
December 29 : Scriptures Revelation 16-18

SUMMARY

We've passed by some interesting sights on our road trip through Revelation. We've seen John surprised by Jesus (ch. 1), Jesus speaking with His congregation in Asia Minor (ch. 2-3), and observed the heavenly court preparing the start of the Final Countdown with the Son of Man (Lamb That Was Slain) taking the scroll of kingdom ownership from the Ancient of Days (the Father's) hand (ch. 4-5).

As the clay Seals are cracked open, the End Times begin with Conquering, War, Famine, and Death released upon the earth. Back up in heaven, we're shown that Christian martyrdom will be global, but not one martyr will be forgotten by God. The cosmos and the planet are shaken, causing many to recognize what's coming, cry out in fear of the coming wrath, and yearn to hide from it because they know what's in store for them (ch. 6). This is just the beginning.

Before the 7th Seal is cracked and the divine Trumpets/shofars blow, 144,000 messianic Jews are sealed on their foreheads, marking them with their Lord's ownership and divine protection. They are possibly a group of Jews who will fulfill God's commission to Israel to be a light to the nations by bearing testimony to the Light of the Word (Isaiah 51:4, 60:3). Back up in heaven, a great choir sings out, led by Jesus' disciples who have come out of the great tribulation, kept their devotion to their Lord, and follow Jesus as sheep follow their Shepherd (ch. 7).

As the 7th Seal breaks, God's judgments are finally released one after the other. The 1st through 4th Trumpet judgments are similar to what mighty Egypt experienced during the Exodus, which punished Egypt for what Pharaoh did to God's children and brought freedom and relief to the Israelites. These global Trumpet judgments are limited as they only destroy a third of their target. The Trumpets call forth burning hail that brings death (1st and 7th Egyptian plagues), a tremendous burning landmass that slides into the sea, causing a third of the oceans and sea creatures to die (1st Egyptian plague) and disrupting shipping, a meteor that poisons freshwater sources causing people to die (1st Egyptian plague), and darkness (9th Egyptian plague) (ch. 8). The 4th Trumpet introduces three Woes/judgments coming to humanity, Trumpets 5, 6, and 7.

Two mighty Trumpets, the 5th and 6th, blow, and two armies, one demonic (the first Woe) and the other human, are released to bring pain and death to the earth's people. Still, they do not turn to God (ch. 9). An angel appears, announcing that there will be no longer

delay. When the 7th Trumpet blows, God's plan will be wrapped up quickly. John is commanded to prophesy about that kingdom shift (ch. 10).

Before the 7th Trumpet sounds signaling the final, all-consuming judgments, the prophetic camera turns momentarily and focuses on the Two Witnesses who testify about Jesus and against the world. This event seems to be a global murder trial. No one can touch or kill the Two Witnesses until God allows it. But three days after they are killed, the Two Witnesses rise from the dead and ascend to heaven. Jerusalem, which the Gentiles have conquered and occupied, gets hit with a terrible earthquake, and 7,000 people die (the second Woe). The 7th Trumpet/Shofar sounds, announcing the world's transition from human dominion to God's dominion (ch. 11). All Hail the King!

The interlude continues with the back story of Satan trying to thwart God's plan by killing God's Son and Jesus' ascension to heaven. The narrative switches to a future event, Satan and crew driven from heaven as God's kingdom advances. Satan persecutes Jews and Christians, and God hides Israel during the 3 ½ year Great Tribulation (ch. 12).

Next, we're introduced to Satan's cohort, the Antichrist and the False Prophet. The Antichrist rises to lead a reborn final empire (possibly Islamic) that denies God's divine right to the world and actively opposes His approaching King, Jesus. The False Prophet performs signs, miracles, and wonders to entice or coerce as many people as possible into pledging allegiance to the Antichrist and his empire. This sifting process determines who belongs to God and who rejects Him. The False Prophet will use economic tyranny to force people to come to the dark side (hat tip to *Star Wars*). The world will become "marked men," either for the Antichrist or God (ch. 13).

Speaking of marked men, we once again see the 144,000 messianic Jews with Jesus, who have kept themselves morally pure with a special devotion to Jesus, like men who have taken a Nazirite vow to set themselves apart to God (Numbers 6:1-21). Three angels follow with three messages to the world – Repent, Retribution, and a Warning. We're given a glimpse of two harvests to come at the End, one performed by Jesus as He gathers His righteous ones, the other by an angel to gather the wicked for termination with extreme prejudice. The bloodbath will be horrendous (ch. 14).

As the 7th Trumpet sounds (11:15), we reach the culmination of God's judgment on the Day of the Lord, the Bowls of His Wrath. Before the Day of the Lord, the wicked people of the world were under the threat of judgment. When the Tribulation starts, God's wrath will begin to be poured out to urge people to accept Him or affirm that they reject Him. *There will be no fence-sitters at the End.* The Tribulation will shake the fence to see to which

side a person falls. The End of the Tribulation will be the Day of the Lord when Jesus returns to establish His Father's global kingdom.

In chapter 15, we saw the scene of an impending execution. The angels carrying the Bowls are the executioners. They stride forth as those killed in the Tribulation for resisting the Antichrist sing about God's deliverance and how all the nations will now come to revere and worship Him. When these 7 Bowls are entirely poured out, God's wrath will be spent on a world that has rebelled against Him from the beginning and committed horrible offenses (sins) against Him (15). What happens next is almost indescribable in its intensity.

Bowl #1 is target specific. Painful sores break out only on those who have sworn allegiance to the Antichrist/Caliph and his beastly Islamic empire. If you've ever experienced shingles, you know how painful such sores can be. This Bowl mirrors the 6th Egyptian plague during the Exodus. (Hey, if it worked before.) Universal sores on the beast's kingdom and subjects signal coming obliteration.

Bowl #2 kills the oceans entirely. "All life in the sea died" (16:3). This starts the worldwide collapse of the ecosystem and food chain. There's no way anyone will survive for long unless God intervenes. This Bowl mirrors the 1st Egyptian plague.

