



REVELATION

part one: sooner than you think

CONTENT

Dawn Gentry, Karl Pagenkemper, Ken Dick, LifeWay Research,
Mark Ashton, Mark Richard, and Teresa Baumbach

EDITING

Dawn Gentry, Jed Logue, Joshua Lillie, Karl Pagenkemper, Leslie Feeney,
Marie Dufour, Rachel Bebee, and Tim Anstead

ART DIRECTION

Jed Logue, Jonathan Norton, Marie Dufour, and Mark Ashton

ILLUSTRATIONS

Dillon Wheelock and Marie Dufour

WORDMARK & LAYOUT DESIGN

Jonathan Norton, Kari Sagal, Marie Dufour, and Rachel Bebee

PHOTOGRAPHY

Eric Wendt; Kevin Carden (Lightstock.com); Claudiad, Frank Ramspott,
Johnny Damian, Kgfoto, LuckyTD, and Wael Alreweie (iStockphoto.com);
and Cole Keister (Unsplash.com)

BIBLE VERSES

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture is from the New International
Version (NIV), Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica; accessed
through BibleGateway.com

Published by Christ Community Church, © 2020
404 S. 108 Ave., Omaha, NE 68154
info@cccomaha.org | 402.330.3360 | cccomaha.org

REVELATION

part one: sooner than you think

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 6

WEEK ONE 15

Message Notes 16

Visual Aids 18

Personal Devotionals 23

Discussion Guide 29

WEEK TWO 33

Message Notes 34

Visual Aids 36

Personal Devotionals 39

Discussion Guide 45

WEEK THREE 49

Message Notes 50

Visuals Aids 52

Personal Devotionals 57

Discussion Guide 63

WEEK FOUR 67

Message Notes 68

Visual Aids 70

Personal Devotionals 75

Discussion Guide 81



SERIES INTRODUCTION

WHY STUDY THE END TIMES?

Let's face it, most of us avoid the book of Revelation. There is so much symbolism! So many possible interpretations, and even scholars disagree! So, how can I—a mere mortal—ever think that I could possibly understand this 2000-year-old book? And even if I could understand it, why go through all the work?

Let me give you seven key reasons it is worth the time, energy, and effort to study this unmatched, world-changing book.

- **First**, it is the only book of the Bible that has a blessing attached to the simple act of reading it. Revelations 1:3 states, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near."
- **Second**, you will gain a bigger picture of Jesus, the hero of the book. If you follow him, this is the bullseye of life. If you are investigating Jesus, it will help you round out what you already may know.
- **Third**, it will enable you to connect current events with the "birth pangs" of the end times that Jesus discussed.
- **Fourth**, it will give a helpful framework for preparation if the tribulation comes in our lifetime.
- **Fifth**, it will inspire you to live with expectancy, to persevere in times of difficulty, to live with hope, and to maintain an eternal perspective.



- **Sixth**, it will teach you things about our afterlife that are found nowhere else in scripture and nowhere else in all of literature.
- **Seventh**, your worship of Jesus will be enhanced. After glimpsing into the heavenly throne room with the twenty-four elders and watching their worship, you will yearn for heaven on earth. After engaging the One who is worthy to open the scrolls, you will stand in awe. After seeing the pictures that God has been drawing since the dawn of humanity that are brought to completion in this book, you will pick your jaw up off the floor and bend the knee to the One who is worthy.

After these seven key reasons, is there anything *better* you could do with your mental energy than to study this amazing piece of literature that teaches about God, life, and your eternity?

I promise to do my best to make the information clear and accessible. I'll work hard to teach you about context and symbolism so that the hidden meanings become unveiled for you, the 21st-century student of the text. You *can* understand the end times. You *can* be prepared for the return of Jesus. You *can* live life with an eternal perspective in mind!

THE BASICS

Author: John, the “Disciple Jesus loved,” likely in his 80s at the time

Audience: Primarily, seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey); secondarily, all followers of Jesus and all who will listen

Date: About AD 95

Theme: Jesus is the centerpiece of the end times. John is encouraging his followers to be faithful and not compromise—even through terrible persecution—until Jesus returns.

CONTEXT

John identifies himself as the author in 1:1, 4, and 9, as well as in 22:8. He received this “revelation of Jesus” while on the island of Patmos, a small island off Turkey in the Mediterranean. John was likely a political prisoner of Rome at this penal colony for his activity preaching the gospel (1:9). The revelation came in the form of visions.

This style of writing is *apocalyptic*, which is highly symbolic. In John's time, not many people could read, so imagine these stories being read out loud in public gathering. Try reading them out loud yourself! The highly charged symbols are designed to be easily remembered and to be deeply impactful. They are highly evocative of images from the Old Testament—of Israel's story, of historical powers, and of God himself. You will understand Revelation imagery better the more you grasp the Old Testament.

Fortunately, many of the symbols are defined within the text—which makes it much easier for the 21st-century reader (stars are angels, lampstands are churches, the great prostitute is Babylon and the heavenly Jerusalem is the bride of Christ).

Also, watch for these key numbers and their symbolic meaning:

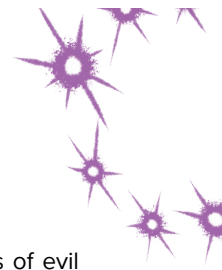
- **7**—Completeness or fullness
- **12**—The tribes of Israel *or* the disciples of Jesus
- **24**—The tribes of Israel *plus* the disciples of Jesus (all God's people)
- **1000**—A multitude
- **144,000 = 12 x 12 x 1000**—12 tribes x 12 disciples x the multitudes

GENRE

One of the challenges of understanding Revelation is that it contains three kinds of literature in a single book. It is simultaneously:

- **A letter**—written to real people in seven churches at the end of the first century. Watch especially chapters 1:1–5 and chapters 2–3. Connect the promises to “overcomers” in chapters 2–3 with the imagery of chapters 19–22.
- **A prophecy**—describing the current situation through the lens of God's divine perspective. It is God's prophetic perspective for both present and future contexts.
- **Apocalyptic**—an unveiling of God's plan, communicated through visions with highly charged symbols. Remember, these symbols can hold meaning for the original audience, as well as ultimate future meaning.





INTERPRETING REVELATION

In a general sense, there are four families of interpreters for Revelation:

1. *Historicists* view Revelation as describing the panorama of church history from Patmos to the end of time as we know it. Many interpreters seek to insert their time in history to the text as proof of fulfillment. The constant failure of this method has kept many from adopting this approach, or from trying any approach.
2. *Idealists* view Revelation as symbolic pictures of the battle of good and evil, God and Satan. It is the view that Revelation is timeless, ideal, and symbolic.
3. *Preterists* hold that Revelation was fully complete in the first century. Many prophecies were fulfilled in AD 70 when Titus and the Roman army reconquered Jerusalem, killed many people, and utterly destroyed the temple. Some of it was related to the contemporary persecution of Christians under the emperor Domitian.
4. *Futurists* view Revelation as a book that primarily (chapters 4–22) takes place in the future. It expects a historical, often literal, fulfillment of the pictures and prophecies in this book.

There have been brilliant scholars in each of these views who are thoroughly biblical and quite thoughtful. This guide will embrace a combination of views. The futurist and preterist will come through strongest, but we will dip into each of the other views from time to time. It seems as though the intent of John (and God!) was to create a book that is both meaningful to the context of the original audience *and* inspires hope to people for millennia following. In my humble opinion, there are many passages that have immediate application/analogy *and* long-term implications.

For example, the “Great Prostitute” in Revelation 17 is later identified as Babylon. Babylon was the nation that brought Judah into exile in 586 BC. It is a literal historical oppressor of God’s people, but it also symbolizes Rome, the oppressor of God’s people in the first century. Babylon is a code word that keeps the author and audience safe, should the letter be intercepted, but Babylon also symbolizes any great governmental power that uses military and economic forces to persecute the

people of God. Finally, Babylon symbolizes the deeper forces of evil that are behind such governments. One passage can have truthful elements from each interpretive perspective.

Millennial perspectives and rapture positions will be described later in this guide, but for those who love to know in advance, I will be leaning toward a premillennial, prewrath rapture position (see diagram on page 70). However, deep humility is recommended in this regard. There are deeply committed pastors, scholars, and Bible teachers who are all over the map on these views.

Fortunately, the most important truths of Revelation do not depend on adopting a particular interpretive bent. They are available to anyone who will read the book for its overall message and resist the urge to get too caught up in details. May God speak to you powerfully as you engage in this study of end times.

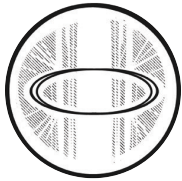
Lead Minister

For more resources related to this series and to the book of Revelation, visit cccomaha.org/revelation.



