

REVELATION: WEEK 6

STEVE WATSON | DAILY BIBLE GUIDE | 2018



Monday, March 26

Revelation 20:1-15

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ²He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

⁴Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.

⁷When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to

gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. ⁹They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. ¹⁰And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; ¹⁵and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Points of Interest

- “the key to the bottomless pit” – I’m thinking of the scene in *The Princess Bride* when our hero wakes to discover he’s in the Pit of Despair. He’s told, “Don’t even think about trying to escape.” This time, though, God’s imprisoning the lying, accusing force behind all evil. Why the temporary release later, I have no idea.
- “a thousand years” – This length of time is repeated six times. It’s the only mention in the Bible, and it seems that this mysterious period of the flourishing of Christ and the resurrected martyrs is meant to be a really long time. Yet, despite the brief and obscure mention, this millennium has been the subject of great debate. Postmillennialists believe Jesus will return to earth after these thousand years, which for early Americans led to optimism and social progress, but also religious imperialism. Premillennialists read this passage most literally and believe Christ returns to earth before a great thousand year reign. This

view has generally produced a more pessimistic view of human culture. Amillennialism reads this all symbolically, to likely be a very long time between Jesus' resurrection and eventual return, a time in which Christ and his followers live and reign, even if unseen to most of us. I have an opinion, but mainly I recommend that you don't care. It's a minor point that doesn't impact the main point of the text – Christ will return and will destroy evil.

- “Gog and Magog” – A reference from the prophet Ezekiel, here recast as human entities in the service of evil.
- “thrown into the lake” – The destruction of evil may sound unkind or violent, but it is necessary. Yale theologian Miroslav Volf has written, “Absolute hospitality would . . . enthrone violence precisely under the guise of nonviolence because it would leave the violators unchanged and the consequences of violence unremedied.” Exclusion is a last resort, but is a mercy.
- “earth and heaven fled” – Earth and heaven stands for everything. One impulse when people see God is to be overwhelmed and want to hide. People feel exposed in light of the stunning and perfect otherness of God – this happened occasionally with Jesus. But here there is no hiding place. All will see and confront their Maker.
- “books were opened . . . another book . . . the book of life” – There are two sets of books in this metaphorical moment at the end of human history, it seems – one book of people's deeds, and one where God registers life. People are judged by their works, but if they are written into the book of life, they are preserved and live eternally regardless.
- “Death and Hades” – This reminds me of the Monty Python scene where the body collector calls, “Bring out your dead.” Here they are called out of all imaginable places for judgment. The “people” singled out for suffering, though, aren't people at all, but the great enemies of humans, personified. Death and Hell are destroyed forever. The God of Life also becomes the destroyer of death. So while the judgment is rightly sobering, I believe it is most fundamentally a place of mercy and protection, rather than punishment.

Spiritual Exercise

This week, as Easter approaches, and Revelation climaxes with its vision of a new heaven and a new earth, we'll look to cultivate hope. What hope does it give you that God is fiercely determined to wipe out death and evil? What realities of life or history do you look forward to seeing destroyed?

A Direction for Prayer

Think of the humans or groups you have heard of that strike you as most violent or evil, today's Gog and Magog, to your mind. Pray that God will have mercy on the people – writing them into the book of life – while healing them of the evil cancer that must die.

Tuesday, March 27

Revelation 21:1-8

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. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶Then 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 water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. ⁸But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Points of Interest

- “heaven” – Heaven in both 1st century Hebrew and Greek didn’t mean “where you might go after you die.” It meant both the skies – the actual place birds fly and clouds appear – and the “invisible realm of God invading us.” Heaven is “the metaphor that tells us that there is far more here than meets the eye.” So it is both future and present tense. “Calling the word *heaven* a metaphor does not make it less real; it simply recognizes that it is a reality inaccessible at this point to any of our five senses.” (Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 169)
- “a new heaven and a new earth” – In ancient cosmology, “heaven and earth” are shorthand for all reality – the earth, the skies, realms visible and invisible. Jesus isn’t replacing material reality with an immaterial heaven, but remaking everywhere and everything in creation.
- “the sea was no more” – For ancient Jews, the sea represented chaos and turbulence. No sea in Jesus’ new heaven and new earth meant for them peace, order, and harmony – nothing to fear. This is part of the present work Jesus has begun and will complete in the future.
- “the holy city... prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” – We’ll talk more about the city tomorrow, but for now, we note John’s mixed metaphors. What Jesus is doing amongst people that love Jesus is like building a new city and is also like preparing a bride to marry him.
- “the home of God... He will dwell with them” – God’s presence is what is most new about this heaven and earth. God’s presence is the source of the comfort, the presence that removes death, and the force that is driving away danger. The noun “home” and the verb “dwell” are the same here, both meaning “tent” or “tabernacle.” Jews, before they built a temple, set up a tent for God to live in, as a symbol that God travelled and lived with them. Jesus is making this symbol real now.
- “See I am making all things new” – This is parallel to the opening “new heaven and new earth” statement. There are narrow teachings on the good news of Jesus that say it is only about forgiving sins or avoiding punishment. Revelation, as with other places in the New Testament, has a really expansive

