

Revelation Book of Hope



Louis Nel

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Jerusalem, Jerusalem!
Hark, how the angels sing:
Hosannah in the highest,
Hosannah to your king!

From The Holy City

Preface

Has Revelation always been a book that you would rather not read because you do not understand it? Maybe this controversial Bible book scares you, or do you hear about so many different interpretations that you are afraid that you might read the wrong one? Then this series of meditations was written specifically for you, because Revelation was never intended to be a hidden Book, and the wonderful hope that radiates from it is a balm for any believer.

This series is not intended to be a complete Bible study of Revelation, but merely to stimulate your mind and to comfort you and give you hope.

My deepest prayer is that this series of meditations will also mean as much to you as it meant to me as I wrote them.

Louis N

Book of Hope

Introduction to Revelation

Revelation Gives Hope! Thus so we can surely summarize this last book in the Bible. Indeed, it is the most controversial book in the Bible, and many people avoid it altogether. It is so full of mysterious symbolism, and most people are afraid that they will get confused. Others, again, want to give all kinds of sensational interpretations about future events that they find in this book. My grandfather read Revelation in our old Dutch Family Bible through and through! This Bible book touched him deeply.

Either way: Revelation has served as a wonderful inspiration for many artists over the centuries. For example, think of that breathtaking composition by Handel, The Messiah, that brings tears to my eyes again and again as I listen to the many poignant

songs in the work. Just think of the poignant Hallelujah Choir and "Surely, He hath borne our griefs". Michelangelo drew just as much inspiration from Revelation when he painted the "Last Judgment" in the Sistine Chapel.

What does Revelation say to the modern believer today? It is indeed a book of hope, but at the same time of warning. It tells us that God reigns and remains in control, even though it often seems that it is not the case. Revelation gives us reassurance, and gives us new life. Furthermore, Revelation reaches back to the sacrifice of the Lamb in the past, and with the same breath it reaches out to the future, the Second Coming of Jesus. Revelation also keeps us believers on our toes. So as gigantic disasters like the terrible earthquakes and tsunamis and even our current Covid 19 crisis, that shook the whole world, so Revelation wants to draw us to God. In His hands the history of the world is like putty, and we can only take refuge in Him. From Revelation we see that history has a new meaning.

The author calls himself "John", which means it could possibly be the Apostle John, or perhaps John of Patmos. There is no consensus on this. For practical purposes, we assume that it was the Apostle. He calls Revelation a prophetic book in 1:3. However, it is rather a revealing or apocalypse. He wrote this book while in Asia Minor, about the year 95 AD.

The first readers of the book are the seven churches in Asia Minor. At that time, they experienced tremendous persecution from the Romans. Christians were considered atheists for refusing to worship the other gods. It would apparently disturb the harmony between the people and the gods, and cause natural disasters if they did not worship the other gods. In addition, the emperor worshipping and fertility cults were affected, and the Romans were not happy!

How should we understand Revelation? There are several ways to look at this book. To understand Revelation you do not need to explain every little detail, but you must follow

the great contours of God's message. Some people want to explain every word of Revelation literally. For example that the new city, Jerusalem, literally descends from Heaven, and there can only be 144,000 people in Heaven. In other circles, everything in Revelation is spiritualized, and a deeper spiritual meaning is sought after each description. Others want to give Revelation a historical character, a blueprint for the history of the past as well as the future. Indeed, the historical facet of Revelation is very important, but it is much more than just a history guide.

In order to truly understand Revelation, we must first realize that it is an apocalyptic dramatic narrative with a prophetic-eschatological approach. This means that it takes into account current as well as last-day events, but also calls and encourages believers to believe, especially in difficult circumstances. The church represents the kingdom of God on the basis of the sacrifice and victory of the Lamb (Jesus). Revelation

is full of symbolism and imagery, and we must read and understand it within the contours of the message that God establishes His dominion on earth.

In the preface (1: 1-3) we see that this book is a revelation or disclosure. Moreover, this is a Divine disclosure, and the book thus has Divine authority. This is further emphasized by the different phases of the tradition: God gives the revelation to Jesus Christ who sent His angel to make it known to John and to the seven churches as recipients.

I would now like to invite you to join me for the next month or two on a journey of discovery through this wonderful book of God's revelations to John.

Prayer:

Lord, please open my heart, eyes and mind so that I can take to heart the wonderful message you want to give me through the book of Revelation.

2

The Letter

Revelation 1: 1-6

Letters, real authentic letters, handwritten by a loved one somewhere out there, and with postage stamps on the envelope! Nostalgia!

It's Saturday morning, and I'm heading to town with Grandpa, to go and do his rounds in Waterval Boven. First the bakery where he can exchange a can of milk for two loaves of crisp white bread. Next stop is the highlight, the post office, a beautiful old stone building. Grandpa empties the mailbox, and right there he stands and reads all the letters eagerly. He is so curious that he can't wait until he is home!

Years later, I lay in an army tent near Potchefstroom, reading the letter I received that day to bits. I am absolutely in love, and very far from my little Sweetheart. By the dim

light of the paraffin lantern I write back about all my experiences. And naturally about how terribly I love her! Oh, those sweet memories, forever trapped on paper!

Revelation is an apocalypse, but unlike any of the other similar writings, it is in letter form, complete with the beginning of a letter and a letter conclusion. The letter is written to the seven churches of Asia, and the author says it comes from John. So there is a very intimate bond between the writer and the readers, and he knew their circumstances very well.

This letter from John, however, is not just the usual old letter written about trivial things. Right from the first verses it is packed with symbolism. For example, the number “seven” plays a very big role. For example, seven churches of Asia, where the number “seven” in it means the perfect number, and that is to say, it has been addressed to **ALL** Christian congregations through the ages. So also to **YOUR** congregation today! So I must realize that the harsh words that are said may also

apply to ME, and it must move me to do introspection.

In the preface, John explains briefly where the letter originated from God. God gave the revelation to Jesus. He again gave it to His angel to hand it to John so that he could make it known to the "seven churches." The revelation is about the things "that must come soon," the fulfillment of God's judgment on the disobedient nations. But it is also about the final establishment of God's reign.

So it's not just about judgment, but also about blessing for those who have taken God's Word to heart.

John writes the letter on behalf of Someone who is exalted and almighty. "Grace and peace to you", he salutes on behalf of "Him who is, who was and who is to come". Many years before, God had introduced himself to Moses as "THE ONE WHO IS". John now uses the same thought to say that the real author of the book is God Almighty. John wants to further emphasise the authority with

which this letter was written by mentioning "The seven spirits before the throne," expressing God's power and presence throughout the world. God is omnipresent through the Holy Spirit. But the greeting also comes from Jesus Christ. He is described by three titles. Firstly, "the Trustworthy Witness." Indeed, He is a certified and faithful communicator of the Divine Intention of Salvation. Secondly, He is called, "the first to rise from the dead," or the risen glorified Christ. He preceded us into a new era. Thirdly, He is referred to as "the Ruler of the kings of the earth". Through His resurrection, He became the Ruler and King of the universe. After all, in Matthew 28:18, Jesus says, "All power has been given to Me."

After this greeting, John sings a hymn in which he praises Jesus'. John mentions three great things that He did. Firstly, His love is so great that He paid for our sins with His precious blood. Secondly, through His blood He saved us from our sins. Thirdly, he made

us, insignificant people, His Kingdom and priests.

Therefore, God's great motivation lies in love for us, and so He sent His Son to bring us salvation and glory through His death and resurrection. Furthermore, we, as priests, are now intermediaries between God and the world on behalf of God. With this we have a very important calling, to rule on earth on behalf of God the King and also to intercede for other people with God. Of course, that would include the missionary idea, because by leading others to God, we also act as intermediaries.

Prayer:

Lord, with John I want to fall down in worship this morning before You, because You are great and good and almighty. Thank You for Your great mercy on me as a sinful, insignificant person. Please give me the strength and courage and zeal today to fully live out my calling as ruler and priest.

He Comes on the Clouds!

Revelation 1: 7-8

Great excitement prevails: our heroes are on their way back to South Africa! Our Springbok team made South Africa proud! The World Cup is once again on our shelves! The men in green and gold have once again shown that this trivial little country, South Africa, has the very best Rugby team in the world, even better than New Zealand! At the airport they are awaited by a huge crowd of rugby enthusiasts, and the bonfires are burning high!

Now what does rugby have to do with Revelation? If the return of the Springboks has caused so much enthusiasm and joy, how much more when Jesus comes again? We have been waiting for that wonderful day for 2000 years now, and the excitement is building up among Jesus' followers. Daniel

has already written in 600 BC of this wonderful event in Daniel 7:13. "Someone has arrived in the clouds, someone like a human being."

We read in the Bible in many places of God's appearances, and each time it is a tremendously dramatic event. When God appears to Moses in the burning bush, it is the turning point in Moses' life. This event instantly transforms him from a stuttering shepherd into the greatest leader of all time, from a refugee to someone who takes on the mighty Egyptian Pharaoh and convinces the fickle Jewish people to migrate through the desert.

Another dramatic appearance of God takes place at the birth of Jesus. The world was in a turmoil, and people traveled for months to witness this wonderful event. An angel choir specially descended from Heaven to give glory to this wonderful event. There was great excitement!

But there were also those who were not happy about Jesus' birth. Herod the Great, fearless strategist, was furious about this "Intruder" in his empire. At the same time, he shrank in fear, for this Baby was a terrifying threat to him and he had to get rid of Him at all costs. The brutal murder of babies and the wailing of grieving mothers that echoed throughout Israel is history.

Thirty years later, there is another appearance of God when the Holy Spirit descends like a dove on Jesus and God speaks audibly from Heaven.

Another 3 years later, at a time appointed by God, there once again was a Godly appearance when Jesus died on the cross after mockery, opposition, rejection, renunciation, betrayal and cruel torture.

As He dies on the cursed cross, this dramatic appearance of God takes place. The sun is darkened, a mighty earthquake breaks open the stones around Calvary, the veil of the temple rips open, and the dead rise from

their graves. Even hardened Roman soldiers are so moved by this event that they confess before everyone that Jesus is truly the Son of God!

Later, there was another appearance of God, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out. These events were so breathtaking that three thousand people were converted then and there. The aftermath of that day spread like a tsunami and flooded the entire world, so that a third of the people on earth today adhere to the Christian faith, all because of that God-appearance!

There were other Godly appearances recorded in the Bible. God appears to Gideon, Abraham, Jacob, Menoah (Samson's father) etc. However, all these appearances were aimed at individuals, or in the case of Pentecost, on a single group of people. However, the final appearance of God will be totally different, because on that day it will be so overwhelmingly great that every person on earth will be able to see it simultaneously. It will be totally unexpected. For many, it will

be the most beautiful, moving, and most heart-rending event in all history of creation. Great rejoicing and joy will prevail, because the long wait is finally over and Jesus has come!

In Zechariah 12:10 the prophet foretells that great sorrow will prevail at the same time. Like Herod of old, people will shrink from fear, for then they will see that they are standing under the judgment of God. People will lament in self-reproach for rejecting Jesus.

If you have not yet chosen Jesus, and accepted Him as Saviour in your life, then you are part of that crowd that will mourn, for the terrible punishment that awaits such people is abominable. I plead with you to turn to Him!

I look forward to that wonderful day with great excitement and anticipation. And you?

Prayer:

Maranatha! Come soon, Lord Jesus, come soon! The world is begging for Your speedy coming, for the oppression is great. I bubble in anticipation for Your return. Come, Lord Jesus!

4

The Vision

Revelation 1: 9-20

Persecution of Christian believers has always been with us. In our modern, enlightened times, there are still countries where you are brutally persecuted simply because you believe in Jesus. A few years ago, for example, a South African woman was jailed for a long time, simply because she was suspected of publishing Christian literature. Christian believers are deprived of all rights in countries such as North Korea, even the right to receive food and the right to live. All residents are forced to bow in worship before the statue of the leader, as in the time of Daniel. Christians who refuse are publicly executed. Yes, persecution of Christians may be worse now than ever!

That's how John was also ruthlessly persecuted, not only because he criticized

the government of his time, but simply because he preached the wonderful Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was not the only one: John was but one of thousands of believers who were cruelly persecuted for their faith, especially in Rome by the barbaric Nero. Eventually he was banished to a small island called Patmos, 96 km southwest of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea. There he would be "safe", because there he could not "rouse" the feelings of people with his "radical theology". But the government did not take God into account, and they forgot that John, with pen and paper, could spread the Word of God just as effectively, if not much better, than he could by preaching to a congregation.

How ironic that Zimbabwe's opposition leader got the world's attention just at the time when he was beaten to a pulp by Mugabe's soldiers, but before that event no one wanted to listen to him.

As John preached to his congregation, he reached only a small group of people around him. However, when he was banned, a whole

new world opened up to him, and he wrote the most controversial book in the Bible. It only shows you once again that one should not sit and whine when "misfortune" strikes you, but that you should rejoice in the Lord, even under risky circumstances, because often it is precisely in such situations that the Lord uses you in a wonderful way.

When the lock-down hit us because of the Covid 19 virus, I also wanted to sit down in sackcloth and ashes. After all, the church is closed! But then the Lord opened brand new doors, and with sermons posted on YouTube, we suddenly reach far more people than before. Suddenly the Word is spreading faster than the virus! I am also getting a lot of new subscribers for the daily spirituals. Hardship makes people hungry for the Word. And this is a common trend among all churches.

And there John sits solitary on the island on a Sunday (the day of the Lord). Suddenly he gets this wonderful vision of Someone talking with a big voice behind him. The voice

commands him to write of his Spiritual vision to the seven congregations. He had to tell them what the Lord was showing him.

When he turns to see where the loud voice is coming from, he sees the most wonderful sight: Among seven golden standing lamps stands "Someone like the Son of Man". The seven lamps are a representation of the seven churches to which he was to write, and the Person standing there is of course the exalted and glorified Jesus Christ, just as he is also portrayed in Daniel's vision. (Please read Daniel 7:13-14). The clothes that John describes also have symbolic value: The long robe is that of a High Priest or dignitary. The golden band is not around His hips, but around His chest, indicating that He has concluded His work. The white hair radiates wisdom and glory, and the flaming eyes indicate spiritual insight. The brass feet symbolize steadfastness, and the "voice like the rush of a great body of water" testifies that He has great authority. The seven stars in his right hand represent the ministers of

the seven churches. The sword is the irresistible Divine words, and especially the judgment He pronounces.

When John sees this wonderful vision, he is filled with awe. He falls before Jesus' feet in worship and dependence. Then Jesus touches him reassuringly: "Do not be afraid, it is I!" These wonderful words are like balm to John's heart. And then he gets the assignment to write.

John obeyed Jesus' command, and his writings have been like a cool, refreshing stream of hope for many millions of people over the past 2000 years.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we praise Your wonderful Name, for the gripping vision that You gave John so long ago. Thank you for the wonderful message it also holds for me today.