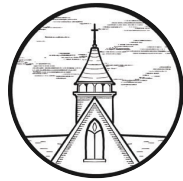
VISUAL AID

SEVENS IN REVELATION



SEVEN "BLESSED'S"

Revelation 1:3;
14:13; 16:15; 19:9;
20:6; 22:7, 14



SEVEN CHURCHES

Revelation 1:4, 11, 20



SEVEN SPIRITS

Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5



SEVEN ANGELS

Revelation 8:2, 6; 15:1,
6–8; 16:1; 21:9; 17:1



SEVEN THUNDERS

Revelation 10:3, 4



SEVEN SIGNS

Revelation 12:1, 3;
13:13–14; 15:1; 16:14;
19:20



SEVEN LAMPSTANDS

Revelation 1:12, 20



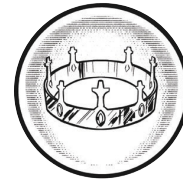
SEVEN STARS

Revelation 1:16, 20;
2:1; 3:1



SEVEN SEALS

Revelation 5:1, 5;
6:1



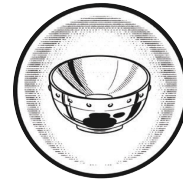
SEVEN CROWNS

Revelation 12:3;
13:1; 17:3, 7



SEVEN PLAGUES

Revelation 15:6, 8



SEVEN GOLDEN BOWLS

Revelation 15:7; 16:1;
17:1; 21:9



SEVEN HORNS

Revelation 5:6



SEVEN EYES

Revelation 5:6



SEVEN TRUMPETS

Revelation 8:2, 6



SEVEN HILLS

Revelation 17:9



SEVEN KINGS

Revelation 17:10



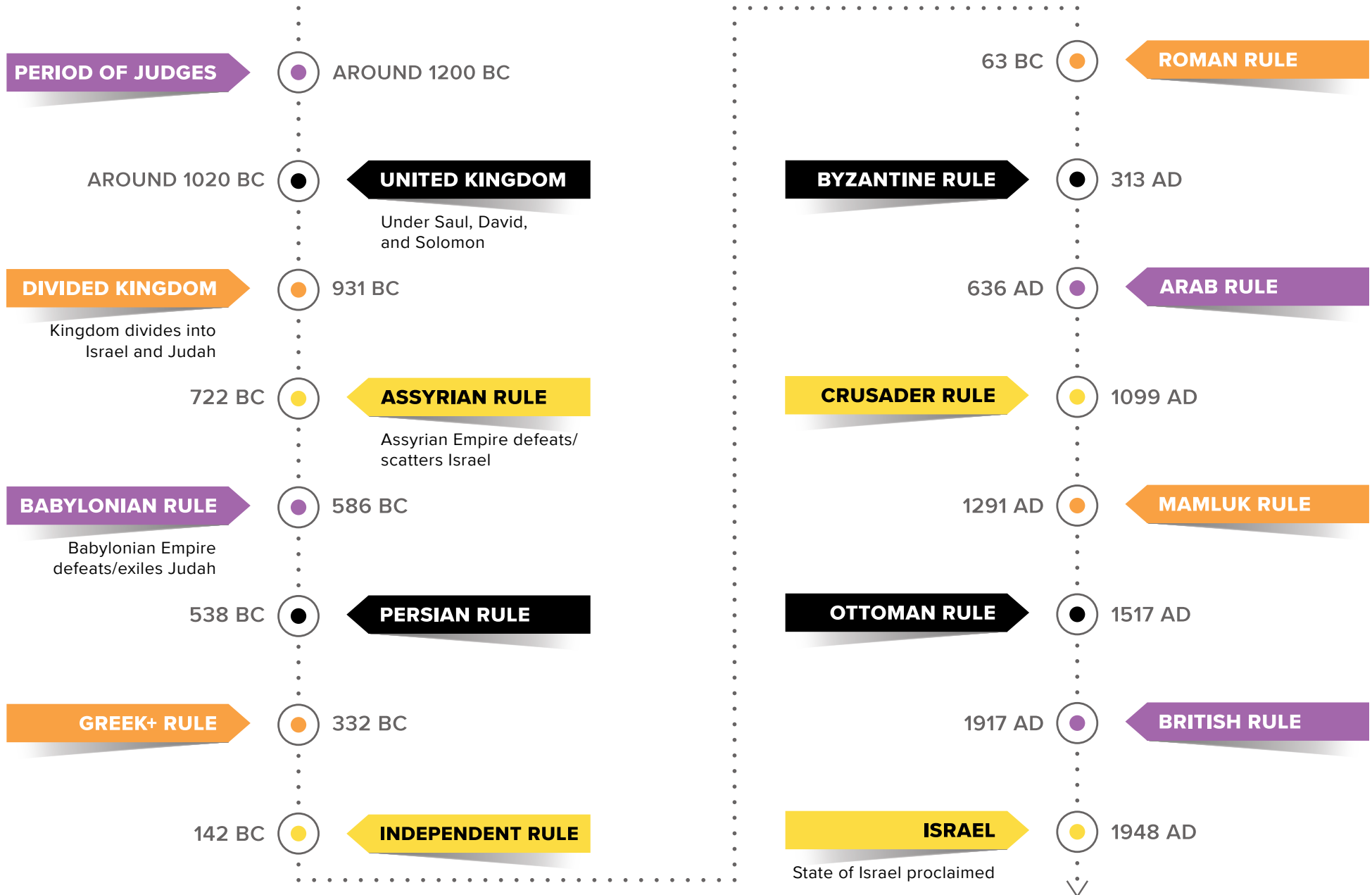
**WEEK
ONE**

MESSAGE NOTES | AUGUST 9

Why Jesus Is Coming Sooner Than You Think

VISUAL AID 1

TIMELINE OF ISRAEL: RULE OVER ISRAEL FROM 1200 BC TO TODAY



VISUAL AID 2

FULFILLED PROPHECIES



Signs, like birth pangs, will grow in intensity.

- Matthew 24, Luke 21, Mark 13
- Wars (against Israel?), plagues, earthquakes, famines, false prophets, and people leaving the faith



Israel will become a nation.

- Promise to Zechariah (Zechariah 8:2–3) and promise to Isaiah (Isaiah 11:12, 52:8)
- Context of Revelation assumes that Israel is a nation
- Context of Matthew 24 assumes that Israel is a nation and Jews live there
- Assault against Israel assumes that Israel is a nation (Daniel 11:45 and Zechariah 12:1–9)



A massive number of Jews will return to Israel.

- Deuteronomy 30:1–5
- Isaiah 11:12, 43:5–7, 49:12
- Ezekiel 20:41–42

Israel will bloom, despite a significant portion of the country being an arid or desert climate.

- Amos 9:11–15
- Zechariah 8:12
- Isaiah 35:1–2, 41:19–20
- Matthew 24:32–33



Jewish children will play in the streets of Jerusalem.

- Zechariah 8:4–5



The gospel will be proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

- Matthew 24:14
- Isaiah 49:6



Nations will align against Israel.

- Ezekiel 38—Iran, Russia, Sudan, Turkey, Libya
- Revelation 16:16

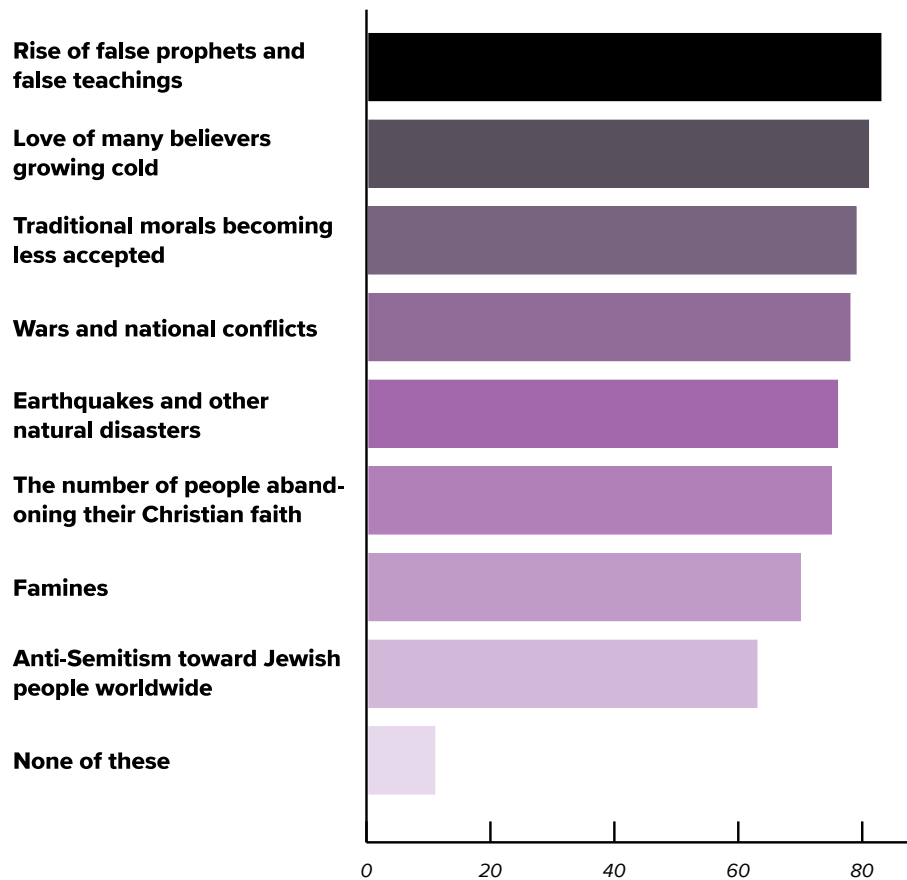


VISUAL AID 3

SIGNS OF JESUS' RETURN BY LIFEWAY RESEARCH

Are any of the below types of current events the “birth pains” to which Jesus was referring when asked by his disciples when he would return?

