
Revelation – Context and Character

Revelation 1:1-3; 22:6-21

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Revelation 1:1-3-

¹ The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

Revelation 22:6-21

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

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

⁸ I, 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, ⁹ but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

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

¹² "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

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

¹⁶ "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

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

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

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

This evening, we are opening our study of the book of Revelation. For many of you, this has been long desired and anticipated. How is this going to function in our preaching over the next twenty or so Sunday evenings?

Challenge – what makes this book so difficult?

A Dead Genre

It is a dead genre - rarely do people write in it. Outside of the Bible, when was the last time you worked through a book about truth and history written in apocalyptic language and form? Have you ever? Don't include fantasy and sci-fi – neither about truth nor history.

Diverse Opinions

There are so many opinions about what it says and what it means. Each of these opinions is based on a series of presuppositions about how the Bible is to be interpreted and how redemptive history flows. Unless you are simply confirming your own categories most people think that the book of Revelation cannot be understood. This is tragic. This is a book we are supposed to read, to understand and to profit from. Listen to Revelation 1:3 again, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”

Misused Hermeneutics

We learned our hermeneutical principles in didactic material. The principles that help us much in that genre can really cripple us in this one. We are used to asking, “This is what? That means what? This corresponds to what?”

Old Testament Unfamiliarity

We are not familiar with the Old Testament and the minor prophets in particular. How many of you can, right now, give me the sequence of visions in Zechariah? Or even anything from Zechariah? Would it surprise you to know that most of the symbols in Revelation come from that minor prophet?

Controlling Frameworks

Finally, our tendency to bring our frameworks to it makes it much more difficult to hear what is actually being said.

Remember,

big **F** little t?

Shouldn't it be

big **TEXT** and little framework?



There is also a negative affect of a framework. We react to a framework we have rejected. So, we come to the text absolutely certain that we do not believe a certain framework. This also blinds us to elements in the text that framework got right. Just because I am **NOT** a dispensationalist should not blind me to the possible futureness of Daniel's seventieth week.

Funny thing - contemporary young people are not turned off by it – it sounds a lot like their video games.

This is why I am going to take some time to “set the book up”. It is not my aim to impose a framework on the text. It is my aim to take the Bible's framework and map it to the book. This will require a clear analysis of the books structure.

Concern – how will we be transformed by taking up this text?

I want to bring a charge, a challenge to you as we open this book. This will not be preached just to fill in your prophetic chart. It is not intended to just give you knowledge – lots of good stuff for your study notebooks. I am taking up this study in the hope that God will transform you. In what ways?

In respect to what is intrinsic in the genre

We are on the edge of what can be said about the transcendent – what is beyond time and space. Yet it is unveiling how the transcendent God is causing history to flow from the headwaters of His grand ends within the banks of His sovereign power to the ocean of His eternal purposes.

Therefore it speaks with a great diversity of appeal – many are curious as to what is going on and how will it all end.

It espouses great moral clarity – history is full of moral realities in which we are immersed. We cannot live without ethics. This book points to the God who will be there at the end in a way that it is all that matters.

Therefore it helps us to think crisply and clearly about moral absolutes. The book places before us a vision of God holding all the universe accountable for its rebellion. From Satan, to fallen angels, to depraved humanity; from principalities and powers inhabiting the cosmos, to kings and thrones, to human rulers great and small, to rich and poor alike all live and die before the face of God. No rebellion, no sin, no persecution of God's people however great or small shall go unpunished. Now and forever.

We must then preach the cross within this context as the way out and the way in.

At the cross, the dreadful punishment for sin and rebellion is put on vivid display. There, the appointed Substitute was punished for His people. There the flaming sword pierced the soul of Jesus. So, God was satisfied and we are justified.

Through the cross, the new creation is begun and the gate to heaven is opened. There, repentant rebels are reconciled, become the children of God and are adopted as sons. So dwelling place of God will be with His people forever.