Letter to Ephesus

Revelation 2:1-7

John is instructed by the “Supreme Authority” to write seven letters to the seven congregations. This was written as a single volume, and read as a whole to all seven churches. So it is not necessarily seven separate letters, but one single message. These congregations to which the messages are addressed lie in a horseshoe on the Roman highway in Asia, but in fact they are symbolic of the entire Christian church.

When we read these seven letters, they together form a unity, and at the same time they join chapter 1. We cannot read them independently. In each of these letters, the Lord begins by saying, “I know...” or “I know everything you do,” and then follows a description of the situation in the congregation, whether good or bad.

The letter concludes with a call to listen to what the Spirit says to the congregations. There is always a promise to those who conquer. With this, the Holy Spirit speaks not only to the seven churches, but to every believer, and so there are wonderful promises for each of us contained in these seven epistles, and at the same time, warnings.

The first congregation in line is Ephesus, a beautiful city with a quarter of a million inhabitants, located at the point where three trade routes come together. This city was a very large and effective trading centre. It was laid out around an estuary and was blessed with a large natural harbour.

In terms of culture, Ephesus was the city that could boast that the Pan-Ionian games took place there. This event, of course, attracted thousands of visitors. Then of course there was also the breathtaking Temple of Artemis, or Diana, as it was known in Latin. This delightful building was considered one of the seven wonders of the world. This was also

not the only temple. There were many similar buildings, the remains of which can still be seen today, two thousand years later. In some of these temples, emperor-worshipping was practised, where the emperor was worshiped as a god. So North Korea is not a novelty!

In the letter to the congregation of this prosperous city, their tireless work as well as their perseverance are commended. They went out of their way to keep the message of the Gospel pure, and the work of false prophets was immediately exposed. Paul, in his farewell talk with the elders of Ephesus, spoke of the "cruel wolves," probably Nicolaitans.

Unfortunately, the congregation's zeal to smell out these errors also had a price. They paid so much attention to this, that a very important part of their relationship with the Lord was lost - their love for Christ began to diminish!

Trying to play sensor all day can be very dangerous, because it can lead to a kind of self-exaltation, which can affect your love for Jesus, and also your love for your neighbour.

In the letter, the congregation is then warned to think about how far their love has deminished, the very love that actually brought about their Christian lifestyle. They must repent and turn away from that sin, and completely renew their way of thinking. But then they also have to go and do what they did right at the beginning, when the Gospel blew through their lives like a fresh breeze. Their enthusiasm for Christ must again glow and become visible in their lives. They must listen to the Spirit of God again.

Indeed, the Word of God speaks to each of us today, as does to the Ephesians. Often we become so obsessed with certain things that we begin to forget the things that matter. Go and contemplate what things dominate your mind. It's not necessarily bad, and often very noble. Maybe it's your passion for preserving our beautiful language. Perhaps it is the

crime in our country that gives you a zeal to fight it with all your might. Maybe you are fighting to stop pornography and blasphemy on TV.

There is nothing wrong with that, and it is all right and very noble, but there must be a balance in your life. If you do these things, and the love that must dominate your life is no longer visible, then you have failed miserably in your Christian duty. The most important of all - love - may never fade in your life.

John concludes this passage with the wonderful promise that the Lord will allow those who conquer, to eat from the Tree of Life. It is figurative language that states that we will have part in God and the Lamb. What a wonderful prospect!

Prayer:

Lord, fill my life again today with Your all-encompassing love.

Persevere in oppression

Revelation 2: 8-11

Mrs. Chang, an elderly lady from China, was already brutally persecuted as a young girl for her faith. When she ended up in solitary confinement for the first time, she was locked up in the pitch dark cell in the most dire conditions. Not only was she all alone, but the cell was filthy dirty. Human excrement from the former prisoners lay strewn on the floor. Mrs. Chang prayed very hard, telling the Lord that she wanted to work for Him so much. Her desire was to share the wonderful Gospel with other people, but in her cell she was without anyone to even talk to.

Suddenly a thought struck her. She called the warden, told him that she noticed how terribly dirty the prison was. The sewer system did not always work properly, and the result was that the sewer was regularly flushed through

the prison. She told the warden that she was prepared to scrub the jail for them, if only he would bring her a scrubbing brush and a bucket of water. Not long after, she got her brush and bucket, Mrs. Chang departed on her journey through the prison on her knees, scrubbing the floor. But as she moved through the cells, she told the prisoners of Jesus, and time and again, hardened prisoners were on their knees, accepting Jesus as their saviour.

And so Mrs. Chang made her way through the entire prison until every prisoner heard the message about Jesus. But then the prison authorities made a very big mistake: they sent Mrs. Chang to another prison, where of course she could start her missionary action again from scratch!

John's second letter was addressed to the church of Smyrna, the only one of the seven cities still in existence today. It is today known as Ismir. It was a wealthy trading town with a large and busy port. Emperor worshipping was a huge and popular activity

here, and all the residents were expected to participate. However, the Christians refused because there is only one Lord that they know and worship. The result was that they faced persecution daily.

However, they also faced opposition from a completely different resort: There were a number of Jewish evildoers who made life very difficult for Christians. They slandered and accused the Christians to the Roman authorities. It was so out of hand that the Christians knew it was their destiny to end up in prison. And life in a Roman prison, one could not exactly describe as a party!

Despite the wealth of the city, the Christians were not part of it, and most of them were destitute. In addition, they constantly had to be subjected to provocation and harassment from all sides, gentiles as well as Jews.

Then came the words of this letter, and flushed cool relief over them, when the sender of the letter presented himself as "The First and the Last, who was dead and

came alive again." Yes, of course He knew their oppression, after all, He himself went through it, and He knew exactly what it entailed! And He knew their poverty, He was in that position himself. He also knew the persecution of the Jews very well, how they also tried to disgrace Him before the Romans! He offered them comfort and encouragement, they just had to hold on! Everything would have been worth it time and time again. Indeed, the persecution could even cost them their lives, but the victory after that was the all-superlative eternal life they would receive as a crown.

Today, the oppression of Christians in some countries is perhaps even worse than in John's time. Only a very small percentage of Christians worldwide live in the freedom you and I know. By far the greater part, about 80% of Christianity is cruelly persecuted for their faith, and cannot worship in freedom. Many must practice their faith in the strictest secrecy. And most of them have never even had the privilege of holding a Bible! These

people need our prayers to carry them through their trials!

Take a look at the Open Doors website, opendoors.org.za, where news about the church in oppression appears! You will be amazed at what Christian believers are going through today in our enlightened age.

But once again John concludes with the wonderful promise: those who continue to persevere and believe may be hit by the first death, but the second, spiritual death - eternal damnation, they will not experience!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for allowing me to worship You in freedom. This morning my heart goes out to millions of Christians who are being brutally persecuted for their faith. Please grant each of them Your Peace that transcends all understanding so that they may remain standing.

Pergamum

Revelation 2: 12-17

John's message to Pergamum goes against the grain with you, because you soon discover that in that city it was buzzing with Satan's activities. Pergamum had plenty of beautiful things to brag about, such as a breathtaking library with 200,000 resources, a seat of justice, educational institutions, and of course, many breathtaking temples for a variety of gods. It was the capital of Asia Minor. But it was "the throne of Satan!" There the brew cooked and bubbled from all the sin!

What was going on in Pergamum that could give her the title of the "throne of Satan"? There were all kinds of bad things going on in the beautiful city. She was beautiful from the outside, but inside she was rotten!

Pergamum boasted the "healing miracle" of the Asklepion, the temple of Asklepios, the god of healing. People came from far and wide to be healed by this idol of all kinds of ailments. This gruesome temple was teeming with snakes. To be healed, you had to spend a night in this temple. If the snakes touched you, you would be healed, so they believed. The serpent was the symbol of Asklepios, but at the same time the symbol of Satan.

There was also the temple of Zeus. He was the supreme god in Greek mythology, the ruler of Mount Olympus and the god of the sky and thunder. In this temple, the sacrificial smoke in Zeus' honour rose up all day long from the giant altar.

However, Pergamum was also the main seat of imperial worship in Asia. There was also a temple dedicated to the state of Rome, where the emperor was honoured as a god. The Christian believers of Pergamum were persecuted in a Satanist way, and this was directly the result of imperial worshipping.

In the middle of all these Satanic things stands a Christian congregation, a congregation that remained true to the resurrected Jesus Christ. When the Lord spoke to them through this letter, He told them how glad He was that they continued to hold on to their faith, despite all the horror that was going on around them. Even when fellow believers were killed around them for their faith, they still remained true to the Lord.

However, there was something wrong in the congregation, as there were some members of the congregation who were guilty of participating in pagan sacrifices and who lived immorally. John writes of the believers who were guilty of eating sacrificial meat.

Now we have to be careful to read this in it's context. If you read what Paul writes in 1 Cor. 8 and 11 about eating idol sacrifice, then you notice that it is not about the actual eating of sacrificed meat, but that it is something much deeper. Paul explains clearly that there is nothing wrong with eating the meat sacrificed to idols, because it cannot harm you, neither

physically nor spiritually. We must realize that eating sacrificial meat is not as such a sin, but if you thereby associate it with the sacrificial practice, then you are colluding with the devil! But there is another aspect involved too, because if you eat with unbelievers, enjoying the sacrifice together, while they are aware that it is an idol sacrifice, then you may conveying to them in error that idolatry is permissible.

When we read in verse 14 of people who follow the teachings of Balaam, we must understand it symbolically. Balaam was a Moabite prophet who influenced the pagan king Balak to use his people's wives to sexually seduce the men of Israel. This resulted in horrific moral decay among Israel. And there were believers in this congregation who were also guilty of similar practices!

Jesus calls these people to repentance. It's not too late. Anything that has to do with idolatry should be released immediately!

For those who remain standing in the midst of all the wickedness, thus gaining victory, there is the bright white pebble, the "entrance ticket" to the wonderful wedding meal. And on this pebble there is a brand new name engraved. It is probably the wonderful Name of the risen, glorified Jesus Christ! You and me, the believers are Jesus' "white pebble people" in this evil world! The pebble we wear around the neck is the joy and love and peace that Jesus gives us, radiating from our faces.

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, for that "white pebble" that You also gave me. I pray for so many people, and especially young people, who are still caught up in the devil's traps of drink, drugs and dissipation - thousands of young people who flock to our beaches to come and surrender to their desires. Lord, please bring a new awareness of Jesus' salvation power, especially among our nation's young people.

Jezebel of Thyatira

Revelation 2: 18-29

"I know everything you do. I know your love, faith, service and perseverance. " Beautiful words to the congregation in Thyatira!

Thyatira was a trade centre where textile workers, tanners, carpenters, weavers and potters worked. Lydia, the Purple merchant of whom we read in Acts 16, came from Thyatira. The city did not have natural protection such as mountains or rivers, and was very vulnerable to any military invasion. As a result, the residents lived in uncertainty.

The church's faith, however, was sound. All the beautiful virtues of faith were outstanding features of the congregation, and it did not go unnoticed by the Son of God. After all, He fathoms everything and everyone. What's more, they do not remain stagnant. They are

constantly growing in their faith, exactly the opposite of what was going on in Ephesus. What a wonderful testimony of a congregation!

Yet there is something in the congregation that was not kosher: Jezebel! They allow this woman, Jezebel, to do her dark things. As with Balaam in the letter to Pergamum, we must also see Jezebel as a symbolic figure. Jezebel represents a heresy with idols and religious practices. Jezebel was the evil wife of King Ahab of Israel. At that time she then brought her idols, Baal and Astarte with her, and eventually ruined the whole of Israel.

Thyatira's "Jezebel" was possibly a leader of the Nicolaitans, who practised sexual malpractice and idolatry, and thus played the same role model as the evil Jezebel of yore. She is warned that if she and her followers do not repent of their malpractices, they will be severely affected by a sickbed an plague. Dissipation often results in some terrible illness. Consider, for example, the terrible consequences of Aids, which is also the

result of a frivolous life. Often innocent people, even children are often struck by someone else's recklessness!

How tragic, that such things may be even more common today, often even in vibrant congregations. The congregation member who is riotous is not admonished, even though everyone knows about it. The person is left to carry on with the evil things. Often, these are "innocent" things that are subtly introduced, and the congregation is seduced to collude with the devil. Let me cite an example: Someone tells me after the worship service, where the birthdays of the week are read: "Oh, I see you are also a Leo!" (born under Leo's zodiac sign) And suddenly danger lights appear, as many people, even believers, follow the predictions of the stars slavishly. These are nothing but occult devilish practices, which innocent believers are dragged into.

Another example is the woman who presented the program on TV a few years ago about contact with the deceased. It was

so beautifully clad in spirituality that many believers fell for it. It is described in the Bible as "an abomination in God's eyes," and so are devilish practices! Stay away from such things, it is extremely dangerous for your spiritual life.

These are just a few examples of the "deep mysteries of Satan" that John speaks of in verse 24.

However, there is also a beautiful testimony about the congregation of Thyatira: Many of the congregation members did not allow themselves to be seduced by these alluring evils. They must be firm in their faith in the risen Jesus Christ. To everyone who clings to Jesus in faith, the kingship of the nations is given with Christ. And whoever perseveres will receive the morning star as a gift. We can see the morning star as the coming of the new dawn of the Messiah, the new David's kingdom. The morning star is descriptive of the "star from Jacob", Jesus Christ. If you receive Him, it means you are given the new life.

When I let my eyes wander over the congregation on a Sunday morning, I see a sea of radiant faces, and I know: they have each received the "morning star" as a gift already. Everything in their lives shows it - their zeal for Kingdom work, their radiant love. But then there are the few "Jezebels" in between, well camouflaged, and they just mean trouble! Jesus' urgent plea from this letter is that if you are perhaps a "Jezebel", repent very urgently! Not only do you lead yourself over the abyss, but you'll bring a lot of people with you.

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for giving me new life. Please hold me tight so that I do not succumb to "Jezebel's" temptation, and then I also want to pray for anyone who is a "Jezebel" in a congregation, that You will please bring her (or him) to their senses.

Sardis

Revelation 3: 1-6

The beautiful city of Sardis was built around a high hill, which strategically provided them with excellent military security. It was extremely difficult for any enemy to take it. It was precisely this fact that made the inhabitants rest on their laurels, and they did not stand guard properly, consequently the city was conquered by an enemy on two occasions! But an enemy of a completely different nature invaded the city in the year 17AD when it was hit by a devastating earthquake. It was chaos! The city was in ruins. However, Emperor Tiberius and Claudius rebuilt the city, and it eventually rose from the rubble.

Sardis also had a great Jewish community.

Sardis makes me think of Ballito in so many ways. Indeed, the residents of Ballito became too self-assured. Of course it is nice to live by the sea, and if you can live so close that you almost have the waves on your doorstep, then it is so much nicer. And if nothing out of the ordinary happens to the sea, then you get reassured, and you build ever closer and closer to the sea.