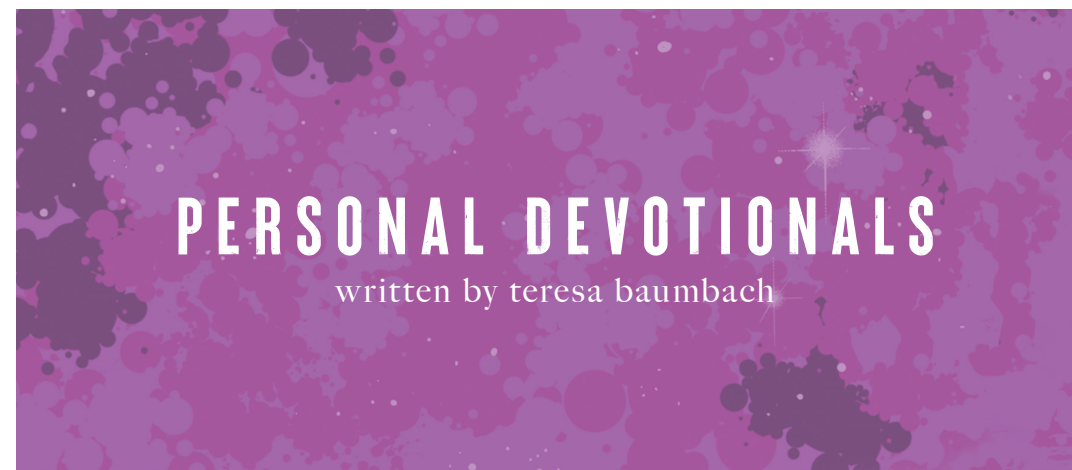
Among pastors at evangelical and historically black churches



Notes: Respondents could select more than one answer; 1% said “not sure”

Study published by LifeWay Research on April 7, 2020. Both the research and the accompanying article (written by Aaron Earls) are freely accessible on LifeWay Research’s website at [LifeWayResearch.com](https://lifewayresearch.com).

<https://lifewayresearch.com/2020/04/07/vast-majority-of-pastors-see-signs-of-end-times-in-current-events/>



DEVOTIONAL DAY ONE

WEEKLY PASSAGE: MATTHEW 24

“‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’” –Matthew 24:3b

REFLECTION

Goodbyes are so hard, especially when it is someone we love and we are not sure when we will see them again. To comfort ourselves, we start to plan when we might reunite. This is the context of Matthew 24. Jesus is speaking with his disciples about going away, and they don’t understand where he’s going and why. Jesus seeks to comfort them by saying he’ll be back, but they want to know the details. Jesus outlines the signs they are to look for, but they were likely shocked by what he said. Wars and natural disasters are bad enough, but then Jesus explains that they will be “handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and [...] will be hated by all nations because of me” (v. 9). Hearing that things would get extremely bad before Jesus would come again is not encouraging news.

However, Jesus also offers a beacon of light amid the dark news: “but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved” (v. 13). What does it mean to stand firm to the end? It means to continue to love God with all our hearts, minds, and souls, despite criticism or persecution. We must not doubt, but continue to believe even when he seems silent and darkness seems to be winning. It means remembering who God is, what he has done for us, and knowing he will do it again (“Are you not... Did you not... Will you not...?” 2 Chronicles 20:6–7, 12). God will deliver and save us, so we can stand firm.

QUESTIONS

1. When you think of the return of Jesus and the end of the age, how does it make you feel—fearful, anxious, or excited? Why?
2. Will you be one who stands firm to the end? What does that mean to you?

PRAYER

Jesus, saying goodbye to those we love is hard, but thankfully we have the promise that you will come again and that those who stand firm will be saved. Help us to stand firm when darkness and doubt creep in and when times are hard. Help us to remember who you are, what you have done, and the promise that you will do it again and again for us. You are so good, and we trust you with our lives.

DEVOTIONAL DAY TWO

“For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.” –Matthew 24:21

REFLECTION

Jesus tells the disciples that the end of the world and his return will be signaled by false messiahs, wars, natural disasters, and rampant sin. With all that is happening in our country and our world, it feels like the end times could be coming soon. We have a worldwide pandemic and many are dying, protests and systemic racism ignite our society against one another, and natural disasters wreak devastation all over the world. We cannot help but think that the end times must be coming. However, Jesus tells us that “the great distress” of the end times will be “the kind that hasn’t taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again.” We have seen other pandemics spread across the world, killing hundreds of thousands of people. Issues of racism, racial tension, and protests have been a part of our history. And devastating natural disasters have occurred since the time of Noah. This could be the beginning of the era of end times, but it could not.

What do we do amidst our present hard and painful times? We pray and trust that God hears our prayers for ourselves, our nation, and our world. We love our families, friends, neighbors, and community. We serve and become the hands and feet of Jesus by stepping out of our comfort zones to help others. We put our faith into action through prayer, love, and service. By doing so, we glorify God.

QUESTIONS

1. How are you responding to the pain and hardship around us?
2. What is God calling you to?
3. How can you be the hands and feet of Jesus in our hurting world?

PRAYER

Jesus, you are our great healer and comforter. Be with all of us in these painful times and give us the courage to speak, act, and serve in ways that glorify you.

DEVOTIONAL DAY THREE

“...they [will] see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.” –Matthew 24:30b

REFLECTION

We sing, “He’s coming on the clouds. Kings and kingdoms will bow down...” I like to imagine Jesus coming on the clouds with shafts of sunlight illuminating him, as we might see on a particularly beautiful Christian bookmark or at the end of a movie where the hero returns in glory and everyone rejoices. Jesus, the King, comes in the clouds. He has finally arrived, and he will establish an everlasting kingdom, a new Jerusalem, and a return to Edenic times. When I think of the end times, this is the picture I want to see. Unfortunately, before Jesus comes on the clouds, complete darkness will fall both literally and metaphorically over the world: “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (v. 29, CSB). It will not be an easy time.

Jesus advises us to “be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (v. 44). We may think we have all the time in the world, but we may not. Our death or the coming of the Son of Man will come unexpectedly. We should be ready at all times for Jesus’ return, but are we?

QUESTIONS

1. If Jesus returned today, would you be ready?
2. If you were to die today, are you ready?
3. What changes do you need to make to be sure you are ready?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, one day you will come in the clouds with power and might to establish your new kingdom here on earth. You remind us to watch and be ready because we do not know the day or the hour of your return or our death. May we live life ready to be reunited with you. Give us strength and courage to live each day fully for you.

DEVOTIONAL DAY FOUR

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” –Matthew 24:36

REFLECTION

Most of us like to assume that we will live a happy, healthy life and die at a ripe old age. But none of us is guaranteed that. We don’t know the time and manner of our death; only God knows. Yet each of us tries to control our lives. We exercise, eat healthy foods, and take our vitamins to prolong our life expectancy. We work hard and save up money so we can have a comfortable retirement. We love our families and care for one another. We pour into the lives of our parents, our siblings, our children, our nieces and nephews, and our grandchildren, hopeful that the next generation will bless us and take care of us when we grow old.

We live our lives today looking towards and planning for tomorrow. But this is a dangerous way to live and think. None of us are guaranteed a tomorrow. All we have is this moment and this day. What do we do? Should we lose hope? Certainly not. Jesus came to earth and died to “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:15). We should all try to live as fully as possible today. We should grow our faith and draw closer to God daily. We should reconcile with others where needed and love fully. We should be at peace knowing God is in control.

QUESTIONS

1. Are you living this day fully or are you focused on tomorrow?
2. Are you procrastinating in seeking forgiveness or reconciliation with God and others, thinking you will do it tomorrow? What if tomorrow never comes?

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of this day. Help us to set aside tomorrow’s cares and instead live today fully and to your glory.

DEVOTIONAL DAY FIVE

“Blessed is that servant whom the master finds doing his job when he comes.”
–Matthew 24:46 (CSB)

REFLECTION

God, our Master, has given us a specific job: to love God and love others. He has gifted each of us with unique gifts and talents to use in that job. But God also gave us the gift of free will, so we get to choose whether or not to accept the job he has given us to do.

We can look around us and see examples of people who have said yes. We see the evidence of their love for God and their love for others in how they live their lives. They are doing the job the Master has given them to do, and they are doing it well. Some say they believe in God and go to church on Sundays, but every other moment, they are living their lives by the world’s standards, rather than by God’s.

Many of us fall into this trap: we say we love God, but he isn’t our priority. We love others, but only those who are easy to love and love us back. It happens quite gradually and subtly. However, in God’s economy, our lukewarm commitment isn’t enough. The Master will richly reward those who have done the unique work he has called them to while the lazy servant will be cut off. We certainly do not want to be in the latter group! Therefore, we must remain diligent and mindful in our unique work and in loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and then loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37–39).

QUESTIONS

1. When the end comes, will God find you doing the job he has called you to?
2. Will your Master say to you, “Well done, good and faithful servant”?
What changes do you need to make for that to happen?

PRAYER

Lord and Master, we thank you for the unique jobs you have given each of us to do. Thank you for giving us all we need to do our job well. Please give us strength, courage, and perseverance for the work before us. We pray this in Jesus’ name.