In respect with Revelation's place at the end of the canon

The book is filled with expressions of newness. Here we have the unfolding of the New Covenant which brings in massive newness. We see a new people, a new Temple, a new Kingdom, a new earth, a new heavens. All this newness is born through the travail and birth pains of suffering. As promised, newness will come. As prophesied, it will come through trial, tribulation and testing.

This book is filled with consummating expressions. The old order is passed away. What we have longed for, wept for, prayed for and sought with all our souls is then here. All the wicked from above the earth, on the earth and below the earth are cast into the lake of fire. Thus wickedness and sin are ended. The old creation infused with the principle and power of sin, the flesh, has been subjected to fire. The new creation emerges as the power of God that intruded into this old and glorified the body of Jesus at His resurrection, that brought life into His people now brings the sons and daughters of God their glorified bodies. Now that all is made new, eternal life breathes in unending day lit by the glory of Christ in His high throne. The consummation has come.

In respect to specific functions

How is the book of Revelation supposed to function in our lives?

For Evangelism

Here we have word pictures in moral absoluteness for a world besotted with relativism.

Revelation 4-5 – We are shown the absolute throne of God in heaven where we have our saving Redeemer and our sovereign Ruler, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 20-21 – We are shown the way things will end: in final and fiery judgment for unbelievers, in glorious resurrection and reign for believers and in radical transformation of a new heavens and earth for creation.

So we say these things to unbelievers *because they are so*. This is truth. This is way it is.

For Endurance

Eschatology teaches us how to wait. The book of Revelation teaches us how to cry out “How long...” and to wait in confident hope of the glorious end. We endure because God wins.

Consider how Matthew 24:36-25:46 informs our need to wait and to endure through great trial and troubles.

Wait as those who will be faithful during the wait (24:36-46).

Wait as those prepared for a long wait (25:1-13).

Wait as those who increase the Master's assets (25:14-30).

Wait as those who care in mercy for other Christians (25:31-46).

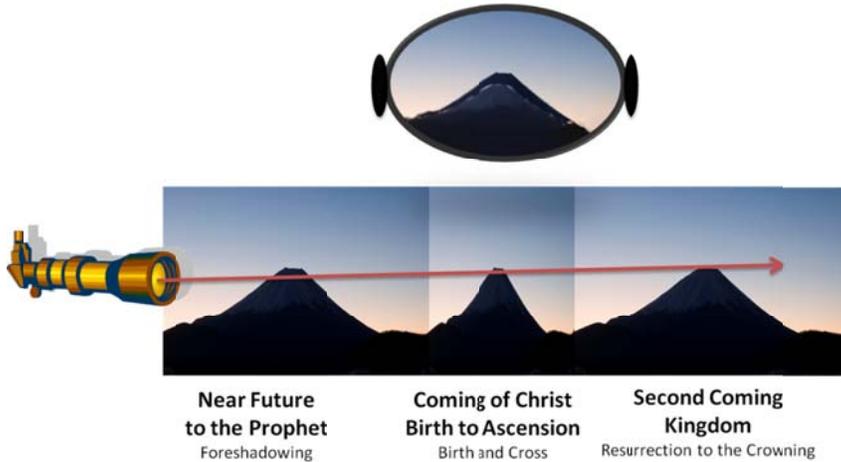
For Explanation

Why are we experiencing our present tribulation and suffering? Genesis 50 and Revelation go hand in hand to explain why we suffer. Tribulation and suffering will come to believers as simultaneously man's intention and God's intention. But He has a “saving this people alive” purpose. Through tribulation God will bring His elect saints so that they will not fall away but through suffering, sword and eventually, rapture, they will ever be with Jesus.

Context – what have we learned so far?

Let's begin with a summary overview that brings us into the book. We will be looking at the book of Revelation with this timeline/schema developed from the rest of the texts we have looked at.

