



REVELATION DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

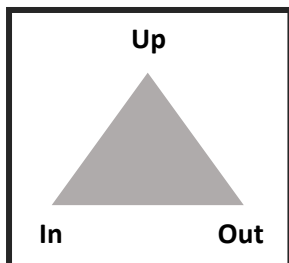
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

As we begin this incredible book, how lovely to see the revelation of our Saviour to us as last-day saints. This book stands as a reminder that God was, is, and always will be in full control. The story is God's story; it has been fully written and we can be fully delighted that we are included in it. According to Revelation 1:3, there stands a promise of blessing to those who read aloud and those who hear this book, so enjoy!

John has a vision and is told to write to seven churches in Asia minor. This command was given to him by One who introduced Himself like this: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."* John, who had laid his head on Jesus' breast when He was here on earth, now falls in terror before the glorified Jesus, who assures him, *"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."* He is saying, "I am Jesus, I'm the boss!" You have got to love this and take assurance in and through it.

We know from comparison with other Scriptures and from the tradition of the early church that the writer was likely John the Apostle, the brother of James and son of Zebedee. He wrote this towards the end of his life; he was probably in his eighties when this vision was given to him. The usual dating of the book is around AD 94-96. It comes, as John says, as a letter written to a series of seven selected churches located in the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey). These churches are named for us later and we will spend time with them as we go through this devotional.

Let's get going in this last great apocalyptic piece of writing. Grab your Bible, loads of journal space, pen, and a cuppa. Be encouraged and be blessed.

Love and prayers,
Phil

Live

The very first word, “revelation”, tells us the nature of the book. From the Greek word ‘apocalypse’, it means, ‘an unveiling, a taking away of that which obscures’. Throughout this book we will find many mysteries opened up to us. We will find the mystery of godliness revealed and the mystery of evil, and also how one can live a godly, righteous life in the midst of a broken and evil world. In verse 4 we have the first of a series of sevens that are mentioned in Revelation. Seven is the key number in this book; it is a symbol of completeness, a sign of perfection.

God is introduced to us not only as who He is and what He does, but also what He will do in the future. Verse 7 says, *“Behold He is coming with the clouds...”*. This is the moment every believer longs for and believes for, the moment towards which the whole creation moves. One of these days Jesus will break through the skies. As He once left this earth, He will come again in glory. His coming will have universal impact as we are told, *“every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him.”*

John then gets a glimpse of the Son of Man. The voice he heard was like the sound of a waterfall smashing onto the rocks, the sound of many waters. The two-edged sword is a symbol of the Word of God. This is the Great High Priest ministering to His own in a scene of desolation and judgment, yet He is in charge of all the events, and in the midst of them is revealing truth by the Word of God. Throughout the book, Jesus appears in other forms. He is a Lamb and a Lion in chapter 5, the Rider of the great white horse in chapter 19, and a Bridegroom coming for his bride in chapter 21.

In verses 17-18 we learn John's reaction to this remarkable vision. *“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead.”* What glory and majesty!

Pray

Father, I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder how He could love me, a sinner condemned, unclean. My encore is... How marvellous, how wonderful is my Saviour's love for me! In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Let me begin with something I feel is important to point out. These were letters to seven historical churches. Each letter deals with actual conditions of church life in John's day. However, as God's Word is written to the whole body of Christ for all history, these letters are also representative of all churches at any time. Many other churches existed in John's day, some larger and better known, yet only these seven were selected. Seven is the number of completion and it suggests that these seven churches perfectly represent conditions that would be characteristic of various churches throughout history. All the letters close with the words "*Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*" Each message is important to all churches, not only in John's day, but ours as well.

The Church of Ephesus faced two major problems: they were confronted with evil men and false teaching, and had lost their first love. To be overcomers, they must deal with both problems. The two tend to be interrelated; people who lose their first love are more susceptible to evil. Jesus commends their labour and patience, then reprimands them for leaving their first love.

To the Church of Smyrna, Jesus commends their piety and promises them support in their tribulation. To the Church of Pergamum, He commends their steadfastness in the heavenly doctrine, then reprimands their weakness in tolerating heretical teachers in the church. To the Church of Thyatira, He commends their charity, faith and patience, then reprimands their tolerance of Jezebel, the false prophetess.

I love the four character qualities mentioned in verse 19 – love and faith, service and perseverance, which are central to the Christian faith. There is no need to move away from what is central to the Scriptures!

Pray

Father, there are many areas of my life in which I long for greater freedom. You challenged Ephesus through John to return to their first love from which they had fallen. May that be me today. May I love You more than I loved You at the start and may I never be led astray. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

There is a great commendation to Philadelphia. This church is suffering. Like the church in Smyrna, they are being persecuted by Jews in their city. And, just like in His message to the Smyrnan church, Jesus refers to these Jews as “*a synagogue of Satan*” since they have unwittingly aligned themselves with the devil by positioning themselves against God and God's people.