JESUS IS COMING SOONER THAN YOU THINK *(Matthew 24)*

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS:
Ezekiel 38:17–23, Matthew 25:1–13, 2 Peter 3:4–14

INTRODUCTION

When we think of Jesus as our Coming King, we acknowledge his coming as personal, imminent, and visible. Every person will see him return (Revelation 1:7) and he will come from the sky, as his disciples saw him ascend (Acts 1:11). Since we do not know when he will return, we need to be ready (2 Peter 3:8–10). This week’s discussion guide affirms the reality of a coming judgment and helps us discern specific actions that “ready” us for Jesus’ return.

CONVERSATION STARTER

Talk about a time you were caught off guard by a guest’s arrival. How did you feel? How did you respond to them?

READ EZEKIEL 38:17–23

In this prophecy, God is going to defend his people by defeating Gog in order to show his greatness and holiness to unbelieving nations.¹

Discussion questions

- What circumstances have you witnessed that show God’s greatness and holiness to the unbelievers in your life?
- How have you called attention to God’s goodness in the presence of others?

READ MATTHEW 25:1–13

In this parable from Jesus, some in the wedding party are ready; others are not.²

Discussion questions

- What are some results of the virgins’ lack of preparation?

- Why is it so difficult to maintain a sense of watchfulness and readiness for Jesus’ coming? How can we function for days or even months without even giving it a thought?
- Does the bridegroom’s response in verse 12 seem harsh to you? Why or why not?

READ 2 PETER 3:4–14

Discussion questions

- In verse 4, Peter suggests that those who are scoffing the second coming “deliberately forget” what God has promised. What can we do to remember how God keeps his promises?
- Because of Jesus’ imminent return, what kind of people should we be?
 - » Peter uses the terms “holy,” “godly,” “spotless,” and “blameless” in verses 11 and 14, but what does that mean to you specifically?
 - » What kinds of daily choices help us live holy and godly lives?
- Why does Peter suggest Jesus has delayed his return?

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for those who have not yet responded to the gospel and for our willingness to share it.
- Pray for wisdom in living holy and godly lives so that we are ready for Christ’s return.

¹ Revelation 20:8 will also use this imagery for Satan’s army. See Fee/Hubbard, *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible* (2011), p. 439.

² For other wedding imagery referring to Jesus and the Church, see Matthew 9:15, Ephesians 5:25–27, Revelation 19:7–9, and Revelation 21:9.



MESSAGE NOTES | AUGUST 16

The Centerpiece of the Past and Future

VISUAL AID

SON OF MAN ILLUSTRATION & SYMBOLS

Each item below correlates to a symbol on the illustration. Look up the verses to read where the Son of Man is described in these ways.

- a. **Ruler of the Kings of the Earth:** Revelation 21:24–26; Isaiah 60:3–5
- b. **Alpha & Omega:** Revelation 1:8; 21:6
Who Is, Who Was, and Who Is to Come: Revelation 1:4, 8; Exodus 3:14–15
First & Last: Isaiah 41:4
- c. **White Hair and Blazing Eyes:** Revelation 1:14; Daniel 7:9, 10:6
- d. **Voice Like Rushing Waters:** Revelation 1:15; Ezekiel 43:2
- e. **Like a Son of Man:** Revelation 1:13; Daniel 7:13
Faithful Witness: Revelation 1:5, 3:14; Isaiah 55:4
- f. **Sword Out of Mouth:** Revelation 1:16; Isaiah 1:20, 49:2
- g. **Seven Stars That Represent the Seven Angels of the Seven Churches:** Revelation 1:16, 20
- h. **Keys to Death and Hades:** Revelation 1:18, 20:1
- i. **Golden Sash:** Revelation 1:13; Daniel 10:5
- j. **Firstborn From the Dead:** Psalm 89:27; Colossians 1:18
Dead & Alive: Revelation 1:18, 2:8; John 11:25
- k. **Seven Spirits:** Revelation 1:4, 3:1, 4:5, 5:6; Zechariah 4:2–6
- m. **Seven Golden Lampstands That Represent the Seven Churches:** Revelation 1:12, 20
- n. **Glowing Feet:** Revelation 1:15; Daniel 10:6
- o. **Coming With the Clouds:** Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:30, 26:64; Acts 1:9–11; Daniel 7:13

The original illustration (without labels) is available to download for free at cccomaha.org/revelation.





PERSONAL DEVOTIONALS

written by mark richard

DEVOTIONAL DAY ONE

WEEKLY PASSAGE: REVELATION 1

“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” –Revelation 1:3

REFLECTION

When our family plans a vacation, I usually make the reservations well in advance to get a good price and have the best options. But the details? We don’t get serious about planning those until a week or two in advance. When the time is near, we scurry to prepare and finalize plans.

“The time is near” is a constant theme in the Bible, especially in the first and last chapters of Revelation. When Jesus spoke of his return, the disciples thought he meant it would be within their lifetime. Paul looked forward to Jesus’ imminent arrival. Two thousand years later, the time is still near. Truthfully, it is nearer each day.

According to verse 1, Revelation was given to us so that we could know what must soon take place. But it is not just for the sake of knowledge—that knowledge has a purpose. The many prophets of the Old Testament often provided a glimpse into the future, but their primary message was not about foretelling the future. Instead, it was a call to repentance, obedience, preparation, and faithfulness. It is the same with the vision John was given to convey to us. Jesus promises a blessing to those who read, hear, and take to heart what is written because today is our opportunity to prepare for his return. The time is near.

QUESTIONS

1. Do your priorities reflect the fact that Jesus’ return is near?
2. What work of repentance, obedience, preparation, or faithfulness would be most helpful for you as you prepare for Jesus’ return?

PRAYER

Almighty God, who was, and is, and is to come, grant us a spirit of expectation and faithfulness that we may be found waiting obediently for you in this day when the time is even nearer. Give us compassion and a heart for the unprepared, that we may seek to reach one more, through Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

DEVOTIONAL DAY TWO

“...has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.”
–Revelation 1:6a

REFLECTION

In the Old Testament, priests were descendants of Aaron who had two special functions: 1) to serve God by offering sacrifices, and 2) to represent God to the people. In our day, we no longer need to offer animal sacrifices because the sacrifice of Jesus is complete in every way. However, the functions of serving God and representing God to people remain. Those tasks are no longer reserved for a special few: all believers are called.

In the Protestant tradition, we usually think little about priesthood, but each of us are priests. We offer praises and prayers to God, which, according to 1 Peter 2:5 and Revelation 5:8, are spiritual sacrifices and incense to God. Additionally, we are called to represent God to people. The old adage “you may be the only Jesus they see” is certainly true, but it is also true that God most often dispenses his grace to people through human hands. Whether it is a word of encouragement, a prayer said for someone’s needs, an act of kindness, a gift, or almost anything else, God’s kindness to people most often flows through the hands of humans. As priests, one of our jobs is to be those people through whom God’s kindness flows into people’s lives. From this, God will be represented and presented to people around us.

QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever thought about your service to God as a priestly function?
2. When have you seen God represented to you by other believers?

PRAYER

Almighty God, who has graciously seen fit to make us into a kingdom and priests, grant to us a spirit of praise and thanksgiving, which will be a pleasing aroma to you. Give to us the ability to represent you well as priests through Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

DEVOTIONAL DAY THREE

“...and all peoples on earth ‘will mourn because of him.’” –Revelation 1:7b

REFLECTION

We live in a day of information distortion. We once thought the availability of facts would allow truth to triumph. Instead, we find a proliferation of narratives, each claiming to be the truth. The author George MacDonald said, “To give truth to him who loves it not is but to give him more plentiful material for misinterpretation.”

So it is with the coming of Jesus. It is a fact which many seek to deny or distort. Unfortunately, it will be an inconvenient fact for those who love him not. Verse 7 tells us, “every eye will see him.” And evidently, they will know instantly what it means for their future and will “mourn because of him.”

Our God respects human choice, free will, so much that he will give each exactly what they desire; his presence to those who love him or his absence for those who reject him. However, God tells us in Ezekiel 33:11a, “As surely as I live, [...] I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.”

Despite the distortion of information, we are tasked with declaring the truth, for God’s earnest desire is that all will choose life and be among those who rejoice when he comes in the clouds. May God’s desire be our desire.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you have a list, short or long, of people you desperately want to see rejoicing rather than mourning when Jesus returns?
2. Are you able to proclaim truth to the lost without contempt?

PRAYER

Almighty God, grant that we would obey what you command and desire what you promise. Have mercy upon us, and upon the whole world, that even one more may be numbered among those who rejoice upon your return, through Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

DEVOTIONAL DAY FOUR

“And among the lampstands was someone like a son of man.” –Revelation 1:13a

REFLECTION

John sees a vision while he is in the Spirit and observes the seven golden lampstands and someone “like a son of man.” The seven lampstands would likely have reminded John of the menorahs built for the wilderness tabernacle and the temple (Exodus 25). Perhaps this gave him an immediate sense of where he was—in God’s holy temple.

The term “son of man” takes us back to Daniel 7 where Daniel describes something similar, someone who looks like a man yet not a normal man. Man-like, but also God-like. Revelation gives us a description of Jesus which takes us beyond the human characteristics he had as a teacher from Galilee. He is now clothed in majesty, filled with glory, and holds all power and authority.

C.S. Lewis wrote, “The prayer which must come before all other prayers must be, ‘O God, let the God that I am praying to be the real you.’” This isn’t a warning that we might accidentally choose a wrong god. Instead, it is that we tend to worship a God created in our imaginations, whose attributes we choose for our own convenience. Glimpses of the heavenly realm—such as this, or in Daniel 7, or in Ezekiel 43—bring us back to the reality of his glory, and the seriousness and largeness of his purposes.

