

REVELATION Bible Reading Schedule

3 WEEKS

WEEK 1

Welcome to our twenty-two-day journey through the Book of Revelation. It is sure to be a meaningful and insightful three weeks. I read these words to highlight our launch into the Book of Revelation: "John's Apocalypse is a magnificent and wonderfully designed message of the salvation that is available in Jesus Christ. The book blesses all who ponder it and sternly warns those who oppose Christ and the Good News and those who are shallow in their Christian walk. The unfolding drama of the book stretches the imagination while bearing witness to God's supreme power. Its visions describe the plight of Christians, God's judgments on their persecutors, and eternal hope and promise for God's faithful people." A shorter and even more concise introduction could not be found. This book has fascinated readers since it was written in about 90 to 95 AD. But it has also confused even the great Theologians like John Calvin and Martin Luther. Nonetheless, it is God's Word and he will help us glean what he has in mind for us! So, I pray that our journey through Revelation will breathe hope into your spiritual lungs because we know how the book ends.

DAY 1 – Revelation 1

As will be true throughout this book, the introduction is equally fascinating and inspiring. The Greek word for Revelation is pronounced in English, "apocalyptic" writings. God communicates his inspired message through mysterious symbols, numbers, and word pictures. From verses 12-20, we read of the first vision which probably should be considered the most significant because it is a revelation of the reigning Christ. As much as this vision portrays the majesty of Christ, the title "Alpha and Omega" has always stirred up reverence in me. The meaning is fairly obvious, "he is the beginning and the end." Verse 17 culminates the chapter with worship: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me..." What aspects of John's vision of the reigning Christ impresses you the most? Why? The vision of Jesus highlights the first chapter but previous to those words are the theme of the book in verse 7. "Look! He is coming with the clouds of heaven and everyone will see him—" Every time we read about the second coming of Christ in the Bible, it tells us he will come in the clouds and everyone will see. Jesus said that about himself in Matthew 24:30, "And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens." And it also says in this same verse, "And they (the people of the earth) will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." I know you already realize that Revelation is about the time when Jesus will return and reign but the first readers would be drawn in right away because John elevates these words of prophecy to the highest level. What caught your eye in this first chapter? How do the words of Jesus in verses 17 & 18 bless you? The mighty Jesus is gentle as he places his hand on us.

DAY 2 – Revelation 2

Today and tomorrow, we are reading words addressed to the seven churches of Asia. John uses a single literary pattern. Each letter begins with an address to the “angel of the church” in a particular city, followed by an aspect of Christ’s appearance taken from the vision of the Son of Man (1:12-18) which we read yesterday. These words are specific to each church giving advice or judgment along with a promised reward for obedience. At the same time, these words ring true still today as an individual church body might fall into the same pattern as is identified by the Lord for these first-century churches. Only one church, in the seven, avoids a rebuke from the Lord and that is Smyrna (Verse 8). But they were being refined through suffering which has a way of keeping believers on track. God uses suffering as much as anything to help us stay dependent on him. The church that gets my attention the most is Ephesus because they had drifted from their first love (Verse 4), literally, “You have lost your first love.” Nothing is more significant in a church than their love for God and their love for each other. Correct theology, action and even suffering are just an empty shell of Christian living if genuine love is absent. The Apostle Paul said that without love these other things do not matter (1 COR 13:1-3). Often in these letters, Jesus calls for repentance which means to turn from. Turn from empty religion (Ephesus); turn from idols and sexual sin (Pergamum); turn from evil deeds and false teaching (Thyatira). God’s people are always called to turn from such sins. But the one that was most challenging for me was losing my first love. This is God’s Word to me that I might turn to him and be renewed in my love. Which challenge from Jesus did you identify with most? Why?

