



MOUNTAIN BROOK
BAPTIST CHURCH

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

2017

Introduction

WORTHY *is the* L A M B

Advent is the season we celebrate in preparation for Christmas; the word has Latin roots and means “coming.” We celebrate Advent prior to Christmas as we anticipate the birth of Christ. While it might seem a bit odd that we aren’t reading the birth narratives from the Gospels in our churchwide devotional reading during Advent this year, the Book of Revelation actually prepares us to celebrate Christmas because it anticipates the second Advent. You see, just as we celebrate the first Advent and the coming of Christ in the manger, we also wait with joyful expectation and eager longing for His Second Coming. Christ came once to earth as a child in the manger, but He will also come again as the Conquering King.

Revelation is a vision the disciple John received while in exile on the island of Patmos. It is the revelation of Jesus, given “to show His servants the things that must soon take place” (Revelation 1:1). Revelation is an apocalyptic work, which means it is an unveiling. It’s giving us a picture of what is to come. Revelation is also a work of prophecy—foretelling future events, yes, but also proclaiming the truth of God’s Word.

Many read the Book of Revelation to gain insight about end-time events. There are definitely many exciting, mysterious, and perplexing events in this book, yes! But more than that, I hope that as you read Revelation, you won’t get too lost in

the trees to see the forest. The Book of Revelation was given to the early church as a source of hope in the midst of conflict and persecution. The resounding gong that beats over and over throughout the text is that Jesus alone reigns. One day, He is coming again, and every knee will bow before Him. Satan will be forever and finally defeated, and Christ will be recognized by all as King of kings and Lord of lords. Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain!

As we anticipate Advent, I can't help but think of the haunting tune to "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." We still live in a world broken by sin, and we deal with the effects of the Fall every day. Our bodies wear out, and our souls grow weary. But the Book of Revelation gives us good hope that Emmanuel is coming again to ransom captive Israel—all who believe in Christ. There is coming a day when our victory over the grave in Christ will be realized, when death's dark shadows will be forever put to flight. Revelation tells us the story of that day when our faith will be made sight, when we will see Christ face to face, and when we will be able to proclaim with all of the saints, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). Until then, as we celebrate this first Advent, we await that second Advent. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

—Amy Jackson

THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA

Monday, December 4 | Revelation 1:1–8

Doug Dostch

Don't you love a good story? I sure do. While we all have our differences when it comes to the types of stories we most enjoy, every good story has a compelling beginning and end. The start hooks us into the plot and the end brings resolution. Without those two components, no amount of suspense in the middle can hold the reader's interest.

The Book of Revelation certainly meets that criterion, and it does so in a person—the risen Jesus. The book begins with an explanation of what John, the author, has seen while exiled on Patmos for his faith. As you read through Revelation, notice the parallels between this work and John's previous works—the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John—and the emphasis on witness and testimony. It's important as well to note that the Greek word for witness is martyr. Hence a Bible-based witness is one that is faithful to speak to one's experience regardless of the costs.

The opening chapter also contains a word of blessing (Revelation 1:3). There are seven such blessings in Revelation, which is the first hint of the importance of

the number seven and how each instance of that number conveys God's divine plan for the redemption of the world. The nature of this first blessing also shows how such texts were nearly always read aloud in their ancient settings.

The book is directed to seven representative churches in Asia Minor, or modern Turkey. As we will see, these churches have much to commend in terms of their witness; but for the most part, the challenging times in which these churches find themselves will require even more faithfulness in how they stand for Jesus.

Lastly, these opening verses focus the reader's attention on the source of the revelation, the crucified and risen Jesus, Who is Himself the model witness. In His death, He fulfilled Old Testament promises, and His imminent return will unleash the events that will make the kingdoms of this world His Kingdom (Revelation 11:15).

The point of these opening verses is to assure us that God is in firm control of world events. Everything began with Him at Creation, and everything will be consummated in the return of Jesus, the Incarnation of the Almighty. Far from being an esoteric theological point, this truth gives us confidence in the face of our everyday challenges that nothing is too difficult for God to address, and certainly nothing takes Him by surprise. For those who are concerned that life seems to be spinning out of control, they can be confident that everything is going according to God's plan, and it will be as good in the end as it was in the beginning.

WRITE WHAT YOU SEE

Tuesday, December 5 | Revelation 1:9–20

Doug Dorch

Patmos was a small island in the Aegean Sea some 55 miles from Ephesus, an important seaport in the ancient world and a center of Christian witness. John had been sent there by the Roman government for his witness to Christ, which was a witness against the Roman gods. There, on “the Lord’s Day” (Sunday), John was inspired with a vision of the exalted Christ standing in the midst of the seven churches to which John was to share his vision.

These churches are referred to as “golden lampstands” (Revelation 1:12), which represents the manner in which God’s presence was reflected in both the wilderness Tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple. The imagery comes from Zechariah 4:1–4 and is an indication of how much of John’s vision connects to Old Testament prophecies and promises.

Much as did Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–6) with his Temple vision, John falls to his feet in worship at what he has seen. But the revelation is meant to provoke action, and so John is instructed to write “what is to take place” (Revelation 1:19).

Again, the emphasis is on God's control of human affairs. The cosmic Christ holds the seven stars, representing His control over the entire universe and the manner in which His message to the churches will sustain them in their time of testing.

It takes faith to recognize God's hand at work when all seems to be in disarray. But for those who do see it and embrace it, the knowledge of God establishing His reign in the Risen Jesus leads us first to worship and then to faithful service.

Revelation 1:17-19

*“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead.
But He laid His right hand on me, saying,
‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one.
I died, and behold I am alive forevermore,
and I have the keys of Death and Hades.
Write therefore the things that you have seen,
those that are and those that are to take place after this.’”*

WRITE TO THE ANGELS: PART ONE

Wednesday, December 6 | Revelation 2

Doug Dorch

John's first audience is those churches that dotted the region of Asia Minor where he himself had ministered so faithfully. The first church, Ephesus, was the administrative and commercial hub of the Roman Empire in Asia Minor. While the Spirit commends the Ephesians for their resistance to the heresy of the Nicolaitians (most likely a group that had accommodated pagan worship), the Spirit's challenge to them was that they be continually vigilant and to remember their first love (Revelation 2:4), lest their lampstand (witness to Christ) be removed.

The second church mentioned is the church at Smyrna. Smyrna was a port city 30 miles north of Ephesus and was a place closely aligned with Rome and the cult of emperor worship ("where Satan has his throne" according to Revelation 2:13). The Spirit commends this church for its perseverance amid affliction and poverty, and is one of only two of the seven churches not challenged to step up their witness, probably because they have undergone so much persecution already.

The third church mentioned is the church at Pergamum. Pergamum was a noted center of the Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor. Its name means “citadel” in the Greek. In spite of how believers there were holding fast to Christ in the place where the Emperor Augustus was worshipped as a divine being, they too have more work to do in renouncing pagan practices (“the teaching of Balaam”).