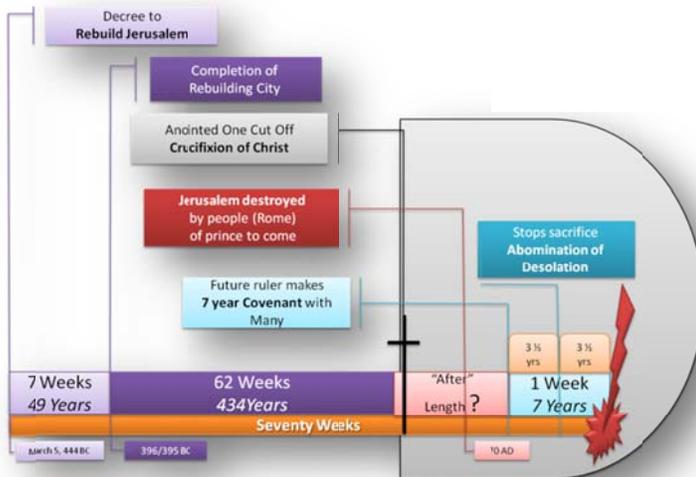
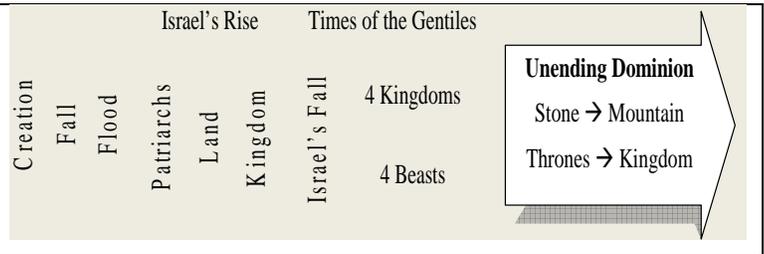
Three Horizons of Prophecy



Prophetic literature sees three major mountain peaks. Sometimes, through the telescope of prophetic visions, those mountain peaks are blended together. The following graphic illustrates this important concept.

Beginning with Daniel

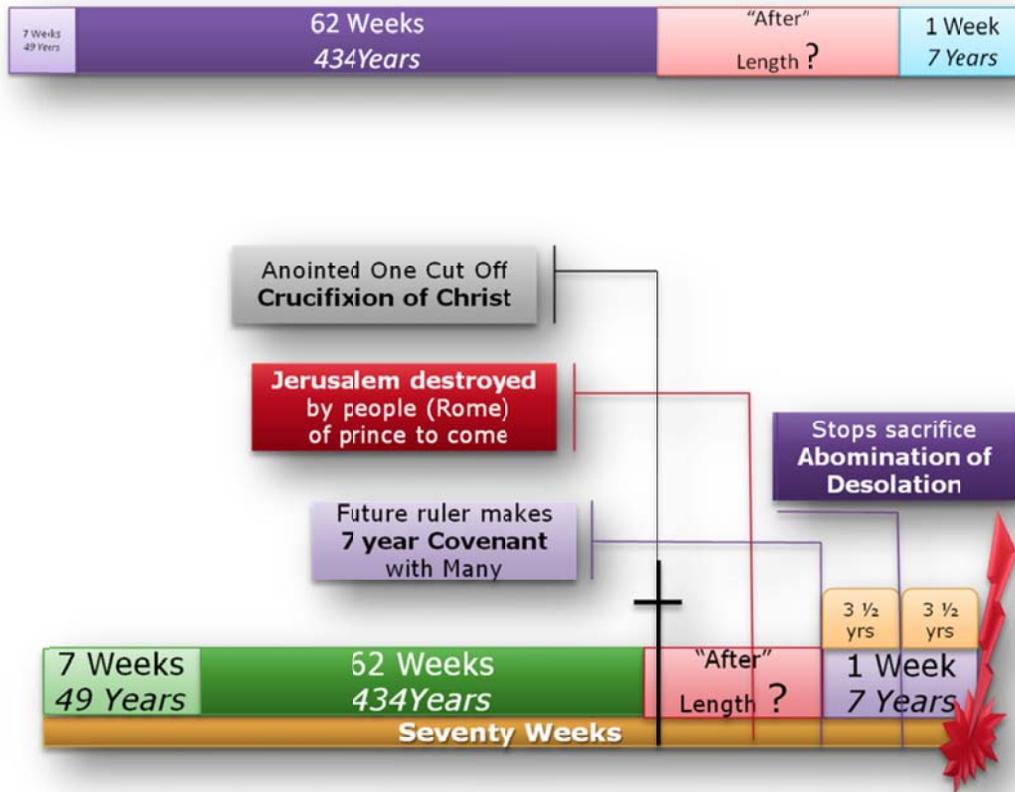
Daniel clearly lays out a timeline for redemptive history. We have spent considerable time developing and working with that timeline. Here is clearly what Daniel laid out for us.