DAY 3 – Revelation 3

As a young intern, I was invited to preach a series on the seven churches of Revelation during the Sunday evening service. That was 40 years ago but I still remember how each church receive a unique message along with similar concerns from Jesus to overcome and stand strong. Affirmation and rebuke were repeated in almost every church. These churches were 30 to 40 years old so they were transitioning into the second generation of faith. It makes sense that the church would be slipping in areas like spiritual fervor, false teaching, works righteousness, struggling to persevere, etc. I mentioned that Smyrna received support in their letter and it appears that Philadelphia also was affirmed except that they were spiritually weak. But Sardis and Laodicea received harsh warnings and a rebuke from the Lord. Even so, the Lord promised not to erase their names from the Book of Life (Verse 5). Also, there is a promise given to the church in Philadelphia that is just as real today as it was then: “I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world.” (Verse 10) The Bible teaches that faithful Christians will persevere to the end. So, believers are secure as their names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life and God promises to protect his followers while his wrath is being released on rebellious humanity. But the strongest and most well-known verses pertain to being spiritually hot or cold. (Verse 15 & 16) The believers at Laodicea had cloaked themselves with prosperity but they were bankrupt. Just listen to the gracious invitation of our Lord to renew fellowship even though they were lukewarm: “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends.” (Verse 20) Christ provides a pattern for renewal for a church that has declined spiritually. Simply opening the door can revive one’s former bond with Christ as an individual or as a church. In fact, the communion meal can be the ideal way to reignite a spiritual passion in our hearts. Each Sunday has the potential to redirect our lives in line with the Lord.

We often need that because this world is full of distractions. How might God be speaking to you through this chapter that highlights three churches from the first century?

DAY 4 – Revelation 4

This chapter marks the beginning of prophecy, symbolism, and some discrepancies with interpretation. One aspect of Revelation that has broadened the scope of interpretation pertains to the numbers. Verse 4 mentions 24 elders which could be literal or symbolic. For example, 24 elders could represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles. And then again, there are 24 divisions in the Israelite priesthood. Why 24? This mostly refers to the unity of both the Old and New Testaments encompassing all of God's redeemed people who surround the throne in worship right now. This is just the beginning of interesting and inspiring words from God's revelation to John. These words highlight the splendor and mystery of heaven. The sevenfold Spirit can refer to the perfection of heaven. The four living beings covered with eyes probably mean they see all and know all because they are in heaven and they are surrounding the throne of God. The idea of one living being as a lion and another an ox, plus, a human being and then an eagle, most likely reflects the amazing creation that points to the holiness and majesty of God. As we launch into the message of Revelation about the last things, we begin in heaven which is the destiny of all who love Christ, all whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. These words of worship are meaningful to us because we are able to announce them now on earth knowing that they will ring out throughout the heavenly realm forever. The words of verses 8 & 11 are directed to the One who sits on the throne. What word or phrase do you appreciate from these words of worship? How does this description of heaven stir your heart and mind?

DAY 5 – Revelation 5

The time has come for the Lamb to open the scroll. The stage is set. The intensity of the last days will unfold but only when the Lamb of God breaks the seals. That time is set in the mind of God. Before that, the chorus of heaven continually affirms the Lamb who was slain. There are even more rich and inspiring words to proclaim to the Lamb in this chapter. The focus of worship is solidly on Jesus, the centerpiece of history. In the next few chapters, we will read about the prayers of God's people filling the golden bowls of incense. There's no question that our prayers are significant now and into the future. In chapter 4, the description of worship is spoken but in this chapter, the worship is clearly songs which means music. The angels, living beings, and the elders join their voices in a mighty chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb..." (Verse 12) All the citizens of heaven will be aware of Christ stepping forward to open the scroll and this causes a magnificent choir of voices to worship and fall down before the Lamb. Think of Jesus opening the gate and entering into the audience of angels, people, and the Apostles; the enthusiasm will be like no other time in history. With this vision, we are on the threshold of the last days. How might you respond to the entry of the Lamb? Which words of worship fill your heart and ignite your prayers?

DAY 6 – Revelation 6

Today the emphasis is on the Lamb breaking the seals. In the days ahead we will read about other judgments like the trumpets and the bowls. Some have interpreted these as chronological but I think they are cyclical as each represents the sequence of God's judgment with different terminology and

