



Glimpses into the **Heavenlies**

A Devotional Journey
through the book of
Revelation

Alan Wagner

Glimpses into the Heavens

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by Alan Wagner

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Introduction

I recently took a “devotional journey” through the last book of the Bible - Revelation. My goal was not to do an in-depth study or to understand every image; it was simply to allow the visions to inspire me - and to give me a greater view of God and his ways. This book is based on the notes I wrote through my journey; I invite you to gaze with me into the heavenly realms and be inspired!

Revelation is an amazing book to read, full of spectacular visions - of God, events in heaven, events on earth, angels, demons and men. Some are crystal clear, but some are profoundly mysterious. This journey is more a journey of seeking *inspiration* than of *understanding*. I have read some diverse interpretations of the visions and don't want to weigh in on those debates. Instead, I have looked for “plain meaning” and tried to learn “lessons for earth” from these awesome “glimpses into the heavenlies”.

All Bible texts are taken from the World English Bible (WEB) because this translation is in the public domain. You may prefer to read the texts in your own Bible (the translation you are familiar with).

I trust that this book will take you on a journey of inspiration!

JOHN'S INTRODUCTION

Revelation 1:1-11

This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things which must happen soon, which he sent and made known by his angel to his servant, John, who testified to God's word and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, about everything that he saw.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written in it, for the time is at hand.

John, to the seven assemblies that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from God, who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us, and washed us from our sins by his blood - and he made us to be a Kingdom, priests to his God and Father - to him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, including those who pierced him. All the tribes of the earth will mourn over him. Even so, Amen.

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

I John, your brother and partner with you in the oppression, Kingdom, and perseverance in Christ Jesus, was on the isle that is called Patmos because of God's Word and the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, like a trumpet saying, "What you see, write in a book and send to the seven assemblies: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

John began writing by setting the scene. He had been sent into exile and was living in isolation from the persecuted church. But he was not isolated from Jesus! In exile, he saw the exalted, glorified Jesus and a series of spectacular visions.

I wonder how John felt when sent off into exile. Was his ministry over? Would he spend his final years in obscurity on a lonely island? Had the enemies of the church successfully “shut him down”?

It may have seemed so - but it wasn't. Instead, Jesus used this time to reveal himself to John in even greater ways, and gave him a profoundly important task. John got to see Jesus as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and wrote what could be regarded as “the grand finale” of the Bible!

We can learn a vital “life lesson” from this -

we're not done until God says we're done!

In places of “exile” - when we feel “shut down” or “shut out”, God can do profoundly significant things!

1: Glory and Presence

Revelation 1:12-20

I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. Having turned, I saw seven golden lamp stands. And among the lamp stands was one like a son of man, clothed with a robe reaching down to his feet, and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace. His voice was like the voice of many waters. He had seven stars in his right hand. Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining at its brightest. When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man.

He laid his right hand on me, saying, "Don't be afraid. I am the first and the last, and the Living one. I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever. Amen. I have the keys of Death and of Hades. Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven assemblies. The seven lamp stands are seven assemblies."

The glory of the exalted Jesus

John's first encounter with Jesus was with Jesus the man. The last he'd seen of him was when he ascended to Heaven. This time, he met the glorified King of Kings!

It was a dazzling sight, totally overwhelming - John collapsed at the sight of him!

In his glory, so much more was evident about him. Dazzling white revealed his purity. The golden sash revealed his royalty. The blazing fire in his eyes revealed his consuming passion. His overwhelming glory was like the brilliance of the sun. His voice like rushing water teemed with power and life. And the double-edged sword from his mouth confirmed his word as decisive and powerful.

His titles were titles of great glory: he is “The First and The Last”, “The Living One”. He has authority over the living, the dead and even death itself!

Sometimes we think of Jesus only in terms of his humanity - the man written about in the gospels - but he is GLORIOUS! He is so glorious that just the sight of him is completely overwhelming (John collapsed at his feet)!

We need to understand that Jesus “emptied himself” and “made himself nothing” to come to earth (we read this in Philippians 2) - but now he has taken back his glory! Let's remember that Jesus is GLORIOUS! He is *overwhelmingly* glorious!

- Let's worship him like that!
- Let's trust him like that!
- Let's obey him like that!

The privilege of his presence

This King of Glory stands *among* the lampstands - the churches. He holds their messengers (“angels”) in his *hands*. He is not distant and aloof, he is present and connected!

It is an incredible privilege to enjoy the presence of the King of Glory with us! This glorious King is *with* us! This ought to change the way we pray, worship and live. When we pray, we are praying to the King of Heaven! When we worship, we are worshipping the one who is too awesome to behold! When we hear his word, we are hearing the words of the King who is above all kings! We are in the presence of the King of Glory!

Take some time today to reflect on the awesome glory of Jesus!

And take some time to enjoy his awesome presence!!

2: Jesus' Letter to the Church in Ephesus

Revelation 2:1-7

To the angel of the assembly in Ephesus write:

He who holds the seven stars in his right hand, he who walks among the seven golden lamp stands says these things:

I know your works, and your toil and perseverance, and that you can't tolerate evil men, and have tested those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and found them false. You have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake, and have not grown weary.

But I have this against you, that you left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I am coming to you swiftly, and will move your lamp stand out of its place, unless you repent.

But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of my God.

Jesus commended the Ephesian church for many great attributes: they were hard working, they persevered through their hardships, they refused to tolerate wickedness in their midst and they showed sound judgement in discerning both false apostles and false doctrine. In many ways, they were doing really well.

Yet there was something that Jesus was deeply unhappy about. He was so unhappy about it, that he promised to close them down if they did not fix the problem! [Albert Barnes notes in his commentary that the church of Ephesus evidently failed to repent - the church did indeed cease to exist.]

The problem was:

“you left your first love”

This reminds me of God's words to Samuel as he looked at Jesse's eldest son as potential king:

1 Samuel 16:7

“Don't look on his face, or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for I don't see as man sees. For man looks at the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks at the heart.”

God considers our heart condition as of greatest importance. We can live lives that look good on the outside... people may think we are “good Christians”... but if we are not loving God first-and-foremost, our hearts invalidate our deeds. We are hypocrites. We *appear* to love God, but we've actually lost our love for him.

Many have observed the passion of a new believer - amazed by God's love and grace, deeply grateful, full of awe, completely and joyfully surrendered to Jesus. Yet with time, many passionate believers “cool down”. Their passion subsides, and they settle into religious routines of ritual, doctrine and discipline. They may be very “religious”, but there is no longer any “fire in their hearts”.

They have not lost their faith (they may even have developed a strong theology) - but they have lost their first love.

Fortunately, Jesus gives the remedy - the way back to our first love:

“Remember therefore from where you have fallen,
and repent
and do the first works”

1. REMEMBER:

Remember what it was like when you were first adopted as God's child. Remember the awe! Remember the gratitude! Remember the joy! Remember the excitement! Remember the passion! Just remembering those days can stir up our passion again!

For many of us, our decline in passion was gradual; if we look back a week or a month, we may not notice much, but when we look back to our beginnings, we can see what we have lost. This motivates us to get back to our “glory days”!

2. REPENT:

“Repent” literally means “change your thinking”. Stop thinking religiously, ritualistically and theologically. Go back to a simple faith and a simple appreciation of the Gospel.

- Jesus loves you enough to die for you - and he did!
- Jesus set you free from the oppression of the devil!
- Jesus has secured your forgiveness for your sins!
- Jesus has prepared a room for you in the Father's house for a glorious eternity!

Getting these awesome realities into our thinking again will re-ignite our love for Jesus!

3. RETURN TO YOUR FIRST WAYS

Albert Barnes put it so well in his commentary that I'll just quote him:

“This is the true counsel to be given to those who have backslidden, and have “left their first love,” now. Often such persons, sensible that they have erred, and that they have not the enjoyment in religion which they once had, profess to be willing and desirous to return, but they know not how to do it - how to revive their ardour, how to rekindle in their bosom the flame of extinguished love.

“They suppose it must be by silent meditation, or by some supernatural influence, and they wait for some visitation from above to call them back, and to restore to them their former joy.

“The counsel of the Saviour to all such, however, is to do their first works. It is to engage at once in doing what they did in the first and best days of their piety, the days of their “espousals” [Jer 2:2] to God.

