



Revelation

The End As We Know It

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“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?”

Acts 8:30b-31a

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Revelation Intro | Jesus Unveiled

We open the book of Revelation today, and verse one begins

"the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Revelation 1:1)

How do you picture Jesus? A bearded man from old paintings, or a wandering rabbi who heals the sick and welcomes children? Or perhaps the Savior upon the cross? However you see him, get ready for it to change. Not that your picture of Jesus is wrong, but I can almost guarantee you that it's too small. In fact, I don't think it's possible for us to have a large enough understanding of who Jesus is. The book of Revelation is a revealing of Jesus Christ in glory. I know, I know, you thought Revelation was about the end of the world. We'll get to that. Revelation is awesome, but the first time I read Revelation I was lost. Dragons and demons. Angels and plagues. Mark of the beast. Stars fall. Heavens rolled up. Cats and dogs living together. Mass hysteria. And that's about what I got from it. And I may have confused it with Ghostbusters. Now, here's the irony of this book: Revelation is meant to bring understanding seriously. The word revelation literally means unveiling, as in revealing a mystery. The word apocalypse is the same. It doesn't mean end of the world. It means unveiling. It pictures something mysterious, covered by a veil, and then the veil is taken away so you can see it, so you can understand. So if Revelation is for understanding, why is it so confusing? Why does reading it feel like I just walked into a class on advanced nuclear metaphysics? Actually, it's a lot like that.

But think about it. Is the purpose of that class to confuse or to bring understanding? Understanding, of course. So why am I confused? Because I didn't take the previous classes with the proper preparation. That class is all about understanding. Listen, Revelation has 517 allusions to the

Old Testament. So if you understand the rest of the Bible first, and with a teacher to guide you, Revelation makes sense. More than just making sense. Revelation explains a lot. There are a whole lot of loose pieces of the Bible puzzle that come together when you get this one placed properly. When you understand God's plan for the end of the story, then you also understand God's purpose for today. It shows you the direction that everything is headed and a lot of temporary stuff is put into proper perspective. So don't quit on me yet. If you get lost, I'll explain as we go. That's my job now. I won't answer every question because I don't know every answer. I'm figuring this out too, but also because I want to keep our focus on the big picture. See the forest before studying the trees. And please do read it for yourself. Dig in. So if this book is revealing something, what exactly is being revealed? Well, that's easy. It's back in verse one,

"the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place." (Revelation 1:1)

So there are two things revealed. First, the revelation of Jesus Christ. This book is an unveiling of who Jesus is. So what is your picture? Do you see gentle Jesus, meek and mild, riding a donkey's colt or the righteous king riding in glory, King of kings and Lord of lords? Or is he somehow all of these things and so much more. Now wait a second. I still thought Revelation was about the end of the world, right? That's the second thing, part of it anyway. Back in verse one,

"to show his servants what must soon take place." (Revelation 1:1)

Now Revelation was written by John the Apostle. He introduces himself in verse four, and it was written to the church. And there in verse four, John wishes them

"grace and peace to you from him who is and who was, and who is to come." (Revelation 1:4)

See, Revelation is not just about the end of the world. It is about past, present, and future, and about the Lord who is God over all time and his plan for where it's all going. And this God gives to you grace and peace. John's description of God here includes all three parts of the Trinity: Father, Spirit, and in verse five,

"Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." (Revelation 1:5)

Jesus is introduced as the ruler of kings. Now, do worldly kings serve Jesus faithfully? For the most part? No.

Most are ungodly, and many have even abused the name of Christ for political power and greed. Revelation will cover that. In fact, that's where this book is going. Jesus is the rightful ruler, but he has left the world under the care of mankind. Think of Jesus' parables. So many of them were about a ruler or landowner who leaves his house and his treasure in the care of stewards, and then returns quite suddenly and then judgment. Those who were faithful are rewarded. Those who were greedy, who thought the king would never know, were judged. They are judged on their actions while the king was away. Revelation is the real-life version of all those parables, and the king that you serve in this life determines the kingdom you will inherit for eternity. Ultimately, Revelation is the return of the King to establish his kingdom. Look back in the middle of verse five

"to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom." (Revelation 1:5)

And then in verse seven,

"Look, he is coming with the clouds." (Revelation 1:7)

Jesus Christ returns as King. In the process the world is judged. God's wrath is center stage here, and it is fierce. Mercy is delivered too, and the gospel of salvation is proclaimed to every creature. Revelation is an end and a new beginning.

"Behold, I make all things new." (Revelation 21:5)

Now, I should point out that good, godly Bible scholars do not all agree on how to read Revelation, and I am not the final authority.

I'm figuring this out just like you. Now I'll give you a quick overview. Some believe that the story is all past tense. Already happened. Some believe it's ongoing. Some in the past, some future. Some believe it's all an allegory. Like a myth with a moral. But it won't really happen. And some believe that it's real and mostly about the future. For me, the last view makes the most sense, and it's true to the way Revelation is written. I'll explain why as we go. There is symbolism here, but symbols of real events and real things. Now I won't have time to explain every viewpoint on every passage, but to be clear, I fully respect those who disagree with me and I respect your right to disagree as well. The end of the world as we know it is a heavy thing to contemplate. I wake up and life is beautiful. Laughter, family, blue skies and green trees. Who would want to end this, Lord? I open the news. So much anger, so much hate. So much war. When will it end, Lord? My day starts another trial. When will we get through this, Lord? And then I open the Bible. Lord, you have a plan. And at the end of the story, two things stand out to me. He will return and we shall overcome.

Revelation 1 | The First and Last

Revelation one today. And the book begins with a vision of Jesus in a whole new light. Now, here's a question for you: Does the way you see God affect how you live? Does it change the way you see the world? I think it changes everything. Whether you see God as good, bad, compassionate, capricious, merciful, vengeful, or even non-existent, it affects you. It changes your worldview, your self-image, your others' image, everything. This is why I'm so passionate about the Bible. First Samuel 3:21—God reveals Himself through His Word. The book of Revelation is an unveiling, pulling back the curtain on two things: Jesus and God's plan for the world. Let's pick up at verse eight.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)

God introduces Himself as Alpha and Omega. That's A and Z in Greek, the first and last letters. He is the Lord over all eternity. Why letters? Letters form words, and words form ideas and understanding. God is the beginning, the origin and source, the first building block of our understanding. And He is the end, the ultimate, the final word on all existence. Then in verse nine, John begins his story. He was on the island of Patmos, exiled because of his testimony—because he testified of Jesus. It is about 95 AD—a hard time to be a Christian.

Persecution under the Roman Caesars is intense. John is the last of the Twelve because they couldn't kill him. He served as pastor to several churches until the Romans sent him to the dry, rocky island of Patmos to die. And yet God had other plans. Verse ten.

"On the Lord's day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches.'" (Revelation 1:10)

Now this voice surprised him, but what he sees next is awesome.

Awesome as in striking, or that strange mix of wonder and fear—holy fear. Verse 12.

"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." (Revelation 1:12-16)

What just happened? Who is this? Some of you are saying, "I knew it. I told you Revelation was going to get weird, and it just got weird." Hold on. We'll find out in verse 18 that this man is Jesus. I told you we'd see Jesus differently. Now, I don't suggest trying to paint this. The visual is not the main point here, and your painting probably will look weird. The real story here is understanding who Jesus is. There's more to Jesus than meets the eye. There's a lot to take in here, so I'll run through it quickly. Back in verse 12, He shows up among seven lampstands like menorahs. The lampstands represent churches—the light of the world. Jesus appears among the lamps. "Son of Man" is a title given to the Messiah in Daniel, and the robe and sash are the garments of a judge and king. The hair as white as wool is a picture also seen in Daniel. There, God is called the Ancient of Days,

with snow-white hair to show it. Jesus is old—never aging, but very old. Eyes of fire—fire's dangerous. Piercing fire refines and purifies. Jesus sees with eyes of fire. Bronze represents judgment, and Jesus' feet are like bronze glowing in a furnace. His voice is like rushing waters—majestic and powerful. And out of His mouth, the double-edged sword.

That's a direct reference to the Word of God. The Word of Jesus is the Word of God, and it pierces. And His face like the sun shining in all its brilliance. Now, if you didn't get all of that, that's okay. I don't think John understood it all right away either. But what did he do? Verse 17.

"When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. Then He placed His right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.'" (Revelation 1:17)

Hold on a second. What did He say? Jesus here is clearly awesome. But does Jesus claim to be God? Remember in verse eight, the Lord God said,

"I am the Alpha and the Omega." (Revelation 1:8)

And in verse 17, Jesus says,

"I am the First and the Last." (Revelation 1:17)

In chapter 22, Jesus says,

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last." (Revelation 22:13)

This is an unequivocal, clear statement from Jesus, among many others, that He is God. And in verse 18,

"I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." (Revelation 1:18)

I love this—Jesus holds the very keys of death. Now, verse 19—mark this verse. Verse 19 gives us a simple outline for the entire book.

It's really interesting and super useful for understanding Revelation. Listen to it carefully. Jesus says to John,

"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." (Revelation 1:19).

Notice there are three things to write down. First, what you have seen—that's chapter one. John saw Jesus. Second, write what is now. Now refers to the present age, the current time period. In chapters two and three, we'll see a picture of the present—the church. There we'll see an overview of the Church Age and what Jesus thinks of the church, good and bad. And third, write what will take place later. That means the future—that means end times—and chapters four to the end of the book are end times prophecy. The Greek phrase used here for "later" is "meta tauta," and chapter four begins with the exact same phrase "meta tauta." So chapter four kicks off the end times. Got that? What you've seen—chapter one. What is now—the Church Age—chapters two and three. What will take place later—end times—chapters 4 to 22. The outline really helps. So I'll remind you again later. Now, one last question: if Revelation is about the future, why should I believe it? It's a good question. Lots of people have predicted the end of the world and were wrong.

Mayan Calendar 2012. Wacky preacher 2011. June 1914, 1915, 1925, 1975, etc., etc.—all wrong. And lots of them tie their predictions to Revelation. So why believe it? Well, Deuteronomy gives a simple test to determine whether a prophet comes from God. If the prophecy doesn't happen—not from God. If it does—could be good. So with all those false predictions that used Revelation, why would I still believe? Think of it like this: What do most counterfeit \$100 bills have in common? They all try to

look like the real thing. See, there's a reason why so many fakes start with the Bible to make their crazy claims. And there's a reason why so many sane, rational, intelligent people believe the Bible. Because the Bible has predicted the future accurately hundreds of times. I don't have time to explore all that. Just to say the Bible is reliable. The science is good, the history is good, the prophecy is good. Empires, wars, rulers, even exact dates—all told in advance. If you want more, try the Book of Daniel, especially chapters nine and eleven. It's amazing stuff. Through the Word can guide you there too, but for now just know I believe Revelation—and with good reason. All right, now it's your turn to read. I'll see you back here for chapter two.

Revelation 2 | What Does Jesus Think of Church?

Revelation two today and an inside look at how Jesus sees the church. Remember back in chapter one, there's a simple outline for the Book of Revelation: what you have seen—chapter one, what is now—chapters two and three, and what will take place later—chapter four to the end. So today we begin the second section, what is now? And that is the age of the church, the time of the Christian Church in this world, from the first century to today.

I saw a bumper sticker that said, "Jesus called. He wants His religion back." Another one said, "Help me, Jesus, save me from Your people." And you know, I've heard some crazy things in the name of the Christian church. Church history can be downright scary, and I wonder sometimes, what does Jesus think of His church? Well, wonder no more—He tells us right here in Revelation two and three. As Jesus writes seven letters to seven churches, this is really something amazing.

In seven letters, Jesus speaks to seven churches, and many believe to seven eras in church history ahead of time—past for us, but future for Him. See, each of the seven churches was a real church here in 95 A.D. when this was written. But each church also shows us a picture of the Christian church in a particular period of history, right up to today. Jesus speaks to His church in advance and gives each one direction, encouragement, and correction.

And more than that, in every letter we find application for us—my church and yours. We all have issues, and Jesus speaks to each one right here. From persecuted to popes to Protestants, Jesus loves His church, and those He loves, He disciplines. So get ready for some personal correction from the One who loves you enough to say what hurts and heals.

Chapter two has four letters, so we'll go through pretty fast, but I strongly encourage a deeper study here. For me, this is the most interesting part of Revelation.

Letter number one is to Ephesus, a good church but with something missing. Jesus reveals Himself to them as

"Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands." (Revelation 2:1)

Now remember, the lamps are the churches. Jesus holds the church, and He is among the church. Jesus is God with us. Verse two:

"I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance." (Revelation 2:2)

The Ephesians are a hard-working church with sound doctrine and strong determination, and Jesus knows it. He sees their work and their perseverance, and He commends them. But in verse four:

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first." (Revelation 2:4)

In all their hard work and all their diligence in doctrine, they forgot love—agape. The word Ephesus can mean darling or first, a term of endearment for young lovebirds. But the relationship that this church had with Jesus was like a good marriage gone stale—not bad, just cold. They were going through the motions but lost the emotions. And when your love for God fades, your love for people fades with it. So Jesus challenges the church in verse five:

"Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first." (Revelation 2:5)

With every correction, Jesus gives direction—a way out. There is hope for every church here, and He challenges all of us:

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 2:7)

Listen, church—the Spirit is speaking to you. Repent. Return to love. And for every church, no matter the struggle, Jesus makes a promise for those who overcome. The NIV calls it victorious:

"To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7)

Now that is a serious reward. Now, this letter can speak to any of us, but historically I believe it speaks to the first-century church after the book of Acts until about 100 A.D.

Letter number two is to the church at Smyrna. Smyrna is the persecuted church, living in affliction and poverty, and to them Jesus reveals Himself as

"the First and the Last, who died and came to life again." (Revelation 2:8).

Jesus conquered death, and the persecuted church needed to know it.

"I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich."
(Revelation 2:9)

They can take your job. They can take your house. But they cannot take your true riches. And Jesus tells them, "You are rich." Beginning around 100 A.D., the Caesars of Rome persecuted Christians—burned at the stake, given to beasts in arenas for sport, and driven to live in catacombs below the earth.

"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days." (Revelation 2:10)

The ten days here may picture the ten waves of persecution that hit between 100 and 300 A.D.—more than 6 million Christians were killed. But Jesus says,

"Be faithful, even to the point of death." (Revelation 2:10)

Now, the church is still persecuted today. More Christians were killed for their faith in the 20th century than every previous century combined. For more information on persecution, please check out persecution.com. But here, Jesus calls us to listen, and to those who overcome—those who face death and won't back down—He promises:

"You will not be hurt at all by the second death." (Revelation 2:11)

Second death is the one that sends you to hell.

Now, letter number three is to Pergamum. Pergamum is the compromised church. Pergamum means objectionable marriage—a marriage between church and state. In 312 A.D., a new empire rose under Constantine, and Constantine decided that he would conquer under the sign of the cross. Christianity became the national religion, and politics and power corrupted the church. Suddenly, it was cool to be Christian. That's bad. When everyone calls themselves Christian, you find a lot of hypocrites, and genuine Christianity becomes hard to find.

To the compromised church, Jesus presents Himself as

"Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword." (Revelation 2:12)

That's the Word of God, and the Word pierces and separates. Jesus encourages this church—many remained true to His name and did not renounce their faith. But in verse 14:

"Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam." (Revelation 2:14)

Now, Balaam was a wicked prophet in the Old Testament. King Balak wanted to destroy God's people—to curse them—but he couldn't do it. So Balaam told Balak, "Here's what you do. Get your pretty pagan girls, have them seduce some of the men of God, and in the middle of adultery, worship another god." And it worked. They cheated on their wives and on God, and they were destroyed by their stupid lust. Balaam's teaching was the objectionable marriage—mix worship with adultery, God's people with idolatry.

And then verse 15:

"Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans." (Revelation 2:15)

Now, this could mean a couple of things. One possibility: Nico means power, and laity means people. So Nicolaitans can mean power over the people. When church and state were joined, the church took on a structure that looked more like government—pushing the leaders up and the people down. Common people had to go through priests and bishops and popes to reach God. Jesus says here that He hates it.

"Repent therefore!" (Revelation 2:16)

Or Jesus promises to

"fight against them with the sword of His mouth." (Revelation 2:16)

That's the Word. Again, there's a call to hear—listen when the Spirit speaks. And again, a great reward for those who overcome. Jesus still hasn't given up on His church.