Thyatira was a commercial center renowned for its many trade guilds. You may remember from your reading of Acts that Lydia, a prominent early church leader, had been a dealer of purple goods there (Acts 16:14–15). While believers there had been growing in their understanding of Christ, they were still guilty of tolerating an anonymous female and had not totally distanced themselves from pagan practices (their toleration of “that woman Jezebel”). Instead of caving in to the cultural pressure, John encourages them “to hold on to what you have” (Revelation 2:25) so they can share in Christ’s imminent victory.

These first letters show us pressures that even early believers felt to compromise their faith in Jesus in subtle ways. But any accommodation stains our testimony, and these words remind us today that being a distinct people—while a great challenge—is always more than worth the effort when we consider the benefits of holding fast to a faithful witness.

WRITE TO THE ANGELS: PART TWO

Thursday, December 7 | Revelation 3

Doug Dorch

The third chapter continues the Spirit's message to the churches in Asia Minor. Sardis was a prosperous city north of Ephesus, which at one time was the capital city of Lydia. It is the only church not offered any word of encouragement, which reveals their trust in their prosperity and its impact on their dwindling faith. They look like a church that is alive, but they are in reality close to death. But if they can "strengthen what remains" (Revelation 3:2), there is every reason to believe that hope is not far away.

Philadelphia was a small town southeast of Ephesus. Though small, the church there had been faithful and true, especially under attack from their Jewish opponents ("the synagogue of Satan"). Philadelphia is also not challenged to strengthen their testimony because of the patient endurance they have shown in the face of their persecution.

The last church mentioned is Laodicea. Laodicea was a wealthy city near Colossae, east of Ephesus. Most of us know of their lukewarm faith, which was complacent and self-satisfied. They are warned to increase their devotion

to the Christ Who knocks at the door (Revelation 3:20), lest when He comes, He spits them out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16).

No church is perfect. We see that point over and over again in this section of John's revelation. And what's most disconcerting is that the more prosperous the church is, the more in danger it is of losing its effectiveness. However, every church has something to be said for its witness, and if it can only leverage that strength, its witness can be preserved and even made more valuable to Christ's cause. As with these churches, we see that the best evidence of our value to the Kingdom is the level of change for good we see taking place in our larger community.

Revelation 3:19-20

*“Those whom I love,
I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.
Behold, I stand at the door and knock.
If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me.”*

THE THRONE IN HEAVEN

Friday, December 8 | Revelation 4

Doug Doatch

The fourth chapter of Revelation sets the stage for the opening of the scroll, which symbolizes the unleashing of the divine will. In this chapter, John is invited to approach the throne room of Heaven, where he sees the saints offering continual praise to God, the Creator of all, and not the Roman Caesar.

There are 24 elders surrounding the throne. This number represents the whole company of believers, with twelve representing the twelve tribes of Israel and twelve representing the disciples of Jesus. Their white gowns and crowns of gold symbolize the victory over the earthly powers and principalities because of their commitment to God's Messiah.

Also, John sees four living creatures. These creatures symbolize the whole of the created order, much in the same way they did for the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:6, 10). They show that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus is the God of Creation, and His power stands above every other worldly power—an important point for a people being persecuted by an Empire resistant to opposition.

John needs such a vision to remind him that what he's up against with the powers that exiled him and that are holding back the church's witness will not prevail. God will prevail. God will hold the powers of evil accountable for all they have done to His good creation, and they will not be able to stand against His purposes that are soon to be unleashed.

For many of us, our understanding of God is too small. We could benefit from a vision of God Who is truly worthy of our worship and praise because of how He transcends all creation and holds everything in His hands. We may not always know what the future holds, but as Revelation reminds us, we can indeed know Who holds the future and how He is able to hold us as we hold fast to our faith in Christ.

Saturday, December 9 – Sunday, December 10

Revelation 1–4

*Reread Revelation 1–4 over the weekend.
Reflect on all that God has been saying to you
through His Word this week.*

THE LION AND THE LAMB

Monday, December 11 | Revelation 5

Mary Splawn

The Christmas story is full of paradox. Think about it: the all-powerful God came in the form of a humble child. The Deliverer was Himself delivered. The King was born to a commoner. His palace was a barn. As the song reminds us, He had no crib for a bed—just a feeding trough and some swaddling clothes. And though many had awaited His arrival, few actually noticed when the Messiah was born.

Jesus' ministry seems paradoxical, as well—power mingled with humility. He turned over tables in the Temple, and He took children on His lap to bless them. He spoke to the sea and it listened, He commanded demons to leave by His voice, and yet He stood silent when condemned to die. He came not to be served but to serve, and through His one life He ransomed many. It is a beautiful mystery.

In the same way, Revelation 5 reveals the paradox of our Savior. He is seen in John's vision as both the Lion and the Lamb. Strength and vulnerability are mingled in the beautiful Lord. We see Jesus as the Lion of Judah Who is the conquering King and as the Lamb Who was slain for the sins of the world.

He is both the Lion and the Lamb, and that is good news this Christmas! Take time to read Revelation 5 again. Allow the language of the elders, angels, and creatures to be your prayer.

Thank You, Jesus, that You have the power to overcome the evil one and the humility to overcome in a way that is for our good! You are worthy of worship, for by Your blood You ransomed people of God from every tribe, language, and nation. Yours is power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. May You sit on the throne of my heart today. Amen.

Revelation 5:2-5

*“And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice,
‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?’
And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth
was able to open the scroll or to look into it,
and I began to weep loudly because no one
was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.
And one of the elders said to me,
‘Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah,
the Root of David, has conquered,
so that He can open the scroll and its seven seals.’”*

REST A LITTLE LONGER

Tuesday, December 12 | Revelation 6

Mary Splawn

When I was a little girl, my grandmother would spend the night with us on Christmas Eve. She would sleep in my bed. Each year, I looked forward to cuddling with her and talking to her as I tried to sleep. Throughout the night, I'd ask, "How much longer till I can get up and see my Christmas gifts?" Until daybreak, she'd gently reply, "You need to rest a little while longer."

In this scene in Revelation 6, the martyrs whose souls are under the altar cry out to the Lord. They ask, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" They too are told to rest a little while longer.

Although they are told to wait (see verse 11), they are also given divine assurance that the Lord will judge and avenge their blood. By saying "a little longer," God is pledging that the time is finite. A day is coming when God will judge the world and those who are disobedient to His will.

After the martyrs cry out to the Lord, John envisions the

judgement that falls upon the earth. The imagery of earthquakes, eclipses, collapse of the heavens, and mighty winds are all symbols of judgment. Kings and servants alike run to the hills, but they cannot escape the wrath of God.

These images of judgment are a warning to those who oppose God, and they are an encouragement to the believers and martyrs that their service of the Lord is not in vain. God will judge evil.

As we wait on the Lord to fully and finally defeat evil, we can rest in the blessed assurance that “Jesus is mine,” as mentioned in Fanny Crosby’s hymn. We would be like those who cannot stand before the wrath if it weren’t for Him. But praise God! He keeps no record of our sin, because we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. As the hymn says, “Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest; watching and waiting, looking above, filled with His goodness, lost in His love.”