To the church at Sardis, Jesus says, ‘You have the reputation of being alive but you are dead. You don’t have the life of God in your souls and you haven’t walked steadily before God. His Spirit has been grieved with you.’ Their outward appearance was envied by many people in the world. They had a great reputation of strength and vitality and success. They were popular and charming, but all of these things were merely grave clothes. In reality, they were spiritual zombies. They were the living dead, living only by the power of their flesh, waiting to die physically, walking spiritually in a direction that would lead to destruction. So sad that a church would have all the trappings of spiritual life and yet, from God’s perspective, be dead.

Speaking to lukewarm Laodicea, Jesus wants to spit them out of His mouth. The Holy Spirit, being repeatedly grieved, is about to finally depart. They performed all kinds of duties, but none completely. They were constantly beginning but never brought anything to a proper end. Their resolutions were hot air, their strength feeble, and their light dim. They probably maintained their reputation before men, but their works were not perfect before God.

Let’s be challenged today to live our lives before God, not before man! I love Jesus for standing at the door of my heart, knocking, waiting, respecting my freedom and longing for me. He longs to enter our hearts and bring heaven with Him. The door is there but only we can open it because our heart is a sacred space; it is where we are king. No one can force entry into our heart.

Pray

Father, may I keep the door of my heart open and stay alert to Your whispers. Come in, Lord Jesus, come in today and come in to stay. May I relinquish control and declare Jesus the King of my heart. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

John sees the throne of God in heaven surrounded by twenty-four elders and four living creatures, all of which join in giving glory to the Almighty. All rightfully acknowledge the infinite supremacy of God and that they have derived their being and their blessings from Him alone. We learn from this song that He made all things for His pleasure. I am so excited that I get to be included in that statement and in His huge story. God chose me. He chose you. It's a source of great peace and freedom to know that the eternal God of heaven has ordained *all* our days for us and that He is writing our story. God is the Author and Perfecter of our faith, the Architect and Builder of our lives. He is the perfect Father, and He does all things really well.

The Old Testament tabernacle of Exodus and the temple of 1 Kings 5 were images of God's throne room in heaven. Here, John sees the original, not a copy. The tabernacle and the temple were both centres for worship and so is the original temple in heaven. Everything going on in the heavenly throne room revolves around God and involves worshipping Him. He is the centre. He captures the gaze of all creatures. He is the One all creation sings to.

When he enters the throne room, John's attention is not drawn to the furnishings or anything else; his eyes make a beeline to God Himself. He sees God seated on a throne, in the middle of everything. In other words, God's authority and reign are supreme. It seems as if the throne room is set up in a circular fashion with the twenty-four elders seated on thrones around God's throne. In the throne room, the four living creatures are proclaiming praise to God and as they do, the elders fall face forward to the ground in humble adoration, giving God glory and casting their crowns before Him. They are worshipping God for His creation. They are worshipping because they are part of His creation. Have you ever thanked God because He made you?

Pray

Father, I'm thrilled You're in control. I know that I won't live one day more or one day less than You decree. I know that nothing can separate me from Your love. One of these days I too will throw my crown at Your feet. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I fell in love with the Word of God when I was a boy. I wasn't a wonderful reader and had to really train my young self to concentrate and read this amazing book. After several runs through the Bible, I began to note some big chapters that seemed to boom the existence of the deity of heaven in a more astounding way than other chapters. Chapters like Exodus 19 and this one today remind me that God is not my buddy. Yes, He is my Father, but He is the eternal Master and Creator of all things.

Here we have a book sealed with seven seals which no being in heaven or on earth could open. At last, it is opened by the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He receives the praises of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, then an innumerable multitude who acknowledge they were redeemed to God by His blood, then all the angels of heaven, and then all of the whole creation, ascribing blessing, honour, glory, and power to God and the Lamb forever. What a crescendo of worship to One who is worthy of it all!

I'm thankful for what this passage reminds me about Jesus. He is tireless in His care, everlasting in His mercies, and generous with His grace. When no one could be found to open the book, He, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, stepped right up and burst it open. Is it any wonder the four living creatures, twenty-four elders, people from every nation, tribe and tongue, innumerable hosts of angels, and every creature in the heaven, on the earth, under the earth and in the sea, say, *"To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"* This is the basis for Handel's closing choruses in *The Messiah*. It closes with one of the most beautiful musical numbers ever written, "Worthy is the Lamb".

