Two is the required number in the Old Testament for the bearing of true witness. Just as seven churches in chapter 1 symbolize the Church in its fullness and completeness, here the two witnesses symbolize the Church in its capacity to give true testimony about Jesus.

⁵ *And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed.* ⁶ *They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during*

the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

The two witnesses are modeled on Moses and Elijah, Old Testament prophets who squared off against God's enemies. (Elijah shut off rain and Moses called down plagues.) The witnesses are protected so that they can complete their mission. (Remember the sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7? John was describing the same idea.) They are protected spiritually, but not physically (see above at the symbolic prophetic action John undertakes in 11:1-2), because:

⁷ And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, ⁸ and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

I mentioned above that John continually comes back to the same idea throughout his vision and describes it in different ways or in greater detail. **Another way to think of it is as a series of Russian nesting dolls: each detail, when opened, contains other details.**

So, the symbolic prophetic action of 11:1-2 is unpacked and explained more in 11:3-13. And, many of the details in vv. 3-13 are unpacked and explained more in chapters 12-15.

So, here we have the first mention of the beast, which John will come back to in greater detail in later chapters, especially chapter 13.

But, here, John tells us that the two witnesses (the church), though spiritually protected for their mission will actually be physically conquered by the beast. They will be martyred, in other words. And then their bodies will lie in the street of the city "symbolically called Sodom and Egypt" (i.e., any city in which the church is persecuted), just as Jesus was martyred in Jerusalem.

⁹ For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, ¹⁰ and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.

“For three and a half days”—the apocalyptic number again!—the people that persecuted the witnesses will perversely rejoice over their deaths! It’s a scene of complete depravity—the people who killed the martyrs will congratulate themselves on their murderous victory. Why? Because they were tired of being told to repent. The witnesses’ message contradicted the world’s self-satisfied delusions of prideful self-sufficiency.

THE VINDICATION OF THE WITNESSES!

But, the witnesses don’t stay dead!

¹¹ *But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.*

¹² *Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.*

Just as Jesus was raised to life after 3 days, so the witnesses will be raised to life after “three and a half days” (that number again!). And, it is obvious to everyone who sees it that God made it happen, thereby proving that they were telling the truth all along.

And so look at what happens next:

THE CONVERSION OF THE NATIONS!

¹³ *And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

The majority of the city repents and gives glory to God! Previously, John has told us that the judgments do not produce repentance (see 9:20-21, e.g.) But here, the martyrdom of the two witnesses produces the amazing result of the repentant nations. Why? What’s changed?

Allow me to quote the New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham at length:

“The point is...that judgments themselves do not convey God’s gracious willingness to forgive those who repent...

[But when the two witnesses come and are] confronted with an addiction to idolatry and evil (9:20-21), they proclaim the one true God and his coming judgment on evil, but they do so as a call to repentance. Therefore, once their witness is seen, not to be refuted by their death, but vindicated as the truth (11:11-13), all who see this repent.”

from The Theology of the Book of Revelation, by Richard Bauckham (page 86).

Why does the testimony of the witnesses produce repentance when judgment alone did not? Because the witnesses tell the world that God is ready and willing to welcome them back!

The witnesses are initially hated, persecuted, and killed. But, they stay faithful to Jesus even to the point of death, and their faithful witness to Jesus is vindicated by God. In this way they participate in the Lamb's victory and even conquer the beast, though he kills them, in the same way that Jesus defeated death by dying.

The faith of the witnesses is protected by God, and through their faithful witness to the world they demonstrate that the beast does not have ultimate power because he cannot make them deny the truth of Jesus. They are willing to die for the truth, and their faithful suffering brings the nations to faith in the true God.

In other words, their faithful suffering has a purpose, and it is to be used by God to bring unbelievers to faith!

*****IN SUMMARY: THE MESSAGE OF
THE BOOK OF REVELATION*****

The message of the parable of the two witnesses (Revelation 11:3-13) will be reexplained over and over again through the rest of John's vision, but allow me to sum up what we have learned so far.

The First Half of Revelation Leads Up to the Message of the Scroll

- John has seen into the heavenly throne room (Revelation 4-5), and he sees that in heaven Jesus is worshipped.
- Although in heaven all things are perfect, they are emphatically NOT so on earth. And so we pray "thy Kingdom come, on earth as it already is in heaven."
- The rest of Revelation will be the explanation of how the Kingdom comes to earth.
- The Old Testament prophets had foretold of a future day when God's Kingdom would come (to cite one of many, many examples, see Micah 4:1-4), but the prophets were never told *how* God's Kingdom would come.
- In the heavenly throne room, John sees that only the Lamb (i.e. Jesus) can open the scroll that contains God's secret plan to bring in the Kingdom.