Seventy weeks determined to bring about redemptive history. Sixty-nine weeks have taken place. The seventieth appears to be yet future. Between the cross and the covenant is an undetermined amount of time. The seventieth week begins with a covenant and ends in the Day of the Lord.

Described by Jesus

Let's expand the time line as Jesus gave it to us in Matthew.



The ending of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant both centered around Christ's first coming.

Jesus' first coming which includes His death, resurrection and ascension.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as the effect of the end of the Old covenant.

A period of time during which the gospel is preached over the whole world accompanied by increasing persecution of believers and general moral decline.

A covenant by a Roman/western leader with apostate Israel for 7 years.

Three and one half years into the 7 year period, an event takes place which is an abomination to Israel.

From then till the end, a terrible persecution of believers takes place accompanied by such destruction and death that God cuts it short in order to preserve human life.

At then of that period of time, there will come cataclysmic events in the heavens including the appearing of the sign of the Son of Man.

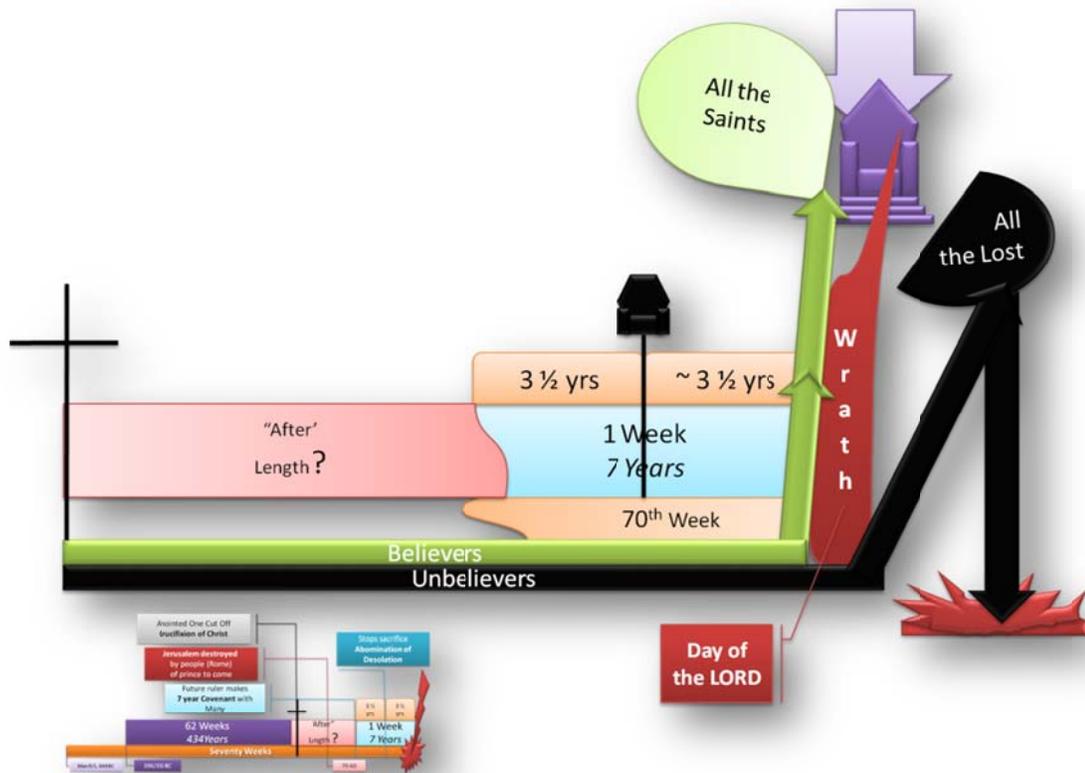
Jesus appears in visibly and in triumphant glory.