Pray

Father, You are my God in whom I trust. I love that You include me in Your eternal story. What is to come for every believer is incredibly awesome. No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what You have prepared for those who love You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

John the revelator opens this chapter like a scene from a blockbuster movie: *“I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals.”* From the previous chapter, we understand this scroll is the history and destiny of mankind and creation, and only Jesus, the Lamb, had the right to open the seals on this scroll of the culmination of history. As we enter chapter six, the scene shifts from heaven to events about to take place on earth. All heaven awaits in anticipation the judgment about to be poured out. Jesus Christ, the Lamb, breaks open the first seal on the scroll. One of the four living beings that is constantly surrounding the throne speaks and his voice is like a peal of thunder. He speaks one word, *“Come.”* The first four seals of the scroll bring four horsemen. The white horse brings a man of conquest. The red horse brings war and conflict. The black horse brings scarcity and a lack of justice. The pale horse brings death. The fifth seal brings forth the cry of the martyrs and the opening of the sixth seal brings cosmic disruption.

I’d need twenty more pages to expound all this! But read this chapter and give thanks today for the Lamb who was found worthy. I love the fact that it is all in His hands. In God all the earth resides. All the planets turn and spin at His command. Every breath of wind and drop of rain blow and fall at His word. Nothing can outwit Him. Every knee will bow to our God the Creator of the heavens and earth. Everyone will acknowledge Him as the Lord and King of all the universe. And, to top it all, this same God calls you and me His children. Try and wrap your head around this – He has made you and me His heirs and joint heirs with Jesus Christ to all of heaven. For that, let’s jump with shouts of joy today! As believers, we should be sharing the good news of the Gospel with everyone we can, giving them an opportunity to repent and find God’s grace through Christ.

Pray

Father, all eternity most likely will never reveal all Your majesty, wisdom, power and love. I love these passages that remind me of all You are and of Your infinite worth and strength. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Revelation 7

Live

We are reminded that in heaven, the redeemed *serve* God. We don't know exactly how, but we know heaven is not only a place of rest from earthly toil but also a place of privileged service (actually, "*day and night*", we're told). In heaven, God will dwell with His people. This is the ultimate fulfilment of King David's great desire in Psalm 27:4 "*One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple.*" I love these portals into what heaven will be like. Imagine a place with "*springs of living water*" and every tear wiped away.

Like the numbers 7 and 666 used in this book, I believe that 144,000 is a specific symbol. The way one interprets the 144,000 will say a lot about their reading of the book as a whole. We have to ask, is this a book of symbols or actuals? If it is of actuals, the tendency is to see the 144,000 as a limited number, a form of scarcity; only a few, the proud and brave, are chosen for this small group of the faithful. But the symbolism here is actually of abundance, open invitation, a celebration of God's generosity.

Let me explain how the number 144,000 can be broken down to symbolise abundance. We start with the 12 tribes named here. Then we multiply that by another 12, symbolising the 12 apostles (based on a later vision from the New Jerusalem). These 2 sets of 12 are representative of all believers in both Testaments. Then we multiply that number by 1,000 – a number in the ancient world that symbolises a huge, huge amount, beyond measure really. So, it's easy to see how the 144,000 could equal *countless multitudes*. Maybe I am being too simple but I do hope this helps you to look with a wider lens.

Pray

Father, thank You that Jesus not only paid the price for my redemption but also secured heaven as my eternal abode. Now, troubles come and age takes its toll but my rejoicing will be eternal. Father, I will seek to take care of myself, and will trust You for healing and health. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The sealed scroll was introduced in Revelation 5 and the seals were opened up to the sixth in Revelation 6. As we waited for the last seal to be opened and the contents revealed, there was a pause in Revelation 7. The pause between the sixth and seventh seal is emphasised by the mention of silence in heaven for about half an hour. This silence is striking, a breathing space, the angels silent so the prayers of the saints can be heard, perhaps also the cry of the martyrs.

Notice what takes place on earth with the first trumpet judgment. One third of the earth is burned up and one third of the trees, and all vegetation smaller than trees (grass, wheat, grain crops, etc) completely burned. What Egypt experienced during Exodus 9:22 the earth will experience during the Day of the Lord. The second trumpet announces the judgment that falls on the sea. Again, a third is affected. A third of the sea becomes as blood and as a result, a third of everything living in this water dies, including all the fish. Even all the ships in these areas are destroyed. Again, we see a degree of comparison with another plague that hit Egypt in Exodus 7.

With the third trumpet, we are introduced to the term "*Wormwood*". It is equated with bitterness or poison. We see this mentioned in Jeremiah surrounding the judgment of lost and idolatrous Israel. The fourth trumpet has a close connection with the ninth plague in Exodus 10:21. A third of the light from the sun is cut off with stars affected as well. It seems as if everything that gives light to the earth, even to the smallest degree, is struck. Since the Lord God spoke the universe into existence, He can very easily dim it a little.