- Why is Jesus allowed to open the scroll? Because he is the Faithful Witness and through his death and resurrection, he has conquered Death and Evil.
- As Jesus unrolls the scroll and breaks its seals, judgment comes on the earth. The judgments are NOT the message of the scroll—they PREPARE for the message of the scroll.
- And what do we learn from the judgments? That judgments alone do not bring about repentance on earth.
- This fact shouldn't surprise us, because judgments never worked in the Old Testament either, and, come to think of it, God could OBVIOUSLY destroy the entire cosmos whenever he wanted, so there must be a reason he forebears to bring destructive judgment on creation. And that reason is that judgment alone doesn't produce repentance!

The Second Half of Revelation Is About What's Written on the Scroll

- John receives the scroll from the angel, eats it, and then begins to prophecy.
- He first enacts the symbolic prophetic action of the measuring of the Temple, which tells us that although the church will be persecuted and conquered by the nations on the outside, its spiritual reality on the inside will not be touched.
- Then John tells us the parable of the witnesses.
- These two witnesses represent the true testimony of the church, and it's a testimony about Jesus and against the lies of the world that the church faithfully tells even unto death.
- Although the two witnesses are protected for their ministry, they are ultimately conquered by the beast.
- But, God raises them again, thereby vindicating their message, and as a result, the nations come to true repentance and begin to worship God!

God's secret plan is this: God sent his son, Jesus. Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection, conquered death and created the Church, into which he calls people of all nations, races, and peoples (see Revelation 7). Jesus then invites the Church to participate in bringing the Kingdom from heaven to earth by its faithful testimony about Jesus, even to the point of death. Once the nations see that the Church is not afraid of death, they repent and come to

faith in God! The rest of Revelation is a retelling of this point, with different emphases and imagery and details.

**BIBLE STUDY TONIGHT (2/15) | 6:30 PM | SANCTUARY
LIVESTREAM: asburytulsa.online.church**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15
REVELATION 11:15-19**

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” ¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying,

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.

¹⁸ The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

¹⁹ Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

Just a quick word on the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15-19). Remember, Revelation revisits the same events over and over, using different imagery to expand on a previous point. The seventh trumpet is The End—the last judgment. We’ve just read about the church fulfilling its purpose and seen the nations repent; now, heaven is coming to earth.

In later chapters we’ll get more details about the last judgment and what happens to those who refuse to repent, but here we just get the simple declaration:

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” [Revelation 11:15.]

Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16 REVELATION 12:1-6

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

12 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. ³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. ⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. ⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, ⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

SOME BACKGROUND

Here are a few key points:

- The time descriptors of “1,260 days” or “42 months” or “a time, times, and half a time” are all key apocalyptic numbers which refer to the same time period: the period of the Church’s persecution and opposition.
- Therefore, any time those terms appear you should understand that John is describing some aspect of the Church’s persecution as it patiently endures until The Second Coming.
- The message of Revelation (as shown in the parable of the two witnesses—Revelation 11:3-13) is that, though it will appear from an *earthly perspective* that the Church is defeated by the enemies of God, in the *heavenly/spiritual perspective* the Church is actually conquering through its faithful witness, even to the point of death.

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

What was it that led the Wise Men to Bethlehem? Matthew tells us that it was a star (Matthew 2), but he doesn't give us any other info about exactly what it was that the Wise Men saw. Whatever it was, it was a significant enough movement in the constellations that the pagan magi were able to understand it signified a Jewish king was being born.

In John's vision, this movement in the constellations is brought alive. Not only is the woman supposed to make us think of Mary, the Mother of Christ, but also Eve from Genesis 3:

*¹⁴ The Lord God said to the serpent,
"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.*

*¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."*

Fortunately, we don't have to wonder who the dragon is, because in the next passage John tells us that he is "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

The dragon tries to kill the child, but he is rescued by God—it is a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus.

And the woman becomes the church, protected by God for 1,260 days—the key apocalyptic number.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17 REVELATION 12:7-17

SATAN THROWN DOWN TO EARTH

7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called

the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world— he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

¹² Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

¹³ And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

¹⁴ But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. ¹⁵ The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. ¹⁶ But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. ¹⁷ Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

The point of John’s vision is to baptize your imagination so you can learn to see clearly the events of history and your life from God’s perspective.

So, the wild imagery is meant to wake you up!

John sees the devil defeated in heaven and thrown down to earth. In other words, Jesus has already won the victory, and what remains is its working out here below. In the meantime, the devil is persecuting the church but it’s too late and ineffective anyway, because the church is protected by God.

Remember what Jesus promised to Peter?

“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it!”

Regardless of how things look, friends, be confident: Jesus has already won, and evil will not last.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20 REVELATION 13:1-10

THE FIRST BEAST

13 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ² And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. ³ One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. ⁴ 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?"