With a trumpet sound, the elect are gathered from the heavens and the earth.

Then the end.

Developed by the Apostles

This timeline is expanded upon by the apostle Paul and is reflected by Peter and Jude.



This portion of our timeline is representing the time from the cross to the final judgment. Please note that it is incomplete. At this point in our study, we still have other Scriptures yet to look at which will give more details and will tell us more about what happens after the final judgment.

Between the cross and the coming of Jesus, believers and unbelievers will exist in the world and in the visible church/kingdom. At some point in the future, Daniel's 70th week will begin. In the middle, the antichrist will do what is described in 2 Thessalonians 2 and is referred to as the abomination of desolation. This will launch what Jesus calls, the great tribulation which is the last 3 ½ years of Daniel's 70th week.

Towards the end of that period, Jesus will come. At His coming, all the saints will be gathered to Him, through the rapture and resurrection. We will meet Him at His throne in the immediate heavens. He will then pour out His wrath during a period of time known as the Day of the Lord. At the end of that period, the unbelieving dead are raised from the dead so that all the lost will stand before the throne at the final judgment. The book of life is opened and the saved are confirmed and enter into the "joy of the Lord". The lost whose names are not in the book of life will have the book of their deeds opened, the severity of their punishment in hell determined and then, after acknowledging that Jesus is Lord, will be cast into the eternal lake of fire along with Satan and the fallen angels.

Characteristics – what kind of book do we have?

Revelation, while not unique in the Bible, does have some important traits that we must understand if we are going to have any hope of handling it well.

It is Epistolary

The book of Revelation is a folio with letters contained in it. It is written to the church of all ages as well as specifically to seven churches existing in that day.

Its author is the Apostle John who wrote the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John. It was written around 96 AD when John was a very old man and suffering for the faith. It is the last book of our Bibles and thus closes with dire warnings to those who alter it and great encouragements to those who read it and profit from it.

It is Prophetic

This book is a prophetic book. Prophecy in the New Testament is both fore-telling and forth-telling. It is intended to speak of the “things that are to come”. It is also intended to speak to the church of that day. Both of these are intended to speak to us today.

As a people reading and learning a prophetic book, we will be careful to pay attention to what God calls us as a church to be and do. We will draw hope and help from it as we live through the days that foretold in this book.

It is Apocalyptic

This book is largely written in an apocalyptic style. The following is an outline of a talk Dr. D.A. Carson gave on the apocalyptic nature of the book of Revelation.

Revelation uses a narrative framework communicated by a spiritual being to a human intermediary to pass on to others. The structure of the narrative is linguistic and stylistic, not chronological.

God's-eye view of the sweep of history directly communicated in visionary language through mediators. These mediators are sometimes men and sometimes angels.

It unveils a God's-eye view encompassing a crisis which runs toward the end and climaxes in hell or heaven.

It includes many symbols and symbolic language:

- Some are derived from the Old Testament - horn .> king/govern domain

- Some are familiar in their contemporary culture -> tepid water

- Some are centered on the author ->

The book schematizes history and uses numbers symbolically. Following the book of Daniel, history is seen as having a hidden order and agenda that is unveiled through the symbols. A careful study of the numbers used in the book of Revelation demonstrates that they tend to be representative and not counting. The exception to this is the use of the numbers developed directly from the book of Daniel - usually referring to a certain number of days.

Deploys many horrible, terrible beasts that are unnatural composites

The three beasts of Rev 12-14 seem to come from the closing discourse of the gospel of John and ape the Trinity

The beasts are totally symbolic and would have been immediately recognized as not literal nor representing real animals.

They are particularly and tightly drawn from OT (allusion and imagery). Most of the beasts in Revelation are like the ones in Daniel and are drawn from Zechariah.