“Let them read the Bible as they did then; let them pray as they did then; let them go forth in the duties of active benevolence as they did then; let them engage in teaching a Sunday school as they did then; let them relieve the distressed, instruct the ignorant, raise up the fallen, as they did then; let them open their heart, their purse, and their hand, to bless a dying world.

“As it was in this way that they manifested their love then, so this would be better suited than all other things to rekindle the flame of love when it is almost extinguished. The weapon that is used keeps bright; that which has become rusty will become bright again if it is used.”

3: Jesus' Letter to the Church in Smyrna

Revelation 2:8-11

To the angel of the assembly in Smyrna write:

The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life says these things:

I know your works, oppression, and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Don't be afraid of the things which you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested; and you will have oppression for ten days. Be faithful to death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

He who overcomes won't be harmed by the second death.

The church in Smyrna was notably poor and persecuted. Jesus did not explain why (although many of us may wish he did) nor did he apologise for these trials (they clearly were not a mistake).

BUT he did comfort them - and we can draw comfort from their comfort. He comforted them by:

- saying that he KNEW their afflictions and poverty. The one who walks amongst the lampstands (churches) SEES US! He is in our midst in our tough times; our trials are not a surprise to him.

- pointing them to ETERNITY. Trials can quickly get us to drop our gaze. When our focus is on “the situation on the ground”, we can easily lose heart. Jesus lifted their gaze. He was at the beginning and he will be at the end. He has died and risen from death. If we trust him, he will take us through our trials, through death and into eternity where the second death - the one to truly fear - cannot harm us.

- pointing them to the SPIRITUAL REALM. They were physically poor - yet spiritually rich! They were hated and persecuted by men - yet loved and favoured by God!

- assuring them that their TRIALS WERE TEMPORARY. They would be persecuted - but the persecution would come to an end. They would face possible martyrdom - but that would release them into a glorious eternity. They would have to fight and overcome - but victory was theirs to take hold of!

Historians tell us that this church persisted. They were poor and persecuted, but they overcame!

Most of us don't want to endure trials, especially poverty and persecution. But that is what some of us are destined to endure. This does not make us inferior believers or imply fault; this church was not rebuked, only encouraged.

When we face trials, we can draw strength from knowing:

- Jesus knows our trials
- Jesus is present in our trials
- Our trials are not eternal - they will come to an end
- Glory awaits us
- Earthly poverty will end; spiritual riches will last forever!

4: Jesus' Letter to the Church in Pergamum

Revelation 2:12-17

To the angel of the assembly in Pergamum write:

He who has the sharp two-edged sword says these things:

I know your works and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. You hold firmly to my name, and didn't deny my faith in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to throw a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans likewise. Repent therefore, or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he who receives it.

This church received both a commendation and a rebuke from Jesus. They had stood strong in the faith, even though their city was in the grip of Satan's oppression - to the degree that Antipas was executed for his faith. Yet this enduring church had allowed both heresy and immorality to creep into the church.

How did this happen?

Perhaps they had given way to the pressure of the prevailing ungodly culture. Evidently they had tolerated the teaching of the Nicolaitans (a powerful group of heretical preachers), because Jesus said he would come and fight against the Nicolaitans with the sword of his mouth (the double-edged sword of his word). However it happened, this seemingly strong church became infected with false teaching.

While we don't know exactly how this happened, we do learn how to fix the problem: we need to return to the truth of Scripture. The cure is to re-align our thinking from man's opinions to God's words.

This letter also makes it clear that Jesus is concerned about our behaviour as well as our doctrine. This is not a new thought (e.g. Mark 9:42 - "Whoever will cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him if he were thrown into the sea with a millstone hung around his neck.") While we are saved by grace alone and not by works, our deeds DO matter to God. Jesus came to rescue us from sin - so to return to sin (and worse, teach others to sin) is to reject (even oppose) his work!

These two rebukes actually go together; if we tolerate unbiblical teaching, we open the door to teachings that undermine Biblical ethics and morality. What we believe ultimately affects how we live. For example, if we are taught that immorality is OK, we are far more likely to behave immorally. The problem is far greater than one of doctrine; it is about how we actually live.

We would be wise to learn from this church - to guard our doctrine. It matters to Jesus and it should matter to us! Many of us are privileged to have the Bible readily available; we would be wise to get to know what it teaches - and put these things into practice!

5: Jesus' Letter to the Church in Thyatira

Revelation 2:18-29

To the angel of the assembly in Thyatira write:

The Son of God, who has his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like burnished brass, says these things:

I know your works, your love, faith, service, patient endurance, and that your last works are more than the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate your woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. She teaches and seduces my servants to commit sexual immorality, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great oppression, unless they repent of her works. I will kill her children with Death, and all the assemblies will know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts. I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

But to you I say, to the rest who are in Thyatira, as many as don't have this teaching, who don't know what some call 'the deep things of Satan,' to you I say, I am not putting any other burden on you.

Nevertheless, hold that which you have firmly until I come. He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with a rod of iron, shattering them like clay pots; as I also have received of my Father: and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

This church also felt the powerful pull of false teaching that leads sincere believers to sin:

“She **teaches** and **seduces my servants** to commit sexual immorality, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.”

We also see another danger here - the danger of the false prophet. It is alarming how a charismatic individual can convince their audience that they are hearing God and speaking on his behalf - yet they speak evil. Such people can be hard to deal with, particularly if they have a following. Yet we cannot be silent when people speak what is clearly contrary to Scripture. Jesus rebukes the church for tolerating Jezebel's false “ministry”:

“You tolerate your woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess”

Jesus also highlights the seduction of “the deep things of Satan” - of “new revelation” or “special revelation” or “deep teaching”. Cults can form and churches can split when a leader proclaims some “new revelation” or “deeper understanding”. This deception is not too different from the original deception in Eden, when Eve sought to be more than she was and to know more than God had revealed. We need to be on our guard against such things!

Jesus also encourages the faithful. When we have heresy and immorality all around us, we can get discouraged. Sometimes we just need to “hold on” (“...hold that which you have firmly until I come”). There are times when we simply have to endure; holding on to Jesus, to what he has revealed to us and to what he has done in our lives. In his perfect time, he will defeat his enemies (we'll see this as we read on)... and he will bring us through our times of testing!

6: Jesus' Letter to the Church in Sardis

Revelation 3:1-6

And to the angel of the assembly in Sardis write:

He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars says these things:

I know your works, that you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and keep the things that remain, which you were about to throw away, for I have found no works of yours perfected before my God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard. Keep it and repent. If therefore you won't watch, I will come as a thief, and you won't know what hour I will come upon you.

Nevertheless you have a few names in Sardis that didn't defile their garments. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no way blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

This must have been a frightening message to receive! This church had a reputation for being "an alive church". They must have *looked* pretty good. They probably thought they were doing well. Yet, Jesus said they were actually a "dead church".

This highlights a frightening possibility: we can have a church that *seems* to be doing well, but is actually doing badly.

And because we *think* we're doing well, we continue to operate what is actually a lifeless church.

How do we get so misled?

The key word is “reputation” - this is what people think and say of us. When our reputation is important to us, we can fall into the trap of listening to *people* more than Jesus!

There is a very real danger of doing things that gain the approval of people - at the expense of seeking Jesus' approval and direction. We enjoy recognition and popularity, and we want to be “relevant” in our community... so we must be careful not to let the community lead us instead of Jesus.

Another frightening rebuke is:

“I have found no works of yours perfected”.

It is possible to be lulled into complacency. This can result in our assigned work on earth being unfinished when Jesus returns.

Complacency lulls us into passivity. We feel that “we have arrived”, that “our work is done”. This is one of the dangers of apparent success; it can lull us into a place where we settle into a state that is far short of our potential and our mandate from God.

Jesus remedy is to revisit the basics:

“Remember therefore how you have received and heard. Keep it and repent.”

I believe we need to regularly stop and do this:

- go back to the Gospel, and Jesus' words and ways
- take hold of these things and change our thinking and ways accordingly
- get on with the mission that Jesus has given us!

It's great to have a good reputation! But let's not let that seduce us, side-track us or lull us into complacency!