Bowl #3 kills all fresh water on land, not just a third as the 3rd Trumpet did. The angel of the waters (16:5) declares it a fitting judgment from God. Since the wicked people of the earth like death so much (killing God's people), they can now enjoy it themselves (16:6). God's judgments are just, measure for measure (16:7). This plague mirrors the 1st plague of Egypt as well.

Bowl #4 hits the cosmos as Trumpet #4 did, only the sun doesn't go dark this time. It intensifies to the extreme. The radiation becomes so intense the heat burns people. What's remarkable is that despite the pain, people refuse to turn to God and ask for mercy. By this time, they *know* who is causing these judgments but refuse to surrender to Him. They curse God as they crisp up (16:9). The King asserts His power against the unrepentant.

Bowl #5 continues the cosmic calamity, and like Egypt's 9th plague, the Antichrist's kingdom is plunged into darkness just like Egypt was. Not only are his people in intense pain, but they can't see anything. God's power darkens the sun. Let's see the Antichrist's power to turn it back on. "Can't do it, beast? Can't stop the pain? Who's in charge now, beast?" This judgment seems like a foreshadowing of the coming hell for those who "did not repent of their actions" (16:11). Since these Revelation plagues parallel the Egyptian

Exodus plagues, I wonder if God's people will have light even during the darkness. We'll find out when we get there. We might observe all this from heaven's bleachers if we're not lost in worship.

Bowl #6 is fascinating and similar to the 6th Trumpet. The 6th Trumpet saw four angels bound at the Euphrates River released to marshal a massive army of 200 million (100 million in other translations) to kill a third of humanity. Bowl #6 sees a similar event, but rather than the angels being bound at the Euphrates, the river itself is bound so that it dries up to clear the way for an army to march from the East. Could that army be from China or India or an Eastern coalition?

Satan dispatches three unclean spirits to gather an immense army to attack God's land, Israel. In other words, *The Empire Strikes Back*. (Thanks, *Star Wars*.) Remember, to be Israel's King, Jesus needs three things: His land, people, and Jerusalem. For this reason, Satan continually stirs up the nations that surround Israel (Islamic, by the way) to persecute the Jewish State. Also, the United Nations is notorious for extreme anti-Israel prejudice and persecution. No nation gets as many U.N. resolutions against it as Israel does. With dictatorial regimes heading the U.N.'s Human Rights Council, U.N. stands for "UnNecessary."

This Bowl judgment sets up the End Time battle of Armageddon (Hebrew – *Har Megiddo*, Mountains of Megiddo) (16:12-14, 16). Go to the map section in your Bible or search online for "Megiddo Israel" and "Valley of Jezreel." You'll see that the Jezreel Valley runs roughly west to east, with the ancient city of Megiddo on the south ridge of low mountains. Megiddo once guarded the trade routes from Egypt going north past Megiddo. North of Megiddo, they split west toward Asia Minor and east to the Fertile Crescent. Trade routes were major highways along which the spice trade moved, and as it says in the book, *Dune*, "He who controls the spice, controls the universe." In this End Time scenario, it's more like "He who controls Israel and Jerusalem controls the world."

The nations are gathering for battle. If we follow Daniel's pattern (Daniel 11), the Antichrist/Caliph will move his Islamic forces toward Jerusalem. As news of army movements from the north (Russia et al.?) and the East (China et al.), the Antichrist will shift to meet them on level ground – the expansive Jezreel Valley, near the mountains of Megiddo – the Battle of Armageddon. For my comment about 16:15, check out the Insight below.

Finally, the 7th Bowl is poured out – *all over the place!* With this Bowl and the angel's cry, "It is finished," God brings down the house of humanity's sinful usurpation of the planet.

What Jesus accomplished at the cross with "It is finished" is completed as His redemptive work restores saved human beings to their rightful place as God's vicereagents and the earth under God's rule.

What happens next will be an earth-shaking event that has never been seen or will be again (16:18). The great city, nicknamed Babylon, will split into three parts, and many cities will fall around the world when the massive earthquake hits. (I'll speculate shortly what city I think this "Babylon" is.) At this point, we know that Babylon is the capital, the epicenter, of the Antichrist's empire, and the Lord will lay down some "capital" punishment. (See what I did there?) This Bowl judgment causes islands and mountains to collapse.

Immense hundred-pound hailstones will fall from the sky and crush people (16:21). For comparison's sake, I just checked my local big box hardware store's website. A new toilet and tank weigh a little over 100 lbs. Now imagine a hailstorm of toilets falling from violent thunderstorms. Think of the upward wind speed needed to suspend frozen water long enough to form 100 lb. hailstones! I'm not being flippant about this. Merely putting this cataclysm into perspective. The damage these rocketing hailstones will cause will be astounding (or stunning if you're hit by one).

We now come to another interlude. John's prophetic camera turns toward the world system, the Woman on the Scarlet Beast. Lest you fret that you won't understand this, the Prostitute and Scarlet Beast's description and the angel's explanation reveal what it means.

The Description (17:1-6):

- 1) Scarlet Beast with 7 heads and 10 horns (17:3) = the great fiery dragon (Satan, 12:3) and the Antichrist (13:1).
- 2) The Woman's name is "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Detestable Things of the Earth," revealing her nature and function/mission (17:2, 4-6). She desires wealth, impurity, and to murder God's people, likely because they represent God's moral standard, and it convicts her of her great sins. The Prostitute seduces world leaders, enticing them with wealth and sexual immorality. In other words, she plays to their lusts for her benefit. Everything about her cries, "Wealth, esteem, opulence, royalty, influence, and power," yet she is vile, impure, and disgusting.

Such is the world's system. Many leaders find themselves in positions where others are held accountable, but not them. "Rules for Thee, but not for me," you know. It's the world's Golden Rule again – "Them what has the gold, make the rules." History is replete with reports of leaders falling into the lust of the flesh (to enjoy), the lust of the eyes (to obtain), and the pride of life (to achieve). It's a story as old as the Fall. How often has the gold (wealth), glitter (fame), and the gals/guys (sex) seduced people into following their urges rather than restraining themselves to follow God? The Woman personifies the way of the immoral world system.

