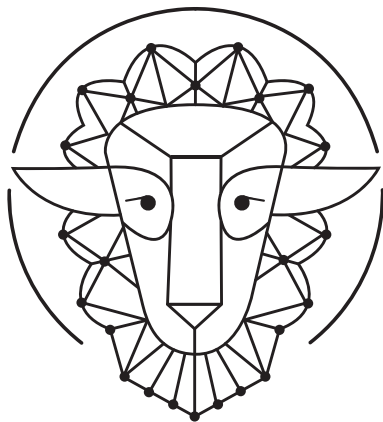




# REVELATION

FOLLOW THE LAMB WHEREVER HE GOES





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# WEEK I







# LESSON ONE

(Re)Introduction to Revelation - Chapters 4-22 - The Restoration of Everything

And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and elders.No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins.They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.  
- Revelation 14:3-4

John came to the end of his book. But he didn't write "The End."  
Because, of course, that's how stories finish. (And this one's not over yet.)  
So instead, he wrote: "Come quickly, Jesus!"  
Which, perhaps, is really just another way of saying...  
TO BE CONTINUED...  
- Sally Lloyd-Jones, The Jesus Storybook Bible, 348.

## Big Idea

Revelation is apocalyptic literature and must be read accordingly.

# Starter

The Restoration of Everything

N.D. Wilson concludes his book, *Notes From the Tilt-A-Whirl*, with a passage on the End that makes for a good beginning.<sup>1</sup>

In the cold, I stand, shivering in the dark storm, moving my light up and down my tunnel. It is collapsing in a rush. These leaves aren't fluttering; they aren't spinning on sun-gold air. They are dying swiftly in the night, their colors already hidden.

I see Rome falling, collapsing by rain.

I see Byzantium, with the pomp and great hats and the importance of emperors.

I see Africa slipping to the earth.

I see Nietzsche and Plato, Hume and Leibniz and Kant. I see kings and prophets unable to stand.

I see myself, my people, my country, my leaves, my blood.

We are dying. We must die. The road is well traveled. We need not fear the dark, for the way is lit with Christmas lights.

We go into the ground, where the moss will feed on us and others will be stacked on top. We go into church floors and graveyards behind grocery stores. We go into the sea and the snow. We are devoured – by each other, by the earth, by time, by cancers and confusion, by the spinning of this sphere as it runs its balanced laps. We are in Winter, where the light dies and the blood runs cold.

But we are not forgotten. Wet, ripped from the trees and trampled, we will not be lost, for we are His words, and when His voice calls, we will come.

Offstage, there is another greater stage.

Come, let us grow old like fishermen. Let us sweeten the air with songs while we fade.

Let us die. Winter cannot hold us. Let us go into the ground, and our faces will find the sun. Let us ride the eruption of Easter.

Our Maker waits. He would have a conversation. What words will we have?

We need only one, the One who spoke to us.

We will hear the angels sing. We will be the sheep. We will be made new and find ourselves standing in a garden. We will be handed bodies and shovels and joy.

No tree will be prohibited.

Blister your hands. Tend to the ants. Push the shadows back. Sing.

Make a garden of the world.

We will laugh and carve FINIS on the earth. We will carve it on the moon. We will look to the Voice, to the Singer, the Painter, the Poet, the One born in a barn, the One with holes in His hands and oceans in His eyes, and on that day we will know –  
The story has begun.  
And we will rake the leaves.

FINIS

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<sup>1</sup> N.D. Wilson, *Notes From the Tilt-A-Whirl* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 196-197. Wilson also writes a clear and powerful meditation on the existence and purpose of Hell in the chapter, "Hell: The Final Conversation," pp. 165-183.

1. We are in Winter... Share where you spent most of your childhood winters, and share a favorite winter memory.

2. Offstage, there is another greater stage. As we embark on the "wild and wooly" sections of Revelation, what are you most looking forward to? What are you dreading? What do you hope to gain from these small group times together?

## **Understanding the Text – How to Read Revelation for All Its Worth<sup>2</sup>**

The purpose of this brief introduction is to discuss the basic interpretive principles we will be using to understand the book of Revelation, chapters 4-22. The full introduction to Revelation from Fall 2016 can be found on the Waterstone website [www.waterstonechurch.org](http://www.waterstonechurch.org). That introduction includes Purpose in Writing, Authorship, Date, First Readers, Genre, Interpretive Approaches and Main Theological Themes.

### **Purpose of Revelation**

To recast the big picture of Revelation, a paragraph from the earlier introduction is helpful: The purpose of Revelation is to experience the sovereignty of God and Christ as their redemptive and restorative intentions for this world are revealed. This exposure motivates worship of God (worship being the expression of our deepest allegiance), which fuels obedience to his word (obedience being the reflection of God's character to the world).

It is important to keep this purpose, worship that leads to witness, central because no book in the Bible has suffered more abuse than Revelation. As G. K. Chesterton wrote: "Though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators."<sup>3</sup> The mishandling comes mainly from reading our present back into Revelation, using the letter as a kind of crystal ball to explain the movement of nations and development of cultures in order to predict how close we are to the end of the world, to getting Left Behind.

Revelation does not intend to chart the specific cosmic movements toward the End. The intent of the letter is to purge and refurbish the Christian mind to truly perceive reality: Jesus Christ is victorious and he reigns; he has the movements configured from beginning to end. Then, rightly perceiving reality, the Christian resolve is riveted to Christ's rule such that Christians resist and challenge the world's dominant ideologies even though it may cost their lives.

Michael Gorman puts it succinctly: "Revelation is not about the Antichrist, but about the living Christ. It is not about a rapture out of this world but about faithful discipleship in this world... If anyone asks, 'Why read the Apocalypse?' the unhesitating answer must be, 'To know Christ better.'"<sup>4</sup>

# Interpreting Revelation

As we reenter Revelation chapters 4-22, here are some key interpretive principles to remember:

1. Revelation is primarily an apocalypse. It was one of several apocalypses well-known to Jews and Christians between 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. These apocalypses share common characteristics:

- The taproot of apocalyptic literature is the Old Testament prophetic literature, especially as it is found in Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and parts of Isaiah.<sup>5</sup> Because apocalyptic literature is usually born out of persecution and oppression, it is primarily concerned with coming justice and salvation. Thus, the great concern of apocalyptic literature is no longer God's movements within history. The apocalyptists see forward and beyond to the time when God will bring a violent, sweeping end to history that will judge evil and restore all things to right.

- Most frequently the "stuff" of apocalyptic literature is presented in the form of visions and dreams, and its language is cryptic and symbolic. These literary devices are used to give the book a sense of age (i.e. "seal it up" for a later day and "open the seals" because we are in the later days). Also, the apocalypses are highly stylized, with a tendency to divide time and events into neat packages (i.e. seals, bowls, trumpets...). There is also keenness for the symbolic use of numbers. It is important not to get stuck on counting. In Revelation, numbers are most often used to convey large size or long times rather than being literal measurements.

- Apocalyptic imagery is of several kinds. In some cases, the images are constant, like the modern-day donkey and elephant in American political cartoons. For instance, the sea beast seems to be a stock image for a world empire, not for an individual ruler. On the other hand, some images are fluid. The "Lion" of the tribe of Judah turns out in fact to be a Lamb (5:5-6). The woman in chapter 12 is clearly a positive image, while the woman in chapter 17 is evil. All of this is to say that the images in Revelation are the most difficult part of interpretation. This next statement is then essential: the reader must see the visions as wholes and not allegorically press all the details into correspondence with something in history. Apocalypses in general, and Revelation in particular, seldom intend to give a detailed chronological account of the future.

The message of Revelation (to bolster the church in worship and witness) transcends mere chronological concern. John's concern is to convince the reader that God is in control of history despite appearances, and even though the church will experience suffering and death, it will be triumphant with Christ.

- Apocalyptic pictures view time telescopically, that is, from outside of time and from the End of time. In other words, many of the pictures in Revelation are intended to express the certainty of God's judgment, not how soon it is coming from our limited perspective. When Satan is defeated at Christ's death and resurrection and is "cast down to earth" to persecute the church and wreck its mission, both Satan and Jesus know that Satan's time is "short." But "short" does not necessarily mean "very soon," but rather something more like "limited."

2. The first task in understanding any text is to seek the author's original intent. The primary meaning of Revelation is what John intended it to mean, which in turn must also have been something his readers could have understood it to mean.<sup>6</sup> Revelation should have meaning for the seven churches in Asia because it's addressed to them and the "time is at hand" (Revelation 1:3). Revelation should be relevant and applicable to us, because "blessed are those who hear and read" (Revelation 1:3).

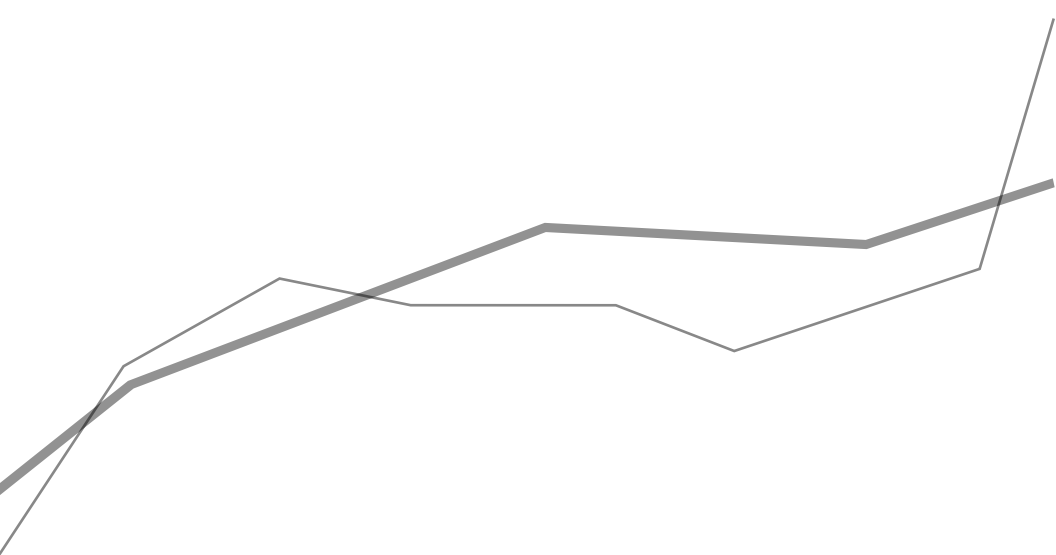
3. The context of Revelation is all of Scripture. This book is loaded with Old Testament references and allusions including Hebrew word pictures, poetic forms and manners of speaking. John's other writings, along with the writings of Peter and Paul, help us understand how John talks in the Revelation. John is writing to and is part of churches that were planted by Paul. For instance, we know from Acts that Paul taught in Ephesus for two years and "all of Asia" came to hear him. We also know that by this time the apostles had a sense that Paul's letters were part of the collected books ("canon") of the New Testament (notice Peter calling Paul's letters "Scripture" in 2 Peter 3:16).

4. Read for the big picture. Like no other book in the New Testament, it is important in Revelation to not "lose the forest for the trees." Do not try to figure out everything. That is neither the intent nor the goal of understanding Revelation. Let your reading itself be a happening, as it were.<sup>7</sup> Let the visions and scenes roll past you with jolting effect. Revelation is an experience. **This is why we have included the entire text of Revelation in the curriculum and encourage groups to take the time to read aloud the entire book.**

### **Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart summarize:**

Just as the opening word of Scripture speaks of God and creation, so the concluding word speaks of God and consummation. If there are some ambiguities for us as to how all the details are to work out, there is no ambiguity as to the certainty that God will work it all out – in His time and in His way. Such certainty should serve for us as for them to warn and to encourage.

Until He comes, we live out the future in the already, and we do so by hearing and obeying His Word. But there comes a day when books such as this one will no longer be needed, for, “No longer will a man teach his neighbor... because they will all know me” (Jeremiah 31:33). And with John, and the Spirit and the bride, we say, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”<sup>8</sup>



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<sup>2</sup> Much of this section on how to read apocalyptic literature comes from Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 205-217.

<sup>3</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Image Books, 1990), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), xv.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 206.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.



# The Great Drama of Revelation<sup>9</sup>

**Chapters 1–3** set the stage on earth and introduce the significant characters: John, Christ (especially the vision in 1:12-20), and the seven churches. This was our study during the fall of 2016.

**Chapters 4–5** also set the stage from heaven with breathtaking visions of worship designed to overwhelm God’s people with the sovereignty and majesty of God’s reign. To struggling churches who may be wondering whether God is still engaged with and for them, Jesus is revealed as the “Lion” who comes as the “Lamb” to conquer evil and death through his loving self-sacrifice.

**Chapters 6–7** begin the unfolding of the actual drama with the opening of the seven seals on the scroll –God’s sovereign plan for history. Three times throughout Revelation the visions are presented in carefully constructed sets of seven (seals in chapters 6-7; trumpets in chapters 8-11; plagues/bowls in chapters 15-16). This first tidal wave of seal judgments expresses the apocalyptic insight that while the world’s suffering is allowed by God, it comes fundamentally as the result of human sin.

**Chapters 8–11** reveal the content of God’s judgment. The first four trumpet blasts indicate that part of that judgment will involve great disasters of nature. Trumpets five and six indicate that judgment will also come from military aggression and a great war. After an interlude where God’s witnesses are exalted even though they died, the seventh trumpet resonates the verdict: “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.”

Thus, we are brought through the big picture of the entire suffering of the Church throughout this age, as well as the judgment of God upon the enemies of the Church to the complete and total triumph of the Lamb. Chapters 12-22 go on to offer further details and drama of that judgment and triumph. “What has happened is something like looking at Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel; at first, one is simply awestruck at the sight of the whole Chapel. Only later one can inspect the parts and see the magnificence that has gone into every detail.”<sup>10</sup>

**Chapters 12-14** present the theological key to the book where, through two visions, we are told of Satan's futile attempt to destroy Christ, but then we see that the story ends in Satan's own defeat. Thus, within the recurring already/but not yet New Testament framework of the kingdom, Satan is revealed as a defeated foe (already), whose final end has (not yet) come. There is rejoicing because "salvation has come," yet there is woe to the Church because Satan knows he is running out of time so he is taking vengeance out on God's people through his influence on the Roman Empire, whose emperors were demanding allegiance or death.

**Chapters 15-22** unveil the doom that awaits Satan, the Empire and its power brokers. The city of earth (Rome, Babylon, ...) is condemned and judged for persecuting the people of God. Then the city of God comes down from heaven where God will live with his people forever.

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<sup>9</sup> Fee & Stewart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth.*, 213. Fee & Stewart use this metaphor ("the great drama") to share how the book unfolds, and this brief survey is indebted to them.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

## GROUP QUESTIONS

4. Based on your previous experience and current understanding, if someone were to ask you what Revelation is about, how would you respond? Who or what has had the greatest influence on how you interpret Revelation?

5. Does it bother you that Christians who are equally committed to the inspiration and authority of the Bible offer so many different perspectives on the intent and meaning of the text of Revelation? How do you manage the diversity of opinion? What effect should this have on our approach to this final book of the New Testament?

6. Revelation is an apocalyptic chapter that reveals Jesus Christ as the Lamb who sovereignly accomplishes God's saving purposes. As such, Jesus is our hope. How would you define hope? Why is the idea of hope critical for the people of God in every generation? How do you experience hope in this season of your life?

7. Please review and commit to the Waterstone Small Group Covenant on the next page. What might we as a small group add to the covenant for this series in light of the fears and anxieties expressed by people in the questions above?

# WATERSTONE SMALL GROUP COVENANT

**UNCONDITIONAL LOVE** — I covenant that there is nothing that anyone in the group has done or will do that will make me stop loving them. I may not agree with their actions, but I will love them as a person and do all I can to hold them up to God's affirming love.

**CONFIDENTIALITY** — I promise to keep whatever is shared in the group as confidential. I will not discuss another small group member's words, attitudes or life conditions with anyone outside the small group unless specific permission is given to do so. I understand that without this important element the group won't survive.

**HONESTY** — I will speak the truth with the desire to not be offensive to group members. If I am having trouble with another person's personality, I will be honest about it and approach that person, in person, outside of the group. I will not resort to personal attacks in or out of the group.

**PRAYER** — I commit to pray for those in the group on a consistent basis.

**ACCOUNTABILITY** — I covenant to come each week prepared to participate. I will make a serious attempt to have the lesson reviewed so that I am able to whole-heartedly engage in the group discussions.

**OPENNESS** — I covenant to strive to become a more open person, disclosing my feelings, struggles, joys, and hurts to those in my small group as much as I am able. The degree to which I do so implies that I cannot make it without them, that I trust them with my problems and my hopes, and that I need them. This is to affirm their worth to me as a person.

**SENSITIVITY** — I promise to be a good listener. Even as I desire to be known and understood by the others in the group, I covenant to be sensitive to each person. I will be attentive when they are speaking, and I will protect their feelings even though they react differently than me. I will self-monitor how much I am talking so that I don't dominate the discussion. I will not be the resident know-it-all who freely gives unwanted advice. I will not be shocked, condemning, or condescending.

I will not resort to labels such as “emotional,” “not very bright,” “too intellectual,” “liberal,” or “conservative.” This is especially important for productive study in a text like Revelation where there are many opinions and convictions about “last things” among many smart and godly people. I will listen and seek to understand with a humble heart.

AVAILABILITY — Anything I have—time, energy, insight, possessions—is at the disposal of those who need it, to the limit of my resources. I give these freely as I give myself as long as they do not interfere with the prior covenants with God or my family, which take precedence.

God being my helper, I enter into this covenant:

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## GROUP PRAYER

During this small group season, we will, for most lessons, use the Evening Prayer template from the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>11</sup>

This is for two reasons. First, our praying lives keep us connected to the saints from all time and place, Laodicea to Latvia to Littleton. Nothing is of greater value to Jesus than the unity of His Body (John 14-17), and nothing is of greater witness to the world. So each week we will pray with old prayers that have anchored churches and believers through the hardest times of life. Second, since we are dying, we need words that prepare us. Making these words our habit will plant them in our minds to recall on those days when we will need them most. And we will need them.

### Book of Common Prayer – Evening Prayers

A reader (whoever wants to, taking turns around the group) reads the plain words;  
**the entire group reads aloud together the words in bold.**

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I return.

**The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.**

O God, come to my aid: **O Lord, make haste to help me.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Kneeling if possible: **Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.**

**I confess to almighty God,  
and to you, my brothers and sisters,  
that I have sinned through my own fault,  
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done,  
and in what I have failed to do;  
and I ask you, my brothers and sisters,  
to pray for me to the Lord, our God.**

Silence (or time to confess to God or one another).

Rebuke me, O Lord, but not in your anger, lest I come to nothing (Jer.10:24).

**Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Amen.**

A candle may be lit while the rest of the prayers are offered.

**Walk in the light, the beautiful light.  
Come where the dew drops of mercy shine bright.  
Shine all around us by day and by night.  
Jesus, the light of the world.**

O gracious Light,  
pure brightness of the ever living Father in heaven,  
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!  
Now as we come to the setting of the sun,  
and our eyes behold the evening light,  
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,  
O Son of God, O Giver of life,  
your glory fills the whole world.

In word or song:

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise God all creatures here below.  
Praise God above, ye heavenly hosts.  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

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<sup>11</sup> Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Enuma Okoro, *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

## Declaring our Faith: The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,  
**and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:**

Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended into hell.

**The third day He arose again from the dead.**  
**He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,**  
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

The third day He arose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,  
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy global church,  
**the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,**  
**the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.**

**Amen.**



Prayers for Others:

Take turns saying aloud prayers for people in your life/our lives,  
our community and the world.

Following each request: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Revelation 1:4-8

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

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father —  
to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

“Look, he is coming with the clouds,”  
and “every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him”;

**and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”  
So shall it be! Amen.**

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

Closing:

Lord God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ triumphed over the powers of death and prepared for us our place in the new Jerusalem: Grant that we, who have this day given thanks for his resurrection, may praise thee in that City of which he is the light; and where he lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

**May the Lord bless us and keep us from all harm; and may  
God lead us to eternal life. Amen.**

## Additional Resources

Text Prayer Movement: During our study of Revelation this winter we invite you to participate in a movement of prayer. Each day you will receive a daily text that highlights a group of people that needs our prayers. Thus, we will “follow the Lamb wherever he goes.”

To sign up, please email Alyssa Frisbie at [alysaff@waterstonechurch.org](mailto:alysaff@waterstonechurch.org). Alyssa will send an invitation to join this texting group from an app called Remind. You will be asked to text: @watersto to 81010.

81010 is the Remind code to access the group, @watersto is the class code for the Waterstone Prayer Community.

Once you have joined the Prayer Community, you will receive a text at 8am each weekday. There are no reading/prayers on Saturdays or Sundays as we will be together as Christ's Church.

We hope the texts launch bursts of praise, reliance and allegiance throughout the day. Remember Revelation 5:8:

And when he had taken it [the Scroll], the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

## About the Weekly Studies

### The format of each weekly group study goes like this:

- Discussion Starter: Each week begins with warm up discussion about how the good news of Jesus Christ intersects and interacts with particular parts of our cultural existence. These starters may become lively and even controversial so it is important to remember that they are designed to be discussion starters not discussion solvers. With the exception of the first week where we take more time for sharing some of our personal stories, limit the time to discuss the case studies to 15 minutes.
- Understanding the Text: This is the “meat” of the discussion when the questions guide us to understand what the text means – which is to ask: what does the original author intend to say to the original audience? Questions will focus on historical background, key words, grammar and context. Listening to the messages on Revelation before the small group meeting will be beneficial. Give these questions 20-25 minutes. Encourage many group members to help read the material aloud.
- Applying the Text: This is the “so what” of the discussion when the questions guide us to work the meaning of the text into our lives. The person who obeys the words of the text is the person who loves God. So any kind of creative ideas and encouragement we can share with one another empowers faithfulness. Give these questions 10 minutes.
- Group Prayer: As our small groups share this season together, we want to grow in prayer and be formed by prayer. During this small group season, we will, for most lessons, use the Evening Prayer template from the Book of Common Prayer<sup>12</sup> for two reasons. First, our praying lives keep us connected to the saints from all time and place, Laodicea to Latvia to Littleton. Nothing is of greater value to Jesus than the unity of His Body (John 14-17), and nothing is of greater witness to the world.

So each week we will pray with old prayers that have anchored churches and believers through the hardest times of life. Second, since we are dying, we need words that prepare us. Making these words our habit will plant them in our minds to recall on those days when we will need them most. And we will need them. These times of prayer will normally take 10-15 minutes.

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<sup>12</sup> Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Enuma Okoro, Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.



# WEEK II



# LESSON TWO

Revelation 4-5 “The Last Word on Worship”

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

– Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Wisdom of the Sands*

## Big Idea

John sees a vision of worship in heaven: God and Christ are exalted on the throne as sovereign ruler over the church and the cosmos, which was accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection. This vision of worship is a call to worship on earth for the centering of our lives.

## Starter

The Last Word on Worship<sup>1</sup>

The Tate Britain Museum in London hosts a painting by Sir John Everett Millais (1829-96) called *The Boyhood of Raleigh*. Sir Walter Raleigh was one of Queen Elizabeth I's intrepid explorers who established British colonies in North Carolina between 1584-89. With the painting, Millais imagines what made Walter Raleigh such an adventurer. His hypothesis? A good storyteller, a withered old sailor who captivates young Raleigh's imagination with tales of what lies on the other side of the horizon.

God woos our imaginations with the “endless immensity” of his being. The “four living creatures” around the throne (4:6-7) seem to represent every living creature: domesticated (ox), wild (lion), human (face like a man) and flying (eagle).



Covered with eyes, they continually view God's inexhaustible creativity. Did you know there are 5,000 known species of sponges on the ocean floor and over 300,000 species of beetles? The animal kingdom reveals God's infinite range of thought and sense of humor, from the sloth to the roadrunner.

That the universe is designed for worship means everyone worships. It seems we know innately how to worship. Whether as football fans who research fantasy teams, plan the tailgating menu, wear the proper (and expensive) jerseys, then shout and curse and jump during the game – it's worship. Or ponder our captivation with sex: we are overpowered by the sight of a sexually attractive object. Many of us would not want anyone to know how much this rends our heart, how when we get upset or down or lonely, we console ourselves with sex. It's worship. Or we're obsessed with celebrity, the glitz of the super beautiful, the rich, the athletic, even the criminal – we seem compelled to worship something greater than ourselves as if there is memory trace of someone on the throne with power, beauty and wisdom. It's worship. Anything that gives you meaning, anything for which you sacrifice, anything that moves you to tears, anything that gets you through the day or grabs you by the throat – it's worship.<sup>2</sup>

Some say, "There are people who grab on to fairytales and lean on their crutches to get by, but not me. I am a skeptic. There is no supernatural; nothing beyond this life." But this existence is brief and small and flat and completely over at death. Without worshipping God, existence shrinks. All there is to live for is the pallet and the provincial.

This is the reason why God commands worship – to connect with eternity. Many are troubled by a God who is continually saying, "Praise Me," like that person at the party who roams conversations: "Enough about you; let's talk about me. Don't you think I'm great?" We deeply misunderstand God's intentions here. Why has God wired us to worship him? It is not because God needs our praise; it is because we need to praise him to be fully alive and connected to reality.

"If there is no center, there is no circumference. People who do not worship are swept into a vast restlessness, epidemic in the world, with no steady direction and no sustained purpose."<sup>3</sup>

1. Where is your favorite place to experience the beauty and vastness of creation?  
What is the farthest place from Colorado you've ever been?

2. As you observe and experience our culture, where do you see "vast restlessness... with no steady direction and no sustained purpose"? Where do you see "vast restlessness" in yourself?

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<sup>1</sup>"The Last Word" titles from Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), vii.

<sup>2</sup>"In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship... is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things – if they are where you tap real meaning in life – then you will never have enough... Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you... Worship power – you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart – you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. The insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful; it is that they are unconscious. They are default settings. They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value without ever being fully aware that that's what you're doing." – David Foster Wallace, "Plain Old Untrendy Troubles and Emotions," *The Guardian*, Sept. 20, 2008, 2.

<sup>3</sup>Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), 60.



# Understanding the Text

**Step one: Observation - What do we see?** Every time we read the Bible, the first thing we should ask is, "What do we see?" Read the text aloud during your group. As you read, mark up the passage by circling what you believe to be key words or phrases. Place yourself into the original audience and ask questions (who, what, where, when, how, why).

## Revelation 4-5 (NIV)

4:1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first 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 there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. 6 Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

"Holy, holy, holy  
is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come."

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they were created  
and have their being."

5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. 4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. 8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. 9 And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased for God  
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.  
10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth."

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they were saying:

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

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

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!”

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

3. Share observations together. What stands out? What do you notice?

**Step two: Interpretation – What does it mean?** The goal is to understand the original author's intended meaning to the original audience. This requires research and discussion on the original readers' cultural and historical background. This is where it is beneficial to dig into a commentary or Bible dictionary, or to listen to a sermon. We are careful NOT to begin our study by asking, "What does this passage mean to me?" That question is application, not interpretation. The meaning of the text is the author's intended meaning. Until we understand the meaning of the text we will not apply the text correctly to our lives.

Background:

The Relation of Revelation 1-3 to chapters 4-5: Christ, the Victorious King. The picture of Christ in Revelation 3:21 – "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne" – leads into the vision of chapters 4-5. John now explains in rich detail and imagery the past act of Christ's exaltation on his throne as ruler over the church and the cosmos, which was accomplished by his death and resurrection.<sup>4</sup>

The theme of "overcoming" from chapters 2-3, where believers were exhorted to "overcome" in the midst of trials and temptations to compromise their faith, is further developed in chapter 5. In fact, the rest of Revelation (chapters 5-22) symbolically describes the victory of the Lamb who will bring his followers with him all the way to the new creation. Christ's challenge to overcome (to follow the Lamb wherever he goes – 14:4), that was shared directly with each of the seven churches by individual letter (Revelation 2-3), is now shared with apocalyptic imagination so that all churches are bolstered by the "endless immensity" of Christ's being and victory.

Revelation 5:5-9 explains that Christ was worthy through his sacrificial death, and, as a result, granted kingship. This reign of Christ, still to come in fullness, is the present participation of believers as "priests to serve our God" in Christ's already here, but not yet complete, kingdom (5:10). Thus, as Christ has faced suffering and death and has overcome, believers can be assured that as they persevere in the present they are already participating in the promised kingdom.

Worship Vision in Chapter 4: The Throne. Christians worship with a conviction that they are in the presence of the living Christ. The predominant image of God's presence in Revelation 4 is the throne in heaven. God's throne occurs 19 times in Revelation 4-5 (43 times from chapter 4 through the end of the book). The emphasis is that although God's realm is separated from the earthly, he is nevertheless in control over earth's events, appearances to the contrary. Regardless of how rampant evil seems to run or the oppression God's people experience, they can know, because of Christ's death and resurrection that God's hand superintends everything for their final good and his final glory.<sup>5</sup>

This is the essential theology of Revelation: God the Creator reigns and is worthy of our complete devotion, and Jesus the slaughtered Lamb who reigns with God is worthy of our courageous witness. Thus, Christian worship is centering.<sup>6</sup>

Worship Vision in Chapter 5: The Lamb. The vision continues as John sees a scroll "in the right hand of him who sat on the throne." There is a dreadful moment of fear and weeping because the destiny of the world and every person in it seems in doubt because there is no one who is "worthy" to approach the throne and open the scroll, that is, to enact its contents. The scroll contains God's plans "to undo and overthrow world-destroying projects that have already gained so much ground, and to plant and nurture instead the world-rescuing project which will get creation itself back on track in the right direction."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> G. K. Beale, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 311.

<sup>5</sup> Beale, 320.

<sup>6</sup> "Worship is a meeting at the center so that our lives are centered in God and not lived eccentrically. We worship so that we live in response to and from this center, the living God. Failure to worship consigns us to a life of spasms and jerks, at the mercy of every advertisement, every seduction, every siren. Without worship we live manipulated and manipulating lives." – Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 60.

<sup>7</sup> N. T. Wright, *Revelation: Everyone Bible Study Guides* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 34.

In Revelation 5:5-6, we come to one of the most decisive moments in Scripture when John hears from one of the elders the announcement of the conquering Lion who is able to open the scroll. But what John sees is the slaughtered Lamb at the center of the throne. From this moment on, John, and all careful readers, are to understand that the victory won by the Lion of Judah is accomplished through the sacrifice of the Lamb.

Christ's sacrificial death reveals the way God rules the world. It is critical that we not miss the paradoxical significance of the slaughtered Lamb sharing in the identity and sovereignty of God on the throne. The exalted Christ remains the crucified Jesus. This is the true face of God and the overcoming way to witness.

Michael Gorman applies this:

When this witness is neglected or forgotten, trouble follows swiftly. Any reading of Revelation – and any practice of theology more generally – that forgets this central New Testament truth is theologically problematic, even dangerous, from its very inception. It is doomed, not to failure, but to success – and that is its inherent defect.

Human beings, even apparently faithful Christians, too often want an almighty deity who will rule the universe with power, preferably on their terms, and with force when necessary. Such a concept of God and of sovereignty induces its adherents to side with the kind of God in the execution of (allegedly) divine might in the quest for (allegedly) divine justice. Understanding the reality of the Lamb as Lord – and thus of Lamb power – terminates, or should terminate, all such misperceptions of divine power and justice...The cross is both the source and the shape of our salvation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 111-112

## GROUP QUESTIONS

4. In Revelation 4:6-11, John describes the four creatures surrounding the throne and twice says they are “full of eyes.” What is implied by this image of being covered with eyes (see Starter, second paragraph)? In what ways would this image have encouraged his first readers? Notice the presence of songs as well - how does corporate singing and worship bring perspective?

5. Read Revelation 5:1-4. What is symbolized by the “scroll?” What would it take for someone to be “worthy” to “break the seals and open the scroll”? Why does John weep bitterly?

6. In Revelation 5:5-6, John hears the Lion of Judah announced, but sees the Lamb who was slain at the center of the throne. What are the differences between these two animals, and what does each one symbolize? What happens when the Lamb takes the scroll? In what ways does Christ as the Lamb reshape your understanding of the identity of God?

**Step three: Application – how does it work?** It is the person who not only knows God's Word, but also obeys His Word that truly loves Him (John 14:21). Application of God's Word to our lives involves identifying the specific instructions from the text and making a plan to obey them.

7. In the vision of Revelation 4-5, reality is God at the center of all things and his followers singing, "You are worthy." Worship is seeing the worth of God such that he becomes the Treasure of your life. Has your life been radically reoriented to the worth of the Treasure? If so, how has it been? What would a more Christ-treasuring lifestyle look like for Waterstone? And for you?

8. We see in Revelation 5:9 that Jesus' blood has "purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation." God is far more committed to saving people than we are to sharing this news with them. What are some reasons we are reluctant to be witnesses of God's grace and reality in Jesus Christ (Waterstone's "Neighbor" rhythm)? (This question is offered in the spirit of Hebrews 10:24: "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.")



## GROUP PRAYER

All creation worships God; we are called to worship him with mind and heart, recognizing that he is worthy of all praise as the Creator of all things and the Lamb who was slain. Take time to offer thanks and praise to God for the specific reasons why he is worthy of our worship – paying attention both to the wonders of his creative work and to his mercies you have observed in your life.

In preparation, have group members re-read the five songs in Revelation 4-5 (4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12, 13). And perhaps, in light of Revelation 5:8, place a lit scented candle at the center of the room while you pray.

Then take time for members to share with God something like this: “God, you are worthy of our worship and witness because...”

Of course singing would be welcomed as well.

## Additional Resources

Revelation 4-5 as Pattern for the Church's Liturgy: This vision of worship in heaven is template for the worship of the Church. Note the mention of worship elements: praise, thanksgiving, confession (weeping), and music. The "harp" in 5:8 is probably a lute – something like a banjo - indicating for sure that bluegrass and folk carry the music of heaven! There are five songs mentioned in Revelation 4-5. Singing is vital to expressive worship because, as Augustine said, "He who sings, prays twice" – once with the head, once with the heart.

There are also vials of prayer from the saints which burn as incense before the Lamb. Lastly, there is the opening of the "scroll" – a book containing God's plan of judgment and redemption. The history of the world is a story and a project; it is going somewhere. The Bible is the story of Christ's project to save the world. Each time believers gather for worship, the Scriptures are opened and we are reminded of this great narrative: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

Thought for our Worship:

Revelation 4-5 brings to mind a question in our worship, "What really is the best posture for worship?" Some people believe that it's standing as it's more reverent. Some people believe face-down prostration is the most honoring. Interestingly, the twenty-four elders are generally described as sitting on their thrones, but they prostrate themselves when the living ones begin worship. The living ones are simply described as being there, though perhaps we can assume they are standing? Regardless, by the time we transition to chapter 5, both the living ones and the elders prostrate themselves while worshipping the slain Lamb.

As such, it seems like any assumptions we make about preferred physical posture during worship are invalid. Stand. Sit. Prostrate. All are appropriate responses to the work of the Lamb and we should take note of this. Not only to ensure that we're worshipping him from an emotional/intellectual/spiritual position of humility, gratitude, and Jesus-glory, but that we're also not tacitly eroding that worship by passing judgment on others who do it differently." – Seth Washeck, M.A.  
Email to Larry Renoe, 12/11/16.

# WEEK III



# LESSON THREE

Revelation 6:1-8:1 “The Last Word on Evil”

I find it most true, that the greatest temptation out of hell is to live without temptations. If my waters should stand, they would rot. Faith is the better of the free air, and of the sharp winter storm in its face. Grace withereth without adversity. The devil is but God’s master fencer, to teach us to handle our weapons.

– Samuel Rutherford, Letters (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderston & Ferrier, 1891), 290.

## Big Idea

The world is shot through with evil. Who can stand? Christ uses even evil heavenly forces to inflict trials on people throughout this church age for either growth or punishment. Christians are protected from the God-separating effects of evil even as they experience and endure suffering caused by it. In fact, because they have Christ, Christians worship (sing and pray) and witness in the midst of it.

## Starter

The Last Word on Evil

Peter Hiatt writes:

I took my kids to see one of those summer movies they release just when school lets out. The Mummy Returns was just like all the others – full of deception, warfare, pestilence, death and demons. It was downright apocalyptic! Imagine sitting down with your children to read Revelation chapters 6-8 as their Bible story for the day. The seals on the scroll are opened, and after the seventh seal is opened, seven angels blow their trumpets after another angel throws the fire of heaven down upon the earth, igniting a great storm.

When they blow those trumpets, a bloody storm begins to devour the world. Wow! The Revelation makes The Mummy Returns look like Thomas the Tank Engine. How do we make sense of such incredible violence?<sup>1</sup>

John's first readers were in the seats to view the Roman Empire's theater of military aggression as well as their brutal tactics to silence any uprising against internal threats – such as Christianity. No doubt they struggled with “the puzzling ascendancy of evil”<sup>2</sup> during their lifetimes. If the kingdom of God has been inaugurated by Jesus Christ, why is Rome (anti-Christ in every way) so strong?