⁵ And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.

⁶ It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, ⁸ and all who dwell on 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 who was slain. ⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

¹⁰ If anyone is to be taken captive,

to captivity he goes;

if anyone is to be slain with the sword,

with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

Today we read Revelation 13:1-10 and look at "the beast" in detail. As with everything else in this sophisticated book, some of what I'll point out below only really makes sense when you read the whole thing through more than once.

WHO IS THE BEAST?

13:1 *And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ² And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and*

his throne and great authority. ³ One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. ⁴ 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 comes from the sea, the source of chaos and evil in the Jewish imagination.

Allow me to point out the obvious, but by seeing the beast’s origin from the sea, John knows that it is evil, despite its lies.

The strange description of the beast alludes to and is a combination of the four beasts described by the Old Testament prophet Daniel in his vision (Daniel 7).

THE MORTAL WOUND OF THE BEAST= THE YEAR OF 4 EMPERORS

We’ll see later in this chapter (the famous 666) that the beast represents the Roman Empire, specifically the Emperor Nero. This historical detail is behind the mention of the mortal wound in v. 3

One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.

This is a reference to what happened in AD 69, the so-called Year of the Four Emperors. After Nero committed suicide in AD 68, there was civil war in the empire and revolt on its borders. For many people, it seemed that the power of Rome was at its end. But, Vespasian (the 4th of the emperors in AD 69) became emperor, consolidated power, and started a new dynasty. Rome seemed stronger than ever.

It looked as if the empire had a “mortal wound” when Nero killed himself, but it actually kept going.

People always worship power, and here is no exception—Rome seemed invincible.

THE BEAST’S PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH

⁵ And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.

⁶ It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, ⁸ and all who dwell on 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 who was slain. ⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

*¹⁰ If anyone is to be taken captive,
to captivity he goes;
if anyone is to be slain with the sword,
with the sword must he be slain.*

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

Catch the breadcrumb John left for us?

Remember that whenever you see the time marker “42 months” or “1,260 days” or “a time, times, and half a time,” those are little bread crumbs that John has left for us to tell us he is talking about the same period each time, i.e., the period of the Church’s opposition and persecution.

So, John sees how the beast is persecuting the Church and demanding allegiance, and he tells the Church: be courageous, and don’t give in.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21 REVELATION 13:11-18

THE SECOND BEAST

¹¹ Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. ¹² It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. ¹³ It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, ¹⁴ and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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.

WHY THE MONSTERS ARE IMPORTANT

The Church—the people of God—has an important role to play in God’s plan to bring the Kingdom from heaven to earth, but the Church will be fighting evil every step of the way.

In his vision, John has spiritual insight into the nature of the evil that the church will be fighting. By knowing these details, we know the nature of the fight and what it means to “conquer”.

Some key insights:

- Anything other than God that demands worship or complete allegiance is evil and must be resisted, even to the point of death.
- Evil is cunning and often appears at first just *slightly* different from Christ, hence the term (found not in Revelation itself, but in the letters of John in the Bible) “antichrist.” The beast, for example, seems to come back from the dead, seems invincible, seems the source of peace. All these things are lies and twistings of the truth.
- Deceit and death are the two weapons of the monsters in Revelation: they lie and they kill. **Christians defeat the beast by living by the truth even to the point of death, thereby showing the beast is not actually all-powerful.**

MONSTER GLOSSARY

- The dragon/serpent is the source of evil itself, i.e. the devil or Satan;
- The beast (from the sea) is the Roman Empire;
- The second beast (on the land) is the Roman imperial cult, i.e., the system of worshipping the Roman emperor through temples and ceremonies in cities across the empire;
- 666 is a numerical code for Nero Caesar.

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

In Deuteronomy 6, the Lord tells his people the importance of remembering his law and their identity:

6:1 These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, Israel,

and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

“Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.” In other words, God wants his people to be committed to remembering his instructions.

The mark of the beast is the opposite of this—it’s the sign that you are committed to the beast. Without the mark, you can’t even engage in commerce. In the Roman Empire, unless you were willing to worship through the imperial cult (the second beast), you were often shut out of a city’s commerce. One of the ways the beast exercises control is to make it harder for God’s people to make money unless they publicly renounce their identity as the people of God.

THE NUMBER 666

The Jews practiced something called gematria, whereby a person’s name had a numerical value, based on the numerical value assigned to each letter. 666 is the number you get when you spell out NERO CAESAR in Hebrew letters.

After Nero killed himself in AD 68, there were rumors that he wasn’t really dead but would come back stronger than before. John is playing with these legends to get us to understand the evil that is often at work behind earthly forms of power.

WHO OR WHAT IS THE BEAST TODAY?