Letter number four is for Thyatira. I believe this represents the age of the Catholic Church from 600 to 1500 A.D., and in some ways even the Catholic Church today. Thyatira means continual sacrifice, which is exactly what the Catholics hold their mass to be—a never-ending sacrifice of Jesus' body. But Jesus said, "It is finished."

Jesus introduces Himself as

"the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze." (Revelation 2:18)

He sees, and He judges. Jesus commends the church for their good works with love and faith, service and perseverance, and their works are getting better. But in verse 20:

"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet." (Revelation 2:20)

Jezebel is an Old Testament villain, wife of Ahab, an awful king. Jezebel murdered the prophets of God, and in one story, she helps her husband steal some property by falsely accusing the owner of cursing God. She arranges an inquisition to have the man accused and put to death—all just to take his property. The period from 600 to 1500 was a time of great power and corruption for the church, and in that time the Inquisition made many false accusations, and with them stole incredible amounts of property and land. All the while, popes and bishops and so many more were involved in adultery and idolatry.

Jesus' words to this Jezebel are harsh. He gave time to repent, but she was unwilling. So there is a bed of intense suffering in store. With His eyes of fire, Jesus says:

"I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds." (Revelation 2:23)

Jesus also notes the many in Thyatira who do not hold to her teaching, and to them He gives no correction. Even within a corrupt church, there are many faithful, and Jesus tells them to "hold on until I come." He calls to the overcomers and promises an awesome reward. And again:

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 2:29)

Now, don't take this and go Catholic bashing. Jesus loves His bride—the church. The whole church. Those He loves, He disciplines. And Protestants are up next, but that will wait for chapter three.

Revelation 3 | Jesus on Church Part 2

Revelation chapter three today on Through the Word, as Jesus speaks directly to His church and you and I get a guided tour through church history in advance—well in advance. When Jesus spoke it, it's past for us. Chapters two and three have seven letters to seven churches sent from Jesus to His church. These were real churches in 95 A.D., but each church bears an uncanny resemblance to the Christian church in a particular period in history. Now, to be clear on this, the text never says these were about the future, but to me, the matchup is beyond coincidence. So you decide for yourself. But more importantly, you and I should take these to heart about ourselves, about our churches. We all have issues, and Jesus has direction.

Now, this whole book is about revealing Jesus in the church age. Jesus reveals Himself to and through the church. Do you remember when Jesus asked the disciples,

"Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15)

And when they got it right, He said,

"On this rock I will build My church." (Matthew 16:18)

What rock? Who He is. The foundation of the church is who Jesus is. And so to each church, Jesus reveals an element of who He is. He's rebuilding their foundation.

Letter number five is for the church of Sardis. Sardis is a church with a solid reputation. They look alive. But in verse one:

"I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." (Revelation 3:1)

A good reputation. Everyone says this church is great, but Jesus says,

"You're dead. Wake up!" (Revelation 3:1-2)

These are strong words. The word reputation here also means name, and the Greek is onoma, which is where we get the word denomination. I believe that Sardis is a picture of the Protestant church—the Reformation and the era of denominations from the 1500s to 1700s, and in many ways to today. In verse one, Jesus holds the seven spirits of God. It's a reference to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is what makes the church alive. But so many churches just seem to forget about the Holy Spirit. The church has a good name, and it looks lively, but without the Spirit they're dead. And verse two, Jesus says,

"Wake up! ... I have found your deeds unfinished." (Revelation 3:2)

That means the work isn't done. The Reformation began in the 1500s, as Martin Luther and many others protested the excesses of the church and returned to the Bible and to grace. It changed the course of history. But did they finish the work? In verse three:

"Remember, therefore, what you have received." (Revelation 3:3)

What did they receive? They received the Bible, the gospel of grace. But where is the Bible now? In too many churches, it sits in the pew unopened, while theologians study and argue endlessly over which part Jesus really said. It's kind of like this: One night in college, I set my alarm for 3 a.m. to get some work done.

But in my dream, every time I hit the snooze button, I was accomplishing something—for three hours. Jesus says, "Wake up. You think you're accomplishing something, but you're dreaming." But then in verse four:

"Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes." (Revelation 3:4)

And once again, Jesus calls the church to overcome and promises great reward. Listen, I grew up in dead denominationalism—most of my generation did—and most of us left. The average age today in many denominations is over 60. They are literally dying off. It's time to wake up and finish the work.

Church number six is Philadelphia. Philadelphia woke up. For this church, Jesus holds the Key of David.

"What He opens, no one can shut; and what He shuts, no one can open." (Revelation 3:7)

That open door led out of the church and into the world. Philadelphia is the missionary church. Philadelphia means city of brotherly love. And historically, this is the church that loved their brother enough to share the gospel. Two big events in the 1700s and 1800s: the Great Awakening and the missionary movement. Passion returned to preaching, and the Bible came alive again—Edwards and Whitefield, Spurgeon and Moody. And verse eight, Jesus says,

"You have kept My word and have not denied My name." (Revelation 3:8)

And the church took that word to the world. Missionaries, for the first time in centuries, hit the world—William Carey, Gladys Aylward, Hudson Taylor, and so many more—an open door that no one can shut.

And brotherly love—rescuing the poor, feeding children, freeing slaves. The last and the least were reached, helped, and saved. If I could recommend one thing to fire up your faith: read missionary biographies. I read them with

my kids at bedtime; I love it. Philadelphia is the church to be. Three keys here: the open door of missions, teaching the Word of God, and of course, brotherly love. Without love, it's all empty.

The seventh church and last church is Laodicea, the apathetic church. This brings us to the present. I only know a few atheists, but I know a lot of theists, especially in church. So many people just don't care. Jesus calls them lukewarm. Every generation needs a revolution, and boy do we. Laodicea means ruled by the people, like democracy, which sounds great. But when the people vote to overrule God's Word, that's trouble. "All right everybody, we took a vote and we decided there is no hell. God doesn't judge anymore. Sin is a relative term. And Jesus never said that He's God. And oh yeah, He never rose from the dead either." Okay, church, whatever. I didn't really care anyway. That's apathy. That last part was an impression of me, by the way—teenage me. I went to church; I just didn't care.

To the apathetic church that tries to outvote the Bible, Jesus says,

"These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." (Revelation 3:14)

Amen means Jesus is the last word. Jesus rules. Jesus calls the church lukewarm. Verse 16:

"So because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of My mouth." (Revelation 3:16)

Jesus says that our apathy is disgusting—just spit it out. So why doesn't this church care? Verse 17:

"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.'" (Revelation 3:17)

See, Laodicea thinks that it's rich. Why care when I have all I need? There's a dangerous move in the modern church to focus on worldly wealth. Listen, God wants you rich in heaven. Wealth on earth is not a sin, but it is dangerous. Jesus tells us,

"But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:17)

You're poor—no treasure in heaven. You're blind—you can't even see how bad you are. You're naked—you sin and you're not even ashamed. Get your riches from Jesus—gold refined in the fire, like faith, hope, and love, refined by trials and lasting forever. Jesus has salve to open our eyes and white robes—that's His righteousness. So stop sinning and start caring.

And then Jesus says something profound:

"Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline." (Revelation 3:19)

And that goes for every church. Jesus loves His church. He loves us enough to say what hurts and heals. And He says,

"So be earnest and repent." (Revelation 3:19)

Earnest means genuine, real. Quit the hypocrisy. The literal translation is ignite yourselves.

Take your worthless apathy and set your faith on fire. Now I realize that I've said some strong words here. I think because no one said them to me. I was the apathetic one. I went to church, and I just didn't care at all, and no one challenged me. But then someone did say something. It was Jesus. Seriously, it was in London. I won a trip on the radio to go see Van Halen—true story. While I was there, I visited Saint Paul's Cathedral. To me, it was an old dead church—beautiful but dead. But a painting on the

wall caught me. Jesus was outside an old shack knocking on a door. And below the painting was Revelation 3:20:

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me." (Revelation 3:20)

It was the first Bible verse that ever grabbed my heart. In the painting, that old shack was my old apathetic, empathetic heart, and Jesus was knocking. Seven letters, seven different churches, and seven times the call to hear. And this time, if you will hear Jesus' voice and open the door, He will make Himself at home and share a meal with you. Two thousand years of church history, movements and revivals have come and gone. What about today? Every generation needs their own revolution. Every generation needs a fresh revelation.

Revelation 4 | Raptured to Heaven

Do you ever wonder what heaven is like? I do. I don't have much detail, but I love the imagining. For all the beauty in this fallen world, my heart soars at the thought of heaven. The Bible gives us just a few glimpses of heaven, and one of the best is right here in chapter four. Now, in Revelation you got to watch the flow. Remember, God gave John an outline in Revelation 1:19: "What you have seen"—He saw Jesus in glory (that's chapter one); "what is now"—the Church Age (chapters two and three); and "what will take place after this"—the End Times (chapter four to the end). How do you know that the end starts here? The words "after this" in Greek are *meta tauta*, and chapter four, verse one begins and ends with the exact same words—*meta tauta*. And this final section has three parts of its own. Bible scholars don't all agree on this, which is okay, but I'll share what I think is the simplest, most straightforward way to read it: Chapters two and three—the Church Age; chapters four and five—the rapture and the church in heaven; chapters six to nineteen—tribulation and the earth in judgment; chapter nineteen—Jesus returns, the Second Coming; chapter twenty—the Millennium, Jesus reigns on earth a thousand years; chapters twenty-one and twenty-two—a new heaven and new earth. You need a review?

Just hit rewind, but for now, chapter four, verse one:

"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.'" (Revelation 4:1)

And suddenly John finds himself in heaven. Now, I believe verse one is the rapture. What is rapture, you say? The word *rapture* means *caught up*. Jesus will return for His church, and we will be caught up in the air to meet

Him. Now, I've heard some teachers say that rapture is not in the Bible. That's ridiculous. It's clear as day. 1 Corinthians 15:52, 1 Thessalonians 4:16:

"The Lord Himself will come down from heaven... with the trumpet call of God." (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

And in verse 17, listen:

"We will be caught up" (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

—in Latin *raptus*, caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

That's the rapture—caught up to heaven with Jesus. And that is exactly what we see here in Revelation 4:1. John hears a voice like a trumpet:

"Come up here," (Revelation 4:1)

and suddenly he's in heaven. Rapture. I can hardly wait. Verse two:

"At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby." (Revelation 4:2)

And so John begins to describe heaven. There is some awesome stuff here, but I'm not quite sure what it all means. And I think that's okay. There's no test on this. More important is to just be amazed—we get a sneak preview of heaven. It's kind of like a movie trailer. It's not supposed to tell you the whole story; it's just supposed to get you excited. It gives you hints and teasers. It gets you wondering and talking about it. All the Star Wars fans I know are fully geeking out over the new previews. Every image, every little clue. What does it all mean? I think that God wants us to

geek out over heaven. Set your mind on things above and set your heart on things above. It changes how you think and how you live.

"Store up treasures in heaven," (Matthew 6:20)

so that when you treasure something, you think about it a lot.

So here comes your heaven trailer, and I'll take my best guesses at what things mean. But I'll know for sure when I get there. If you want to dig in more, you might try matching up this picture of heaven with the tabernacle picture as more clues there. Well, the very first thing John sees in heaven in verse two:

"There before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it."
(Revelation 4:2)

The word "throne" appears 14 times in this chapter, 46 times in the whole book. Throne is the focal point, and every element that we read about in heaven is described relative to the throne. What is a throne? It's the king's chair, of course—the seat of judgment and rule. God reigns. My life may be in chaos, but I know in heaven my God is in control. He is on the throne. Now, John can only describe the One on the throne by comparing His appearance to gemstones—jasper and ruby. I don't think that human words can capture the appearance of God. Psalm 104 says He is robed in light. Awesome. Around the throne is a rainbow, like an emerald—a reminder of God's covenant, a promise of mercy. There in heaven, the rainbow makes a full circle—never-ending mercy, everlasting covenant. Around the throne we see 24 more thrones with 24 elders, each with a white robe and a crown of victory. They are purified. They overcame. Now take your guess at the 24—maybe representatives, 12 patriarchs and 12 apostles? I'm not sure. But then lightning comes from God's throne, peals of thunder—signs of a storm coming, judgment. Seven lamps blaze before the throne—the seven

spirits of God. Scholars say this is the Holy Spirit—and that a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

And then in verse six:

"In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back." (Revelation 4:6)

These guys are awesome. What are they? I just told you—they're awesome. Lion, ox, man, eagle—all of them with six wings and covered with eyes, seeing everything. So what are these creatures? Some say cherubim. Does that clear anything up? Not really, but they're still awesome. And notice that each one is a sort of king in its own domain: lion—king of the wild; ox—king of the work animals; eagle—king of the sky; and man—the crown of creation. But all worship before the great King.

In verse eight,

"Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.'" (Revelation 4:8)

"Holy" means set apart, like nothing else. It's a word you use when words just aren't enough. And when the creatures worship, everyone worships. Elders go face down, crowns cast before His throne, as if to say, "You won this victory, Lord." And as they sing worship, one phrase really captures it for me: "You are worthy." What is worship? Have you ever thought about that? One simple definition: to ascribe worth—to value something for what it's worth. Why do we worship? Because it feels good? Well, yes—but no. Because it's good for you? Again, yes—but no. Imagine you sit down for the most incredible concert performance in history. It's amazing. Why do you applaud? Clapping feels good? Because it's good for you? No—because they're worthy.

Verse 11 says:

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things." (Revelation 4:11)

God is worthy because God created us all. And why did He create us? If you want to know why God did it, if you want to know the meaning and purpose of life, read verse 11 carefully:

"For you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." (Revelation 4:11)

We exist by God's will. The King James translates it "pleasure." The word means more than just choice; it includes desire and purpose and pleasure. Think of it this way: if you were a piece of artwork, would you rather the artist created you for his whim or his job, his boredom or his pleasure—made because he really enjoys it? In Christ, we are God's workmanship—His *poema*. Do you know that feeling you get when you do what you're good at—not just good at, made for—that feeling like you can feel God's pleasure, like a kid making Dad proud? By His will and for His pleasure, we are made—and He is worthy.

Revelation 5 | Title Deed to the Earth

Revelation five today, and the world needs a hero. There's something wrong with this world. Don't get me wrong—it's beautiful, it's amazing, and I think that's why it's so hard to see it so messed up. I get little glimpses that show how good it can be, then a dose of reality knocks me down again. War, poverty, human trafficking, corruption, addiction, scandal—so much hatred, so much evil. The world needs a hero.

Back in Revelation, we left off with a glimpse of heaven—the church raptured up to be with the Lord, with 24 elders and four living creatures all encircled around the throne of God and all in worship. It's beautiful. But then something happens. Chapter five, verse one:

"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." (Revelation 5:1)

This scroll is the focus of chapter five. So what is it? There's a few guesses, but one makes the most sense to me. The scroll is peculiar; most papyrus scrolls are written on one side—the smooth side—and sealed with one seal. In Jewish culture, a scroll written on both sides and sealed with seven seals like this one could be a title deed, as in a deed to own property. At first, a title deed would be written on just one side with one seal. But if the owner went into default on a debt, he would give up the deed, and on the back was written the price required to redeem the property.

Actually, it's a little like Monopoly when you mortgage a property and the mortgage price is written on the back. Anyway, the scroll is then sealed with seven seals, which cannot be broken until the debt is paid in full. I believe this scroll is the title deed to the earth. That's what this whole story is about, right? The redemption of the world. God gave the world into the care of

Adam. When Adam defaulted on the agreement, the earth was given to the rule of Satan. Now Satan is called "the prince of this world." Remember when Satan tempted Jesus by offering to give Him all the kingdoms of this world? That's because Satan has all the kingdoms, and he knew that Jesus' heart's desire was to get them back. So Satan offered them to Jesus the easy way—just worship Satan. But Jesus didn't take the easy way; He chose the right way. And that is what Revelation is all about—the redemption of the world, the right way.

So back in our story, Father God has the scroll all sealed up. Verse two:

"And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?'" (Revelation 5:2)

Oh, breaking the seals would mean redeeming the earth, like rescuing a house from foreclosure. But the price was high, and only someone worthy could do it. If you remember the story of Ruth and the kinsman-redeemer, Ruth's story is a picture of this. Verse three:

"But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.