But that's not all: If you look at a natural beach setting, you'll see a very specific pattern of vegetation, from extremely hardy pioneer plants protecting the "shrubs" behind them. These "shrubs" are often dwarfed redwood trees, which can be a hundred years old, but look like shrubs. Unfortunately, these "unsightly" plants obstruct your view of the sea, and so they are gradually being eradicated to give the property greater value. If only these very important plants were left intact, Ballito's beach area would still have been protected!

Then, one terrifying night, on March 19, 2007, a devastating storm hit the coast

completely unexpectedly. No one was warned of a possible flood beforehand. But that night, huge waves smashed homes, apartments, and restaurants on the beach to shreds. Sewerage pipes were washed away and raw sewage was pumped into the sea. The beautiful walkway disappeared completely, devastated by the violence.

I gasped for breath as I came to the shore that morning and saw the chaos and devastation. Of some apartments, only an empty shell was left. There was nothing left of the beautiful golden beaches, only horrible bare rocks. Ballito was ruined!

As Sardis was rebuilt after the terrible disaster, so the sea finally gave back the sand to restore Ballito's ruined beach. Ballito's beautiful golden beaches were eventually again intact. However, the sewer pipes, walkways, buildings, gaping abysses and unsightly piles of rubble took years to restore to their former glory.

However, there is another aspect of Ballito that also reminds me of Sardis: When John writes to the congregation on behalf of the Holy Spirit: "... you have the name that you live, and yet you are dead ...", then it required deep introspection. Ballito, at first sight, is a bustling holiday destination. It is a lovely village, with palaces worth billions of rands, hanging on the steep hill slope, which in fact is actually a high sand dune.

The church is also going strong in several areas, there are no less than 56 churches in Ballito! If you want to attend a church service here on Christmas morning, you have to be there hours ahead to find seating.

But if you delve a bit, you'll find that there is a deadness deep down within, even in the church, just as John describes. At first sight, you see beautiful things being done in the various congregations. But this is done by only a handful of active members. Each time, it is the same few who do everything - the rest are stagnant! They only ride along as passengers.

Dear reader, I write about Ballito because I know the town and the community. This rich-man's village is rotten from the inside! But what about the community where you live? What does your town, your community look like from the inside? And what does your congregation look like? Isn't it just the same?

John writes, however, that it is not yet too late to rectify matters. "... repent.... wake up...". If you know that you are one of those slowly drifting away, then the urgent message is to wake up and turn back to God. John shares the wonderful promise of Jesus to everyone who remains faithful: "Those who win the victory will be clothed like this in white, and I will not remove their names from the book of the living. In the presence of my Father and of his angels I will declare openly that they belong to me." What a wonderful promise! That promise is for you and me. Make it your own!

Prayer:

Lord, please make me alive for Your Kingdom, and give me the zeal to live your love practically and with passion all the time.

Philadelphia

Revelation 3: 7-13

Philadelphia! What a beautiful name for a city! It means "Brotherly Love". Philadelphia was also known as "the Gate to the East", as it was the door to the plateau of Asia Minor. As a result, the city had a thriving business life. But Philadelphia was also severely hit by the same devastating earthquake that struck Sardis in 17AD. Eleven other Asia Minor cities were leveled to the ground during that horror. A terrible disaster! However, despite the earthquake, the agriculture of the region did very well, as the fertile volcanic lava layers made farming very rewarding.

After the disturbing letter we read yesterday, this one is like the relief of a cool, refreshing mountain stream after a hot day's hike. The letter begins with a beautiful symbolism, where Jesus - the Holy, the true God - is in

possession of the keys of life, or as John calls it, "the key of David."

Christ is the One who is the door between man and God. To believers, He opens this door, giving free access to God. For unbelievers, however, He closes this door tightly. Although unbelievers are often under the impression that they have access to God, this is a myth. It's a fallacy the devil gives them. I have heard so many times an unbeliever boasting how much he prays. However, a prayer without faith in Jesus is useless!

Christ tells the congregation in Philadelphia that He has unlocked a door before them that no one can lock again, not even the Jews. Indeed, the Jews were able to lock the doors of the synagogue for them, but that's where their power ended. However, the door that Christ opens is much bigger than the door shut by the Jews. Just think of the door to the heathen-lands of Frigia, where a fallow land lies open for the spreading of the Gospel.

Today, Jesus is still opening doors where people think they have closed it tightly. If you listen to the stories told by Open Doors, where ordinary people smuggle Bibles into inaccessible countries, then you stand in amazement. Stefan v d Bergh from Open Doors once told me that believing tourists often take bags full of Bibles to these countries where Bibles are totally banned. When they reach the customs officers, the suitcase is opened, and the man simply doesn't see the Bibles, or he looks away the moment it passes through the X-ray machine. Miracles happen there daily because Jesus is in possession of the keys. So, if you plan to travel to one of these countries after Covid 19 has passed, feel free to contact Open Doors, and take some Bibles to a congregation where a single Bible is often shared amongst several thousand people.

The letter to Philadelphia bubbled over with promises not only to that congregation, but to you and me today. Not only does Jesus open

doors, but He even has the power to make the Synagogue of Satan, the Jews who still think they are the chosen people, “bow down” to Him. And when tribulation and trials come, we need not be discouraged, because Jesus will hold us tight.

We live in a time of terror, where crime, violence, fraud - just name it - is flourishing around us. No one escapes the injustice that spills over us. And now we are faced with the terrible virus that is restricting and threatening us from all sides! But know that we are not alone, and that Jesus holds us tightly even through this nightmare. We often sigh disheartingly that criminals are protected, and that the righteous are extradited to violence. Maybe it is so, but Jesus, went through exactly the same things, and much worse. And He stands with us through every trauma, highjacking, burglary, robbery and lock-down. We often hear wonderful stories of believers carried through the deepest night by the love of Jesus. For example, the story of Louis and Hettie Brittz

grabbed the world's attention when they were attacked that terrible night and Hettie was raped. However, the Lord held them tightly in His loving hands, and carried them so wonderfully that they could even forgive their attackers! Many similar stories play out daily, where believers can only witness how they were miraculously held throughout their greatest ordeal.

“Hold on tight to what you have so that no one can take away your crown,” Jesus tells you and me today. In Heaven there are great rewards for those who continue to hold on to their faith, those who achieve victory. You and I are more than conquerors through Jesus who gives us the power to do so. Whoever overcomes will be a solid pillar in the new Jerusalem, and no earthquake will ever make that pillar falter.

Prayer:

I rejoice in jubilation in You, Lord, for You have already gained the victory for me. Hold me tight always, and if I want to break free to

go my own way, please tug me back to You,
because in You alone I am safe.

Luke-warm Laodicea

Revelation 3: 14-22

The letter to the church in Laodicea is the last of seven letters. Laodicea was the richest city in Phrygia. The city was particularly famous for its thriving textile industry, it's banking centre and it's medical school, which was world famous for it's eye-and ear ointment. Some of the parishioners became rich in this bustling city.

What was the response of this prosperous congregation when they received this letter? I know what my reaction would be! One of total displeasure! For, unlike Philadelphia, of which good things have been said, there is no praise for this congregation. They were reprimanded, because they were lukewarm - neither cold, nor hot, lukewarm!

My first early cup of steaming coffee in the morning is a great treat and actually makes my whole body glow with sweetness. Delicious! But in my childhood days there was another great treat that was totally the opposite of steaming coffee, the fountain on our farm! Many times I lay flat on my stomach at the fountain, drinking the delicious sweet, ice-cold water bubbling out from beneath the giant old granite boulders until I was satiated. I just couldn't get enough of it.

But have you ever tried to drink lukewarm water? That's horrible! And especially if it still smells of rotten eggs. At the eye of Badplaas I scooped water out with a tin-can years ago and just drank it for fun. Besides the awful smell, the water also tasted bad, partly because it was lukewarm.

What made Laodicea's people so horribly lukewarm? Maybe it was the rich people's wealth that made them self-complacent. "We're rich, very rich, and we don't need anything more!" - that was the conviction of

the people. They began to think that they were totally self-sufficient and independent, and they never realized that they were in fact miserable, deplorable, poor, blind and naked! They began to forget about their total dependence on Jesus, and where their wealth really came from.

No, it's not wrong to be rich. I know wealthy people who live very close to the Lord, and still realize their dependence on Him, the Giver of all things, and in addition apply their wealth to Kingdom work. However, it is so easy, when you are rich, to forget about Jesus. Thus, a rich man must work twice as hard at his faith to stay on fire for Christ.

John writes that Jesus says that they should buy the right things with their wealth: gold purified by fire, white clothing, and eye ointment. The gold that Christ purifies is spiritual abundant of faith, purified by the truth. The people of Laodicea know everything about the textile industry, so John couldn't say much to them when he spoke of white clothes. However, these clothes are

different, because white clothes symbolise purity and cleanness, and without them they cannot appear before God.

They also understand what Jesus is saying when He said they have to buy eye ointment, because isn't that what made their city world famous? But this eye ointment that Jesus is talking about is very different in the sense that it does not let them see physically, but spiritually. Without Jesus' eye ointment, they would be spiritually blind.

To buy also does not mean that with their physical wealth they can obtain these things, but they must in faith alone accept the spiritual benefits that Jesus already deserves, and bought very expensively.

Jesus spoke harshly to this congregation, touching a few very sensitive areas. This did not mean, however, that He wrote them off or rejected them, even though they disappointed Him bitterly. On the contrary, He still loved them, and He chastised them so as to win them back. He stood ready with a

glorious feast for the day when these faithless people obey His plea to open up to Him.

Jesus speaks through this letter, not only to the church of Laodicea, but to everyone who has become lukewarm, those whose faith has cooled down. He wants you to glow again and live your faith with enthusiasm. Those who conquer will reign with Jesus on the throne.

The seven letters John recorded were dictated by Jesus personally Himself! They must force every believer into self-examination and a conversion to the glorified Jesus Christ. They made me look at Revelation with brand new eyes. And you, what about you?

Prayer:

Thank you Lord Jesus for these letters specially addressed to me. Please help me to live out the things you ask of me in these letters with all my heart.

God's Throne Chamber

Revelation 4

Which young boy does not look for adventure? In 1960, someone told us about a cave somewhere in the Lowveld, and our family decided to go and explore. And so this guide, a little Swazi boy, lead us that morning to the gaping hole high up in the the mountain side. What I saw in the bowels of the earth in the dim light of our flash light made me gasp for breath. Suddenly we were in a huge hall that stretched to infinity, filled with numerous breathtaking limestone formations. Later, the cave was developed as a tourist attraction, the Sudwala caves.

In Revelation 4, God gives us the indescribable privilege of catching such a glimpse into the breathtaking Heavenly Court. For John, trying to convey the things he saw into human language was a huge

problem, because how do you describe something no one has ever seen? Chapters 4 and 5 are the run-up to the final events. His description goes beyond imagination, so you should listen carefully when reading this section.

People believed that there was a gate to Heaven. Today, the Heavenly gates where Peter sits as a gate guard are still jokingly talked about. However, John sees the door to Heaven simply in the sense that God opened Heaven for a while so that we can see something of it.

In a Spiritual rapture, John was shown the miracle of God's throne chamber. He then tried to describe it by using familiar things, because everything was so wonderful and overwhelming and different. He saw God sitting there on the throne, from where He rules and gives justice. He did not describe God directly, but stated that His appearance was like jasper and carnelian. Jasper is a transparent gemstone that symbolizes purity. Carnelian has a red glow and symbolizes

judgment. The rainbow with the gleam of emerald around the throne is a symbol of God's grace and goodness.

In Ezekiel 1: 4-28, a similar vision is described. It's a poignant sight, and John finds it very difficult to describe. Very striking are the circles. Four living creatures circling the throne, the rainbow circling God, the 24 elders sitting in a circle on thrones, the angels circling the throne. Symbolically we can describe it, that God is the centre of everything and everyone.

The elders represent the church, the believers. They wear white robes, which say that they have been declared righteous before God. They wear golden crowns, which show that they rule. The number 24 symbolizes the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles, which means that it is the sum total of all the believers.

What John experiences is accompanied by overwhelming natural phenomena such as lightning, rumbling and thunder. Such

dramatic natural events cause you to fall down to the greatness and glory of God.

The seven Spirits of God symbolize God's omnipresence through His Holy Spirit. The sea before the throne, can also be described as the sea of glass and describes the unspeakable glory of God.

The four living beings are symbols of God's creation. They have eyes in front and behind, which imply that nothing escapes their alert attention. First the lion, according to Jewish tradition the strongest of the wild animals. Then a bull, strongest of the tame animals, an eagle, strongest of the birds, and a human, mightiest of all creation. They therefore represent the entire creation. Each has six wings full of eyes. It symbolizes their eager willingness to execute God's commands with great speed.

The whole creation praises God day and night with the words: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!" Of course God is holy! He is so totally different from His creation, and there is no

limit to His might and power. He is the Almighty, and He is timeless, from eternity to all eternity.

The elders kneel before God and place their golden crowns before Him as they sing His praises. By this they say that they are totally dependent on God, and that their rule is only borrowed. After all, it belongs to God! So this morning it also forces you and me to fall before Him in worship and cry out together with all creation: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, He who was and is and is to come! "

When I look outside my office window, and I see the wonder of God's creation in the flowers, the trees with their beautiful green foliage, the birds that frolic in their branches, then I can understand what John experienced, because our God is great and good and almighty. Let us worship Him wholeheartedly.

Prayer:

Almighty Creator God, all my praise, thanks and worship go to You alone. Thank you also for having recorded this wonderful vision by John. Thank you that I can know this morning that I can worship a Living, Omnipresent and Almighty God.

The Lamb of God

Revelation 5

A very dramatic scene plays out around God as He sits on His throne. In His right hand He holds a sealed scroll, but no one can open it. John is deeply saddened because no one is worthy to open the scroll. What is he going to do? Then an elder turns to John and comforts him. Yet there is One who can open it - the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Conqueror.

The vision reaches a climax when the LAMB, standing between the Throne and the elders, instead of the Lion, receives the scroll. Then comes a tribute from all those who surround the Throne - the elders and the living beings. They pay tribute to God and the Lamb with harps and incense in golden bowls (the prayers of believers). And they sing a brand new song: "You are worthy to take the book

and open its seals because You were slaughtered and with Your blood redeemed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they will rule over the earth. "

The question is: what does all this mean then? It's not just a pretty dream! Indeed, every little detail has great value. The whole scene is packed with symbolism.

Let's start with God's right hand. It symbolizes His power and omnipotence with which He rules creation.

The scroll is a symbol of all history. Indeed, many things still need to happen. This scroll contains God's Master Plan for world history.

The fact that the scroll is sealed with 7 stamps tells us that it is completely closed and inaccessible. Important Roman documents were so rolled up and sealed.

