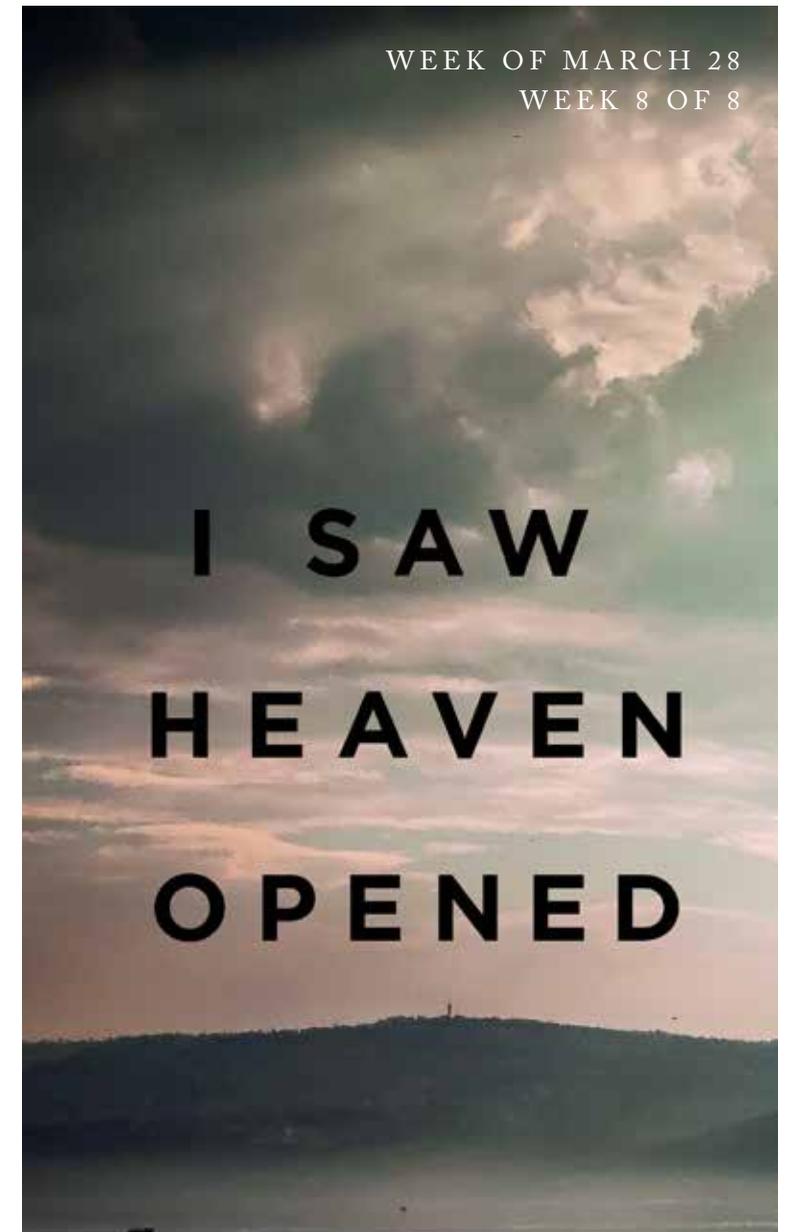


- Jesus IS God. Revelation has a very high Christology, or belief system, about Jesus. John is clear in many ways that Jesus the Lamb is equal to God the Almighty. They are both God. They are one God in two persons. Even though John doesn't dwell on the Holy Spirit as much, the Holy Spirit is in Revelation, you just have to look closely (see Rev. 22:17).
- Above all, Jesus is the Lamb of God. That is John's preferred description of Jesus, used 28 times in Revelation. This has huge significance. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). In Revelation, John helps us behold, over and over, the Lamb. The Lamb lived and died sacrificially for our salvation. We are told to live sacrificially as our faithful witness to the Lamb (John 20:21). God conquers all who are his enemies with the sacrifice of love and offer of a gracious salvation. If people refuse his grace/offer, they will experience his holy anger against their evil. All evil is anti-life, anti-Christ, and anti-God. Jesus wants to forgive and free people from their evil. If they persist in their evil, they will be judged by Jesus, who is Lamb, Lion, Lord, and Judge. Revelation says to receive him as Lamb so you don't encounter him as Lion-Judge.
- When you study prophetic and apocalyptic passages, use all three lenses of the Franklin glasses. The first lens reminds you to make sure you know what it meant to the first audience. Read all these verses in their context. Remember that context includes an amazingly creative use of the Old Testament by John. The context includes living in Rome, a fallen kingdom and an empire hostile to King Jesus.
- When you know through first lens seeing what it meant for them, then you use the second lens and look for the deep truth, often beneath the surface of the details. What is the theological and spiritual truth those details illustrate? When you know that truth, you are then ready to apply that deep truth through all of history and in all of our cultures.

- Finally, use that third lens to peer into the future, which for John turned out to be a far, distant future. For us, that future may be steadily drawing closer. The third lens helps us see how the experiences of the original audience, and the deep truth for all times, can be applied as we experience what John describes.
- However, resist trying to find or fit a one-to-one correspondence of particular verses in Revelation, or anywhere else in the Bible, with specific people and events in our 21st century time. That form of speculation is not helpful, and often results in harmful conclusions and decisions made from those conclusions. It is best to look for patterns and not particulars. It is also counter to the fact that the very traditions that do this believe Revelation 4-19 is not happening now, but describe the future tribulation.