Pray

Father, it's hard to imagine a world of perfect peace and eternal shalom, but that's what You promise me through the finished work of Jesus. Every time I ponder this, my whole being grins with eternal hope. May this hope encourage me to engage and not retreat. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The first four seals and trumpets presented judgments directed against the earth. Four horsemen brought tyranny, war, famine, and death, affecting vegetation, seas, fresh waters, and the sky. The last three seals focus on heaven – the cry of the martyrs, cosmic disturbances, and the heavenly prelude to the seven trumpets. I was taken by the last sentence of the chapter today and I thought, if there was a line to summarise today's society, this would be it. But the huge lesson I learn from this chapter today is that God is in utter control in all of this.

Chapter 9 presents the judgments of the fifth and sixth of the seven trumpets which were introduced in chapter 8. These two trumpets are also identified as two of three great "woes" that will come upon the earth. I want to stress that the judgments of this book are real. They are terrible, horrible disasters, and there is both a literal and a figurative dimension to them.

One day, God will wipe away our tears but not before Jesus has wept many of His own, tears He shed coming into a broken and rebellious Jerusalem, tears also shed, I'm sure, over us and our brokenness. We would still be looking for peace elsewhere if He hadn't opened our eyes to see our need and His grace. We have no claim to salvation apart from God's sovereign grace. John's writings ought to thrill our souls, just to know we are part of this great climatic end to the world as we know it. We see how wonderfully tender and gracious God is, how much He wants people to be delivered from judgment, but in the end, we must ask ourselves, "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*" For those of us who know that this Word is faithful and true, our calling to evangelism should be stronger, our hope more blessed, our faith more certain, our worship more informed, and our praise for His saving grace more exuberant. May these truths fill our minds and hearts.

Pray

Father, I'm looking forward to launching into eternal surprises galore. I think that's what the Scripture means when it says no eye has seen, no ear has heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the things You have stored up for those who love You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We all must listen very carefully to the angel described at the outset today and consider his mission with utmost seriousness. I mean, honestly, which of us would not be trembling if we saw a creature like this towering over us, calling out with a voice that rattled our bones? Revelation 9 left off with the sounding of the sixth of seven trumpets, ushering in the end of all things. Now, instead of the seventh trumpet, we have another interlude until chapter 11. I know these interludes serve a dramatic purpose (more than I am skilled to expose), but maybe they also show the mercy of the Lord in allowing more opportunity for repentance. It is as if God brought things to the brink, then pulled back a little to grant mankind more time to repent.

I am reminded today that it was when I was still in my sins that Christ died for the ungodly. Stand in awe with me of such incredible unbelievable mercy! God is the Alpha and the Omega, and everything in between. Angels worship Him and we depend on Him. Jesus is our reigning and returning King, sovereign over days and dominions, the Lord of every hair and heartache, in control of every international threat and fearful worry.

The most mysterious part of this vision is *“the seven thunders”* mentioned in verses 3 and 4. Since the Old Testament routinely talks about God “thundering” when He speaks, this is most likely a reference to the perfectly powerful voice of God. As the mighty angel calls to heaven, heaven responds. What was revealed by *“the seven thunders”* is intelligible to John and he’s about to write it down but another voice, probably Jesus, instructs John to seal up that revelation. Why? Why does John get to know what *“the seven thunders”* declared and not us? I think there’s something critical about maintaining humility in the midst of receiving revelation. Let’s “eat the Word” today!

Pray

Father, broken lives love Your appearing. Eternity will be an endless revelation and celebration of Your glory and grace. What stuns me the most, as I think about You today is that You had me in Your mind when You created all things – me! In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In the Old Testament, the idea of measuring communicates ownership, protection, and preservation. When Habakkuk prophesied, “*He stood and measured the earth,*” the idea was that the Lord owned the earth and could do with it as He pleased. When this temple is measured, it shows that God knows its every dimension, and He is in charge. This is one of the mighty themes of the Book of Revelation. Verse 17 again uses the title ‘Almighty’; the Greek word describes ‘One who has His hand on everything’.

We read of two men who are like lampstands giving light in the midst of the darkness of earth. They are fed by the Spirit of God Himself (olive oil represents the Spirit), so their witness cannot be extinguished. They cannot be eliminated until their work is done. They are human flame-throwers! This is strongly suggestive of the ministry of Elijah the prophet. In 2 Samuel we are told how the king twice sent a company of fifty soldiers to take Elijah captive; each time fire came down from heaven and destroyed them. These men in Revelation 11 were also given power to suspend all rain upon the earth. That again reminds us of Elijah who had authority from God to withhold the annual rainfall.