The power of John’s images is that they help us see reality from a spiritual perspective. We no longer have to fight against the Roman Empire or Nero Caesar, but the beast is still on the prowl. Any rivals that claim complete control and power are the beast. The Soviet Union was the beast; the Chinese Communist Party is the beast. The mark of the beast? To take a contemporary example, think of the social-credit system that is being developed in China, or the so-called “surveillance capitalism” that is already here.

How do we defeat the beast in our time? In the same way as in John's vision: by our commitment to the truth about the world and about Jesus, even to the point of death.

Will a final greater beast come before the end? Seems likely. But, we should not be afraid—we know it will be defeated!

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

REVELATION 14:1-5

THE LAMB AND THE 144,000

14 Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.² And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps,³ and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.⁴ It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb,⁵ and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.

God's people—the church—are portrayed in John's vision like a Messianic army. Note the detail about how they refrain from sex—just like David's army in the Old Testament, they are a holy army. They have spiritual power and are facing off against the beast and his lies.

Here, they are gathered on Mount Zion—the traditional center of God's power and presence in the Old Testament—as they make their stand against the beast.

They fight by their commitment to the truth; just like the sacrificial lambs in the Old Testament, they are “blameless” (literally, “spotless”).

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23

REVELATION 14:6-13

THE MESSAGES OF THE THREE ANGELS

⁶ Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. ⁷ And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

⁸ Another angel, a second, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”

⁹ And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

¹² Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. ¹³ And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”

To recap:

- Judgments alone do not produce repentance (see Revelation 9:20-21).
- Jesus creates the church to tell the truth—to bear witness—to the unbelieving nations, and the church’s testimony and truth-telling even unto death actually leads people to repent and give glory to God (see the Parable of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11:3-13)!
- The church faces great opposition and persecution from evil (see Revelation chapters 12 and 13)—the battle between the church and evil is THE struggle in history.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24
REVELATION 14:14-20

THE HARVEST OF THE EARTH

14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” ¹⁶ So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

¹⁷ Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸ And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” ¹⁹ So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. ²⁰ And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia.

Today, we read about the effect the church’s/martyrs’ testimony will have on the nations. There are two possible outcomes to the church’s/martyrs’ testimony. The first is a positive outcome:

1. The nations will repent and be gathered into the kingdom in a great harvest (14:14-16).

The second possible outcome is negative:

2. The nations will refuse to repent, and will be judged along with the beast in the winepress of the wrath of God (14:17-20).

Which will it be? John doesn’t tell us—he just describes the two possibilities.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27
REVELATION 15:1-8

THE SEVEN ANGELS WITH SEVEN PLAGUES

I⁵ Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.

³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!

⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.

All nations will come
and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

⁵ After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, ⁶ and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. ⁷ And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, ⁸ and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

What is God’s plan for history? How will the Kingdom come?

God gave John his vision so that the Church would know the answer to that question.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus defeated evil and launched the Church. The Holy Spirit came to incorporate people of all nations into the Church, and not just the Jews.

As we read through the New Testament, we see the Church made up of believers from—in the language of Revelation—every nation, tribe, people, and language.

That alone is of utmost importance.

But Revelation tells us something electrifying:

Namely that the multi-ethnic church is not the goal—it is the means to the end.

In Revelation 15, John compares the victory of God at the end of history to the victory of God over the Egyptians in the days of the Exodus; in other words, John sees a new and greater Exodus.

² *And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.*

³ *And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,*

“Great and amazing are your deeds,

O Lord God the Almighty!

Just and true are your ways,

O King of the nations!

⁴ *Who will not fear, O Lord,*

and glorify your name?

For you alone are holy,

All nations will come

and worship you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

The new song the people sing is not just the song of Moses (as in Exodus) but also the song of the Lamb, because it is the death of the Lamb (i.e. the death of Jesus) that has won the victory.

And what has that victory achieved?

“That all nations will come and worship” the Lord.

Revelation reveals that the reason the Lord created a multi-ethnic church was so that the multi-ethnic church would evangelize the multi-ethnic world.

A CHURCH FROM ALL NATIONS FOR ALL NATIONS

Richard Bauckham, as usual, puts it perfectly:

“In 15:2-4 the martyrs celebrate the victory God has won through their death and vindication, not by praising him for their own deliverance, but by celebrating its effect on the nations, in bringing them to worship God. This gives a fresh significance to the earlier use of new exodus imagery with reference to the Lamb’s victory, in which by his death he ransomed a people from all the nations to be a kingdom and priests for God (5:9-10). We now see that this redemption of a special people from all the peoples is not an end in itself, but has a further purpose: to bring all the peoples to acknowledge and worship God. The immediate effect of the Lamb’s own victory was that his bloody sacrifice redeemed a people for God. But the intended ultimate effect is that this people’s participation in his sacrifice, through martyrdom, wins all the peoples for God. This is how God’s universal kingdom comes and the concluding verse of the song of Moses [in Exodus] is fulfilled: ‘The Lord will reign forever and ever’ (Exodus 15:18).”

— Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*

OTHER QUICK POINTS ON REVELATION 15

- John portrays the conversion of the nations in several different ways: in 11:3-13 it’s the result of the testimony of the two witnesses; in chapter 14 it is through the image of the harvest; here, it’s the image of a new exodus.
- The sea of glass is mixed with fire as a sign of heavenly judgment.
- The seven bowls are the final judgment and there is no more delay from this point on because the church has been created and God’s purposes have been realized.
- In v. 5, heaven is opened so that God’s glory can be seen in the midst of the final judgment.
- In v. 8, we see that God’s glory in heaven is manifested as wrath on earth, and vice versa.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28 REVELATION 16:1-7

THE SEVEN BOWLS OF GOD’S WRATH

16 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

² So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful

and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

³ The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

⁴ The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵ And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments.

⁶ For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!”

⁷ And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!”

There are 3 sets of 7 judgments in Revelation, and each one is a further explanation of the one before, though they are each about the same thing: the judgments from God that precede the Second Coming. Each way of talking about the 7 judgments is meant to show a different aspect of God’s judgment.

Today, we read of the beginning of the final series of 7 judgments: the 7 bowls.

Each of these bowls pours out a plague on the earth, just like the plagues of Egypt so many centuries before.

In the previous two series of 7 judgments (the seals and the trumpets) there has been a pause between #6 and #7 in which John tells us about the church.

Here, there is no pause, but just a message from Jesus: “Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”

The reason there is no pause is because it’s now time for the end to come. The church has been testifying to the truth, and at this point it’s too late to repent. Look at what happens at the 7th bowl:

“they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.”

If these plagues—coupled with the church’s message—won’t cause people to repent, then nothing will.

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1
REVELATION 16:8-16**

⁸ The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. ⁹ They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

¹⁰ The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

¹² The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. ¹³ And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. ¹⁴ For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

¹⁵ (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”) ¹⁶ And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

The Final Judgment is approaching, and no matter how bad things get, people refuse to repent.

Let it not be so among us.

Lord, give us hearts for repentance and help us turn towards you.

**THURSDAY, MARCH 2
REVELATION 16:17-21**

THE SEVENTH BOWL

¹⁷ The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” ¹⁸And

there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. ¹⁹ The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰ And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. ²¹ And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

The Final Judgment has arrived. And Babylon, which has appeared invincible, is finally brought down.

Don't be deceived today—God wins. And anything and everything opposed to his Kingdom will fall.

FRIDAY, MARCH 3 **REVELATION 17:1-6a**

THE GREAT PROSTITUTE AND THE BEAST

I7 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” ³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. ⁵ And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” ⁶ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

Richard Bauckham has a helpful summary of what John is telling us in Revelation chapters 17-18:

“The book of Revelation uses two major, complementary images of the evil power of Rome. One is the sea-monster (‘the beast’), introduced in chapter 13. It represents imperial power, the Roman Emperors as a political institution, and in particular their military might, on which the Roman empire was founded. The other image is of the great city Babylon, first named in 14:8, and then portrayed as a woman, ‘the great harlot,’ in chapter 17. Babylon is the city of Rome (built on the seven hills: 17:9) and in particular the city of Rome as a corrupting influence on the peoples of the empire. Chapter 17 brings the two images together: the harlot is enthroned on the seven heads of the beast (17:3, 9-10). In other words, Roman civilization, as a corrupting influence, rides on the back of Roman military power. The city of Rome grew great through military conquest, which brought wealth and power to the city, and its economic and cultural influence spread through the world in the wake of the imperial armies. John never forgets that Rome’s power is founded on war and conquest, but he also recognizes that it cannot be reduced to this. As well as the irresistible military might of the beast, there are the deceptive wives of the great harlot.”

—Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*

In Revelation 17-18, John uses a startling image to describe Rome—as a prostitute. In John’s vision, Roman economic power and wealth have the seductive allure of a prostitute, but he wants his people to know that Roman prosperity comes on the back of Roman conquest and war. This language is striking:

^{1b} “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” ³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. ⁵ And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” ⁶ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. [Revelation 17:1-6.]

The woman rides on the beast, because Roman wealth comes from Roman conquest.

An important insight that John sees is that wealth and materialism can make you drunk—she holds a cup that looks good on the outside, but on the inside is the vilest filth.

Our global economic system can be like that, can't it? Think of the ways that some of our economic practices enrich the people at the top but exploit the ones at the bottom.

It is important that we don't allow wealth and the pursuit of wealth to corrupt us and pull us away from faithfulness to the gospel.