The question is, why doesn't God open the scroll himself? Of course He can open it

Himself, but here it is not about an act of power but about an act of mediation. Furthermore, the One who opens it also has to give effect to the contents of the scroll.

When no one can be found who can open the scroll, John becomes very sad, and he bursts into tears. Why? These are tears of disappointment and dismay. If God's Council plan is not carried out, then there is no protection for His children. There will be no judgment on the world that so cruelly persecutes the church. But John is comforted by one of the elders who, as we saw yesterday, represents the church: The Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Conqueror, He will open the scroll.

Now the Lamb that was slain is described: He has seven horns and seven eyes. The horns symbolically signify the complete power and dominion of Jesus Christ. The eyes indicate His complete vision, or His Omniscience. The seven eyes are also described as the 7 Spirits of God, in other words the Holy Spirit. The reference to the

Lamb that was slaughtered says that Jesus Christ is God's Passover Lamb. He died in our place at Calvary. Jesus Christ is already the Conqueror, but for us His dominion may not yet be fully visible. At His return, however, every eye will see Him and His kingdom will be fully visible.

The great moment arrives when the Lamb takes the scroll. The elders and the living beings kneel before Him, and then the Heavenly sounds of a new song are echoed. In the first verse, the dignity of the Lamb is sung, and we as redeemed can already share in the rule. We can live as co-conquerors in Christ. In the second verse, millions of millions of angels sing the dignity of the Lamb: Power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and praise, all God's attributes, are now being attributed to the Lamb. The third verse is the climax of the new song. In this, all creation brings praise to God and the Lamb, as the greatest song of praise of all time echoes through the Heavens.

Today, you and I as God's redeemed children can rejoice and bow down in gratitude and worship before Him, the King of Kings, the Slaughtered Lamb. Indeed, He has pulled you and me out of the darkness of sin into His Wonderful Light! Our comfort is in these times of terror and crime, war, tribulation, mass murders, robberies, rapes, fraud and now, moreover, the devastating Covid 19 virus that is spreading across our country and around the world, that whatever happens, nothing can ever separate you and me from Jesus' love! What wonderful comfort, security and peace it is!

Prayer:

I fall down in worship this morning, Lord Jesus, for You are worthy! I praise and thank and worship You.

14

Six Seals

Revelation 6

Jesus, the Lamb of God received the scroll. It was sealed with seven seals, and now He begins to open the seals. As they are opened, we hear of all kinds of judgments that strike the earth. However, these are not the final judgments of God, but only introductory plagues that strike mankind before the final judgment of God.

The question we instinctively want to ask is why then is a judgment of execution necessary? The reason is actually obvious. If you just think about the terrible sin in which the world has fallen, then it is completely understandable. The nations persevere in sin, and God simply cannot allow it to be tolerated or unpunished. Today, the world absolutely bubbles and boils over from sin,

and every day you are shocked by the most horrific events.

When we read of this judgment of God, your heart wants to shrink, for we only expect misery. But believers are constantly reminded of God's great mercy on us, and that our destiny has already been secured by the redemption of the Lamb. Note, for example, that when John writes about the opening of the seven seals, there is only an interlude after the sixth seal, where believers are assured of their salvation before the seventh is opened. The same goes later for the seven trumpets.

The Lamb himself opens the first seal, and then a white horse appears, which is the symbol of victory. There is no agreement about the interpretation of this seal: according to the Bible millennium, it is the false prophets who lead a triumphant journey around the world. Dr. Jan Blignaut's opinion again was again that it is the Symbol of Jesus Christ as the Conqueror, with the Gospel Victory campaign throughout the

world. Compare this with parallel passages in Matthew 24:14 and Revelation 19: 11-21. The spreading of the Gospel precedes the final judgment. Personally, I also believe that this interpretation of Jesus the Conqueror is the correct one.

After the spreading of the Gospel, more seals are opened. The second seal releases a rider on a fiery red horse. It spells war and bloodshed, and he robs the earth of its peace.

The third seal releases a rider on a black horse. The consequences of war are usually extreme famine and inflation that gets out of hand. The remark about the olive oil and the wine has to do with the fact that soldiers usually destroyed the vineyards and olive orchards during wartime, and this is a plea to stop it.

The fourth seal releases a pale horse, actually pale green, the colour of a corpse. One of the consequences of war is all kinds of diseases caused by famine. Also

unemployment, violence, murder and people dying on a large scale. A quarter of the people who inhabit the earth are taken away by death, yet God limits or restricts this slaughter. God remains in complete control! This is also a symbolic expression of God's growing anger and His judgment over the wicked.

The emphasis on destruction, death and judgment is only the prelude to the final judgments of God. But we must also keep in mind that the eternal presence with God follows directly on this for all who are children of God. This is our comfort in life and in death! It is clear that the judgments of God strike the wicked! For the faithful, Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God brought reconciliation and peace with God through His blood sacrifice. Whatever, nothing can ever destroy this reconciliation and peace.

The fifth seal is about martyrdom. Indeed, many people have already died because of their faith, and it still happens today. The consolation, however, is that they are near

God at the foot of the altar. Their prayer is that God's judgment must come soon so that justice can be done. They receive long white garments that symbolize purity and righteousness before God. Their victorious clothes are washed in the blood of the Lamb. However, they still have to wait a little while, because God's great plan must first be fully fulfilled.

When the sixth seal is opened, the day of judgment arrives. The destruction of the universe is part of God's judgment execution. Big earthquakes, the sun and moon becoming like blood, stars falling, the sky disappearing, mountains and islands disappearing. These things mean that God's great day has dawned. The big question is: who will stay standing? The next chapter is an interlude. Here the question is answered. Believers, after all, know that Jesus holds those tight who belong to Him during this terrible time of trial that is flooding the whole earth. What a wonderful comfort!

Prayer:

Thank You Lord, that I know today that I am also secure in You, and that You hold me during the horror that is to come. Come, Lord Jesus, come soon!

15

144'000

Revelation 7: 1-8

Two by two they come down the street with a packet of leaflets that they distribute from door to door. They knock on my front door, and before I can utter a word, they ask the opening question they learned over the past week: "What do you think of the current global warming situation? Where will it end?" Actually, they are not the least bit interested in my opinion, it is just a starting point to get a foot in the door. And, of course, everything is detailed in the leaflet they are selling or giving away this week. Before I can say that I am not interested in their propaganda, they simply invite themselves in, and take over the conversation.

But then I play my trump card: "Do you remember Uncle Gert?" At last I got a word in when the woman paused for breath. Of

course, every Jehovah's Witness remembers Uncle Gert, because he was one of the "holy" men amongst them, and highly respected. When he was still walking the earth, Uncle Gert and my father were brothers. "Uncle Gert was my uncle, and he often stayed with me when you held conferences in Durban, and we had very deep conversations. He never was able to convince me of your faith! How will you ever get it right?" And with that, they usually turn around disappointed and slink off. You see, they believed Uncle Gert was one of the 144,000 chosen ones, possibly the very last one ever!

Revelation 7 has been a big problem for many people. If, of all the billions of Christians, there are only 144,000 who receive salvation, then it is a disaster! Where do I fit in? Is it worth it for me to still try to live for God?

In John's vision, the destruction of the earth is imminent, and the angels who are to fulfill it are ready. But first they have to wait so that the elect get a seal on the forehead. This

seal is a symbolic mark to say that they are genuine and belong to God. Later we see that the unbelievers also receive a similar symbolic mark. John learns that there are 144,000 people who get the seal. But what does that mean? Why such a strange number?

Here is one explanation, which explains the symbolic composition of the number 144,000.

We start with the number 3, which indicates the Trinity of God. Secondly, the number 4 which indicates the whole creation, the 4 wind directions of the earth. Multiply the two, and you get the number 12. When the Trinity completes the salvation work on earth, we find in the Old dispensation the 12 patriarchs and in the new dispensation the 12 Apostles. To get to the Church of the Old and the New dispensation, the twelve must be multiplied by 12 = 144. We also read later in Revelation 21 of the New Jerusalem with 12 gates bearing the names of the 12 tribes and 12 foundations with the names of the 12 Apostles written on it. To emphasize that the

Church in its totality, perfection is in other words the warring church on earth and the triumphant church in Heaven, 144 is multiplied by $10 \times 10 \times 10$ (a perfect cube), which indicates double perfection.

So when John hears of the 144,000 sealed, it is the total warring Church on earth, from the Old as well as the New dispensation, all the servants of God. Although they are subject to the great tribulation, persecution and suffering, their destination is guaranteed, no matter how rough their journey is. What encouragement and comfort do we not get from this vision! God ensures that everyone who belongs to Him will not only be able to stand during the execution of His terrible judgments on the Wicked, but will also triumph victoriously in the Name of the Lamb.

John is told that the 144,000 are made up of twelve tribes. But if we look closely, we see some irregularities in the composition of the tribes. Why?

Judah and not Reuben (eldest son) appear at the top of the list. WHY? Because Jesus Christ was born of the tribe of Judah. Manasseh and Joseph were included in the list, but Dan and Ephraim were omitted, probably because of their later idolatry. So it is clear that we cannot interpret the sealed of the 12 tribes literally, but that this list of tribes points to the symbolic People of God, the Church of Christ as the New Israel, the New People of God of the end times, who undertake the new exodus to the New Jerusalem.

So the question is: are you and I, the believers part of that 144,000? And the answer is in plain words: “Yes! For sure! ”

Prayer:

Thank You Lord, that I, and with me a huge crowd of believers, get Your seal on our foreheads, and that we can be encouraged and comforted that You keep us standing through the great tribulation. Thank you for choosing us.

The Vast Multitude

Revelation 7: 9-17

Perhaps I should emphasize again that this is not a complete Bible study of the book of Revelation. This is just a series of reflections, and it should encourage you to continue doing Bible study on the subject. Please read good commentaries on this wonderful, sometimes controversial Bible book.

I have to remind you again that the first six seals were opened. Then an interlude followed first before John experienced the opening of the seventh seal. Yesterday we heard about the 144,000 sealed chosen ones. It was part of this interlude that continued when John told of a myriad of people who had gone through the persecution and who had already gathered in the Heavenly court.

Who are these people? Basically the same as the 144,000 but seen from a totally different perspective. The 144,000 are from an earthly perspective, and the countless crowd from a Heavenly perspective. In Revelation 7:1-8, the 144,000 believers on earth were sealed for the coming oppression, while the "great multitude" is the Triumphant Church in Heaven, those who have already endured the great oppression. This vision is to encourage all believers who are still on earth. You may be in the oppression right now, like people in countries like North Korea where believers are being brutally persecuted. Or maybe you still have to face the dark hour of trial that is about to come before the end times. Then this vision encourages you, and gives you a vision of the eternal glory before the great white Throne of God and the Lamb!

Let me explain it this way: In this lock-down you are confined to your home. Day after day you are trapped between four walls, and you have a longing to break away from under this

dark cloud just a little while. Then you get an email telling you that a wonderful, idyllic vacation is waiting for you somewhere on a tropical island. Those photos are breathtaking! Once lock-down is over, you can board the plane and leave. All expenses have already been paid! Suddenly all your dark clouds are gone, and you look forward with great anticipation to that day. In the same way, this vision should excite you as a believer for what awaits us.

This Heavenly perspective of the righteous is gripping. In John's vision, he sees the glorified church standing before the throne of the Lamb. It is clear that they have completed the earthly struggle, for they are wearing white clothes - symbolic of their purity and righteousness in order to be allowed to appear before God. They hold palm branches. The Jews gathered palm branches during the Tabernacle Festival as a symbol of their victory after the 40 years in the wilderness. Thus, in John's vision, the palm branches can be seen as a symbol of

the victory festival after our earthly desert journey.

The angels, elders and living beings, in other words the church and creation, kneel before the throne as they sing a victory song. And then one of the elders asks John who these people are in the white robes? A funny question, because he knows! Maybe he just wanted to make John curious! When John shrugs, the elder answers his own question: "These are the ones who come out of the great oppression." Then he describes how their clothes were washed and whitened in the blood of the Lamb. In other words, they accepted the sacrifice of the slaughtered Lamb by faith, and this security carried them through to Jesus' return. In Exodus 19:10-14 we read that the Israelites also had to wash their clothes before appearing before God at Sinai.

All the earthly worries, hunger, thirst, sadness etc. is now something of the past, and now they are in the absolutely perfect presence of God, serving Him day and night.

John describes this as a situation of complete bliss, where the Lamb who rules is their shepherd, and leads them to the fountains of the water of life. He wipes away their tears. All the sorrow and hardship they experienced on earth is gone forever.

This interlude that John describes gives you and me, who still have to fight the bitter struggle on earth, new courage. Yes, here we are still suffering from sickness, suffering, poverty, oppression and the mockery of the wicked. Here we still have to fight every day against the many attacks of the Evil One.

But one thing we need to know is: we belong to God! We are sealed and our end is triumphant in the perfect service to Him, where we will be in the direct presence of God and the Lamb. What wonderful comfort this chapter offers us!

Prayer:

Lord God Almighty, we praise and thank You this morning for preparing us a place in

Heaven - a place where we can sit at Your feet and experience Your wonderful presence. Thank you that You have already paid the full price and redeemed us with the precious blood of the Lamb.

The Seventh Seal

Revelation 8: 1-13

When you read certain parts of Revelation, there is a danger that you may fall into depression because you only see death and destruction and judgment. Therefore, you should always read it in the right context. In other words, you must always keep the big message of Revelation in your mind. So as children of God, we must look at it positively, and see beyond the horror the gracious God who came to save me and you from the terrible judgments. We must also see a merciful God who, even while judgment is in progress, gives the sinner another chance to repent.

The Lamb opens the seventh seal, and suddenly there is a deadly silence in Heaven. Everyone is holding their breath for the horror that will follow. Even the angels praising God

remain silent for half an hour as the tension builds up.

Then seven angels appear, each with a trumpet. Any moment now, the terrible judgments are going to hit the earth. But before that can happen, another angel must first come with a censer. He stands at the altar and throw coal and incense together, so that it's delicious aroma fills the room.

Have you ever sat in the veldt by a campfire, and then late at night, when the night jars sing for you, then you throw a few dry Sicklebush twigs on the glowing embers? Or Mopanie wood? The delicious, breathtaking scent of the Sicklebush fills the veldt around you. It's Heavenly! Then the night looks so much more beautiful, and the stars so much brighter, then you can't help but praise the Creator of it all in a song of praise that makes your heart beat wildly.

The scent of the incense fills the room together with the prayers of the faithful. Do you and I not also pray every day that the

terrible injustice that dominates the world all the violence and crime, murder and wars should end? Our prayers do not fall on deaf ears! God hears our prayer because it rises up to Him like the scent of that incense (or the Sicklebush).