version of the good news, that Jesus is renewing all things – from work to politics to real estate to ecology to our own emotional and psychological experience of life.

- “It is done” – As future tense and unaccomplished as this vision sounds to us, God is confident that it is finished. This experience has begun and will not be stopped.
- “To the thirsty” – Evocative of Isaiah 55’s prophecy and Jesus’ own words about being living water that deeply satisfies, John’s image of a spring of living water evokes refreshment, satisfaction, and delight.
- “Those who conquer” – This has been the goal since the opening letters to the churches in Chapters 2 and 3, that people and communities not give up on persevering in faith, even in the face of all of life’s challenges and grief. Mama and Papa God is here unseen, and has a great inheritance for us, the children.
- “as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted” – If we took this literally, likely we’d all burn. I’ve certainly been a coward and a liar and my body and mind are certainly polluted. As with the other judgment language in Revelation, this isn’t meant to condemn us personally to hell but to assure us all that the worst in our society and the worst in us won’t last forever, that God will root it out, one way or another.

Spiritual Exercise

This week, as Easter approaches, and Revelation climaxes with its vision of a new heaven and a new earth, we’ll look to cultivate hope. What have you experienced so far of the new heaven and the new earth? Any ways you’ve experienced comfort or satisfaction or protection from God? However small or large that is, what does it mean to you that there is infinitely more where that came from? Ask God to grow your hope that the best of your experience of God and the best of your experience of life is yet to come.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for your six, that they will experience more of God’s comfort in sorrow and greater hope that Jesus is making all things new. Ask that Jesus will encourage each of them today in the particular place where they are most tired and discouraged of the reality they see and know.

Wednesday, March 28

Revelation 21:9-27

⁹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” ¹⁰And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. ¹²It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; ¹³on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. ¹⁶The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. ¹⁷He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the

angel was using. ¹⁸The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. ¹⁹The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. ²¹And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.

²²I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Points of Interest

- “one of the seven angels” – So far the angels have been pretty grim messengers, taking John – and us – on a tour through the very worst of the earth’s past, present, and future. After showing us all that we have been or could at our worst become, now the angels excitedly reveal what God is making us into.
- “the holy city of Jerusalem” – John continues with the mixed metaphor of the bride and the city, but starts to put more focus on the new Jerusalem. I’ll quote Peterson again on this. “We enter heaven not by escaping what we don’t like, but by the sanctification of the place in which God has placed us. There is not so much as a hint of escapism in St. John’s heaven. This is not a long (eternal) weekend away from the responsibilities of employment and citizenship, but the intensification and healing of them. Heaven is formed out of dirty streets and murderous alleys, adulterous bedrooms and corrupt courts, hypocritical synagogues and commercialized churches, thieving tax-collectors and traitorous disciples: a city, but not a holy city.” (*Reversed Thunder*, 174) The Bible’s story begins in a garden – an otherworldly paradise; but it ends with a garden city, the perfection of our current existence.
- “twelve tribes of the Israelites” – Everything in the city comes in sets of 12, in honor of Israel’s founding twelve tribes, and Jesus’ first twelve messengers, who were mainly his twelve closest students at first. Some of these are known to history, some barely at all, and the ones who are known are not necessarily admirable and heroic. God can work with the heroic and the tragic, the exceptional and the mundane, to make something strong and beautiful.
- “fifteen hundred miles” – This is no ordinary-sized city. Cubes were considered a perfect shape in the

first century, thus its dimensions. The Roman Empire also stretched for roughly fifteen hundred miles from West to East, so this city is approximately as large as John's known world.