greater intensity. All three cycles (seals, trumpets, & bowls) end at the same chronological point with the return of Christ. The seventh seal is mentioned in chapter 8:1 with silence throughout heaven. Greater clarity will be revealed as we read more of Revelation in the days ahead, but the first 6 seals are progressive leading to the wrath of the Lamb (Verse 16). I understand the four horses and their riders (seals 1 thru 4) to represent the power structures of the world. Their primary activities lead to war, violence, economic chaos, and death. The breaking of these seals will lead to ¼ of the population losing their lives (Verse 8). You might expect the next aspect of the sequence because the world will become so evil that standing up for Christ will be a life-and-death issue. Many will give their lives as martyrs for the word of God (Verse 9). But the 6th seal has language that I recognize from other Biblical authors. It is known as the Day of the Lord. Joel, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, and John, of course, to mention a few, wrote about the Day of the Lord. Matthew 24:29-31 combines the Day of the Lord and the coming of Jesus. The day is described in Isaiah 13:9 as a day of judgment upon sinners. Then, the sign of the Son of Man will appear. It seems understandable to have the wrath of God descend on the earth which will cause great mourning. But at the same time, Jesus says that the gathering of the Lord's chosen ones being lifted to heaven where we will be with him forever. Evil commingles with righteousness right now. But the day will come when God will separate them forever. How might you prepare yourself for the challenges that are sure to come for believers? How might you fortify your soul so that you will be able to stand firm in the faith?

DAY 7 – Revelation 7

As intense as the last days will be, there is this assurance of God's protection for his people. The seal of God identifies us as his! Most scholars believe that the 144,000 is symbolic of all God's people. By the 90's AD, when John wrote down these words, Israel's twelve tribes no longer existed. The list of tribes includes Joseph, Levi, and Manasseh which are not a part of the traditional ancient tribes. There is obviously much symbolism behind these numbers and names. The vast crowd of believers in verse 9 describes the gathering of God's people who now celebrate the end of a hostile world with evil eliminated. Revelation gives us hopeful reminders that the tribulation of the last days will ultimately end in triumph. The picture portrayed by John is that of a victory parade. There will be singing and worship, along with recognition of sacrifice and perseverance. Verses 16 & 17 point to heaven with no pain or hunger as the Lamb offers life-giving water. God will comfort and affirm his followers with the assurance of life with him forever. Not all of Revelation is filled with the difficulty of the great tribulation. John continually shares hopeful words for us to hold on to. Chapter 7 is meant to give you and me hope! How does the praise of all God's people inspire you? How does the assurance that those sealed by God will be protected to the end encourage you?

WEEK 2

Get ready for extreme creativity and symbolism this week. How are we to understand the trumpets of judgment, the two witnesses, the many terrors, as well as the woman, the dragon, the beast? People request for me to teach on the Book of Revelation more than any other book in the Bible. That makes sense in that it is difficult to understand but doesn't make sense because it is difficult to understand even with the best explanation. I invite you to jump into the deep end with me.

DAY 8 – Revelation 8

The first thing I notice besides a similar emphasis on judgment would be the prayers. The prayers are described as incense rising to God's altar. There's no doubt that prayers are used by God to initiate his judgment of the world. God's people cry out for justice and the Lord answers the prayers of the saints. Never underestimate the significance of prayer in the plans of God. How often have I heard believers complaining about the decline in our world compared to their passion to pray for God's justice?! I believe the situation in our world will get worse and God's people will finally realize that not praying is a foolish choice. Prayers move the heart of God. Secondly, I notice the parallel to the plagues of Egypt in Exodus 7 thru 11. The forerunner to these plagues was the people of God crying out to him for justice. You might be able to identify the similarities in this chapter to the plagues of Exodus. Both the history behind the Exodus and the anticipation of God's deliverance for his people in the last days have the same purpose: to show the powerlessness of worldly strength compared to the power and sovereignty of God. The judgment on Egypt and Pharaoh foreshadows God's final judgments on our proud world of pagan leaders and governments. The use of "one-third" is not so much a precise number as it is an indication that God's judgment on the earth is just beginning and is sure to get more intense. This chapter ends with a sound that is like a screech of an eagle notifying the world that God's judgments are beginning and will not be reversed. How might your prayers be increased and shaped by the truth that they rise to God like incense?