I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside." (Revelation 5:3)

John's weeping here is serious sobbing. Why? I think he was hit with a harsh reality—if no one opens that scroll, the world is lost. It is stuck in war, poverty, oppression, hatred, anger, sin. John was too familiar—Lord knows how many brothers and sisters he lost to Roman cruelty, to sword, crucifixion, to lions for sport. It's a messed-up world, and if no one can fix it, John weeps. Verse five:

"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.'" (Revelation 5:5)

So there is hope. Judah was the lion of Israel's kings, and the Lion of the tribe of Judah is Jesus. Jesus has triumphed. Jesus said,

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Jesus is able to redeem. John looks, but he doesn't see a lion. Verse six:

"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." (Revelation 5:6)

A slain Lamb. The image is one of the most striking and most important in the entire Bible. It was a lamb that would take Isaac's place in the sacrifice. It was a lamb that saved the families of Israel from death in the Passover. Isaiah 53 paints a vivid picture of a Savior led like a lamb to the slaughter, pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him.

The slain Lamb is Jesus.

John describes the Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes,

"which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." (Revelation 5:6)

Again, don't paint this—it looks weird—but understand the number seven is the Bible's number for complete or perfect, and horns represent power. Seven horns is all-powerful; seven eyes is all-seeing; and seven spirits sent

into all the earth is all-present—omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. This Lamb bears the very attributes of God. Verse seven:

"He went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

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." (Revelation 5:7)

Now pay attention to that incense—it will come back again. The incense in heaven is the prayers of God's people. And they all have harps. Sadly, this is where we get that goofy picture of sitting on clouds in heaven with harps—pretty boring. Actually, the instrument is a zither, more like a guitar. And based on what happens next, these strings are tuned to rock the heavens. What happens would blow away the best concert you've ever heard.

The redeemed have seen the Lamb—the church sees its Savior. To see the One who saved your life and to see the price that He paid—what happens is gratitude. What happens is a victory cry. What happens is praise from the redeemed, from a myriad of angels, from all creation. The scene that finishes the chapter is so breathtaking that it just doesn't seem right to interrupt it or color it with commentary, so I will close with it, beginning at verse nine:

"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.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.'

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.

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!'

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!'

The four living creatures said, 'Amen,' and the elders fell down and worshiped." (Revelation 5:9-13)

Revelation 6 | Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Revelation six today—the seals are opened, the tribulation begins, and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride out. In chapter six, judgment gets real. We left off in heaven. The scroll, the title deed to the earth, is in the hands of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. There are seven seals on that scroll, and those seals represent the price tag for redeeming the earth—buying it back from sin and darkness, and from the rule of Satan. But the price is high. And here in chapter six, at verse one:

"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!'" (Revelation 6:1)

What we're about to read is the opening of the seven seals. With each seal comes a judgment upon the earth. John is called over to look down from heaven back to the earth as judgment is unleashed. Thus begins the tribulation period. Now, to understand all of this, we need to pan out to the big picture. So let's go back to the outline for Revelation to put this in perspective: What you have seen—He saw Jesus (chapter one); what is now—the Church Age (chapters two and three); and what will take place after this—the End Times (chapter four to the end). And here in the End Times: chapters four and five—the rapture and the church in heaven; chapters six to nineteen—the tribulation and the earth in judgment; chapter nineteen—Jesus returns, the Second Coming; chapter twenty—the Millennium, Jesus reigns on earth a thousand years; chapters twenty-one and twenty-two—a new heaven and new earth. Need a review? Just hit rewind again.

So chapter six begins the tribulation. What is the tribulation? It is seven years—the last seven years of earth as we know it. Tribulation means

trouble or trial, and the tribulation is God's judgment on the world. Evil is unrestrained. God allows mankind to see just how wicked it is, and God brings justice. The tribulation is also one last great effort to save. The gospel is proclaimed to every last person. We'll get the details as we go. But first, what's the purpose of the tribulation? For that, we go to one of the key passages to understand the End Times and all times: Daniel nine. In Daniel nine, God lays out a timetable for His ultimate plan for Israel and for the world. Written around 600 BC, Daniel gives a spectacular set of prophecies that accurately predict empires, leaders, and wars for many centuries. In chapter nine, an angel lays out God's timetable in seventy weeks, where a week is seven years rather than seven days—seventy weeks, 490 years, and sixty-nine of them led up to Jesus' death—precisely. Then God hit the pause button. The pause was the Church Age (chapters two and three). As soon as the church is raptured, the clock is ticking again. The last week—the last seven years—is the tribulation.

Now it is there in Daniel nine that God explains the purpose. Listen carefully:

"Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness." (Daniel 9:24-27)

So the plan is to end sin. The plan is to atone—that means cover sin, to make it right. The plan is everlasting righteousness—living right, right with God and right with each other forever. Now for a fuller explanation, please listen to our guide in Daniel nine. For now, just know this tribulation—this last seven years—is about ending the wrong and making it right, and right forever.

All right, now let's zoom back into the story here in chapter six. The Lamb has the scroll, and the first seal has been opened. Verse two:

"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." (Revelation 6:2)

The first seal opened releases a rider on a white horse. It is the first of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Sounds really dramatic, right? Because it is dramatic—it's the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Now remember, Revelation is full of symbolism, but symbolic of real things. The first one rides on a white horse, and he carries a bow. Some readers have thought this is Jesus because Jesus rides a white horse in chapter nineteen, but the other three riders are war, famine, and death—which is not exactly Jesus' posse.

This rider is someone who tries to look like a savior—it's the Antichrist. He carries a bow, which could be a weapon, or it could be like a rainbow—a covenant of peace. In Daniel and in Second Thessalonians, we know the Antichrist will be a charismatic world leader who will make a peace treaty with Israel. He will solve the Middle East mess, but he will use the promise of peace to conquer.

The second seal is opened. And in verse four:

"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." (Revelation 6:4)

The second horseman is war.

The third seal is opened—a black horse. Scarcity and poverty. A day's wages will only buy enough wheat for the day, barely scraping by. But there's plenty of oil and wine. The picture here is the poor suffering while the rich enjoy their luxuries. What's happening here? Well, reality is happening. I heard a report that 95% of famines are caused not by ecology

but by politics—man-made. The seal judgments are not so much God punishing man as they are God leaving man to his own devices. Antichrist is the ultimate human leader, unsubmitted to God. War is how man makes peace—the scarcity and poverty while the rich have plenty.

And with God's people taken out of the way, mankind gets a full taste of life without God. Like a prodigal child who says, "Give me my inheritance and leave me alone." God says, "Okay, you can go." But as we shall see, the Father will leave the door open.

Back in verse seven, the fourth seal is opened, and the fourth horseman—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."

(Revelation 6:8)

Verse nine is the fifth seal—no more horsemen. The fifth seal opens the cry of the martyrs, those who have been killed for their faith in Christ, and they cry out to God for justice:

"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (Revelation 6:10)

So this is about vengeance. Christian martyrs want vengeance? Yes. Understand—Christians are imprisoned, beaten, killed today, right now, for their faith. And they forgive freely because God promises that He will make it right. Vengeance is the Lord's. The martyrs are given white robes—God's righteousness—and asked to wait just a little longer. All in God's time.

Verse twelve:

"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, and the stars in the sky fell to earth."

(Revelation 6:12)

What is that? Sun black, moon red, stars fall, then the sky rolls up. What happened? I don't know—seriously, I don't—but I'm pretty sure you'll know it when it happens. Some have guessed that this is nuclear war, and John describes it in the best terms he knows how. Or God could be doing something radical. Mankind abused the earth, took God's gifts for granted, and God takes away. I don't know for sure. Whatever it is, it sends the peoples of earth running for cover in caves and mountains.

Verse sixteen:

"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!

For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?'"

(Revelation 6:16)

And so ends chapter six—six seals down, one to go.

Two big questions we haven't approached yet: One, how do we know for sure that we won't go through the tribulation? Not everybody agrees on this. And two, so much judgment—what happened to the God of mercy and grace? Same Jesus, same God—yesterday, today, and forever. So what happened? Well, we'll get back to those in chapter seven. There we will see mercy flowing out again. But the God of justice and the God of mercy are one and the same. For now, read chapter six and allow God to reveal Himself and His glory and who He is as He planned it—through the Word.

Revelation 7 | God of Wrath, God of Mercy

Welcome back to Revelation chapter seven today. And we left off with some difficult questions. The Book of Revelation can be hard to read, partly because of all the symbolism, but mostly because of all the judgment. Why so much judgment? What happened to the God of mercy? We have a dilemma. We like the God who forgives, the God of grace and mercy. Isn't it our God who says, "Judge not" and "Don't avenge yourself, because vengeance is the Lord's"? And therein is the crux: "Vengeance is Mine," declares the Lord, "I will repay."

The whole basis that you and I have for not taking vengeance is that God will take care of it. We leave judging to Him. He will set things right. He will repay each person according to their deeds. Needs justice. God is just. He is long-suffering. He is kind and compassionate even to the wicked. But don't mistake His kindness for weakness. He offers a thousand chances to repent and be forgiven, but He will not wait forever.

And what about hell? Why would a merciful and just God create hell? Is that fair? Actually, it is. The Bible consistently describes hell as a place where each person gets precisely what they deserve—exactly, precisely fair from the fairest judge possible. But hold on a second. That's hell. In Revelation, all this wrath is on earth. Why? Because there is still one last chance.

Those on the earth during the tribulation will see the reality of hell on earth to save them from the reality of hell in hell. A traveling missionary once told me, there are two times when people are way more likely to get saved: when they're young and after a disaster. And I've seen it—the busiest church day in America in my lifetime was September 16, 2001, the first

Sunday after 9/11. It's a harsh reality, but some people need a shock to wake them up.

Now, to be clear, I don't believe that every disaster is God's judgment on the victims—that's bad theology. But I do believe that God allows disasters to wake us up, and He uses them to open a door for the gospel. At the end of chapter six, as men, great and small, go running to the hills to hide from God and from the wrath of the Lamb, pay attention to their question:

"For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?" (Revelation 6:17)

So, good question. Who can stand in the day of God's wrath? Chapter seven is the answer to that question. And there are two groups. Verse one opens with four angels holding back the four winds. From the context, the winds they hold back are probably winds of destruction—think hurricane force. This is a break from all that. But why? In verse two, another angel comes up from the east, having the seal of the living God. Now the seal is the focus of the chapter. A seal is used to mark property or show authority, like a logo or a trademark. In the past, kings used a wax seal to sign official documents and mark their treasure. Don't mess with the king's stuff. And what is being sealed? Verse three:

"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." (Revelation 7:3)

Then I heard the number of those who were sealed:

"144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." (Revelation 7:4)

So the angels were to go about marking 144,000 Israelites with the seal of God—marked God's authority, God's property. Don't mess with God's stuff.

And it appears that this seal will protect them from harm. They are marked as His. There's a similar story in Ezekiel nine worth checking out.

Now, there are lots of seals in the Bible and elsewhere, but the best analogy I could find for this one is from Toy Story. The little boy Andy puts a seal on his toys—his name in permanent marker. When Woody was worried that he would be left behind because he couldn't find his hat: "Look under your boot. What does it say?" Andy. When there were two Buzz Lightyears, how did they know the real Buzz? He lifted his boot—Andy. And how did Jessie and Bullseye finally know they were safe at home? They were sealed—Andy. And childish as that is, this is kind of the same. God marks His own with a seal. They are safe. They are the real ones, and they are His.

Now, we have a seal too. Ephesians 4:30 says that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. That's awesome for us. But this is a little different. This is tribulation time, and these 144,000 are a special group. Several cult groups over the years have claimed to be the 144,000. It doesn't quite make sense. Look at verse five. God names, one at a time, each tribe of Israel to make up this group:

- **Reuben: 12,000**
- **Gad: 12,000**
- **Asher: 12,000**
- **Naphtali: 12,000**
- **Manasseh 12,00**
- **Simeon 12,000**
- **Levi 12,000**
- **Issachar 12,000**
- **Zebulun 12,000**
- **Joseph 12,000**

- **Benjamin 12,000**

(Revelation 7:5-6)

These are Israelites—true-blood Jews. Remember, the tribulation is the 70th week of Daniel, a time in which God says He is specifically using the Jewish people. The tribulation is also called the time of Jacob's trouble—that's Israel. With the church gone, God will use Israel once again to share the gospel of Christ. Zechariah prophesied, The Jews will look upon the one they pierced.

But it's not just about Israel. God's plan was always to choose one people to reach all peoples. And here it happens. Although the text is not explicit about it, the context suggests that these 144,000 are sent out to share the gospel, to preach salvation, to bring hope to a world that might finally listen. 144,000 powerhouse evangelists sent to every corner.

Now, why do I think that? Look what happens in verse nine:

"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."

(Revelation 7:9)

Now one of the elders explains to John that this great multitude 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."

(Revelation 7:14)

We call them tribulation saints—Christians saved during the tribulation. God's plan works. Disasters hit hard. People run. Who can stand in the day

of God's wrath? But God sends hope—144,000 messengers carrying the gospel. And John sees the saved in heaven—a massive, countless multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language. God loves everyone. God wants all people saved.

In verse ten:

"And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" (Revelation 7:10)

This is what the End Times are all about—salvation. Robes washed in the blood of the Lamb and made white. Watch throughout the story: two things keep coming back—disaster and the gospel. Whatever it takes to save.

Now, these tribulation saints are in heaven, but I don't think they are the same as the church before the tribulation. Now, you can dig more, but you may notice the tribulation saints serve God in heaven—that's awesome—but the church is called a bride who reigns with Christ, not just serves. Tribulation saints stand before the throne, but the church in chapter three is promised a seat on the throne, and the word "church" is never once used in chapters 6 to 19. Now, maybe I'm reading into it, but it looks to me like there's a big reward for following God early.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." (John 20:29)

Well, either way, it's good to be saved.

All the saints shout praise, and the angels, "Amen!" And the chapter ends with a beautiful promise for every one of those new saints:

"Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat."

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." (Revelation 7:16-17)

Revelation 8 | Seven Trumpets

Revelation eight today. Welcome back to the end of the world as we know it. Chapter seven was a break in the chaos. Now in chapter eight, the storm returns. We're back in heaven as Jesus holds the scroll—could be the title deed to the earth, could be the will of God. Six seals have been broken, one to go. Verse one:

"When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." (Revelation 8:1)

It is interesting what a powerful statement that silence makes. Silence is the sound of awe. Silence is the sound of humility. Silence is time to think, to ponder and wait. After the loud shout of praise from the countless multitude, everyone goes quiet—30 minutes. Why? I don't know; it may shock you to discover that I, your teacher and guide, don't have all the answers. Turns out I'm a fellow traveler, just like you. In fact, back in chapter seven, an elder asked John a question about the vision, and he didn't know. Back in Daniel's prophecies and visions, Daniel confesses that even he was confused at times. Prophecy is like that.

So here's my question: Why did God make this book so challenging to understand—so much mystery and symbolism? Why not just tell us plainly? Well, I asked God about that, and funny enough, He answered me in a Through the Word study from one of our other teachers. Proverbs 25:2 says:

"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings" (Proverbs 25:2).

I like that. What it means is God creates mysteries; He conceals—it shows us His glory. But mankind has a glory as well. We search things out. It is a

kingly thing to dig and uncover. We are made to be full of wonder. God doesn't conceal to make a thing unknowable; He conceals to make us dig, because there's something that we learn in the digging—more than just information: experience. Like Proverbs 2: search for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and you will gain the knowledge of God. Remember, that's what this book is about—the revelation of Jesus Christ, the revealing of who He is. So dig in. Ask. Seek. Knock.

One of my favorite quotes from A.W. Tozer: He said, "How tragic that we in this dark day have had our seeking done for us by our teachers. We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found Him, we need no more seek Him."

So you may notice that I make it a point to not answer every question. I want you to dig. I want you to uncover. But what if we mess up? What if we disagree? It's okay. It's healthy. It's humbling—that's good for you. Just watch out for pride. Avoid fruitless debates. And remember, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."

Case in point: There's a disagreement among us on one big question—does the church go through the tribulation? Now, as I read it, no. The church is raptured up before the tribulation because God has not appointed us to wrath. Back in chapter three, God promised His church:

"I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world." (Revelation 3:10)

And the word "church" is never once used in the tribulation section. However, there are people smarter than me on both sides of this argument. That's okay. You and I can keep on digging.

Now, back in chapter eight, I think the 30 minutes is up. Verse two:

"And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them." (Revelation 8:2)

Now those seven trumpets will be important, but first, pay attention to verse three. You got to picture this one:

"Another angel, who had a golden censer—that's an incense holder—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.