The first angel comes forward. He lifts his trumpet and blows. This is the announcement of God's first judgment. The indescribable devastation and horror that follows touches your heart. But for the faithful, and especially those who suffered so much from the oppression, the sound of this trumpet is the most beautiful music ever! Hail mixed with fire and blood destroys a third of the earth. Terrible! But even in this we still see God's great and loving grace, for two-thirds of the earth is given another chance to reflect.

When the second trumpet reverberates, a third of the sea is hit, and it turns into blood. It reminds one of the deadly red tide that sometimes hits the West Coast, where the sea literally turns red from a certain type of

plankton that poisons everything. John's vision is something like a burning mountain thrown into the sea. Asia Minor was well acquainted with volcanoes, where the glowing lava rolls down the mountain slopes. Just think of the devastation caused by such a volcano in the city of Pompeii, where all its inhabitants died a gruesome death. How much greater will this judgment of God be! But once again, God's grace is still there, because two-thirds of the earth is given another chance.

When the third trumpet sounds, a burning star falls from the sky, and a third of all freshwater sources are contaminated. Involuntarily you think of the great concern caused by the acid water that rises in the old mines and threatens all the water sources. Even the foundations of the large buildings can be affected.

By the way, the star mentioned here is Wormwood. Some doom prophets claimed that an invisible planet called Wormwood

would destroy the earth in December 2012. That didn't happen after all.

Even the Heavens are not spared, and when the fourth trumpet sounds, the sun, moon and stars are hit so that darkness hangs over the earth like a black blanket. But still there is time for grace, because once again, only a third of things are destroyed.

Then the eagle flies high in the sky and warns all the inhabitants of the earth, or the unbelievers, of the frightening things to come. God's judgment is directed against the unbelievers, and the eagle flying high is visible to all, so that no one can say that he has not been warned. God's decisive judgment is striking, but His patience and grace, while still trying to persuade the unbeliever to come to his senses, is so much greater.

Prayer:

Lord, my prayer rises this morning with those of millions of other believers to You like a

glorious incense: come quickly, Lord Jesus,
and put an end to the terrible injustice on
earth.

Locusts with Stings

Revelation 9: 1-12

Mosbolletjie yells, and I jump up to save her from the great danger that threatens her. And there the guilty one is sitting in the kitchen, pitch black and threatening tail in the air!

A scorpion is one of the most frightening things and gives most people the chills. However, if you let him be, he will not attack you with his dangerous sting. No, I have never been bullied by any of these poisonous creatures, despite having encountered them often. I even have a great admiration for these prehistoric creepy-crawlies.

Wasps have often stung me, and that's a sting you remember! Us young people went camping one weekend at Oribi Gorge, and as we walked through the veldt, I disturbed a wasps' nest in the tall grass, and they stung

me senseless. Then the next day I wanted to take a photo of my mates standing across the gorge. In order to get a better position for the photo, I had to climb down to a narrow ledge hundreds of meters high on the cliff face. Then the wasps said, "Howzit!" and they attacked me from all sides. All I could think of at that moment was to get away from them. And while on the brink of death, I performed a breakdance that would make Michael Jackson look like an amateur!

Well, I know exactly how a wasp's sting feels, and they say that a scorpion is ten times as bad. Fortunately, scorpions don't fly! Well, John thought so, too, until he had that vision of the "flying scorpions," or locusts with stings!

In ancient times it was believed that the evil spirits dwelled under the earth, and that somewhere there is a shaft to their "nest". John saw how the door of the shaft to the underworld was dramatically unlocked by an angel after the fifth trumpet sounded. Out of the smoking hole, a huge swarm of locusts

with scorpion-like stings spread across the earth.

The vision reminds you of the volcanic eruption that time in Iceland, which forced the whole of Europe to a halt when it's black cloud of smoke obscured the air for thousands of miles away.

A swarm of locusts is already a frightening sight! Like a pitch-black cloud, they darken the earth, devouring everything in their path. However, these locusts were different, they did not eat, but attacked and stung people. I can imagine the horror if you were to be attacked by a swarm of scorpion-like locusts. The agonizing, unbearable pain you have to endure. The pain is so great that you wish you could die, but merciful death escapes you. This horror lasts for a full five months, the normal lifespan of a locust.

Still, not everyone is targeted. The believers are spared the terrible torment, and only the unbelievers are affected. The situation is now suddenly reversed! Where previously it was

the believers who suffered from the onslaught of evil, it is now the wicked who have to face the music. These things take place under God's instruction.

When John describes the locusts, it hardly makes sense, because they act like scorpions, resemble war horses, wear golden crowns and have human faces. They have long hair, teeth like lions, chests like iron harnesses, and tails with stings like scorpions. It sounds like something from a Star Wars movie! The composition of the locusts does not sound logical, but it describes them as quick-footed, tormenting, intelligent, vibrant, devouring (like lions), and indestructible. In one word: horrible-scary! The name given to these monsters is Abaddon, which means Destroyer.

The fact that the wicked are not killed must be seen as the grace of God, for they are once again given a chance to repent. Their torment is not only the physical pain that is caused by the beasts' stings, but also spiritually, the anguish they experience.

Coaxing did not help to lead them to repentance – hopefully this torture might persuade them to take their refuge in God!

And through it all, believers remain absolutely unscathed - they are protected by God.

How far does God have to go with some people! He begs them to turn to Him. He fully paid the price for salvation - you simply have to accept it. Why is it so terribly difficult for some people to just accept the gift of eternal life?

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that You also gave me the gift of eternal life. However, there are so many people I meet every day who refuse to receive that gift - please also touch their hearts so that they can realise that You are the only Saviour.

Monstrous Horses

Revelation 9: 13-21

I have often wondered where the producers got their inspiration from for the horrific monsters in fiction films like Lord of the Rings and Star Wars? Often the monster spits fire, and the mere sight of some of those creatures is enough to cause any hardened soldier's knees to crumble. And then their evil power of destruction is usually so great that people die like flies under the onslaught of their hordes. Reading Revelation 9 makes you wonder if they perhaps get their inspiration from the Bible!

John also sees exactly such monsters in his vision! There are millions of them as if a single vicious monster isn't enough to give one the horrors!

It all starts when the angel lifts the sixth trumpet, and its sounds echo across the earth. The time has come for the four demonic angelic beings to be released to do their destruction work on earth. These are evil angels, and they are tied on the banks of the Euphrates River. This place, of course, also has a strong symbolic meaning, as the Euphrates River formed the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. Beyond the border lived the dreaded Partians. They even attacked the mighty Roman Empire! Symbolically, this means that the evil, the terrifyingly devastating army, comes from the area on the opposite bank of the Euphrates. The Euphrates River is the symbol of Assyria and Babylon, in other words, the wicked, corrupt world. These Evil Powers are released from the depths of the underground.

We must also note that these evil forces do not simply begin their destruction on their own initiative, but that God determines the time for it. In other words, God is still in complete control - even over the evil forces!

John hears a voice coming from the altar, asking for the angels to be released. This is the voice of believers who cry out for God's judgment for His glory and justice. Note: they do not call for revenge! Today we also plead urgently that justice will prevail in our country. We ask that the government acts against crime, not for us to avenge the criminals, but that justice will prevail, and that the slaughter of innocent people will come to an end.

When the four evil angels are released, they bring their terrifying army. The monsters are purely demonic, and terrifying. We see horses with lion heads exhaling sulphur, fire and bubbling smoke. Their tails are like snakes that strike and torment everyone they encounter. The riders' outfits are fiery red, dark blue and bright yellow, and highlight the fire, smoke and sulphur coming from the horses' mouths. Their numbers are staggering - "millions upon endless millions". The purpose of the huge number is to emphasize how overwhelming their onslaught is. Indeed, a third of the people on

earth are destroyed. You will probably remember that the "people on earth" are only the wicked or unbelievers.

Once again we see God's grace in this whole episode, as the remaining two-thirds are still given time to repent. Surely they must be driven by this destruction and terror to turn to God, to open their hearts to Him. However, we see that this is not happening, and they continue to sin against God. They simply continue to worship evil spirits and idols. They also continue to sin against man, murder, witchcraft, immorality and theft. Their wickedness and sinfulness is self-destructive.

However, God's incomprehensible patience is emphasized once again as we read the next chapter of this very dramatic and gripping story, for there we see how the gospel proclamation continues in the hope that there will still be people who repent. Indeed, we see time and again that Revelation is not a book of God's judgment, but rather of His great, everlasting grace and

love. We always see how He tries to save the wicked from his own selfish self-destruction.

In fact, God's grace for humanity is so great, He loved the world - that He sent His only Son to suffer and die the horrible death on the cross for sinners - infidels, murderers, crooks, fraudsters. He says that if they could only believe in Jesus, then they will not be lost, but will be saved and even receive wonderful eternal life! (John 3:16)

Prayer:

Lord, You are great and almighty, and from this gripping chapter I have been able to see Your power again, even over evil. Thank you Lord, that I once again could experience Your endless grace - your grace also for me, insignificant being.

The Bitter-Sweet Book

Revelation 10: 1-11

John has to eat a book. It tastes deliciously sweet, but it is bitter in the stomach.

After the sixth trumpet we now reach a double interlude, the little booklet and the two witnesses. The preamble to this booklet that John must eat begins with an angel that John sees descending from Heaven. Unlike the angels we read about in Friday's devotion, which were demonic angels, this one is in the service of God, and his whole image radiates it.

By the way, you should of course immediately recognize a believer by the image that he radiates! The question is: what does the image you radiate look like? This angel was sent by God to bring a message of hope to the afflicted church. We see that he

stands with legs wide apart across the land and sea. Of course, it is a symbol of his comprehensive position.

If we think back to the beginning of Revelation, where God is described, then there is quite a similarity in the description of this angel, which radiates the image of God. Just think of the cloud around him, the rainbow above him, his face shining like the sun and his legs like pillars of fire. It is truly a breathtaking figure that bears witness to great power and authority. His mission therefore carries Divine sanction.

And then there is the open booklet, actually an unsealed scroll he holds in his hand, similar to the large scroll John describes in Revelation 5: 2. This Booklet is probably a smaller version of the big Book Roll. It is the testament of future events.

The angel speaks with great authority, and his voice is very loud, like a lion roaring. Have you ever had the privilege of hearing a lion roar nearby? That privilege was granted

to me on a few occasions. And believe me, his voice is majestic, really thundering! He really lets the windows in your house rattle, so you feel like you want to shrink away. You feel very small and fragile in such choice company!

When this angel speaks, the Heavens answer in seven thunder-claps. This, of course, confirms his Divine authority. John wants to write down everything he hears, but a voice from Heaven prevents him – it is still a secret. Then the angel announces that there is no more time left. The seventh trumpet is about to reverberate soon, and that will mark the introduction of the final end. He affirms this with an oath when he extends his right hand to Heaven, as was the command to take an oath. The hidden intention, or the full counsel of God, will then be fulfilled. The end is near!

What is meant by all this? Everything and everyone has now reached their God-given meaning. This becomes clear as we read a little further in Revelation 11:15, when the

seventh trumpet sounds and God's perfect rule begins.

But then John gets that difficult assignment. A voice from Heaven tells him to take the open booklet from the angel and eat it. Through this symbolic act, John is now actively participating in the final events. We read in Ezekiel 2 from verse 8 of the same kind of thing that happens to Ezekiel, where he is commanded to eat a scroll. This book tastes sweet like honey, and after he eats it he has to preach the Word of God to Israel. So the prophet must first digest the message - in other words, he must make it his own before he can convey it.

John's book is also sweet as honey, but when it reaches the stomach it is bitter. It is wonderful to read and study the Word of God, but when it comes to proclaiming that which you have made your own, it is not so easy. Preaching the Word is demanding, and is often accompanied by very difficult resistance.

John's instruction is therefore to preach God's message. His message touches the whole world - peoples, nations, languages and kings. Again, it is God's immeasurable grace that emerges as He continues to give the world the opportunity to repent to God before the final judgment comes.

It is as if God is putting His hand on our shoulders today as well, urging us to spread His Word to everyone we come into contact with. What a wonderful privilege we have! We are filled with the delicious sweet taste of the Word, but we must prepare ourselves to also experience the bitterness of rejection when people throw God's Word back into our faces.

Prayer:

Thank you for the wonderful privilege, Lord, that I can also spread your Word throughout the earth. I want to ask that You please open doors for me so that the Word will resound far and wide, and that everyone will know of Your great grace and love.

Two Witnesses

Revelation 11: 1-14

The big question we ask this morning is whether the church will ever be able to stay standing when the great tribulation comes? Someone has commented that there will be no church in America within the next few decades. All around us we see with great dismay congregations shrink and fade away and even disappear completely. In the city of Durban alone, I had to witness over the last two decades how large, thriving congregations became extinct. One vibrant congregation where as a young man I was part of, the enthusiastic youth movement could move mountains. The church building was often too small to accommodate all the members. The congregation eventually disintegrated and the church building was sold. This happened while there was

unprecedented growth in the area. The people did not become less, but the church nevertheless died.

Even giant macro congregations with thousands of members are waning. Is the church becoming extinct? It distresses me greatly.

But there is also a positive - there are indeed congregations that are growing, and where there is a very positive spirit. In addition, small house congregations are shooting up everywhere. For example, where Ballito only had 4 churches years ago, there are now about 60 churches!

In John's vision he gets a measuring stick made of cane, which looks like a scepter. It is symbolic of his royal actions. With this he has to go and survey the temple and its people. The temple is a symbol of the church of Christ, in other words, all God's property and the fruit of His salvation work. The church will be kept from destruction. You notice that the courtyard is not surveyed. The courtyard of

the temple was also accessible to gentiles at that time. The fact that John should not measure it means that unbelieving outsiders cannot rely on God's preservation.

The two witnesses John sees in his vision hint to Moses and Elijah. We read in 2 Kings 1:10 and 1 Kings 17:1 that Elijah could strike his enemy with fire and shut down the Heavens so that it did not rain. And in Exodus 7 and 8 we read again of the water that turned into blood and the earth that was struck by all kinds of plagues at Moses' command. The Jewish expectation was that Moses and Elijah would return before the end of the world.

However, the two witnesses personify the testimony of the church by the end time, where the church is preaching penance - the people are called to repent. Just as Moses and Elijah did great supernatural signs, so will the church do signs that will demonstrate God's authority during the time of persecution.

Only when their testimony is fully finished does the beast emerge from the underground depths to kill the wicked. Should we now assume that the church has been finally destroyed? No, indeed not! A parallel is made of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The end of the church is guaranteed, and it must serve as inspiration to stand strong in the persecution. Indeed, the evil one wants to try to show that the church is truly dead by leaving the bodies of the two witnesses in the street for three and a half days so that the whole (wicked) world can rejoice in the death of the church.

But then the miracle happens when, after three and a half days, God gives life and breath to the church, and they are triumphantly taken up in a cloud to Heaven in full view of their enemies. It reminds one of Ezekiel's death bones in Ezek. 37.