The Gospel declares God's love for the world and his power over evil, yet Roman authority is making a spectacle of the Christian movement by placing Christians in front of lions in the Coliseum. No doubt modern readers of the Revelation deliberate: Christ came, lived among us, suffered, died and rose again – and is the world getting better or worse? Annie Dillard puts the question (a question she ranks as the chief theological question of all time) this way: “What in the Sam Hill is going on here anyway?”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Hiett, *Eternity Now!* (Brentwood: Integrity Publishers, 2003), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 72.

<sup>3</sup> Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 60.

1. What is the most troubling movie, theatrical production or piece of literature that you've encountered? How did it affect you?

2. In your opinion, is the world getting better or worse, and what evidence would you give?

## Understanding the Text

**Step one: Observation – What do we see?** Every time we read the Bible, the first thing we should ask is, "What do we see?" Read the text aloud during your group. As you read, mark up the passage by circling what you believe to be key words or phrases. Place yourself into the original audience and ask questions (who, what, where, when, how, why).

## **Revelation 6:1-8:1 (NIV)**

6:1 I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" 2 I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

3 When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" 4 Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other. To him was given a large sword.

5 When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. 6 Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "Two pounds of wheat for a day's wages, and six pounds of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

7 When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" 8 I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.

10 They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.

12 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14 The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

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. 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." 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.

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. 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. 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 ‘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.'"

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

3. Share observations together. What stands out? What do you notice?

**Step two: Interpretation – What does it mean?** The goal is to understand the original author's intended meaning to the original audience. This requires research and discussion on the original readers' cultural and historical background. This is where it is beneficial to dig into a commentary or Bible dictionary, or to listen to a sermon. We are careful NOT to begin our study by asking, "What does this passage mean to me?" That question is application, not interpretation. The meaning of the text is the author's intended meaning. Until we understand the meaning of the text we will not apply the text correctly to our lives.

Background:

Beginning in Revelation chapter 6, the unveiled Jesus Christ opens the seals (seven scenes) of the scroll to unveil the main theme and flow of history: to be human is to be at war.<sup>4</sup> Nearly half the book of Revelation is visions of judgment. What does it all mean?

"We do not need Christ to tell us that the world is full of trouble. But we do need his explanation of history if its troubles are not to be meaningless."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, there appears to be a theological conflict raised by the heavy judgment scenes: if we take Revelation 4-5 as the book's core vision of the slaughtered Lamb on God's Throne ("Lamb power" is "God power"), then how is all of this judgment by God/Christ in Revelation not in conflict with the divine identity and his Lamb power? How are we to understand Revelation's judgment scenes and all of the destruction? As one commentator put it: "It ceases to be fun."<sup>6</sup>

First, we note that these visions are symbolic, not literal. For instance, regarding the judgment scene in Revelation 19:11-16 when Jesus comes on a "white horse" with a "sharp sword" coming out of his mouth to "strike down the nations," Bruce Metzger writes:

[This is] symbolism at its highest...Never shall we see the "white horse," or the sword projecting from the mouth of the conqueror, or the birds gorged with the flesh of fallen warriors (19:21). The descriptions are not descriptions of real occurrences, but of symbols of the real occurrences. The message that John conveys through this symbolism is that evil will surely be overthrown. Here that message is presented in apocalyptic pictures of almost repellent realism.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The first four scenes ("four horsemen," Zechariah 6:5-8) are: first, "conquest" (6:1-2) is international warfare; second, "make people kill each other" (6:3-4) is Cain-and-Abel brokenness in the human community including racial violence; third, "pair of scales" (6:5-6) is economic chaos and greed-fueled inequity; and fourth, "sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts" (6:7-8) is natural disasters, accidents and disease ("unnatural causes"). The fifth seal reveals that God's people will suffer in the midst of this fallen world, and many will be martyred (6:9-11). The sixth seal reveals that in the end sin will not go unpunished, that is, history is moving inexorably toward the great "day of the Lord" (6:12-16).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 69.

<sup>6</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation* (New York: Penguin, 1980), 135.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 92.

The purpose of such symbolism, it would seem, is not to instill hopeless fear through these apocalyptic literary experiences of shock and awe, but rather, to provide a wake-up call to those who are sleeping through life and world-power politics. (\*See Additional Resources for more detail regarding symbolism in Revelation.)

Second, we remember that the existence of suffering is the result of human sin. This “tidal wave of violent imagery expresses the apocalyptic insight that the world’s suffering is allowed by God, but more fundamentally it is the result of sin.”<sup>8</sup> Michael Gorman writes, “The question ‘human sin or divine punishment?’ presupposes a divine dichotomy and asks for an unnecessary choice; the answer is of course, ‘both.’ But it is clear that sin precedes judgment, and is not the will of God.”<sup>9</sup>

Third, New Testament scholar Warren Carter is helpful when he points out that Revelation draws on traditions about judgment from the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus, and he indicates several ways that Revelation qualifies the violence:<sup>10</sup>

1. Revelation shows that each empire (worldly powers that carry out the violence) brings about its own demise. In other words, this is justice at work, not merely revenge.
2. In the seven trumpets, mercy tempers the destruction which turns out to be partial rather than total and is intended to bring about repentance.
3. In the figure of the slaughtered Lamb – Christ himself the victim of imperial violence – we see God’s life-giving, non-violent, counter-Roman means of ultimate triumph.
4. Divine judgment ensues only upon people who refuse to repent.



5. The end goal of the overarching agenda is salvation, not vengeful destruction. Divine judgment is not an end in itself, rather, it is God's Plan B when humanity persists in evil. It then becomes a means to God's Plan A – the ultimate healing of the nations and peace within the final space when all people flourish together before God.<sup>11</sup>

6. God's people are not called to overthrow the Empire by violence but to resist it by faithful living. The mission of human beings in history – at least those who are the people of God – is to announce this judgment prophetically, but not in any sense to execute it as individuals.

Revelation provides believing imaginations with images that account for every aspect of human evil: social strife, economic injustice, ecological disaster, disease, natural catastrophe, religious persecution. Nothing that we experience as evil is unnoticed or unacknowledged. Christians do not shut their eyes to the world's cruelty in themselves or in others. In fact, Christians (usually) are the very persons in society who can be counted on to have no illusions about the depth of depravity in themselves or in the world at large, yet they are not cynical because they are sealed in Christ (Revelation 7:3; see also Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30).

The 144,000<sup>12</sup> is symbolic of the vast and complete people of God from all ages who are protected from the God-separating effects of evil even as they experience the suffering caused by evil. Because they have Christ, they are not only secure, but also exuberant such that they worship and witness in the midst of evil.

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<sup>8</sup> Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling the Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 142.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 141.

<sup>10</sup> Warren Carter's insights on judgment in Revelation are listed in Michael Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 150-151.

<sup>11</sup> "Nowhere in the Bible is there any attempt to answer the question, 'Why does a good God permit evil?' Evil is a fact. The Bible spends a good deal of space insisting that certain facts are evil, and not minor blemishes on the surface of existence. But the Bible does not provide an explanation of evil – rather, it defines a context: all evil takes place in an historical arena bounded by Christ and prayer. Evil is not explained but surrounded. The Revelation summarizes the context: admit evil and do not fear it – for 'he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (1 John 4:4); endure evil, for you are already triumphant over it – 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven' (Luke 10:18). The Revelation expands apostolic words into visions. By putting evil in its place and enumerating it accurately in the precise part of the story where it belongs, it is seen as finite episode and not a total triumph." – Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 85.

<sup>12</sup> On the 144,000, see Additional Resources in Lesson Five – "Note on Revelation 14:4 and the '144,000.'"

## GROUP QUESTIONS

4. Read Revelation 6:1-8. When the Lamb opens the first four seals of the scroll, instead of four glorious remedies for everything that's wrong with the world, we see the four living creatures summoning four horses and riders, each (it seems) making matters worse. Describe how and where we observe these "four horsemen" riding throughout history (from John's readers to our day):

- "Conquest" (6:1-2) - international warfare and aggression between nations and people groups.
- "Make people kill each other" (6:3-4) - Cain-and-Abel brokenness in the human community including racial violence.
- "Pair of scales" (6:5-6) - economic chaos and greed-fueled inequity.
- "Sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts" (6:7-8) - natural disasters, accidents and disease ("unnatural causes").

5. N.T Wright shares:

Things have to be exposed before they can be dealt with. Things have to come to light before the surgeon can perform the operation. Ancient memories of guilt and sorrow must be raked up, however painfully, before they can be prayed through and healed. Revelation is, as it were, a cosmic version of the tough pastoral struggle over the deeply wounded soul. The soul of the world is aware of immediate problems and pains; but unless we look deeper, to the ancient patterns of conquest, violence, oppression and death itself we shall not begin to understand what needs to be done to be healed, really healed rather than merely patched over for a few more years.<sup>13</sup>

What seems to be the ultimate goal of allowing the horsemen to ride into the world inflicting so much damage? How would John's first readers have viewed these images in their world where mere men ("emperors") were saying, "Give me your allegiance because I can and will fix things"?

6. Read Revelation 6:9-17. Who does John see under the altar and what is their cry? Why are they given white robes and told that they must wait a while longer? In contrast, why are the kings of the earth, the rich and powerful, singled out among all the people who hide in caves (6:15)? If we were John's first readers living under Roman rule, how would this make us feel?"

**Step three: Application – how does it work?** It is the person who not only knows God's Word, but also obeys His Word that truly loves Him (John 14:21). Application of God's Word to our lives involves identifying the specific instructions from the text and making a plan to obey them.

7. There is a long tradition, going back through the Psalms and the Prophets, of God's people crying out to God to do something at last. This cry – "How long, O LORD?!" reverberates through the centuries, and is heard again as the fifth seal is opened. How is this cry echoed in our own day – in our churches, in our world, in your life?

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<sup>13</sup> N. T. Wright, *Revelation: For Everyone Bible Study Guides* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 40.

8. In Revelation 7:15-17, we are given a glimpse of the way the Father is going to relate to us in heaven. What effect do you imagine this had on John's harassed churches in Asia? What effect does it have on you? What keeps us from believing that God loves us now the way he will love us then?

## GROUP PRAYER

Praying Psalm 13

We hear God's people praying the Psalms throughout the book of Revelation. We hear it, for instance, when Psalm 13 is echoed in Revelation 5:10 as the martyrs cry out, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"



1. As a group, read Psalm 13 together aloud:

**Psalm 13**

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

**1 How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?**

**How long will you hide your face from me?**

**2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?**

**How long will my enemy triumph over me?**

**3 Look on me and answer, LORD my God.**

**Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,**

**4 and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"  
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.**

**5 But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.**

**6 I will sing the LORD's praise,  
for he has been good to me.**

2. Share aloud the first names of people, or the names of groups who are suffering, being persecuted, or struggling to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Identity words or phrases from this Psalm and pray them for these people.

For example, "Father, may you give light to \_\_\_\_\_'s eyes."

Or "Jesus, may you reveal your unfailing love to \_\_\_\_\_."

3. Read Psalm 13 aloud together again.

## Additional Resources

Reading the symbolism in Revelation: Revelation 6-8 is a good place to be reminded about how apocalyptic symbolism works. The four horsemen and their riders are symbols. John does not expect that his readers will shortly look out their window to see these characters riding by on the streets of Smyrna. Furthermore, the sequence is also symbolic. John does not suppose that conquest is followed by violence and then by economic disaster which will be trailed by widespread death. This sevenfold sequence is not chronological. It is the presentation of a sevenfold reality.

N.T Wright explains:

We should not suppose that this sevenfold sequence of seals being opened is supposed to take place before the subsequent sequences of the trumpets (chapters 8-11) and the bowls of wrath (chapter 16). Rather, each of the sequences is a fresh angle of vision of the same highly complex reality of our existence. If we look at the problems and pains of this world from this angle, God's answer is to draw out the arrogant wickedness of humanity to its full extent and then show that he is bringing his people safely through (chapter 7). If we look at these same problems and pains from the next angle of vision (chapters 8-11), God's answer is to allow these forces of destruction to do their worst, so that he can establish his kingdom fully and finally over the world. And if we take a deep breath and begin the story again from yet a third angle of vision (chapters 12-13), we see the full depth and horror of the problem, to which God's answer will be to inflict on the rebellious world the equivalent of the plagues of Egypt, before finally rescuing his people and finally judging the dark powers that have for so long enslaved them (chapters 12-19).<sup>14</sup>

Two great resources for enduring Suffering: To wrestle philosophically with the presence of suffering in the realm of a powerfully good God, we recommend Timothy Keller's *Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering*.

For those who are currently enduring a life-altering season of suffering, we recommend Gerald Sittser's *A Grace Disguised*, in which he shares both story and insight for holding on to Christ and life in the midst of great suffering.

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<sup>14</sup> N. T. Wright, *Revelation*, 43.

# WEEK IV



# LESSON FOUR

Revelation 10-11 “The Last Word on Witness”

It is both difficult and dangerous to tell the truth. People who tell the truth not infrequently get killed. The word used in the first Christian century for telling the truth about God in a given situation, *martus*, has come into our language as “martyr,” the person who loses his life telling the truth.

- Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 102.

We digest the word, but in the end we find the Word has digested us.

We are the body of the Word of God. We are the body of Christ in this world.

So whether or not there are two freaky, weird witnesses in the reconstituted temple in Jerusalem in the year 2059... I don't really care. Because they are boring compared to you. You are the end-times superheroes... We don't conquer with well-laid military plans, secret bomb shelters, and legislation regarding the modern nation of Israel.

We conquer with the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony, even if we die – especially if we die – which is to live.

- Peter Hiett, *Eternity Now!* 143-144.

## Big Idea

The contribution of Revelation to the work of witness is not instruction, telling us how to make a convincing, coherent case for believing Christianity; rather the contribution of Revelation is imagination, strengthening the spirit with images that breed courage.

Jesus desires his followers be witnesses, not just textbooks or tracts.  
Witnesses are much less boring.

# Starter

The Last Word on Witness

Author Scotty Smith shares this story about growing up with his best friend, Reid Christy, who lived on a nearby farm:

There always seemed to be a smile for me at the Christy home and table. It was one of those places where I felt the welcoming heart of God even before I came to know him as my true shelter.

But one of the most profound memories I have of the Christy farm and family was the time they installed the first “bomb shelter” I had ever seen. It was during the Cuban missile crisis when President Kennedy took such a strong stand against the threat of Premier Khrushchev’s maddening quest to have Russia swallow the world...In the atmosphere of real fear and great concern the “bomb shelter” business thrived!

I remember feeling a certain amount of anxiety when the Christys installed their little underground steel house. “Will there be room for me? Can I still spend the night if Russia invades North Carolina?” These concerns of “wars and rumors of war” were never very far from our hearts in those days...Gradually, however, this season gave way to another and my friends whose families had bought into the “bomb shelter” mentality began to convert their shelters into musty storage units or underground attics.

This was not the last time I experienced the “bomb shelter” mentality. While the first one was political and generated by the threat of communism, the second one was spiritual and generated by the threat of the “Antichrist.” A lot more fear than faith was generated...by those who were constantly searching the newspapers and newsreels in order to interpret the last book of the Bible...

The net effect of those who made their living by feeding phobias and suspicions was the retreating of Christians from the culture into little ecclesiastical bomb shelters... The buying of common properties, stockpiling of food and multiple warnings against owning or receiving anything with the number 666 on it were profuse. Guessing the identity of the Antichrist became a popular sport among those who were becoming less and less engaged with the world into which we were commissioned as witnesses and kingdom representatives until King Jesus returns.

It really makes me both mad and sad as I look back over those days, for this is just the opposite effect that the book of Revelation is meant to have.

– Scotty Smith and Michael Card, *Unveiled Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 138-139.

1. Share a time when you have lived through an event or season of global history where you felt fear and wondered if the end of the world (or at least the comfortable life you knew) might be near.

2. In your Christian experience, have you ever been affected by a “bomb shelter” mentality? In what ways are you inclined to “cocoon” within the church and retreat from the world?

# Understanding the Text

**Step one: Observation - What do we see?** Every time we read the Bible, the first thing we should ask is, "What do we see?" Read the text aloud during your group. As you read, mark up the passage by circling what you believe to be key words or phrases. Place yourself into the original audience and ask questions (who, what, where, when, how, why).

## Revelation 8-11 (NIV)

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

2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

3 Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. 4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

6 Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

7 The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

8 The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, 9 a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

10 The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky 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 turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

12 The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.

13 As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

9:1 The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. 2 When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. 3 And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. 4 They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes. 6 During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

7 The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. 8 Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9 They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. 10 They had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. 11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).

12 The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

13 The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. 14 It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number.



17 The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. 18 A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. 19 The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.

20 The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

10:1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. 2 He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, 3 and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. 4 And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."

5 Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. 6 And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! 7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies 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 asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." 10 I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. 11 Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

11:1 I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers. 2 But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. 3 And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." 4 They are "the two olive trees" and the two lampstands, and "they stand before the Lord of the earth." 5 If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. 6 They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. 8 Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city — which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt — where also their Lord was crucified. 9 For three and a half days some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. 10 The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

11 But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck 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, while their enemies looked on.

13 At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14 The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

“The kingdom of the world has become  
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,  
and he will reign for ever and ever.”

16 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,

17 saying:

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

18 The nations were angry,  
and your wrath has come.

The time has come for judging the dead,  
and for rewarding your servants the prophets  
and your people who revere your name,  
both great and small—  
and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

19 Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm.

### 3. Share observations together. What stands out? What do you notice?

**Step two: Interpretation – What does it mean?** The goal is to understand the original author’s intended meaning to the original audience. This requires research on the original readers’ cultural and historical background. This is where it is beneficial to dig into a commentary or Bible dictionary, or to listen to a sermon. We are careful NOT to begin our study by asking, “What does this passage mean to me?” That question is application, not interpretation. The meaning of the text is the author’s intended meaning. Until we understand the meaning of the text we will not apply the text correctly to our lives.

#### Background:

Except for the opening vision of Jesus Christ in chapter one and the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2-3, the book has centered on the scroll from the right hand of God, containing the word of God (Revelation 5:1-4).

By the end of chapter 9, all the seals on the scroll are broken and all but the last trumpet blast has sounded.<sup>1</sup> We’ve been led to imagine warfare, famine, plague, death, earthquakes, burning mountains, hideous demons from hell, and massive armies marching across the face of the earth.

Yet, as chapter 9 concludes, “The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons and idols of gold, silver and bronze, stone and wood — idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts” (Revelation 9:20-21).

These final verses of chapter 9 indicate John's understanding of the human plight: we have great difficulty listening to God. The world, though made by the wise and loving Creator, has come to harbor rebellion, filth and destructiveness. God normally restrains this situation, but there are times throughout history when human depravity is seen in high definition.

John believes human evil emerges from idolatry (the ancient Jewish worldview): you become what you worship; you are what you love. So if you worship that which is not God, the image of God becomes marred. Thus the two verses of Revelation 9:20-21 stand in stereo: worship idols (blind, deaf, lifeless things) and become like them (blind, deaf, flat lives).