- A case in point is the anti-Christ. The anti-Christ in New Testament thinking involves a number of images, symbols, and patterns. There are many anti-Christ—false teachers who lead people away from Christ (the spiritual dynamic). Some of them may have political power as well. There are anti-Christ ideologies or belief systems in opposition to the Christian faith, and systems or kingdoms that are in opposition as well. There may be a particular person who turns out to be the summation of evil and deserves the title of Anti-Christ as none other before him. But keep in mind, the pattern is most important. Anti-Christ is constant and powerful.
- Heaven is infinitely better than you can ever imagine. John tries to help us imagine it. I have found two books by C.S. Lewis very helpful in my own imagining. *The Great Divorce* is about a "bus trip" souls take from purgatory (for Lewis just a literary device) to the outskirts of heaven, to see if they would like to give heaven a try! The descriptions of the outskirts are beautiful. Also, in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, the 7th book is *The Last Battle*. It is all end times. Starting in chapter 14, Lewis describes heaven. It is breathtaking. I read it several times every year.

Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people (be with you). Amen. —Revelation 22:20-21



Sermon: Heaven Forever



Wrapping up Revelation

The challenge for this series of devotionals was how to explain in a few short words very large and complex Bible passages. We have used many of the best resources that study and explain Revelation. Most of those resources take 15-50 pages per chapter. We had to reduce that to a column per chapter. There is so much more. Our intention was to give you enough to get a general overview and make some sense out of the challenging prophetic, apocalyptic teaching of Revelation.

Our final devotional is different. You have 4 days to read through three chapters. Chapter 20 is the final word of judgment, and chapters 21 and 22 are the final words about eternal life in the new heaven/earth with JESUS. Only brief words are provided about the chapters. The rest of the devotional is some big picture thoughts to sum up this series. Read a few of the bullet summary points per day, or all at once.

Day 1: Revelation 20: The Thousand Years and Judgment

This chapter is dense with spiritual realities. It is the most debated chapter in Revelation. It would require too much space just to describe the options, much less support the one I believe best. So, just read about the 1,000 years, Satan bound, the first resurrection, and the second death; then the judgment of Satan and the beast and false prophet; and then the judgment of all the dead; and the consequences of unrepentant evil that says no to God.