7: Jesus' Letter to the Church in Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13

To the angel of the assembly in Philadelphia write:

He who is holy, he who is true, he who has the key of David, he who opens and no one can shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says these things:

I know your works (behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one can shut), that you have a little power, and kept my word, and didn't deny my name. Behold, I give some of the synagogue of Satan, of those who say they are Jews, and they are not, but lie - behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you kept my command to endure, I also will keep you from the hour of testing which is to come on the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming quickly! Hold firmly that which you have, so that no one takes your crown.

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will go out from there no more. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

After some of the stern rebukes we have read, this letter is particularly tender. Jesus knows that this congregation has little strength, but commends them for keeping his word and not denying his name.

Jesus recognises their "little power" - but also their faithful endurance. They were not a "strong church" or a "high impact church". They may have been labelled as a "low impact church", or a "weak church" - or even an "insignificant church".

But they were a *faithful* church. Their limited strength was directed at faithfully following Jesus and holding on to the truth of the Gospel.

Jesus applauded that!

Jesus also promised something particularly kind:

“I also will keep you from the hour of testing which is to come on the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

This is a beautiful picture of the Good Shepherd! Jesus knew that these sheep had little strength - perhaps being faithful under their present degree of persecution was close to their breaking point - so he promised to shelter them from the greater trials that were coming.

This is a very encouraging glimpse of the heart of Jesus - we see that he knows us well and shepherds us accordingly - his goal is not to lose us but to get us home!

In their weakness, Jesus encourages this church. He doesn't focus on their weaknesses and give them “ten tips on how to become stronger sheep”; he points them to himself. When we see Jesus clearly, we become instantly stronger!

- Jesus is holy: there is no “dark side” to him, so we can trust him with our lives. He will do us good, not harm!
- Jesus is true: there is no deceit in him, so we can believe everything he said!
- Jesus is Lord of all: what he opens no one can shut and what he shuts no one can open!

- Jesus is our advocate and defender: while others may accuse us and criticise us now, Jesus will vindicate us in the end!
- Jesus is our protector: we may be weak, but he is strong. He is fully able to protect us against any enemy!
- Jesus promises eternal rewards to the faithful: right now, we may feel like we are “losers” - but Jesus will reward our faithfulness for all eternity!

When we feel weak and weary, we need to look to Jesus and remember who he is: our shepherd, our redeemer, our defender and our king!

Be faithful! Jesus is!!

8: Jesus' Letter to the Church in Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

To the angel of the assembly in Laodicea write:

The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of God's creation, says these things:

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing;' and don't know that you are the wretched one, miserable, poor, blind, and naked; I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich; and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

As many as I love, I reprove and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with me.

He who overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

"Everything in moderation" is a popular statement in some circles. It sounds so reasonable - and so respectable. And "moderates" are unlikely to be persecuted - because they never take a strong stand!

But the Gospel and the Great Commission are not moderate! Jesus did not call for moderation; he called for absolute commitment!

Consider these words recorded in Luke 14:26-27: "If anyone comes to me, and doesn't disregard his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can't be my disciple. Whoever doesn't bear his own cross, and come after me, can't be my disciple."

So Jesus called this church to make up their mind:

- Are they "in" or "out"?
- Are they disciples or not?
- Are their lives laid down or not?

He makes his feelings very clear: "neither here nor there" disgusts him; he'd rather we be cold than lukewarm!

Jesus also challenged their attitude: it seems they had a smug, self-sufficient attitude: "I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing." Their wealth had evidently blinded them into believing that they were in a great place, whereas in reality they were in a shocking place - "the wretched one, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

Jesus called the church to reinvest their wealth. Instead of holding on to it, they needed to invest in what would bring riches in heaven: pure faith in him, holiness and spiritual sight. This is true wealth!

"I stand at the door and knock"

These words are often quoted to unbelievers, but they are actually spoken to believers who have "lost the plot" and are the object of a scathing rebuke from their Lord. The wonderful news is that when we "lose the plot", Jesus does not walk away in offence! Because he loves us, he rebukes us - "As many as I love, I reprove and chasten."

Even though these believers are in such a bad place that they revolt Jesus, he knocks on their door to be invited in for fellowship! He truly is the “friend of sinners”!

This letter is a powerful call to “get our house in order”! We would do well to heed the call - there is a great reward when we do! Jesus wants to enjoy a great relationship with us - if we would just make up our minds to be “all-in”!

9: God is at the Centre of it All

Revelation 4

After these things I looked and saw a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, like a trumpet speaking with me, was one saying, "Come up here, and I will show you the things which must happen after this."

Immediately I was in the Spirit. Behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting on the throne that looked like a jasper stone and a sardius. There was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald to look at. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones. On the thrones were twenty-four elders sitting, dressed in white garments, with crowns of gold on their heads. Out of the throne proceed lightnings, sounds, and thunders. There were seven lamps of fire burning before his throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Before the throne was something like a sea of glass, similar to crystal. In the middle of the throne, and around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within. They have no rest day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come!"

When the living creatures give glory, honour, and thanks to him who sits on the throne, to him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives forever and ever, and throw their crowns before the throne, saying,

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honour, and the power, for you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!"

This vision is a first of a number of glimpses of the throne room of heaven. From it, we see clearly that:

God is at the centre - everything revolves around him

This vision is absolutely focussed on God - and it gives us a spectacular view of him! He is glorious beyond description! He is constantly worshipped - because he is constantly worthy of worship!

- He is GOD!

- He is GLORIOUS!

- He is WORTHY OF GLORY, HONOUR AND POWER!

- He CREATED IT ALL! And he is therefore ENTHRONED OVER IT ALL.

Oh that we would have a view of God like this!

10: The Glory of Jesus

Revelation 5

I saw, in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a book written inside and outside, sealed shut with seven seals. I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice,

“Who is worthy to open the book, and to break its seals?”

No one in heaven above, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book or to look in it. Then I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look in it.

One of the elders said to me, “Don’t weep. Behold, the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome: he who opens the book and its seven seals.”

I saw in the middle of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the middle of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

Then he came, and he took it out of the right hand of him who sat on the throne. Now when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sang a new song, saying,

“You are worthy to take the book and to open its seals: for you were killed, and bought us for God with your blood out of every tribe, language, people, and nation, and made us kings and priests to our God, and we will reign on the earth.”

I saw, and I heard something like a voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders. The number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who has been killed to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and blessing!"

I heard every created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honour, the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen!"

The four living creatures said, "Amen!" Then the elders fell down and worshipped.

This chapter shows Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, exalted and worshipped for what he has done! We see him worshipped by the living creatures, the elders, the angels... and finally, by every creature!

We also see the Lamb, the one who ushered in the church age with his sacrifice on the cross, being given the right to end the age.

This is our king!!

11: The End Begins

Revelation 6:1-8

I saw that the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying, as with a voice of thunder, "Come and see!" And behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow. A crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come!" Another came out: a red horse. To him who sat on it was given power to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another. There was given to him a great sword.

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come and see!" And behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a balance in his hand. I heard a voice in the middle of the four living creatures saying, "A choenix of wheat for a denarius, and three choenix of barley for a denarius! Don't damage the oil and the wine!"

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see!" And behold, a pale horse, and the name of he who sat on it was Death. Hades followed with him. Authority over one fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword, with famine, with death, and by the wild animals of the earth was given to him.

A truly dreadful time is coming. When "time is up", God will bring a foretaste of his wrath to the earth. Battles of conquest, violent conflict, crop failure and even attacks by wild animals will be experienced at an unprecedented level. The days of God's patient waiting will come to an abrupt end.

2 Peter 3:9-10

The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but he is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Let's make the most of the time we have; one day, God's season of patient waiting for man's repentance will come to an end!

12: The Prayers of the Martyrs

Revelation 6:9-11

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed for the Word of God, and for the testimony of the Lamb which they had. They cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, Master, the holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" A long white robe was given to each of them. They were told that they should rest yet for a while, until their fellow servants and their brothers, who would also be killed even as they were, should complete their course.

I personally find it hard to read and hear stories of martyrdom - that godly men and women would be killed, often brutally, for their testimony of Jesus. To me, it's a look into the eyes of the devil - seeing his hatred of those who put their faith in Jesus.

In contrast, I find it beautiful to read that the souls of the martyrs are to be found under the altar of the throne room of heaven. It may have seemed as if God had forsaken them, but here we see that they were welcomed into a privileged place in the presence of God.