The Angel's Explanation (17:7-18):

1) The Scarlet Beast. Going by the previous description of what existed, does not, and will again indicate the last human empire. After watching the line of empires on earth, this last empire (Islamic) will be the epitome of power, viciousness, and oppression as described by Daniel 7:7. Notice similarities between the Daniel and Revelation beasts. They appear to be the same beast. Those who aren't saved will be in awe of this political monster. Now comes the tricky part – the Woman.

2) The Woman. She sits atop seven "heads," i.e., mountains/kings (17:9). Some interpreters claim the seven hills are Rome, the "city on seven hills." However, rather than literal physical mountains, we could be talking figuratively about the seven principal empires of history because the picture of mountains is sometimes used in the Bible to refer to kingdoms (Daniel 2:35; Micah 4:1). If so, then the seven heads/kings are the succession of seven great empires: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greek, Islam (was), and a revived Islamic empire ("is not, is itself an eighth king, but it belongs to the seven and is going to destruction," 17:11). In this case, symbolic seems to work better. The woman appears to be the world system that attempts to ride the final Islamic empire to wealth and power as it has ridden every other earthly empire or kingdom for wealth and power.

See? Sometimes Bible interpretation can be challenging when talking literal or figurative. We'll try our best.

What about the ten horns? In the Bible, a horn often refers specifically to a person (Psalm 148:14; Daniel 7:8,11, 8:12). It seems the final empire will have ten Islamic leaders whose nations stand independently but will ally with the Antichrist/Caliph for a brief time (17:12-13). This possible End Time Islamic coalition will wage war against Jesus when He returns. Spoiler alert! Jesus crushes them (17:14).

3) The Waters. "The waters you saw, where the prostitute was seated, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages" (17:15).

So, let's summarize how Chapter 17 *could* be fulfilled. For those who hold to the *Left Behind* version, this speaks of a revived Roman empire with Super Antichrist Boogeyman rising from the European Union. Rome is the city, and the Apostate Church, led by an Apostate Spiritual leader, stands against Jesus. Perhaps.

On the other hand, it could be that a revived Islamic empire will rise, and ten Islamic nations will declare their allegiance to the restored Caliphate with its leader, the Caliph/Mahdi. For the record, a major sect of Islam (called The Twelvers) awaits Jesus' return, and when He does, He will point to the Caliph/Mahdi as the embodiment of Allah on earth and demand that the world submits to the Caliph. The goal is to make the whole world Islamic. The Jesus-pretender is likely the False Prophet who performs miracles just like Jesus did. What a way to convince people to shift their allegiance from Jesus to the Caliph. "Hey! Jesus has appeared, and He tells us that Mohammed was right, so let's all worship the one god, Allah. Kum-ba-ya."

Islamic End Time theology claims that *their* Antichrist, Al-Dajjāl (Arabic for "The Deceiver"), will fight against the Caliph for world dominion. Islam says The Deceiver *will descend from heaven to start the final battle!* Do you see it? Islamic End Time theology mirrors Christian End Time theology. Everything is the same, except the meaning is reversed.

Going back to the Prostitute, the world system will attempt to ride the Islamic empire for its benefit, but Islam will have none of it. Islam (in its radical/root form) cares only for itself. It doesn't negotiate and doesn't compromise. It's all or nothing. Therefore, in the end, the Islamic empire will turn against the world system and "devour, crush, and trample with its feet whatever is left," as described by Daniel 7:7.

A revived Roman or Islamic empire? I'll let you know when we get there.

Chapter 18 is Babylon's epitaph (a text inscribed on a tombstone). Is Babylon a literal or figurative city? If it's a literal city, is it historical Babylon in Iraq or another city that serves as the epicenter of idolatry like it often depicts ancient Babylon? Again, I think Joel Richardson has hit the nail on the head in his book *Mystery Babylon*. If the final revived empire is literal Islam, led by a literal Caliph/Mahdi (Antichrist) and a Fake Jesus (False Prophet), then Babylon the Great of Revelation 18 could be the epicenter and capital of

Islam, Mecca. Or Babylon the Great could also include other Islamic cities rife with wealth, power, luxury, excess, and human trafficking and exploitation.

Even now, the Saudi kingdom is constructing a new \$500 billion city called *Neom*, which is supposed to be the ultimate city of the future in the northwest part of Saudi Arabia along the Red Sea coastline. Who knows? Maybe Neom is the Babylon referred to here, but given the spiritual context, Mecca is the most likely candidate. Again, I'll let you know.

The point is that this Babylon is the most spiritually dark place on earth (18:2) and ground zero for immorality and material excess (18:3). Her sins have reached their limit. Her cup of judgment is full (18:5). She gets double what she's done to others while thinking she's untouchable (18:4-7). God will take her down suddenly and quickly (18:8). If John's words are literal, her downfall might come from a nuclear explosion or a supernatural firestorm like Sodom and Gomorrah received from God.

When this evil city is destroyed, the world will be thrown into turmoil and grief because it was the hub for world trade, even the multi-billion human trafficking industry we see today (18:11-13). Merchants will mourn because tremendous wealth will be destroyed (18:15-19). Yet, the saints will rejoice because they'll see Babylon finally paid back for the sorrow and pain she dished out on God's people (18:20).

This epicenter of rebellion against God will be totally and forever wiped off the earth. The world's idolatry, represented by this city, will be erased. John writes that its merchants spread Babylonian idolatry across the globe, deceiving humanity and infecting all people with the worship of gods other than the One True God. Now this epicenter of idolatry will be held responsible for the deaths of those who refused to worship other gods but Yehovah (18:24). Good riddance!

INSIGHT

Jesus gives John an enigmatic warning to share, "Look, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who is alert and remains clothed so that he may not go around naked and people see his shame" (16:15). Jesus was using an example from the Temple's nightly operation. After the Temple doors were closed for the evening, one priest (the duty priest) was stationed to ensure that all remaining offerings on the Bronze Altar were consumed to ash and that no unauthorized persons entered the Temple's holy courts overnight. The Altar offerings might take hours to burn and cool before the dawn cleaning.