DAY 9 – Revelation 9

What do you think of that chapter? It has the most symbolic language of any chapter so far. There is no doubt that the 5th and 6th trumpet judgments are full of terror. The purpose for these natural disasters and heavenly judgments is clearly seen in verses 20 & 21. In spite of the plagues and the suffering, the people still refused to repent of their evil deeds and turn to God. The hard-heartedness of God's enemies is shocking. They cry out to die rather than to admit their sin. For these people, it does not seem to matter what happens to them, they will not change even under pressure. I want you to think of God's judgments on the unredeemed people of the world as a last-chance offer to repent. The locusts were told not to harm the grass or plants or trees, but only the people who did not have the seal of God (Verse 4). Revelation 7 tells us that God's servants will receive his seal before God's judgments descend on the earth. There is clearly a connection between Satan and the angel from the bottomless pit as the Destroyer (Verse 11). The sixth angel blew the trumpet of demonic conflict as the invisible forces number in the millions. The unusual nature of the horses and the riders makes these confrontations more likely to transpire in the invisible realm with devastating consequences for human life. This truly reveals the depth of human depravity that controls unbelievers. It is not logical to worship powers and beings that

torture and kill, but the powers of sin and rebellion against God are deceptively captivating. How ready are you to repent of your sins that the Holy Spirit reveals? How quick are you to confess your sins?

DAY 10 – Revelation 10

The delay between the sixth trumpet blast and the seventh has arrived. The mystery of God will be fulfilled. Everything is leading to the seventh trumpet blast which we must wait for even now because isn't announced until Chapter 11. Sometimes the Lord does delay and we are called to wait patiently. This is obviously a missing ingredient to the modern man of our day. Listen to the words of Revelation 6:10, "The martyrs shouted to the Lord and said, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?'" The answer, "Rest a little longer..." I wonder if the time frame of "a little longer" felt that way to these martyrs as they prayed. The seventh seal is broken open by the Lamb. That seems especially big. But the result is silence throughout heaven. (8:1). The hush permeated the heavens as people waited for their prayers to be answered. But Chapter 10 says, "There will be no more delay!" We are halfway through John's Revelation and so much is still to come. But the culmination is just on the threshold of God's timeline. The word of God prophesied will be sweet and sour at the same time. Surely it will mean promise for some and judgment for others. The permanent separation of people who believe and who do not believe is just on the horizon. Waiting is an incredibly difficult reality in a quick-fix world. Psalm 27:13-14 are words that I desperately need and continue to meditate upon: "Yet I am confident I will see God's goodness while I am here in the land of the living. Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord." Every generation of God's people has had to wait for His timing and resolution. I am not suggesting you pray for patience, but I am saying that spiritual maturity is only developed as we learn the importance of patience. In what way are you waiting for the Lord?

DAY 11 – Revelation 11

This is obviously a fascinating chapter and it leads right into the culmination of wrath and reigning by our God. The two witnesses are again a gracious gesture from God to display his power and his truth so that people might repent. Some scholars believe that the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah because Moses brought down the plagues on Egypt and Elijah stopped the rain. Both of these judgments are announced in verse 6. These witnesses also remind us of God's power to raise the dead just like he raised his Son from the grave. Yet, the people of this world will not humble themselves before God even in the midst of warnings and miracles demonstrated by God through his witnesses. The message in verses 1 to 14 seems to reenact aspects of God's use of prophets throughout history like Jonah warning Nineveh and Elijah displaying God's miracle powers at Mount Carmel. Plus, our Savior Jesus is in the grave for three days and then brought back to life. The reminders are clearly showing how God has moved then and now. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Will the people make the connection? It doesn't seem so. Verse 18 summarizes the permanent separation Jesus referred to in a parable about sheep and goats. God's wrath rests on those destined for destruction and God's reward blesses those who fear his name. The truth is every person you ever meet is either saved or not saved. There's no middle ground. It might seem like there exists a gray zone of either or, but everything in God's Word points to fellowship with the Lord forever or separation from God forever. The truth of heaven and hell are believed less and less in our modern world. But God's Book leads to these final realities. Just like the seven seals, so too, the

seven trumpets lead to the victory of Christ and the hope of his reign forever and forever. In the meantime, it is our witness that God desires to use to point people to Himself. How might you increase your involvement as God's witness?