In this age, we do not always see God defending or avenging his martyrs. But, at the end of time, they *will* see God avenge them. Justice WILL be done. (Romans 12:19 - "Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, 'Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord.'")

We also see the difficult truth that martyrdom will be an ongoing reality until the end of the age. Even at the "beginning of the end", believers will be killed for their faith. God allows this and we have to accept this. We can take consolation in knowing that their deaths take them to a place of glory!

13: The Wrath of God

Revelation 6:12-17

I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake. The sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became as blood. The stars of the sky fell to the earth, like a fig tree dropping its unripe figs when it is shaken by a great wind. The sky was removed like a scroll when it is rolled up. Every mountain and island were moved out of their places. The kings of the earth, the princes, the commanding officers, the rich, the strong, and every slave and free person, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. They told 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 his wrath has come; and who is able to stand?"

Some scorn those who believe in God - and in particular, those who warn of his justice and coming wrath. Their human senses show them nothing of this as they figuratively (and sometimes literally) "get away with murder".

When the wrath of God is finally unleashed, it will be absolutely terrifying, even to the toughest and mightiest. They would rather die than face it!

Know this - in due time, the wrath of God *will* be poured out - whether we believe it or not!

14: God's "Pause for his People"

Revelation 7:1-8

After this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth, or on the sea, or on any tree. I saw another angel ascend from the sunrise, having the seal of the living God. He cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Don't harm the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads!" I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel: of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed, of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, and of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.

As we see the unleashing of the wrath of God, we see that this is not a wild fury. At a pivotal moment, God "hits the pause button"... the next unleashing must wait for a key task - the "sealing", or marking of his servants.

No reason is given at this stage why they are sealed (this is revealed later), but it is clearly important to God that his servants are identified as his before the next events take place.

I think it is remarkable and wonderful that God would stop everything in order to put a mark of approval/ownership/ commission on his servants. In the midst of the awful outpouring of wrath, God pauses to attend to his people!

15: Believers in the Great Tribulation

Revelation 7:9-17

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could count, out of every nation and of all tribes, peoples, and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, dressed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. They cried with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation be to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" All the angels were standing around the throne, the elders, and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before his throne, and worshipped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power, and might, be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

One of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and where did they come from?"

I told him, "My lord, you know."

He said to me, "These are those who came out of the great suffering. They washed their robes, and made them white in the Lamb's blood. Therefore they are before the throne of God, they serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them. They will never be hungry or thirsty any more. The sun won't beat on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the middle of the throne shepherds them and leads them to springs of life-giving waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Some believe that God would not allow his people to experience "the tribulation", but in this glimpse of heaven, John sees "a great multitude, which no man could count, out of every nation and of all tribes, peoples, and languages".

We see that a vast number of people from every people group will experience great tribulation. Evidently this is something that many of God's people will experience.

Others believe that hardship is a sign of God's displeasure or our sin - but these people are described as "They washed their robes, and made them white in the Lamb's blood". These people are clearly precious to God, for they are rewarded with a place in his presence!

We read in Hebrews that hardship should be regarded as the discipline of the Father - it is a *good* thing!

Hebrews 12:7-11

"It is for discipline that you endure. God deals with you as with children, for what son is there whom his father doesn't discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have been made partakers, then you are illegitimate, and not children. Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they indeed, for a few days, punished us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

16: Silence in Heaven

Revelation 8:1-5

When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer. Much incense was given to him, that he should add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. The angel took the censer, and he filled it with the fire of the altar, then threw it on the earth. Thunders, sounds, lightnings, and an earthquake followed.

Here we see another pause in heaven. Before the trumpets herald the outpouring of wrath, there is a time of silence. This is no frenzy of anger; there is a calm, deliberate order.

As the seven angels prepare to sound their trumpets, another angel presents the prayers of God's people to God. *These prayers are heard by God before the trumpets sound* - it is comforting to know that in this most terrifying time, God stops to listen to the prayers of his people.

The prayers having been heard, the censer is now filled with fire from the altar in heaven and hurled onto the earth. God has paused, God has listened to the prayers of his people... now he unleashes his wrath on the earth.

17: The First Four Trumpets

Revelation 8:6-13

The seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

The first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. One third of the earth was burned up, and one third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

The second angel sounded, and something like a great burning mountain was thrown into the sea. One third of the sea became blood, and one third of the living creatures which were in the sea died. One third of the ships were destroyed.

The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from the sky, burning like a torch, and it fell on one third of the rivers, and on the springs of the waters. The name of the star is called "Wormwood." One third of the waters became wormwood. Many people died from the waters, because they were made bitter.

The fourth angel sounded, and one third of the sun was struck, and one third of the moon, and one third of the stars; so that one third of them would be darkened, and the day wouldn't shine for one third of it, and the night in the same way.

I saw, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe! Woe! Woe for those who dwell on the earth, because of the other voices of the trumpets of the three angels, who are yet to sound!"

The first four trumpets bring about *partial* destruction of key parts of earth as we know it: plant life, sea life, fresh water and light. Earth as we know it is coming to an end.

Yet there is a restraint from God - typically the degree of destruction is only one third. Again we see that God's wrath is poured out in a *measured, controlled* way.

Even in his wrath, God is measured, in control. His wrath is not like human rage that can often run out of control. It is comforting to know that God is always perfect in all of his ways, even when dispensing his wrath!

18: The Fifth Trumpet

Revelation 9:1-12

The fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from the sky which had fallen to the earth. The key to the pit of the abyss was given to him. He opened the pit of the abyss, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke from a burning furnace. The sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke from the pit. Then out of the smoke came locusts on the earth, and power was given to them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were told that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only those people who don't have God's seal on their foreheads. They were given power, not to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a person.

In those days people will seek death, and will in no way find it. They will desire to die, and death will flee from them. The shapes of the locusts were like horses prepared for war. On their heads were something like golden crowns, and their faces were like people's faces. They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like those of lions. They had breastplates, like breastplates of iron. The sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, or of many horses rushing to war. They have tails like those of scorpions, and stings. In their tails they have power to harm men for five months. They have over them as king the angel of the abyss. His name in Hebrew is "Abaddon", but in Greek, he has the name "Apollyon".

The first woe is past. Behold, there are still two woes coming after this.

The fifth trumpet unleashes a reign of terror by forces of darkness.

Note that they are *permitted* to inflict great agony - but not kill - and they were only allowed to torment those who God had not put his seal on.

It may shock you to see that God releases dark forces to wreak their havoc; but be encouraged by two things:

- God watches over his own people. His faithful had previously been marked with a seal (chapter 7), and this seal protected them from the tormentors.
- The tormentors had a limit imposed on them by God - even in this terrible time of “all hell breaking loose”, God is in control - and God sets the rules!

19: The Sixth Trumpet

Revelation 9:13-21

The sixth angel sounded. I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Free the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates!"

The four angels were freed who had been prepared for that hour and day and month and year, so that they might kill one third of mankind. The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million. I heard the number of them. Thus I saw the horses in the vision, and those who sat on them, having breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulphur yellow; and the horses' heads resembled lions' heads. Out of their mouths proceed fire, smoke, and sulphur. By these three plagues were one third of mankind killed: by the fire, the smoke, and the sulphur, which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails. For their tails are like serpents, and have heads, and with them they harm.

The rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues, didn't repent of the works of their hands, that they wouldn't worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood; which can't see, hear, or walk. They didn't repent of their murders, their sorceries, their sexual immorality, or their thefts.

Finally death comes to *humans*, as a third of mankind are killed by a massive army.

In the midst of this though, we see that God's heart is STILL REDEMPTIVE! The lament is that *none of the wrath thus far has convinced the remaining unbelievers to repent.*

It is astonishing how stubborn people can be! Some people believe that anyone will repent if they see the power of God. But that is clearly not true; these people refuse to change their ways!

But this is pointed out because **God's love has not changed** - *he STILL seeks the redemption of the lost!*

Oh that our hearts will also be unswervingly redemptive!

20: A Mighty Angel

Revelation 10

I saw a mighty angel coming down out of the sky, clothed with a cloud. A rainbow was on his head. His face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. He had in his hand a little open book. He set his right foot on the sea, and his left on the land. He cried with a loud voice, as a lion roars. When he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices. When the seven thunders sounded, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from the sky saying, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders said, and don't write them."