As you might expect, the duty priest might have become sleepy as the night passed. The High Priest would appear to check on the duty priest and the Altar's status sometime just before dawn. If the High Priest found the duty priest asleep, he would walk to the Altar, take a shovelful of coals, walk to wherever the duty priest was reposing, and drop the coals in his lap. Naturally, the duty priest's linen garments would catch fire, requiring rapid undressing. The unfaithful duty priest would then be dismissed from ever serving again and forced to walk home naked, to his public shame.

Do you see Jesus' point? While we anticipate His return and could quite possibly know the year and the season, we should never let anything lull us to sleep lest we miss His arrival and lose our garment of salvation and righteousness. This warning is especially true now since we don't have severe Tribulation events constantly reminding us of Jesus' approaching return. *We must always remain awake and aware of our relationship with Jesus. If we sleep, we may miss the moment He comes to us to see how we're doing, much to our lasting shame, even more so if we find ourselves in the End Times.* So, "Stay awake and pray so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38).

December 30 : Scriptures Revelation 19-20

SUMMARY

Have you ever had to endure a situation that kept you in a constant state of anxiety, stress, and fear that seemed would never end? A divorce? Cancer treatment? Or especially when you scan the online news and always see the bad guys avoid accountability while the good guys get smeared, abused, persecuted, and unjustly prosecuted? *Arrgh!*

I've had days (weeks, years) like that. At those times, when frustration crowns my head like a garland, and anger wells up in my chest, I so easily identify with the Psalmist, "Lord, how long will the wicked – how long will the wicked celebrate?" (Psalm 94:3). Even worse, the Lord refuses to punish them on *my* timeline, "Lord, how long will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages; rescue my precious life from the young lions" (Psalm 35:17).

This cry is the same one from the Revelation martyrs who had been "slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony they had given. They cry out with a loud voice, 'Lord, the one who is holy and true, *how long until you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?*'" (6:10, italics author).

The Lord's answer is reassuring but frustrating if you don't trust Him. "They were told to rest a little while longer until the number would be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters, who were going to be killed just as they had been" (6:11). Knowing that the Lord is working out His sovereign plan brings a measure of comfort to the exasperated soul, "the Lord is my refuge; my God is the rock of my protection. *He will pay them back for their sins and destroy them for their evil. The Lord our God will destroy them*" (Psalm 94:22-23, italics author).

In Revelation 19, that time has finally come! Babylon, the ground zero of global idolatry, immorality, and innocent bloodshed that has stained and defiled the planet since the Fall, has finally been destroyed under God's hand. With the outpouring of the 7th Bowl, "It is done!" (16:17). The epicenter of sin on earth is a smoking heap of rubble, much like Sodom and Gomorrah had been. The last beast empire has turned on the world system, the Prostitute who sold herself for wealth and pleasure and eviscerated her. She thought she could ride the most vicious and powerful empire to fame and glory, only to find herself in its teeth and under its iron claws, pouring out blood and burning with fire (17:16). This was the Lord's plan until He could execute His judgment on all evil. All that's left is the Islamic beast empire with its beastly rulers, the Caliph/Mahdi/Antichrist, and the Fake Jesus/False Prophet manipulated and empowered by Satan himself.

Now that the final judgment moves like a tsunami over the global landscape, God's multitude in heaven erupts joyfully. The whole number of the martyrs has been reached. It's time to avenge their deaths. It's time to crush the wicked. It's payback time with extreme justice. And so the vaults of heaven ring in celebration. All that pent-up frustration is released in an explosion of praise and worship.

"Hallelujah! Salvation, glory, and power belong to our God, because his judgments are true and righteous, because he has judged the notorious prostitute who corrupted the earth with her sexual immorality; and he has avenged the blood of his servants that was on her hands" (Revelation 19:1-2). The praise rolls on and on and on! "Hallelujah! Her smoke ascends forever and ever!" (19:3) The inner circle of God's divine council joins in, "Amen! Hallelujah!" (19:4). One of the creatures at God's throne cries out, "Praise our God, all his servants, and the ones who fear him, both small and great!" (19:5).

Even more excellent than the celebration over the destruction of the wicked comes the announcement and invitation all of the Lord's people have been long awaiting. It reverberates throughout the heavenly realms like a multitude of voices, cascading waters, and the blast of rolling thunder:

"Hallelujah, because our Lord God, the Almighty, reigns! Let us be glad, rejoice, and give him glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has prepared herself. She was given fine linen to wear, bright and pure" (19:6-8).

A word about Jewish weddings in Jesus' day. On the engagement day, a young man and his father meet with the prospective bride and her family. The future groom presents a contract called a *ketubah* to his beloved fiancée along with a cup of wine, the *kiddush*, meaning "holiness," showing that something is "set apart for another" (myjewishlearning.com/article/kiddush). The Sabbath is set apart from the other days of the week by drinking from the *kiddush*. A bride is set apart for her groom when she accepts his proposal and drinks from the *kiddush*.

After the proposal, the son and father return to their family home to build an addition to house the future couple. At the Last Passover, after Jesus and His disciples drank the *kiddush* and set apart the evening for the Passover, Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also. You know the way to where I am going" (14:2-4). Keeping in mind the Jewish marriage covenant engagement ritual, the Last

Passover was also a "marriage proposal" by Jesus to His future bride, the Bride of Christ, all those believers who would covenant with Him in an everlasting, intimate relationship.

Even though the future groom goes away to prepare the marital home, he promises he will return to consummate the marriage. In anticipation of their wedding day, the future bride drinks from the engagement *kiddush* cup every Sabbath to remind herself of her fiancé', her vows to remain faithful, and to affirm her commitment to him. At the Last Passover, the Lamb's engagement ceremony, Paul reminds Jesus' fiancé' at Corinth, "In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. *Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me*'" (1 Corinthians 11:25). This rehearsal of vows goes on until the wedding day. The exact day and hour of the groom's arrival remain unknown to the future bride and won't happen until the groom finishes the addition to the father's house and the father tells him to get his bride for the ceremony.