DAY 12 – Revelation 12

The paragraph that I reference the most in the Book of Revelation is found in this chapter. Verses 10 – 12 are the most encouraging to me because they announce the sure victory of Christ and his followers. But surrounding these words is confrontation and the real attack by the dragon who is none other than Satan. The first six verses are connected to Christ's birth with the woman being Mary but she also represents the people of God. The idea of one-third of the stars being thrown to the earth has often been thought of as the fallen angels who followed Lucifer. We know that King Herod made a devilish attack on Bethlehem to kill the Messiah but "her child was snatched away from the dragon..." (Verse 5) The repeated time frame of 1,260 days surfaces here; it is usually associated with the final tribulation. I am drawn to these specifics but the certainty of their meaning is questioned as there are several different interpretations of these verses. This seems to be intentional as God's plan is to prepare us for the difficulty ahead but also to have us live by faith right now because we might not know all the specifics. But we do know the One who has the victory. So, I might suggest that verses 1 to 6 are an overview of several significant events like the coming of the Messiah, the intense conflict in heaven, the certainty of Christ's reign, and the ongoing attack of Satan on the offspring of the woman being God's people. This leads to the description of the war in heaven (verses 7 - 9) and then continues with the war on the earth in verses 13 – 17. But I focus my attention on verses 10 to 12 because they teach me something practical and inspire me to continue on courageously. The voice is still shouting across the heavens that the accuser has been expelled from heaven and is ultimately defeated realizing his time is short. But the shed blood of the Lamb and the genuine testimony of God's courageous people will prevail. Our testimony has power. We know that Christ has paid for our victory so we announce our personal faith and relationship to a world in turmoil because we actually have certain hope and they don't. This does not mean the battles are over but we know for certain the war has been won. How might you share your testimony of faith this week? What aspect of this chapter encourages us (inspires courage)?

DAY 13 – Revelation 13

We are introduced to the first and second "beasts" in this chapter. These two characters are from Satan and the motivation is devilish. John wrote about the Antichrist in 1 John 2:18, 22; & 4:3. The Apostle Paul refers to the Antichrist as the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 to 12. Most conservative scholars identify the beast as the Antichrist. His authority and power come from the dragon who has been identified as Satan in 12:9. The beast wants to imitate the Lamb "as though it has been slain." The Antichrist will utilize deception to his own advantage as is always true of the devil. The beast was "allowed" to advance and set up his dictatorship. This tells us that God is still in charge and that this Satanic takeover is only temporary. "This means that God's holy people must endure persecution patiently and remain faithful" because we know the end is near. (Verse 10) Then another beast is thrown into the ring, so to speak (verses 11 to 18). Most would identify the second beast as the "False Prophet" mentioned by John in 16:13 & 19:20. In John's day, the imperial cult of nations and rulers fostered

“worship” of the empire and the emperor as a divine savior and lawgiver. The abuse of religious allegiance to manipulate thoughtless devotion to the state is an ageless phenomenon. It will be in full force as these last days unfold. The false prophet counterfeits God’s power to claim that the first beast is divine and should be worshiped; must be worshiped. We read about the seal of God earlier in chapter 7 but now the mark of the beast is introduced. These could be physical features but no matter what, they represent the heart allegiance and spiritual control of either the beast with 666 or the Lamb with the seal of God. The establishment of the devil’s control is the main point of this chapter which describes the darkest hour in human history. We are also in a battle right now. The New Testament clearly tells us to stand firm and resist the devil. That is true now and will be especially true in the last days. What do you read in this chapter to help you remain steadfast as we are called to persevere?

DAY 14 – Revelation 14

I obviously appreciate this chapter compared to the last one that highlighted the demonic trinity. The Lamb stands ready in heaven with the remnant of his holy people. There is celebration and worship for the time has come to avenge the saints. God sits as judge; he is worthy. Earthly powers and corruption will cease. God’s wrath will be released on all those who worshiped the beast and his statue and have accepted the mark of its name. (Verse 11) Because of the intensity of these days it says, “Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on... they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from their hard work, for their deeds have followed them.” (Verse 13) The culmination of this chapter tells us that God’s enemies stand no chance when the Son of Man comes in judgment. God is just and fair in giving people exactly what they deserve. Jesus clearly taught the difference. “Anyone who believes in God’s Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God’s angry judgment.” (John 3:36) Without Christ we would be judged by our deeds, not by our faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. The lost world is accountable for their actions and will be eternally punished because there is only one adequate payment for sin found in Christ. Without Christ the wrath of God is the final result which is graphically portrayed in 14:20, “and the blood flowed from the winepress in a stream about 180 miles long and as high as a horse’s bridle.” The world has been warned. I know you wonder about the 144,000 and so do I. Some scholars have suggested that this is the number of Jewish believers who have trusted in Christ as their Messiah during the great tribulation. That could be but the number has a ring of completion. It could represent all those who received Christ and stand with the Lord. They know that the Day of the Lord has arrived which expresses the wrath of God on a rebellious world who have ignored and rejected the Son of God. This prepares us for our last week in the Book of Revelation. How does this chapter stir your heart to love the lost? May we feel compassion for lost people.