The two witnesses also had power to turn the waters into blood and to bring plagues and diseases among the people. That looks back to the ministry of Moses. When Pharaoh resisted Moses' appeal to let the people of God go, Moses turned the waters into blood and called plagues down upon the Egyptians. This is why many expositors see these two witnesses as Moses and Elijah appearing again. They are cruelly killed, resurrected three and a half days later, and ascend into heaven before the eyes of a startled crowd. Terror shivers through them as they watch. The worst anyone can do, Jesus said, is put you to death; after that, there is nothing more they can do. Not even death can hinder the carrying out of God's program!

Pray

Father, thank You for the inside job You're accomplishing in me. Not only are You seeing to it that I work for Your good pleasure, You're also giving me the will to do so. I have no doubt, You are in charge! In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is the first of seven signs that John reveals and is described as a “*great and wonderful sign*”. In the next few chapters, the main figures of the Great Tribulation are described. Some are easy to identify, like the dragon representing Satan. The entire career of the devil is described in verse 9 – deceiving the whole inhabited earth. The man-child born to the woman is the next easiest to identify because we are told in verse 5 that He is the one “*who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre*”. Clearly, that is a reference to the Lord Jesus. The woman most likely represents Israel. We will also meet the archangel Michael, head of the angelic host.

From this scene, we can draw the conclusion that up to these last days of history Satan has had access to heaven. In the book of Job, he appears before God and requests permission to attack Job’s livelihood, family, and body. In the book of Zechariah, he is also seen accusing the saints of God before Him, in heaven. And Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:12 that we believers today “*do not wrestle against flesh and blood but rather against principalities and powers and rulers in high places.*” Basically, he is saying that other people are not really our problem. It is what the devil is doing to people that makes them oppose us.

So, we see that throughout this present age Satan has access to heaven. But when it gets to this point of Daniel’s seventieth week, God has had enough of the presence of the devil in heaven. He sends Michael, the great archangel, with his angels, and together they force the devil and his angels out of heaven and hurl him to the earth. I love how the believers overcame the evil one by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony and by not loving their own lives even unto death. These are great tools to step us into freedom in Christ.

Pray

Father, I know You knew the end from the beginning but there is just so much to take in, my mind bends with the weight of stuff You actually conquered. A ‘Thank You’ seems a feeble response from me today but I say it with all gusto and more belief than ever. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In chapter 12, the Apostle John saw a great red dragon with seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns, clearly identified as a manifestation of Satan. Now, in chapter 13, John sees a further manifestation of that same beast. This likeness identifies this beast with the one popularly known as 'the Antichrist'. The word 'Antichrist' only appears in the Bible five times in four verses. This beast arises from the earth, used throughout Revelation as a symbol of Israel; this is why most biblical scholars say this man is probably a Jew. He comes from Israel and has two horns like a lamb. He looks like a lamb but he talks like a dragon. This is the Antichrist, the one who comes instead of Christ, one who offers himself as though he were Christ. It is for this reason I believe the term Antichrist is properly applied to this second beast (although both beasts are anti-Christ in character). Horns speak of power, and this man has two lamb-like powers. Jesus also had these powers: the powers of a priest and of a prophet. This man acts as both. Jesus is a priest who leads men and women all over the world to worship the Father; this individual is a priest leading the world to worship the first beast.

Many have pointed out that we have here a kind of Satanic trinity. The first beast corresponding to the Father, the false prophet corresponding to the Son, and the dragon himself, Satan, playing the role of the invisible Holy Spirit. It is Satan's imitation of the one true God. Eugene Peterson helpfully says this about the number 666: "Expose these religious pretensions. This religion has nothing to do with God. Get its number: it is a human number. This is not divine mystery, but a confidence man's patter; it is religion that makes a show, religion that vaunts itself, religion that takes our eyes off of the poor and suffering and holy Christ. In the language of numbers, 666 is a triple failure to be a 777, the three-times perfect, whole, divine number."

Pray

Father, thank You for such a great salvation. Rescue me when I forget Your faithfulness in delusional moments, when I begin acting as though Jesus' sacrifice for my sins weren't enough or when I hear the accusations of Satan more clearly than You rejoicing over me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

These 144,000 were last seen in chapter 7 where we discussed whether it was an actual number or a symbol of an abundance of people. Either way, they were identified as a group of Jewish believers who minister during the Great Tribulation. Since they stand on Mount Zion with the Lamb, it shows that they emerge victorious. The beast of Revelation 13 has not defeated this abundance of people. They are triumphant, worshipping, and standing firm with Jesus. In chapter 7, they are seen at the beginning of the Great Tribulation; chapter 14 shows them in triumph at the end of it. An encouragement to keep worshipping! In Christ we have ultimate victory.