On the wedding day, the groom arrives after sunset (a new day) with his entourage, the wedding party. His assistant, the "friend of the groom," shouts, "Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" (Matthew 25:6), at which point the bride gathers her assistants who have been eagerly awaiting this moment and the bride's entourage parades out to meet the groom and his wedding party. Together, they go to the wedding feast during which they are married and *finally* consummate their long-awaited marriage.

Revelation 19:6-8 is the highly-anticipated wedding announcement! It's finally time to bring together Jesus' bride, the entire community of believers on earth and in heaven, to meet Jesus face to face. "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). The Lord who died to make us whole and holy, has brought His work to completion. We will wear white linen, "the righteous acts of the saints" (19:8).

The message John receives for Jesus' disciples is simple. "You're blessed if you're going to the Lamb's marriage feast. I'm telling the truth about this" (19:9). John is so overwhelmed by this he falls to worship the one speaking to him, which we find out is just another redeemed saint (19:10).

The Final Battle Begins! We're about to witness the long-prophesied grudge match between the Almighty, Ever living, Eternal God with authority and power over all creation, seen and unseen, versus a puny creation with delusions of grandeur. Seriously? You've heard the quip, "Don't bring a knife to a gunfight?" Well, don't bring a

destroyable creature to a Creator fight. It won't even be close. Remember all those times we feared the forces of darkness and wicked people? Forget that. Now they're revealed for how weak and insignificant they are.

Our scene begins in heaven and moves to earth. Jesus appears on a white horse as the Supreme Conqueror. During Jesus' first time on earth, He arrived in Jerusalem riding on a donkey, a sign that He used to declare Himself Israel's humble Davidic king (1 King 1:33; Zechariah 9:9). This time, Jesus rides out on his war horse to claim His throne in Jerusalem, the same throne the Antichrist has claimed as the god-king. Jesus' appearance answers the question from 13:4, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" Duh. Jesus can, He will, and He does.

Jesus is Faithful and True, absolutely Trustworthy and the Truth. Therefore, He alone can fight the Antichrist, the epitome of the one who is Treacherous and False. Jesus judges and fights with absolute moral clarity, perfectly aligned with His Father and His will (19:11). He sees with piercing holiness, and Jesus' many crowns show He has more authority and power to rule than any opponent (right, Satan?). His "name that no one knows except Him" means Jesus' divine nature prohibits anyone, especially not His enemy, from knowing Him completely. Even when we become intimate with Jesus and see Him as He is, some aspects of Jesus' person will remain incomprehensible to us forever and place Him far above His creation.

Jesus wears a robe stained with blood, referring to His sacrificial death, which earned Him supreme authority in heaven and on earth (Philippians 2:9-11) and reveals He's about to shred the Antichrist's forces. Check out this End Time prophecy from Isaiah:

Isaiah: "Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength?"

Jesus: "I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save (Jesus' name means *salvation*)."

Isaiah: "Why is *Your apparel red*, and *Your garments like one who treads in the winepress*?"

Jesus: "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; *their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes*. For the *day of vengeance is in My heart*, and the *year of My redeemed has come*. I looked, but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold; therefore, My own arm brought salvation for Me; And My own fury, it sustained Me. I have trodden down the peoples in My anger,

made them drunk in My fury, and brought down their strength to the earth" (Isaiah 63:1-6, italics author).

That's right. Isaiah saw Revelation 19 long before it was revealed to John.

Jesus is also the Word of God, meaning He is the fullest expression of God we will ever know. He is His Father's perfect reflection in human form and obeys His Father perfectly.

The army in white garments are not angels. That army *is us!* Jesus' army is the entire body of Christ, the formerly dead and the living, who together have been transformed into glorified beings – body, soul, and spirit. After years of study and thought, I believe the Rapture is not the moment where Jesus snatches us off the earth to keep Christians from the Tribulation (the Pre-Tribulation Rapture). The Blessed Hope (Titus 2:3) is not the hope to avoid persecution. If that were so, why do so many Christians suffer persecution today and will during the Tribulation? Doesn't it seem arrogant that we in the U.S. church think we're so special that Jesus wants to keep us from suffering while He allows other Christians worldwide to go through the grinder of persecution and martyrdom?

Here's the Rapture/Final Battle scenario I see based on Jesus (the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24), Paul (1 Thessalonians 4), and John (Revelation 19). The battle lines have been drawn. The Islamic Antichrist and his forces oppose Jesus' return because He is *their* "Antichrist" and threatens their plans for global Islamic domination. As Jesus rides out to execute the final global judgment, he raises the righteous dead to life and, together with the surviving Christians, creates new glorified bodies for us, fit for everlasting life. He takes us up from the earth to come alongside Him as His entourage as the King descends to claim His throne and destroy the Usurper (19:14). (If this sounds like *The Return of the King* from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, you're spot on. Aragorn arrives with a spiritual army to destroy the enemy. Do you think Tolkien just made that up?)

Jesus won't have to fight long or hard. His word is the Law that gives Him the right to strike down His enemies and rule with a firm hand over any survivors (19:15). His royal robe and person declare Jesus to be creation's Absolute Sovereign (19:16).

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb begins as the Bride of Christ joins her Groom. At the same time the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is announced (19:7), a bright angel rings the dinner bell for scavenger birds to gather for their dinner, the Feast of Leviathan. The menu will only have one entrée – the bodies of the Antichrist's army and the earthly soldiers from the northern and eastern armies gathered in the Valley of Armageddon.

As Jesus advances, it appears He'll be waging war as He goes, starting in Bozrah (Jordan). Jesus will arrive on the Mount of Olives, and there will be a great earthquake that splits the mountain north to south, creating a rift running from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea (Zechariah 14:4). From there, He will advance to put an end to the Antichrist's army (19:19).

The once-feared and seemingly undefeatable Antichrist and his partner, the False Prophet, are taken prisoner and thrown alive into the ever-burning Lake of Fire (the ultimate judgment) to endure punishment forever (19:20). The rest of the Antichrist's army is mercilessly killed and become dinner for the birds of the air (19:21). But it's not over, yet.