The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to the sky, and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there will no longer be delay, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as he declared to his servants, the prophets. The voice which I heard from heaven, again speaking with me, said, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land."

I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. He said to me, "Take it, and eat it. It will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey."

I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it. It was as sweet as honey in my mouth. When I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. They told me, "You must prophesy again over many peoples, nations, languages, and kings."

Angels are seldom portrayed in the arts as overwhelmingly powerful. Robes, wings, trumpets and halos abound, but they

are not typically intimidating creatures. This “mighty angel” is terrifying! He stands with one foot on the sea and one foot on the land - he is evidently HUGE! And his shout was terrifying - like a lion's roar! It summoned voices of thunder!

This mighty angel brings a message: time is up! No more waiting for people to repent (2 Peter 3:9-10 - “The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but he is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”)

The angel then gives John a scroll to eat and commissions him to prophesy further about many things. The scene is similar to Ezekiel's visionary experience (Ezekiel 3:3-4 - “He said to me, “Son of man, cause your belly to eat, and fill your bowels with this scroll that I give you.” Then I ate it; and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. He said to me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel, and speak my words to them.””)

It is a wonderful picture of *God putting his words into his prophet*:

2 Peter 1:20-21

...no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit.

21: Showdown in Jerusalem

Revelation 11:1-14

A reed like a rod was given to me. Someone said, "Rise, and measure God's temple, and the altar, and those who worship in it. Leave out the court which is outside of the temple, and don't measure it, for it has been given to the nations. They will tread the holy city under foot for forty-two months. I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands, standing before the Lord of the earth. If anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies. If anyone desires to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, that it may not rain during the days of their prophecy. They have power over the waters, to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them. Their dead bodies will be in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. From among the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations, people will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not allow their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. Those who dwell on the earth rejoice over them, and they will be glad. They will give gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

After the three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood on their feet. Great fear fell on those who saw them. I heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" They went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies saw them.

In that day there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified, and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe comes quickly.

“The gloves are now off” as some would say. Two witnesses emerge who prophesy for 3,5 years. They are not “meek and mild”; they defeat their opponents with terrifying supernatural powers!

Then the beast that comes up from the Abyss overpowers them and kills them. We see the evil that has gripped the people of the earth as they gloat and celebrate the death of the prophets.

But God has the upper hand - as always! 3,5 days later, they rise from the dead and ascend to heaven. A terrible earthquake kills 7 000 and the survivors have a moment of clarity - fear of God strikes them and they give glory to him.

It is said that when the pressure is high, we see who people really are. Evil is sometimes revealed in shocking degrees, including absolute hatred.

*As frightening as unbridled evil is, God is even more fearsome. He is to be feared more! It may not always be evident, but he *always* has the upper hand!*

22: It Begins...

Revelation 11:15-19

The seventh angel sounded, and great voices in heaven followed, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ. He will reign forever and ever!"

The twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God's throne, fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying: "We give you thanks, Lord God, the Almighty, the one who is and who was; because you have taken your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and your wrath came, as did the time for the dead to be judged, and to give your bondservants the prophets, their reward, as well as to the saints, and those who fear your name, to the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."

God's temple that is in heaven was opened, and the ark of the Lord's covenant was seen in his temple. Lightnings, sounds, thunders, an earthquake, and great hail followed.

Finally the seventh, and last, trumpet is sounded. The end begins! There is no more latitude, no more patient waiting; the time has come to "wrap it up", to execute final judgement, reward and punishment. The Ark of the Covenant is revealed in God's heavenly temple - the holiest of holies is opened, accompanied by thunder, lightning, a hailstorm and an earthquake!

23: Great Battles in Heaven and on Earth

Revelation 12

A great sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child. She cried out in pain, labouring to give birth. Another sign was seen in heaven.

Behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven crowns. His tail drew one third of the stars of the sky, and threw them to the earth. The dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. Her child was caught up to God, and to his throne. The woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that there they may nourish her one thousand two hundred sixty days.

There was war in the sky. Michael and his angels made war on the dragon. The dragon and his angels made war. They didn't prevail. No place was found for them any more in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, the old serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying,

“Now the salvation, the power, and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ has come; for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life, even to death. Therefore rejoice, heavens, and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil has gone down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time.”

When the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. Two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, so that she might be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. The serpent spewed water out of his mouth after the woman like a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream. The earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon spewed out of his mouth. The dragon grew angry with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep God's commandments and hold Jesus' testimony.

John sees "a great sign" - first, a heavenly battle between good and evil which sees the devil being cast out of heaven and hurled down to earth. Then war shifts to earth. The scene ends with the devil declaring war against Jesus' followers.

Many have debated the detailed meaning of the sign; we won't join those debates. We can see some "plain meanings" though:

- We see our real enemy, first encountered in Genesis, alive and at work deceiving mankind - "...the old serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world."
- We see Satan and his angels being cast out of heaven - "He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."
- We see the reality of the state of war between the devil and Jesus' followers - "The dragon grew angry with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep God's commandments and hold Jesus' testimony."

This sign gives a spectacular visual backdrop to writings of Paul and Peter:

Ephesians 6:10-13

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober and self-controlled. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

The devil is real and at work. He has lost his footing in heaven, but is still very much at work on earth. We need to live accordingly. Fortunately, as we will see later, his final defeat *will* come!

24: The Beast from the Sea

Revelation 13:1-10

Then I stood on the sand of the sea. I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads. On his horns were ten crowns, and on his heads, blasphemous names. The beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. One of his heads looked like it had been wounded fatally. His fatal wound was healed, and the whole earth marvelled at the beast. They worshipped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" A mouth speaking great things and blasphemy was given to him. Authority to make war for forty-two months was given to him. He opened his mouth for blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his dwelling, those who dwell in heaven.

It was given to him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them. Authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation was given to him. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been killed.

If anyone has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, he will go into captivity. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, he must be killed. Here is the endurance and the faith of the saints.

John sees another sign - a beast from the sea. It is empowered by the dragon (the devil) and appears invincible.

It is difficult for some of us to accept that God would allow an evil ruler to attack and conquer his people - yet he does. We saw it in the exile of Israel and Judah as a discipline, and also in the vicious persecution of the church.

“If anyone is to go into captivity, he will go into captivity. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, he must be killed.”

While we see that God permits such things, we also see that God is fully aware of what is happening. *God is not unaware of the trials of his people, nor is he taken by surprise by them.*

We don't understand why such things must happen, but we take comfort that God remains completely “in the picture” and completely in control.

25: The Second Beast

Revelation 13:11-18

I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke like a dragon. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. He makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. He performs great signs, even making fire come down out of the sky to the earth in the sight of people.

He deceives my own people who dwell on the earth because of the signs he was granted to do in front of the beast, saying to those who dwell on the earth that they should make an image to the beast who had the sword wound and lived. It was given to him to give breath to it, to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause as many as wouldn't worship the image of the beast to be killed.

He causes all, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, and the free and the slave, to be given marks on their right hands, or on their foreheads; and that no one would be able to buy or to sell, unless he has that mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Here is wisdom. He who has understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. His number is six hundred sixty-six.

This second beast is the subject of many theories and debates as to its number; it is possible that the meaning will only be clear in that time. Rather than weigh in on the debate, let's rather look to clearer messages:

“He had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke like a dragon.”

The beast has lamb-like attributes, but speaks evil. Jesus warned of false prophets who appear to represent God, but are in fact enemies of the church (Matthew 7:15 - “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves.”).

“He deceives my own people who dwell on the earth because of the signs he was granted to do...”

Beware of the seduction of signs and wonders, they do not necessarily mean that God is in them. We see here that counterfeit signs can deceive many. We must heed Jesus' warning! (Matthew 24:24-25 - “For there will arise false christs, and false prophets, and they will show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen ones. Behold, I have told you beforehand.”)

“He causes all, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, and the free and the slave, to be given marks on their right hands, or on their foreheads; and that no one would be able to buy or to sell, unless he has that mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.”

We see here the evil of DOMINATION - the beast takes absolute control over the people. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:13, “...who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love”. Here we see the dominion of darkness being outwardly affected. But remember, Jesus came to set us free (John 8:36 - “If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed”).

While the number of the beast may not be clear at present (it surely will be when we need to know), we do see the WAYS of the beast.