The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand." (Revelation 8:3-4)

Okay, incense and prayer come up to God together. If you remember the layout of the temple, the golden altar of incense comes right before the mercy seat of God, and incense symbolizes prayer—sweet-smelling, slowly rising up to God. And watch what happens to that incense. Verse five:

"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." (Revelation 8:5)

That was awesome. Our prayers drift up to God like incense, and they crash down to earth like lightning—peals of thunder, earthquake. This is the image that God uses for prayer. This is Bible prayer mixed with fire from the altar—God's fire, not ours. And the results are powerful—prayers like "Thy kingdom come", "Lord, do whatever it takes to save my lost family", "Lord, bring back my prodigal", and the prayer of the martyrs back in chapter six: "Avenge our blood. We leave it to You, Lord."

After the thunder, the seven trumpets begin. This is the second series of judgments. First we saw the seals, now the trumpets. Verse six:

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

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.

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, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed." (Revelation 8:6-9)

This is serious stuff. Judgment comes down hard. What is it all exactly? It's hard to say, but I do know this—it will be easy to identify when it happens. Some have matched this up with the destruction of meteorites:

"Something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea." (Revelation 8:8)

Could be. Or massive volcanoes. Or it could be a nuclear war—that one is an impressively close match. A lot matches up in nuclear tests in the '50s—fire and hail showered down. The third trumpet looks a lot like nuclear fallout. Interesting. The star called Wormwood in verse eleven.

Wormwood is a plant—in Ukrainian, it's called Chernobyl. Happens to be the location of the largest nuclear accident to date. Maybe a coincidence, maybe not. Listen, we should not forget the reality that we are all a few buttons away from worldwide destruction.

The fourth trumpet—darkness. And the chapter ends with a warning:

"As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in mid-air 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!'"

(Revelation 8:13)

This woe is given to the inhabitants of the earth. The wording used indicates more than just where they live—it means those who live for the earth. Just as believers live for heaven, there are those who live for earth. But why the warnings and why so much destruction? Why doesn't God just skip to the end and get it over with?

Hebrews 12 talks about God shaking the heavens and the earth. It explains that God shakes the earth for the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

See, God shakes things up—earthquake, flood, darkness—whatever it takes to remove what can be shaken, to help us let go of the temporary. For those foolish enough "to gain the whole world but forfeit their soul." He shakes the world—let it go. But there are some who just won't let go. For them, the eagle shouts:

"Woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!" (Revelation 8:13)

Revelation 9 | No Repentance

Revelation nine today—two great trumpets of judgment and a stubborn world that will not repent. What does it take to get someone to repent of their own free will? Have you ever attempted to fight someone else's stubbornness? Every parent knows this battle. I was always determined to outstubborn my kids, but it's not easy. Come on, kid, all it takes to end this is a simple, humble apology. Just let it go. But the human heart has a stiff neck. God gave us free will, and we use it and abuse it.

Repentance is a key word in the Bible. And here in Revelation nine, repentance is a simple act—it means change your mind. That's it. Admit I was wrong. And when you change your mind, God gives you a change of heart, which in turn changes your direction. See, it's more than saying sorry. Sometimes sorry is just regret, but nothing changes. Repentance is seen in actions.

Now, why is this so important? Because repentance is our first step to salvation. That's why John the Baptist came before Jesus. John said, "Repent." Then Jesus said, "Follow Me." Change your mind about the direction you're going, then choose to follow Jesus. Do you ever wonder at the stubbornness of the Pharisees? They saw Jesus heal the lame and the blind, and all they cared about was that a guy picked up his mat on the Sabbath. Luke seven explains it this way:

"The Pharisees rejected God's purpose for themselves because they had not been baptized by John." (Luke 7:30)

What that means is they refused to repent—stubborn hearts, stubborn minds that won't change. So how does God deal with it? How does He get a person to repent? Well, a lot of ways, really—whatever it takes. Second

Timothy and Second Peter, several places tell us that God wants everyone saved, but He will not force us. So what does He do? In Romans 2:4,

"He uses kindness, kindness to lead us to repentance."

But what if that doesn't work?

Well, welcome back to the tribulation. Remember where we left off? God shakes the earth to help us let go of all the things that can be shaken, so that what cannot be shaken will remain. In chapter nine, the tribulation is on. Multitudes have been saved already, but will the rest of the people let go?

Verse one:

"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." (Revelation 9:1)

This is the fifth out of seven trumpet judgments. Now we are clearly in the realm of the supernatural here—the demonic. The star that had fallen from the sky is likely an angel or demon, quite possibly Satan. Whoever he is, he is given the key to a shaft called the Abyss. The Abyss is a jail for certain demons, locked up until this very time.

Verse two:

"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.

And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth." (Revelation 9: 2-3)

These locusts are not normal bugs. They appear to be demons or demon-possessed, and the damage they inflict is insidious. But in verse four:

"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." (Revelation 9:4)

The mark—the seal of God—protects the people of God. We know the 144,000 have it, and my guess is that other believers have it too. Remember, you are sealed today with the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Bible, we see that God sets clear boundaries that plagues and demons cannot cross. In Exodus and Job, God is always in control. God protects. He allows a lot of damage—just ask Job—but God sets the limits.

Here, the seal marks God's witnesses, set apart so that the world will know, as Peter says, that

"the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment." (2 Peter 2:9)

Meanwhile, the ungodly are tortured by the locusts—not killed, but bad enough to wish they were dead. The locusts are described—beastly looking—and their king is named in verse eleven: Abaddon or Apollyon. It means Destroyer. Remember what Jesus told us—that

"the enemy comes only to steal, kill, and destroy." (John 10:10)

That's it. That's his only plan; he doesn't have a nice day. But Jesus came that we might have

"life, and life more abundantly" (John 10:10)

Verse twelve:

"The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come." (Revelation 9:12)

The sixth angel sounds his trumpet, and with this one comes a call:

"Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates,"
(Revelation 9:14)

and they were released to kill a third of mankind.

"The number of the mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number." (Revelation 9:16)

That means 200 million troops—that's more troops than the world has ever seen in battle, more than all the people in the world at John's time.

However, China has claimed to have that many in their military—exactly 200 million. And some scholars think this verse is an attack from China heading across the Euphrates to Israel. I don't know. There are horses with riders, and John describes horses with heads like lions, shooting fire and sulfur from both head and tail. Now, this could be tanks or some kind of mechanized warfare, or it could be some kind of crazy beasts—not sure.

But what I really want you to see here is how mankind reacts. Demons released, people suffering, war destroying—and in verse twenty:

"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, 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)

They won't let go. Crazy, but they won't let go. Stubborn heart—just let go. They worship idols—that means any replacement for the true God. And look carefully at verse twenty-one what they would not repent of:

- Their murders—that's hatred and violence.
- Their magic arts—now that can mean witchcraft, but the Greek word is pharmakeia, like the word pharmacy. In Greek, it referred to drug abuse; sorcery often included hallucinogens.
- Their sexual immorality—some people love their pleasure more than they love the God who created it, and they won't let go.
- And then their thefts.

Hold on—you say, "You can't judge me. Only God can judge me." Yes, exactly. I don't judge you, but God can and does. Listen—drug abuse, sexual immorality, theft—I was guilty on all counts. But God didn't save me to leave me where I was; He saved me to change me. That's repentance—change of mind, change of direction. I don't care if you were born that way. I don't care how it happened. We're all born sinners, so be born again.

But I know some people won't let go—the porn, the weed, the boyfriend. What will it take to let it go?

Remember the verse I shared from Luke seven about Pharisees who refused to repent? Jesus adds some comments there as the gospel goes out but stubborn hearts won't listen. He compares it to children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other:

"We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry." (Luke 7:32)

In other words, Jesus says, we tried everything. We played a happy song—God's kindness and joy, unconditional love—but you wouldn't dance.

So we sang a dirge—a funeral march, losing a friend, facing the reality of death—but you didn't even cry. You refused to feel. Dance, cry, anything—feel something. Something to change your perspective, something to make you consider that maybe you're wrong. Maybe you should change your mind. Maybe it's time to repent.

Revelation 10 | No More Delay

Revelation ten. And do we have some good mysteries to unravel today? I have to tell you, I really enjoyed preparing for this one. When I started out, I was a little lost, but I read, I prayed and asked God some questions, listened to some good teachers, and now I really dig this chapter and I love that process. I love following clues and piecing together a good puzzle, and I'm convinced that God enjoys leaving clues as much as we enjoy finding them. One thing I don't like is a mystery that can never be solved. Those get to me like movies without an ending that drives me crazy. And sometimes life can feel like that. Sometimes you feel like you have more questions than answers. You know God is with you and God is working. You just wish you could figure out what on earth He's doing. Revelation ten is about resolution. It's about answering a mystery, not just a mystery. The mystery—verse seven—calls it the mystery of God. What is it? Stay tuned. We left off amidst the seven trumpet judgments—six down, one to go. And we begin at verse one:

"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." (Revelation 10:1)

Now, who is this mighty angel? It's not 100% clear, but there are a lot of clues, and I think we're supposed to follow them. The description here reminds me of someone—someone we saw recently. Face like the sun, legs like fiery pillars. That sounds a whole lot like Revelation one. And that was Jesus. Now, is this Jesus? I don't know. Jesus can be tricky. He walked ten miles with two disciples without being recognized. But can the Son of God be an angel? Well, so far we've seen Him as a man, a lamb, a lion. I think He can be an angel if He wants to. In fact, in the Old Testament, I'm convinced that an angel called the "Angel of the Lord" is in fact Jesus.

Now, I could be wrong on this one, but this is how solving mysteries works—you've got to dig and guess a little. Now, if you ask me, there is more to Jesus than meets the eye. And He shows up more often than we realize. So what is this angel up to? Whoever He is.

Verse two:

"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, and He gave a loud shout, like the roar of a lion, when He shouted." (Revelation 10:2)

The voices of the seven thunders spoke. This angel is massive with His two fiery pillars for legs. He straddles the sea and the land. Walking on water reminds me of someone. Now you have to picture this one in your mind. He plants His feet. I see a stand of victory—claiming land and sea. After all the seals are broken, the price is paid. The redemption of the world is at hand. And in verse three, He shouts like a lion's roar.

"He shouts, 'Lion! A king of beasts!'" (Revelation 10:3)

Reminds me of someone again. Now, did you know that on a quiet night, a lion's roar can be heard from eight kilometers away? That's five miles. I think this roar covers the world. And you know why they roar—to proclaim their territory. I picture this like the T-Rex roar in Jurassic Park—"I claim this land."

And look back in verse three when He shouted:

"The voices of the seven thunders spoke." (Revelation 10:3)

Voices of seven thunders. The roar goes out and the very thunders respond. I don't even know what that means, but it's awesome. Now, I

couldn't resist on this one. I had to have a little fun with sound effects. I wanted to imagine something like what John heard. So here goes.

Oh.

Okay, something like that.

John hears it all. And check out verse four:

"I was about to write down what I heard, but a voice from heaven said to me, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.'" (Revelation 10:4)

Hey, I wanted to know why can't John tell us? I don't know, but there's a verse that helps me with all of this. Deuteronomy 29:29 says:

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." (Deuteronomy 29:29)

God keeps His secrets, and I'm okay with that. But He also reveals, and what He reveals we hold on to, and there is more to come. Watch what happens in verse five:

"Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised His right hand to heaven. And he swore by Him who lives forever 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, that there would be no more delay." (Revelation 10:5-6)

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.

Whoa! The mighty angel swears by God Almighty—

"There will be no more delay." (Revelation 10:6)

I like that phrase. The waiting is over. Sometimes the waiting is the hardest part, especially waiting on God's timing. When will God get to the point? When will God work all things for good? His word says it, I believe it, but when? Lord, will I see it? The mighty angel swears by the eternal God—

"There will be no more delay," (Revelation 10:6)

but no more delay of what? Watch verse seven carefully:

"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." (Revelation 10:7)

Did you catch that? The mystery of God in the Bible—a mystery is a sacred secret. This is the mystery—God's great big plan. What is it? I don't know exactly, but I'm guessing that it will answer a lot—a lot of why, Lords, a lot of when. "What are you doing, Lords?" "The mystery of God will be accomplished." And look, just like the prophet said.

So what is it? We have a clue. Look carefully at verse seven. God gives us the timing:

"But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet." (Revelation 10:7)

Okay. Now, this is a little goofy, but if you had kids when I had kids, or if you were a kid when I had kids, this is going to make sense.

Do you remember Blue's Clues—Blue the dog? A guy named Steve with striped shirts or Joe? But I like Steve. Okay. Every show—what did you

look for? Paw prints. Paw prints were clues. This is the paw print—when the seventh angel sounded the trumpet. Watch for it. Draw paw prints in your Bible when you see it. Now, unfortunately, it's not in this chapter. But when we get there, I expect all of you to say, "A clue. A clue." Unless you're Blue the dog. In which case, you say, "Purple. Blue." And if you haven't seen Blue's Clues by now, you think I'm crazy? Fair enough. Even so, watch for the seventh angel. For now, read chapter ten and wait. This is our calling—we wait.

It was about twelve years ago. I was a believer. I trusted God with anything. But my dad's family got hit—one with Alzheimer's, one cancer, and one delusional bipolar. Good people. Believers. But I had to ask, "Why, Lord?" He gave me one answer. Psalm 27:13 says:

"I would have given up hope unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

"Wait for the Lord, be strong, and take heart, and wait for the Lord."
(Psalm 27:13)

Revelation 11 | The Temple, Two Witnesses, & The Mystery of God

Revelation 11 today, and we left off somewhere in the middle of the tribulation period. In fact, we might be exactly in the middle. Chapters ten through fourteen appear to be a halfway marker. The tribulation is seven years—we know that from Daniel—and in these chapters, there are four references to a time period of three and a half years or some equivalent. That's half of seven. And as we shall see, this halfway point is crucial.

Now, remember from last time, we're still looking for a clue. You know what it was, right? From 10:7:

"But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished." (Revelation 10:7)

Now, this is big. I want to know what the mystery of God is. So I put on my striped green shirt, got my handy-dandy notebook—I'm looking for clues. Remember, the seventh angel sounded his trumpet.

Verse one:

"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.'"
(Revelation 11:1)

So John gets a measuring rod used for construction, and he's told to measure the temple of God. Now that is a big deal. When John wrote this, there was no temple—it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. And today, the Temple Mount is the most controversial plot of land in the world—the temple, the place where God promises to dwell with mankind.

Today, in the Church Age, we are the temple—He dwells in us. So this could refer to the church, but I think this is a real rebuilt temple building—the third temple. Why? Because of the abomination of desolation. Remember, Revelation's not the only End Times book. In Matthew 24, Jesus said that this was the sign to watch for:

"The abomination of desolation standing in the holy place." (Matthew 24:15)

That's the temple. Daniel mentions it three times. What is it? Daniel explains that the Antichrist will confirm a covenant with many for seven years—that's a peace agreement, possibly one between Israel and Palestine. If that's right, that deal could include the Jews rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. But Antichrist will betray them. According to Daniel, halfway through the tribulation—three and a half years—everything changes. The abomination of desolation is the Antichrist setting something abominable in the temple. Second Thessalonians says Antichrist will sit in the temple to show himself that he is God.

Now, in 95 AD, and for about 1,900 years, the idea of a new temple was a little crazy. Until 1967, Israel reoccupied Jerusalem. But if you know politics, it's still crazy. The Jews can't rebuild the temple because the Dome of the Rock is on the site—the shiny golden dome you see in pictures. It's a Muslim holy site, and they'll never let it go. But there may yet be a way.

Now, the Muslims have long said that the Dome of the Rock is on the Temple Mount. But what if they're off? Look at verse two:

"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." (Revelation 11:2)

So the outer court is given to the Gentiles. There are today prominent archaeologists who have offered strong evidence that the Dome of the Rock mosque is not on the temple site but in the area called the outer courts. So maybe—all theory—but maybe the Antichrist will broker a deal wherein the Jews rebuild the temple, and the Gentile Muslims keep their mosque.

And notice the time period—42 months. That's three and a half years. The pieces are starting to fit.

Now verse three:

"And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days," (Revelation 11:3)

which is—guess how long? Three and a half years. The two witnesses—these guys are legends in the prophecy world. If ever there was a Prophet-Con, all the prophecy geeks would dress up as the two witnesses because they're awesome.