So, you think Satan has immense power, second only to God? Think again. In chapter 20, only *one* mighty angel descends from heaven with a chain, arrests Satan, binds him hand and foot, and throws him into the Abyss from whence the demonic forces had been held captive (20:2-3). Satan gets to cool his heels while Jesus reigns on earth for 1,000 during the Messianic Kingdom. However, he will get another chance to incite a global rebellion against Jesus (20:3).

In the meantime, righteous people will be given leadership functions in Jesus' earthly kingdom (20:4). The rulers will include those who were beheaded during the Antichrist's reign for not following the Antichrist (20:4). Is this another clue that the End Time empire is Islamic because beheading is the preferred method of execution, especially for non-Muslims, those who refuse to convert, and those who leave Islam for another faith, particularly Christianity. Other leaders will include Jesus' Disciples, who will rule over the restored nation of Israel (Luke 22:30).

So who are all the people in Jesus' Millennial Kingdom? Time for a bit of speculation. First, there will be all of the believers who took part in the first resurrection (20:5). They will never die or be separated from God again. It seems all those who fought against Jesus will be out of the picture, so there's that. *But what about people on earth who refused to worship the Antichrist but hadn't committed to Jesus?* Don't start picking up stones just yet. Hear me out.

While I said there were no fence-sitters, could it be that some people who weren't saved at the point of Jesus' return and who weren't opposing Him accepted Jesus' rule at that time but *after* the Rapture could be spared and live under Jesus' 1,000-year reign in their mortal bodies?

I suggest this because we know saved and glorified people would *never* follow Satan's insurrection when he's released from the Abyss. And yet, Satan will lead an army of people against Jesus. Where does he get the people? My only conclusion is people who are born during the Messianic Reign.

This scenario is challenging. However, I say this because of prophecies that speak of people being able to die during the Messianic Age physically.

For example, Isaiah wrote, "*In her, a nursing infant will no longer live only a few days, or an old man not live out his days. Indeed, the one who dies at a hundred years old will be mourned as a young man, and the one who misses a hundred years will be considered cursed. People will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build and others live in them; they will not plant and others eat. For my people's lives will be like the lifetime of a tree*" (Isaiah 65:20-22, italics author). Then again, Isaiah's prophecy is in the context of the new heavens and earth, which happens *after* Jesus' Messianic Kingdom. How can we square this?

First of all, *I'll let you know when we get there*. But let's continue speculating for fun. Second, all early prophecies see the future from a distance, and like looking through a telescope, future events seem to coincide even if they are separated from each other by a long distance. Isaiah could see Jesus' Messianic Kingdom overlapping with the new heavens and earth. I'm not sure.

But if I'm correct, this has some fascinating implications. Imagine the world is filled with people who will never die and some who will. Since God plans to restore Eden, our original assignment to subdue and rule creation (bring it under control and manage it) will again be restored to its proper function. After the horrendous Revelation judgments, the world will need repairing, and that's what we'll be doing. And according to Isaiah, it sounds like babies will be born, thus restoring God's mandate to humanity to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28).

However, there's a question about people not marrying in the resurrection (the Messianic Age). Still, I don't want to get into the weeds on that other than say that the marriage covenant is needed where there's the possibility of betraying one's spouse. In the Messianic Age, a glorified person will be unable to lie or betray their spouse, so will our commitment to our spouse be unbreakable? Will formal marriage be needed at all?

Perhaps men and women will bond with their helpmate and remain committed for the duration as it was in Eden. Also, babies would need to be born to restock humanity after so many lost people have died and will never return. Just thinking out loud.

Anyway, first death, second death, and first resurrection, second resurrection (20:5-6). What gives? The first death is our physical death which comes to all because we were separated from God when humanity sinned (Genesis 2:17, 3:19).

The second death is when lost people are forever separated from God, as we will soon see.

The first resurrection is the resurrection of the righteous when Jesus returns (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Those who participate in the first resurrection will never face judgment or the possibility of permanent punishment in the Lake of Fire.

The second resurrection comes after Jesus' Millennial Reign. The remaining dead, everyone who has rejected God, and the righteous mortals who died during the 1,000 years will be resurrected into eternal bodies to be judged. Those who are righteous will live with Jesus forever. Those who rejected Him will be punished eternally.

This brings us to the end of the 1,000-year reign (20:7). Satan is released for one last run at unseating God from His throne. Who is going to follow Satan? Not the resurrected saints, that's for sure. But remember (per my assumption), there will be mortals on earth under Jesus' rule. Some will have been born, never knowing what life was like before Jesus' triumph. It will be like Eden all over again! Satan's enticement will be the same as in Eden, "Hey! Throw off Jesus' rule. If you do, you shall be an ascended being like me and the God over there!"

The text says many people will join Satan's insurrection. Satan's forces are given the apocalyptic name Gog and Magog, affirming their anti-God status (Ezekiel 38-39). They'll march on Jerusalem, and again, the battle won't be even close. They'll be instantly and wholly consumed by fire from heaven (reminiscent of Elijah's contest on Mount Carmel, 1 Kings 18) (20:9). Satan is thrown into the Lake of Fire. Buh-bye!

It's now judgment time for the wicked! The Ancient of Days, the Father, sits as their Judge, with holy, pure, and absolute justice. Heaven and earth dissolve and reveal all the remaining dead people for their judgment. This trial isn't a judgment for *righteous* works (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). This is a salvation judgment, and what people have done will

reveal where they stand, either convicted or excused. Since “All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a polluted garment; all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities carry us away like the wind” (Isaiah 64:6), precious few will find their names in the Lamb’s Book of Life (20:15). However, some will (Romans 2:15). Death is no more and since there’s no more reason to have a storage place for the dead awaiting judgment, God destroys the jail, Hell/Sheol (20:14).

Selah. (Pause for reflection.)

INSIGHT

Why do we fear Satan and his minions at all? They’re real. The Bible tells us so. I’ve also encountered demons in life. I’ve participated in casting out demonic beings and unclean spirits that people have allowed into their lives and beings. True, it’s spooky and weird and makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck. But demons aren’t all-powerful beings. Jesus said, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go...” (Matthew 28:18). All grammatical parsing aside, I see that as we go, we go with Jesus’ “all authority in heaven and on earth.” If we’re tight with Jesus, we need not fear spiritual forces. They must get through Jesus first; the “all authority in heaven and on earth” is a mighty high fence to jump. Satan can’t even act unless the Father allows him to do so. We saw that when Satan wanted to prove Job’s trust in God, he had to get permission to do so (Job 1:9-12, 2:4-6).