As we come to Revelation 10, God reveals how human listening to God can increase. He will send witnesses throughout history carrying his word. We return to the symbol of a scroll when John is directed to take "the little scroll" from the angel and then eat it (10:2, 8-10). "Eating the scroll" is a vivid metaphor for the way in which a witness, then and now, can share God's word.

Eugene Peterson writes, "Eating a book takes it all in, assimilating it into the tissues of your life. Witnesses first become what they then say."<sup>2</sup>

This is part of what it means to say that God desires to act in the world through his obedient followers. John eats the book (similar to when the LORD commanded Ezekiel to eat a book) and finds it sweet to the taste but bitter in the stomach. This polarity is the experience of being Jesus' witnesses: the word is sweet to the witness as it is received from God and it is bitter when it is rejected by others.

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<sup>1</sup> The Trumpet blasts parallel the judgments God visited on the Egyptians during the time of the Exodus (7-11). Now the greater exodus from sin and death effected by King Jesus is being revealed by God's judgments in history. The trumpet blasts include: natural disasters, economic collapse (the sea, main venue of commerce, is stricken), widespread sickness and disease (much from polluted water), signs in the skies, agricultural disasters and famine ("locusts"), and military aggression.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 107.

In Revelation 11, John alludes to the story of Jesus' transfiguration in order to bolster the courage of witnesses. This event (shared by Matthew, Mark and Luke) occurs at a critical time in Jesus' ministry as he is transferring his authority into the hands of his disciples. Peter has just recognized Jesus for who he really is and confessed his lordship. Jesus is focused on training his disciples to endure the difficulties that will come because he is now embarking on his final journey to Jerusalem to face rejection, suffering and death for his witness. As part of the training, he takes Peter, James and John to a mountainside for time in prayer. In an unforgettable moment, they see Jesus transfigured when the brilliant glory of heaven rests again on him – where it belongs.

As the glory shines through Jesus, two witnesses – Moses and Elijah – appear in conversation with him, witnessing that all of the Law (Moses) and Prophets (Elijah) confirm him as the Messiah. They are enveloped in a cloud and the Voice from heaven confirms their witness: "This is my beloved Son, listen to him." The cloud clears, the two witnesses are gone, and now the three (Peter, James and John) are the witnesses. John's Revelation recasts this story to impress on us both the blessedness and danger of Christian witness.

Revelation 11 is a difficult chapter to understand so it is vital that we don't "lose the forest for the trees." The goal of interpreting Revelation is not to figure out what each symbol and detail mean, rather it is to keep in mind that John is writing to help his seven churches "rise to the occasion" with their worship and witness for Jesus in the midst of a challenging culture.

This vision of Jesus and the End is designed to overwhelm his followers with his greatness and power within and throughout the story of history (which helps explain all the Old Testament references in Revelation). For instance, in Revelation 11, John does not mean that Moses and Elijah will literally return to earth to carry out what chapter 11 says. Rather, what John is saying is that the prophetic witness of the Church, in the great tradition of Moses and Elijah, will present powerful evidence of Jesus' presence and authority that will both attract and trouble the surrounding culture such that the climax of their witness could be the martyr-death.

## GROUP QUESTIONS

4. In Revelation 10:1-11, what is to be the scope of witness that John is to have (see 10:11)? As you reflect on the presence of the Church in the world throughout history, how has “the scroll,” the gospel message about the Kingdom of Heaven, been both “sweet” and “bitter”?

5. In Revelation 11:1-14, how is the tone of voice and shape of this content different from what we have encountered so far in Revelation? What makes this a difficult passage to understand? How does remembering the nature of apocalyptic literature (see Introduction) help to understand it? How do you think texts like this chapter would have impacted the witness of the first readers?

6. If we understand the two witnesses (11:3) to be Elijah (“power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain,” 1 Kings 17:1) and Moses (“power to turn the waters into blood,” Exodus 7:14-11:10) who represent the witness of God’s people, in what way might it be said that “these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth” (11:10)? What is the ultimate destiny of the two witnesses (11:11-12)?

**Step three: Application – how does it work?** It is the person who not only knows God's Word, but also obeys His Word that truly loves Him (John 14:21). Application of God's Word to our lives involves identifying the specific instructions from the text and making a plan to obey them.

7. What does it mean to be a witness? Who are witnesses that you observe with respect? Why don't you witness more, especially in conversations?

- 1) You don't know what to say and you don't want to sound like a Bible tract.
- 2) You don't have all the answers to the questions and you don't want to be embarrassed by what you don't know.
- 3) You secretly worry: "What if some of their questions make me doubt my faith?"
- 4) You are intimidated by how well others seem to be able to witness.
- 5) You do not believe it will make a difference.



## GROUP PRAYER

### Book of Common Prayer – Evening Prayer

(Individuals read regular font, **group reads bold font together**)

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I return.

**The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.**

O God, come to my aid: **O Lord, make haste to help me.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Kneeling **Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

**I confess to almighty God,  
and to you, my brothers and sisters,  
that I have sinned through my own fault,  
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done,  
and in what I have failed to do;  
and I ask you, my brothers and sisters,  
to pray for me to the Lord, our God.**

Silence (or time to confess to God or to one another).

Rebuke me, O Lord, but not in your anger, lest I come to nothing (Jer.10:24).

**Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Amen.**

A candle is lit during the next song and prayer:

**Walk in the light, the beautiful light.  
Come where the dew drops of mercy shine bright.  
Shine all around us by day and by night.  
Jesus, the light of the world.**

O gracious Light,  
pure brightness of the ever living Father in heaven,  
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!

Now as we come to the setting of the sun,  
and our eyes behold the evening light,  
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,  
O Son of God, O Giver of life,  
your glory fills the whole world.

### **Affirm the Faith: The Apostles' Creed**

**We believe in one God the Father, the Almighty, creator of heaven and earth,  
and of all that is, seen and unseen.**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.**

**We believe in one, holy, global and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen**

Prayers for Others: take turns saying aloud prayers for people in your life/our lives, our community and the world.

Following each request: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Revelation 11:15-19:

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

**“The kingdom of the world has become  
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,  
and he will reign for ever and ever.”**

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

**“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,  
the One who is and who was,  
because you have taken your great power  
and have begun to reign.  
The nations were angry,  
and your wrath has come.  
The time has come for judging the dead,  
and for rewarding your servants the prophets  
and your people who revere your name,  
both great and small -  
and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”**

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm.

Closing: Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

**May the Lord bless us and keep us from all harm; and may God lead us to eternal life. Amen.**

WEEK V



# LESSON FIVE

Revelation 12-14 “The Last Word on Politics”

Politics always competes with religion (joining it, tolerating it when it must, and absorbing it when it can) in order to promise, if not a life beyond, then a new deal on this earth, and a Leader smiling charismatically from the placards.

- Erik Erikson, *Toys and Reasons*, 91.

God reigns over the nations;  
God is seated on his holy throne.  
The nobles of the nations assemble  
as the people of the God of Abraham,  
for the kings of the earth belong to God;  
he is greatly exalted.  
- Psalm 47:8-9

## Big Idea

Revelation 12-14 retells the story of Christ's first coming from heaven's point of view. The effect of this Christmas story is not angels singing and shepherds kneeling, but rather all-out war in the heavens (cp. Isa. 14:12; Luke 10:18). Yet the “seed of the woman” will crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). The church's response to this Christmas story is worship (14:1-5), preaching (14:6-13), and holy living (14:14-20).

# Starter

## The Last Word on Politics

Politics matter. God is interested and involved in politics. The gospel story is more political than we can imagine or tolerate. “Kingdom” (a political metaphor) insists on a gospel that includes everything and everyone under the rule of the sovereign God and victorious Christ.

But there’s a problem: politics matter. So Christians begin to assume they are in a position to pronounce God’s political leanings, and things get a little dicey. Abraham Lincoln walked this out in his Second Inaugural Address when he noted that, “Both [the North and the South] read the same Bible and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other.” The great challenge of politics for Christians is to keep politics in kingdom context.

John Ortberg presents a little thought experiment that helps place politics in kingdom context:

Imagine that we elected all the right people to all the right offices – President, congress, governors, right down to the school board, city council members, and dog catcher...

Let’s imagine that all these ideal office holders instituted all the right policies.

Let’s imagine that we got all the propositions right... Every piece of legislation – from zoning laws to tax codes to immigration policy to crime bills – is just exactly the way you know it ought to be.

Would that usher in the kingdom of God?

Would the hearts of the parents be turned toward their children?

Would greed and pride be legislated out of existence?

Would human beings now at last be able to master our impulses in areas of sexuality and anger and narcissism and greed?

Let’s get a little more personal.

Would you finally become the woman or man you know you ought to be? ...

No human system has the ability to change the human heart. T.S. Eliot summed up our quandary: “We want a system of order so perfect that we do not have to be good.”

The human race needs an administration of another kind. There is one possibility. Someone needs to be in a position to say: "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News." Scholars remind us that these words were politically loaded. They deliberately echo or parody the claims of Rome – that Caesar was lord, that his kingdom was Good News... Scholars remind us that in the early centuries of the church, its finest years were when it was marginalized in the life of the Roman Empire. When it got cozy with Rome, when it became identified with Empire, things went south in a hurry. A warning for the church in America.

The Gospel of the early church was, among other things, a deliberate in-your-face to the empire. Pretty cheeky when you remember that the church had a few thousand ragged cohorts, and the Empire ruled 65 million hearts. It was pretty clear which horse to bet on. But here we are, two thousand years later, and we give our children names like Peter, Paul, and Phoebe; and we call our dogs Caesar and Nero.

- John Ortberg, "Non-prophet Preaching," Leadership Journal, Summer 2008, 29-31.

1. Who was the President of the United States when you were born?

2. In your opinion, what challenges does the political party or philosophy that you most associate with present to Christ's Church as we strive to carry out the mission to advance God's kingdom?



# Understanding the Text

**Step one: Observation – What do we see?** Every time we read the Bible, the first thing we should ask is, “What do we see?” Read the text aloud during your group. As you read, mark up the passage by circling what you believe to be key words or phrases. Place yourself into the original audience and ask questions (who, what, where, when, how, why).

## Revelation 12–14 (NIV)

12:1 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.

4 Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. 6 The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:  
“Now have come the salvation and the power  
and the kingdom of our God,  
and the authority of his Messiah.

For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,  
who accuses them before our God day and night,  
has been hurled down.

11 They triumphed over him  
by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their lives so much  
as to shrink from death.

12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens  
and you who dwell in them!

But woe to the earth and the sea,  
because the devil has gone down to you!

He is filled with fury,  
because he knows that his time is short.”

13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.

15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

13:1 The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. 2 The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. 3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. 4 People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?"

5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. 6 It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. 7 It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

9 Whoever has ears, let them hear.

10 "If anyone is to go into captivity,  
into captivity they will go.  
If anyone is to be killed with the sword,  
with the sword they will be killed."

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people.

11 Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. 12 It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. 13 And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. 14 Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

15 The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. 16 It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, 17 so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.

18 This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.

14:1 Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. 3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. 4 These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

6 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. 7 He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

8 A second angel followed and said, "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

9 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, 10 they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name." 12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

14 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

17 Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." 19 The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. 20 They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

3. Share observations together. What stands out? What do you notice?

**Step two: Interpretation - What does it mean?** The goal is to understand the original author's intended meaning to the original audience. This requires research on the original readers' cultural and historical background. This is where it is beneficial to dig into a commentary or Bible dictionary, or to listen to a sermon. We are careful NOT to begin our study by asking, "What does this passage mean to me?" That question is application, not interpretation. The meaning of the text is the author's intended meaning. Until we understand the meaning of the text we will not apply the text correctly to our lives.

Background:

Shortly before he would go to the cross, rise from the dead and ascend to his Father, Jesus tells his disciples, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Trouble. In Revelation's letters to the seven churches (chapters 2-3), John explains the trouble between the church and the world as one in which Satan is allowed to pressure and persecute Christians (especially using governments and their prisons) as he tries to stomp down the Christian movement.

Jesus, however, calls these occasions "tests" which prove and improve the strength of his Church (2:10). In Revelation 6-11, we see that as the seven seals of history are opened, spiritual forces of evil continue to be unleashed against both believer and unbeliever by angels in accordance with the command of the resurrected Christ. The seven trumpets reveal that demonic forces of judgment are sent to punish hardened humanity, yet even these forces are released and controlled by God's angelic forces. Interspersed throughout the seal and trumpet judgments are passages which assure God's people (his witnesses) that they will be protected spiritually through the woes, and that these trials will refine their faith.

The main purpose of Revelation 12-14 is to assert that the trouble is worth it. John begins by identifying the main characters in the story God reveals as reality. First, there is the devil (dragon, 12:3, 7-9, 13-17) who prowls behind the persecution of witnesses. The devil is revealed as the deepest source of evil and "grand initiator of the trials and persecutions of the saints."<sup>1</sup> The devil unleashes the "beast" and the "false prophet," and the whore of Babylon is also under his control. But the devil is not autonomous. He and his forces can persecute the saints only during prescribed time periods (12:6, 14; 13:5).

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Beale, *New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 622-623.

In fact, the devil is enraged and attacks Christians because his defeat has already been set in motion by Christ's resurrection, and his time of rage is limited by God (12:7-17). This knowledge of Satan's fall motivates believers to stand firm all the more, since they know their struggle is "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). "The troubles of the persecuted saints occur now not because Satan is too powerful for them but because he has been decisively overthrown. He does all the damage he can, but he cannot prevail over the church in any ultimate way. The readers can now know that if they compromise, they are not merely compromising with the world but with the devil himself. This realization should shock them out of any degree of spiritual complacency."<sup>2</sup>

Second, there is the "woman" who is about to give birth (12:1-6). This woman seems to be symbolic of two figures. First she represents Israel – the people of God – not the faithless Israel so often rebuked by her prophets, but rather the covenant-loyal Israel, the bride of Yahweh. The second figure may well be Eve, the original mother of all human life (and represented by Mary at Jesus' birth). It is Eve who was told that her "seed" would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). The two identities go together: Israel (the people of God) is the one in whom God's purposes are to be realized, including, centrally, the crushing of the ultimate power of evil.

Third, the woman "gives birth to a son, a male child, who 'rule all the nations with an iron scepter'" (Revelation 12:5; Psalm 2:9). This is Jesus who was taken up to heaven after his death and resurrection and who will one day return to "rule the nations." The immediate response to the birth is not Christmas carols and pageants. The birth excites evil, and "ferocious wickedness is goaded to violence by this life (see Herod, Judas, Pilate)."<sup>3</sup> Can a baby lying in swaddling clothes in a manger survive the machines of terror?

The dragon hates the Son. Revelation 12:7-16 describes a "war in heaven" in which the dragon is "hurled down" by forces empowered "by the blood of the Lamb and by word of their testimony" (12:10-11). Having failed to destroy the "male child," the devil spends the rest of his "short" time seeking to destroy the "offspring" of the woman (12:17) – the family of God. This is the essence of reality, of spiritual warfare: the hatred of Jesus by the vanquished adversary is marshaled against the followers of the Lamb. "In this world you will have trouble."



In Revelation 13, the dragon stands on the shore of the sea to contemplate his failures. He decides to recruit help from the underworld. The sea beast and land beast with the dragon are a satanic trinity that infiltrate the political world, aiming to deflect worship from the God whom we cannot see to the authorities we can see. Their goal is to deceive the world into buying into a worldview or religion that offers the visible results of self-preservation and/or self-gratification.

The sea beast is “given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them” (13:7). This beast symbolizes the activity of the devil throughout history within human government and politics (Daniel 7:2-8). For John’s original readers this would be the Roman Empire. Beginning with Julius Caesar, Roman emperors were deified, usually after they had died. But during the time Revelation is written, Emperor Domitian required people to address him as “our lord and god.” The land beast intends to promote worship of the sea beast through “great signs” that would deceive the inhabitants of the earth. The sea beast symbolizes the persecuting power of the devil operating through human government, while the land beast symbolizes false religions and philosophies of the world.

In chapter 14, John is given a vision of Jesus (the “Lamb”) standing the victor (over the dragon) on Mount Zion along with the people of God (symbolized by 144,000 – see Additional Resources). They are signed, sealed and safe to the Father by the triumphant Lamb. God’s people respond to the Lamb’s action among us in three ways. First, God’s people worship (14:1-5) – “they sang a new song before the throne.” Worship is “the act in which we find our fragmented lives corrected and arranged into a whole and perfect offering to God.”<sup>4</sup>

Could it really be that worship matters more than any movement of human politics? Second, an angel “had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth” (14:6-13). Preaching is a reminder of what is happening in our world – that the world is not primarily a place where information is stored and retrieved, but is a place where humans are engaged in a moral and spiritual battle/contest, a place where good news can be proclaimed.

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<sup>2</sup> Greg Beale, *New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 623

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 121.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 129.

Third, God's people express the presence of Christ by the action of holy living.

(14:14-20). "Holy living is posited on the conviction that everything we do, no matter what we do, however common and little noticed our lives, is connected with the action of God and is seed that becomes either a harvest of holiness or a vintage of wrath."<sup>5</sup>

These are the ways that Christians survive and flourish politically: engage in worship, listen to and proclaim the Gospel, practice holy living.

There is no avoiding politics. The moment that one life impinges on another is politics. The question is not whether we will engage in politics, but rather what kind of politics will come from us. The politics of the Lamb take ordinary elements of obedience (worship, gospel, holiness) and shape them into transformational components in the cosmic and eternal drama. Do these stand up against the dragon, his beasts and all their propaganda? "It was largely due to the propagation of such resolute ideas as are expounded in the Apocalypse that Christians were kept loyal to their faith and that, without a tear in their eye or a sword in their hand, they were eventually able to change the face of the world by enforcing the recognition of their claims at the hands of the empire."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 129.

<sup>6</sup> James Moffat, *Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), vol. 5, 313.

## GROUP QUESTIONS

4. In Revelation 12, how would this vision of the woman, the child and the dragon help John's readers to better understand where God is in the midst of their chaos and persecution?

5. In Revelation 13:9-10, we observe John's sober realism when contemplating the vision of the sea beast: some people are going to be taken captive. Others are going to be killed with the sword. That's just the way it is. Then John comments, "This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people." What would this kind of patience and faithfulness look like? In what ways have God's people been tempted to compromise their faith in order to make life easier?

6. In Revelation 14:4, God's witnesses are described as those who "follow the Lamb wherever he goes." Where is the Lamb going?

**Step three: Application – how does it work?** It is the person who not only knows God's Word, but also obeys His Word that truly loves Him (John 14:21). Application of God's Word to our lives involves identifying the specific instructions from the text and making a plan to obey them.