MONDAY, MARCH 6
REVELATION 17:6b-18

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. ⁷ But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. ⁸ The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. ⁹ This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; ¹⁰ they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. ¹¹ As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. ¹² And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. ¹³ These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ They will make war on the Lamb, 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."

¹⁵ And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. ¹⁶ And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, ¹⁷ for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. ¹⁸ And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth."

The angel is here explaining the vision to John, so that he understands clearly that the woman is Roman culture and commerce, riding on the back of Roman military power. The references to mountains and heads and horns are all images relating to Roman political history.

The point is that the woman is evil and persecutes the Church of Jesus, but that Jesus will win in the end, and evil will turn against itself.

Once again: don't be afraid. Keep going.

P.S. Is this chapter about the historical city of Rome at the time of John's vision, or is "Rome" a symbol for all governments and empires who are opposed to the Kingdom of God, both at the time John was writing and in the future?

Yes.

P.P.S. Note that the city is never called "Rome" in Revelation, but rather is referred to as "Babylon." In other words, although John is speaking to Christians under the Roman Empire in the 1st century, he is using the image of an ancient enemy of Israel to explain what Rome is like. All the more reason to understand Revelation to be *both* speaking to John's 1st century audience and to God's people of all times and places.

TUESDAY, MARCH 7

REVELATION 18:1-3

THE FALL OF BABYLON

18 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. ² And he called out with a mighty voice,

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
She has become a dwelling place for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

³ For all nations have drunk
the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,
and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her
luxurious living."

In Revelation 18, John sees the fall of the system that is opposed to God:

- 18:1-3, An angel pronounces judgment on Babylon;
- 18:4-20, A voice from heaven predicts the fall of Babylon;
- 18:21-24, An angel pronounces judgment on Babylon a second time;
- 19:1-8, Voices in heaven praise God for the fall of Babylon.

In the plot of Revelation, we are now within the final judgments, when all evil is being brought to account. At this point in the vision, it's too late to repent and turn.

The good news is that it's not too late for us and our world—the final judgment that John sees has not yet happened here.

FROM WHAT DO YOU NEED TO REPENT TODAY?

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8

REVELATION 18:4-8

⁴ Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;

⁵ for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.

⁶ Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

⁷ As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,

‘I sit as a queen,
I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.’

⁸ For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

In Chapter 3, Jesus warns the church in Sardis not to be self-satisfied or corrupted by wealth. Here we see that one of the ways that the

woman (i.e., Rome) maintained power was through the corrupting influence of luxury and wealth.

Remember the warning of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel: "where your treasure is, there your heart will be." [Matthew 6:21]

In what way do you and I need to repent from loving luxury and wealth more than God today?

THURSDAY, MARCH 9
REVELATION 18:9-20

⁹ And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. ¹⁰ They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

"Alas! Alas! You great city,
you mighty city, Babylon!

For in a single hour your judgment has come."

¹¹ And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, ¹² cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, ¹³ cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

¹⁴ "The fruit for which your soul longed
has gone from you,
and all your delicacies and your splendors
are lost to you,
never to be found again!"

¹⁵ The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

¹⁶ "Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold,
with jewels, and with pearls!

¹⁷ For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off ¹⁸ and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

"What city was like the great city?"

¹⁹And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned,
crying out,
“Alas, alas, for the great city
where all who had ships at sea
grew rich by her wealth!
For in a single hour she has been laid waste.
²⁰ Rejoice over her, O heaven,
and you saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgment for you against her!”

Again—and this point is very uncomfortable for affluent American Christians like me—note how one of the marks of the evil empire is its great wealth, wealth that was derived from exploitative economic practices. It’s like the Capital in *The Hunger Games*—its citizens live in luxury that was only possible because other people were in poverty.

One of the messages of Revelation is that God’s Judgment will ultimately bring down such evil systems.

And the message to me today is to remember that wealth is fleeting and true joy comes from knowing God.

FRIDAY, MARCH 10 **REVELATION 18:21-24**

²¹ Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,
“So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,
and will be found no more;
²² and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,
and a craftsman of any craft
will be found in you no more,
and the sound of the mill
will be heard in you no more,
²³ and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more,
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,
for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth.”

Note the contrast between all the marks of wealth and luxury, on the one hand, with the martyrdom of the prophets and saints on the other.

In this world, it often looks like the people of God have lost.

Don't be deceived—death isn't the end for God's faithful ones.

Keep going.

MONDAY, MARCH 13

REVELATION 19:1-5

REJOICING IN HEAVEN

I⁹ After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

² for his judgments are true and just;

for he has judged the great prostitute

who corrupted the earth with her immorality,

and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

³ Once more they cried out,

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!”

And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

you who fear him,

small and great.”

Today in our reading of Revelation we finally get to the point toward which the entire book has been proceeding, where what John has seen in heaven (chapters 4-5) comes to earth: the Second Coming of Jesus.