Don’t fear your enemy—fear (have reverence for) God only. Make the enemy go through Jesus first. Be at peace, knowing the One who has “all authority in heaven and on earth” is watching your back.

December 31 : Scriptures Revelation 21-22

SUMMARY

Congratulations! You've reached our final destination on our *Cruisin' Through The Bible*. I know it's been a lot to go through and a lot to see along the way. I applaud your tremendous efforts. However, your real commendation comes from the Lord whose Word you regarded as so important that you spent a year of your life reading through it, meditating on it, and hopefully, learning how to live for Jesus better. I also hope that if you started this project and didn't know Jesus, you picked Him up along the way, and I'll be able to meet you in His Kingdom! That would make all this work worthwhile to me.

Speaking of Jesus' Millennial Kingdom, it ends in Revelation 21. It's time for a heaven and earth makeover to remove every vestige of imperfection caused by sin and to recreate a new environment fit for God's people. This last part is so far into the future John has trouble relating what he sees. He can only put it in symbolic or descriptive terms, but if we go with the Hebraic "How does it function?" idea, we'll understand what Jesus reveals about Himself and our ultimate destiny. Cinch up your seat belt on last time. Here we go.

Why does God make a new heaven and new earth? As you may recall, the Lord God called the old heaven and earth to function as witnesses against Israel in case they violated their covenant with Him (Deuteronomy 4:26, 30:19, 31:28). Since the only people who remain after the Grand Purge of All Evil are those who will never again betray God, there's no need for the covenant witnesses from the old age. Thus, "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" (21:1).

Next, John sees the New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb, coming down from heaven. Is this literal or not? I believe it will be literal, but John's description carries symbolic images to convey particular meanings. Just like the redeemed are Jesus' cleansed and spotless bride (perfected people with an intimate relationship with Jesus), New Jerusalem will be our fitting habitation with Jesus (21:3).

The One on the throne declares that there will no longer be any separation between God and His people. The break that began with the Fall in Genesis 3 has been removed, and the physical and spiritual worlds are again fused. God created us to live with Him in His presence. It was that way in Eden and with the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and Temple.

God's most fantastic work of tabernacling with humanity was when He took on human flesh and shared our humanity. Because of sin, we couldn't go to Him, so the Lord came to us, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). God tells us we belong together with Him (21:3) and because we're in His glorious presence where there is no separation from Him, all that resulted from death – grief, crying, and pain – will be gone. Won't that be great!

The Lord is playing the long game. From John's prophetic perspective, what began with the Fall will take millennia to reverse, but it will come. During the Father's plan, Jesus accomplished the means by which a sinner is forgiven, cleansed, and made new by the Holy Spirit's work (Romans 8:11). We became new creations walking in the foreign territory of an old, sin-stained creation. Now in Revelation 21:5, all things are made new. *We're finally home.*

"It is finished!" (21:6). Jesus spoke those words as He completed His work on the cross and set the restoration of all things in motion. Now He speaks those exact words as the restoration process is completed. He was the process's beginning and end (English – A to Z, Greek – Alpha to Omega, Hebrew – Alef to Tav). Yup, it's all Jesus' work, and He is the source of life. Those who conquer will receive it. Those who refuse get fire instead of water (21:8).

John gets a closer look at humanity's new home with God. It is glorious, blindingly colorful, built of extremely precious materials, and illuminated by God's presence. The massive walls have twelve gates, three to a side, and rest on a twelve-layer foundation (19:12-14). The twelve gates and foundation layers represent the Older Covenant and New Covenant leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel, God's miracle people. While the function of God living with His people was first revealed in the Older Covenant with the Tabernacle and Temple, its reality rests in the New Covenant.

Similar to Ezekiel's vision, John is commanded to measure the city. Ready to have your mind blown? New Jerusalem is a 1,400 square mile cube (21:16). I don't think this is symbolic or needs to be allegorized. God has the right to design His city as He wants, and who are we to argue with Him?

Rather than using stone, God chooses to build it from more precious materials. Please note that the gates are made from massive single pearls. First, I would *love* to see the oysters those babies came from. Second, a pearl is the only precious gem from a non-kosher source. Why is this significant? Because the Temple courts were reserved for Jews

only. Gentiles weren't allowed into the courts under penalty of death. A low wall called the *soreg* was built around the Temple to show Gentiles the limit (Acts 21:28-30; Ephesians 2:14).

In a sense, Gentiles could have been regarded as "non-kosher" because they didn't know Israel's God and worshipped idols. But when they converted to Judaism, they became Jews and could freely enter the Temple. To me, a pearl gate speaks of the Gentiles finally having access to God's presence, not because they converted, but because God made them His people within. As Paul said, "A person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter. That person's praise is not from people but from God" (Romans 2:29). All the redeemed, Jew or Gentile, may freely enter God's presence in the New Jerusalem.

But there's no Temple (21:22). Right! What was the purpose of God's Temple in Jerusalem? The Temple served as God's holy habitation in an unholy world. Now that the new creation is entirely holy, no sanctuary is needed to contain God's holy presence. In New Jerusalem, we will dwell in His presence, and He will be our sanctuary and place for communion, intimate contact, and security. Our Most Holy Place is in His presence which will forever surround us. The Father and the Son will cover and overshadow us (21:22). What about the Holy Spirit? Since I see nothing in scripture to the contrary, He will continue to indwell us. Man, are we covered!

Here's a prophetic fun fact. Even though we'll have a new heaven and earth and be one people of God, there will still be a variety of nations with designated rulers who will give their glory to God (21:24). Fascinating, huh?

There will be no need to close the gates of New Jerusalem because closed gates are defensive measures. But God's people will have no enemies in heaven because all the baddies are burning in the Lake of Fire (21:25-26). Also, closed gates prevent unclean people and objects from entering God's holy Temple courts and defiling them. Perpetually open gates mean there's no chance of that ever happening because all defilement and its causes are erased (21:27). Those written in the Lamb's Book of Life will forever remain undefiled.