QUESTIONS

1. Does the description of Jesus here give you a different perspective than you might have by reading one of the gospels?
2. Do you have a mental picture of God that limits him?

PRAYER

Almighty God, you give us the privilege of knowing you, even though you are high above anything we can imagine. Grant that we may worship you in spirit and in truth so that we honor who you are, rather than who we would prefer you to be, through Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

DEVOTIONAL DAY FIVE

“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.” –Revelation 1:17a

REFLECTION

When John sees the risen Jesus, his first reaction is not to take a selfie and send it to his friends; he falls at the feet of Jesus “as though dead.” The glory, the majesty, and the holiness of Jesus are so overwhelming that it brings fear and awe. John’s reaction is not unique. When encountering God, Moses covered his face; Isaiah said “Woe is me”; Ezekiel and Daniel fell upon their faces; and Paul fell to the ground.

Over the past few years, I have become more aware about my own attitude when coming into the presence of God. We live in a casual culture, and my approach towards God often reflects that same casual spirit where it is easy to forget the majesty and holiness of our God. While we can certainly pray anytime, anywhere, in any posture, it is healthy to also consider God’s great majesty and sit in silence before him, remembering that if we were in his physical presence, we would likely be on the ground, just as John, Daniel, Paul, and others did. The prophet Habakkuk tells us, “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him” (Habakkuk 2:20).

Out of our fear and reverence, Jesus comes to tell us, “Do not be afraid,” for the God of the universe invites us into his presence.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you imagine you would react if you came into God’s physical presence?
2. Do you practice sitting in silence before the Lord?

PRAYER

Almighty God, who is far above anything we can imagine, yet invites us into his presence, allow us to remember each day your invitation to boldly approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need, through Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.



JESUS IS THE MAIN CHARACTER

(Revelation 1)

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS:
Daniel 7 & 10, Isaiah 41 & 49

INTRODUCTION

As a church, we are “All for Jesus!” As a book, Revelation is all about Jesus! Jesus’ testimony is given to John as a message for all the church(es) and Jesus himself is the “faithful witness” that all these things will come to pass (Revelation 1:5). Not only is the message from Jesus, it is a vision about Jesus. Today’s lesson will examine some of the prophecies that describe or are fulfilled in Jesus, specifically in the Revelation of Jesus given to John.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- When you were first learning about Jesus, how would you have described him?
- Have everyone Google “images of Jesus” and choose one picture to share with the group.
- Discuss the similarities and differences of those images, and of any common expectations of what Jesus looks like.

READING

Have everyone divide into groups of two or three. Assign a few of the texts below to each group. Have every group list as many descriptors of Jesus as they can find in their reading and then search Revelation 1 for a corresponding description.

- Daniel 7:9–13
- Daniel 10:5–14
- Zechariah 12:10
- Isaiah 44:6
- Isaiah 49:2
- Ezekiel 43:1–2
- Acts 1:9–11
- Hebrews 4:12

Discussion questions

- How are these descriptors from the text different from or similar to the images you had in your mind, or images you found online of Jesus?
- How does our visual image of Jesus affect our likelihood to be awed by or obedient to Jesus?
- What other emotions do these images bring up in you?
- In the Christian & Missionary Alliance, CCC’s denomination, Jesus is described as our Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King.
 - » Discuss any of these descriptions you notice in the scriptures reviewed today.
 - » Can you think of any worship songs or hymns that allude to any of these pictures of Jesus?

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for those who have not yet heard about Jesus and for our efforts to take the best news ever to the least-reached people groups.
- Pray through Isaiah 53.
 - » Give adoration to God for sending his son to be oppressed and afflicted for us.
 - » Confess our iniquity, our pride, and the times we’ve “turned to our own way.”
 - » Give thanks for Jesus’ own willingness to suffer and carry the weight of our sins.
 - » Praise God that Jesus, though “assigned a grave with the wicked,” again saw the “light of life” in resurrection power.



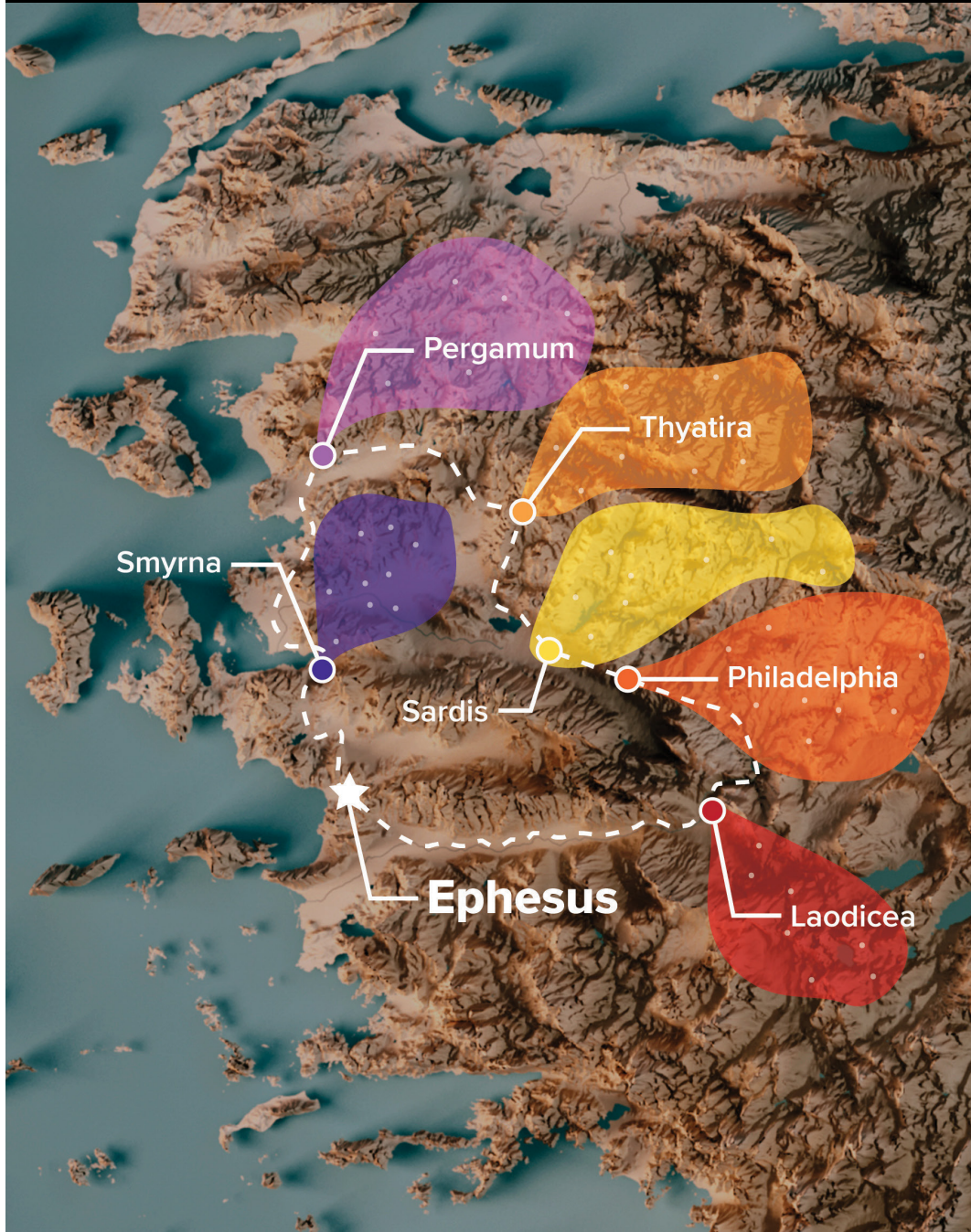
**WEEK
THREE**

MESSAGE NOTES | AUGUST 23

God Wants You Hot

VISUAL AID 1

MAP OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES



VISUAL AID 2

CHART OF THE SEVEN LETTERS

As you study the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation 1–3, fill out the chart below. In each letter, look for each of the elements listed in the top row.

	CHRIST	COMMENDATION	COMPLAINT	CORRECTION	CONCLUSION
EPHESUS					
SMYRNA					
PERGAMUM					
THYATIRA					
SARDIS					
PHILADELPHIA					
LAODICEA					

A horizontal purple banner with a dark, textured background of black and dark purple spots. A bright starburst is located on the right side of the banner.

PERSONAL DEVOTIONALS

written by karl pagenkemper

DEVOTIONAL DAY ONE

WEEKLY PASSAGE: REVELATION 2 & 3

“To the angel of the church in... to the angel of the church in... to the angel of the church in...” –Revelation 2–3

REFLECTION

The scene in Revelation shifts from an explosive vision of the Living One in Revelation 1 to seven letters to seven churches (Revelation 2–3). Placing these churches on a map produces a circle, suggesting that Jesus' words, while directed to specific churches, can find meaning to churches throughout the region, in all church history, and in our own day.

This is the first major use of the number seven in Revelation. This number has ancient significance, starting with the creation cycle: six days of work and one day of Sabbath (from Hebrew for “seven”). This forms the basis for our week even today. Seven often signals completion. The sense of completion is not accidental. Jesus expects all the church to hear and respond, even today.