Now, witness means that they testify. These two proclaim God's truth and God's gospel to the world. Remember, God is shaking the world to force people to let go of idols, but He also gives them something to hold—hope, salvation in Jesus Christ. So for the first three and a half years—witnesses—we already saw a countless multitude saved.

But then, not everyone likes the gospel. Some get angry when light shines in their darkness—angry enough to attack. Then what happens?

Verse five:

"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." (Revelation 11:5)

And now you see why all the prophecy geeks want to be these guys—they get superpowers. I mean, if you're going to cosplay prophets, these are the dudes. Verse six says they can stop the rain, turn water to blood, and call down plagues. Now, maybe that's all symbolic—I don't think so. I think that in the final countdown, God isn't messing around, and the supernatural gets real. God will not allow this witness to be stopped.

Then in verse seven, when the witnesses finished their testimony, the beast—that's Antichrist—attacks them and kills them. Their bodies lie in the street in Jerusalem, and the whole world celebrates. Then after three and a half days, God raises them back to life, and a voice calls out, and they're carried up to heaven in a cloud. A massive earthquake rocks Jerusalem, and the survivors give glory to the God of heaven—shaken up one more time.

And then verse fourteen:

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

"The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:" (Revelation 11:14-15)

A clue, a clue.

Hold on everyone, Daddy's recording. Shiloh, can it wait?

"No, Dad, a clue."

You want glue? Honey, can you ask your mom?

"No, a clue."

What?

"Dad, it's the seventh trumpet—you know, the mystery of God."

Oh—a clue! That's right. Thanks, kiddo. Well, let's see what happens.

"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." (Revelation 11:15)

Aha! I knew it was big. This—this is the mystery. This is what God has been planning. This is how it all works for good. It was always about a kingdom—from the time of kings to the prophecies of Daniel to so many details in the Gospels. What did Jesus preach? The gospel of the kingdom. What were so many parables about? The Kingdom of God. What was the sign above His cross? King of the Jews. The Bible is about His kingdom. More than that, it is about verse fifteen:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)

The twenty-four elders go face down, thank God Almighty:

"You have taken your great power and have begun to reign." (Revelation 11:17)

This is the moment—the moment I'm waiting for. God reigns.

Now, the question is, if God has that great power, why doesn't He just reign now? I have a theory on this. I believe that God is building His kingdom with those who are loyal no matter what. After all, you don't know who your

real friends are until you're losing and they think you're not looking. God wants to know His real friends, so He holds back.

Jesus preached, "The kingdom of God is at hand." People could look around and say, "What are you talking about? I don't see God ruling." But He didn't say look around; He said "at hand"—within your reach. You can choose it now. Just let go of the world and hold on to Christ. Remember, the king you choose in this life determines the kingdom you inherit forever.

But wait a second—I thought we were just halfway through the tribulation. That's right, and it's time to clean house.

Verse eighteen:

"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." (Revelation 11:18)

Revelation 12 | Dragon War

Revelation 12 today on Through the Word: A woman, a dragon, and a war in heaven. We're still at the halfway point in the tribulation period. John is in heaven as the story of the end of the world is revealed here in chapter 12. John gets a vision that pans out to the grand story of history—the story of Israel, of Satan, of Messiah, and the great battle of angels and demons in heaven. As we shall see, that battle reaches a peak right here at mid-tribulation. So let's start in at verse one:

"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.

She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads."

(Revelation 12:1-3)

So a woman and a dragon. What is going on? First off, notice these are signs that John sees in heaven. That means they're symbolic. But remember, symbolic of real things and real events. Now, if you read this as an allegory, that's different. An allegory is symbolic of ideas, not real things. And some read it that way, which I get, but I disagree. But in any case, what are the symbols? First, a woman clothed with the sun and the moon underfoot.

Some say this is Mary, Jesus' mother. I think the imagery suggests it's Israel, the whole nation. The sun and moon images come from Joseph's dream in Genesis, and the twelve stars for the twelve tribes. And then in verse two, the woman is pregnant, ready to give birth—God's purpose for

Israel to bring the Messiah. Enter the dragon: enormous and red, with seven heads and ten horns. Revelation just got serious. Verse nine explains:

"The dragon is Satan, the devil, the one who leads the whole world astray." (Revelation 12:9)

That's a telling statement. The seven heads and ten horns represent power, and more will be explained in chapter 14. For now, what's the old dragon up to? Verse four:

"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."
(Revelation 12:4)

Here we have a short overview on Satan's story. Satan wasn't created evil. He was made an angel—a powerful one with free will like any moral creature. Isaiah and Ezekiel tell us that Satan led a rebellion in heaven against God, and one-third of the angels joined him. That's the picture here—the dragon's tail knocks a third of the stars out of the sky.

That's the angels who became demons. It's all symbolic. So angels are not actual stars, and Satan's not an actual dragon. But the demons are very real. And then the dragon waits to devour the child of the woman—that means Jesus, the child of Israel. Satan's goal is to kill the Messiah as soon as He's born. Remember, Herod murdered every boy two and under in Bethlehem. Guess where he got the idea? But then in verse five:

"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." (Revelation 12:5).

So Israel gives birth to the one who will rule the nations. You may have noticed that's one of the major themes here—Jesus will rule the nations. That's why Satan is after Him. He doesn't want to give up control. But Jesus is snatched up to God's throne in heaven—that's Jesus' ascension after He died. And verse six brings the story back to the middle of the tribulation. Then in verse seven, the scene changes:

"Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.

But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven."
(Revelation 12:7)

War in heaven—gotta wonder what that looks like. Angels and demons go at it. Michael is an archangel, a chief among angels, and he leads the battle against Satan. Now, some have said that Michael is really Jesus, but I don't think that adds up. Daniel 12:1 tells us that Michael has a specific assignment to protect Israel, which fits the story here. This war in heaven appears to be right at the halfway point in the tribulation, and it ends in verse nine with Satan hurled to the earth and his angels with him. A cry of victory resounds in heaven:

"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." (Revelation 12:9)

Now, this is an insight you need to know about the devil. The word "devil" means "accuser." That is exactly what he is. He is the ultimate guilt tripper.

Satan wants you tripping all over your guilt. The Book of **Job** gives us an example—Satan pleads his case to God against us. Now, why is that important to know? Because the accusation doesn't stick in Christ. No weapon formed against you will stand, including accusations. Why? Verse eleven:

"They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." (Revelation 12:11)

There is a powerful statement of how Satan and all his accusations against you are defeated—the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony. What word is that? I put my faith in Jesus; His blood covers all my guilt and shame. The accuser has nothing on me. And what if taking a stand for Jesus puts you in danger? Back in **verse eleven**:

"They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."
(Revelation 12:11)

So the heavens rejoice, but the earth is warned. In verse thirteen, the dragon realizes what happened and he goes after the woman—that's Israel. Now, Satan has been on the attack against Israel since their beginning. Hitler wasn't the only one. Racism against Jews is called anti-Semitism, and it is one of the most consistent and cruel racial hatreds in history. I am convinced that Satan is behind it. Now, I am not saying that the Jews are right in all they do, nor are their enemies all wrong. They're not all racist. Hatred is wrong in any direction—anti-Jew, anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian—all hatred is wrong. But I will say this: in chapter twelve, those who attack Israel in the End Times will have a strong ally in Satan. Something to consider here.

At the halfway point in the tribulation, Satan pulls his many strings of power on earth and goes after the Jews. But in verse fourteen:

"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." (Revelation 12:14)

So twice in this chapter we see the picture of Israel fleeing to the wilderness and kept safe somewhere. Both verses list the time in the wilderness as 1,260 days, a.k.a. three and a half years, a.k.a. "a time, times and half a time." That makes sense because Antichrist breaks his covenant with them at mid-tribulation. After that, Israel is in hiding. The chapter ends with the dragon enraged. He can't attack Israel, so he goes after her offspring—that's tribulation Christians. Notice in the last verse he attacks all those

"who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus." (Revelation 12:17)

Interesting—in the same chapter, your testimony about Jesus gets you two things: attacked by Satan and saved by God. Satan is always on the attack here—against Israel, Jesus, angels, and Christians. His goal is to steal, kill, and destroy. But hold fast—by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony, we shall overcome.

Revelation 13 | The Beast

Revelation 13 today—the dragon raises up a beast. We're jumping back into the vision we began in chapter 12 of the woman and the dragon.

Remember, this vision is all symbolic, but symbolic of real people and real events. And the story gets a new player today—two, in fact, both of them are beasts. In the Bible, beasts are often symbolic of the power and cruelty of emperors and empires. The annals of history are full of evil dictators and selfish rulers—read their stories and "beast" is an apt description.

Now, the difference between the Bible and the history book is that the Bible described many of those beasts in advance. The book of Daniel is the real key to understand this chapter. Daniel 7 and 8, in particular, describe a vision much like this one, with a series of beasts who would be the great empires and emperors of the ancient world—from Babylon to Persia to Alexander the Great and Greece, and finally the Caesars in Rome. Daniel wrote that vision in 600 BC, centuries before most of those leaders and empires existed. Now, I mention that because it is the accuracy of those prophecies past that validates the authenticity of prophecies like these not yet fulfilled. In other words, it's one of the big reasons that I trust the Bible.

So for Daniel, those beastly men who ruled were future, but now they've come and gone—except for one: Antichrist. Now, in English, "Antichrist" means "against Christ," which is true enough, but in Greek it literally means "in place of Christ"—a substitute savior. First John explains that there are many antichrists in the world—many things and people that try to take Jesus' place. But this is **the** Antichrist, the one who comes to take the place as savior of the whole world. He has many different names in the Bible: man of sin, son of perdition, the lawless one, and here in Revelation, the beast.

Verse one:

"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." (Revelation 13:1)

Now that's a weird-looking beast. But don't get confused—Antichrist will be a man. This is a vision, remember? Symbolism. It shows his nature, not his physical form. Horns represent power in the Bible—think of ram's horns—and heads represent leaders in the Bible because your head leads your body, and then crowns represent authority. So Antichrist has power, leadership, and authority—lots of it, probably over several nations.

In verse two:

"The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion." (Revelation 13:2)

Now, all three of those refer to Daniel's prophecies of kingdoms—Greece, Medo-Persia, and Babylon. So Antichrist will rule in a similar way to those tyrants of ages past. Verse two also explains that the power of Antichrist comes from the dragon—that's Satan. Remember when Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship? Apparently, Antichrist takes that offer.

And then verse three:

"One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed." (Revelation 13:3)

In other words, the beast appears to be raised from death or close to it. It goes on:

"The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast."

(Revelation 13:3)

Now this is key here—people follow the beast. The world will think he's great. Now, if you don't believe that could happen, if you don't think the world would follow a wicked ruler, you don't know much history. From Huns to Caesars to Tsars to Führers, it seems to be the great theme of history—bad guys in charge.

In verse four:

"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?'" (Revelation 13:4)

That's Satan's plan from the beginning—he wants worship. And they worship the beast too. The world thinks he's awesome.

And then in verse five:

"The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months." (Revelation 13:5)

That means speaking against God or equating himself with God. And the time of his rule is given—forty-two months, which is, you guessed it, three and a half years.

He makes war against the saints and conquers them. God lets the bad guy win for a time. In verse seven:

"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." (Revelation 13:7)

In verse eight:

"All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 13:8)

The whole world goes after him—unless your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

And then in verse ten:

"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." (Revelation 13:10)

He's a true dictator, and this calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people. If you're a Christian at that time, you've got to endure. You've got to wait it out.

And then in verse eleven:

"Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon.

It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast." (Revelation 13:11-12)

This second beast appears to be a religious leader—we call him the false prophet. Dictators often work this way—a political leader works together with a spiritual leader, and together they dominate. Add the dragon to this mix, and we have an unholy trinity.

In verse thirteen, the second beast performs great signs and miracles, and it says:

"It deceived the inhabitants of the earth." (Revelation 13:13)

That's important—the people believe the deception. Satan is the lord of lies, and he's good at it. And then something interesting—the false prophet orders the people to set up an image in honor of the beast—Antichrist. An image—that means a statue, but this one is for worship, like an idol. And the prophet gives the image breath so it can speak and kill. I don't know if this is animatronics, a hologram, or even artificial intelligence, but it's scary.

And the chapter ends with one of the greatest sources of Christian conspiracy theory—the mark of the beast. Verse sixteen:

"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, 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." (Revelation 13:16-17)

So all people are forced to get a mark, and without it you can't buy or sell. Now, what is this mark? Theories abound—most of them bogus, but some are plausible. Could it be a barcode, a microchip implant, a tattoo of the Apple logo? I made that last one up, but I've heard weirder.

Now, the microchip idea is intriguing. They have them in credit cards—why not switch them to a hand or forehead? Actually, I read a long article on a huge plan—lots of research for implanting a chip that you can use to make payments. Seriously, I even researched it and I found that most of it was lies. Well, actually it was truth mixed with lies—that's how deception works. And yes, even from Christians.

Now, the mark could be a microchip—I don't know. And amazingly, a cashless society built around a tiny payment device is totally plausible now

for the first time in history. However, be careful of the conspiracy theories. The very next verse says this calls for wisdom. So please be wise. Stop calling every presidential candidate the Antichrist, and don't run from every new technology because it might be the mark of the beast. Use wisdom.

And then the last verse gives us one last clue—the number of the beast: six six six. Old Iron Maiden fans will remember this one, and it's been used in lots of horror movies and crazy stuff too. But don't get distracted by all that, and try not to get distracted by the Christian conspiracy theory stuff either. Focus on what the Bible says.

In the Bible, six is the number of man. So three sixes are a reminder that the beast is only a man—a man, a man—not a god. And maybe it's a code of some kind too. Just be careful, check your facts, and don't trust the internet. Read Revelation 13 for yourself. The story in the Bible is good enough without all the conspiracies.

Revelation 14 | Angels Proclaim

Revelation 14 on Through the Word. As the saints sing a new song, angels proclaim the gospel, and the harvest of the earth begins. It's a vibrant picture here in chapter 14. Amazing stuff. And I have to admit, some of it I can't wait to teach through, and some of it is hard. In the same chapter, we have the forgiveness of God and the wrath of God. Now, it's tempting to teach you one and skip the other, but this is God's revelation, not mine. And here in God's revelation is the great winepress of God's wrath. It's a hard truth, but I'll take hard truth over soft lies any day. The question today is: Which one will the world choose?

Let's dig in at verse one:

"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." (Revelation 14:1)

So the chapter begins with Jesus—the Lamb—standing on Mount Zion. That's the hill where Jerusalem sits, and with Him the 144,000 Jews who were sealed for God's service back in chapter seven. And John sees Jesus with His people because Jesus promised to be with us to the very end of the age. So here He is.

Then in verse two, John hears a sound from heaven, like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. I think chapter 14 is meant to be read with your ears. The sounds here are awesome, so listen carefully as you read. As John listens, a song begins in heaven—a new song that only the 144,000 can learn.

Now, I like that picture. A song is a wondrous thing. Sometimes a song hits me, and it's like my heart suddenly got a voice. And my heart's voice

sounds like rhythm and words, and it expresses emotions and memories and life and worship and tears all rolled together. A song like that is born out of hard trials and great joys, and when you sing it together with those who went through it with you—that's your song. That's how I see this song. These 144,000—they share a mission like no other, and this song is theirs. It is their story and their worship, and they sing it.

I mean, think about it. Imagine their calling. They serve in the tribulation. The entire world needs relief, work desperately, and God sends them. Verse four describes their calling. For one, they're called to purity. Now, marriage is a good thing, but in that time, with their calling, they remain virgins, and they follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Now that's mission—follow the Lamb. Where would Jesus go?

And "they were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb." (Revelation 14:4)

Now, a firstfruit is the very first part of the harvest. As we saw, the harvest of new believers in the tribulation will be a countless multitude. Again, the picture here suggests that the 144,000 will be witnesses, and they will reach many. But it will not be easy. They will have to be blameless. Integrity is key to their witness. But from that work, they have a song, and that is theirs alone.

Do you have a song? You know what I mean—a song, something that reminds you of where you came from and what you've been through, that you share with the ones who went through it with you, and with God who never left you. When my wife and I were newlyweds, we decided that our song would be *"Tubthumping" by Chumbawamba*. Then we realized it was a drinking song, so we changed it. But seriously, do you have a song? Like Moses sang after they crossed the Red Sea:

"The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation."
(Exodus 15:2)

I love that one. They sang it because it was their experience—the Lord is my song.