Take a few minutes to sing “Blessed Assurance” as a prayer to the Lord. Also read Psalm 130 and thank the Lord for the forgiveness and the assurance that with the Lord is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption.

COUNTED

Wednesday, December 13 | Revelation 7:1–8

Mary Splawn

All throughout the year, my uncle saves his pocket change, and on Christmas night, one lucky person wins it at our family's gathering. But the fun doesn't stop there. After the initial prize is determined, we are all given the opportunity to guess the total amount of money and the number of pennies in the jar. We gaze at the jar, make some calculations, and write out our guesses. The person who guesses closest to the correct amount or the right number of pennies wins \$100. But, in order to find out who gets these prizes, we have to do some sorting and counting. Rows and rows of change cover the table that is surrounded by past winners who are now designated counters (because that's the one catch—if you win, you count . . . for five years).

Revelation 7:1–8 is a vision of sorting and counting, as well. John sees the faithful of Israel being sealed (marked as God's people) and then organized, as an army would divide up in preparation for battle. Those counted are put into groups of 12,000 sorted from each tribe, totaling 144,000. The battalions are organized and sealed, ready to serve in the army of the Lord.

This number of the troops has been misinterpreted throughout history, especially by the Jehovah's Witnesses. They believe this passage supports the doctrine that only 144,000 people will be in Heaven. But if you read on in the next vision in the second half of the chapter, you'll see that there is a great multitude of people that no one could number from every tribe and nation surrounding the throne in Heaven. This vision shows so many worshipping the Lord that it seems they can't even be counted! I wouldn't even guess at that number.

This is the wonderful message of Christmas that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds: "good news of great joy that will be for all the people," not just the 144,000 most faithful! "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

Christ has come so that all who believe in Him may have salvation and they may be sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit who serves in our hearts as a guarantee of the eternal inheritance that is to come (Ephesians 1:13-14). It is our job as Christians to share this great message of joy, because salvation is the best gift anyone can receive at Christmas.

BEFORE THE THRONE

Thursday, December 14 | Revelation 7:9–17

Colton Earles

Can you believe there was a time when the Jews thought Christianity was only for themselves? In fact, the only way the Jews believed Gentiles could come to the faith was by becoming circumcised, practicing Jews. In Acts 15, Paul makes his case at the Council of Jerusalem, defending the genuineness of the Gentiles he had seen come to faith. At this council, it is decided that the Gentiles do not have to be circumcised to be considered Christ followers; they just have to live a repentant life to the standard Christ has set. As Gentiles, we should all be very thankful for that. What is really crazy is that there are people who claim to follow Christ today who marginalize others from the gospel because of their race, social class, or education level.

In Revelation 7:1–8, we see the Jews taking their place in Heaven; but as we move into Revelation 7:9–17, we see another multitude taking their place in Heaven. The people described in verses 9–17 are made up of believing peoples from every nation, all tribes and all languages. And what are these multitudes doing? They are all standing before the throne, praising God and the Lamb saying, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:10). All believers from every race, social class, and education level will fall on their faces before the throne

saying, “Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever! Amen” (Revelation 7:12). What a beautiful picture of reconciliation we see before the throne. Before the throne, man is reconciled back to God, being made righteous through the work of Christ. Before the throne, man is reconciled to man, for they no longer live in pride and selfishness, but have been perfected in Christ and live in equal unity with others. This picture of Heaven makes me wonder, How am I making the gospel available to all and contributing to that great multitude before the throne?

As believers leave behind a life of suffering, tribulation, persecution, and trials, they enter Heaven and wash their robes white in the blood of Christ. Standing before the throne, Revelation 7:15–17 paints the picture of a Shepherd taking care of His sheep. Before the throne of God, the sheep serve day and night in His Temple. They are sheltered with His presence. They do not hunger or thirst. The sheep are not left out in the sun to be struck by its heat, for the Shepherd, the Lamb, guides them to springs of living water. God wipes away every tear from their eyes, for they will never again suffer, endure tribulation, be subject to persecution, or go through trials. All believers from all nations, tribes, and languages have been brought into the presence of God. And it is here that they will dwell forever before the throne. Again, I wonder, How am I making the gospel available to all and contributing to that great multitude before the throne?

Note: Colton Taylor serves in our Christian Life Center. He is a student at Beeson Divinity School.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SILENCE

Friday, December 15 | Revelation 8:1–5

Mary Splawn

One of the most memorable worship services I attended as a child was a silent Lord's Supper service. We all sat silently in the sanctuary until the appropriate time when the pastor took a big loaf of bread in his hands, raised it above his head, broke it, and bowed his head in prayer. After he prayed, the bread was distributed, and when everyone had some, he motioned for us to eat. Next, he took a pitcher and poured the juice into a cup. Then, he raised the cup, bowed his head, and prayed. Next, small juice cups were distributed and in silence we partook again. Then, the pastor sat down and for what seemed like half an hour, we reflected in silence on the gift of grace we had received in Jesus. Eventually, one by one, we left in silence.

I remember the service because of its novelty, but also because of the welcomed presence of silence. It was a holy moment where no music or speaking was allowed—only time for silent reflection on Christ's sacrifice and a visual picture of His broken body and blood poured out for us. The silence helped me contemplate the significance.

I believe the silence in Revelation 8 is meant to call the

assembly around the throne to reflection. Revelation 8:1 says, “When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” Instead of moving quickly into the scene of judgment and destruction that is coming in the verses to follow, the action stops for thirty minutes. Nothing happens. No one talks. No horn blows.

Perhaps this time was given for all who surrounded the throne to sit silently before the Lord and reflect upon His patient, forgiving character and His desire that none should perish but that all might come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Maybe the silence reminds those present of the severe nature of judgment and the gravity of what is to come. The silence surely helps them contemplate God’s great sadness over the judgment that must come for those who reject Christ as King.

Following the silence, the prayers of the saints rise before the Lord as incense. Included in these prayers are those of the martyrs who call out for Christ to end the suffering of the faithful (Revelation 6:10). Then, the trumpets blow. With each loud blare, judgment is hurled upon the earth. It is a terrible scene of destruction and reckoning.

As we contemplate this passage, we too are called to reflection. We must realize that God’s wrath will come on those who do not submit to Him. And, we must remember that silence before the Lord, while to our modern sensibilities feels awkward and unproductive, is actually a wonderful opportunity to remember God’s great love. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

Take a few minutes to silently reflect on the fact that Jesus took the judgment we should bear in order that we may be saved from the wrath that is to come. Thank the Lord for those who have lost their lives as martyrs so that we may know the great message of hope. Ask the Lord to give you urgency and boldness when sharing the message of God's love with those who do not follow Christ.

Revelation 8:1-5

“When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.”

Saturday, December 16–Sunday, December 17

Revelation 5:1–8:5

Reread Revelation 5:1–8:5 over the weekend.