And we now arrive at our destination, the final chapter of the Bible. When you finish, you'll have cruised through 66 books, 1,189 chapters, 31,102 verses, and approximately 785,000 words depending on your translation. Kudos to you!

Chapter 22 continues John's panorama of the new heaven and earth, which parallels what Ezekiel saw in Ezekiel 47, the River of Life. Only John sees the one thing humanity hasn't enjoyed since Genesis 2, the Tree of Life. Pushing past simple descriptions, what do we learn? Life, all life, has its source in God – the Father and the Son (22:1). The Holy Spirit is the manifestation of God's life within us (John 7:38). God's life nourishes, sustains, and heals us (22:2). God's curse on creation is gone. Separation from God was humanity's separation from life which affected the entire world. Now that the breach has been healed, life flows in abundance.

The Lord's presence will be continual, and like the 144,000 that were sealed with God's name (Revelation 7), we will be known throughout creation as those who belong to Jesus. We will know Him as He knows us, for we will look upon His face, and the face reveals the person (22:4). The glory of God's presence will be so strong and continual that there will be no need for heavenly bodies for illumination (Genesis 1:14-18).

As for the words of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, John is told that the words are "faithful and true," meaning we can utterly trust them (22:6). God sent His angel (i.e., His messenger) in the spirit of the prophets (it's not an allegory, but an accurate prophetic word) to tell John "what must soon take place" (1:1). Remember, that's per the Lord's timing, not ours.

Speaking of soon, Jesus reassures John that He's coming "soon" and that those who keep (watch over protectively, guard, preserve, heed, and observe practically) the words of this prophecy will be blessed. (Hey, I'm all in!)

Just like John testifies about being a firsthand witness to Jesus' life (heard, seen, observed, and touched, 1 John 1:1), he does so again regarding this prophecy of the End. John is so overwhelmed that he again falls in worship at the messenger's feet. What the messenger says about himself is unusual. He claims to be "a fellow servant with you, your brothers the prophets, and those who keep the words of this book" (22:9). In other words, the messenger is not an angel but a real human being who has died whom God has chosen to bring this prophecy to John. Don't ask me. That's what it says. The messenger's point is that John should not worship him regarding these words, but God who revealed them to John.

Unlike what an angelic messenger tells Daniel about sealing up his prophecy about the End (Daniel 12:4, 9), John's messenger tells him to keep the prophecy open and readable. People will do with it according to their unrighteous or righteous nature.

Jesus now testifies: He's coming soon with His reward for those who have been faithful (22:12-13). They are blessed and will be with Him in New Jerusalem. Not so for the wicked. They're excluded from the source of life. Jesus sent His messenger to John to deliver this revelation, prophecy, and message to His churches in Asia Minor. (By extension, this includes all Christians of every congregation since those days.) He is the true Messiah as David's descendant (2 Samuel 7:12-13) and the star (Numbers 24:17).

As the Spirit and our soon-to-be-home ask Jesus to fulfill His promise to return, so should those who "hear" this word. Jesus offers eternal life, the River of Life, to anyone who thirsts for it (22:17). *"Jump on in. The water's fine!"*

John closes his Revelation of Jesus Christ with a warning, a repeated promise, and a blessing.

John warns us that no one should tamper with what he's shared. As God told Moses about the Torah, nothing is to be added or subtracted from the Revelation. Period. Otherwise, the person who adds will enjoy the plagues in this book, and those who subtract will lose access to the Tree of Life and the New Jerusalem, indicating God's rejection. So, for those who dismiss the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ as mere fantasy or purely symbolic, are they walking a thin line? That should undoubtedly spur us to read it seriously.

Jesus assures us that He will indeed return (22:20), to which John gives a hearty, "Amen! And quickly, Lord Jesus!" As my Holman Christian Study Bible says, "John prayed for Jesus to come soon. God's patience toward the unbelieving world is a cause of Jesus' delay." That's certainly a big part of it. According to Peter, "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

In closing the summary, I want to share something I read in both of my Study Bibles. Please notice the Revelation of Jesus Christ begins with "John: To the seven churches in Asia. *Grace and peace to you from the one who is, who was, and who is to come*" (1:4) and ends with "The *grace of the Lord Jesus* be with everyone" (22:21). Revelation begins with Jesus' grace and ends with His grace. All the tumult of judgment in between is confusing and scary, but God's grace flows through the entire book for those who love and trust Him.

That got me thinking. The Bible begins in Genesis with God's gracious creation and ends in Revelation with God's gracious re-creation.

We born-again people can claim nothing but the Lord's grace for bringing us to Himself and sustaining us until we see Jesus face to face, either in this life or in the resurrection. Hymn-writer John Newton could have penned his second stanza for the end of Revelation:

"Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home."

In the meantime, you've done well, dear reader. The good news is you can begin again tomorrow. As St. Jerome put it, "The Scriptures are shallow enough for a babe to come and drink without fear of drowning and deep enough for theologians to swim in without ever touching the bottom." With Jesus' grace, begin again. Ask for more of the Holy Spirit, understanding, and a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Amen! Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

INSIGHT

In closing our *Cruisin' Through The Bible*, I have to repeat this. Suppose you regard the book of Revelation as simply allegory or a symbolic letter encouraging 1st-century Christians in their struggle against Rome and the waves of persecution under anti-Christ emperors. In that case, I believe you're on shaky ground. Since John was shown things about Jesus and the End Times that parallel prophecies from genuine prophets, then by dismissing John's revelation, you also dismiss the other prophets like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and their Holy Spirit revelations of God's End Time plans. If so, then what are we left with? Spiritual cheerleading.

Let's take God's word seriously. Let it be literal where it's literal, even if it seems utterly fantastic. After all, the center of our faith and eternal life revolves around the most awesome, hard-to-fathom, wonderful truth of all – that God came to us in the flesh and died for us so we could be reborn and live with Him as He always wanted us to do.

*"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy,
and blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy
and keep what is written in it, because the time is near."* (Revelation 1:3)