7. Revelation 12 reminds us that though the decisive battle has been won, the devil's nature is that of an accuser who will frantically attack the people of God with slander, fear and doubt. On the subject of the devil's tactics, C.S. Lewis warned that we can make two equally fatal mistakes about the devil: on one hand, we can be filled with obsessive fear; on the other hand, we can be dulled by naïveté. Do you agree? Do you observe more paranoia or presumption about the devil among Christians?

8. What lies about politics would Satan tell John's churches? What lies about politics come at Waterstone and God's people today? How might we resist these lies? How can a deeper understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ (the gospel) be our most effective tool for engaging in politics?

## GROUP PRAYER

### Book of Common Prayer – Evening Prayers

(Individuals read regular font, **Group reads bold font together**)

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I return.

**The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.**

O God, come to my aid: **O Lord, make haste to help me.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Kneeling **Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

**I confess to almighty God,  
and to you, my brothers and sisters,  
that I have sinned through my own fault,  
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done,  
and in what I have failed to do;  
and I ask you, my brothers and sisters,  
to pray for me to the Lord, our God.**

Silence (or time to confess to God or to one another).

Rebuke me, O Lord, but not in your anger, lest I come to nothing (Jer.10:24).

**Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Amen.**

A candle is lit while during the prayer:

**Walk in the light, the beautiful light.  
Come where the dew drops of mercy shine bright.  
Shine all around us by day and by night.  
Jesus, the light of the world.**

O gracious Light,  
pure brightness of the ever living Father in heaven,  
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!

Now as we come to the setting of the sun,  
and our eyes behold the evening light,  
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,  
O Son of God, O Giver of life,  
your glory fills the whole world.

In word or song:

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise God all creatures here below.  
Praise God above, ye heavenly hosts.  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

**Affirming our Faith: The Nicene Creed, 325 A.D.**

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father.  
Through him all things were made.

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered, died, and was buried.**

On the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.  
We believe in one holy global and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers for Others: take turns saying aloud prayers for people in your life/our lives, our community and the world.

Following each request: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

### **Revelation 12:10-12**

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

**“Now have come the salvation and the power  
and the kingdom of our God,  
and the authority of his Messiah.**

**For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,  
who accuses them before our God day and night,  
has been hurled down.**

**They triumphed over him  
by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their lives so much  
as to shrink from death.**

**Therefore rejoice, you heavens  
and you who dwell in them!**

**But woe to the earth and the sea,  
because the devil has gone down to you!**

**He is filled with fury,  
because he knows that his time is short.”**

Almighty God, we give you thanks for surrounding us, as daylight fades, with the brightness of the vespers light; and we implore you of your great mercy that, as you enfold us with the radiance of light, so you would shine into our hearts the brightness of you Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**May the Lord bless us and keep us from all harm; and may God lead us to eternal life. Amen.**



## Additional Resources

Note on Revelation 13:18 and “number of the beast.” This is one of the most infamous verses in the Bible, offering the greatest parody of all time. The number 666 represents, by one of many formulae well known at the time, the name Nero Caesar when written in Hebrew characters (many peoples and many languages used letters as numbers, as we would if we devised a system where A=1, B=2, C=3 and so on – called gematria).

The monster who was, is not, and is to come looks pretty certain to be Nero. But the number 666 isn't just a cryptogram; it's also a parody: “The number of perfection would be 777. For John there is little doubt that Nero, and the system he represented, and embodied, was but a parody of the real thing, one short of the right number three times over – a triple failure. Jesus was the reality; Nero, just a dangerous, blasphemous copy.”<sup>7</sup>

Note on Revelation 14:4 and the “144,000.” N.T Wright observes:

Ancient Israel had a clear policy about going to war; if war was justified, war was also holy, and those who fought in it had to obey special rules of purity, including abstention (for the time) from sexual relations (see, for example, Deuteronomy 23:9-10; 1 Samuel 21:5). As usual, we need to be clear about the symbol and the reality to which it points. In the symbol, this body consists of 144,000 (we have met them before in Revelation 7); they are in fact a great company which nobody could count. They are, in other words, the ideal representatives of the people of God, permanently ready for battle.

This great crowd, surrounding the Lamb, is not the sum total of all believers. It is the beginning, the great advance sign of an even greater harvest to come. That is the point of the “first fruits” image in 14:4. At the ancient Jewish harvest time, the first sheaf of wheat (or whatever crop it might be) was offered to God as the “first fruits,” signifying the expectation and prayer that there would be much more on the way. Even so, these 144,000 are to be an encouragement to the churches. Already there is a great multitude! The Lamb is winning the victory! We can carry on patiently.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> N.T. Wright, *Revelation: For Everyone Bible Study Guide*, 77.

<sup>8</sup> N. T. Wright, *Revelation: For Everyone Bible Study Guide*, 81-82.



WEEK VI



# LESSON SIX

Revelation 15-18 "The Last Word on Judgment"

I never really understood wrath until I had kids. It's not because they were so bad, but because I loved them so much.

- Peter Hiett, *Eternity Now!*, 190.

No one from the east or the west  
or from the desert can exalt themselves.

It is God who judges:

He brings one down, he exalts another.

In the hand of the LORD is a cup  
full of foaming wine mixed with spices;  
he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth  
drink it down to its very dregs.

- Psalm 75:6-8

## Big Idea

The judgment in Revelation - symbolized by the seven plagues, seven bowls, and demise of Babylon - is not the activity of a ranting, out-of-control God, but rather the commitment of a deeply loving and inexorably just Father who is faithful to his creation and his people.

# Starter

## The Last Word on Judgment

Wrath is part of the human experience of love. When we are injured or someone we love is hurt or abused, we experience wrath. Dispensing wrath – judgment – is difficult, as we are prone to either overpay or underpay. Dispensing too much wrath, often motivated by revenge, leads to a wider damage of relationships. Holding on to wrath is a heavy burden that leads to bitterness.

Christians say they want to entrust wrath and judgment to God, but let's be honest: we have trouble entrusting our finances to God, much less our wrath. We worry that God will underpay and will instead meet the perpetrator with mercy or measly justice. Or we worry that God will overpay, forever punishing people. Modern people have great difficulty with the concept of a God who sends the unrepentant to hell. That's a lot of wrath – even for someone who has hurt another person.

Concerning this resistance to the wrath and judgment of God, Fleming Rutledge writes:

If we are resistant to the idea of the wrath of God, we might pause to reflect the next time we are outraged about something—about our property values being threatened, or our children's educational opportunities being limited, or our tax breaks being eliminated. All of us are capable of anger about something. God's anger, however, is pure. It does not have the maintenance of privilege as its object, but goes out on behalf of those who have no privileges. The wrath of God is not an emotion that flares up from time to time, as though God had temper tantrums; it is a way of describing his absolute enmity against all wrong and his commitment to set matters right.

- Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*, 130.

2. Share your response to this paragraph:

“What does a Dad do when his own children murder each other? Rape each other? Destroy each other? What does a Father do with His wrath? – I guess just kill them all...flood them all...drown them all. In fact, He tried that once. The problem was, Noah got away. Of course he was meant to get away, but that’s a huge mystery in the Old Testament: Why are we still here? People are put off by all the violence in the Old Testament, but the mystery is why there is not more. God said, “If you eat of the fruit of the tree, you will die.” We ate, so we’re either dead or dying (walking dead). What a nightmare. We long for justice, yet the justice we long for is our own death.”

- Peter Hiett, *Eternity Now!*, 191.

## Understanding the Text

**Step one: Observation – What do we see?** Every time we read the Bible, the first thing we should ask is, “What do we see?” Read the text aloud during your group. As you read, mark up the passage by circling what you believe to be key words or phrases. Place yourself into the original audience and ask questions (who, what, where, when, how, why).

## Revelation 15–18 (NIV)

15:1 I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed. 2 And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God 3 and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb:

“Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
Lord God Almighty.  
Just and true are your ways,  
King of the nations.  
4 Who will not fear you, Lord,  
and bring glory to your name?  
For you alone are holy.  
All nations will come  
and worship before you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

5 After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple — that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law — and it was opened. 6 Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. 7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. 8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels,  
“Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.”

2 The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

3 The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died.

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

“You are just in these judgments, O Holy One,  
you who are and who were;

6 for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets,  
and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.”

7 And I heard the altar respond:

“Yes, Lord God Almighty,  
true and just are your judgments.”

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. 9 They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

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 agony 11 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.



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 Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

15 "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed."

16 Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. 19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. 20 Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. 21 From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

17:1 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. 2 With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

3 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. 5 The name written on her forehead was a mystery:

BABYLON THE GREAT

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

6 I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. 7 Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. 8 The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because it once was, now is not, and yet will come.

9 "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. 10 They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while. 11 The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.

12 "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. 13 They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. 14 They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings — and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

15 Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. 16 The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17 For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God's words are fulfilled. 18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

18:1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. 2 With a mighty voice he shouted:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!"

She has become a dwelling for demons  
and a haunt for every impure spirit,  
a haunt for every unclean bird,  
a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal.

3 For all the nations have drunk  
the maddening wine of her adulteries.

The kings of the earth committed adultery with her,  
and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven say:

“‘Come out of her, my people,’  
so that you will not share in her sins,  
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

5 for her sins are piled up to heaven,  
and God has remembered her crimes.

6 Give back to her as she has given;  
pay her back double for what she has done.  
Pour her a double portion from her own cup.

7 Give her as much torment and grief  
as the glory and luxury she gave herself.

In her heart she boasts,  
‘I sit enthroned as queen.

I am not a widow;  
I will never mourn.’

8 Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her:  
death, mourning and famine.

She will be consumed by fire,  
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

9 "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. 10 Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:

"Woe! Woe to you, great city,  
you mighty city of Babylon!  
In one hour your doom has come!"

11 "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore — 12 cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; 13 cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves.

14 "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' 15 The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn 16 and cry out:

"Woe! Woe to you, great city,  
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,  
and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!  
17 In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"

“Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. 18 When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, ‘Was there ever a city like this great city?’ 19 They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out:

“Woe! Woe to you, great city,  
where all who had ships on the sea  
became rich through her wealth!  
In one hour she has been brought to ruin!  
20 “Rejoice over her, you heavens!  
Rejoice, you people of God!  
Rejoice, apostles and prophets!  
For God has judged her  
with the judgment she imposed on you.”

21 Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said:

“With such violence  
the great city of Babylon will be thrown down,  
never to be found again.  
22 The music of harpists and musicians, pipers and trumpeters,  
will never be heard in you again.  
No worker of any trade  
will ever be found in you again.  
The sound of a millstone  
will never be heard in you again.  
23 The light of a lamp  
will never shine in you again.  
The voice of bridegroom and bride  
will never be heard in you again.  
Your merchants were the world’s important people.  
By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.  
24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of God’s holy people,  
of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.”

3. Share observations together. What stands out? What do you notice?

**Step two: Interpretation - What does it mean?** The goal is to understand the original author's intended meaning to the original audience. This requires research on the original readers' cultural and historical background. This is where it is beneficial to dig into a commentary or Bible dictionary, or to listen to a sermon. We are careful NOT to begin our study by asking, "What does this passage mean to me?" That question is application, not interpretation. The meaning of the text is the author's intended meaning. Until we understand the meaning of the text we will not apply the text correctly to our lives.

## Background

Revelation 15-16 records the pouring out of the wrath of God on those who choose to worship the beast and persecute the people of God rather than follow the Lamb wherever he goes. This vision includes the final defeat of all forces of evil personified by the prostitute, Babylon. John's readers would be greatly encouraged by this promise that Babylon, Rome, would not ultimately prevail over the Christian movement, since initial evidence seemed to indicate that there was nothing more powerful in the world than Rome.

Chapter 15 begins with John seeing another "great and marvelous sign: seven angels with seven last plagues – last, because with them God's wrath is completed." This is preparation for the final release of God's judgment upon his world that has rejected his Son. Whereas the seven trumpets were intended to "blast" warnings to those who refuse God's grace, these seven plagues ("bowls of wrath" in Revelation 16) go beyond warning to actually promising the arrival of God's justice. Note that the people of God have no fear of the coming wrath of God because, in Christ, they have passed through judgment to life.



The two names, Moses and Jesus, are linked (15:3) and the song that the followers of the Lamb sing is a much-abridged version of Deuteronomy 32, a song that Moses taught to Israel. The song reminds Lamb-followers that they find themselves in the same amazing position as Israel: "Saved people, set down in a dangerous world. Just as Israel, 'bought with a price' and trained in the rough disciplines of the wilderness years, purged and toughened by the judgments of God, is ready to enter into the promised land, so are we – conquering and to conquer."<sup>1</sup>

We see again in 15:3-4 that the worship of God is the theme that ties together the entire book of Revelation. Worship is the central and essential act of the Christian, even in the worst of times. Worship is that discipline of giving committed attention to the being and the action of God.

In the press of world events, worship seems absurd – like we are not doing anything at all and, in fact, wasting time. Yet John has been seeing and saying all along the Revelation journey that the relationship between God's actions and our witness to his actions is fueled by worship. Nothing we do has more effect in heaven or on earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 139.

Chapter 16 uses the imagery of the plagues visited on Egypt during the Exodus to reveal the growing intensity of God's judgment upon those who worship the beast instead of the Lamb. What we are faced with here is neither a capricious or ill-tempered God, nor a careless, laissez-faire deistic ruler. We are faced with the God who made the world, and whose generous love is seen most clearly in the sacrifice of his Son, the Lamb, who shares his throne.

The wrath of this Creator consists principally of two things. First, he allows human wickedness to work itself out, to reap its own destruction. Second, he steps in more directly to stop it when it has gotten out of hand. If we really knew our reality, we would thank God for both of these, even though both can appear harsh. They need to be. If they were any less than harsh, the wickedness in question would merely pause and then carry on as before.

With both narration of the destruction and then song, Revelation 17-18 gives a vision of the judgment and the end of the characters and conduits of evil which have perpetuated Satan's attempt to usurp God's place and glory.

Babylon is the city which tried, like Babel of old, the pinnacle of human achievement and experience. "Babylon" represents what the New Testament often refers to as "the world;" not the physical creation, but the fallen ideology and worldview of those who seek to live in open defiance or indifference to the Lamb. The brutal but seductive civilizations and empires, which ensnare the world by promising luxury and producing dependency, promising freedom and producing slavery, gain their power from the "prostitute," the great Babylon.

Babylon makes promises and demands that only God can make. It claims that its power is salvation and then requires absolute allegiance to that power.

The longest song recorded in Revelation concerns the overthrow of Babylon. In prophetic tradition (Isaiah 13, 21, 47; Jeremiah 50-51; Ezekiel 26-27), a song of doom is sung against the enemy of Babylon. In Revelation 17-18, the great prostitute image is less about sex and more about worship – worship gone wrong. John is concerned that his churches open their eyes to the difference between the worship of the Lamb and this other worship of human promise, achievement, pleasure and arrogance.

## GROUP QUESTIONS

4. In Revelation 15:8, the reference to no one being able to enter the heavenly temple is reminiscent of 1 Kings 8:10-11 during the dedication of Solomon's temple: "When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple." How does this Old Testament background help to understand what is going on in 15:8?

5. In Revelation 16, attempt to describe the intended effect of each "bowl":

- First Bowl: 16:1-2 – "Ugly, festering sores broke out."

What happens when people's health is disturbed?

- Second/Third Bowls: 16:3-4 – "Turned to blood...every living thing in the sea died."  
In John's day, the sea and the rivers were the source of trade and economy.

What happens when human commerce and livelihood is disturbed?

- Fourth/Fifth Bowls: 16:8-10 – "Sun was allowed to scorch people with fire... kingdom was plunged into darkness." What happens when unexplainable natural disasters pound the earth?

- Sixth Bowl: 16:12-16 – John's society had a deep-seated fear about the great enemy to their east, Parthia. The Euphrates River formed a boundary and gave protection from an invasion. But then the river dries up and they are left open to attack. No one knows what "Armageddon" means. Many suggest it refers to Megiddo, a place where battles were fought from time to time in Israel's history. This bowl depicts all-out war between the nations.

What happens when people are confronted with the violence of war?

- Seventh Bowl: 16:17-21 – "It is done." This is the "Day of the LORD." The seventh bowl does not reveal the collapse of the physical earth. John's readers would have no difficulty in getting the point since the prophets used the same sort of metaphorical language to describe God's judgment on the nations in their day, not the literal end of the planet which obviously did not happen back then. Terrible things will happen in human society, for which the only fitting metaphor will be earthquakes and hailstones. This is the only way to describe the collapse of the entire social and political system on the earth.

What happens when people are confronted with the possibility of their own death?

6. In Revelation 17-18, why is the image of the “whore” used to describe Babylon and the system it represents? Who would John’s readers see as Babylon? How would the demise of Babylon (18:21-24) encourage John’s readers?

7. In Revelation 18:12-14, John implies that when we worship the “goods” of Babylon – give them the place of prominence due God – we will find ourselves sacrificing things we never thought possible. The giveaway point comes at the end of verse 13 with implacable protest against the entire system upon which the ancient world was built. How does this final item of “cargo” reveal the depth of Babylon’s wickedness?

**Step three: Application – how does it work?** It is the person who not only knows God’s Word, but also obeys His Word that truly loves Him (John 14:21). Application of God’s Word to our lives involves identifying the specific instructions from the text and making a plan to obey them.



8. What if, in the face of the great evil and injustice that millions have faced in history, God did no more than say, "There, there. Boys will be boys, and girls will be girls."? What would be the reaction of the victims of that evil? How then might we say that Judgment is good? Could it be that God will take even the wickedness and rebellion of the world and turn it to praise and to the salvation of his people? How does even judgment reveal God's grace and mercy?<sup>2</sup>

## GROUP PRAYER

### **Book of Common Prayer – Evening Prayers**

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I return.

**The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.**

O God, come to my aid: **O Lord, make haste to help me.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Kneeling **Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

**I confess to almighty God,  
and to you, my brothers and sisters,  
that I have sinned through my own fault,  
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done,  
and in what I have failed to do;  
and I ask you, my brothers and sisters,  
to pray for me to the Lord, our God.**

Silence (or time to confess to God or to one another).

Rebuke me, O Lord, but not in your anger, lest I come to nothing (Jer.10:24).

**Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Amen.**

A candle is lit while during the next song and prayer:

**Walk in the light, the beautiful light.  
Come where the dew drops of mercy shine bright.  
Shine all around us by day and by night.  
Jesus, the light of the world.**

O gracious Light,  
pure brightness of the ever living Father in heaven,  
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!  
Now as we come to the setting of the sun,  
and our eyes behold the evening light,  
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,  
O Son of God, O Giver of life,  
your glory fills the whole world.