TUESDAY, MARCH 14
REVELATION 19:6-10

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;

⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹ And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” ¹⁰ Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

THE ENDING OF ONE CITY AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE OTHER

⁹ And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” ¹⁰ Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

These verses move us from the fall of Babylon to the arrival of the New Jerusalem.

I find it so interesting that John tries to worship his angelic guide, much to the angel’s horror! Why shouldn’t angels be worshipped in their majesty and glory? **Because angels—no matter how majestic and glorious—are created things, and it’s wrong to worship anything except the Creator.**

To worship the Creation rather than the Creator is idolatry, and it is the way of death.

Don't miss the opportunity to praise and thank the Lord today for all his blessings.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

REVELATION 19:11-16

THE RIDER ON A WHITE HORSE

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

THE SECOND COMING

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse!

This is the moment to which the book has been working: heaven is fully revealed on earth. The kingdom has now come.

The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Jesus is a conqueror, but he conquers as a martyr, hence the bloody robe.

He comes as truth, which is why he is called The Word.

He strikes down his enemies with the Truth, which is why his mouth is a sharp sword.

His true identity is now revealed (an apocalypse!) to everyone: King and Lord.

THURSDAY, MARCH 16

REVELATION 19:17-21

¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, “Come, gather for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.” ¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. ²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹ And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

The Second Coming results in a complete rout of the enemy.

In John’s vision, judgement on the earth is described in multiple different ways, starting in chapter 6. To put it another way, John describes the same thing—the earth under God’s judgment—to us in different images and with different emphases. In each series of judgments, right before the Second Coming would occur, there is a digression as John describes the church’s mission.

And then each time he circles back to a theme he’s previously discussed, he tells us something new.

Allow me to recap the book's plot so far and show you what I mean:

- SET UP: Chapters 4-5, John sees the heavenly throne room.
- JUDGMENT 1ST DESCRIPTION: Chapter 6, the judgments of the seals (#'s 1-6);
- CHURCH DIGRESSION: Chapter 7, a description of the messianic army;
- JUDGMENT 2ND DESCRIPTION: Chapters 8-9, the 7th seal, then the judgments of the trumpets (#s 1-6);
- CHURCH DIGRESSION: The message of the scroll (chapters 10-11), and then further explication of it (chapters 12-15);
- JUDGMENT 3RD AND FINAL DESCRIPTION: Chapters 16-19.

The reason for the digressions is so that John can explain to the church that it has a role in God's plan: to testify to the truth about Jesus so that the unbelieving nations will hear and repent.

BUT

Those who ultimately refuse to repent will face judgment when Jesus finally comes and time runs out.

This is what is described in graphic terms in John's vision (19:17-21, above).

It is not God's desire that anyone should face judgment. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son" (John3:16); Revelation tells us that the church's role is to preach repentance in the name of Jesus to all nations, so that all nations might be saved. But God will not force people to repent, and those who stubbornly refuse will finally be destroyed.

FRIDAY, MARCH 17

REVELATION 20:1-3

THE THOUSAND YEARS

20 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

Evil has finally been defeated! Now, it's just the cleaning up and the sorting out that needs to occur—the "scouring," to paraphrase Tolkien. The source of evil—the devil—is thrown into the abyss until it's his time to be judged. It's like he's being kept in a holding cell, awaiting trial!

Let me say again: don't despair—evil loses in the end.

MONDAY, MARCH 20

REVELATION 20:4-6

⁴Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

The message of Revelation to the church is, "Don't give up, and don't be afraid—stay faithful to the Truth no matter what."

The reason this message is needed is because the beast often seems all-powerful, and even goes so far as to put the followers of Jesus to death. But, John's vision reminds the church that appearances can be deceiving, and that the way they conquer is staying faithful *even to the point of death*.

At the end, John sees that it is the *martyrs* who will reign with Christ, and not the beast. In the end, they are vindicated such that John sees it as a special blessing to be used by God in this way.

I'm reminded of what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount:

¹⁰ *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

¹¹ *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. [Matthew 5:10-12]*

TUESDAY, MARCH 21 REVELATION 20:7-10

THE DEFEAT OF SATAN

⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Once the King has appeared (chapter 19), evil never again has power. In John’s vision, Satan is released from the prison he was being temporarily held but it doesn’t matter.

It’s not a fair fight, and it’s over before it even begins. There is God, and then there is everything else.

Don’t be afraid!

**BIBLE STUDY TONIGHT (3/22) | 6:30 PM | SANCTUARY
LIVESTREAM: asburytulsa.online.church**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22 REVELATION 20:11-15

JUDGMENT BEFORE THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was

written in the books, according to what they had done.¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Note that what matters when Judgment Day arrives is having one's name written in the book of life. How does that happen? You ask for it!