*Reflect on all that God has been saying to you
through His Word this week.*

WILD THINGS

Monday, December 18 | Revelation 8:6–9:21

Hayden Walker

Have you ever read the children's story *Where the Wild Things Are*? In the book, a young boy named Max travels to an imaginary land. It is a place filled with mythical creatures composed of mismatched animal parts. One of the most memorable of these creatures has the hair of a man, the horns of an ox, the skin of a fish, and the talons of a bird. There is something appalling about one beast constituted of various other creatures.

Perhaps as you read the passage for today, you painted mental pictures of the creatures described that were equally terrifying. The locusts of destruction described in verses 9:7–10 sound ferocious enough to send chills down your spine. Similarly, the lion-headed horses have snakes for tails (Revelation 9:17–19). These mighty creatures are capable of immense damage and pain. In fact, by their destruction, a third of the remaining people on earth are killed.

As interesting as these creatures are, the most fascinating part of the passage is Revelation 9:20–21. Two-thirds of all humanity is spared from death by these fearsome creatures. However, they continue to live in their dark and evil ways, worshipping their idols. These idols cannot see nor hear nor

move. Unfortunately, the people continue to trust in them and do not see their salvation from the beastly destruction as an opportunity to repent and turn to God. They continue worshipping false gods and live for momentary pleasures, even after their lives are spared. Humans are stubborn creatures. We do not like to turn from our wicked ways, and we do not like to admit we are wrong.

During this season of Advent, as you wait for the joy of Christmas, might you take the time to evaluate the condition of your heart? Are there things that are a part of your life—even good things—which take primacy over Jesus? What are you worshipping with your time, attention, and money? Let us repent of this sin and turn our hearts fully to the sovereign God. He, unlike our idols, sees us and hears us and moves in our lives and hearts. Thanks be to God!

Revelation 9:20-21

“The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

A DAY WITH NO MORE DELAY

Tuesday, December 19 | Revelation 10

Hayden Walker

A favorite Advent hymn of many is “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” The text of this hymn was first written in Latin over 1,000 years ago. My favorite renditions of the song are slow and contemplative, allowing room for the longing and waiting of the people of God to resonate with me. Israelites cried out to God for centuries for the Messiah to come and deliver them.

While we are on the other side of Christ’s first Advent, we can relate to those ancient Israelites because we still long for the return of our resurrected and victorious Messiah. We feel this tension of longing for Christ’s return most deeply in seasons of suffering. We are certain that final victory is ours in Jesus, which supplies us with hope. However, we are not escapist; as Christians, we acknowledge that our lives are filled with pain and trials. Often from our places of pain, we cry out, “How long, O Lord?” (Revelation 6:10). We yearn for Jesus to make everything right.

In our passage for today, we see that one day, there will be “no more delay” (Revelation 10:6) in God’s action. This

truth is given to John in the form of a little scroll. He is told to eat the scroll, which is at first sweet, but then bitter in his stomach (Revelation 10:10).

The truth that Christ will one day return in justice is indeed sweet news for the believer, but it is also a bitter truth that Christians will continue to endure pain, persecution, and sorrow until that day. We must remember that Christ's Kingdom has been inaugurated, but not yet consummated. As believers, we live our lives in the tension of Christ's final victory and our present suffering. We can persevere with great hope, however, because we know that just as the Resurrection—not the cross—was the final word for Jesus, our glorification—not our suffering—is our destiny. Even so, come Lord Jesus! We long for the day when there is no more delay!

Revelation 10:8-9

“Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, ‘Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.’

So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, ‘Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.’”

FAITHFUL WITNESSES

Wednesday, December 20 | Revelation 11:1–14

Hayden Walker

We often attempt to tie specific people and events with each text in Revelation. When we do so, we become wrapped up in details that often cause us to miss the point of the passage. That is a danger of today's text, as well! Though we would all like to know the identity of these two witnesses, we would do better to understand the point this text is illustrating. In fact, the story of the two witnesses serves to demonstrate the truth we learned in chapter 10: believers will have final victory, but that doesn't preclude suffering in this life.

The two witnesses faithfully proclaim God's truth, with great power (Revelation 11:5–6). This power should remind us of the prophets of the Old Testament, who demonstrated the might of God through signs and wonders. So, what does this have to do with us? We are called, just as the witnesses are, to preach God's truth to a dark and broken world. Like the witnesses, we are not left to this calling without power. The Holy Spirit indwells believers and supplies us with what we need to faithfully minister to those around us. As Christians, we should glean great hope from this passage.

Tragically, we see that though the witnesses are faithful, they still face persecution and death. We must take this as a reminder that trials, suffering, and even death of believers are not indicative of God's abandonment. Though the witnesses are martyred, God raises them up from the dead. God's breath enters their bodies and they return to life, death no longer having any hold over them (Revelation 11:11).

Christmas can be a particularly hard time of year for those of us who are missing our loved ones who have died. Though death may reign for a season, God will raise up His people just as the witnesses are resurrected. While the wait may seem long and lonely, God has not forgotten you and certainly has not abandoned His resurrection program. The hope of our bodily resurrection from death gives us authentic comfort in seasons of sorrow. Thanks be to God!

Revelation 11:9-11

“For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.”

WHEN THE FUTURE IS NO MORE

Thursday, December 21 | Revelation 11:15–19

Hayden Walker

The conclusion of Revelation 11 looks forward to the day when judgment ends and God’s rule and reign is established forever and ever. In fact, Revelation 11:14–19 is our first glimpse into God’s perpetual Kingdom. Chapters 19–22 will cover in greater detail what is announced here. This is the view from an airplane; those later chapters will come down to the height of a helicopter. However, the theme remains the same: Jesus wins and reigns forever.

You may remember the elders from earlier portions of the book (Revelation 4:4–11; 5:5–14). This special order of angels is regularly falling down before the throne of God in reverent worship. Their words of praise and adoration in Revelation 4:8 conclude with the expression that the Lord God is the One “who was and is and is to come.” In 11:17, they continue to praise the Lord God, but the phrase changes. Now, they only exclaim that He is the One “Who is and Who was.” By this point in the story, the “Who is to come” finally has come. All of the promises of the future, of victory, of Christ’s Kingdom are at last realized. From that point forward, there is no more future—only the eternal present of God’s presence with mankind.

This presence is demonstrated in this passage with the opening of God's heavenly Temple (Revelation 11:19) as the Ark is revealed. In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant was so holy that it was only seen by one person, once a year. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies to sprinkle blood upon the mercy seat of the Ark. The vision in Revelation 11:19 shows that the Ark is now visible to all people, all of the time. This image is representative of God's presence with His people, which will last forever in His new Kingdom.

Come, Lord Jesus! We await the day that all of our future hope will be the present. Amen.

Revelation 11:15-17

*“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet,
and there were loud voices in heaven, saying,
‘The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ,
and He shall reign forever and ever.’*

*And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God
fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying,
‘We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, Who is and Who
was, for You have taken your great power and begun to reign.’”*

A COSMIC VIEW OF BETHLEHEM

Friday, December 22 | Revelation 12

Hayden Walker

One of my favorite traditions at MBBC is our Christmas Eve candlelight worship service. Every year as we listen to the birth narrative from Luke 2, scenes of the living nativity play in my head as I attempt to fathom what it must have been like that night in Bethlehem so long ago. While the Gospel stories of Jesus' birth are a regular part of our Advent readings, this chapter from Revelation likely is not. However, this passage is a sort of cosmic view of Christ's life and holds value for us as we reflect on the true meaning of Christmas.