While Revelation was written to seven historical churches, it is also written for us, all who identify with the Living One. Stress was heavy on the early churches—some internal, some external. Pressure to compromise or assimilate to the world is perennial, often subtle, and is true for us too. John invites us all to self-examination, both personally and as a whole church. The letters to these churches follow a pattern that invites our own self-reflection: a context-specific description of Jesus (he always enters our life in specific ways), commendations and/or concerns, recommendations (with consequences if ignored), and promises granted to victorious ones.

QUESTIONS

1. As you look over these churches, what catches your attention? What encourages you? What concerns you? Why?
2. As you think about our church, is Jesus speaking to us today through first-century churches? How so?

PRAYER

Father, you are both our Father and the Lord of history. Jesus, you are the “Living One” who knows well the strengths and weaknesses of your Church, and of us. We invite you to speak to us today, personally and corporately, just as you spoke to these churches. Comfort and correct us. Continue to give assurance that you will do your work until you call us home.

DEVOTIONAL DAY TWO

“You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet [...] you have forsaken the love you had at first. [...] If you do not repent, I will [...] remove your lampstand from its place.” –Revelation 2:3–5

REFLECTION

Ephesus was Rome's power center in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. However, amidst imperial pressures, the Sovereign Son, who holds all churches, sees the Ephesian believers. He takes pleasure in their hard work and endurance: they have persevered despite hardship, and they were careful of false apostles in order to keep their doctrine pure.

However, something was eating at the core, and Jesus saw that too: “If you do not repent, I will [...] remove your lampstand.” Sometimes Jesus' words are difficult. This is one of them. Jesus calls out their waning love. It is not clear if this is love for God or love for one another. Perhaps it does not matter. The remedy, oddly enough, is *do* things: “Do the things you did at first.” The proof-positive test of genuine faith in God's Messiah was love in the form of practical help for others, especially those normally marginalized—the poor, lonely, sick, and hungry (remember the sheep and goats in Matthew 25?).

Sometimes we tire, don't we? Compassion fatigue can cause us to ease slowly into a comfortable existence. Yet, the all-knowing “Holder of the Churches” identifies a heart disorder. Many actions were approvable, yet something fundamental was missing. Service without love is deficient service, which was serious enough that the continuance of this church was at risk. We are given precious little more detail than that, but that alone should give us great pause. What do *you* hear?

QUESTIONS

1. Do you sense any application of this text to our church life?
2. Do you feel prodded by these words about love? If so, where? Be specific.

PRAYER

Sovereign Lord Jesus, you hold all churches in your hand and are all knowing. We invite you to examine not only our actions but also our hearts. We yearn to be motivated by your very heart. Continuously revive our love for you and our love for others by the empowerment of your Spirit. Mold us toward victory through loving endurance and prepare us so that we might eat of the Tree of Life.

DEVOTIONAL DAY THREE

“...the words of him [...] who died and came to life again. [...] Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. [...] Be faithful.” –Revelation 2:8, 10

REFLECTION

Throughout history, some churches have experienced fierce persecution and poverty. Not all, for sure, but some. Smyrna was one of those. Political and social pressures were serious. Jesus knew they were slandered and publicly attacked. Some, close cousins in the Abrahamic faith, aligned with pagan authorities to harass this poverty-stricken Jewish sect known as “The Way.” Into this speaks the One who had died and rose to life. He knew suffering, and he saw them. This One says: “Do not be afraid.” Jesus does not rebuke this church; rather, he offers both warning and hope. Imprisonment, testing, even death, trouble is ahead (for ten days), but it has limits. However long, they are ultimately safe, even in death itself. For life will be theirs, like crowns, to mark the true royalty of believers.

Unlike most western Christians’ experiences, many faithful around the world know economic hardships, slander, ostracism, and even death for their faith. Yet until Christ returns, death comes to us all. Our Lord knows this, having walked that path. Those who endure, even until death, will be warmly received by him and never feel the pain of the “second death” (see Revelation 20:6, 14; 21:8). They will go through the first death and will meet the One “who died and came to life again.” Believers the world over find hope in this. Do you? However, refuse Jesus and a person will experience both deaths.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you know some who live at serious risk due to their lack of faith? How do you mourn for them? Have you ever seen or felt that kind of risk?
2. Do you know pockets within our own church where such struggles exist? How do you think Jesus would respond to those situations? How do you respond?

PRAYER

Lord of Life, while we are often distant from the struggles of brothers and sisters, we mourn for their pain. Perhaps we are more sensitized now due to social unrest in our country, yet pain and death remain an enemy. We need your encouragement to endure. Remind us of your presence and assure our hearts that the sting of death has been taken away.

DEVOTIONAL DAY FOUR

“I know [...] you did not renounce your faith [...] Nevertheless [...] there are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam.” –Revelation 2:13–14

REFLECTION

Tolerance is a wonderful virtue, but Pergamum was at risk due to *too much* tolerance. While they were commended for hanging tough, something was out of balance. A beautiful city, Pergamum was famous for idolatry and commitment to the Emperor Cult through its holidays and social structures. Pressure to compromise was everywhere. Who wished to end up like Antipas, the martyr? Jesus simply mentions Balaam and meaning unfolds (Numbers 22–25). Balaam became a byword in ancient Judaism for false prophets who led Israel into idolatry. For Pergamum, compromise meant inappropriate tolerance of idolatry, represented by meat sacrificed to idols. Paul granted freedom to believers who understood such meat itself was “nothing” (1 Corinthians 8). However, actual veneration of *false* gods was an affront to the *true* God (1 Corinthians 10). Public (community-based) and semi-public (clubs and trade guilds) celebrations were thorny because they revolved around expressions of commitment to their gods. Patriotism and civic commitments were deeply intertwined with idolatry, as they can be today. Such tolerance is serious, says Jesus with his double-edged sword (Revelation 1:16).

Christians cannot avoid difficulties in our world, politics, or social engagements. But we can and should represent God’s values in these contexts because our confusion of God’s values with the world’s system of priorities can put us at odds with God and mute our testimony.

QUESTIONS

1. Are you at risk for compromise with the world? Where might you be brought into judgment by God in this area?
2. Revelation 2:16 suggests God may come into judgment with his Church. What does this mean? What might this look like in our experience in this city?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you know us intimately. You know our commitments and our compromises. You know how we sometimes miss your will by blindness to our own compromises. Thank you for being gentle with us even when you call us to repentance. Our heartbeat is to be faithful throughout our lives to you and to be a people upon whom are you proud to put your name.

DEVOTIONAL DAY FIVE

“I know your deeds, your love and faith [...but] you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet.” –Revelation 2:19–20a

REFLECTION

To Pergamum, Jesus used Balaam to signal concern; to Thyatira, he used another famous name—Jezebel. For the Jews, “Jezebel” was trigger-language for an outsider who came to lead Israel away from worship of the true God. Her role (1 Kings 16–22) and unpleasant death (2 Kings 9) were notorious. Some self-described prophet at Thyatira claimed to teach deep truths of God but actually taught Satan’s deep secrets. Unlike Pergamum, where pressures were external, “Jezebel” appears inside the church community. Similar to Pergamum, the pressure was toward spiritual and moral compromise. The linkage of idolatry and immorality is strong. One place to locate prostitutes in the ancient world was near pagan temples. This muddled community apparently concluded that spiritual freedom was found in sexual license and attendance at pagan shrines and meals. Perhaps some were so bold as to enter enemy territory to prove one’s invulnerability.

The believers in Thyatira were loving and commendable in many things, but they were *undiscerning*. And the Son of God, in imagery of fire and glory (echoing Ezekiel 1:27), promises to repay according to their deeds. Still, believers who hold fast to what they know to be true about Jesus have nothing to fear. They will find that Jesus gives them himself (“the morning star,” Revelation 2:28, 22:16). What was true for the believers in Thyatira can be true for us today.

QUESTIONS

1. How can we protect a church from such compromise?
2. Often, we fall prey to the next fad: celebrity Christians, deep teachings, and the latest thing. Do you find this true in your life? In your study group? In your church? Explain.

PRAYER

Lord, protect your people from both external and internal enemies. Protect them from the kind of compromises that will cause you pain. Help us, through daily and faithful living, to endure firmly to the end so that we may be able to experience true intimacy with you forever!



GOD WANTS YOU HOT

(Revelation 2–3, especially 3:14–21)

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS:

Acts 2:42–47; Romans 12:9–12; James 1:27, 2:14–26

INTRODUCTION

Many descriptions of the churches in Revelation 2–3 convict our hearts, but none more than the letter to the Laodiceans. As comparatively wealthy Americans, we tend toward self-sufficiency, if not outright greed and apathy. We don't mean to be lukewarm, we simply forget to be intentionally on fire for God. We are busy and distracted. We think we don't need a thing. We are not adamantly opposed to God. But we often fail to be advocates for God, true representatives of Christ's kingdom on earth. In this week's study, we'll discuss what it looks like to be God's ambassadors, practicing "pure religion" (James 1:27).

CONVERSATION STARTER

- Describe the last time you were passionately, enthusiastically, trying to convince someone else of your point of view. How did the conversation go? What do you remember about it?
- Ask if anyone in your group has traveled in Europe and has an opinion about soft drinks with or without ice.