We are told in verse 3 that the 144,000 learn a new song which they hear from heaven. Remember, heaven is not way off somewhere; it is just beyond the realm of visibility. We are told that they kept themselves for the Lord only and they followed the Lamb throughout the earth. They are the "*first fruits*" of the harvest during the tribulation period.

We are presented with three angels who are carrying three important declarations from God. The first angel announces the eternal gospel to the whole earth. The second proclaims, "*Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great*", speaking of a world power! The third angel makes his declaration that anyone who worships the beast will drink the wine of God's wrath.

Verse 14 reveals the Son of man, Christ Himself, coming to harvest the earth. The stage is set. The people of God will be gathered and those who worship the beast will be slain. Notice the imagery of verse 20. The wicked are put into the winepress of God's wrath and the blood flow is as high as a horse's bridle for 1,600 stadia – that is a few feet high for approximately 184 miles. Can you imagine how much blood would have to be shed? This is a graphic image to exhort the world to stop worshipping the beast.

Pray

Father, in light of Your living hope and compelling love, measureless grace and eternal inheritance, free me to spend the rest of my days living to Your glory and not in my worry. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We find the final series of judgments from God in chapters 15 and 16. This is the time when the great cry of the oppressed of all ages is finally answered: *"How long, O Lord, how long?"* The pouring out of the seven bowls of the wrath of God is the third of a series of sevens that has formed the structure of this book. It is introduced to us here by a great sign which John sees in heaven in verses 1-4. As we come to these seven bowls of God's wrath, we have reached a turning point in history. God will begin to set up His kingdom upon the earth.

In this scene, John describes a great host of martyrs, men and women who have given their lives under the Antichrist, the beast of chapter 13. They are now seen in heaven standing on the sea of glass or crystal. I love this line: *"They sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb."* Only one song is sung but it goes by two titles, *"the song of Moses"* and *"the song of the Lamb"*. Here is a perfect union between law and love, between Old and New Covenant. It is a song of the deliverance of God's people by divine power, based upon a blood redemption.

There are many pointers in this chapter to the Exodus of Israel and deliverance from bondage. We see plagues, Moses, the tabernacle, and the cloud of God's glory. The striking thing about this song of the Lamb is that there is not a single word about their own achievements! The opposite is true; they sing, *"Great and marvellous are Your deeds, just and true are Your ways"*. When we stand in the presence of God, we will not feel that we have done anything. We will simply be abundantly grateful for what God has done for us.

Pray

Father, today I want to sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, *"Great and marvellous are Your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Your ways, King of the nations. Who will not fear You, Lord, and bring glory to Your name? For You alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed."* In Jesus' strong name.
Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The seven angels pour out their bowls in rapid succession. It is a terrible time of judgment, the most intensive period of tribulation the world has ever seen. It is what several Old Testament prophets call "*The Great and Terrible day of the Lord.*" It is what Jesus referred to in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:22 when He said, "*If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive.*" No one! All the population of the world would have been destroyed. All these plagues that are poured out are similar to the Exodus story. There, they are described as the wrath of God, and I feel their purpose here is the same. They are chastisements with the purpose of bringing repentance as much as they are punishments with the purpose of dispensing justice. While a lot of the language is symbolic, God's judgment of this world will not be a symbolic judgment. The reality behind a symbol is always greater and, in this case, more terrifying than the symbol itself.

This is the battle of Armageddon! We are given insight into the way nations are manipulated by unseen forces. They are unconscious of the fact they are being made to do certain things. Three evil spirits appear like frogs, coming out of the Satanic trinity – the great red dragon, the scarlet beast, and the false prophet. By miracles, they deceive the nations. This is the time when armies gather into Palestine to make war, first with one another and then, in a last desperate combat, with the Lamb of God Himself!

As I meditate and pray my way through this chapter, my heart feels stunned, silenced, left in awe. God's eternal majesty and reign are inevitable. It is only the gift of faith that can enable me to grasp the wonder of these words and the magnificence of this moment. And it is only the power of the gospel that can free me to believe and obey them. I'm sure you, like me, are so glad to be redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, awaiting our eternal home with Him.

Pray

Father, I am so glad that I am Your child and by royal invitation I live with You forever. Never will I face Your wrath, all because Jesus paid my debt in full. Thank You, ten thousand times ten thousand! In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Revelation 17

Live

Revelation has been called “a tale of two cities”. One is Babylon that represents this evil world and opposes the things of the one true God. Its character and destiny are described in detail in chapters 17-18. The other city is the New Jerusalem. Its glory and goodness are laid out in Revelation 21-22. At this point in the book, we are confronted with inescapable questions: Which God will you worship? Which city will you love and live for? We must all answer these questions. In a real sense, this is where Revelation has been taking us all along.