Day 2: Revelation 21:1-8: All Things New

Notice the essential features of the new heaven and earth as you read through chapters 21 and 22, and each description of God/ Jesus.

Day 3: Revelation 21:9-22:5: The New Jerusalem

John is using superlative images and ideas to help you imagine the unimaginable. Like the song "I Can Only Imagine," John is trying to help you imagine heaven. What do you think John is trying to express with each new image?

Day 4: Revelation 22:6-21. The Final Words of Invitation For the rest of the chapter, John is wrapping everything together. It is a word of summary, a word of encouragement, a final warning, an amazing invitation, a fervent reminder (of the return of the King), and the promise of blessing.

The rest of this Devotional Guide is a list of summary beliefs about Revelation and the end times. We tried to capture most of what was covered on Sundays and during Wednesday Night Online.

*There are different views on the end times. There are core and essential truths, and then there are important and varied interpretations. It is essential to believe in the return of Jesus. There is freedom to differ in when and how it happens. Therefore, Living Word affirms the core, and teaches a faithful and fruitful interpretation on the particulars. But you have freedom to sort through the teachings and the responsibility to come to a good conclusion. What follows are mostly the **Essentials About the End Times**.*

- There will be the return of Jesus Christ the King. He came once as a baby. He will return as the Lamb who was slain and who is also the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, riding a white horse.
- Evil is everywhere in our world. Evil is supernatural in origin. It is destructive by nature. Evil destroys. In humans, evil is described as sin. Evil is not only in persons, but it is embodied in nations, systems, and ideologies. The image of the "beast" is a powerful metaphor to describe how evil becomes embodied in the systems of our world.
- The Church is stressed and challenged by living in a fallen world. At times there is less stress and tension, other times the stress becomes intense. Living in the United States has been relatively easy for Christians through much of our history. Christianity has had a favored position and our theological and ethical beliefs have shaped our culture. That was NOT so for the early Church and not true for the 7 churches of Revelation. They were a minority and, increasingly, a persecuted minority. The Church in the United States needs to be prepared to be steadily marginalized in the 21st century. The world's current is flowing strongly away from Christian faith. We need to get used to what the Church has experienced through much of history and what some of the Church experiences right now around the world, and that is more trouble and tribulation, perhaps some persecution as well.

- John does not assume that the Church will be faithful in resisting the pressures to conform to the world (the message in much of 1 John as well). The 7 churches were struggling with faithfulness. They were already under pressure. John does not minimize that pressure, nor the potential consequences of saying no to Caesar, to Rome, and to the beast. Instead, John promises that Jesus will provide for them so they can endure, and he will ultimately deliver them safely to heaven as well.
- Worship is central to Revelation. That was a new idea for many people. Worship is everywhere in Revelation. There are 7 times of worship, indicating the theological importance of worship. Why is worship so important? Because it is worship that connects you with the life of God Almighty and the Lamb who was slain, gives you strength to trust, and the ability to witness with faith, hope, and love. One of the strong messages of our series is: 2020 wrecked our worship and 2021 is the time to reclaim worship.
- God is sovereign and that means God is in control. Even though evil is everywhere, God permits and God limits evil. God will use the consequences of evil (destruction) as the occasion to foster repentance and a return to him. God is not willing for any to perish, but wants all to come to Jesus. But God will exercise justice about evil and judgment on evil. Those who persist in evil will experience the tragic consequences, and those who have been the victims of evil will be vindicated and recompensed beyond measure.
- Revelation is all about God. This is vital because so many popular teachings about the end times spend most of their energy trying to make correlations between verses in Revelation and events in the world. Revelation has a different focus. GOD is the focus. If the devil can get our eyes off of Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, and on to the evil and events around us, then we will fall short in our witness. We will tend to withdraw for safety, and our main concern will be to escape this mess as soon as possible (i.e., the rapture). At all times, but certainly in end times, we keep our eyes on Jesus.