### **Affirming our Faith – The Apostles’ Creed 390 A.D.**

**We believe in one God the Father, the Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen.**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

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<sup>2</sup>“So, God spare us a life of fairness! To live in a world with grace is better by far than to live in a world of absolute fairness. A fair world may make life nice for us, but only as nice as we are. We may get what we deserve, but I wonder how much that is and whether or not we would really be satisfied. A world with grace will give us more than we deserve. It will give us life, even in our suffering” – Jerry Sittser, *A Grace Disguised* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 130.

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.**

**We believe in one, holy, global, and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers for Others: take turns saying aloud prayers for people in your life/our lives, our community and the world.

Following each request: **Lord, hear our prayer.**



## **Revelation 15:1-4**

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues — last, because with them God's wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb:

**“Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
Lord God Almighty.  
Just and true are your ways,  
King of the nations.  
Who will not fear you, Lord,  
and bring glory to your name?  
For you alone are holy.  
All nations will come  
and worship before you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”**

Closing: O Lord, God Almighty, as you have taught us to call the evening, the morning, and the noonday one day; and have made the sun to know its going down: Dispel the darkness of our hearts, that by your brightness we may know you to be the true God and eternal light, living and reigning for ever and ever.

**May the Lord bless us and keep us from all harm; and may God lead us to eternal life. Amen.**

## Additional Resources

Further comment on the Wrath and Judgment of God in Revelation:

We are uncomfortable to entrust wrath to God. Revelation does, but with these qualifications: 1) This is justice, not vengeance – i.e. the empire brings about its own demise; 2) In the trumpets, mercy tempers the destruction which is partial, not total, and is intended to bring about repentance; 3) The slaughtered Lamb himself, victim of imperial violence, experiences the justice of God on behalf of the followers; 4) Divine judgment ensues only when people refuse to repent; 5) Salvation of multitudes is the end result, not annihilation. The role of God's witnesses is to announce this judgment, not to execute it. It is important here to remember the task of apocalyptic literature is to provide graphic images of unnoticed powers in order for us to really see them and repent.

From *The Importance of Hell* by Timothy Keller:

In 2003 a research group discovered 64% of Americans expect to go to heaven when they die, but less than 1% think they might go to hell. Not only are there plenty of people today who don't believe in the Bible's teaching on everlasting punishment, even those who do find it an unreal and a remote concept. Nevertheless, it is a very important part of the Christian faith, for several reasons.

1. It is important because Jesus taught about it more than all other Biblical authors put together. Jesus speaks of "eternal fire and punishment" as the final abode of the angels and human beings who have rejected God (Matthew 25:41,46). He says that those who give into sin will be in danger of the "fire of hell" (Matthew 5:22; 18:8-9). The word Jesus uses for 'hell' is Gehenna, a valley in which piles of garbage were daily burned as well as the corpses of those without families who could bury them.

In Mark 9:43, Jesus speaks of a person going to "hell [gehenna], where 'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'" Jesus is referring to the maggots that live in the corpses on the garbage heap. When all the flesh is consumed, the maggots die. Jesus is saying, however, that the spiritual decomposition of hell never ends, and that is why 'their worm does not die.'

If Jesus, the Lord of Love and Author of Grace spoke about hell more often, and in a more vivid, blood-curdling manner than anyone else, it must be a crucial truth.

In Matthew 10:28, Jesus says, "Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." He is speaking to disciples, some of whom will eventually be tortured, sawn in half, flayed and burned alive. Yet, he says, that is a picnic compared to hell. Clearly, for Jesus hell was a real place, since he said that after judgment day people would experience it in their bodies. Hell is a place not only of physical but also of spiritual misery.

Jesus constantly depicted hell as painful fire and "outer darkness" (Matt 25:30; cf. Jude 6,7,13), a place of unimaginably terrible misery and unhappiness. If Jesus, the Lord of Love and Author of Grace spoke about hell more often, and in a more vivid, blood-curdling manner than anyone else, it must be a crucial truth. But why was it so important to Jesus?

2. It is important because it shows how infinitely dependent we are on God for everything. Virtually all commentators and theologians believe that the Biblical images of fire and outer darkness are metaphorical. (Since souls are in hell right now, without bodies, how could the fire be literal, physical fire?) Even Jonathan Edwards pointed out that the Biblical language for hell was symbolic, but, he added, 'when metaphors are used in Scripture about spiritual things . . . they fall short of the literal truth.' (from "The Torments of Hell are Exceeding Great" in volume 14 of the Yale edition of Edwards' works.)

To say that the Scriptural image of hell-fire is not wholly literal is of no comfort whatsoever. The reality will be far worse than the image. What, then, are the 'fire' and 'darkness' symbols for? They are vivid ways to describe what happens when we lose the presence of God. Darkness refers to the isolation, and fire to the disintegration of being separated from God. Away from the favor and face of God, we literally, horrifically, and endlessly fall apart.

In the teachings of Jesus, the ultimate condemnation from the mouth of God is 'depart from me.' That is remarkable - to simply be away from God is the worst thing that can happen to us! Why? We were originally created to walk in God's immediate presence (Genesis 2.) In one sense, of course, God is everywhere and upholds everything. Only in him do we all speak and move and have our being (Acts 17:28.) In that sense, then, it is impossible to depart from the Lord; even hell cannot exist unless God upholds it. But the Bible says sin excludes us from God's 'face' (Isaiah 59:2.) All the life, joy, love, strength, and meaning we have looked for and longed for is found in his face (Psalm 16:11) - that is, in his favor, presence, fellowship, and pleasure.

Sin removes us from that aspect of his power that sustains and supports us. It is to us as water is to a fish - away from it our life slowly ebbs away. That is what has been happening to us throughout history. That is why, for Paul, the everlasting fire and destruction of hell is 'exclusion from the presence of the Lord.' (2 Thessalonians 1:9.) Separation from God and his blessings forever is the reality to which all the symbols point. For example, when Jesus speaks of being 'destroyed' in hell, the word used is *apollumi*, meaning not to be annihilated out of existence but to be 'totaled' and ruined so as to be useless for its intended purpose.

The image of 'gehenna' and 'maggots' means decomposition. Once a body is dead it loses its beauty and strength and coherence, it begins to break into its constituent parts, to stink and to disintegrate. So what is a 'totaled' human soul? It does not cease to exist, but rather becomes completely incapable of all the things a human soul is for - reasoning, feeling, choosing, giving or receiving love or joy. Why? Because the human soul was built for worshipping and enjoying the true God, and all truly human life flows from that. In this world, all of humanity, even those who have turned away from God, still are supported by 'kindly providences' or 'common grace' (Acts 14:16-17; Psalm 104:10-30; James 1:17) keeping us still capable of wisdom, love, joy, and goodness. But when we lose God's supportive presence all together, the result is hell.

3. It is important because it unveils the seriousness and danger of living life for yourself. In Romans 1-2, Paul explains that God, in his wrath against those who reject him, 'gives them up' to the sinful passions of their hearts. Commentators (cf. Douglas Moo) point out that this cannot mean God impels people to sin, since in Ephesians 4:19 it is said that sinners give themselves up to their sinful desires. It means that the worst (and fairest) punishment God can give a person is to allow them their sinful hearts' deepest desire.

What is that? The desire of the sinful human heart is for independence. We want to choose and go our own way (Isaiah 53:6). This is no idle 'wandering from the path.' As Jeremiah puts it, 'No one repents...each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle' (8:6). We want to get away from God, but, as we have seen, this is the very thing that is most destructive to us. Cain is warned not to sin because sin is slavery. (Genesis 4:7; John 8:34). It destroys your ability to choose, love, enjoy. Sin also brings blindness - the more you reject the truth about God the more incapable you are of perceiving any truth about yourself or the world (Isaiah 29:9-10; Romans 1:21.)

What is hell, then? It is God actively giving us up to what we have freely chosen - to go our own way, be our own "the master of our fate, the captain of our soul," to get away from him and his control. It is God banishing us to regions we have desperately tried to get into all our lives.

J.I.Packer writes: "Scripture sees hell as self-chosen...[H]ell appears as God's gesture of respect for human choice. All receive what they actually chose, either to be with God forever, worshipping him, or without God forever, worshipping themselves." (J.I.Packer, Concise Theology, 262-263.)

If the thing you most want is to worship God in the beauty of his holiness, then that is what you will get (Ps 96:9-13). If the thing you most want is to be your own master, then the holiness of God will become an agony, and the presence of God a terror you will flee forever (Rev 6:16; cf. Is 6:1-6).

Why is this so extremely important to stress in our preaching and teaching today?

The idea of hell is implausible to people because they see it as unfair that infinite punishment would be meted out for comparably minor, finite false steps (like not embracing Christianity.) Also, almost no one knows anyone (including themselves) that seem to be bad enough to merit hell. But the Biblical teaching on hell answers both of these objections. First, it tells us that people only get in the afterlife what they have most wanted - either to have God as Savior and Master or to be their own Saviors and Masters. Secondly, it tells us that hell is a natural consequence. Even in this world it is clear that self-centeredness, rather than God-centeredness, makes you miserable and blind. The more self-centered, self-absorbed, self-pitying, and self-justifying people are, the more breakdowns occur, relationally, psychologically, and even physically. They also go deeper into denial about the source of their problems.

On the other hand, a soul that has decided to center its life on God and his glory moves toward increasing joy and wholeness. We can see both of these 'trajectories' even in this life. But if, as the Bible teaches, our souls will go on forever, then just imagine where these two kinds of souls will be in a billion years. Hell is simply one's freely chosen path going on forever. We wanted to get away from God, and God, in his infinite justice, sends us where we wanted to go.

In the parable of Luke 16:19ff, Jesus tells us of a rich man who goes to hell and who is now in torment and horrible thirst because of the fire (v. 24). But there are interesting insights into what is going on in his soul. He urges Abraham to send a messenger to go and warn his still-living brothers about the reality of hell. Commentators have pointed out that this is not a gesture of compassion, but rather an effort at blame-shifting. He is saying that he did not have a chance, he did not have adequate information to avoid hell. That is clearly his point, because Abraham says forcefully that people in this life have been well-informed through the Scriptures. It is intriguing to find exactly what we would expect - even knowing he is in hell and knowing God has sent him there, he is deeply in denial, angry at God, unable to admit that it was a just decision, wishing he could be less miserable (v. 24) but in no way willing to repent or seek the presence of God.

I believe one of the reasons the Bible tells us about hell is so it can act like 'smelling salts' about the true danger and seriousness of even minor sins. However, I've found that only stressing the symbols of hell (fire and darkness) in preaching rather than going into what the symbols refer to (eternal, spiritual decomposition) actually prevents modern people from finding hell a deterrent. Some years ago I remember a man who said that talk about the fires of hell simply didn't scare him, it seemed too far-fetched, even silly.

So I read him lines from C.S. Lewis: Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others...but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself, going on forever like a machine. It is not a question of God 'sending us' to hell. In each of us there is something growing, which will BE Hell unless it is nipped in the bud.

To my surprise he got very quiet and said, "Now that scares me to death." He almost immediately began to see that hell was a) perfectly fair and just, and b) something that he realized he might be headed for if he didn't change. If we really want skeptics and non-believers to be properly frightened by hell, we cannot simply repeat over and over that 'hell is a place of fire.' We must go deeper into the realities that the Biblical images represent. When we do so, we will find that even secular people can be affected.

We run from the presence of God and therefore God actively gives us up to our desire (Romans 1:24, 26). Hell is therefore a prison in which the doors are first locked from the inside by us and therefore are locked from the outside by God (Luke 16:26). Every indication is that those doors continue to stay forever barred from the inside. Though every knee and tongue in hell knows that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11), no one can seek or want that Lordship without the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). This is why we can say that no one goes to hell who does not choose both to go and to stay there. What could be more fair than that?

4. The doctrine of hell is important because it is the only way to know how much Jesus loved us and how much he did for us. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus says that no physical destruction can be compared with the spiritual destruction of hell, of losing the presence of God. But this is exactly what happened to Jesus on the cross - he was forsaken by the Father (Matthew 27:46). In Luke 16:24, the rich man in hell is desperately thirsty (v. 24) and on the cross Jesus said "I thirst" (John 19:28.) The water of life, the presence of God, was taken from him. The point is this. Unless we come to grips with this "terrible" doctrine, we will never even begin to understand the depths of what Jesus did for us on the cross. His body was being destroyed in the worst possible way, but that was a flea bite compared to what was happening to his soul. When he cried out that his God had forsaken him he was experiencing hell itself.

But consider - if our debt for sin is so great that it is never paid off there, but our hell stretches on for eternity, then what are we to conclude from the fact that Jesus said the payment was "finished" (John 19:30) after only three hours? We learn that what he felt on the cross was far worse and deeper than all of our deserved hells put together.

And this makes emotional sense when we consider the relationship he lost. If a mild acquaintance denounces you and rejects you - that hurts. If a good friend does the same - that hurts far worse. However, if your spouse walks out on you saying, "I never want to see you again," that is far more devastating still. The longer, deeper, and more intimate the relationship, the more tortuous is any separation.

But the Son's relationship with the Father was beginningless and infinitely greater than the most intimate and passionate human relationship. When Jesus was cut off from God he went into the deepest pit and most powerful furnace, beyond all imagining. He experienced the full wrath of the Father. And he did it voluntarily, for us.

Fairly often I meet people who say, "I have a personal relationship with a loving God, and yet I don't believe in Jesus Christ at all." Why, I ask? "My God is too loving to pour out infinite suffering on anyone for sin." But this shows a deep misunderstanding of both God and the cross. On the cross, God HIMSELF, incarnated as Jesus, took the punishment. He didn't visit it on a third party, however willing.

So the question becomes: what did it cost your kind of god to love us and embrace us? What did he endure in order to receive us? Where did this god agonize, cry out, and where were his nails and thorns? The only answer is: "I don't think that was necessary." But then ironically, in our effort to make God more loving, we have made him less loving. His love, in the end, needed to take no action. It was sentimentality, not love at all. The worship of a god like this will be at most impersonal, cognitive, and ethical. There will be no joyful self-abandonment, no humble boldness, no constant sense of wonder. We could not sing to him "love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

Only through the cross could our separation from God be removed, and we will spend all eternity loving and praising God for what he has done (Rev 5:9-14.) And if Jesus did not experience hell itself for us, then we ourselves are devalued.

In Isaiah, we are told, "The results of his suffering he shall see, and shall be satisfied" (53:11). This is a stupendous thought. Jesus suffered infinitely more than any human soul in eternal hell, yet he looks at us and says, "It was worth it." What could make us feel more loved and valued than that? The Savior presented in the gospel waded through hell itself rather than lose us, and no other savior ever depicted has loved us at such a cost.



## Conclusion

The doctrine of hell is crucial: without it we can't understand our complete dependence on God, the character and danger of even the smallest sins, and the true scope of the costly love of Jesus.

Nevertheless, it is possible to stress the doctrine of hell in unwise ways. Many, for fear of doctrinal compromise, want to put all the emphasis on God's active judgment, and none on the self-chosen character of hell. Ironically, as we have seen, this unbiblical imbalance often makes it less of a deterrent to non-believers rather than more of one. And some can preach hell in such a way that people reform their lives only out of a self-interested fear of avoiding consequences, not out of love and loyalty to the one who embraced and experienced hell in our place. The distinction between those two motives is all-important. The first creates a moralist, the second a born-again believer.

We must come to grips with the fact that Jesus said more about hell than Daniel, Isaiah, Paul, John, Peter put together. Before we dismiss this, we have to realize we are saying to Jesus, the pre-eminent teacher of love and grace in history, "I am less barbaric than you, Jesus. I am more compassionate and wiser than you." Surely that should give us pause! Indeed, upon reflection, it is because of the doctrine of judgment and hell that Jesus' proclamations of grace and love are so astounding.

- Timothy Keller, *The Redeemer Report*, 2009



WEEK VII



# LESSON SEVEN

Revelation 19 "The Last Word on Salvation"

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.  
- Nicolaus von Zinzendorf

You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
forever.  
- Psalm 23:5-6

## Big Idea

Jesus saves! Salvation is God's action throughout history to deal with the catastrophe of human sin and its effects. The root meaning of the Hebrew word "salvation" is "to make broad, to become spacious, to enlarge." Thus, the word carries the idea of deliverance from an existence of oppression, confinement and condemnation. In Revelation 19, salvation is revealed with a word ("Hallelujah!" which is Hebrew for "Praise the LORD!") and two visuals: a wedding and a war.

# Starter

The Last Word on Salvation

Weddings can be highly expensive in America. The Knot's 2014 Real Weddings Study, which surveyed 16,000 American couples, found the average wedding cost at \$31,213. Forty-five percent of weddings exceed a couple's budget and, more worrisome, 23% lack a budget altogether. Most brides spent an average of \$1,357 on their wedding dress. As a pastor who has officiated these kinds of weddings, there is much about this that I find sad, mainly because it gives to the ceremony a showy flavor which overshadows the real meaning of the wedding day.

But from another perspective, the ever-increasing cost of weddings is an affirmation of something profoundly true about what it means to be human.

N.T. Wright explains:

We are, after all, made male and female in God's image, and in Genesis that is the climax of the whole story of creation. For a man and a woman to come together in marriage, whether they know it or not, is to plant a signpost which says: God's creation is wonderful! God's purposes for it are not over! His plan is going ahead, and we are part of it! Theologians down the ages have always seen the promises made at a wedding, promises of faithfulness through thick and thin, as a proper reflection of God's promises to his world, to the human race and to his own people in particular. A wedding, then, is a glorious symbol. Even when people enter upon it with no thought of God, and with an eye only for the dress, the photographs and the wine, it remains powerful.

– N.T. Wright, *Revelation: For Everyone Bible Study Guides*, 103.

1. What is the most memorable wedding you've attended, and why was it memorable?

2. Why do you think weddings, or perhaps better – marriage - has held on so long as a tradition in cultures around the world?

## Understanding the Text

**Step one: Observation – What do we see?** Every time we read the Bible, the first thing we should ask is, "What do we see?" Read the text aloud during your group. As you read, mark up the passage by circling what you believe to be key words or phrases. Place yourself into the original audience and ask questions (who, what, where, when, how, why).

Revelation 19 (NIV)

1 After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

"Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

2 for true and just are his judgments.

He has condemned the great prostitute

who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

3 And again they shouted:

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”

4 The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:

“Amen, Hallelujah!”

5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

you who fear him,

both great and small!”

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

9 Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

10 At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.”

11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small."

19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

3. Share observations together. What stands out? What do you notice?



**Step two: Interpretation - What does it mean?** The goal is to understand the original author's intended meaning to the original audience. This requires research on the original readers' cultural and historical background. This is where it is beneficial to dig into a commentary or Bible dictionary, or to listen to a sermon. We are careful NOT to begin our study by asking, "What does this passage mean to me?" That question is application, not interpretation. The meaning of the text is the author's intended meaning. Until we understand the meaning of the text we will not apply the text correctly to our lives.