WEEK 3

I think we could summarize these final chapters as “judgment and triumph!” But that title might seem too casual for the incredible nature of how this world concludes and how the Lord ushers in his eternal kingdom. This is the culmination of it all.

DAY 15 – Revelation 15

This is the shortest chapter in the Book. This highlights the transition to the final set of judgments referred to as the “Bowls.” The song of the Lamb has to be the highlight for us as believers. The message in the song is significant because the mighty power of God sustained these persecuted believers. They had counted on the Lord and he had been faithful. The emphasis of worship is on the justice and truth of God. The final chapters we will read this week present the release of God’s wrath which is not for those who put their faith in the Lord. God’s wrath is contained in seven bowls until now. Justice will be served to a rebellious world. Still, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Lord of lords and the King of kings. The Apostle Paul recorded this truth with the promise found in Philippians 2:10 & 11. In verse 4 of our chapter it says, “All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous deeds have been revealed.” To me, this is an important chapter because it assures us that we will celebrate God’s victory in the end as the world receives God’s judgment for sin and unbelief. It is unthinkable that people will not repent up to the very end. “Who will not fear you, Lord?” (v4) Only a fool will close their eyes to the clear evidence of God. The Psalmist simply wrote, “Only fools say in their hearts, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good.” (Psalm 14:1) I encourage you to share the words of verses 3 & 4 in prayer to God. Notice the significance of their meaning. How do these words fit how you understand the Lord and his greatest?

DAY 16 – Revelation 16

Seal #6 (6:17) matches the sixth bowl of verse 12 in this chapter. Each refers to the great day of God’s wrath/judgment. This event is something I have highlighted already. There are 88 Scriptural references to the “Day of the Lord” which is usually described as “terrible.” That would be true in this chapter of Revelation also. Sores breaking out; blood filling rivers; burning from the sun; darkness over all the world... each of these is connected to the pouring out of bowls representing the wrath of God. It says these are for “everyone who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue” (Verse 2). We also read the familiar name, “Armageddon,” which has been associated with the end of the world even in modern-day movies. But my favorite reference is probably not surprising to you with “It is finished!” (Verse 17) This proclamation has the same meaning as the one that Jesus gave from the cross in John 19:30. This scene pictures an end to rebellion against God. Woven into these verses is the repeated theme of cursing God and not repenting. And, some of these bowls match the plagues of Egypt in Moses’ day. You remember that Pharaoh hardened his heart even though the evidence of God’s power and presence were undeniable. There seem to be hardened hearts right up to the very end. This does seem crazy but then again people harden their hearts to God every day and there are plenty of reasons to believe in the Almighty but human nature says, “I am my own god” and people choose to live separated from God now and without a change of heart will be separated forever. Believers even question God about his activity in the world or lack of it. Often believers want God to settle the score

right now. But life continues to be a confusing commingling of God's presence and plan versus the world's rebellion and evil. Sometimes it feels like the evil part is winning. But the Book concludes with "your judgments are true and just" (Verse 7). God's justice will prevail one day, "Scream in terror, for the day of the Lord has arrived—the time for the Almighty to destroy." (Isaiah 13:6) I understand chapter 16 to be a reminder for us about the certainty of the Day of the Lord which brings destruction and at the same time victory. Why is it hard to wait for God's justice? Let's pray for the arrival of God's justice in his timing and in his way.