The angel speaking to John describes this great harlot as the one who sits on many waters. We are told later in this chapter that the many waters are the nations, people groups, language groups, multitudes of people that are ruled by Babylon. The fact that the woman is riding the beast shows us two things: first, she is supported by the political power of the beast; and second, she has a dominant role in the beginning, and, outwardly at least, is directing the beast. The beast on which the woman sits is described as scarlet; the Antichrist has taken on the colour of the dragon. It is a colour associated with luxury and royalty. It is also a colour associated with sin, spoken of in Isaiah 1:18. John says she is drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. This harlot will have a murderous lust for violence and will hate those who profess Jesus Christ as the Saviour.

In the end times, it is clear that this harlot’s false religion and apostasy (a turning away from the truth) will increase. Her influence is still with us today and is subtle. Satan is trying to draw us away from following Jesus and he uses people and sources that we would never suspect to be used. We must be very careful if we find ourselves questioning or compromising the Word of God when we know the truth.

Pray

Father, I bring to You my excuse making, unbelief, pride, and self-righteousness. Thank You for not giving up on me and for always being the Victor. You reign in righteousness and You always win. I stand redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus today. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The previous chapter would seem to speak of religious Babylon while this chapter refers to commercial Babylon. While they are intertwined, they each have their own distinctions. In the final destruction of the city a mighty angel takes up a stone and casts it into the sea as an emblem of the destruction that is to come. The voice of harpers, musicians, and pipers would be silent, no worker would trade there anymore, the sound of the millstone would be heard no more, the light of a lamp shine no more, and the voice of the bridegroom and bride never be heard again. Two things are certain here: God's judgment on sin is final and severe, and He will reign victorious!

I think verse 4 is the key to applying this chapter to believers today and in every age. *"And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her My people, so that you might not participate in her sins, and so that you might not receive of her plagues.'"* This verse is directed to Christians in John's time as well as in our own. The danger is real, as the seven letters to the seven churches show. It is not as easy to come out of Babylon as it sounds. We can see others around us, believers and unbelievers, being enticed by Babylon the Harlot. It can be more difficult to see how we ourselves are compromising with the Harlot, but believe me, the danger of compromising with the Harlot is real. The Laodicean letter, for example, portrays a wealthy church who is blind to her spiritual poverty. The Thyatira church has been enticed into thinking that she can worship God and worship the Beast as well. They do not appear to see the dangers of the compromises they are making. One of the themes of the seven letters is to prepare for the second coming of Jesus, and one of the ways we do this is by coming out of Babylon.

Pray

Father, chapters like this awaken me to be ready and to establish my heart, for the coming of the Lord draws near. Forgive me for living as if life is just going to go on forever. Help me today to refresh my mind with Your coming glory and Your eternal judgment on wickedness and sin. May I eradicate sin from my life once and for all. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

For me, there are five humongous chapters in the Bible. This is one of them! A voice is heard in heaven shouting “*Hallelujah!*” because God has judged the great harlot that had corrupted the earth. The Lamb of God is united to His bride, the church, nevermore to be separated. After all the persecutions and conflicts, this long-desired union is consummated.

We read a description of the conqueror – the Son of God as He appears on a white horse, the emblem of victory. He has on His head many crowns; wears a vesture dipped in blood; is followed by the armies of heaven; from His mouth goes a sharp sword; and His name is prominently written on His vesture and His thigh. This is the final war with the beast. The kings of the earth and their armies are gathered for battle. The beast and the false prophet are taken and cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. All that remain of the enemies of God are slain. The last obstacle that prevented the dawn of the millennial morning is taken away, and **THE CHURCH IS TRIUMPHANT!** What a chapter! The heavenly multitude praises God for the destruction of His enemies and the destruction of Babylon.

By holding fast to the message of what God has done in the person of Jesus Christ, we are, even now, preparing ourselves to receive the glorious gift Jesus Christ Himself will give us – the wedding garment of fine linen, bright and clean. God has invited us to that glorious feast which celebrates the destruction of His enemies and the final vindication of His grace. There will be the finest of everything. There is no more death, despair, pain or suffering. It is the appointed time for the glorious wedding of the King’s Son. And we are invited to this wedding, not merely as guests to watch the grand display; we are invited to become Christ’s own glorious bride: “*Radiant, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*” Simply stunning!