### Background

Leading up to Revelation 19, we have just witnessed the fall and lament of the great whore, Babylon, which represents the anti-God cultures of idolatry, evil and chaos – cultures of death. But the judgment of God does not end with the lament in chapter 18; no, it ends with the "Hallelujah Chorus" (19:1-8). The timing is right for Revelation's first occurrence (actually the first occurrence in the New Testament) of the word hallelujah (Hebrew for "praise the LORD") as it protects our gratitude for deliverance from degeneration into gloating over the judged. As the smoke rises from Babylon's demise, so the praise rises because salvation has come. There are four hallelujahs that build in intensity to introduce the "wedding of the Lamb" (19:7).

The vision of the wedding feast begins with an invitation: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (19:9). The "wedding supper," occurring after the groom had formally received his bride, was a great feast at the home of the groom's father. It would last between seven and fourteen days. Very few celebrations in the Jewish community could compare with the joy and bond of a wedding feast. And our feast with Jesus will last longer. In fact, it has already begun. Each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we affirm the action of Christ for our salvation. What we know and believe of Christ in his incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection and what we expect and hope of Christ in his coming again brackets our present lives and we celebrate our salvation.

The second element in John's salvation vision is a war. In extreme contrast, the Bridegroom Christ is also the Warrior riding into the final war to eliminate evil. Here the two energies of salvation are revealed: the embrace of love and the assault on evil, in polar tension, each defined by the other, each feeding the other. The last word, though, is that every form and source of evil is banished from existence.

## GROUP QUESTIONS

4. In Revelation 19:1-10, how does the passage emphasize the intensity of the celebration that takes place? Why is there so much celebration in heaven? And how excited is the apostle John (19:10)? (Notice how John wanted to worship this angel, but is told that the angel is not worthy of worship, and that John should worship God.)

5. In Revelation 19:11-16, what is the significance of the names given to the one riding the white horse? How do the images in 19:14-16 enhance worship of Jesus Christ?

6. According to Revelation 19:17-21, how would you describe the decisiveness of the battle's outcome? Why do the beast and the false prophet face such harsh judgment?

**Step three: Application – how does it work?** It is the person who not only knows God's Word, but also obeys His Word that truly loves Him (John 14:21). Application of God's Word to our lives involves identifying the specific instructions from the text and making a plan to obey them.

7. When we understand who Jesus is and the significance of the victory which he has won in his death and resurrection, there can be no doubt about the final outcome of history or our individual existence. Bestial regimes will come and go; lies and deceit will be spread. But the King of kings is victorious, and we must not compromise.

What are the lies and deceit of "Babylon" (the lies and schemes of this fallen world) that we (you) are most likely to fall prey to? How can we help each other be on guard against falling prey to these lies and deceptions of "Babylon"?

8. What would make you say Hallelujah!? How has your interest in worshipping God increased or decreased since studying Revelation?

# GROUP PRAYER

## Book of Common Prayer — Evening Prayers

(Individuals read regular font, **group reads bold font together**)

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I return.

**The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.**

O God, come to my aid: **O Lord, make haste to help me.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Kneeling **Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

**I confess to almighty God,  
and to you, my brothers and sisters,  
that I have sinned through my own fault,  
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done,  
and in what I have failed to do;  
and I ask you, my brothers and sisters,  
to pray for me to the Lord, our God.**

Silence (or time to confess to God or to one another).

Rebuke me, O Lord, but not in your anger, lest I come to nothing (Jer.10:24).

**Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Amen.**

A candle is lit during the prayer:

**Walk in the light, the beautiful light.  
Come where the dew drops of mercy shine bright.  
Shine all around us by day and by night.  
Jesus, the light of the world**

O gracious Light,  
pure brightness of the ever living Father in heaven,  
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!

Now as we come to the setting of the sun,  
and our eyes behold the evening light,  
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,  
O Son of God, O Giver of life,  
your glory fills the whole world.

In word or song:

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise God all creatures here below.  
Praise God above, ye heavenly hosts.  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

**Te Deum — one of the earliest Christian Hymns:**

**We praise thee, O God: we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.  
All the earth doth worship thee: the Father everlasting.**  
To thee all Angels cry aloud: the Heavens, and all the Powers therein.  
To thee Cherubim and Seraphim: continually do cry,  
Holy, Holy, Holy: Lord God of Hosts;  
Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty: of thy glory.  
**The glorious company of the Apostles: praise thee.  
The goodly fellowship of the Prophets: praise thee.  
The noble army of Martyr: praise thee.**

The holy Church throughout all the world: doth acknowledge thee;  
The Father: of an infinite Majesty;  
Thine honorable, true and only Son;  
Also the Holy Ghost: the Comforter.

**Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.**  
**Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.**

When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man: thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.  
When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death:  
thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.  
Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father.

**We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge.**  
**We therefore pray thee, help thy servants whom thou hast redeemed**  
**with thy precious blood.**  
**Make them to be numbered with thy Saints in glory everlasting.**

## **Revelation 19:11-16**

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.

His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.

He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.

The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.

**“He will rule them with an iron scepter.”**

He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Closing: Grant us Lord, the lamp of charity which never fails, that it may burn in us and shed its light on those around us, and that by its brightness we may have a vision of that holy City, where dwells the true and never-failing Light, Jesus Christ.

**May the Lord bless us and keep us from all harm; and may God lead us to eternal life. Amen.**





WEEK VIII



# LESSON EIGHT

Revelation 20 “The Last Word on Kingdom”

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.

The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Whoever has ears, let them hear.

– Jesus Christ, Matthew 13:40-43.

The event is unimaginable, no doubt, but human imagination is no measure of what a sovereign God can and will do.

- J.I. Packer, Concise Theology, 258.

## Big Idea

John's intent is that Jesus reigns – already, not yet, and then in full, whatever we believe about the millennium. Thus, Satan is doomed. Every person is evaluated.

History has meaning. And one more thing, the End is near.

# Starter

## The Last Word on the Kingdom

Will Willimon, Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School, shared this story in a sermon:

Early in my ministry, I served a little church in rural Georgia. One Saturday we went to a funeral in a little country church not of my denomination. I grew up in a big downtown church. I had never been to a funeral like this one. The casket was open, and the funeral consisted of a sermon by their preacher.

The preacher pounded on the pulpit and looked over at the casket. He said, "It's too late for Joe. He might have wanted to get his life together. He might have wanted to spend more time with his family. He might have wanted to do that, but he's dead now. It is too late for him, but it is not too late for you. There is still time for you. You still can decide. You are still alive. It is not too late for you. Today is the day of decision."

Then the preacher told how a Greyhound bus had run into a funeral procession once on the way to the cemetery, and that that could happen today. He said, "You should decide today. Today is the day to get your life together. Too late for old Joe, but it's not too late for you."

I was so angry at that preacher. On the way home, I told my wife, "Have you ever seen anything as manipulative and insensitive to that poor family? I found it disgusting."

She said, "I've never heard anything like that. It was manipulative. It was disgusting. It was insensitive. Worst of all, it was also true."

- Will Willimon, "The Writing on the Wall," [PreachingToday.com](http://PreachingToday.com)

1. If you were in that funeral audience with Will and Patricia Willimon, how would you have reacted?

2. What was the last funeral that you attended, and what was it like?

## Understanding the Text

**Step one: Observation – What do we see?** Every time we read the Bible, the first thing we should ask is, “What do we see?” Read the text aloud during your group. As you read, mark up the passage by circling what you believe to be key words or phrases. Place yourself into the original audience and ask questions (who, what, where, when, how, why).

### Revelation 20 (NIV)

1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They 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 a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

3. Share observations together. What stands out? What do you notice?

**Step two: Interpretation – What does it mean?** The goal is to understand the original author’s intended meaning to the original audience. This requires research on the original readers’ cultural and historical background. This is where it is beneficial to dig into a commentary or Bible dictionary, or to listen to a sermon. We are careful NOT to begin our study by asking, “What does this passage mean to me?” That question is application, not interpretation. The meaning of the text is the author’s intended meaning. Until we understand the meaning of the text we will not apply the text correctly to our lives.

## Background

Revelation 20 is one of the most controversial texts in all of Scripture. Entire systems of understanding the end times seem to rest on the interpretation of one phrase in 20:4: "a thousand years." (Read about the views on the "millennium" in Additional Resources.) To focus on the meaning of the millennium as the crux of this chapter buries the lead. John's concern in this chapter is that every person understands that Jesus reigns and the Church will rule with him. Satan and all evil forces will be thrown down from having any influence. And every person will stand before God to be "judged according to what they had done" (20:13).

The key to interpreting this chapter is in verse 4: "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge." Where have we seen these thrones before? In heaven in Revelation 4:1-14, and, way before that, in Daniel 7:9-10, where the "thrones" were for "the Ancient of Days" and "the one like the son of man." But Daniel 7 ends with this final succession: "Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him."

It seems as though John is referring not to a literal thousand-year period only on earth, but to the heavenly reality which is already achieved during a particular period. When? Jesus, according to the entire New Testament, is already reigning (Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:25-28), and what John is saying is that the martyrs are already reigning with Christ. This echoes what is said in Ephesians 2:6 where the church is said to be "raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realms."

Perhaps John's "millennium" corresponds with the majority view of the early Church – that believers are already reigning with Christ, serving him as "priests of God and of Christ" (20:6). Revelation 20 calls John's readers to rise to the occasion in their oppressing situations by remembering that every believer is a child-king reigning with a Regent named Jesus Christ. Believers are a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Jesus launched the Church with these words in Matthew 28:18: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Every follower of Jesus has been made one of the co-regents and priests who lives and reigns with Christ. Satan's hope is to convince (by accusing) them that it's not true – so that believers will be fearful, anxious and timid, wringing their hands and hanging together while they wait for the rapture and dream of the millennium. Satan's strategy is to convince believers they are victims of a bad world, when in reality they are victors within a bad world. The world does not rule believers; the believers rule the world with Christ! As the apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16:

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?”

In Revelation 20:7-10, we read of the final judgment and demise of Satan. Babylon (secular authority) was overthrown in Revelation 17-18; the beast and false prophet (demonic structures and forces) meet their doom in chapter 19; now at last the dragon (Satan) has been overthrown as well, and for good (20:10).

In Revelation 20:11-14, the final enemies of God and humanity are death and Hades. Death here represents both the fact and the power of death; Hades is the abode of the dead, the place from which they cannot nor want to escape. The dead in the sea are mentioned (20:13) because in ancient cosmology they formed a separate category of the dead as they were never buried. But they too will now be brought to stand before the great white throne.



Many have worried that 20:11-12 seems to contradict the gospel of justification by God's grace through faith by saying that every person will be judged "according to what they had done as recorded in the books." It is important to understand "John's understanding of "the books."

The "book of life" (mentioned in Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8 where it is said to be the Lamb's book of life and written before the foundation of the world) connects to Jesus' teaching in John's Gospel where Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). All whose name is written in this book of life has been saved by God's choice to prompt faith and trust in God, not by their works. Those whose names are written in the other books will face judgment in accordance with the totality of the life that each person has lived, which is written in "the books."

In summary, Revelation 20 asserts three vital truths about the Kingdom of God:

1. There will be an End to this present period of time when God's Kingdom is already here (inaugurated at Christ's first coming) but not yet here in its fullness. All of history churns to this chapter. History is not an endless cycle of meaningless experiences. The curtains will close on this age and the End is coming. Do you believe this?

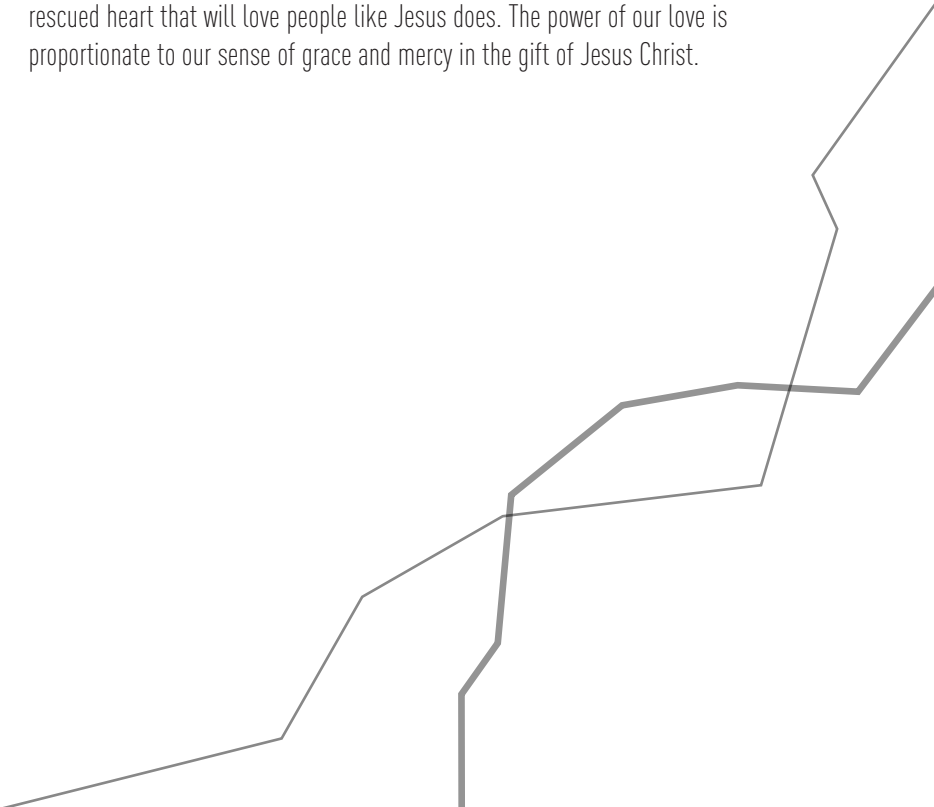
2. There will be a Judgment at the End of this age. God is unveiled as the Judge of every person. He has complete ownership of the world. History is the will and purpose of a just God who knows all things. The judgment reveals God's love has never faded to indifference. The End comes and all humans from every age are raised for judgment to take their place before Jesus the King and the final seat of judgment. Ownership is the ultimate issue of life. There is not one inch of life about which God does not say, "It is Mine" (Abraham Kuyper). Your life is - and always has been - God's. You were granted life. In the End, the issue will not be: "Who are you?" but rather, "Whose are you?" Do you believe this?

3. There is a hell. Anyone who reads the life of Jesus will be soberly impressed with the amount of "hell, fire, and brimstone" in his teachings. The phrase does not come from nowhere. Jesus' language is meant to appall and assure that as heaven will be better than we could imagine, so the wrath of hell will be worse than we can conceive. It is my duty to tell you, based on the authority of God's Word, that hell is unending and there is no place in God's teachings where a "second chance" is offered. Scripture sees hell as self-chosen - that is, those in hell realize that they sentenced themselves to it by loving darkness rather than light, choosing to ignore their Creator, preferring to suppress the truth about Jesus Christ and go about life their own way. What is most interesting about Jesus' teaching on hell is that most often when he spoke of hell it was to his already-believing disciples. The doctrine of hell is a doctrine directed at Christians. Why?

a. We must understand hell to understand God. We have a hard time taking hell seriously because our conscience is decayed by our therapeutic, self-absorbed culture. The revelation of hell in Scripture assumes a depth of insight into divine holiness and human sinfulness that most of us do not have. Jesus spoke about hell in order to reveal a holy God. We must remember that Satan did not force hell upon God; hell is God's design and appointment for people he has made who have rejected him.

b. We must understand hell to understand that God takes sin seriously. We must feel in our hearts that once we were as close to hell as we are to the chair we are sitting on. Its views were our views. We were children of the devil; the wrath of God and eternal separation were our justice due (Romans 1:18-20). All the righteousness in the universe was on the side of God and against us; "none is righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). We were guilty through and through while God was perfectly righteous in his sentence.

c. We must understand hell to understand grace. We must feel in our hearts the horrid condition of being separated from Christ, without hope and without God, on the brink of hell. If we don't feel hell, the heavy consequence of our sin, then the blessed love of God in Christ will hardly shine through us at all. We will truly shine when we understand the pit that Jesus has stepped into and pulled us out of. It is a broken and rescued heart that will love people like Jesus does. The power of our love is proportionate to our sense of grace and mercy in the gift of Jesus Christ.



## GROUP QUESTIONS

4. In Revelation 20:1-3, what happens to the dragon and for what reason? What does verse 3 reveal about Satan's involvement with world history? In what ways does Satan strive to deceive the nations?

5. In Revelation 20:4-6, what is the first resurrection? What is the second death (see also 20:11-14)? What does it mean that those who share in the first resurrection will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years? How would John's readers have been impacted by this text?

6. In Revelation 20:7-10, the troops go straight for the camp of the saints, but no battle takes place. What happens instead (verses 9-10)? Again, how would this picture of final victory give strength to John's readers?

**Step three: Application – how does it work?** It is the person who not only knows God's Word, but also obeys His Word that truly loves Him (John 14:21). Application of God's Word to our lives involves identifying the specific instructions from the text and making a plan to obey them.

7. What do you find comforting in this chapter? What disturbs you?

8. In Revelation 20:11-15, what is the significance of "the books" that are opened as the dead are gathered around the throne? In Revelation 13:8, believers' names are said to be written in the Lamb's book of life. How does knowing we are in the Lamb's book of life change who we are and what we do today?

Or ask the question this way: Imagine a book made of your life with every thought and deed documented, then made available to all. How would you feel? If Jesus stepped in to edit that book by substituting his thoughts and deeds for yours, how would you feel then (because this is exactly what has happened!)?

## GROUP PRAYER

### Book of Common Prayer – Evening Prayers

(Individuals read regular font, **group reads bold font together**)

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I return.

**The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.**

O God, come to my aid: **O Lord, make haste to help me.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Kneeling **Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

**I confess to almighty God,  
and to you, my brothers and sisters,  
that I have sinned through my own fault,  
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done,  
and in what I have failed to do;  
and I ask you, my brothers and sisters,  
to pray for me to the Lord, our God.**

Silence (or time to confess to God or to one another).

Rebuke me, O Lord, but not in your anger, lest I come to nothing (Jer.10:24).

**Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Amen.**

A candle is lit during the prayer:

**Walk in the light, the beautiful light.  
Come where the dew drops of mercy shine bright.  
Shine all around us by day and by night.  
Jesus, the light of the world.**

O gracious Light,  
pure brightness of the ever living Father in heaven,  
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!

Now as we come to the setting of the sun,  
and our eyes behold the evening light,  
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,  
O Son of God, O Giver of life,  
your glory fills the whole world.

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise God all creatures here below.  
Praise God above, ye heavenly host.  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

#### **Declaration of Faith — Nicene Creed (325 A.D.)**

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy global and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers for Others: take turns saying aloud prayers for people in your life/our lives, our community and the world.