DAY 17 – Revelation 17

Have you ever stared at someone or something that is so contrary to God that it grabbed your attention? That is what is happening in this chapter. There could be several explanations for the identity of the Great Prostitute; she might represent some worldly ruler, authority, or just the overwhelming societal sin of a godless world. "I stared at her in complete amazement." (Verse 6) I think it was more of shocked amazement because it says she was "drunk with the blood of God's people." This has to be upsetting and grotesque at the same time. Sin and rebellion and hard-heartedness have reached its peak as the forces of this world go to war against the Lamb (Verse 13). With the rejection of all restraints, the next step is to defy God and try to defeat the King of kings and Lord of lords. That is just as foolish as the pursuit of worldly wealth and sensual pleasures. As might be expected, the alliance of evil foes breaks down and the beast hates and kills the great prostitute. Satan strikes even those he uses for his evil purposes (v16). Verse 17 is the strongest statement of truth and application, in my thinking. It says, "For God has put a plan into their minds, a plan that will carry out his purposes." This obviously affirms that God is in control and his plans will be accomplished even though the shocking reality of evil is all around us and it will be until the end. Chapter 17 is the setup for the next chapter, as the fall of satanic enemy opposition is predicted. God ultimately orchestrated everything for his purposes. That is even true right now in your life. Romans 8:28 affirms this with Paul's beautiful promise: "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good (God's definition of good) of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." I am sure you believe that. So, what does that mean for you in your life right now?

DAY 18 – Revelation 18

Scholars usually identify Babylon as symbolic rather than a specific nation or city. Some point to Rome because Rome dominated the world at that time and existed in full force for 500 years before its collapse in 410AD. All the things John describes in this chapter fit for Rome. But I am not drawn to that conclusion because the revelation of John is about the triumphant return of Christ and the enviable destruction of the dominion of the devil. Babylon is John's metaphorical name for the evil world power and all it represents. Everything that tries to block God's purposes will come to a violent end. The people of Babylon represent the people of this worldly system that strive after luxury and pleasure. The focus on things and affluence and self-sufficiency are equally our temptation as well. The evil system led by Satan can lure us in. Pride, sensuality, money, and worldly status can undermine our simple and sincere devotion to Christ. These are the products of Babylon that will be judged swiftly and completely. It uses the time frame of a "single day" or a "single hour" in this chapter. I have always thought of the Day of the Lord as a decisive moment in time that swiftly brings final judgment on the earth. "(Babylon) will be completely consumed by fire." (Verse 8) Peter wrote these words which point to the earth being

consumed by fire, "But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment." (2 Peter 3:10) I am also drawn to verses 11 to 13 from Peter. I think they fit perfectly in light of what we have read, "Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heaven and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness." How do you respond to these words?

DAY 19 – Revelation 19

There are more connection points for me in this chapter. The songs of verses 1 through 8 are more inspiring to me than the poetry of chapter 18 which is filled with the disgusting things that describe Babylon and the consuming evil that dominates the earth. The response is one of gratitude for the destruction of evil and the joy of reward for God's people found in these first eight verses. And these beautiful words of invitation, "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb." These words mean so much to believers because the wedding feast gathers the bride of Christ for the celebration of consummation as we will be with Christ forever. Even as we are imagining the glory of this event, the next few verses burst forth from the pages of Scripture as the victorious Jesus enters the scene riding the white horse so anticipated by all believers. But with his victory comes the judgment promised to all those who have refused his offer of redemption. We don't often recognize the holiness of God and the judgment awaiting those who reject his plan of salvation. But in these verses, we read the outcome as "the entire army (the rest of mankind) was killed by the sharp sword that came from the mouth of the one riding the white horse." (Verse 21) We often emphasize the mercy of God but we must not exclude the wrath of God and his hatred for sin. Possibly, you identify with one of the phrases of praise in verses 1 – 8. Maybe you are drawn to the vision of Jesus coming in triumph in verses 11 – 16. The final verses are difficult but they do express a warning to an unbelieving world. We are called to announce the mercy of God but also to warn a skeptical world that unbelief will be severely punished. We warn them out of love for them. Amen!? What aspect of this chapter stirs your heart the most? Why?