Well, back here in chapter 14, the scene changes from a song to the voice of angels. Verse six:

"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." (Revelation 14:6)

As we read on, John sees three angels—or hears, really. Now, the word "angel" means messenger. So these angels could be a picture of God's people or even technology, or it could be real angels. But whatever the case, the important thing is the three messages.

First, the eternal gospel. The whole world hears clearly, in every language on the planet: salvation, forgiveness. Jesus died so you could live. The price is paid.

"Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship the Creator." (Revelation 14:7)

The second angel in verse eight:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." (Revelation 14:8)

Now, in the Bible, Babylon is the worldly system that is set up against God. It is false religion, and it is a commercial society built on money and on man's work apart from God. Now, we'll explain more in chapter 17, but

basically, angel number two tells the whole world it's all going down. The whole system is crashing. So let go. Jump ship before it sinks.

See, that's what the tribulation is all about. God does everything He can to save the world. The system is messed up. God has to sink this ship. But His angels call out to every last person: Get in the lifeboat. God built you an ark, and it's big enough for everyone. But then some people are a little too happy hanging out in the Titanic bar and casino, if you know what I mean.

So a third angel cries out again in a loud voice:

"If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand,

they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath." (Revelation 14:9-10)

And here we have the hard truth, and it comes in a cup—the cup of God's wrath, the wine of God's fury. See, that casino that the world is hanging out in is not all innocent fun. I'm not preaching on gambling or drinking—it's a metaphor—but it is a good picture. A man can throw his life away on a pair of dice. He can destroy himself for a shot of tequila. But it's not the dice, and it's not the liquor—it's sin. It's greed and lust and lies.

The angels are calling out: Let it all go. Stand up and walk out before the ship sinks. And don't take the mark. In verse eleven, there is no rest if you take that mark. And hell is pictured in no uncertain terms—smoke and torment rising forever. But God's people with God's mark—be patient, it says. It's not the easy road, but in verse thirteen, God's people will find rest.

After the warnings are out, it's time for the harvest. The chapter ends with the harvest of God's wrath. Now, a harvest is the time to gather the crop after the grain or the fruit has fully grown. It's a powerful picture. Harvest

always comes after a long wait. In the Bible, fruit is evidence—it tells you what the vine or tree really is. Now you know for sure which seeds took root when the fruit is ripe.

Now, the picture here is the patience of God's wrath. He waits. He doesn't judge the seeds, doesn't destroy the little plant. He allows the wicked to prove themselves for what they are. But when the fruit is ripe, the grapes are gathered for the great winepress of God's wrath. And the picture is grim—God's wrath is severe. But is it fair? And we'll come back to that question in chapter 15. For now, read Revelation 14, find your song, proclaim His gospel, and save anyone and everyone who will listen.

Revelation 15 | Is God's Wrath Fair?

Welcome back to the Book of Revelation, chapter 15. Today, as we tackle hard questions about the wrath of God. Here in chapter 15, heaven is preparing for seven last plagues. The seal judgments have passed, the trumpet judgments are complete, and there is one more set—the bowl judgments. You'll notice there are seven of each. In the Bible, seven is the number of completion, and that is exactly what this is about—finishing it.

In the seven seal judgments, the world was destroyed by man. God allowed man's rule to complete its course to ruin—the four horsemen, leaders among men who brought conquest, war, famine, and death. Then the seventh seal—the end of man's rule—leads to the seven trumpets. Satan takes over. In the seven trumpet judgments, the world is ruled by Satan, the restraints come off, the Abyss is opened, and a whole new realm of demons and spiritual darkness is unleashed.

But at the seventh trumpet—you remember the seventh trumpet, right? At the seventh—that's completion. Man's destruction of the world—complete. Satan's rule over the world—complete. At the seventh trumpet, the mystery of God is revealed.

"The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ." (Revelation 11:15)

So what's left? Why is there one more seven? Revelation 15, verse one:

"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." (Revelation 15:1)

So the last seven is the completion of God's wrath. Wrath means anger. The Greek word is thumos; it means fierceness, passionate anger—hot

and glowing like fire. Jesus has taken over rule, and it is time to clean house and pour out His wrath.

Now, maybe you don't picture Jesus as angry. He is slow to anger and abounding in mercy, but slow doesn't mean never. We saw in chapter 14 that the grapes of man's wickedness have been growing slowly, now picked for harvest, trodden in the winepress of God's wrath. And now that wine has been poured into seven bowls, ready to pour out back onto the earth—the wickedness of mankind poured back on their own heads.

God's wrath—it's a hard subject to stomach. I mean, wouldn't it be easier to just not read this part? Easier, maybe, but not wise. I want to know God as He is, not as I make Him to be. That's why I want revelation—God reveals Himself. Now, in His revelation, God is love, and God has wrath. And notice the emphasis on God completing His wrath—to be done with it.

But can a loving God be wrathful? Perhaps we need a little more revelation. Chapter 15, verse two:

"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." (Revelation 15:2)

Now, we saw the sea of glass before surrounding God's throne. I picture it as a great reflector of God's glory and purity. Now that sea is glowing with fire—still holy and pure, but the fire of wrath burns. And now, next to that sea are the Tribulation Saints—victorious over the beast of Antichrist. Now they're in heaven. Their victory cost them their lives; they were killed for their faith in a loving, forgiving Savior—their faith in Jesus.

And as Jesus looks at His faithful believers tortured for Christ—fathers and mothers, sons and daughters killed for their faith—do you think that wrath

could be righteous? As for the victorious saints, God gives them stringed instruments, and in verse three

“they 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.” (Revelation 15:3-4)

The song of these redeemed says a lot about our Lord. These are men and women—and children too—who have just lost every earthly treasure to the cruelty of man's rule on earth. The enemy came and stole, killed, and destroyed. And what did they sing about God?

"Just and true are Your ways." (Revelation 15:3)

God is just. God is true. God is holy.

And this is really the heart of the issue. It's the real question we have with God's wrath: Is God fair? Every one of us has a built-in sense, just as strong as our own conscience, that God must be fair. That's what justice is all about. But think about it—with one breath, we ask, "If God is just, why doesn't He do something about evil?" But with the next one, we ask, "If God is love, why does He judge? Why does He send someone to hell?" But we can't have it both ways.

God is just, and so He does something about evil—He judges it. In His righteousness, He is wrathful. As God takes over and pours out the bowls of His wrath, we will see this refrain over and again:

"Just and true are Your judgments." (Revelation 15:3)

The nations will come to worship You,

"for Your righteous acts have been revealed." (Revelation 15:4)

Now, we have watched as God has sent witnesses, angels, every possible opportunity to call the people of the world to let go of sin and find forgiveness. Jesus came to pay the price—to drink the cup of God's wrath. Is God fair in judgment? Is He fair? Wherever you read about God's judgment in the Bible, there's a strong emphasis on fairness. In Romans 2, it says

"God will repay each person according to what they have done."
(Romans 2:6)

But then Romans 3 says that everyone has done evil—all have sinned. And yet God offers mercy—free mercy—by faith in Jesus.

Is God fair? Yes, and better than fair. But what about hell? Is that fair? Actually, yes. It is often described as getting exactly what you deserve—that's the very definition of fair. The hard truth is coming to grips with exactly what it is we deserve.

One of the Bible's hidden gems is Ezekiel 18. If you wrestle with this question, read Ezekiel 18. God personally responds to the question, "Is God fair?" The people of Israel have accused God of being unjust and punishing mankind. But the Lord says:

"Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?..."

Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust?..."

Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!"
(Ezekiel 18:23-32)

See, God does justly, but He loves mercy.

Back here in Revelation, the time of mercy is up. In verse five, John sees the temple and the tabernacle of the covenant law opened up. That law is used for fair judgment. And in verse six:

"Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues."
(Revelation 15:6)

Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.

"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." (Revelation 15:8)

Revelation 16 | Sowing and Reaping

Revelation 16 today: Whatever you sow, that also shall you reap. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Your chickens will come home to roost. Karma, farming, physics, Eastern philosophy, and the Bible—pretty much everyone has some understanding of this principle: What goes around comes around. Although I don't quite get the chickens one, but then I'm a city boy.

We left off with heaven preparing for the final seven judgments upon the world—the seven bowls of God's wrath. But His wrath is not out of control; it's not a lost temper. It is described repeatedly as just and fair. Remember what's in these bowls that are about to be poured out. It began with the grapes of man's wickedness. Once ripened, the grapes were gathered into the winepress of God's wrath. The Lord crushed the grapes, and now the wine is poured into bowls and prepared to pour back onto the earth. It is the completion of the circle—the people will reap what they have sown.

The judgment in this chapter is severe, but remember what we've already read: God's forgiveness proclaimed to the entire world. Everyone hears; the world is given the choice—forgiveness or fairness. Either allow Jesus to drink the cup of God's wrath for you, or drink your own cup. The warnings have been given; decisions have been made. Now is the time to reap.

Verse one:

"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.'"

"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." (Revelation 16:1-2)

The first bowl: ugly, festering sores. And it only affects those who took the mark. Remember the mark of the beast from chapter 13? The Antichrist commands every person to receive a mark on their right hand or forehead so that no one can buy or sell without it. Now, theories abound about this. Could it be a cashless society? Maybe a microchip implant that works like a debit card? Well, it could be. Maybe the Antichrist will try to rescue the world from economic disaster with this new failsafe payment system.

However, some Christians take that and start warning everyone against tattoos or animal microchips or any new technology that could be related to the mark of the beast. Beware the Apple Pay! Listen, rest at ease. The real issue here is not the technology nor the tattoo. If any marking was the issue, why would God put a seal on His chosen? Remember that?

Look at the end of verse two: The punishment comes on those

"who had the mark and worshiped its image" (Revelation 16:2)

—the two go together. The real issue is what they worship. The mark is just evidence of it. Worship has always been the real issue. Money is not evil; it's the love of money. Pleasure is not wrong, but when the love of pleasure replaces the love of God—that's idolatry. For God's people, it's adultery—cheating on God.

Many times in the Old Testament, God tells His people, "If you love your idols, I will turn you over to them. Let them save you." Reap what you sow. And that is the story here. The mark—the sign of idol worship—turns to ugly, festering sores.

Verse three:

"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."

The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

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;

for they have shed the blood of Your holy people and Your prophets, and You have given them blood to drink as they deserve.”” (Revelation 16:3-6)

These judgments are severe—all the waters turn to blood, just like the first plague in Egypt. Severe but just. The angel declares it: "They shed blood; they will drink blood." Also remember that in the Bible, blood symbolizes life, and God said repeatedly, "Do not drink blood." Do not find life by taking it from others. But in Jesus, blood is eternal life—He gives it. Yet for those who search for life anywhere but Jesus, the waters turn to blood.

And in verse seven, even the altar itself speaks:

"Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are Your judgments."
(Revelation 16:7)

The altar—the place of sacrifice—it pictures the cross, the place that the price was paid for us. But for those who refused to accept the price paid, they pay their own. "True and just are His judgments."

Now, a question we often ask: What about those who didn't know, never heard of Jesus, didn't understand? Well, I asked God that question. Sure enough, He answered—He does that, you know. He answered in Proverbs 24:11-12:

"Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter". (Proverbs 24:11)

Now that part is a call to believers, to go tell them, to share the gospel and save the lost. But then it says:

If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' (Proverbs (24:12)

Here is that question: "What about those who did not know?". Watch the response:

"Does not He who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not He who guards your life know it? Will He not repay everyone according to what they have done?" (Proverbs 24:12)

And there it is again—according to your deeds. Justice.

In verse eight, the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. So the bowls have been poured out onto the land, the sea, the rivers, and now the sun—all of them gifts and blessings of God, all of them taken for granted, credited to worthless idols. Now the bowls turn it around. And how do the people respond? In verse nine:

"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." (Revelation 16:9)

Same thing happens again after the fifth bowl, as darkness comes over the kingdom of the Antichrist. But the people curse God and refuse to repent. Reminds me of another proverb:

"A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord." (Proverbs 19:3)

See, he blames God for the ruin that he brought on himself—that God warned him about.

And then the sixth bowl:

"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." (Revelation 16:12)

Euphrates—from Turkey through Syria and Iraq—it is the longest river in Western Asia. And in verse 12, it is dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Those eastern kings are gathering troops for a battle. We saw the count of 200 million a few chapters back—possibly China and the East. Now look on a map. In order to march troops from Asia into Israel, you have to cross the Euphrates. So it's dried up. But how? It could be an act of God. But in 1990, the Turks completed the Atatürk Dam with the power to cut off the Euphrates River completely. They've done it once already.

And then in verse 13, three evil spirits are sent out performing miracles, and they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. And where are they gathered? Verse 16 gives us the location of the final battle over the earth as we know it—Armageddon.

Now, Armageddon doesn't mean end of the world—it's a place. There is a valley in Israel between Jerusalem and Nazareth called Megiddo. Megiddo has been the site of many battles—four in the Bible and over 200 throughout history. Now, some see this as symbolic, but many see it as the location of the final showdown.

And why do these kings gather for battle? To attack Israel or to fight the Antichrist? Ultimately, as we shall see later, this battle is against Jesus.

But first, there is one more bowl—the seventh completion. In verse 17, a loud voice declares,

"It is done!" (Revelation 16:17)

Lightning and peals of thunder, and the greatest earthquake the world has seen splits Jerusalem in three parts. And in verse 19:

"God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath." (Revelation 16:19)

Now, who is this Babylon, and why does she drink the cup of God's wrath? The answer—in chapter 17.

Revelation 17 | Babylon the Great

Revelation 17, and first a PG-13 warning on today's chapter. Parents, listen first. For the rest of us, a question: When you hear the word religion, is it a positive or a negative? You may be surprised to find out that the word religion only comes up five times in the Bible, and of those, only once is it a positive—and that is a reference to

"pure and undefiled religion." (James 1:27)

Every other time in the Bible, it's religion gone bad. Look around the world and there's plenty of it, and a lot of it in the name of Jesus. Now, I know that atheists hate religion, but what does God think of it?

We'll get back to that. But here in Revelation 17, we come to one of the most mysterious characters in the book: Babylon. We left off with the final bowl of God's wrath poured out on the earth, and God remembered specifically Babylon the Great and gave her the cup with the wine of the fury of His wrath. Now, this one character is called out by name for wrath. Back in chapter 14, a great angel declared to the world that "Babylon is fallen."

Who or what is Babylon? Now, this is an important one—so important that in verse one John tells us:

"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 on many waters.'" (Revelation 17:1)

So the angel tells John to take a closer look at this one specific punishment. Chapters 17 and 18 will be just that—it is the punishment of the great prostitute. Now, the Old Testament will be the key to unlock this chapter. In the Old Testament, prostitution and adultery are often used to

picture cheating on God. Worshiping false gods who aren't really gods—like money and pleasure and knowledge—instead of worshiping the God who gave them is cheating on God; that's adultery. And when you worship other gods for the benefits that it'll give you—getting paid—that's prostitution. Remember Hosea's story.

Verse two explains that this great prostitute seduced the kings and inhabitants of the whole earth. This is about the whole world cheating on God.

And then verse three:

"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.

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.

The name written on her forehead was a mystery:

BABYLON THE GREAT,

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." (Revelation 17:3-5)

So the picture gets interesting. This prostitute has a name: Babylon. Not just a prostitute—the mother of prostitutes and abominations. And in the vision, John sees her riding a beast. Now, we've seen this beast before—the seven heads and ten horns. It is Antichrist. And this woman, Babylon, rides atop the beast as if he were under her control.

Now, if you thought Babylon was a place and not a prostitute, the Old Testament will help again. Babylon is a place—an ancient empire along the Euphrates in modern-day Iraq, with its capital city of the same name. In many ways, the Bible is a tale of two cities: Babylon and Jerusalem. Babylon is mentioned 287 times, Jerusalem about 800. To understand the story of the Bible, follow these two cities.

In the Bible, Babylon represents the world system with two major aspects: the godless religion of the world and the kingdom or economic-political system of the world. Now watch those—world religion and world kingdom. Babylon's story begins in Genesis 10 and 11 with the Tower of Babel. You remember that one—Nimrod founded Babel. He was a mighty hunter against the Lord, and the people tried to build a tower to heaven until God foiled their plans. Now, this is the heart of the story—mankind trying to build their way to heaven on their own work. Babylon means "gateway to heaven."