The pregnant woman in this passage is not the virgin Mary, but the faithful Israelites who have waited so long for their Messiah. Before the child is even born, a ferocious dragon waits to devour Him. This evil creature is certainly representative of Satan. Indeed, Satan did stand ready in an attempt to destroy Jesus. However, the efforts of evil are futile; the child is caught up to Heaven (Revelation 12:5). While Jesus' life on earth lasted over three decades, here we see it portrayed as a brief moment before the Ascension.

The woman then flees for protection. She continues to represent the people of God, and we see that God cares for her, just as He cares for us (Revelation 12:6). The chapter concludes with a heavenly war. But just as the Christ child was triumphant immediately, this war is really nothing to God. The victory is His with no equal effort. Satan and his demons are defeated unequivocally. Battle gives way to rejoicing! God's people have been victorious by the blood of the Lamb. This story gives us a cosmic view of Christ's life and triumph, a grander picture than just the manger. Perhaps it might even find its place in your family's Christmas Eve traditions!

Saturday, December 23–Sunday, December 24

Revelation 8:6–12:17

Reread Revelation 8:6–12:17 over the weekend.

*Reflect on all that God has been saying
to you through His Word this week.*

FAITHFULLY AWAITING OUR KING

Monday, December 25 | Revelation 13:1–10

Wayne Splawn

The first recipients of John's revelation were well acquainted with the arrogance, pride, and blasphemy associated with the Roman rulers of their day. Caesar readily accepted divine titles and required Roman citizens to offer worship to him. The worship of local deities would have been allowed, but only if worship was offered to Caesar, as well. In the original context of Revelation, John's first audience most probably understood the beast as representative of the emperors who required citizens to worship them. Failure to willingly engage in such emperor worship would have meant persecution, and in many cases, death.

So, John encourages his audience to patiently endure suffering and remain faithful to Jesus Christ (Revelation 13:10). As we celebrate Christmas today and the first coming of Christ our King, we are reminded that Jesus will once again return to our world. This time, Jesus will once and for all destroy all demonic and earthly powers who oppose His plans and His purposes in this world. In the meantime, Christians can expect to be faced with

varying levels of opposition and persecution because of our unwillingness to bow our knees or offer our worship to anyone other than Christ. Such a life of faithfulness will require us to remember that there is no one like our God and that no one, no matter how powerful or impressive they may seem, will ever be able to thwart His purposes in our lives.

As you conclude your time in the Scriptures this morning, ask God to show you the ways you are tempted to give your allegiance to anyone or anything other than Jesus Christ. Also, ask God to give you the courage and faithfulness you will need to follow Him faithfully every day between today and the Second Coming of Christ.

Revelation 13:10b

*“Here is a call
for the endurance
and faith of the saints.”*

LEADING OTHERS TO CHRIST

Tuesday, December 26 | Revelation 13:11–18

Wayne Splawn

Throughout the Book of Revelation, various beasts are mentioned who represent people in positions of worldly authority in John's day. Many of them share the characteristic of doing seemingly miraculous things meant to influence people to offer them worship and allegiance. Here in Revelation 13:11–18, John mentions a beast who had the ability to overcome a seemingly mortal wound. Another is said to call down fire from Heaven. However, John is clear that these acts were nothing more than stunts designed to deceive the people (Revelation 13:14). And, if the people weren't swayed by seemingly miraculous acts, government officials would put economic pressure on them designed to convince them to fall in line to avoid harsh punishments.

In our own day, there are still people who try to amass followers. Some even do so in the name of God. How do we recognize leaders truly sent from the Lord? One characteristic godly leaders will have is a desire to point people away from themselves and toward Jesus Christ. Their boasts will be in what Christ has done

rather than in what they can do. In verse 18, John says the mark taken by those who worship the beast is 666. Scholars generally agree this number either represents Nero Caesar (whose name would have equaled 666 using the technique known as gematria when written in Hebrew) or is simply a number used to show the inadequacy of all humans (since 7 was the number of perfection and 777 would represent the perfection of our triune God).

As we consider what it means for us to faithfully worship and follow Jesus Christ, the One Who humbled Himself by taking on flesh that first Christmas morning, it is important we remember that our call to follow His example of humility will be diametrically opposed to the world's definition of power and greatness. Rather than bow our knees and offer our allegiance to the worldly leaders or seek to amass followers by drawing attention to our gifts and abilities, we must follow in the footsteps of Jesus and unapologetically point others to Him no matter the cost.

FOLLOWING THE LAMB

Wednesday, December 27 | Revelation 14

Wayne Splawn

Here in Revelation 14, John sees the Lamb standing on Mount Zion together with 144,000 people who bear the name of the Lamb and His Father on their forehead. The 144,000 John mentions in these verses most certainly refers to the full number of God's people, because John mentions a host of people around the throne no man can number in Revelation 7:9. Rather than taking on the mark of the beast, these people bear the mark of the one true God.

How do people who bear the mark of God live? They sing a new song of worship, they follow the Lamb wherever He goes, and they live lives characterized by honest speech and holiness. This Christmas season, what might it look like for us to follow Christ and bear witness to Jesus? We may not have a visible mark on our heads that signifies we belong to the Lamb, but we can show others we belong to Jesus Christ by how we live. During this season of the year, we are often focused on giving gifts to others and singing beloved Christmas carols. Perhaps the best gift we could offer to our sin-sick world would be to yield our lives to Jesus Christ and follow in His footsteps. Such a life will be marked by an honesty and holiness and will bear witness to our belief that the good news of Christmas is so much more than a song on our lips.

Revelation 14:1-5

*“Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb,
and with Him 144,000 who had His name
and His Father’s name written on their foreheads.
And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar
of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder.
The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists
playing on their harps, and they were singing
a new song before the throne and before
the four living creatures and before the elders.
No one could learn that song except the 144,000
who had been redeemed from the earth.
It is these who have not defiled themselves with women,
for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb
wherever He goes. These have been redeemed from
mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb,
and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.”*

A SONG OF HOPE

Thursday, December 28 | Revelation 15

Wayne Splawn

Singing is one of the most important things Christians do. God commands that we sing His praises, and the content of our songs is important because the theology we sing usually shapes our understanding of God in powerful ways. Many of us prefer different styles of music in worship, but one thing upon which we all should agree is that we must sing things that are true. Substance is far more important than style.

Here in Revelation 15, we find a group of believers who have been victorious over the beast. They are holding harps and singing:

“Great and amazing are Your deeds,
 O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are Your ways,
 O King of the nations!
Who will not fear, O Lord,
 and glorify Your name?
For You alone are holy.
 All nations will come
 and worship You,
for Your righteous acts have been revealed”

(Revelation 15:3–4).