READ ACTS 2:42-47 (NIV)

Discussion questions

- What does the word devoted mean to you (v. 42)? How did the early church show they were not just devoted to God, but devoted to one another?
- When you read this description of the early church, what similarities do you notice with your own group? What differences do you notice?
- What intentional practices might your group add to show more devotion to one another?

READ ROMANS 12:9-12 (NIV)

Discussion questions

- Make a list of all the active verbs you find in this text (note the word devoted again).
- What does it mean to have zeal or fervor (v. 11)? How does this relate to the Laodiceans being described as lukewarm?
- How does this lifestyle in Romans 12 compare with values you see in our current culture?
 - » How would we stand out if we lived according to these values?
 - » What might be the result?

READ JAMES 1:27, 2:14-26 (NIV)

Discussion questions

- What are some other translations for "pure and faultless religion" (1:27)? How does James describe this sort of religion?
- What other practical deeds put feet on our faith in James 2?
- Are these practices individual or corporate? How might your group encourage one another to be active in showing our faith in these practical ways?

PRAYER POINTS

- Confess our tendency to be apathetic, or at least unaware, of the practical needs around us.
- Pray that God will open our eyes to specific opportunities:
 - » to show our faith by our deeds.
 - » to show that we are devoted to one another.



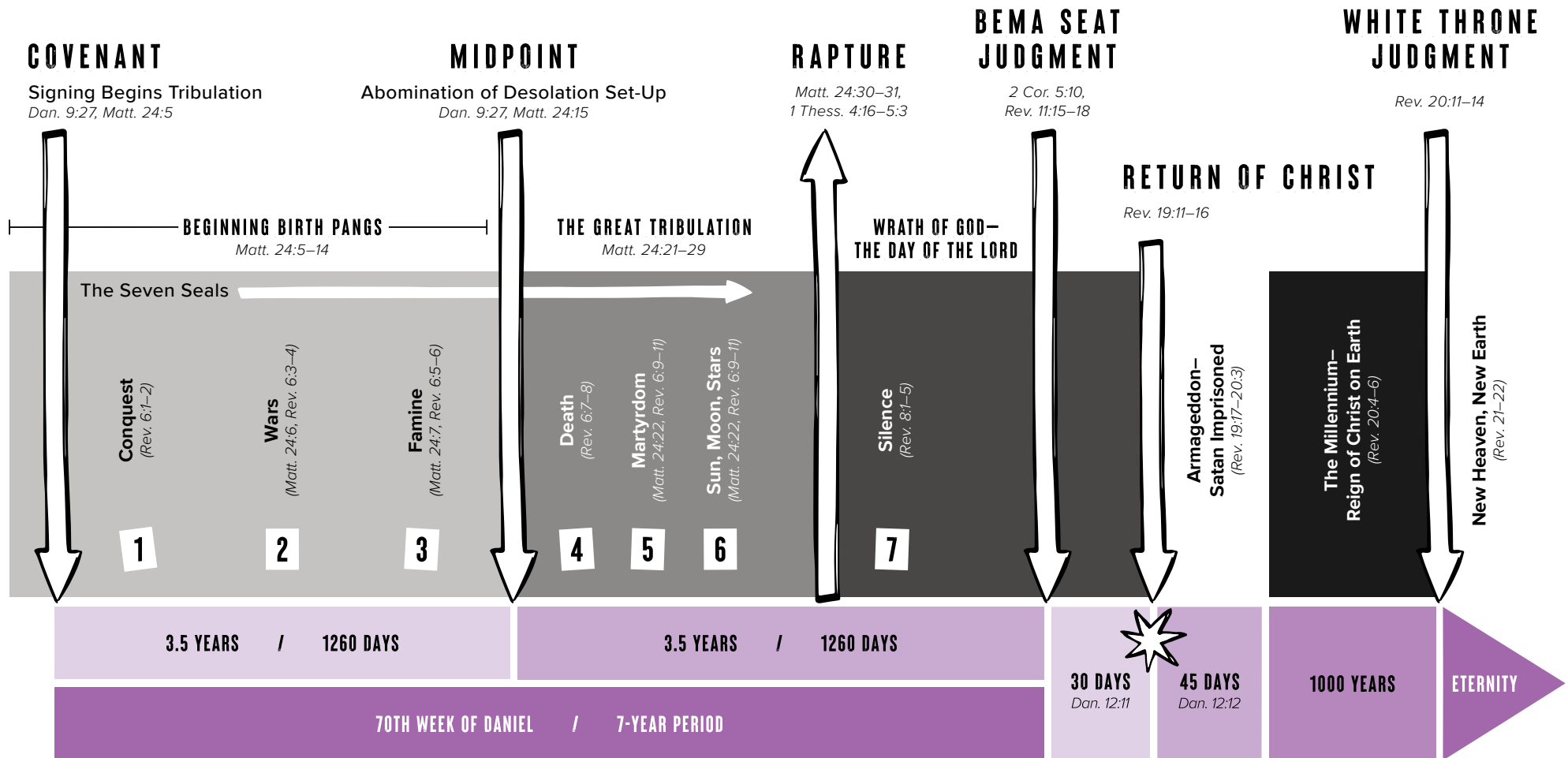
**WEEK
FOUR**

MESSAGE NOTES | AUGUST 30

Watch the Timeline

VISUAL AID 1

THE END TIMES: A PREWRATH VIEW OF THE TRIBULATION & MILLENNIUM



PREWRATH RAPTURE: The rapture will occur sometime after the midpoint of the tribulation but before the trumpet judgments. It will happen in conjunction with the sign of the sun being darkened and stars falling from the sky (see *Matthew 24:29–31* and

Revelation 6:12–14). Believers will endure a great deal of suffering, but will be saved from the wrath of God (see *Revelation 6:15–17*). Jesus will return in power and glory after God’s wrath has been poured out.

VISUAL AID 2

MILLENNIAL DEFINITIONS AND PREMILLENNIAL RAPTURE POSITIONS

MILLENNIAL DEFINITIONS

Postmillennialism

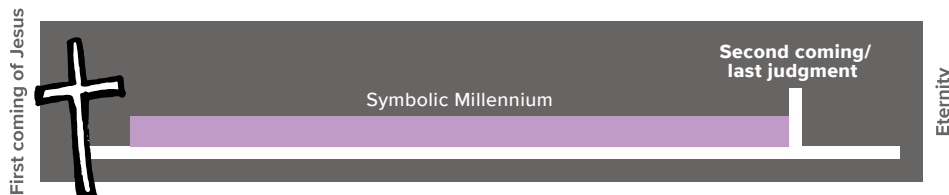
Some scholars believe that the Millennium will happen on earth before the second coming of Christ. During this time, things will get better and better. They believe the forces of Satan will be defeated by the expansion of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

The world will be Christianized and then Jesus will return. Famous postmillennialists include Jonathan Edwards, Lorraine Boettner, Jacques Ellul, B.B. Warfield, and A.H. Strong.



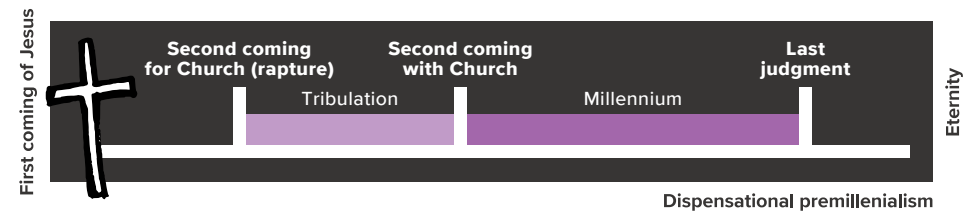
Amillennialism

This literally means “no Millennium.” Amillennialists interpret the Millennium as a spiritual rule of Christ. They point to Jesus’ present spiritual rule from heaven at the right hand of God. The Millennium is not a literal thousand years, but a “long period of time.” Famous amillennialists include later Saint Augustine, Polycarp, Martin Luther, most Roman Catholics, most Presbyterians, most Protestant denominations, John Ortberg, Hank Hannegraff, and R.C. Sproul.



Premillennialism

Christ Community Church, like all Christian & Missionary Alliance churches, subscribes to a premillennial view. We believe that a seven-year tribulation will happen first, and then the thousand-year reign of Christ will follow, based on the order of events in Revelation 19–20. In dispensational premillennialism, a geopolitical Israel plays an important role in end-times events and Christians will not experience the Great Tribulation. Historic premillennialism, which includes the prewrath rapture view, is differentiated in that the Church will experience part or all of the Tribulation as the covenant promises to Israel apply to the Church as well. All premillennialists believe the Tribulation and Millennium are still coming. Famous premillennialists include Papias, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, most Baptists and Charismatics, Chuck Swindoll, and the *Left Behind* series.



PREMILLENNIAL RAPTURE POSITIONS

Within the premillennial family, there are at least three major views on when the rapture will occur. All three are held by various individuals within the CCC family.

Pretribulation Rapture: The rapture will occur for the entirety of the Church, dead and alive, before any part of the Great Tribulation begins. The Church will not go through any part of any judgments. Jesus’ victorious second coming will happen at the end of the seven years.

Prewrath Rapture: See diagram and description on the previous page.

Post-tribulation Rapture: The rapture will occur at the end of the Tribulation and will coincide with the second coming of Jesus in victory and glory. Believers will endure the entirety of the seven-year tribulation.

For a list of resources and critical definitions, visit cccomaha.org/revelation.