As Revelation has shown over and over—and as the whole Bible teaches—God desires that all people would come to know him and be part of his family. However, God won't force anyone to accept his love and mercy, and ultimately God will give us over to our desires, which is what happens when the Judgment arrives in John's vision—those who won't repent are given what they want, which is NOT God. And because God is life and love and joy, eternal punishment is the opposite of those things—life without God is Hell.

But, no one need perish. All that it takes to receive life is to ask for it!

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!”

And he will.

If you have never asked to be saved, let today be that day. That's what a Christian is: a person who has acknowledged that Jesus is who he says he is and someone who has asked Jesus to save him or her.

This is how the Apostle Paul explains salvation in his Letter to the Romans:

“⁹If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’” (Roman 10: 9-11)

THURSDAY, MARCH 23
REVELATION 21:1-8

THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

The Kingdom has come, and with it comes the reality that there will never again be any bad thing.

From the opening message to the Ephesian church (chapter 2) all the way through, John’s vision is showing the churches what it looks like to conquer, namely to stay faithful to Jesus no matter what, even to the point of death. Why? Because when the Kingdom comes, it will all be worth it.

Note that:

“the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Why is that? Why can't unrepentant sinners be included?

Because the New Creation is perfect, and people who refuse to accept God's rule over their lives, admit that they need mercy, and repent from their ways can't be part of what will happen, because they would bring sin with them.

FRIDAY, MARCH 24

REVELATION 21:9-21

THE NEW JERUSALEM

⁹ Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— ¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. ¹⁶ The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. ¹⁷ He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. ¹⁸ The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

The city is a perfect cube, just like the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

It is made up of jewels, the same type of jewels that adorned the high priest's breastplate.

The entire city is meant to reflect and refract the glory of God.

MONDAY, MARCH 27
REVELATION 21:22-27

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Just like in Eden, in the New Jerusalem God's presence pervades everything, and so there is no need for a Temple, just as there is no need for mediated sources of light—all the light comes from the Lord God and the Lamb.

And the city will be adorned with all that's best and beautiful from the cultures of the earth.

Beautiful things that humanity makes, when dedicated to God's glory, will have a place in the New Creation. All good things will have a place in the New Creation, and there will be no place for anything bad.

Work hard at something beautiful today!

TUESDAY, MARCH 28
REVELATION 22:1-5

THE RIVER OF LIFE

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Way back on January 6 we read Ezekiel's vision of a River of Life. Here we see in John's vision that the reality is even better than what Ezekiel foresaw: how the Tree of Life spans the river and produces fruit and leaves that heal and delight.

And then there is that beautiful note that the servants of God and the Lamb will "reign forever."

God's plan is not to take away human freedom, but to allow it to flourish in its proper place. This was the plan from the beginning, and one day it will be realized.

[God's] kingdom turns out to be quite unlike the beast's. It finds its fulfillment not in the subjection of God's 'servants' (22:3) to his rule, but in their reigning with him (22:5). The point is not that they reign over anyone: the point is that God's rule over them is for them a participation in his rule. The image expresses the eschatological reconciliation of God's rule and human freedom, which is also expressed in the paradox that God's service is perfect freedom (cf. 1 Pet. 2:16). Because God's will is the moral truth of our own being as his creatures, we shall find our fulfillment only when, through our free obedience, his will becomes also the spontaneous desire of our hearts. Therefore in the perfection of God's kingdom theonomy (God's rule) and human autonomy (self-determination) will fully coincide."

Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*

God's will is for us to reign!

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29
REVELATION 22:6-15

JESUS IS COMING

⁶ And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”

⁷ “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

⁸ I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, ⁹ but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

¹⁰ And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹ Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

¹² “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Here we are again reminded of what we were told in the very first verse of the entire book: that the Revelation came to John from God by way of an angel.

And the purpose of that Revelation is to strengthen the church to be faithful no matter what, even to the point of death. This is what it means in Revelation by “wash their robes”—that is, to be faithful to the point of death, just like Jesus, and thereby participate in both his death and his triumph.

THURSDAY, MARCH 30
REVELATION 22:16-21

¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

The End.

The message of not just the book of Revelation, but the entire Bible:

In The End, everything will be okay.

If it's not okay, then it's not The End:

And if it's not The End, then God still has work for us to do.

So, no matter if Jesus returns in triumph now or later, it's going to be good.

Come on, Lord. Let's go!

FRIDAY, MARCH 31
JOHN 16:33

“In this world, you will have trouble; but have no fear: I have overcome the world.”

Our reading of Revelation has concluded, but God still has work for us to do. John 16:33 is a verse worth memorizing and keeping close as you move forward.

Keep going!

“Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated into any other language. The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, is adapted from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.”