Unlike other apocalyptic literature, Revelation is enclosed in letter form. I have already alluded to this. It is a folio, a letter, an encyclical meant to be passed around the churches and read by all.

It has an open and closing that function the same as a letter of that day.

It contains seven letters addressed to seven congregations.

It is filled with moral appeals, warnings, exhortations as well as encouragements.

Because of its parallel structure, it often introduces a theme or symbol that will be unpacked later in the book.

You will find that many decisions about what something is or means are governed by later things in the book. This sense of turning a corner that looks back is deeply satisfying but also very challenging. There will be many times that we will be saying, "See this here? Didn't we encounter it earlier? Now, we really understand what that was..."

Particularly appropriate for explaining divine realities

The nature of spiritual realities requires a way of communicating that uses analogies and metaphors. God has designed the physical reality we live in and through to be able to communicate many spiritual realities. But some are so difficult that symbols and imaginative creations (like the beasts) are used. When these are used, we are thereby warned that the reality behind that symbol is much more difficult to communicate and understand.

The lack of our experience with these things also dictates that we be satisfied with the limited knowledge available to us. Paul had an immediate experience of heaven and spiritual realities. He struggled both with the God-given limitation on what he could say and on the limitation of our own experience. To bridge that gap, John is given visions, dreams in which the suspension of reality is used to unveil the real behind the physical.

Christ – where is Jesus?

Do you remember the *Where's Waldo?* books? You had whole pages of very detailed pictures often filled with people or animals and you had to find one character named Waldo. The book of Revelation is a bit like that. The point is to find Jesus page by page. So, I am giving you a cheat sheet if you will. Here is an illustrative list.

1:1-3	Agent and substance of divine self-disclosure
1:4	Redeemer and ruler through his resurrection
1:5-6	Redeemer and ruler through His blood
1:7-8	Looking forward to His return with texts from the Old Testament
1:9	In Jesus is the partnership of kingdom, tribulation and endurance
1:12-16	Jesus is the culmination of the Old Testament symbols (through Daniel 7, etc.) Reservoir of allusions and symbols for the rest of the book
2-4	Is the Lion and the Lamb
5:6	A composite vision
5	A perfection of praise
6:1	Opens the seven seals as qualified by His death and resurrection
7:10	Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb
7:14	Christ is the center of the multitude (and 144,000)
9	Judgment is executed by the Lord
11	The kingdom of Christ and His forever rule flowing out of His death and resurrection
12	The child who is born and ascended is filled out with the people of God opposed by the dragon; Last part of chapter shows how the church is suffering under the wrath of the dragon
14	The Lamb and the multitude The Heralds of the Harvest
17:6	One saved by the other drunk upon the blood of Jesus

Concern – why study such a difficult book?

Seven "blessed" in the whole book...

- 1:3 **Blessed** is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and **blessed** are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.
- 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: **Blessed** are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "**Blessed** indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"
- 16:15 ("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!")
- 19:9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: **Blessed** are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."
- 20:6 **Blessed** and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.
- 22:7 "And behold, I am coming soon. **Blessed** is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."
- 22:14 **Blessed** are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

Seven "endure" in the whole book...

- 1:9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient **endurance** that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.
- 2:2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient **endurance**, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.
- 2:19 "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient **endurance**, and that your latter works exceed the first.
- 3:10 Because you have kept my word about patient **endurance**, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.
- 13:10 If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the **endurance** and faith of the saints.
- 14:12 Here is a call for the **endurance** of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.
- 2:3 I know you are **enduring** patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

Reflect and Respond

I am hoping that I am not promising more than I can deliver.

We will begin with understanding the book the 1st century terms. We are going first to Asia Minor and then to us.

We will be watching closely for large Biblical-Theological structures culminating in the New Heavens and the New Earth

Finally, the book of Revelation is full of massive ultimates. There is an ultimate spiritual war, an ultimate great God and an ultimate glorious victory.

Even so come, Lord Jesus...