Immediately after the great triumph of the church, there is a huge earthquake and thousands of people die a horrible death when a part of the city collapses. Again, it is

God's grace that shines through, because 90% of people survive to get another chance. The moment is so great and frightening that the survivors realize that these happenings are all God's doing, and "give glory to God," in other words, to repent.

Yes, God often has to chastise a person very hard before you come to your senses and turn to God. How many times does it not happen that a criminal must first experience the terror of prison before he is converted, or that your loved ones are first cruelly taken away from you before turning to God?

If you are perhaps reading this devotional, and you have not yet reached Jesus, then I want to beg you today to accept His gift of eternal life, before you may have to be shaken to come to your senses. Or maybe worse, that you might never again get the chance to see eternal life again later. The decision is yours alone!

Prayer:

Thank You Lord, that I can know this morning that You are upholding Your Church yourself, and even though the picture may sometimes look so bleak to us, I can know that You are in control and that You will intervene in time.

The Seventh Trumpet

Revelation 11: 15-19

Finally, the seventh angel emerges and his trumpet resounds. The seventh trumpet is also heard with mixed feelings. The first six trumpets were the symbolic representation of the judgment, and the wicked people were summoned every time and warned to repent.

However, the seventh trumpet is completely different: it proclaims God's kingship! Yes, of course we know that God has been ruling from the beginning of all times. But we simply cannot repeat it enough. Moreover, not everyone acknowledges His dominion. In fact, there are only a handful of people who recognize Him as King. Most people claim that God does not really exist, or that He is powerless and certainly not the King. Or that they would rather be under the rule of another "king", and therefore reject him.

However, when this trumpet blows, His kingship is increased to such an extent that the whole world must recognize it. This means that it is not only the believers, but everyone on earth, also the unbelievers, the idol worshippers and even the Satanists!

Among the believers there is great joy when voices from Heaven trumpet forth: "The kingship of the world belongs to our Lord and his Anointed One, and He will reign forever." The twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God kneel in worship. Symbolically, of course, it refers to me and you, the believers. The elders shout a prayer of praise that sings of God's kingship. They are very grateful to the Lord that they can now see His great omnipotence and see that He reigns as King.

However, not everyone is equally enthusiastic about God's kingdom, for along with this trumpet of joy, there is also the blare of judgment. The trumpet announces the final judgment on those who stubbornly refused to accept God's rule. The nations, in other

words the unbelievers, are furious at the outcome. They actually wanted another leader! They elect the Evil One as their leader! Those who delighted in destroying the earth now receive a great surprise: they are now on the receiving end, and now they are being destroyed! Their punishment is horrible.

More and more people are living today as if there will never be any judgment. Every day they look at how much they can enrich themselves, whether financially or physically. To them God does not exist! And even if they still believe in God's existence, then He is to them only Someone who wants to take the delicacies out of their lives and rob them of their earthly pleasures. And for that reason, they want to ignore God and do not want to enter into a covenant with Him.

Most unbelievers also deny the reality of eternal damnation. Others mockingly refer to it as "old Nick's place", as if it were a big joke, and a fable like Santa and the tooth fairy. I have often heard someone say

unconcerned: "Oh, I suppose I'll go to Hell one day!" However, a bitterly unpleasant surprise awaits them! Hell is a concrete reality!

But what about the believers? The reward for believers, on the other hand, are wonderful! Whether you are an ordinary Christian, and whether you are a Billy Graham or Andrew Murray - everyone gets his reward. This reward was earned by Jesus Christ on the cross.

After the sound of the trumpet, a wonderful thing happens: God's temple, which is in Heaven, opens to reveal the ark of the covenant. This is a self-disclosure of God. Just as the ark of the covenant in the Old Testament was the symbol of God's presence, so this now also becomes the symbol of God's eternal presence. This is a wonderful encouragement for all believers, as it assures them that the Covenant God remains faithful to all His covenant promises. Indeed the wicked are destroyed, they are consumed in eternal damnation. The

believers are redeemed to be in glory with God forever!

Are you also looking forward to that great glory of being with Jesus forever?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the wonderful assurance, the promise that You also give us as believers this morning, that You remain faithful, and that one day we will be able to sit at Your feet.

The Woman and the Dragon

Revelation 12

In the next section of Revelation, the background features the battle between the evil and the church throughout history. The evil trio, that is, the dragon, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land, persecute the church. This Satanic trio is opposed to the Divine Trinity. In the visions that follow, the past, present and future are revealed. Here it is described how evil is condemned and how believers go to meet the new Heaven and earth.

Revelation 12 tells of the woman, the dragon and the child that is born. The woman who is written of here is the Messianic mother, or Heavenly Israel. In understandable language it simply means that it is the believers, or the church. The church's origin is of course with God in Heaven.

John describes the woman as a radiant person. She has the sun as her robe, which highlights her radiant, exalted and untouchable position. The moon under her feet says she is ruling. She wears a crown of twelve stars, which accentuates her authority. In other words, it is her crown of victory. In Revelation 17 we also read of a woman, but then it is the immoral woman of Babylon. The woman we read of in Revelation 12 contrasts strongly with her.

John tells us that the woman is pregnant, however, and about to give birth. She screams when her birth pains start. It is interesting, however, that Israel is often described in the Old Testament as a woman with birth pains. For example, read Isaiah 26:17 and Micah 4:10.

When the woman's birth pains are at their worst, another figure appears on the scene. From the sky a great red dragon emerges. He has seven heads and ten horns, and on each head there is a ruler crown. This dragon is none other than the serpent of old who

seduced Eve at that time, the very same Satan. He is an evil, murderous, warlike ruler with great power.

Evil is often described as a dragon in the Old Testament. In Psalm 74:14 it is the Leviathan and in Psalm 89:11 the monster Rahab. The Babylonians painted the dragon (the evil one) with seven heads.

When John describes this dragon, there is a great deal of symbolism involved. It's colour is fiery red, and it tells of it's warlike murderousness. The seven heads say that it was very intelligent, and good at contriving evil plans. The ten horns tell of his power and that he was extremely strong. The seven rulers' crowns depict his great authority and power. With his tail he drags a third of the stars after him. This may be the description of how Satan dragged a number of apostate angels with him in his rebellion against God. Indeed, he is not alone, and has built up a great, evil force for himself.

This drama is brought to a pinnacle when the woman gives birth. The dragon confronts her aggressively, ready to devour the child. The Child that is born is Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The wrathful aggression of the devil towards Jesus is recorded in the Gospels, where Jesus was repeatedly attacked by him. It begins as early as during Jesus' birth, where Herod wanted to eradicate him. He is however pulled away by His suffering and death on the cross, where He sits on the throne of God after His ascension.

Then John tells us that the woman has fled to the desert. It describes the tribulation that the church must go through. Yet we see that God tends for her. However, God cares for His church despite the unsympathetic inhospitability of the evil, hostile world in which the church stands, just as you find in the desert.

However, in Heaven there is war, but this war has already been won. Believers can gain comfort and courage from this. Despite the persecution we are still facing on earth,

where we are in a fierce battle with evil, we can know that the war has already been won in Heaven! The dragon was thrown out of Heaven, and there is no trace of him there anymore. Now he is trying to destroy the church on earth, but he has only a limited power. The influence of the devil is an earthly reality! His ground staff (by way of speaking) are still alive and vigilant, but they can only go as far as God allows them.

After John describes this battle, a hymn follows in honor of the Lamb, but we will talk about that tomorrow.

Prayer:

Lord, we praise Your great Name, for You have overcome the dragon. Thank you that we can know the persecution that the children of God are facing today is only temporary, and that the devil's power is limited so that he will not devour me as long as I hold on to You. Please give me the strength to stay standing and to triumph with You in victory.

The Dragon Kicked out of Heaven

Revelation 12

After Michael defeated the dragon, a voice from Heaven sang a hymn to the Lamb, loud and clear. It is a song of reconciliation. It sings of God bringing salvation, His power and kingship and over the authority of His Anointed, Jesus Christ the Messiah. A great victory was achieved through the blood sacrifice of the Lamb. Through this, God and the Lamb's kingdom became visible, and Satan was conquererd. The believers rejoice, for Satan has been thrown out of Heaven. In verse 7 we read how the angel Michael and his angel-soldiers fought against the dragon (Satan) and his angels who rebelled against God with him. Satan was defeated and he and his followers were thrown out of Heaven.

The voice from Heaven rejoices in his hymn of praise that everyone in Heaven is

overwhelmed with joy because Satan is no longer there. But in the same breath, he feels deeply sorry for the inhabitants of the earth, for Satan has come to earth, and he is furious at what has happened to him. Now he takes it out on the earth's inhabitants.

The conquered Satan who came off second best in Heaven is still very active here on earth, and his cunning and venom are very clearly visible here as he tries his best to avenge his defeat in Heaven by afflicting believers (the church). It is only natural that he wants to regain his lost reputation. Unfortunately for him, he realizes that his time is running out, and the closer it gets to the end, the more intense his attack is on the church.

Indeed, the voice from Heaven also says that Satan thoroughly realizes that his time has almost run out, and that is why he is now trying every means to seduce humanity.

I don't think we really realize the implications of this. On the one hand, we are all too

aware of the attacks of the devil, and sometimes it even feels to us that God does not care about us, because we only see all this violence, crime, dissipation and bloodshed all around us, all the work of the devil. The good news, however, is that it is all just temporary, and that there is already a place that has been cleared. Moreover, there is no longer even a sign of the devil. What a consoling thought! How wonderful it would be to live in a world where there is no sin, crime, war, murder, hatred, animosity etc.

It may sound like an impossible groan, but that place already exists! See, God has already cast out the devil and all his followers, of which there is a legion, from Heaven, so there it is now clean. It's like walking into a dirty house, and cleaning it from one end. You don't clean all the rooms simultaneously, but one at a time, leaving behind a sparkling room. Eventually, the whole house will be spotless. Here on earth it is still dirty, but eventually it will be sparkling

clean here as well. The big spring-cleaning is drawing nearer!

In verses 13 to 17 we read that the dragon does three things to try to and destroy the church. First, he followed the woman. It reminds you of the exodus of Israel from Egypt when Farao wanted to destroy them. They went through many tribulations, but God led them into the wilderness and saved them from Pharaoh. God gives the woman, or the church, wings of an eagle to flee to the desert. It is symbolic of God's salvation. There in the desert, where help can only come from above, God cares for her. In this we see God's care for the church in the time of tribulation.

The second thing the dragon does is to spit a stream of water behind the woman to drag her along. But the earth swallows the river of terror. God saves his church every time and saves and redeems where needed. We see this clearly in countries where the church is being brutally persecuted. Numerous stories that leave you stunned, play out there. Every

time we see how God preserves the church, despite the power that is trying to destroy it. Indeed, the cunning of the wicked is great, but God is so much greater, and He gives the wicked only limited scope.

Thirdly, the dragon makes war against the woman's offspring. It refers to Christians in general. He is furious, because he cannot accomplish anything with the church. On his own, he doesn't get very far, and he actually wages a lost battle! Therefore he goes to seek help from the "beast from the sea and the beast from the earth". He goes to wait for his evil companions on the beach to help him with his evil fight against the believers.

But here we have to call it a day. Tomorrow we will see what happens next in this exciting drama!

Prayer:

Gracious Father, our hearts are filled with gratitude, for this morning we have the assurance that You are still in control, and that You repel every attack of the devil against us and protect us, Your children.

The Beast from the Sea

Revelation 13: 1-10

Satan's attack on the church failed, and now he gathers reinforcements, the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth. They are given the task of propagating Satan's cause on earth.

The first animal emerges from the sea. Like the “underground depths”, the sea is also symbolically the abode of evil.

In Daniel 7, we read of a dream in which Daniel sees four animals, or four world powers, marching against God's people. There are quite remarkable similarities between Daniel's animals and those described by John in Revelation 13.

The beast in Revelation 13 is a combination of Daniel's beasts, and the ten horns,

symbolic of the beast's power, correspond with Daniel's fourth beast, a terrifying and very powerful beast.

The animal John describes here looks like a leopard, which highlights his craftiness. It has the paws of a bear, which tells us that the animal is overwhelming. Furthermore, he has the mouth of a lion, which implies his immense power. The seven heads correspond to the dragon, and the ten rulers' crowns tell of his mighty rule. The blasphemous names on his heads hint at the Roman emperors who proclaimed divine titles for themselves, and even insisted on being worshipped.

What does this animal mean? It personifies the Roman authority that so cruelly persecuted the church of Christ in the time of John. This empire can rightly claim the title of Antichrist. He receives his orders from the dragon (Satan).

God allows the beast's authority for a period of forty-two months, a symbolic time of the

persecution of the church. It is striking that God gives him the authority, and that he is allowed to exercise it, and even blaspheme against God. He is even allowed to wage war against the believers and to win. However, we must remember that this victory only affects their bodies, but it does not undo the victory that the Lamb has already achieved over the spirit.

It is interesting that the animal in some ways mimics the Lamb. We see it in his power, rule and great authority in which he imitates that of the Lamb. Like the Lamb, he was also fatally wounded, but he survives miraculously. Actually he revives and the world is in awe of him.

There is a legend that Emperor Nero committed suicide, but that he revived (like the beast?) to be able to reign further. His "wounds" heal apparently miraculously. The world worshipped the dragon (the devil), and now they also worship the beast, asking the arrogant question: "Who can be compared to the beast?" In all respects there seems to be

a parallel with Christ, but this is only an evil attempt at a parallel. Although the world worships the beast, this is not the case with believers. They are protected because they are God's property bought at an expensive price!

At the end of this pericope, there is a call to believers to be on their guard spiritually. They must expect to face captivity and even death, and they must be prepared to do so. They must do this with faith and perseverance. Yes, hardships will be there to the extreme, but they must continue to believe and persevere.

Cruel scenes took place during the Roman Empire, and especially during the reign of the cruel Nero. Many Christians were fed to the lions to be eaten in the view of a bloodthirsty crowd of screaming Romans. Some Christians were even smeared with tar and lit as torches to light the streets at night. Others were cruelly crucified or tortured to death by soldiers, and it seemed to be the end of the church. However, wonderful things have

happened, and there are soul-enriching stories of many believers singing hymns of praise as they died cruelly. They knew where they were going to, and I'm sure many of them saw Heaven opened before them, with Jesus waiting for them with outstretched arms as they faced cruel death and the devil's tirade!

Today, similar things still happen. Because we live safely in civilized countries, we only occasionally hear about the persecution of believers in the inaccessible countries. However, the beast is desperate now, and he is furiously continuing to persecute believers cruelly. Let's keep on praying for them.

Prayer:

Lord, we thank and praise You that You have prepared the way for us, and that we can be assured of a future with You. Where we face death daily in a bitterly uncertain world where evil seems to be dominating, we want to ask You today to hold our hands tight and keep our eyes on Jesus. Give us the strength and

grace to deal with the onslaught of evil so that we can stay standing.