Now, for a more thorough background, check out our guides to Genesis 10 and 11 and Daniel 2. But I'll give you a quick run-through here. Historically, Babylon is the birthplace of false religion. The religious stories, practices, and gods of many civilizations can be tracked back to Nimrod's wife, Semiramis, and her son Tammuz. The names changed to Venus and Cupid, Aphrodite and Eros, to Isis and Horus, and Ashtoreth and Baal. The practices even crept into the Christian church—Ishtar eggs, Yule logs, Lent, celibate priests, and scarlet robes and high hats. It all traces its way back to pagan religions and ultimately back to Babylon.

No, I don't think Easter eggs are inherently evil. As I said yesterday, the real issue here is who you worship. So this woman, Babylon, is not just a prostitute but a mother of prostitutes. Here in chapter 17, I believe that Babylon represents all false religion of every name, including a great deal

that calls itself Christian. The woman is dressed in dazzling attire and holding a golden cup. Religion sure can make itself look pretty, but that shiny cup is filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.

Now, ancient Babylon is also the birthplace of commercialism—the world economic-political system that runs on money and greed. Commercialism will be judged in chapter 18, but here in 17, the woman is false religion, and she is riding a beast. Religion can be dangerous, but when godless religion rides atop the power of wicked government, it can be outright deadly.

In verse six:

"I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus." (Revelation 17:6)

Religion is responsible for the death of many believers. Though it's a hard number to count, estimates of Christian martyrs in the last 2,000 years are around 70 million, with most of them in the last century.

Now, John explains here that when he saw the woman, he was astonished. What does it mean? And so the angel explains. Now, as you read, there are lots of clues here to investigate—some really fascinating stuff if you dig. And there are several theories on what it all means. As always, I am not the final authority. But if you decide to study up on this, I recommend balance. Read several opinions. blueletterbible.org has a good variety of commentaries, and most of all, keep your eyes on the big picture.

The beast is clearly Antichrist here, but then a reference in verse nine to

"the seven hills on which the woman sits" (Revelation 17:9)

is interesting. There's one very famous city on seven hills—it's Rome. So this could be a rebuilt Roman Empire, which would basically be a united

Europe. Also near Rome is the Vatican, the single most powerful hub of religion in the world. And the Catholic Church has some bad history of riding political power. And there's a lot of good in the Catholic Church too. But I think there's more to this picture.

False religion takes many names and many forms, and this woman pictures all of it. But now imagine if the rapture took all the genuine Christians out of the Catholic Church, the Orthodox, the Protestant, and all the rest too. And all that was left were the hypocrites, the fakes, and all the power and money still there. Now team them up with godless religions worldwide, and you get false, empty, greedy, adulterous religion—the harlot. Now put that on top of a beast of a new world government—one world religion, one world government, united in purpose.

Now, like I said, the theories abound here on what the details mean. But don't miss the big picture. What is this all about? Verse fourteen:

"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." (Revelation 17: 14)

In the end, it is a war against Jesus. This is back to the battle of Armageddon. But Jesus overcomes the world. The kings gather, but He is King of kings, and with Him will be His called, chosen, and faithful followers—that's us.

And the chapter ends with the beast and ten kings with him turning against the prostitute:

"They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire." (Revelation 17:16)

Ultimately, this is about judgment. False religion is betrayed by the power and greed that she rode in on. God has His final say—His last statement on what He thinks of godless religion. As it says in verse seventeen:

"For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose."

(Revelation 17:17)

Revelation 18 | Babylon Part 2

Welcome back to Revelation chapter 18 today. What does God think of politics and commerce? Now, I don't mean, is God a Democrat or a Republican, a capitalist or a communist. I mean the whole system. What does God think of the world's political and commercial system, and what does He think of the kings and merchants who keep it running—make a pretty penny doing it?

We're moving quickly to the end of the Tribulation, so keep your eye on the big picture here. This is the revelation of Jesus, revealing Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Ultimately, this is about the kingdoms of the world becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. But it's not as simple as Jesus just telling the world that He's King now. No, in order to establish His kingdom on the earth, the whole system has to change—religion, politics, commerce—the whole system.

Now with that, chapter 18 returns again to the fate of Babylon. Only this one is a little different. Yesterday, Babylon was the mother of harlots, the godless religious systems of the world. We saw her fate destroyed. So why is she back? Let's read on.

Verse one:

"After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor.

With a mighty voice he shouted:

'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!'" (Revelation 18:1)

So it's Babylon again.

But something is different. The clue here is in whom this Babylon is connected with. Throughout the chapter, it is kings and merchants—in verse three, verse nine, and verse eleven. Kings and merchants represent politics and commerce, the secular establishments of the world system.

Back in verse two:

"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." (Revelation 18:2)

Basically, that's the corruption of the system. It's not that politics and commerce are inherently wrong, but they have become the dwelling of demons. Everything unclean and detestable makes a home here—corruption, greed, injustice—detestable.

Verse three:

"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." (Revelation 18:3)

The kings committed adultery. Their authority was given by God, but they abused their power for greed. They should have been shepherds; instead, they became slave drivers. And the merchants grew rich from her excessive luxuries—that means they took way more than they needed. We all know how it works—the concentration of wealth, the greed at the top.

One of the arguments that I wonder over is as a Christian: communism versus capitalism. Two very different economic systems. On the surface,

communism appears much closer to Christian ideals—equality, living in community, providing for the needy. In practice, communism has been violently anti-Christian. Soviet communism alone has the blood of twenty million Christian martyrs on its hands—that's three times the Holocaust. And the equality in community just doesn't seem to appear—corrupted, just one more dwelling for demons.

Capitalism also has its Christian slant, built on the ideals of freedom and hard work, and to some extent, it has sustained an equitable middle class. Look a little deeper, though, and you'll find a heavy dose of greed and ungodliness. When greedy men are left free to pay workers little and charge buyers much, then poison the skies and pollute the minds—all because they can—it's not right.

So which one do I support? In the end, neither. And that's what Revelation is about—the end. Christians, we are called to look ahead to the end of things. Greed works for the moment; it's the way of the world. But we are not of this world. Look at verse four:

"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;

for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.'" (Revelation 18:4)

This voice is to me and to you—Christians,

"Come out of her, my people." (Revelation 18:4)

We are called to be in the world, but not of the world. We are called to stand for justice, for equality, and freedom. But beware of the tangles of the system. James delivers a strong warning:

"Don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity towards God?" (James 4:4)

That means the world system. If you follow the way of the world—in life or in business—you will reap what you sow. Beware the love of money, the seduction of luxury, and the intoxication of power.

"Come out of her, my people," (Revelation 18:4)

or go down with the ship—and that ship will go down fast.

And again, we see the cycle of sowing and reaping. In verse six:

"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."

"Give her as much torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself." (Revelation 18:6)

Then verse eight:

"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." (Revelation 18:8)

Judgment falls. And then, one at a time, all those who got rich off of her stand in shock. First, the kings in verse nine,

"who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury." (Revelation 18:9)

"They will weep and mourn over her when they see the smoke of her burning.

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!'" (Revelation 18:9-10)

Then the merchants in verse eleven, they mourn because no one buys their cargoes anymore. The party is over. A long list of their cargoes follows—most of them luxuries. This is materialism—the worship of stuff. And at the end of verse thirteen, one more cargo:

"bodies and souls of men." (Revelation 18:13)

Slavery. Human trafficking. Sex trade. Did you know that pornography is a twenty-billion-dollar-a-year industry? That's just the legal stuff, and it destroys viewers, destroys the performers. It ruins people—the bodies and souls of mankind. But it makes a lot of money.

I saw the movie *Taken* once. The reality of the sex trade is too disturbing for me to watch it again. But there is a part of me that wants to cheer for the hero with a very particular set of skills, who will find them and stop them. That is the story here. Mighty is the Lord God who judges her, and He will find them and stop them.

The merchants weep and mourn just as the kings before them:

**"Woe! Woe to you, great city,
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,**

and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!

In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" (Revelation 18:16-17)

And then the sea captains join in—all who travel by ship and earn their living from the sea. Their lament is the same.

But not everyone is mourning. Verse twenty:

"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."
(Revelation 18:20)

When justice wins, heaven cheers. The oppression is over, and one more angel pronounces the final judgment:

"The great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again." (Revelation 18:21)

Verse twenty-two is interesting:

"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." (Revelation 18:22)

And what is this? Music, work, production—these are the basics of life and society, the simple and good things that have been all too easily corrupted by the politics of greed. They will never be heard in Babylon again.

Verse twenty-three:

"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.

In her was found the blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth." (Revelation 18:23)

Revelation 19 | Second Coming

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah.

Now don't worry, everyone—you got the right station. It's still me. But Revelation 19 had to start with a little celebration. Chapter 19 is victory. All right, cut the music.

I want you to think back a moment and remember what it feels like to win. I don't mean just a little win—I mean a real win. A hard-fought struggle, determination, perseverance, work, sweat, exhaustion, and fight-the-good-fight-to-the-very-end kind of win. Do you remember what that feels like? I'm not sure I know it from experience yet, but I dream about it. In Revelation 19, we win. Revelation 19 is the climax of the entire Bible—1,185 chapters of rising action—and this is it.

We left off on earth with Babylon defeated—Babylon the harlot, false religion and all its chains, cruelty, hatred, and lies destroyed. And then Babylon the great city—the politics of greed, the commerce of corruption, the world system that sells the bodies and souls of mankind for profit—thrown down like a boulder into the sea, never to be found again. And now it is time to celebrate.

The closest thing I can relate to this in my lifetime is the fall of the Iron Curtain. I was only a teenager, but I knew I was watching the world change. At the time, I didn't understand the decades of oppression, the heartless cruelty that took the lives of more than 85 million souls under communist rule. But I remember the sledgehammers that the common people took to the Berlin Wall. I remember the celebration when the ropes pulled down statues of Lenin and Stalin. I remember the look on the faces of those who stood over them. It looked like victory. After decades of oppression, cruelty, and death—victory at last.

Revelation 19 is like that. It's victory—only this one is bigger and better. And this one is final.

Verse one:

"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,

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.'

And again they shouted:

'Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.'" (Revelation 19:1-3)

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!" (Revelation 19:4)

What John describes here is nothing short of overwhelming. When you read it, try to imagine it. Try to immerse yourself in the sound of it. It begins with the roar of a great multitude in heaven, and they all shout "Hallelujah!" It's a Hebrew word. "Hallelujah" means "Praise the Lord." Interesting—it's the first time this word shows up in the New Testament. God saved it for this day.

And why? Praise the Lord for salvation, for glory, for His power, for His judgments that are true and just. He set things right. He avenged the blood of His servants. The twenty-four elders, the four living creatures—they all cry out:

"Amen! Hallelujah!" (Revelation 19:4)

And then a voice from the throne calls for praise. And in verse six:

"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.'" (Revelation 19:6)

Can you picture that sound in your mind? I know the roar of rushing water, and I know the peal of thunder. But what if that sound was praise? Praise because God reigns. That is the climax of the Bible: God reigns. Glory, glory, hallelujah—He reigns.

And then in verse seven:

"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." (Revelation 19:7)

Now check this out—it's a wedding. The wedding—Jesus and His bride, the church—that means us. Now, being the bride doesn't mean I'll be a woman. It's the covenant, the commitment of love—that's what this is about. Marriage is the closest thing we have to picture it. And I love a wedding.

Now, in Bible times, it's interesting. A Jewish wedding began with the groom surprising the bride and whisking her away for a private ceremony

and seven days together, and then the wedding celebration. You see the picture here? Ain't no party like a Jesus wedding party!

Back in verse seven:

"For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready."

"Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Revelation 19:7)

Now, this isn't about a dress. Verse eight explains that "fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people." We will be dressed in righteous acts. Good deeds make you beautiful. But don't get confused—it's not your righteousness. The fine linen was given to the bride. It's His righteousness. We just have to put it on and live it out.

And then the angel tells John to write:

"Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:9)

Now, that written here in verse nine is your invitation—you're invited. Don't miss out. Don't make any excuses—you've got to be there. John is so overwhelmed that he falls down to worship the angel. The angel stops him fast:

"Don't do it! 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." (Revelation 19:10)

That last phrase is big. It is the purpose of prophecy—prophecy is a testimony of Jesus. Don't get caught up in the angels or awed by the predictions of the future. In the end, it's all about Jesus.

And then the scene changes. Back on earth, there's still unfinished business. Remember back in chapter 16, the kings of the whole world had gathered at the place called Armageddon for the battle of the great day of God Almighty. Chapter 17 told us that they will make war against the Lamb. Those kings and their vast armies are still waiting—but wait no longer.

Verse eleven:

"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." (Revelation 19:11-12)

If you didn't recognize it yet, this is the Second Coming—the ultimate fulfillment of the return of Christ. He came first as a suffering servant; He will return as the conquering King—the rider on the white horse, Faithful and True. He has come to wage war, but not like a man wages war. With justice, with righteousness, He judges and wages His war.

And in verse fourteen:

"The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean." (Revelation 19:14)

Now, those armies are us. But I don't think we're there to fight—no swords in our hands, just dressed in fine linen. Remember, those are righteous acts. No, the only weapon wielded in this battle is in verse fifteen:

"Coming out of His mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations." (Revelation 19:15)

Now, don't picture Jesus here with swords flying out of His mouth. The sword is His word. He will strike down His enemies with His word.

"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." (Revelation 19:15-16)

The chapter closes with the final defeat of those who, in their arrogance, had gathered to fight against the Lord. Young listeners, pause now before it gets bad.

An angel calls to all the birds to gather for the great supper of God—a feast on flesh. First, the two beasts—the Antichrist and his false prophet—are captured. In verse twenty:

"The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur."

"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." (Revelation 19:20-21)

It is a gruesome end. It is the end of the flesh—the end of the battle against God. They came out to kill by the sword; instead, they were killed. The birds clean up the mess. But that's just their bodies. What about their souls? Stay tuned for chapter 20.

For now, Jesus has returned to reign.

In the kingdom of heaven, and He shall reign on earth. Hallelujah! We shall praise God in our faith.

La la la la la la la la. Fish and fisheries, parade in favor of the Holy Name of the Lord. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Praise.

Revelation 20 | Millennium

Revelation 20, the millennium, the great white throne judgment. This chapter is huge, so I'll apologize now in case the time goes over. But we're talking heaven and hell here. Speaking of which, do you believe in heaven and hell? Does it make a difference if you do? C.S. Lewis said, "If heaven is real, nothing else matters. If heaven is not real, nothing matters at all." Think about that. And what about hell? Does it exist? Does it make a difference? Of course, it makes a difference. That's like saying, does it make a difference whether life has consequences or not? Yes, consequences matter. And eternity matters a lot. It matters forever. See, we left off with a lot of people dead, judged on earth, their flesh destroyed. But what about after that? What happens to their souls? In chapter 19, we got just a glimpse of the Second Coming. Jesus returned to earth astride a great white horse, emblazoned across his thigh and on his robe, the title King of Kings and Lord of Lords. With him are his faithful servants, believers like me and you. The kings of the earth had gathered together at Megiddo for the great battle against the Lord, a battle which failed miserably. Now, if you don't think that people would gather to fight the Lord, you don't know people. Now the battle is over. Antichrist and his prophet are in the lake of fire. The armies are destroyed. But there is one more enemy that remains: verse one.

"And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the abyss, and holding in his hand a great chain." (Revelation 20:1)

He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. So this is the destiny of Satan, the Lord of lies, the accuser of the brethren, Lucifer. He is bound and put into the abyss. Now that's different from hell. You may recall that the abyss is a prison for demons only, but this one is not forever, not yet. At the end of

verse two, it is for 1,000 years, and again in verse three. What is this thousand years? It's called the millennium. For 1,000 years, Jesus reigns on earth. This is what Jesus asked us to pray for:

"Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."
(Matthew 6:9)

Now you should know there are several ideas about this millennium and how it plays out. Some say the word millennium is not in the Bible. That one is silly. Millennium means thousand years, which appears six times in this chapter. Some say the millennium is now Jesus reigning spiritually, not physically. Still, others say the millennium happens before Jesus comes back. The church sets it up. Now you can read up on the arguments if you like. You can probably tell that I don't agree with any of those, but I really encourage you to read the Bible for yourself and ask what it says above, what I say or anyone else. I try to read it the way it's written and believe the Bible means what it says.