- “each of the gates is a single pearl” – In case you were wondering where the phrase “pearly gates” came from, now you know. They are part of John's jewel bedecked city, which isn't meant to come off as gaudy or materialistic, but symbolic of beauty and care and elegance. Architecture is just one of the arts and vocations put to use in the perfect work of God in the new heaven and new earth.
- “I saw no temple” – The Bible's narrative begins without a temple, as the whole earth was fit for God to live in. It also ends without a temple. The whole cubic city itself resembles the heart of a temple, and God's presence – again found everywhere – is throughout.
- “the kinds of the earth will bring their glory... people will bring into it the glory ... of the nations.” The best of God's future includes the best of our past and present as well. The best of human culture and achievement will be welcome, without any of its downsides.
- “Its gates will never be shut... there will be no night” – These are two ways of saying the same thing. Cities had gates to shut each night and in times of threat, to keep out strangers and enemies. Jesus' renewal of all things means the removal of all that is dangerous as well. This again is why evil is excluded, to create the conditions for safety and peace and complete flourishing.

Spiritual Exercise

This week, as Easter approaches, and Revelation climaxes with its vision of a new heaven and a new earth, we'll look to cultivate hope. What are some human achievements you most love – in food, sport, music, culture, whatever? Consider that even the best of life we know has downsides too. I think, for instance, of a Boston Cream from my favorite donut shop and know that too many of these will make me sick and eventually kill me. But now consider a future that contains all the best elements of life – the glory and honor of the nations – but cleansed of all their problems. Tell God about the holy city you hope God is preparing – or write about it, or draw a picture. Ask God to show you how God's future for us all is even better than that.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for some of the largest companies or industries you can think of in your city or region. Ask God to grow all that they do that is glorious and honorable and to lead people to renew and purify them of all that is false or harmful or in any way abominable.

Thursday, March 29

Revelation 22:1-7

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And there will be no

more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

⁶And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

⁷"See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Points of Interest

- "the river of the water of life" – It turns out that the spring in this city becomes a whole river that is born in the very person of God. Jews long had a hopeful vision of good and beautiful things being born in their largest city of Jerusalem, symbolized by a river flowing out from Jerusalem. This hope was something of a literal impossibility for this dry, elevated location. Now, with God living in the great city that is the whole new heaven and earth, the dream comes true. All that is inside of God flows to all of us.
- "the tree of life" – This is evocative of the garden of Eden as well as several other moments in the Old Testament. Here, though, there are twelve different fruits and its' found on both sides of the river. So it's not so much a tree that God has planted as a whole orchard. I've watched a friend of mine plant and tend to a small orchard, meant to nourish its owners with delightful fruit. It is such a gift, and one that takes such immense planning and work and care. All that is the case here, but the produce isn't just apples or peaches but abundant, many-varied fruit, and medicinal leaves that heal us all. So beautiful.
- "his servants will worship" – The word for servants is literally slaves. Scholars estimate that around one third of the population of the Roman empire were slaves, so all of John's first audience were either slaves or slave-owners or knew one of the two. The word is used here but for the opposite of its reality. The slaves have a couple of slave-like qualities still – they are marked by God on their foreheads, a sign of belonging but of ownership as well; and they worship God. But they also are welcome at the throne and the reign with God forever, so they are co-rulers, not slaves at all. I think this indicates a radical and liberating shift in the human experience.
- "they will see his face" – The new heaven and earth experience is less that of a worker or slave and more of a trusting child or intimate lover. Metaphors of children of God and bride of Christ are used to indicate the trust and openness and immediacy of seeing God face to face.
- "These words are trustworthy and true" – As John starts to wrap up, he rephrases many of his opening statements, including an assurance of his complex letter's authenticity and reliability.
- "I am coming soon" – However God's time works, people of faith in Jesus have always called Jesus' next arrival "soon." The God of Revelation is very much transcendent – so different in every way, unlike any other force or person we have ever known. And yet the same God is also utterly immanent – close at hand, with and among us and sustaining us all.

Spiritual Exercise

This week, as Easter approaches, and Revelation climaxes with its vision of a new heaven and a new earth, we'll look to cultivate hope. Take some time and use your imagination to cultivate hope. Picture yourself walking alongside the river of the water of life, sampling the orchard's abundant fruit, applying the balm from their leaves to any inner or outer wounds. What does this feel like? Take your time. Now picture yourself face to face with God, who is full of light. What do you experience? What do you do or say? What does God have to say to you? What expression is on God's face?