Following each request: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

### **Revelation 20:4-6**

**I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They 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 a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.**

Closing: O Lord Jesus Christ, who by thy death didst take away the sting of death: grant unto us thy servants so to follow in faith where thou hast led the way, that we may at length fall asleep peacefully in thee, and awake up after thy likeness; for thy tender mercies' sake.

**May the Lord bless us and keep us from all harm; and may God lead us to eternal life. Amen.**



## Additional Resources

Views of the Millennium (thousand-year reign) in Revelation 20. There are three schools of interpretation represented by women and men who affirm absolute inspiration and authority of the Bible.

### Premillennialism

This position comes from an approach that Revelation is to be interpreted as literally as possible. Numbers and images are to be taken at face value unless a symbolic intent is clearly apparent. Thus, this school of interpretation maintains that the “one thousand years” of John’s vision is an actual, measurable period of history.

Central to premillennialism is the belief that Jesus will return to earth in order to inaugurate this period of peace and righteousness – thus the name “pre-millennialism.” The millennium is a period in which Jesus will literally reign upon the earth with his saints. At the beginning of this era, Satan is bound, the first resurrection of Christians occurs, and the kingdom rule of the Lamb is patent throughout the earth.

After one thousand years, Satan will be set free to make a final attempt to deceive the nations and attack the saints. This rebellion leads to the final confrontation between his forces and the Kingdom of God, and Satan and his forces will be utterly defeated and disposed to the lake of fire. The second resurrection of unbelievers and final judgment will then take place following the thousand years, and the final state of the new heavens and new earth will be ushered in. While these are the basic elements, there are many variations of premillennialism.

The most important feature of premillennialism is that there is still a distinct future for the people of Israel, and thus premillennialism reads many of the Old Testament prophecies (such as the future rebuilding of the Temple in Ezekiel 40-48) as still to come and not fulfilled by the Church.

### Postmillennialism

This view maintains that John's vision of a thousand-year period refers to a growing environment of peace, prosperity and victory throughout the world during this age of the Church. It is not a literal period of one thousand years, but symbolic of the long length of this Church age. The preaching and influence of the Gospel will effect this growing improvement that will reach completeness before Jesus returns to the earth. Those who hold this view believe that the Church should work, pray, hope and expect a near Christianizing of the entire world prior to the return of Christ. This view was most popular before the two world wars in the twentieth century.

### Amillennialism

This view holds that the thousand years are to be taken symbolically, consistent with the use of numbers throughout Revelation. Therefore, there is no calendar-calculated millennium; rather, this period is understood to represent the entire period of time between the first and second comings of Christ. It is seen as describing the present reign of Christ from heaven with his saints, both in heaven and on the earth. Jesus is acknowledged to be the King of kings and Lord of lords now, having ascended to the right hand of the Father after his resurrection. The "first resurrection" in this view refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in which all Christians share by virtue of their union with him.

At the end of history, Satan will be loosed to deceive the nations and attack Christians – setting the stage for the return of Christ. Then comes the "second resurrection" at which time all people will be raised from the dead to face final judgment. For those whose names are not "written in the book of life," there will be the "second death," the eternal state of separation from God.

For further study of the millennial views, see Blaising, Craig A., Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., and Robert B. Strimple. *Three Views on The Millennium and Beyond*. Edited by Darrell L. Bock. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999.

For further study of God's wrath and judgment, see "The Importance of Hell" by Timothy Keller, listed in Lesson Six's Additional Resources.

WEEK IX



# LESSON NINE

Revelation 21-22 "The Last Word on Heaven"

All of your life there has been an unobtainable ecstasy that has hovered just beyond the grasp of your consciousness...When you are starting in on a pleasurable experience, you think, "Ah, finally. This is it" and yet you never have it. All the things that have ever deeply possessed your soul have been but hints of it, tantalizing glimpses, promises never quite fulfilled...They are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of the tune we have not heard, news from a country we have not yet visited.

It is a music we are born remembering.

- C.S. Lewis, Problem of Pain, 130-131.

## Big Idea

John's final vision of the new heaven and earth is not an ending, but the beginning of all things new. This is the deepest Christian motivation for worship of and witness for Jesus.

# Starter

The Last Word on Heaven

We would sure like to get to that Garden with the Tree of Life, to that water of Life because sometimes it feels like we are going to die of thirst.

In C.S. Lewis' *The Silver Chair*, Jill finds herself alone and full of shame in a strange world because she has done a prideful and stupid thing. After she cries, she is terribly thirsty. The sight of a beautiful stream across a meadow doubles her thirst. But as she moves toward the stream, she is stopped in her tracks by an immense lion standing in front of the stream. The lion looks at her as if he knows her. She is frozen, caught between fear of the lion and longing for the water. Then the lion speaks in a deep and clear voice – twice – telling her she may come to the stream and drink. It does not make her any less frightened and she does not come to the stream:

"Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion.

"I'm dying of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I – could I – would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

"Will you promise not to – do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill.

"I make no promise," said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

"Do you eat girls?" she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I dare not come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion.

- C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, 17.

1. Did you have a favorite children's story or movie? Why do you think children, and even adults, are drawn to stories?

2. What has most shaped your understanding of the eternal dwelling place of Christians? When do you find yourself "thirsty" for heaven?

## Understanding the Text

**Step one: Observation – What do we see?** Every time we read the Bible, the first thing we should ask is, "What do we see?" Read the text aloud during your group. As you read, mark up the passage by circling what you believe to be key words or phrases. Place yourself into the original audience and ask questions (who, what, where, when, how, why).

### Revelation 21 – 22 (NIV)

21:1 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

6 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 water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

7 Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. 13 There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. 14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. 16 The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. 17 The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. 18 The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. 19 The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

6 The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

7 "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll."

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!"

10 Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. 11 Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy."



12 "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have 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, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

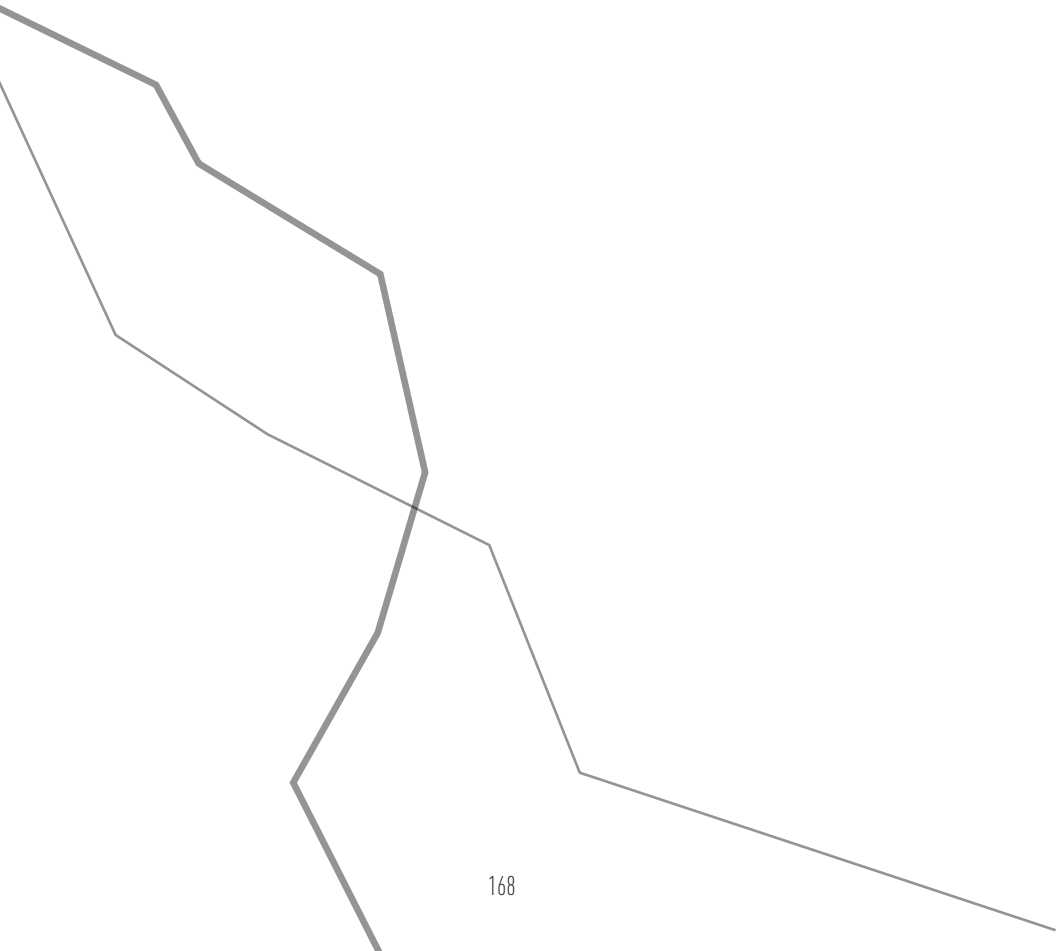
17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

3. Share observations together. What stands out? What do you notice?



**Step two: Interpretation - What does it mean?** The goal is to understand the original author's intended meaning to the original audience. This requires research on the original readers' cultural and historical background. This is where it is beneficial to dig into a commentary or Bible dictionary, or to listen to a sermon. We are careful NOT to begin our study by asking, "What does this passage mean to me?" That question is application, not interpretation. The meaning of the text is the author's intended meaning. Until we understand the meaning of the text we will not apply the text correctly to our lives.

### Background

As the climax of the New Testament, Revelation 21-22 reveals that the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth is now reprised eternally as God and the Lamb dwelling with humanity forever. The reign of God that was inaugurated in the coming, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – and witnessed throughout the New Testament age – now arrives in its fullness. There is no other stream. Genesis and Revelation are the Story's two bookends. The grand narrative that began with creation in a Garden now ends in new creation in a City, as promised all along by the Prophets. "The original garden that became a source of curse and death because of human disobedience is now an urban garden, the place where millennia of human civilization come to fulfillment and nations finally live in peace, where blessing and life replace the original curse and death. 'Hallelujah!' is the only appropriate response."<sup>1</sup>

Here are three highlights of this final vision:

1. Creation is restored. The word "new" in the phrase "a new heaven and a new earth" (21:1) speaks of a change of quality, not origin. This world is rehabbed, transformed, refined by fire (2 Peter 3:7). Heaven is not the escape of individual souls from the earth to some ethereal spiritual sterility, but rather it is a new heaven and new earth "coming down" fully restored. In other words, the great hope of believers is not an escape from material existence but rather the very fulfillment of material existence. Jesus' resurrection body is the first fruits of what existence will be like. He is preparing a place for our redeemed physical bodies to live in true healing and human flourishing before God. The physicality of the text is unmistakable. The "new Jerusalem" (21:2) has walls and gates and rivers and streets and trees.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 161.

It is a specific, physical Cube (like the Holy of Holies in 1 Kings 6:20) where we will walk, eat and run. 21:16 says it will be a cube 12,000 stadia in length, width and height. That is 1,400 miles, the distance from Mexico to Canada or Denver to Pittsburgh. "In my Father's house are many dwellings!" (John 14:6). The measurements are most likely not literal, but rather they plant endless expectations of size and fullness in the mind of John's readers. In fact, scholars believe the footprint of this new Jerusalem is equal in size to the entire land mass of the Roman Empire ("Babylon").

Furthermore, we notice the glory of the place. John sees walls of precious stones, gates of pearl, streets of pure gold. And what will make heaven most spectacular is the radiant glory of God that will replace the sun's light. The stones in 21:19-21 are from the Priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:15-21) in the Old Testament reminding us of what has been promised – Home – throughout history.

Finally, as striking as the presence of glory is the absence of loss. Heaven is a "no" place. There will be no sin, no evil, no suffering, no sorrow, no disease, no disaster, no death. Think of all the jobs that will be permanently retired: exterminators, counselors, insurance adjusters, doctors, mechanics, police, and what others?

Revelation 22:2 notes: "On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month." Today, 800 million people go to sleep hungry; one in six people live in extreme poverty, earning less than one dollar a day; the average salary of the top twenty hedge fund managers is 22,000 times the salary of the average worker. These things will have "no" place in heaven. "Your kingdom come."

2. Community is restored. Heaven is a garden city. Richard Bauckham writes: "In the beginning God had planted a garden for humanity to live in (Genesis 2:8). In the end he will give them a city. In the New Jerusalem the blessings of paradise will be restored, but the New Jerusalem is more than paradise regained. As a city it fulfills humanity's desire to build out of nature a human place of human culture and community."<sup>2</sup>

The New Jerusalem is the antithesis of Babylon – a culture infested with demons, evil and brokenness - a culture of death. The first city, Enoch (Genesis 4:17), was built by the first murderer – Cain - and destroyed in the Flood. The second city, Babel, was built in arrogance to ascend to heaven and was drowned in languages. Jerusalem was the city known for rejecting the Messiah. Yet here we will be with all of our brother-hating (city of Enoch), God-defying (city of Babel), Christ-rejecting (city of Jerusalem) saved-by-the-grace-of-God brothers and sisters alive in the City!

The gates are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel – men like Judah who sold his own brother into slavery and fornicated with his daughter-in-law. The city's foundation stones are the twelve apostles of Christ - men like Peter who denied knowing Jesus and John who wanted to murder an entire Samaritan village. This City is built by God with liars, fornicators, murderers who have been redeemed. This offers the promise of our own redemption, meaning that there is nothing so evil in our unfaithfulness, nothing so obscure about our lives that is not, even now, being fashioned into the walls and gates of heaven!

Even more, we will have restored relationships with one another. Heaven will be not boring because self-forgetfulness will be the new human nature. Because Jesus lived the life we should have lived (so we are clothed in his righteousness) and died the death we should have died (so we are forgiven of our sins), God's grace changes our hearts to be like Jesus, the "Man for Others" (said Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Bauckham, *New Testament Theology: The Book of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 135

3. Communion with God is restored. The most important thing in heaven is God. He is our portion. In the end, we get God. God is the light of heaven so the only vision we'll have is from him and for him. Heaven not only means that bad things stop, but even more, God himself wipes away our tears! Only people who want God will be there.

The seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty," before the throne day in and day out. They look up and see some new facet of God and say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." They look down and contemplate what they've just seen. Then they look up, and there's something new: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!"

If we don't want God, we will not be very interested in heaven. John did not write Revelation for a cluster of academicians trying to flowchart how the End will happen. He wrote it to seven churches that were going through persecution under Emperor Domitian – homes taken, fed to lions in the arenas, boiled in oil and crucified along major roads. John gives them this: dwelling with God in the new heaven and new earth. And the simple fact of history is that it worked! Early Christians took their suffering with poise and peace so that the more people killed them, the more the movement grew.

There is no other stream.

## GROUP QUESTIONS

4. Read Revelation 21:1-5. Up to now, “the one who sits on the throne” has been mentioned only obliquely – God has been there and been worshipped. But all the talking has been by done by Jesus, or by an angel, or by a “voice from heaven.” Now, at last, for the first time since the opening statement in 1:8, Father God himself, directly and without an intermediary, addresses John and the seven churches.

What is the message that comes from the One who sits on the throne (21:5)?  
For John’s readers, what is included in “everything new”?

5. In Revelation 21:6-21, the New Jerusalem is described as an enormous, perfect cube because that is the shape of the Holy of Holies at the heart of the ancient temple in Jerusalem, the place where God’s presence is most palpably found (1 Kings 6:20).

What is the significance of this connection between the Holy of Holies and the New Jerusalem? How is the New Jerusalem specifically designed to reflect the identity of God’s people (see 21:12-14)? How are the walls of the city decorated (21:18-21) and what do you think is the reason for so much detail?

6. In Revelation 21:22-22:21, John sees the river of life flowing through the city streets (see Ezekiel 47:12) and out into the countryside beyond. The tree which grows in profusion on either bank of the river is “the tree of life,” the tree which was forbidden to Adam and Eve as they were expelled from the garden.

According to John, what is the purpose of the leaves on this tree (22:2)? The text goes on to say that God’s people will “reign forever and ever” (22:5), indicating that heaven is not just a destination but even more a vocation. How might John’s readers have been encouraged by this vision of coming vocation?

**Step three: Application – how does it work?** It is the person who not only knows God’s Word, but also obeys His Word that truly loves Him (John 14:21). Application of God’s Word to our lives involves identifying the specific instructions from the text and making a plan to obey them.

7. “Yes. I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

In his novel, *The Second Coming*, Walker Percy posed the question, “Is it possible for people to miss their lives in the same way one misses a plane?”<sup>3</sup> The answer depends on your view of time: Chronos or Kairos (two Greek words for different kinds of time). Chronos is duration – counting time. Kairos is opportunity – making time count. The coming of Christ cannot be confined to a date, rather it is an arrival which is already in process of taking place and for which we are already making preparation.

Are you living Chronos? Percy describes that way of life: “Not once in his entire life had he allowed himself to come to rest in the quieter center of himself but had forever cast himself forward from some dark past he could not remember to a future which did not exist. Not once had he been present for his life. So his life had passed like a dream.”<sup>4</sup> If we are dominated by a sense of Chronos, the future is a source of anxiety, leeching energy from the present or leaving us whiningly discontent with the present like a child who can’t wait for Christmas.



But if we are dominated by a sense of Kairos, the future is a source of expectation that pours energy into our present.<sup>5</sup> In other words, if we solely live in Chronos time, we miss out on the way that Jesus is already coming and working in the present, the way that he is already working to make all things new. But if we live in Kairos time then we start to see glimpses here and now of how God is at work, how his kingdom is advancing. These glimpses create more excitement for the future when this will all be consummated. Which kind of time most characterizes your life – Chronos or Kairos?

8. What have you sensed God is trying to say to you and work with you in the midst of this remarkable book of Revelation? What will you take away?

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<sup>3</sup> Walker Percy, *The Second Coming* (Picador, 1999), 124.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 192-193.

## GROUP PRAYER

### **Praying Revelation 22:17, 20-21**

**Leader reads:** None of us are likely to be thrown to the lions, but we have things that are weighing us down. History says that people with living hope conquer absolute misery. What makes a Christian Christian is the inability to quit hoping. We have seen that despite our sin and smallness, we, through Christ, have received our heart's deepest desire: heaven, eternal joy in God's presence. What can earth do to us if we are promised heaven? To fear the worst earthly loss would be like a billionaire fearing the loss of a penny, or worse, a scratch on a penny. This hope will always grow us.

**Someone reads:** The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

**Group takes turns describing our thirst for the grace of God by saying aloud:**  
**Lion of Judah, I am thirsty for . . .**

**Someone reads aloud:** He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

**Group reads aloud:** Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

**Group concludes by reading aloud:** The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

## Additional Resources

An alternate (and fitting) way to end your Group study of Revelation would be to read together the powerful last chapter from *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones.