In a world marked by chaos and destruction, these believers proclaim truth in song. God's deeds are great and amazing. God's ways are true and just. All people will fear Him and glorify His name. All nations will one day come and worship before Him. The believers who first receive John's revelation no doubt feel as if they are a small, persecuted minority, and they endure the scorn of people who oppose God and His people. But, the truth they sing into this situation reminds them that things will not always be this way. One day, God will be worshipped and feared by people from every tribe and nation. This truth will empower them to remain faithful to God even in the face of hardship and persecution.

As you go about your day today, keep the truths of Revelation 15:3–4 ever before you. When things seem dark and you feel despondent, preach the truth of this Scripture to yourself and ask God to give you faith to believe that one day, every creature in Heaven and on earth will give God the glory due His name!

Revelation 15:5–6

*“After this I looked, and the sanctuary
of the tent of witness in heaven was opened,
and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with
the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen,
with golden sashes around their chests.”*

STAY AWAKE

Friday, December 29 | Revelation 16

Wayne Splawn

Have you ever missed an important meeting because you overslept? I would venture to guess that each of us has done this on at least one occasion. Few things are more embarrassing than missing an appointment because you slept through your alarm clock.

In Revelation 16, we read of seven angels who pour out seven bowls of God's wrath upon the residents of earth who had taken the mark of the beast. People are afflicted with sores, seas and rivers are turned to blood, people are burned by the scorching heat of the sun, and more. How do the afflicted respond to God's judgments? They curse God and refuse to repent of their wickedness. What is the point of John seeing this revelation of impending judgment?

In verse 15, John records the following words of the Lord, "Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!" These scenes of coming judgment and doom are meant to remind us of the importance of being prepared for the coming day of the Lord. During Advent, we celebrate Jesus' first coming to earth. And as we look back to that glorious day, we should

also look forward to the day when the Lord will once again return to the earth. On that day, God's Kingdom will fully come, and those who have opposed God's purposes will receive their just reward. In the meantime, you and I must stay awake and make preparations for the Lord's coming. We are often distracted from giving ourselves to things of eternal importance when we fail to remember that so many of the cares of this world are temporary. May God give us the grace we need to remain focused on things of eternal importance and to share the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ with those God puts in our lives.

Saturday, December 30–Sunday, December 31

Revelation 13–16

Reread Revelation 13–16 over the weekend.

*Reflect on all that God has been saying to you
through His Word this week.*

THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

Monday, January 1 | Revelation 17

Amy Jackson

One of my favorite things about a wedding is seeing the bride for the first time. If you aren't in the wedding party, chances are when the doors are opened and she appears in the narthex, ready to walk down the aisle, this is the first time you've seen her on her wedding day in a beautiful dress and perhaps wearing a flowing veil. Brides seem to glow on their wedding days, don't they? Sometimes, we can be even be taken aback by their beauty and radiance!

At this point in John's vision, John is given a glimpse of something he hasn't seen before; but rather than seeing a bride clothed in white waiting for her groom, he sees "a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names" (Revelation 17:3). She seems to be a woman of wealth and means, "arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls" (Revelation 17:4). But she doesn't glow with the radiance of an innocent bride; rather, she is drunk on the blood of the martyrs.

Who is this woman? John learns that her name is "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations" (Revelation 17:4). She rides on the beast

and derives her power from Satan himself. She is a woman of treachery and deceit, who finds joy in the suffering of Christ's saints. She is the transfiguration of the adulterous spirit at work in the hearts of people, tempting and taunting and calling people to worship the things of the world. And she brings destruction to everything she touches.

John and his audience would have clearly identified this woman with the pagan powers of Rome. And it seems as if the woman and the beast are invincible. John marvels at her when he sees her, clearly overcome by her treachery (Revelation 17:6). Yet the angel encourages John by reminding him that the power of all who oppose Christ is limited, because "they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful" (Revelation 17:14).

While we don't live in the first century, we too see this same adulterous spirit at work in our world, don't we? Satan works to lure our hearts away from God, to turn our allegiance from the Creator to created things. He rejoices as he watches the saints suffer for their faith. Yet we, like John, are encouraged as we are reminded that Satan's power is only temporary, and that one day, God will forever vanquish evil. On that day, all of Heaven and earth will rejoice as the Bride of Christ is revealed, clothed in white, waiting in joyful expectation for the advent of her Groom (Revelation 19:6-8).

A WARNING AND A PROMISE

Tuesday, January 2 | Revelation 18

Amy Jackson

As a child, my mother's warnings often came with promises: "Don't touch the stove, or you'll burn your hand!" or, "Don't walk in the street, or you might get hit by a car!" In Revelation 18, John's vision includes a warning and a promise. We see Babylon's final fall and ultimate destruction. She's been wreaking havoc for thousands of years, and yet in a day—even in an hour!—God brings about her ultimate demise. God repays her for her sins "heaped high as heaven" (Revelation 18:5). Her days of selfish pride and arrogance come to an end at the hand of the Lord. She lived as though she would never receive retribution for her sins, but Revelation 18 reminds us that His judgment is mighty, sure, and just (Revelation 18:7–8).

"What does the judgment of Babylon have to do with us?" you might ask. The call from the voice on high in verse 4 answers this. "Come out of her, my people," God calls. Her judgment is a warning for us, too. If we align ourselves with the ways of the world, God promises we will be judged in the same manner. For those in Christ, their sins are forgiven and washed white as snow (Isaiah 1:18); "as far as the east

is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). But, notice that this is not the case for Babylon the Great. God has remembered her iniquities and pays her back “as she herself has paid back others” (Revelation 18:6). The call to “come out of her” in Revelation 18:4 reminds us that we must choose a side. Either we will side with Babylon the Great or with the Lord. Either our sins will be remembered or they will be covered by the blood of Christ. We are called to live as God’s holy people, distinct and separate from the world.

But while this is a promise of judgment for some, it is a promise of hope for others. Since the beginning of time, creation has been longing for its redemption, groaning with the rest of mankind as we wait for the day when sin is no more (Romans 8). Revelation 18 is the answer to this longing, to the question posed to the Lord in Revelation 6:10: “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” There is an end to suffering. There is a final defeat of evil. There is a day coming when our faith will be made sight and a day when justice will be received for “the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth” (Revelation 18:24).

THE GREATEST CELEBRATORY MEAL OF ALL

Wednesday, January 3 | Revelation 19:1–10

Amy Jackson

I love birthdays. I enjoy celebrating my own, of course, but I also love celebrating other people's birthdays, especially over meals. Our birthdays are reminders that the Lord has granted us another year of life. I appreciate being able to sit down over a nice meal and celebrate something like that with people I love.

We have a celebratory meal here in Revelation 19:1–10. It's not just a meal celebrating birthdays, though. Instead, this meal is called the marriage supper of the Lamb. It's the celebration of God's defeat in Christ over sin, death, and the grave. Evil has been forever vanquished, and in response, God's people are called to praise Him and join together for this monumental meal.