Again, I understand symbols and visions, but Bible symbols represent real things. And if you take the order here in Revelation a straightforward way, we just saw Jesus coming next chapter, millennium. I believe this is real, literal thousand years on earth where Jesus reigns physically, personally, here as King. Now, the first thing we see here in verse three, Satan is locked up 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. So Satan is gone, but he will come back. We'll see why in a moment. But in the millennium, things are right. No more deceptions and no more false religion or corrupt system. Jesus is King. But who are the people on earth then? If you follow the story, there are two groups. When Jesus returns on the white horse, with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers. Christians come back, but in resurrected bodies; we will be changed at the

rapture. No more corrupted body, no more sinful nature. Also on earth are the survivors of the tribulation. Many died in judgment, but after seven years, many are still alive. Same human bodies they started with and not necessarily believers. So the first group: resurrected believers. Second group: survivors of the tribulation. Now let's see what else John tells us. Verse four,

"I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge." (Revelation 20:4)

Now these thrones are seats of authority and rule, all under Jesus' authority, of course. But Jesus will have a government. See, the millennium isn't heaven. It's earth ruled rightly. And Jesus promised believers that we would rule with him, not lord it over you. Rule Jesus-style: servant leaders, righteous, truly good government. And then John sees the souls of the tribulation martyrs in verse four. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. Verse five calls this the first resurrection. That means getting the new body, incorruptible. In other words, the tribulation martyrs join the pre-tribulation Christians. And in verse six,

"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." (Revelation 20:6)

That's how this works. First resurrection, no second death, and we will reign with him. Remember the parable of the talents: be faithful with little things now, and he will trust you with bigger things then. But there will be a later resurrection. Back in verse five, the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. Non-believers who died before the millennium. They wait. Why wait? Because the millennium has a purpose. God will be demonstrating something about his righteousness,

something that needs to be shown before final judgment. So what else do we know about the millennium? Well, scattered around the Bible, there are passages about a time on earth when things are right.

Really right? Right in God's eyes, not just mine or yours. Jesus will reign and the capital will be Jerusalem. Isaiah 2 describes the last days when people from all over the world will come to visit Jerusalem, Mount Zion, to be taught by the Lord and to follow his ways. Isaiah 11 describes it as a time without war when swords are beaten into plowshares. Nations will still have their issues, but Jesus will settle matters and rebuke as needed, and people will live and thrive for a long time. In Isaiah 11, we find out that animals will change and they'll all get along. Now, I love this part. If you love pictures of animals playing together, go read Isaiah 11. Wolves and lambs, leopards and goats, all of them back to herbivores so they don't eat each other. And little children can play with all of them. And Israel, the nation and the people, will be fully restored. Ezekiel 40, Zechariah 13, and more show a rebuilt temple and restored worship and feasts. Now you can go study all of that. But here in Revelation, what happens next? Verse seven,

"When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, and to gather them for battle. A thousand years of righteousness." (Revelation 20:7)

And Satan is back, and he convinces a huge mass of people to go attack Jerusalem and God's people. Seriously, what is going on? Now remember, God doesn't force anyone to be a believer.

Those who were not yet resurrected, tribulation survivors, and their many descendants still have free will. I believe this is the purpose of the millennium. God is demonstrating thoroughly that even if life is perfect, we

still have the choice. We can't blame our circumstances, and those who choose not to trust in Christ choose to be deceived. The battle is fast. Fire comes down from heaven. Then and only then is it time for the final judgment in verse ten.

"The devil is thrown into the lake of fire. This is the true hell, and it is torment for ever and ever." (Revelation 20:10)

In verse 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." (Revelation 20:11)

Now this is Judgment Day. God saves it for the very end. Every story is complete. Everything is known now. Most Bible scholars see two different judgment seats: one for believers and one for non-believers. For believers, the judgment seat, or Bema Seat of Christ, is in 2 Corinthians 5, for believers, sin has already been judged, paid for at the cross. It's done. "Thank you, Jesus. It is finished." The Bema Seat is about reward, not punishment. There, at the judgment seat of Christ, our works will go through the fire and our motives revealed. Sin is gone, but our works will be rewarded. He will not forget the good. I think that one happens much earlier and determines our roles in the millennium.

Now this one is different: The great White Throne. This one is about justice. In verse 11, earth and heavens flee. There's no place to hide anything. And then in verse 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." (Revelation 20:12)

The books: a complete record. Imagine a book that has everything on you: every action, every word, every motive, everything. This has to be fair. Twice it says each person was judged according to what they had done. If ever you feel that God is unfair, remember he offers two simple choices: fair or forgiveness. On one hand, exactly, completely, righteously fair, according to your works; or forgiven, Jesus pays the price. Take forgiveness and your name is written here in the Book of Life. Jesus said,

"Rejoice that your name is written in the Book of Life." (Luke 10:20)

Turn that offer down and you stand alone. Verse 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. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:13)

Revelation 21 | All Things New

Revelation 21. And I have to tell you, I'm a little overwhelmed at the prospect of trying to teach these last two chapters. They're so big, so important. They're so amazing. The way I feel about these chapters is like the way a soldier at war feels about home. It's a beautiful word, isn't it? Home for me. My home is a place I've never been. And I can't wait to show it to you. To be honest, I don't even really want to teach this chapter. I just want to enjoy it together. It's so good. It's the new heaven, the new earth, and a city so amazing it boggles the mind. There are so many wonders and mysteries, so don't expect me to answer all your questions here. How could I attempt to explain it? I can barely take it all in, but one thing I can do, I can enjoy it with you. Now remember where we left off: the tribulation is over, the second coming, a thousand years of Christ's reign on earth, and then one last battle, and finally the Last Judgment, the White Throne. Eternal destinies are settled. And just when you thought it was the end, God makes a beginning. Let's start at verse one.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and there was no longer any sea."
(Revelation 21:1)

So there will be a whole new heaven and new earth. Did you know that Isaiah 65 talked about it too?

"Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come to mind." (Isaiah 65:17)

See, the old earth is tainted by sin, and even the old heaven has Satan's disgusting footprints in it. So God totally starts over, but He keeps us. And special attention is given here to one particular city. Look at verse two.

"I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." (Revelation 21:2)

Jerusalem. God's chosen city. God makes a new one. Now, to appreciate this, you have to remember how we got here. I mean, the whole Bible back in Hebrews 11, there's a review of all the great heroes of faith. And they had one thing in common: they were strangers on this earth. Pilgrims like Abraham, who was called out from the city, he knew to go somewhere he'd never seen before. But it wasn't about a promised land on earth. It says he was looking forward to the city with foundations,

"whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:10)

This is the call of every believer. We are not at home. We are longing for a better country, a heavenly one, and for people who live that way. It says,

"Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:16)

Now you know why I like that verse? Because it's about home. I love home, and this city comes down out of heaven from God. And I love the picture John chooses. He says it's like a bride.

Literally the most beautiful moment my eyes see in this lifetime: my bride prepared for me, walking down the aisle. That's what John compares this to. Jesus said He is going to prepare a place for us, and when it's ready, it deserves a grand entrance. Then verse three,

"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.'"

(Revelation 21:3)

Now that's so good. I don't know what to say. God dwells there with us. To dwell is to be at home. Did I tell you I love home? Verse four.

"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.

He who is seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new.' Then He said, **'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'**" (Revelation 21:4-5)

Now this is the part that amazes me. God ends the Bible with this:

"I am making everything new," (Revelation 21:5)

and He commands John to write it down. This is for real. This is true. This day will come. See? On earth, everything gets old. Well, actually, not quite everything. There are just a few things, like faith in God and people getting saved and hope. I never get tired of hoping and love. Love never gets old. It's the eternal stuff. Outwardly we're wasting away. But inwardly we are renewed day by day.

I just love serving a God who can make all things new. And then in verse six,

"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.'" (Revelation 21:6)

In the Bible, thirst represents longing as a thirst inside us. God put it there, and nothing in this world can satisfy it. But God gives the water of life for free. Verse seven,

"Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God, and they will be my children." (Revelation 21:7)

The word "inherit" there isn't about someone dying and you get some money. It's the word for a father sharing what He has with his children, shared together. And it's saved for those who are victorious, who overcome. Verse eight,

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters, and all liars will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

Now I refuse to sidestep the reality of hell here. The second death is the second death. Throughout these chapters, the Lord calls to every one of us to accept the free gift of heaven to allow Him to change us. But if we refuse to repent, that's it. First on the list are cowards. It takes courage to follow Jesus and then sexually immoral, rejecting the goodness and holiness of sex as God made it. I saw a bumper sticker on a truck.

It said, "I heart Jesus." Only Jesus was crossed out, and scrawled next to it was something perverted: "I heart yuck." Sad. But that is exactly the choice that people make. They choose sin over Jesus. God opens the invitation to everyone. Forgiveness is free. But if you want your sin, you take it with you forever. And then magic arts. That includes drug abuse, liars who deceive, and look over that list. In the new heaven, there will be no one to harm you, nothing to be afraid of. And then an angel calls to John, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." But what He shows John is not people, but the great city. It's a little curious. I think that the people in the city are sort of one, just like today. Some people are in the city, and the city is them. They have the same personality, and it's part of their identity. Now, this place is so perfectly made for us. It's like we wandered and searched

for so long that this place, this is us, this is home. The description is amazing: 12 gates made of pearl, 12 foundations made of gemstones. It is square, measuring 12,000 stadia on each side. That's 1,500 miles. That's like Maine to Florida square for one city. Now the walls are made of jasper, and the city itself is pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations. Verse nineteen goes through every foundation. I love these foundations. "C Foundation" means solid. It's lasting.

Remember Hebrews 11, we pilgrims long for a city with foundations and the streets—streets of pure gold like transparent glass. Now don't think of all these gems and gold as rich stuff that you see in a jewelry store. Think of the wonders of nature. The most amazing thing about gems is what they do with light. Have you ever marveled at the wonder of light? It's amazing stuff. Little photons at different wavelengths do the most incredible things. Everything about this place is made to do amazing things with light. Verse twentythree,

"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. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it." (Revelation 21:23)

Now, if I'm picturing this right, this city is up in the sky. God dwells in it. And the 12 gemstone foundations below it reflect the light of God for some kind of spectacular light show. Now, if you're like me, you have a lot of questions right now. What about the new heaven and the rest of the earth? And who are these kings of the earth? I don't know, but I can't wait to get in and find out. Speaking of getting in, verse 25 says,

"On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there." (Revelation 21:25)

So the doors are never locked. You know what that sounds like to me? It sounds like home.

Revelation 22 | I Am... Coming Soon

Revelation 22 everyone, we made it the last chapter, and I have to apologize if the audio sounds a little different. I'm on the road today, so you might hear the road noise. Family road trip—finally going to Yellowstone for the first time. And there's something fitting about the open road for this chapter. I love gazing out at the wide open spaces in the Southwest and the great mountains of the Rockies. It always stirs something in me, a gentle but definite longing for some other place. It's a funny feeling, really, somewhere between longing to get away and yearning for home. Well, whatever it is, it fits well. Today, Revelation 22 gives me that same sort of feeling. It is what we've never imagined before and what we've always wanted, but all at the same time we left off at the end with God making a brand new beginning. All things new—a new heaven, a new earth, and one beautiful new city in particular, Jerusalem recreated. John saw the great city come down out of heaven, down to the new earth. It is beautiful, and it's huge. That's where we join John again. As before, I won't be able to answer every question about this new city, but I will certainly enjoy a stroll down the main street together. So join me, won't you? Chapter 22, verse one.

"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 down the middle of the great street of the city." (Revelation 22:1)

So right there in the heart of the city, flowing down the middle of the main road, the river of the water of Life. I love a city built on a river. But then something always happens to a river. When you build a city on it, it gets gross. But this one, this one is the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, and its source is the throne of God. When the source is pure, the river is pure. Now every human being understands that water is necessary for life.

But do you remember the story? When Jesus met the woman at the well, she had water to drink. It kept her alive, but it didn't fully satisfy. So Jesus offered her living water. Later on, Jesus called to anyone who thirsts and made a bold and open offer to come to Him and find rivers of living water, which the Bible says is the Holy Spirit. Now here in the great city, in the eternal Jerusalem, the main river flows with the water of life. Does that mean the Holy Spirit is in it? I don't know, but I'm getting thirsty. And then back in verse two,

"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." (Revelation 22:2)

Now the tree of life brings us right back to the Garden of Eden. And the description here is either multiple trees on either side of the river or a single tree that spans the river. Either way, the roots get their nutrients from the water of life. I love fruit. Fruit is amazing to me. Crispy green apple. Mhm. Perfect peach. And it's good for me—healing and energy. Now the tree of life here has twelve crops. It could be twelve different fruits off the same tree. And it's faithful every month. And the word "healing" here means life-giving, energizing, and invigorating. Now, I don't know how it works exactly, but I don't think it's some kind of magic tree. I don't imagine God suddenly changing His M.O. and skipping the science part. He created it. I think in the new heaven, God steps up His game. Then verse three,

“No longer will there be any curse.” (Revelation 22:3)

Now stop right there. Catch that. No longer any curse. The curse. The results of sin. Genesis three. The curse. The cause of all frustration. The reason why something always goes wrong. The thorns and weeds and bugs in the machine that make all our work difficult. Do you know that? Do you know that the curse is the reason it goes wrong? The reason work is

frustrating. Why? Because God cursed the world when man sinned, and I believe God did it to make man hope, to keep us from being satisfied with anything here and make us long for another place. A place with no more curse.

Back in verse three

“The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. 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 forever and ever.” (Revelation 22:3-5)

And with that, we close the picture of the new city. That's all the glimpse we get. But the book isn't over just yet. The angel who gave the tour speaks up in verse six,

"These words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 22:6)

And then Jesus speaks up.

"Look, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll." (Revelation 22:7)

The book began with a blessing for anyone who reads it. Now there is another one for those who keep it. Hold on to it. Don't forget it. Then the angel tells John in verse ten,

"Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near." (Revelation 22:10)

In other words, don't forget Revelation. Don't keep it from people. God's people need to know this book.

We need the reality of eternity always on our minds. And in verse eleven, something interesting.

"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." (Revelation 22:11)

So what does that mean? Let them continue. You see, this is the story of the very end. But in a word, to you and I today, the angel says, "Allow each one to continue to prove their character." For now, let it go. God will judge in the end, and because God gives it time, allows it to be proven. There will be no argument on the last day that His judgment is just. Let it be. God will judge. And then Jesus speaks up again, verse twelve. Now, as you read this one, it's as if Jesus grabs the pen for the first time in the entire Bible here in the very last chapter, to speak directly to the reader, to us.

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 22:12-13)

This is a clear and direct claim to be God, and He calls us to look, to look to His coming and to the reward He brings."

I believe that we are wired to long for the reward, and Jesus carries the only one that lasts. Then in verse fourteen,

"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. Outside are the dogs." (Revelation 22:14-15)

Now? In the Bible, "dogs" refers to legalists, the self-righteous, judgmental Christian hypocrites. Outside of the dogs are those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who

loves and practices falsehood. And then it's as if Jesus signs the letter personally,

“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.” (Revelation 22:16)

And then to follow it, another speaks up. "It is the Holy Spirit along with the bride." That's every Christian together. And they make an invitation to anyone and everyone who reads this.

"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come,' and let anyone 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." (Revelation 22:17)

The invitation is for anyone who thirsts, who longs for that something, that water of life. And the gift is free. Jesus paid the price. Listen, if you started listening to this thing out of curiosity, this call is for you.

You know, it's funny. The reason I'm going to Yellowstone—I kept thinking about it, and every time I'd mention it to someone, as soon as I got to the word Yellowstone, they'd stop me. "Dude, you got to go." Seriously, it's like the most beautiful place on the planet. Every time it was like they were ready to go back that instant. And they wanted me to go, like, as a fellow human being on the planet Earth. I want you to be there. And here in this chapter, that is exactly how I feel reading about heaven and eternity. First, I want to go. I really want to go. But then I'm hit so hard. I want you to go. I want everyone to go. As a fellow human being on this planet, I say to you, please go. I tell you what, when we all get there, meet me at the base of the Tree of Life. The first Thursday, 2:00. We'll all meet up. I want to see you there. The book ends with a stark warning: "Do not add to and do not

subtract from this book." So please read every word. And then a final word from Jesus.

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' "

(Revelation 22: 20)

And then one from John.

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen." (Revelation 22:21)

And then one more last word from me. "First Thursday, 2:00. Please."