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for people and groups you are aware of who are most wounded, most oppressed or outcast or hurt. Ask Jesus to grow the orchard of fruit and healing in their lives. Ask Jesus to flow toward them the river of life that begins in God's self. Pray for God's presence and healing for them.

Friday, March 30

Revelation 22:8-21

⁸I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; ⁹but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”

¹⁰And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

¹²“See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

¹⁴Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. ¹⁵Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Points of Interest

- “I am a fellow servant” – For the second time, John falls to his feet to worship one of God’s messengers. It seems easy for people, while on a search for beauty and goodness and truth to emulate and admire, to stop short of the source of it all and fixate on something else instead. Here the angel urges John – and us – to find our center in God.
- “Let the evildoer still do evil... and the righteous still do right” – Verses eleven and fifteen are a final assurance of the exclusion of unwilling to change evil and a final urge to separate from the worst ways of our world. A few centuries into church history, Christian churches got less interest in the ongoing pilgrimage of pursuing Jesus and more interested in acquiring power and aligning with the interests and privilege of state power. John would see that as a tragedy. Revelation urges us to be joyfully in our world Jesus is renewing while also removing ourselves from its worst practices.
- “to repay according to everyone’s work” – It’s a tragedy that one of the upshots of Revelation has been a focus on details we can’t know about the future, hoping that somehow they’re hidden in Revelation, like buried treasure. Revelation’s purpose it to help us prepare, though, not predict.
- “Blessed are those who wash their robes” – The call for the churches and their members is to resist and so to conquer, but more than that, to take a shower. Connect with Jesus – learn from Jesus, love Jesus and let Jesus love you, be baptized, but none of this as a one-off or a phase. Keep going to Jesus when you fall, keep going to Jesus when you’re afraid, keep going to Jesus when you need forgiveness, keep going to Jesus.

¹⁶“It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.”
And let everyone who hears say, “Come.”
And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; ¹⁹if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person’s share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

- “everyone who hears say, ‘Come.’” – The Kingdom of God, the new heaven and earth that Jesus is making, is nothing if not a place of constant invitation. Come. Be filled. Drink life. Be satisfied. You are welcome. Come.
- “if anyone takes away from the words of the book” – Before copyright, this is the kind of thing you’d drop on the end of your scrolls to make sure the scribes don’t change your words. John’s a little harsh, though, having a hard time lightening up at the end.
- “Surely I am coming soon” – John quotes Jesus saying this for the second time. What is soon, though? Greek had two words for time - *chronos* and *kairos*. Chronos is chronological time we can measure in seconds or years or centuries. Kairos, though, means the right time, or the time of importance, as in “the times” we live in or “the time of our lives.” We don’t know in what year Jesus will return or how. We also never know when we’ll experience Jesus in time, but we know it’s always soon. Walker Percy, in his novel *The Second Coming*, wrote “Is it possible for people to miss their lives in the same way one misses a plane?” He described this in a person as he wrote, “Not once in his entire life had he allowed himself to come to rest in the quiet center of himself but had forever cast himself forward from some dark past he could not remember to a future which did not exist. Not once had he been present for his life. So his life had passed like a dream.” May we not obsess over chronos, gripped by anxiety, and miss our lives as they pass like dreams. May we live in God’s eternal now, expectant of Jesus’ returning or enjoying the foretaste of Christ with us already.
- “Come, Lord Jesus” – Before closing with a words of comfort, love, and encouragement, John gives us a core prayer of the life of faith. Come, Jesus, in the future. Come, Jesus, you have been here before. Come, Jesus, in this moment of expectation and hope. In this moment, Jesus, come.

Spiritual Exercise

This week, as Easter approaches, and Revelation climaxes with its vision of a new heaven and a new earth, we’ll look to cultivate hope. Practice praying the prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Pray it in gratitude for Jesus’ time on earth in Palestine, two thousand years ago, for the record of Jesus’ life and teaching. Pray it for the future, asking Jesus to return to earth and fulfill all these promises of the new heaven and earth. And pray it for the present, welcoming Jesus with you today.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for your six, that each of them would have the gift of knowing Jesus’ welcome to water of life. Pray also that their experience of friendship with you, and being prayed for by you, would encourage them to experience more from Jesus.