Pray

Father, I used to sing as a boy, “Some glorious morning Jesus will come, some glorious morning battles all won. He’ll shout the victory, break through the blue, some golden day-break, for me, for you.” Thank You that through You I am victorious! In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Here we see the binding of Satan. An angel comes down from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand, seizes the dragon and casts him into the pit that, for a thousand years, he should deceive the nations no more. The end is triumphant and glorious and we are assured that every enemy of the church will be slain. Satan's release at the end of the thousand years results in a rebellion. It is awful that even after ten centuries of peace and righteousness, led by Christ Himself, so many people will be willing to follow Satan that "*their number is like the sand of the sea*". But those who oppose God will be defeated. This time, Satan is cast forever into the lake of fire. There will be no escape or temptation from him ever again.

After the final defeat and punishment of Satan, the rest of mankind is resurrected. These are the non-believers brought back to life in the second resurrection. They are brought to a great white throne, symbolic of purity and justice. Unlike the rainbow throne described in earlier chapters, this one is not nice. Those who died in Christ are judged on the basis of His life rather than their own, but this group, when the records of human actions are opened, shall be judged according to their own works. All who are not found written in the book of life shall be cast into the lake of fire. Eternal judgment is final and daunting and as we come to the conclusion, my instinct to be ready rises and challenges me. At this point in Revelation, victory over death and evil is complete. Every harm, every wrong, and every sin has been punished. Every person who followed God has been restored and rescued. Satan is gone forever. All wrongs have been made right. What follows in the next chapters are John's visions of the eternity believers will share with Christ. I'm glad to be at this point in the study!

Pray

Father, I know that Jesus is not pacing the corridors of heaven, worried and fretting. He is enthroned beside You, Father, and reigning over all things, waiting for the Day when He will humble His enemies and return for His bride. These chapters inspire my spirit for that Day. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love the three little words that John was told to write down in verse 6, *"It is done!"* It reminds me of the words from Jesus on the cross, *"It is finished!"* What an incredible vision of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, descending from heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. All tears will be wiped away. In that blessed place there will be no more death or sorrow or pain. God will be there and all sorrow will cease. This is the glorious termination of all the struggles and conflicts of the Church. This is the result of Jesus' work of redemption in building the broken and in bringing us into more than we lost in Eden.

John attempts to describe the New Jerusalem in terms others can understand. He mentions precious materials such as gold and jasper but associates them with properties those materials don't normally have. Gold, for instance, is not normally clear, neither is jasper. This is John's struggle in explaining what he sees, an effort to describe the indescribable. He also points out that there is no temple in this new city since there is no need for it. Temples, priests, and rituals are all necessary when man is separated from God, but we will be living in direct communion with God and won't need a temple. I can't help but smile at this glorious prospect.

The Bible closes, as a revelation from heaven should, in a manner that drives out every anxious feeling, fills the soul with peace, and leads me and every child of God to look forward with bright anticipation, saying, as John did, *"Come, Lord Jesus"*. What joy awaits us in this glorious abode for the redeemed. It makes me realise the importance of telling as many people about it as I can. Our love for Jesus only deepens and intensifies as we read more of His Word and since loving well is the clearest evidence of us receiving more of Him, may He increasingly free us to love more and more.

Pray

Father, may the gospel be so evident in my life that I'll be more intrigued by people and less irritated by them; less resentful of their weaknesses and more engaged with their brokenness, so as to bring more people to glory. Now, that's a great ambition. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Here we have the epilogue of time as we know it. The main purposes of the vision are accomplished. The enemies of the Church are conquered. The Church is triumphant. The affairs of the world are wound up. The redeemed are given their eternal abode. The wicked are cut off. The earth is purified. And the affairs of the universe are fixed on their permanent foundation.

John sees a river of the water of life, a river that began in Genesis 1 in the Garden of Eden and runs through all of Scripture, the river of Grace. Water and life are often intertwined in Scripture, especially in the writings of John (see John 4:14 and 7:37-38). This city also contains a tree of life, something from which fallen man was barred after the fall. The reference to the leaves being used for healing is a poignant metaphor of God's goodness and power. Light is also a prominent metaphor in the Bible, representing truth and knowledge in passages like John 8:12 and Matthew 4:16. John comments in this chapter that night will be no more and the Lord God will be the Light.

A few miscellaneous matters close the book. A solemn affirmation that these revelations are true and will be speedily accomplished, and that anyone who keeps these sayings will be blessed. A solemn command not to change anything that has been revealed in this book. And the beautiful final statement of the One who reveals of all this to John: *"Yes, I am coming soon."*

Breathless with anticipation! We are so blessed by our Saviour and Lord, and at long last the bride loves Him like He loves her and the curtains of time are drawn only to reveal the majesty of all we have believed in, in fathoms beyond anything we could ever have dreamed in our wildest dreams. Jesus' return is inevitable and unavoidable. The dawn of eternity awaits us and the greatest love of our lives awaits and beckons us home!

Pray

Father, thank You for these immortal words... *"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let the one who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life, come."* I come... in Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