This marriage supper isn't just mentioned in Revelation; the Old Testament prophets looked forward to a day when sin and death would be no more, to a day when God's people would gather together on His mountain for

a feast, to a day when they would declare, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord, we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isaiah 25:9). This Old Testament banquet imagery is coupled with the Jewish wedding customs. After the period of betrothal, the bride would prepare herself on the wedding day. The groom would come to her house and escort her back to his home to consummate their marriage and celebrate with the wedding feast.

One day, Christ will return and bring His Bride, the Church, home. And on that day, all of God’s servants will praise Him, great and small (Revelation 19:5). We will cry out “Hallelujah” as we enter into His presence clothed in fine white linen, “the righteous deeds of the saints” (Revelation 19:8). And we will celebrate together with a meal that will commemorate the dawning of a new day when sin and death are forever defeated. I expect it will be a meal that will be much richer than any earthly birthday meal, because rather than celebrating another year of life on earth in our frail and mortal frames, we, the saints, will be celebrating the end of evil, the end of sin, and even the end of death in our glorified bodies. We’ll feast together with our Groom, the Lord Himself, and we will see Him face to face as we begin what C.S. Lewis calls “Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before” (C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*).

THE CONQUERING KING

Thursday, January 4 | Revelation 19:11–21

Henry Jackson

One of the things I love about the Book of Revelation is how John paints such vivid pictures for us. We've heard in our recent readings about God's final victory in Christ, and now in Revelation 19:11–21, we see it for ourselves. The battle begun by God's enemies at Armageddon (Revelation 16:12–16) is consummated by a rider on a white horse.

This description of Jesus is a little startling, isn't it? I think we are probably more accustomed to thinking of Jesus as a kind and docile man Who gathered children to sit on His knee. We often picture Jesus as the slain Lamb of Revelation 5:6–10. While this is a true image, the slain Lamb is also the conquering King. On His second Advent, He won't come as a baby, meek and mild. Instead, He will come as the Warrior, wielding His sword and ready to conquer. As Scott Duvall puts it, "Jesus will return in power because there is a final battle to be fought against the enemies of God. We dare not attempt to domesticate the Lion. He comes to destroy His enemies and establish His universal reign" (Scott Duvall, *Teach the Text: Revelation*).

What stands out to you from this description of Jesus found in verses 11–16? After reading Revelation, the

name written on His robe and thigh, “King of kings and Lord of lords,” strikes me as a comforting truth in a world where worldly powers claim to be sovereign. Caesar may have called himself Lord. Babylon perhaps thought she was supreme. Satan may deceive himself into thinking he is almighty. But at Christ’s return, there will be no questions about Who is in charge. The King of kings and the Lord of lords will conquer His enemies once and for all. And notice how He will do it! Through just the word of His mouth, every opposing force will be overthrown (Revelation 19:15). Christ will speak and all will fall into submission. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10–11).

This text reminds me of C.S. Lewis’s portrayal of Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Aslan is the king of the wood, and Lewis uses Aslan to portray Christ in his allegorical series. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the children worry about meeting Aslan for the first time because he is a lion, wondering if he is safe. The Beaver’s famous reply echoes in my mind in light of John’s word: “Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.” Jesus isn’t safe or docile. He will come to conquer and defeat His enemies. But He is a good and faithful and righteous King (Revelation 19:11).

THE MILLENNIUM

Friday, January 5 | Revelation 20

Andy Jackson

Today's reading is controversial; many intelligent, wise, and thoughtful biblical scholars who love and take Scripture seriously have different interpretations of the millennium—the thousand-year reign of Christ. Some believe that Christ will return before the millennium and that all believers will reign with Him during this period (*premillennialists*); others believe that Christ will return after the millennium, after the world has been transformed by the spread of the gospel (*postmillennialists*); still others believe that the millennium is a figurative period of time we are living in now—Christ is reigning with those who have died in Him and one day will return (*amillennialists*).

One of my fears in reading Revelation is that sometimes we can get so caught up in the details and prophecies, trying to figure out what it all means and how everything's going to happen, that we miss the main point. It's helpful for us to take a step back and be reminded that Scripture is God-breathed, and that we are not God. His ways are not our ways, and sometimes His plan is a mystery to us. Regardless of where a scholar might fall in the “millennium” camp and in how all of these things will take place, there are three truths we can remember from these verses:

1. Satan will not have the last word (Revelation 20:10). At last, we see that the power behind the serpent, the dragon, and even the great prostitute has been overthrown. This is part of God's sovereign plan: "although [Satan] tempts, accuses, and tries to deceive now, his time is limited and his doom is certain" (Duvall, *Teach the Text: Revelation*).

2. We will all stand before the Lord (Revelation 20:11–12). Some will stand before God and be judged on their deeds found in the books, according to what they have done. Unfortunately, these people will face judgment because of their sins, for all have fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). Others will stand before God in hope—not because of anything they have done, but because their names are written in the book of life. These are the people who put their hope in Christ; when God looks upon them, He will not see their lacking deeds or shameful sin, but instead will see the blood of Christ and His righteous record.

3. Death itself, the final enemy, will be forever destroyed (Revelation 20:14). The cycle of death that began after the Fall will be reversed. We will experience true resurrection and be given glorified bodies. Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of children of God (Romans 8:22).

For some, this is a hard word. There is a coming a day when it will simply be too late to repent. Even now, repent of your sins and believe God's Word and what His work of salvation accomplished for you on the cross of Christ. For others, this is a word of hope. There is a coming a day when sorrow, sin, and death will be no more. God's people will dwell with Him in a land where there will be no more need for tears or grief. Death itself will die on that day.

Revelation 20:11

*"Then I saw a great white throne
and Him who was seated on it.*

*From His presence earth and sky fled away,
and no place was found for them."*

Saturday, January 6–Sunday, January 7

Revelation 17–20

Reread Revelation 17–20 over the weekend.

*Reflect on all that God has been saying to you
through His Word this week.*

THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD

Monday, January 8 | Revelation 21:1–4

Allison McSwain

What a promise to cling to! This first creation in which we live, one broken and corrupted by sin, will one day be replaced with a new reality. This new Heaven and earth will be as God intended our world to be: perfect and devoid of evil. In Genesis 3, the first creation becomes subject to death because of sin. However, there is hope for the future. No longer will the believers suffer under the effects of the Fall, but will live forever with God as He dwells among them once again.

The first time we see God make His dwelling with man is through the birth of Christ, of course: “and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). God loves sinners enough to humble Himself by becoming a man and coming down to the very earth He created. He loves sinners enough to die a horrendous death in their place. He loves sinners enough to prepare a place for them and spend eternity with them as their God. Let us joyfully anticipate that day when we will see God in His glory in that holy city.

When life leaves us hopeless, let us find hope in the promise of the New Jerusalem. Look forward to the absence of tears,

mourning, and pain. Let us remember, though, that God has already come to dwell with us in Christ. We already have access to His presence through His Son, Immanuel, which means “God with us.” He is not a distant God. Rest in the fact that God is with you now even in the darkest times, and never forget that the City of God isn’t too far away. We will experience His presence in the most physical way. What a city it will be, a city whose name is literally “The Lord Is There” (Ezekiel 48:35).

Note: Allison McSwain serves as a Student Ministry Intern. She is also a student at Beeson Divinity School.