The Beast from the Earth

Revelation 13: 11-18

If it is because I am clever to be able to understand all these complicated visions of Revelation so well? No, indeed not! I get my knowledge from authoritative commentaries. I especially make use of the explanation of the Bibellennium, since it is not the view of a single person, but a number of scholars who have worked together, each a great authority in his own field. They have done a lot of research on this field of study. Again, I would like to emphasize that this is a meditation, and not a complete Bible study of the passage. For this, you need to use a textbook that specifically does a Bible study on Revelation.

According to Jewish mythology, God would have made two sea monsters on the fifth day of creation. The Leviathan, the female

monster, remained in the sea. Behemoth was the male monster, and he went to live in the desert. The Jews believed that these two monsters would emerge after the Messiah was revealed. Isn't it interesting how this mythology corresponds with the animals John sees?

We saw yesterday that the beast from the sea symbolizes the Roman Empire. The beast from the earth is the false prophet. He can thus represent the cult of imperial worship in Roman times. This cult is served by the priests of imperial worship.

We notice that the beast is trying to imitate the Lamb, but he is still undeniably connected to the dragon. Just as the Holy Spirit inspires believers to serve Christ, so this animal persuades the wicked to worship the beast from the sea, the Antichrist or the Roman Empire. The beast of the earth has horns like the Lamb, but he speaks like a dragon. So he wants to pretend to be lovingly gentle and harmless, but in the meantime he uses evil language to seduce people.

So we could say that the false prophet is the religious arm that propagates the constitutional power of the antichrist. The beast from the sea gives the beast from the earth the power to entice people to worship the beast from the sea. An image of the beast from the sea is erected, and this image comes alive. This means that images have been erected of the emperors, and then sacrifices are made to the gods in favour of the emperor. Imagine, for example, how the hated Nero fits into such a picture, and the terrible attack and persecution he has done to all believers.

Whoever worships the beast receives a mark on the right hand or on the forehead. The mark on the right hand symbolizes that your ability to work has been influenced, and that to your forehead, that your intellectual capacity has been affected.

The number 666 is named as the number of the animal's name. In ancient times, numeric values were assigned to the letters of the alphabet, so your name could be expressed

as a numeric value. For example, the number for Jesus is 888. It is interesting that the name of Emperor Nero in Aramaic letters (John's mother tongue) yields the number 666.

There is an interesting view on the number 666 - "the number of a man" (Rev. 13:18). The number 7 is the perfect number, and the number 666 strives to reach this perfect number from God, but for him it is impossible.

What does all this information tell us today? Naturally, we can also see this in a future perspective. Satan is very cunning, and he uses camouflage tactics to seduce people. Like this second beast, he often gets the appearance of the Lamb, which requires thoughtful wisdom from the believer to make a distinction. Often he even uses the motive of religion to seduce you.

There are many cultic religious groups that even include the Name of Jesus in their confession of faith, but the root of their

religion lies deep in the devil. Once you get caught up in their web, it's over, and you won't escape easily! Some examples of this are Christian Scientology, where Jesus is regarded as just one of many good "teachers". New Age, where all religions are embraced, and part of the larger whole, including the Christian Religion. The traditional African religions often come under the name of a Christian church, and even acknowledge Jesus as Saviour, but at the same time they also worship the ancestral spirits. The latest, of course, is the New Reformers, who doubt many of the basic scriptural truths. They are all part of the false prophet, the Beast from the Land. In these last days, we must keep our eyes on Jesus, the true Lamb of God.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, please hold my hand tightly today so that I do not wander from Your flock. Keep my eyes open so that I will recognize the false prophet. I want to worship You alone!

The Waterfall

Revelation 14: 1-5

A feeling of excitement vibrates through my body. In front of me, the mouth of the train tunnel that old President Paul Kruger had tunnelled through the granite rocks at Waterval Boven for the railway to Lourenço Marques. I am a young boy, full of energy, and always game for adventure. Across the tunnel is the waterfall. I've been to this impressive waterfall many times, but this time it's different, because the Elands River is in full flood.

Walking through this spooky tunnel is exciting. Us children run excitedly the first few steps into the mysterious dark hole until you can no longer see your hand in front of your eyes. Waterval Boven's famous old tunnel follows a bend through the mountain, which is why it is pitch dark inside. In

addition, there are also all kinds of rubbish lying around in the tunnel, pieces of railroad tracks, stones, sleepers, junk, holes. One just had to tread carefully, and if you fell over something, the dust fumes would choke you. In addition, there are all kinds of stories of ghosts and creepy things, people who were run over years ago by a train in the tunnel!

An icy shiver runs down my spine as a bat sweeps past my ear. After what feels like an eternity, a slight glow of light begins to emerge in the tunnel. It gets brighter and brighter, until I see there before the glittering light ahead of the tunnel opening. The last distance we run frantically out of pure excitement, until we stand in the bright sunshine, with the thunder of the waterfall now very loud.

We climb over giant rocks down the steep mountain slope. Then suddenly the waterfall is in front of us in all it's glory, a spectacle of power and majesty. The footpath down to the Elands River is narrow and littered with giant rocks and stinging nettles that you should

avoid at all cost, otherwise you will have a problem! The rumbling of the waterfall is getting louder and louder, until eventually, as we stand at the foot of the waterfall, it is an overwhelming, thundering that rips through your entire body. Awesome! But despite the violence, a soft mist caresses my face. God's presence is so clearly visible, tangible.

I know exactly how John felt in this vision, where he saw the 144,000 chosen ones on the Mountain of Zion. Compared with the face of the dragon and it's hanger-ons, who sow death and destruction, this scene is now sketched of the Lamb. Straight away you have new courage for life again. The Mountain of Zion is, of course, the place where the temple stood. There God lived, so the Jews believed, and there, one day, the Messiah would appear.

The sound John describes is intensely dramatic, like a waterfall in flood. Or thunder, combined with the soft, quiet sounds of harpsichord players. And then, the great moment when a mighty choir with it's

144,000 choir members sing a brand new song. I've already experienced a choir with 1,200 voices, and it was touching. Can you imagine such a huge choir? Heavenly sounds filled the entire sky!

There are a few questions about this crowd of people: Are they just men? Are these only people who never married? Some would like to think so. However, it must be seen against the background of a male army. While war was being fought, men were forbidden to sleep with their own wives. This would indicate undivided allegiance to the country. In the same way, we see the faithfulness of these 144,000 people to Christ, who do not pollute themselves with wicked idolatry. Indeed, their chastity lies in their undivided allegiance to the Lamb, and they follow the Lamb. Their obedience to the Lamb becomes evident in their imitation by means of word and deed.

These people were redeemed as firstlings to God and to the Lamb (verse 4). Firstlings in this sense point to the first fruits of the

harvest sacrificed to God, indicated that the whole harvest actually belongs to God. There was never a lie that came from their mouths. This means that they never denied God. They clung to the Truth and lived in the Truth. At the same time, they were blameless (verse 5). Just as a sacrificial lamb had to be blameless, without any defect and fit for God's sacrifice, so these 144'000 were in every way suitable and useful to God.

The question this morning is whether you and I can claim a place in that choir. How do we live out the Truth? How blameless are our lives? Are we truly fit and useful to God?

Prayer:

Lord, I must confess that there are many shortcomings in my life. Often I look the other way when your Name is blasphemed, and sometimes I react loveless towards your children. Forgive me for that, Lord, and please make me useful to Your Kingdom.

Heaven and Hell

Revelation 14: 6-13

Is Heaven really a reality? But of course! What kind of question is this? Every believer believes it with complete dedication. Most believers are also sure that they will go there when they die one day. Oh yes, there are some believers who doubt this fact, and are not sure if they will be allowed into Heaven, but the Word is very clear about this.

However, when talking about Hell, there is not so much consensus of opinion. There are even many believers (and certainly many more unbelievers!) who doubt whether there is such a place as Hell. Some believers argue that God is love, and that He would never do such a cruel thing as to throw people into Hell. Unbelievers will only die a second death, or so they say.

Oh, I can understand very well why many people want to believe this way: when a loved one has led a careless life, and died an unbeliever, then you very much want to believe that he will be spared eternal punishment. What a painful thought to live with, if your loved one dies an unbeliever!

Over the past few years I have attended various funerals of believers, and time and time again it was actually a very beautiful and wholesome occasion. A crowd of friends and family coming to say goodbye to their loved one on his final journey. Often, in a way, it was a joyous occasion rather than a sad occasion. Oh, yes, tears were shed, but not of hopelessness, because everyone knows exactly where their loved one is. The tears were there because they would miss the loved one until their reunion one day, almost like greeting someone who was going overseas for an indefinite period.

John tells of three angels announcing urgent messages of judgment. The first angel brings a good message, that the Creator must be

served and worshipped, because his execution of judgment has dawned. Indeed, there is still time for mercy, and the wicked still have an opportunity to repent. God does not punish to destroy, but to persuade people to believe.

The second angel tells of the fall of Babylon, which was known as the godless capital of Mesopotamia. Here, however, reference is made to Rome, where Christians were cruelly persecuted, and where the evil, idolatrous emperor cult was highly celebrated.

The third angel describes the torment that the worshippers of the beast will endure. God's judgment will no longer be diluted with grace. It will be poured out undiluted on all who have despised the sacrifice of Jesus. The hellish punishment will be like what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, when they perished from sulphur and fire. However, it will not only be a once-off burning, this punishment will go on and on and on!

I remember once when I was a young boy, we had to stop a runaway wildfire. It was late at night, when we were still battling and fighting to get the flames under control. That scorching heat, the suffocating smoke, the terrible thirst! Your arms are dead tired but you dare not stop killing the flames for a moment, otherwise it will devour absolutely everything. You feel despondent and fragile when the hellish fire suddenly just ignites again from nowhere, and then you start again! I imagine Hell to be like that, only much worse than any earthly runaway fire. And there is no end to it!

On the other hand, John writes the wonderful, encouraging words in verse 13, which refresh the believer like a cool, clear stream of water. "Blessed are those who die in the Lord ... they will find rest." Then all the persecution, tribulation and hardship is over, and the wonderful rest with Jesus awaits. "

Years ago, I and a few other young people climbed the Drakensberg. For four days we had experienced indescribably beautiful

scenery with breathtaking highlights. But the hardships and pain of that experience will remain with me forever. The blisters on our feet, aching muscles, chafed shoulders, bitterly unbearable cold and the sun that burned us to blisters, I will not forget. The last day was the worst, because descending the steep slopes tormented my calf muscles, until afterwards they felt as if they were being torn from my legs. But I had to keep going, going forward till the end, when I fell down on the lush green lawn and my sore feet and legs and shoulders could relax and rest - oh utter bliss! Every painful step I took was worth it!

Likewise, life is a painful experience. But if, at the end of the day, you enter into that wonderful eternal rest, and you can look back on your life's journey, you will also be able to say that every painful step was worth it.

Prayer:

Thank you for that wonderful prospect of eternal rest, Lord. Please help me over this last painful mountain pass.

Harvest day

Revelation 14: 14-20

Like a light swell over a sea of gold, the ripe wheat land, heavily laden with fat ears of wheat, wave undulatingly as the breeze blows over it in the late afternoon sun on the Free State plains.

I ran a bookstore in Welkom, and we stayed on a farm in a thatched roof rondavel house on the outskirts of the city. Those Free State plains are ruthless. Dust storms were a common phenomenon. When such oncoming dust clouds roll over the plain and close the air over you, it gets dark and the choking dust robs you of your breath. In our thatched cottage, it almost felt like rain, as the grains of sand and red dust slowly sifted through the thatch and covered everything in a layer of red! Mercifully, such a dust storm does pass.

This is a place of all extremes. In the summer, the scorching heat of the Free State is almost unbearable. The tinder dry air burns your lungs, and the rain stays away. In winter, it is again the chilly cold that causes everything to freeze. That's when the ground starts to crack, causing the walls of the house to burst, resulting in cracks in the walls, so large that you can squeeze your hand through them. And the icy wind is blowing through it!

But the soil is fertile, and if enough rain comes, and on time, then the lands will yield a rich harvest. That year, the rains were timely and sufficient, and the fields were heavily pregnant with ears of wheat bursting from their seams. The stage was ready, and you could feel the anticipation and tension in the air.

One fine morning, shortly before dawn, I wake up to an unearthly drone that vibrates harder and harder through my heart. Half asleep I jump up to see what's going on. A long line of dust swirled on the farm road. In

front of the dust cloud, a giant green monster with a set of teeth wider than the farm road, breaks through, and in his line of dust another five harvesters and trucks are already approaching.

Right away I'm excited. It's harvest time! For the next few days, the harvesters rolled up and down the fields, injecting a golden stream of wheat grains into the waiting bins of the trucks, until only the stubble was left on the barren fields. A deadly silence descended over the farm, and the breeze whispered sadly over the skeletons in the wheat field.

In John's vision he sees the time for the great harvest dawning, the great harvest of Jesus' judgment. This is a wonderful image, full of symbolism. Just imagine how a grain of wheat is buried in the soil, literally dying before it begins to grow as a tiny baby wheat plant, just as you had to die as an infidel first. But then the miracle happens, because God gives you new life as a born again believer, still fragile in your baby faith, just like that

little wheat plant. The new believer also grows in his faith, just as the wheat plant grows, until the veins finally begin to form and he bears fruit. Just as the wheat plant must face numerous setbacks, droughts, worms, lice - so every believer must endure many storms and setbacks in his spiritual life. However, know that these chastisements make you strong spiritually.

And then the big harvest day arrives! It is not a day to fear, but a joyous day to look forward to for every believer. There is also so much symbolism in the harvest. Just imagine how those grains of corn are stripped from the mother plant, thrown into giant silos and then ground into a fine flour. This flour is the raw material for baking delicious, crisp white, steaming breads that distribute their pleasant aroma. Likewise, after the great harvest, the believer is transformed from a “dry grain of wheat” to obtain a brand new glorified body.

However, harvest time also has its sad side, because not everyone is harvested like wheat. Yes, the unbelievers are also

harvested, but as grapes are trampled in a winepress, and the red grape juice flows from them, so the unbeliever will be trampled and crushed and deprived of their life blood. A thick stream of blood covering the earth, chest height deep and for a distance of 1,600 kilometers, indicates that God's judgment will affect all creation. It is frightening and global. It takes place outside the city, away from the believers (verse 20). Yes, Jesus also had to pay outside the city for the sins of everyone who believes in Him, including you and me. There His blood flowed on the cursed wooden cross. That is why we stand today on God's cornfield, eagerly awaiting the day of the great harvest.

Prayer:

Lord, I thank You this morning that I can know for sure that I am not destined for the wine press of Your wrath, but that I, along with a huge crowd of believers, can wait excitedly for the day of Your great harvest. Thank You for also saving me from eternal destruction.