We would be wise to watch out for “wolves in sheep's clothing”:

- They present themselves as representing God, but their ways are evil.
- They operate powerfully in the supernatural and seduce many, yet their power is from the devil, not God.
- They dominate people, controlling the lives of those they influence.

1 John 4:1-3

Beloved, don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit who doesn't confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God, and this is the spirit of the Antichrist, of whom you have heard that it comes. Now it is in the world already.

26: The 144 000 Victorious!

Revelation 14:1-5

I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him a number, one hundred forty-four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads.

I heard a sound from heaven, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of a great thunder. The sound which I heard was like that of harpists playing on their harps. They sing a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the one hundred forty-four thousand, those who had been redeemed out of the earth.

These are those who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were redeemed by Jesus from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb. In their mouth was found no lie, for they are blameless.

Earlier we read of the 144 000 being sealed, marked as belonging to God. Many tumultuous events later, we see them worshipping before the throne of God. They worship in purity - they are blameless.

We see something of the privilege or blessedness of worship - they are rewarded with a new song of worship that only they can learn. It has been said that ministry is a privilege and a reward - we ought to be grateful for opportunities to glorify God!

Some wonder if it is possible to live godly lives in a godless world. So much evil, so many temptations, such enormous pressure to compromise! These men prove that it is possible to live blameless lives at a time when “all hell was breaking loose” - literally!

Philippians 2:14-15

Do all things without complaining and arguing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God *without defect in the middle of a crooked and perverse generation*, among whom you are seen as lights in the world.

27: Three Angels, Three Messages

Revelation 14:6-13

I saw an angel flying in mid heaven, having an eternal Good News to proclaim to those who dwell on the earth, and to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He said with a loud voice, "Fear the Lord, and give him glory; for the hour of his judgement has come. Worship him who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and the springs of waters!"

Another, a second angel, followed, saying, "Babylon the great has fallen, which has made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her sexual immorality."

Another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead, or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger. He will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. They have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the perseverance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'"

"Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow with them."

Three angels are dispatched, each with a message:

The first proclaims the Gospel and calls mankind back to their correct attitude towards God: "Fear the Lord, and give him glory". As the age enters its final days, God still calls mankind back - to repent and believe. God does not change - even as his wrath is about to be poured out, he continues to call mankind to himself.

The second proclaims the final demise of evil - "Babylon the great has fallen". Evil seems to persist relentlessly and often appears to have the upper hand as so many people are deceived and society declines. But God is still ruling over it all - and Babylon will fall!

The third warns of the coming judgement for those who take the mark of the beast. He also calls for patient endurance on the part of those who are suffering for refusing to take the mark. Those who die for their faithfulness are blessed. For those of us who are conditioned to avoid suffering, this sounds strange - but this is Biblical thinking. Suffering - particularly for one's faith - is not abnormal and Jesus foretold this (see John 15:18-21, 16:1-4, 33). Early martyrs considered it an honour to die for their testimony of Jesus!

28: Harvesting Earth and the Grapes of Wrath

Revelation 14:14-20

I looked, and saw a white cloud, and on the cloud one sitting like a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

Another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Send your sickle, and reap; for the hour to reap has come; for the harvest of the earth is ripe!" He who sat on the cloud thrust his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven. He also had a sharp sickle.

Another angel came out from the altar, he who has power over fire, and he called with a great voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Send your sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for the earth's grapes are fully ripe!"

The angel thrust his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God.

The wine press was trodden outside of the city, and blood came out of the wine press, even to the bridles of the horses, as far as one thousand six hundred stadia. [300 km].

This "harvest of the earth" is the fulfilment of Jesus' words. In Matthew 13, Jesus explained his Parable of the Weeds:

Matthew 13:36-43

Then Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into the house. His disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the darnel weeds of the field."

He answered them, "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the Kingdom; and the darnel weeds are the children of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

"As therefore the darnel weeds are gathered up and burned with fire; so will it be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do iniquity, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Sometimes delays can cause us to doubt what God has said. Certainly Israel waited centuries for their Messiah to come. King David's Psalm 22 was written about 1000 years before the crucifixion and Isaiah foretold the crucifixion roughly 700 years before it happened (Isaiah 53). Similarly, Jesus foretold the end of the age and his return and we have waited 2000 years.

People were becoming impatient while the apostles were still alive, and Peter addressed this in 2 Peter 3:8-10:

But don't forget this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but he is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

We can look back at the Old Testament and see that God does everything he says he will do - in his time. We can therefore look forward knowing that he will do these things as well!

All of us have experienced "sin against us" to some degree - and many sins seem to go unpunished. The song leader Asaph wrestled with this and described his struggle in Psalm 73. In the end, God's wrath for all sin will be poured out - and it will be a massive outpouring! John saw a 300 km lake of blood flowing from the winepress of God's wrath - that is a lot of wrath!

In God's perfect time, this age will be concluded. He will end it perfectly, and the end will include perfect justice (and, thankfully, perfect grace as well). He is in control. He knows exactly what he is doing - and we, who do not know, need to trust him!

29: The Beast Can Be Overcome!

Revelation 15:1-4

I saw another great and marvellous sign in the sky: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them God's wrath is finished. I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who overcame the beast, his image, and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

"Great and marvellous are your works, Lord God, the Almighty! Righteous and true are your ways, you King of the nations. Who wouldn't fear you, Lord, and glorify your name? For you only are holy. For all the nations will come and worship before you. For your righteous acts have been revealed."

The mysterious beast has received a great deal of attention and many attempts have been made to identify him. To some, the thought of the beast invokes fear. Will I be able to withstand him? Will I eventually succumb to pressure and take his mark?

In this vision we see that he *can* be overcome! A victorious throng stand by this sea of glass!

Yet they are not celebrating their victory - they are worshipping God! They are celebrating the display of the righteousness of God!

These victorious ones understand how victory is won. It is not won through their own strength; it is won by recognising the glory of God!

We should do the same things:

- Recognise the great things that God has done.
- Recognise the justice and holiness of God.
- Respond in reverent awe - the fear of God - and worship!

30: The Seven Last Plagues

Revelation 15:5 - 16:21

After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. The seven angels who had the seven plagues came out, clothed with pure, bright linen, and wearing golden sashes around their breasts.

One of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power. No one was able to enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels would be finished.

I heard a loud voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God on the earth!"

The first went, and poured out his bowl into the earth, and it became a harmful and evil sore on the people who had the mark of the beast, and who worshipped his image.

The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man. Every living thing in the sea died.

The third poured out his bowl into the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. I heard the angel of the waters saying, "You are righteous, who are and who were, O Holy One, because you have judged these things. For they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. They deserve this." I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are your judgements."

The fourth poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was given to him to scorch men with fire. People were scorched with great heat, and people blasphemed the name of God who has the

power over these plagues. They didn't repent and give him glory.

The fifth poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was darkened. They gnawed their tongues because of the pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores. They didn't repent of their works.

The sixth poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates. Its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings that come from the sunrise. I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, something like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs; which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them together for the war of that great day of God, the Almighty.

"Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his clothes, so that he doesn't walk naked, and they see his shame." He gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew, "Megiddo".

The seventh poured out his bowl into the air. A loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" There were lightnings, sounds, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake, such as has not happened since there were men on the earth, so great an earthquake, and so mighty. The great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. Every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. Great hailstones, about the weight of a talent, came down out of the sky on people. People blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, for this plague is exceedingly severe.

The wrath of God is a fearsome thing! Seven angels pour out a complete expression of God's wrath. Grace after grace has been poured out, and all who would repent have repented... now is the time for wrath to be poured out.

As the wrath of God is poured out, we see that the people still refuse to repent of what they had done. Instead, they hold on to their sin and curse God! It is no longer possible to *deny* him, but they still refuse to *submit* to him.

I find this more frightening than the plagues - that a person can see God at work, hear his rebuke, feel the pain of consequences of sin and still insist on living in rebellion against him!

31: Babylon Reaps What She Has Sown

Revelation 17

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying,

“Come here. I will show you the judgement of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed sexual immorality. Those who dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her sexual immorality.”

He carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of the sexual immorality of the earth. And on her forehead a name was written,

“MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered with great amazement. The angel said to me, “Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go into destruction. Those who dwell on the earth and whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel when they see that the beast was, and is not, and shall be present.

Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. They are seven kings. Five have fallen, the one is, the other has not yet come. When

he comes, he must continue a little while. The beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goes to destruction. The ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These have one mind, and they give their power and authority to the beast. These will war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings, and those who are with him are called chosen and faithful.”

He said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages. The ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the prostitute, will make her desolate, will strip her naked, will eat her flesh, and will burn her utterly with fire. For God has put in their hearts to do what he has in mind, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished. The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

Here we see a graphic picture of God's judgement over “Babylon the Great”. There are mysteries to unravel in the imagery, but we'll focus on the essence of the moment: this great force of evil will be severely punished!

Jesus warned of the dire consequences of leading people away from God and into sin:

Matthew 18:6-7

...whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him if a huge millstone were hung around his neck, and that he were sunk in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must be that the occasions come, but woe to that person through whom the occasion comes!

Here we see how profound that woe is!

Babylon is subjected to unbridled hatred, humiliation and violence - her destruction is as ugly and brutal as all of the atrocities she has committed and incited.

Babylon once seemed to be a powerful, unstoppable force. Sometimes we see that kind of evil at work. We see evildoers who seem to “operate above the law” and destroy any who would oppose them. It appears that no one can stop them. But Jesus reigns over all - he is the “Lord of lords and King of kings”. Their time *will* come. It may not be in our lifetime, but Jesus will ultimately deal with them.

32: Babylon's Subjects Mourn their Loss

Revelation 18

After these things, I saw another angel coming down out of the sky, having great authority. The earth was illuminated with his glory. He cried with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and she has become a habitation of demons, a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her sexual immorality, the kings of the earth committed sexual immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from the abundance of her luxury."

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, that you have no participation in her sins, and that you don't receive of her plagues, for her sins have reached to the sky, and God has remembered her iniquities. Return to her just as she returned, and repay her double as she did, and according to her works. In the cup which she mixed, mix to her double. However much she glorified herself, and grew wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning. For she says in her heart, 'I sit a queen, and am no widow, and will in no way see mourning.'

Therefore in one day her plagues will come: death, mourning, and famine; and she will be utterly burned with fire; for the Lord God who has judged her is strong. The kings of the earth who committed sexual immorality and lived wantonly with her will weep and wail over her, when they look at the smoke of her burning, standing far away for the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For your judgement has come in one hour.' The merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise any more: merchandise of gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, scarlet, all expensive wood, every vessel of ivory, every vessel made of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble; and

cinnamon, incense, perfume, frankincense, wine, olive oil, fine flour, wheat, sheep, horses, chariots, and people's bodies and souls. The fruits which your soul lusted after have been lost to you. All things that were dainty and sumptuous have perished from you, and you will find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, who were made rich by her, will stand far away for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was dressed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in an hour such great riches are made desolate.' Every ship master, and everyone who sails anywhere, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood far away, and cried out as they looked at the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like the great city?' They cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had their ships in the sea were made rich by reason of her great wealth!' For she is made desolate in one hour.

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, you saints, apostles, and prophets; for God has judged your judgement on her." A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down, and will be found no more at all. The voice of harpists, minstrels, flute players, and trumpeters will be heard no more at all in you. No craftsman, of whatever craft, will be found any more at all in you. The sound of a mill will be heard no more at all in you. The light of a lamp will shine no more at all in you. The voice of the bridegroom and of the bride will be heard no more at all in you; for your merchants were the princes of the earth; for with your sorcery all the nations were deceived. In her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on the earth."

Babylon has fallen. Her sentence has been carried out. Now those who were under her dominion mourn.

But they don't mourn *her*. They mourn the loss of the wealth and pleasure that they gained from her. Her power was in the deceitfulness of pleasure and wealth.

This is a sobering picture:

- We see how easily we can be seduced by pleasure and wealth - and how powerful the seduction is!
- We see how widespread this influence is, dominating government and business.
- We see how these systems exalt themselves above God and his people, oppressing, silencing, even killing those who would stand up for him.

This can seem to be “a lost cause” - it can appear that evil has won. But God remains exalted. He will deal with his enemies. God's people are not ultimately “on the losing side”; we may “lose some battles”, but we will “win the war”!

This is a message of encouragement for those who believe in Jesus. Be strong! Humanly, the odds can seem overwhelming, but remember who is over it all!

And he is at work in you:

1 John 4:4

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.

33: Worship and Wedding Preparations

Revelation 19:1-10

After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,

“Hallelujah! Salvation, power, and glory belong to our God; for his judgements are true and righteous. For he has judged the great prostitute, who corrupted the earth with her sexual immorality, and he has avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.”

A second said, “Hallelujah! Her smoke goes up forever and ever.” The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who sits on the throne, saying, “Amen! Hallelujah!”

A voice came from the throne, saying, “Give praise to our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, the small and the great!”

I heard something like the voice of a great multitude, and like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of mighty thunders, saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns! Let’s rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and let’s give the glory to him. For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready.” It was given to her that she would array herself in bright, pure, fine linen: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

He said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.’” He said to me, “These are true words of God.”

I fell down before his feet to worship him. He said to me, “Look! Don’t do it! I am a fellow bond-servant with you and with your brothers who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy.”

In this glimpse of heaven, we hear jubilant cheers and worship in response to the final demise of Babylon. God is just, and justice has finally been done. He said “vengeance is mine” and his martyrs have finally been avenged.

Then the focus shifts - it's time for a wedding! The bridegroom, Jesus, is waiting for his bride, the church. She has made herself ready! She is given magnificent wedding clothes - the righteous acts of God's children. A wedding feast is being prepared!

As we read of the events of the last days, we can get caught up in all of the judgements and conflicts. *But the end goal is a wedding!* Jesus, the Lamb of God, is the bridegroom, and he is going to receive the church as his bride. Yes, judgement and justice must be completed, but the end goal is for the Bride and Groom to be married and to live together forever!

At times, we have to fight battles and struggle through trials. Know this: the final goal is not to win the battles and get through the trials; it is to spend eternity in a magnificent union with Jesus! Let this goal inspire you as you fight your battles - you are on the way to heaven!

34: The King Goes to War

Revelation 19:11-21

I saw the heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it is called Faithful and True. In righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has names written and a name written which no one knows but he himself. He is clothed in a garment sprinkled with blood. His name is called "The Word of God."

The armies which are in heaven followed him on white horses, clothed in white, pure, fine linen. Out of his mouth proceeds a sharp, double-edged sword, that with it he should strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He treads the wine press of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty. He has on his garment and on his thigh a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

I saw an angel standing in the sun. He cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the sky, "Come! Be gathered together to the great supper of God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, small and great." I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him who sat on the horse, and against his army. The beast was taken, and with him the false prophet who worked the signs in his sight, with which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. The rest were killed with the sword of him who sat on the horse, the sword which came out of his mouth. All the birds were filled with their flesh.

Many pictures present Jesus the shepherd; here we see Jesus the general - the commander-in-chief! He is fearsome! He rides the king's white horse into battle against those who set themselves up against him. He defeats their armies, captures them, and throws them into the Lake of Fire. All the armies of the earth are no match for Jesus!

Let's understand that Jesus is a mighty warrior and a great king as well as a great shepherd - and worship and revere him accordingly!

35: Satan's Last Days

Revelation 20:1-10

I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were finished. After this, he must be freed for a short time.

I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was given to them. I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as didn't worship the beast nor his image, and didn't receive the mark on their forehead and on their hand. They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over these, the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him one thousand years.

And after the thousand years, Satan will be released from his prison, and he will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. They went up over the width of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints, and the beloved city. Fire came down out of heaven from God and devoured them. The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

In these glimpses of the heavenlies, we gain some insights into our greatest adversary - Satan. He is ancient, far older than we are. He is the snake, the one who convinced the first couple to step out from under the security of God's rule - and thereby gained an ugly dominion over mankind. He is "diabolos", the slanderer and false accuser. He is "Satanas", the adversary and accuser. He is the deceiver of nations. He is the enemy of God and of God's people.

Paul wrote of our true adversary and true battle in his letter to the Ephesian church:

Ephesians 6:12

For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

When we face opposition, are mistreated or persecuted, we need to remember who our true adversary is. Satan is our enemy. *And he is also the enemy of those who oppose, mistreat and persecute us.* He wants to blind *all* people to the goodness of God and the work of the cross of Christ. *Every* person needs to be rescued from him - including those who mistreat us. When we gain this perspective, we are able to pray for enemies as Jesus taught.