Revelation 21:1-4

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’”

TO THE THIRSTY

Tuesday, January 9 | Revelation 21:5–8

Allison McSwain

When was the thirstiest you've ever been? Was it after an extended period of yard work or a long day at the beach? Did you forget your water bottle when you went to the gym? I was a cheerleader for nine years in the south Mississippi heat, so I know a thing or two about thirst. In high school, our squad would start each practice by running a lap around our large school campus. I can remember how hard those last 50 yards or so were: me panting for air, heart pounding with a dry tongue. Being parched is not fun, but that first gulp of cool water after a long run brought instant healing.

In Revelation 21:6, we see that God promises to give the water of life to the thirsty. What is this water? It is the same water offered to the woman at the well in John 4—the living water, the Holy Spirit, the refreshment of salvation. This water is God's free gift, as we see that it is given "without payment." There is nothing we can do to earn it; it is simply by God's grace that we receive it.

What are you thirsting for? So often, we as sinful humans look to gain satisfaction apart from our salvation in Christ. We turn to the temporal things of this world—our jobs, our human relationships, and our hobbies—to make us feel happy and complete. These things are not bad in themselves.

Our families, careers, food, and sports are gifts from God and should be enjoyed as such. However, these things will never truly fulfill us.

Jesus told the woman at the well that “whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). From now until we reach eternity, let us find our true satisfaction in the gracious gift of God that is our salvation. Christ is enough to sustain us and bring us joy, comfort, and peace. Drink deep from the well of the Spirit today, acknowledging that in Him you have all you need.

Revelation 21:5-8

“And He who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also He said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ And He said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.’”

THE BRIDE

Wednesday, January 10 | Revelation 21:9–27

Allison McSwain

I've been in three weddings in 2017. That's three sacred ceremonies, three new marriages, and three beautiful brides in white dresses. While I'm not married myself, I've been involved in enough weddings to know that the bride is expected to be magnificent in appearance, and she is always radiantly beautiful on that day.

Scripture often calls the Church—the body of believers—the Bride of Christ. We've seen this in Revelation already. Some scholars say the Bride mentioned in Revelation 21:9 is the city, the New Jerusalem. Regardless if the Bride referenced in this particular instance is the city or the people, we know that the people—the Lamb's wife—will dwell in that city. We see that God's people are not just the Gentiles nor solely the Jews, but all of God's elect. The city has gates inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, representing the faithful Israelites, but also has foundations inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles, representing the Christian church. We see here in this city the unification of God's redemptive story—all of His people gathered as one Bride belonging to Him.

Why is the term “Bride” used to describe the believers/the New Jerusalem? The only humanly way we can express the

love God has for us is in a marriage metaphor. This metaphor describes our belonging to God and His commitment to us—marriage is, above all, a commitment. The Lamb, as the Bride’s husband, protects and serves her. He never abandons her. Marriage also denotes intimacy, a theme found in verses 23–27, where it is said that God Himself will be the only light needed in the New Jerusalem.

The church—the Bride—is dearly loved despite its adultery. The Israelites often “cheated” on their Creator by worshipping idols. Sadly, this practice is still alive in the church today. We may not be bowing down to golden images, but we devote most of our affections and energies to things other than God. Hallelujah that He is faithful to us even if we are unfaithful! It is only by the blood of Christ that we can be presented as a pure Bride, faultless and worthy to live in God’s beautiful city. His righteousness is what makes us radiant.

Revelation 21:9–11

“Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”

NAME-BEARERS

Thursday, January 11 | Revelation 22:1–5

Allison McSwain

We live in a culture consumed with identity. Who are you? A Democrat, a Republican, a Bama fan, a War Eagle chanter, a feminist, a vegetarian, a nerd, a Baptist, a businessman? What labels do you subscribe to, or is “child of God” enough of an identity marker for you?

Revelation 22:4 tells us that one day we will see God’s face and His name will be on our foreheads. This intimacy with God contrasts with Adam and Eve hiding from His presence in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8). Sin had created a barrier between God and man that could only be bridged by Christ. But oh, how great our God is. Not only did He give us the opportunity to cross that gap through salvation, but also the chance to spend forever face to face with Him, no hiding necessary.

The image of people bearing God’s mark—His name or logo—has been seen three times previously in Revelation: in verses 3:12, 7:3, and 14:1. By God’s designation, we know who we are. We are not our own, nor are we owned by our political ideology, our career, or, yes, our favorite sports team. This mark is not one of only identification, but also one of ownership. This marking identifies the believers

as belonging to God, His “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). In belonging to God, there is security. There is contentment. There is peace.

By having God’s name on our foreheads, we are and will be His representatives—not just in the life to come but in the present life, as well. May others see God’s name on us before any other name as our actions and words point to Him above all else. May we also consistently remind ourselves of who we are in Christ. The enemy will tell you to identify as unloved, unwanted, and beyond redemption. His lies aim to convince you that you are not special and that you are purposeless and doomed to fail. Let us strive to throw off every label other than that of God’s name. Your identity is a child of God.

Revelation 22:3-5

*“No longer will there be anything accursed,
but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it,
and His servants will worship Him.
They will see His face, and His name will be
on their foreheads. And night will be no more.
They will need no light of lamp or sun,
for the Lord God will be their light,
and they will reign forever and ever.”*

COMING SOON

Friday, January 12 | Revelation 22:6–21

Allison McSwain

If I text my friend and tell them I'll come over soon, I'm expressing that I will leave in five minutes or so. For some of my friends, however, leaving "soon" is more like in 30 minutes after a shower and a snack. "Soon" doesn't have an exact timestamp to it, but we know one thing for sure: it's not far away. Examine your heart and your day-to-day practices. Are you living as if Jesus is coming soon?

Three times in today's reading, Jesus says He is coming soon. This promise is not meant to call us to pre-emptively determine the exact day of the Second Coming. Scripture tells us that He is coming "at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44) and that no one, neither angels nor the Son, knows when that will be besides the Father (Matthew 24:36). Rather, this promise is a call to readiness and watchfulness.

"Soon" may not be in our lifetimes, but we should most certainly live as though it will be. The thought that Jesus' return may happen at any minute calls us into action. We love those who are unlovable. We give to the needy. We show grace to the sinful. We live lives full of compassion and understanding. We share the gospel of Jesus Christ with our

neighbors. We do this not for our own benefit, but to point to the One Who is coming quickly. If our time is short, the time to act is now. Now is the time to evangelize, to show others the hope we have in Jesus. Now is the time to encourage others to “wash their robes” of all sinfulness so they can join us in God’s presence forever (Revelation 22:14).

It is my prayer that during this Christmas season, you have not only looked backward to Christ’s first coming, but that you have also remembered the hope we have in His future coming. As we celebrate the humble coming of Christ down to the little town of Bethlehem, let us eagerly anticipate the day of glory when He will return again. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Saturday, January 13–Sunday, January 14

Revelation 21–22

Reread Revelation 21–22 over the weekend.

*Reflect on all that God has been saying to you
through His Word this week.*

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