PERSONAL DEVOTIONALS

written by ken dick

DEVOTIONAL DAY ONE

WEEKLY PASSAGE: REVELATION 3

"...The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. 'I know your works.'" –Revelation 3:1a (ESV)

REFLECTION

Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Three more churches and three more messages. The Lord instructs and confronts us through these messages to these churches. Last week, we looked at the first four churches; this week we will meet the last three—Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Each of these churches are known by their works. It is of interest to note that they are recognized by how they worked out their salvation in their day-to-day lives. Paul tells us to “work out [our] salvation...” (Philippians 2:12). We cannot work for our salvation, for it is by faith and that is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). But we are also known by our works and by how our relationship with Jesus impacts our daily lives.

There are some repeated phrases in these teachings to the churches: “remember,” “repent,” and “hold fast/return.” These are good reminders for us. We need to remember what Jesus has accomplished for us. We need to remember the fervor with which we originally came to Jesus. We need to remember the unquenchable thirst we had for him and his Word. We need to remember the joy of spending time in fellowship and prayer. We also need to repent from those things that keep us from spending time with Jesus in the Word, in prayer, in fellowship. Then we need to hold fast/return to those disciplines.

QUESTIONS

1. What do you need to remember?
2. What is blocking you from returning/holding fast?
3. How do you need to repent of those things and put them behind you?

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, bring to mind those things we can do to hold fast to you and to put off those things that keep us from doing them.

DEVOTIONAL DAY TWO

"I know your works, you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up..." –Revelation 3:1b–2a (ESV)

REFLECTION

Sardis was a vibrant church in a wealthy city. It had a great reputation of being alive and for doing the right things. Yet Jesus, who sees the heart, said it was dead. There were still a few who had it right, but for the most part the church at Sardis was just going through the motions. Their call was to fan the flames of what was left of their faith in order to bring it back to life. Again, Jesus called them to remember, repent, and keep at it.

Revelation 3:1–2 is reminiscent of the passage in Luke 6:46 (ESV) where Jesus says, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and not do what I tell you?” Jesus then proceeds to describe the house built on the rock versus on the sand. When the houses were done, they both looked good, but only one was built on the foundation of Jesus.

He is coming and we don’t know when, but what do we want him to catch us at when he returns? He warns Sardis to be about the things of the kingdom. If we have ears, we are to listen and learn from this warning to them.

QUESTIONS

1. What are you building on, appearance or the true rock?
2. What do you need to put aside in order to keep at it?

PRAYER

Father, may we not appear solid while being built on shifting sand. Instead, may our foundation be you, our solid rock. May we keep at building the kingdom for your purpose, by your power, and for your glory.

DEVOTIONAL DAY THREE

“I know your works [...] I have set [...] an open door [...] you have kept my word and have not denied my name. [...] Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you. [...] I am coming soon. Hold fast...” –Revelation 3:8–11a (ESV)

REFLECTION

The church at Philadelphia was built on God’s Word and clung to it tenaciously. God wanted them to continue holding on to his Word.

In the introductory verses in this section, Jesus is noted as the one “who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens” (v. 7, ESV). It goes on to say, “I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut” (v. 8, ESV). The church at Philadelphia was not a powerful or prestigious church, yet it is the one with the open door. Why? Because they were the ones who “kept my word” (v. 10, ESV). They have endured patiently, and Jesus calls them to continue to hold fast to what they have. This is one of two churches (the other being Smyrna) that receive praises from Jesus.

I love this church. It has little to show in terms of worldly power, yet it has the open door for spiritual power, for ministry, for growth. They just need to stay the course. Our church should be like this church.

QUESTIONS

1. What door has God opened for you?
2. What are you doing to help the church to stay the course?
3. What role does his Word play in your life?

PRAYER

Dear Father, may we be like the Philadelphians by clinging to your Word, living by your promises, and moving into the open door of opportunities so that we may serve your kingdom purposes.

DEVOTIONAL DAY FOUR

“I know your works: you are neither cold or hot. [...] So, because you are [tepid...], I will spit you out of my mouth. You are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. [...] Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” –Revelation 3:15–18, 20 (ESV)

REFLECTION

Laodicea was near two other towns, each of which had a unique water source. To the north was Hierapolis, which had a natural hot spring, often used for medicinal purposes. To the east was Colossae, which had cold, pure waters. In contrast to these towns, Laodicea had no permanent supply of good water. Efforts to pipe water to the city from nearby springs were successful, but it would arrive lukewarm.

The metaphor was used to show that this church was focused on their own wealth and abilities. They were neither fervent (hot) nor refreshing (cold). Because of this, Jesus is going to vomit them out of his mouth. (The word here in the Greek is literally vomit.) This was a wealthy church that was self-sufficient, self-satisfied, and self-serving. Jesus calls them to repent and to return to him. He was still knocking and desiring fellowship with them. He is doing the same with us today.

QUESTIONS

1. What’s your temperature?
2. Where are you depending on something other than Jesus?
3. Where do you need to answer the knock at the door and have fellowship with Jesus like those in Laodicea?

PRAYER

Father, may we not be content in our own efforts but rely totally upon you. May we not be tepid, but may we be fervent and refreshing in your Spirit.

DEVOTIONAL DAY FIVE

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”
–Revelation 3:22 (ESV)

REFLECTION

In Revelation 3, we have three more churches all known for their works: one had the pretense of life, one had real life, and one had a tepid life. The instructions to these churches are not only for them but also for us.

There was a time when my wife had a serious medical issue. The doctor told us she had internal bleeding, and it was possible that without intervention she would bleed to death. I was scared and awakened to how much she meant to me. She had surgery, and as I stayed with her in the hospital afterward, I saw her ministering to all who came into her room. I witnessed her grace and caring for me, our kids, the nurses, the doctors, everyone. I saw the characteristics in her that I had fallen in love with twenty years earlier, only now with two decades of maturing. I was guilty of taking her for granted. That night at home, I was telling Jesus about my discovery when this still small voice said, “You have done the same with me.” I had been reading Revelation 2 and 3, and I was convicted as to which church I had become. God called me to remember, repent, and return to my first love of him, just like I had with my wife.

We each need to examine our lives to honestly discern which church we most resemble. Then we either need to continue doing what Jesus calls us to, or we need to remember, repent, and return to our first love, Jesus.

QUESTIONS

1. With which church do you identify?
2. Where are you taking for granted that which Jesus has accomplished for you?
3. Where do you need to remember, repent, and return?

PRAYER

Father God, help us to cling to your Word and your hope and look to build your kingdom. Help us to remember and repent, not living on past reputations. May we stay focused on you. This world is full of distractions, but may our lives be centered on you.



COMPROMISE VS. FAITHFULNESS

(Revelation 2:8–11)

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS:

Daniel 9:3–19, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11

INTRODUCTION

The letter to the church of Smyrna (Revelation 2:8–11) tells them not to be afraid of coming persecution. Some scholars suggest that Paul writes to the Thessalonian church about those who were martyrs to encourage those who remain.¹ Because of these martyrs' faithfulness, God has promised they will receive salvation. This is encouraging news for those who remain on earth, even in times of trial and persecution. Daniel's corporate prayer of confession reminds us that it is God's faithfulness and mercy, not our own righteousness, that give us hope for God's ultimate deliverance when Jesus returns.

CONVERSATION STARTER

- Talk about the most faithful person you've known. What makes their story impactful for you?
- Share a time when God was faithful with you during trials.

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–5:11

Discussion questions

- In 4:13, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that we do not grieve like those "who have no hope." On what do we base this hope?
- Have you attended funerals of those who are believers, as well as those who are not? If so, what stands out about the stories shared or the emotions that were evident?
- In 5:5–8, Paul contrasts light/day with dark/night as metaphors for good and evil (see also John 9 and Ephesians 5). How is your life currently reflecting the light? How does our resurrection hope influence the way that we choose to live?
- Read Ephesians 6:13–17 and compare it with 1 Thessalonians 5:8–9. What are some of the pieces of armor that help us wage war against darkness? Why is this significant?

READ DANIEL 9:3–19

This is Daniel's prayer on behalf of the nation of Israel when he realizes that judgment (desolation) is coming and will last seventy years.

Reflective exercise

- Read through the entire prayer aloud. Write down all the words and phrases that describe God.
- Read through the prayer again. Write down all the words and phrases that describe Israel.
- Take a moment of silence to reflect on this list. Do any of them describe you?

Discussion questions

- Daniel mentions "the iniquities of our fathers" in verse 16 (which echoes Deuteronomy 5:9 and Numbers 14:18). Yet other passages suggest we are punished for our own sins, and not those of our parents (Deuteronomy 24:16, John 9:1–3). How do you reconcile this? Do the sins of our ancestors affect our own standing before God today? Do they affect how we should treat others? If so, how?

PRAYER POINTS

- Use Daniel 9 as a confessional and responsive reading with your group.
- Pray specifically that God will hear our prayers, look with favor, and not delay in response to those who bear the name of Jesus.
- Give thanks for God's great mercy and faithfulness.

¹ Craig Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary, NT* (IVP Academic, 2014), p. 589.



**CHRIST
COMMUNITY
CHURCH**

404 S. 108th Ave. / Omaha, Nebraska / 68154
cccomaha.org / 402.330.3360 / info@cccomaha.org

C C C O M A H A . O R G / R E V E L A T I O N