DAY 20 – Revelation 20

You can't help but focus on the meaning of 1000 years. That is a long time. We usually refer to this as the Millennium. I have basically been taught that the 1000 years are literal and will take place after Christ's return. This is called "Premillennial." This says it will be a literal 1000-year rule on earth for God's chosen people to enjoy before the final judgment. But I have read other conservative scholars who think the 1000 years is more symbolic and refers to salvation and the reign of Christ in our hearts as people of His Kingdom. The concept of Satan being released for a time and people being swayed by him is one of my least favorite ideas. But the Word of God is bigger than my preferences. But ultimately, he is defeated and thrown into the lake of fire. The great white throne judgment is essentially the separation of the sheep and goats that Jesus taught in Matthew 25. People will be judged by their deeds unless their names are written in the Book of Life. Sheep (believers) are received by Christ eternally because their names are written in the Book. But the goats (the lost) are judged and fall short of God's standards

receiving condemnation for their sinful deeds. One idea that I read was thought-provoking and made sense to me. God allows Satan to be released for a time so that he might repent but his devilish rebellion against God and his people are as real and dark as ever. God is absolutely just in sentencing Satan to eternal torment. How has God spoken to you through is interesting and sobering chapter?

DAY 21 – Revelation 21

Recently I have spent several hours in this chapter as I prepared a study for the Marion County Jail. I taught on the topic of heaven to about a dozen inmates which led to the invitation to be sure that one day they would be received into heaven by the Lord himself. All of the men felt like they were ready and confident through faith in Jesus that one day they would go to heaven. I think this chapter tells us more about heaven than any other Scripture in God's Word. What does this teach us about heaven? I have seven "S's" to describe heaven: First, SEEING God face to face. "He will live with them." (Verse 3) We are not allowed to see the Lord in this life even as Moses only was given the privilege of seeing God from behind. It will be the first and most amazing aspect of heaven. Second, SATISFACTION with no pain or sorrow or death (Verse 4). Everything will be new. There is nothing like it. There will not be any disappointments. I could go on and on, but complete satisfaction is the word I have chosen for our experience in heaven. Third, SPECTACULAR fits "the glory of God" in verse 11 with streets of gold and the illumination of the Lamb as the lamp of heaven. It will be beyond words in its splendor. Fourth, SPACIOUS as the New Jerusalem is measured at 1400 miles long, wide, and high in verse 16. A Mathematician calculated the space for each person if there were 20 billion people in heaven which would mean that each person would enjoy 75 acres of glory for themselves. Of course, they would not be selfish about it at all. Only gratitude and generosity will be their/our response. Fifth, SECURE/SAFE as the boundary walls are 216 feet thick in verse 17. And along with this, the gates are open and there is no night according to verse 25. There is no fear except awe in heaven. Sixth, SALVATION as faith in Jesus means your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Verse 27). "Nothing evil will be allowed to enter..." By faith, we have received the righteousness of Christ as well as the forgiveness of all our sins. By grace, we are given access to God's home, his eternal dwelling where we will live with him forever. Seventh, SINGING must be included. The certainty of worship, music, and singing are highlighted throughout the Book of Revelation. Even though this chapter doesn't emphasize it specifically, we can imagine our response to all that we will see and hear causing us to fall on our knees in worship. Amen?! What excites you about heaven?

DAY 22 – Revelation 22

The title of these first few verses in my Bible is "Eden Restored." With the river flowing through the center of the city and the tree of life on each side, this does sound like Eden in Genesis 1 & 2. But we also read that the curse of Genesis 3 is completely removed and will never return. Verses 6 to 21 seem to focus on the reader so that the words given by John might warn the wayward person and/or cause the believer to have a heart filled with anticipation. "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this message for the churches." (Verse 16) The prophecy from John ends in verse 5 on a high note. Because of what you have read there is still time to respond in faith and obedience. "Blessed are those who obey the words of prophecy written in this book." (Verse 7) The resounding prayer, as John closes the book, is "Come." The

invitation is still open to drink the living water. The prophet Isaiah used similar words in Isaiah 55; you might want to check it out. The prophecy of Isaiah 55 is one of my favorites. Verse 20, "Come, Lord Jesus," echoes the early prayer of the Aramaic-speaking church, "Maranatha..." Oh Lord, come! How do you respond to John's invitation as he wraps up the record of his vision from God? Do you long for Christ's return so much that you are motivated to pray the same prayer that concludes this incredible Book? How has God used Revelation in your life these last 22 days?