We also see that Satan will be defeated and punished for all he has done. He would like people to believe that he is in charge (and his limited dominion is indeed powerful) - but actually, Jesus reigns over all. Final justice *will* be done: the devil *will* receive his just punishment!

36: The Final Judgement

Revelation 20:11-15

I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them.

I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books.

Another book was opened, which is the book of life.

The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

We often think of justice in terms of our *present* situation. But final justice will only be dealt out at the end of the age. Every person will stand before the throne of God and face his perfect judgement. Some people get away with many things in this life, but they have only escaped justice for a time. Eternity lies before us all, and God's final justice will be inescapable.

Judgement appears to have two aspects to it. First, books are opened that reveal what we have done. Our deeds will be judged. But then, another book is opened - the book of life.

It is not clear what the implications will be of the judgement of our deeds. It *is* clear what the implications will be of the reading of the book of life. If our name is not in *that* book, our eternal destiny is the lake of fire!

This is sobering and encouraging. Some of us are very aware of our sins. In the hands of some judges, we would be damned. But God is a different kind of judge. He is a judge who extends perfect grace as well as perfect justice. When we put our faith in the work of the cross of Christ, we find that our just punishment has already been borne by Jesus - what amazing grace!

It would be extremely foolish to move on from this point without making up our minds about Jesus. Our eternal destiny hangs on one question alone: is our name written in the book of life? Please don't dismiss this question - your eternal destiny is at stake here!

The final judgement is a magnificent presentation of the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ. There is no way to deny our wrongdoing. We have all sinned - and the reading of the books will make that absolutely clear. The good news is that God has made a way for us to be spared eternal punishment for our sin. He has opened another book - the book of life. In his grace, he has offered payment for our sin and adoption as his children - through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Romans 5:6-9

For while we were yet weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man. Yet perhaps for a righteous person someone would even dare to die. But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him.

37: All Things New!

Revelation 21:1-8

I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more.

I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away."

He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." He said, "Write, for these words of God are faithful and true." He said to me, "I have become the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son. But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."

It is done! This age is over. This messy, sin-infected world is finished! God dismisses heaven and earth as we know it and makes a new heaven and a new earth. *Everything is new!*

The new realm is free of sin and the curses they brought - no more death, mourning, crying, or pain. All are now in a completely restored relationship with God as his children.

In a sense, God's original intent is restored. The Bible begins with Eden - with God, man and creation in perfect harmony. It ends with the new heaven and earth; with this harmony perfectly restored!

We live in an “in between place” - between Eden and the new heaven and earth, a place spoiled by sin. For most adults, we get used to it, “toughened up” by the trials that are part of this life. Yet this is not “normal” to God! If something within us cries out “there must be more, there must be better”, we are right! One day God's normal will be restored - magnificent creation in magnificent harmony with magnificent God! If our names are in the Lamb's Book of Life, this is our glorious, eternal destiny!

So be strong! Be encouraged! One day he will make all things new!

38: The New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:9-27

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were loaded with the seven last plagues came, and he spoke with me, saying, "Come here. I will show you the wife, the Lamb's bride."

He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, as if it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal; having a great and high wall; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. On the east were three gates; and on the north three gates; and on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.

He who spoke with me had for a measure a golden reed to measure the city, its gates, and its walls. The city is square, and its length is as great as its width. He measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand twelve stadia. Its length, width, and height are equal. Its wall is one hundred forty-four cubits, by the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was jasper. The city was pure gold, like pure glass. The foundations of the city's wall were adorned with all kinds of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; and the twelfth, amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls. Each one of the gates was made of one pearl. The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. The city has no need for the sun or

moon to shine, for the very glory of God illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk in its light.

The kings of the earth bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. Its gates will in no way be shut by day (for there will be no night there), and they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it so that they may enter. There will in no way enter into it anything profane, or one who causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life..

Sometimes things look as if they are way out of control - certainly the world today seems to be full of chaos and anarchy. In these times it can be hard to see the hand of God. Yet he has things perfectly planned from his heavenly, eternal perspective. Right now, sin and Satan are at work, so life can get messy and can be full of nasty surprises.

We have seen in some of the previous visions how God deliberately allows mankind and the devil some "room to manoeuvre". On earth, it can look as if God is not in control, but he is very much ruling over it all. His plan is "playing out". Hearts are being revealed and sides are being chosen. It is tragic (and so destructive) that some reject God, but all must choose their allegiance while living on earth. Both sides have to live together, like wheat and weeds sharing the same field until the harvest (Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43).

But, at the end of the age, sin and Satan will be defeated and "taken out" - they will not be able to infect the new heaven and the new earth! This is not a hope or an intention; it is a guaranteed plan of God! It *will* happen!

God has carefully designed a spectacularly beautiful new world - with a spectacularly beautiful order to it. In this vision, we see the new Jerusalem. It is designed and measurable; John sees it being measured out and he marvels at its magnificent design and beauty.

It has a heritage in the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles; Jews and gentiles together under Christ. In this vision, we see God's plan "coming together" gloriously!

Let these visions strengthen your faith! God is in complete control! His plan is unfolding! Yes, there are some ugly in-between moments, but there is a glorious conclusion for his children!

39: More than “Back to the Garden”!

Revelation 22:1-5

He showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruits, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will be no curse any more.

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no night, and they need no lamp light or sun light; for the Lord God will illuminate them. They will reign forever and ever.

The NIV translators title this passage “Eden Restored”. This certainly is beautifully reminiscent of Eden:

Genesis 2:8-10

Yahweh God planted a garden eastward, in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground Yahweh God made every tree to grow that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it was parted, and became the source of four rivers.

This new city is even more magnificent - perhaps we could call it “Eden resurrected” or “Eden glorified”! A river also flows through it, this one flowing with the water of life! Two trees of life are there. Most important of all, God is fully present - “They will see his face.”!

Genesis 2 and Revelation 22 show us something wonderful in the heart of God. He created us in his image not just to reflect his glory, but to enjoy relationship with him. This eternal time will be even more magnificent than Eden! God won't be a visitor; we'll dwell together!

John recorded a promise from Jesus:

John 14:2-4

In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also. You know where I go, and you know the way.

Some have pictured "heaven" as an ethereal place in clouds where we float around and play harps... This vision makes it clear that "heaven" is absolutely tangible and absolutely magnificent! This will be where we can finally enjoy life in its absolute fullness!

But the greatest joy of heaven will not be its magnificent beauty, rich provision or our perfect health; it will be a perfect, unbroken relationship with an ever-present God!

Believers in Jesus, what a glorious hope we have!

40: Epilogue

Revelation 22:6-21

He said to me, "These words are faithful and true. The Lord God of the spirits of the prophets sent his angel to show to his bond-servants the things which must happen soon."

"Behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Now I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who had shown me these things. He said to me, "See you don't do it! I am a fellow bond-servant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

He said to me, "Don't seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who acts unjustly, let him act unjustly still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still. He who is righteous, let him do righteousness still. He who is holy, let him be holy still."

"Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely.

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book. He who testifies these things says, "Yes, I come quickly."

Amen! Yes, come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints. Amen.

I hope you've enjoyed this journey through Revelation and the glimpses into the heavenlies that we gain from it. As we conclude the book, let me close with three thoughts:

"These words are faithful and true"

These visions are trustworthy! We can believe them! We can adjust our thinking and living accordingly! And we would be wise to do so!

"Yes, I come quickly."

We don't know when Jesus will return and these things will happen. It's taken longer than many thought; but they could begin at any time. Jesus taught his disciples to "be ready"; we need to live with this sense of readiness. In his parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the wise made proper provision for their wait for the bridegroom. They were ready if he came immediately and they were ready if he kept them waiting. We don't know exactly when he will come. Let's be ready - and let's stay ready!

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.”

I sincerely trust that my reflections have in no way added to, or taken from, the prophecies we have read! Please regard them as my personal “devotional reflections” - for that is all they are. I hope that they have stirred you to really appreciate this magnificent piece of Scripture! I urge you to take time to read the whole book again - this time on your own, with no comments from me - and allow God to stir you again!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you! Amen!