The Bay

Revelation 15: 1-4

Where exactly that bay was, I can't remember, it was many years ago when I was just a young boy. But it was somewhere in the Cape during a holiday. The men wanted to go fishing, which I did not really want to partake in, but I went along for the adventure.

One of the local fishermen came along to show us this exclusive fishing spot. Dad parked his Landrover on a hill where the narrow dirt road ends. Far below us lies the most beautiful bay, halfway surrounded by rocks and high cliffs, with a strip of white sandy beach, and a steep descending footpath.

My heart beats wildly with excitement, and I scramble light footed down the path to the

sea, while the men are still busy with all their fishing gear. I marvel at the marine life in the rock pools, most of which I have never seen in my life. In a larger pool I see a movement. Then a cat-like eye peeks at me. I beckon our guide closer. It's a chameleon octopus! He tells me in his colourful language that he saw with his own eyes how an octopus ran over the dry rocks. I look at him incredulously, can an octopus run?

“Nay, I tell you, it's true! The sun was just falling into the sea, when this slimey creature jumped out of the pool. He ran like crazy! He hopped over the rocks on his eight legs, I tell you! On the tips of his thin little toes. No lie!

I was ecstatic, and I couldn't wait for sunset to see an octopus run like that!

The men caught some shiny fish, and sunset also came. But what I experienced at sunset that day was worth even more than an octopus running on it's "toes".

The sun set low at an angle over the bay and into the sea. The fine detail was etched deep into my memory, and I still see it today, after all those years clearly before me. The sky is adorned in fine shades of yellow and orange, and as the sun goes down, it becomes more red by the second. The bay lies there as smooth as a mirror, with only a few small reddish waves glittering in the setting sun.

Two dolphins arrive to frolic in the bay. The orange-red reflection of the sun on the water transforms the bay into a lake of fire as the dolphins jump out of the water and play in the late afternoon sun. Everything moves in a kaleidoscope of colours that change continually. The men have long since stopped fishing, and everyone is in awe of the Divine performance, because that is the only description you could give.

Then we have to hurry up the steep hill before darkness overtakes us. By that time, the octopus had not yet run over the rocks!

Revelation 6 told about the seven seals that were opened, in which God's execution of judgment was revealed. It was the introduction to say that it was on its way. Chapter 8 tells of the seven trumpets that emphasize the urgency of this execution of judgment. Now the final fulfillment of God's judgment over the wicked begins. The seven bowls are poured. The tension builds up!

This last judgment begins with a great and miraculous sign from Heaven, a typical introduction to a new vision for John, and emphasizes that it comes from God. Not only does John see the seven angels bringing the final plagues, but he also sees a breathtakingly beautiful scene of a mirrored sea with flames of fire dancing in it. And on the shore stand the people who have won victory over the beast and his image. They play on harps they got from God, and they sing a song, the song of Moses. It is also the song of the Lamb.

It reminds me of what I experienced at the bay that day. John's vision may have looked

the same. The sea symbolizes the Reed Sea through which Israel travelled to escape Pharaoh's revenge, and the fire in it, God's judgment to be fulfilled. Just as Moses and the people sang after their salvation, the conquerors now also sing a song, the song of the Lamb. They sing this victory song cheerfully and bubbly as they praise God for His great and righteous salvation work and all His deeds and actions. They honour God's holiness.

“Lord God Almighty, how great and wonderful are your deeds! King of the nations, how right and true are your ways! 4 Who will not stand in awe of you, Lord? Who will refuse to declare your greatness? You alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship you, because your just actions are seen by all.” This is how the song went.

Prayer:

Lord, together with the victors at the sea, I want to praise You, for You are indeed great and wonderful! You are holy and just and

merciful, and therefore I fall down at Your feet
in worship.

The Temple Gates Swing Open

Revelation 15:5 - 16:7

After the wonderful sight of the mirrored red sea, the scene shifts to the temple in Heaven, God's place of residence. From here, the final judgment will be orchestrated. John sees how the temple is opened. Now great things are going to happen!

The moment the temple gates open, seven stately angels come out. Their appearance is breathtaking, dressed in bright shiny clothes that remind you of the clothes of priests. Their task is to observe the ministry. The angels each have a golden band around the chest, just like the high priest's band. This means that they have a high priestly task to perform.

Then one of the four living beings comes forward and he gives each of the angels a

golden bowl. You will probably remember from chapter 4 that the four living beings symbolize God's creation.

The seven golden bowls referred to here are the dishes in which the burning coals were kept for the incense offering. However, these bowls are now filled with the fire of God's wrath. We must remember that this is not about satisfaction of God's anger, but it is about God's holiness that cannot bear sin.

The whole temple is filled with smoke. However, it is not the smoke rising from the bowls that fills the room, but the wonderful smelling odour of God's glory and power. Just think for a moment about that glorious scent of the smoke of Sicle bush or Mopanie wood smoke that fills the atmosphere around you as you sit next to a fire in the bush. It conveys you into a spiritual euphoria. It also tells you about the wonder of God's indescribable creation, and you smell in it the fine detail with which every insect, blade of grass and delicate wildflower is carefully planned in the smallest detail. It is

breathtakingly blissful! Likewise, the Divine smoke fills the temple and spreads the scent of God in all His glory and power and majesty.

But first everyone has to wait patiently, for though the gates of the temple have swung open, no one can enter there. The seven angels must first complete their task. The seven bowls of God's wrath must first be poured out completely.

Suddenly, a loud voice from the temple cries out, "Go and throw the seven bowls filled with the wrath of God into the earth!" This is the order the angels have been waiting for, and then the first angel comes forward to go and perform his task.

Where the trumpet blasts were the announcement that only part of the earth would be hit, and that there was still time for grace, there is now a finality in God's judgment. The process can no longer be reversed, and it culminates in the final bloody war at Armageddon.

When the first bowl is poured, the beast's imitators are hit with malignant and painful sores, and they endure much suffering. Shortly after, another angel follows with the second bowl that hit the sea, causing it to become blood so that all marine life would die. The third cup hits the freshwater springs and rivers, making it completely unusable. These two bowls strike the worshippers of the animal in a very tender place: the basic function of all water sources.

It is noticeable that we are currently slowly poisoning the sea and freshwater resources in every way possible - landfill, sewage, industrial waste, and the latest acidic mine water!

As these things happen, the angel guarding the water sings a hymn about God's judgment: "The judgements you have made are just, O Holy One, you who are and who were! They poured out the blood of God's people and of the prophets, and so you have given them blood to drink. They are getting what they deserve!"

Then the angel guarding the altar "Amen!" with the words: "Lord God Almighty! True and just indeed are your judgements!" Moving!

The question is: is God's judgment unjust? But He is a God of love, so how can He do such terrible things to the unbelievers? I have heard the remark so often that God would not be so "unfair" as to express judgment on anyone. With the angel's hymn, he wants to say that the judgments and plagues that God sends over earth are certainly not unjust.

We must remember that the people affected here by God's judgment have all chosen to be enemies of God. They have heard the message of God's grace and salvation, but laughed it off and trampled it in the mud. In addition, they tortured and killed those who accepted God's salvation. Is it unfair for God to condemn them? I certainly do not believe so!

Prayer:

Lord, together with the angel I want to sing
Your praise, for You are holy and righteous
and gracious.

Seven Bowls

Revelation 16: 8-21

I sometimes wonder if the sun's radiation has changed over the last few years? Could it have become more violent? It seems to me that this is certainly the case. When I was a kid, I spent all day outdoors, and the sun never burnt me. And during holidays on the beach, the sand sometimes burned blisters on my feet, but the sun rarely burned my bare back and shoulders. I could spend hours in the sun without any consequences.

However, if I spend only half a hour in the sun today, I have problems! Has ultraviolet radiation increased dramatically? If we think of the effects of global warming, it does seem like that to me. However, there are constant reports of extraordinary activity on the sun, where huge explosions have rocked the sun and flames of thousands of kilometers high

are seen on the surface of our star. The effect of this can cause havoc on our globe. Such sunspots can cause immeasurably damage to our communication systems and even power networks.

In the vision that John sees, seven angels each stand with a bowl full of God's wrath. Yesterday we saw the first three bowls being thrown out. The earth and water are hit hard. Today we see how the other four bowls are thrown out.

The angel empties the fourth bowl into the air so that it hits the sun. Then the fiery celestial body gets hotter and hotter until it radiates it's deadly rays so fiercely that people get scorched and burnt. Fire, of course, symbolizes God's judgment. However, people don't convert, but they blaspheme God only more. It is not that they do not know - they are very aware of exactly Who it is that struck them, and where the plagues came from.

Against the background of the vision, we once again very clearly see the Exodus motif, where God struck the Egyptians with plagues. Shortly thereafter, God's wonderful salvation follows as He liberates the people from Egypt. In the same way, this image also wants to assure the first readers of Revelation that their deliverance from the yoke of the Roman Empire is a joyful prospect once the bowls of God's wrath are poured over Rome.

The fifth bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast. We have already seen that the beast is the Antichrist. When the fifth angel pours out his bowl, a complete darkness descends upon the world. Now the reign that God has allowed the beast is coming to an end. It is a painful experience for the Antichrist, and people literally bite their tongues while they lament with pain.

But we still see that despite the unbearable torture they have to endure, they still absolutely stubbornly refuse point blanc to turn to God. It has become a refrain that the

imitators of the beast continue to blaspheme God and blame Him for their torture. If only they would take that one simple step to God! He is waiting for them there in Grace!

The sixth bowl is emptied out on the great Euphrates River. This famous river formed the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. Across this border, great evil has erupted throughout history. There, among other things, the cruel, ferocious Partians set their sights on Rome. When the angel empties the bowl, the Euphrates dries up and Rome's enemies can literally walk through dry-shod to carry out their onslaught.

From the mouths of Satan, the Antichrist and the false prophets appear evil spirits that resemble frogs. Frogs are, of course, unclean animals, and this reminds us of yet another of the plagues of Egypt. These frogs are devilish propaganda that stirs up the kings of the world with miracle signs to march to war against God at Armageddon. Here the final battle will take place.

Finally, the seventh bowl is thrown into the air. It fills the atmosphere, and the angel exclaims, "It's over!" Natural disasters hit the earth: lightning flashes, rumbling, thunder, a devastating earthquake like the world had never experienced before, and giant hailstones. The hailstones are described as 50kg in size, which means that no one hit by them can survive. Islands disappear under the sea and cities and mountains are swept away by the violence of the disasters. No one can flee or hide from God.

But still, the unbelievers continue to persevere, and instead of repenting, they blaspheme God. Absolutely nothing would make them repent! They remain stubbornly loyal to the animal!

Prayer:

Lord, how terrifying is Your judgement over those who refuse to accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank you for preserving us as believers from that judgment. Please keep our eyes upon Jesus, where all our help

comes from, and keep us safe in You, our Father.

The Woman on the Beast

Revelation 17: 1-6

In the last two devotionals we saw the seven bowls of God's judgment being poured out on the earth. In the next two chapters we will look more closely at the pouring of the seventh bowl. It's scary! The purpose, however, is not to frighten us as believers, but rather to illustrate God's righteousness, as well as the fact that He cannot allow sin to remain unpunished. John begins by describing in detail the fall of Babylon, and then the consequences thereof, as the businessmen, kings, and sailors fall into despondency over her fall.

An angel invites John to come and see how the immoral woman falls. Babylon is compared to a notorious immoral woman. It was common practice to compare idolatry to a immoral woman, possibly because idolatry

is often accompanied by immorality. Often prostitutes were an integral part of a temple and especially during major festivals. Cities were also often described as women. Jerusalem was occasionally called a prostitute. In this case, Babylon is symbolic of the city of Rome and all her wicked practices.

Today we do not really realize how corrupt the city really was. To name but a few: the goddess Roma, the divine claims of the Romans to be rulers of the world, financial exploitation of everyone in her power, the imperial cult, the ruthless persecution, torture and extermination of Christians and much more. The city was totally immoral and corrupt, and backstabbing and betrayal were part of daily life. In short, it means that Rome was the seat of idolatry and wickedness, and that she also seduced everyone around her.

John is taken to the desert to look at the woman. Here the wilderness is the place of evil, as well as the place where judgment will be executed. The woman sits on the back of

the bright red beast, the Antichrist. We see that the beast is covered in blasphemous names. This probably refers to the slanderous claims of the emperors, that they are divine and saviours. The animal's ten horns and seven heads symbolize its power and authority.

The woman's dress reminds you of a Hollywood glamour event. The purple and red clothes bear witness to extreme luxury, as only kings could afford such expensive clothes. The gold, gemstones and pearls also speak of wealth. The golden cup of dissipation she holds in her hand tells how she seduces the nations. Her name, "Great Babylon," appears on her forehead. It was a practice for a prostitute to carry her name on her forehead. Indeed, this woman was the mother of immorality and dissipation on earth. She was the source and origin of all wickedness. The fact that the woman is drunk from the blood of believers (verse 6) testifies to the bloody and cruel persecution of Christians, especially under the rule of

Nero. However, it is not only the physical persecution that was executed so cruelly to Christians, but also psychological and spiritual undermining.

Today we experience "Rome" in a different, more modern and often subtle way. If we cite South Africa as an example, the government of our country is anything but Christian. In parliament are Muslims, Hindus, people who openly worship ancestral spirits and much more. The Christians can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Corruption, theft, immorality etc. is the order of the day. And that's just Parliament!

How have the people of our country not been seduced by all these wicked practices? Even Satanism is an accepted practice and religion! If you turn on the TV, it is teeming with immorality, violence, bloodshed, murder and blasphemy. Meanwhile, the churches are empty, and congregations are going bankrupt. Christians are seduced by the brilliance and glory of the world, and those who do not let themselves be tempted often

suffer bitterly. Are we perhaps not living in a modern “Rome”? Indeed, we are still living in a free country, but in many countries of the world things are far worse, and Christians are being cruelly persecuted.

However, these things should not discourage us. We must not be blinded by the immoral Woman on the beast, and all her glory. She is only temporary, and destined for eternal destruction. When we look past her, we see God in heavenly glory seated on the throne, and He reigns! He still has everything under control.

When John sees this vision, he does not quite understand all of this. There is a hidden meaning behind everything. So the angel takes John and explains to him very clearly what it is really about. Let's look at the angel's explanation tomorrow.

Prayer:

Lord, when we look at the "woman", then our hearts want to shrink in fear. Please keep our

eyes directed on Jesus, where all our help comes from, and keep us safe in You, our Father.

What Does the Beast Mean?

Revelation 17: 7-18

John is amazed at the immoral woman and the fiery red beast she is sitting on. What could be the meaning of this? That it is evil is very clear, but this terrible two-some must surely have a deeper meaning! Then an angel comes to explain to John what this is all about. And John probably thinks, "Aaaaah, but of course!" But reading this explanation only makes it more mysterious. In verse 8, for example, we read of the beast that was and now is not, and that he is going to come out from the underground. It does not make sense! It is for this reason that many people begin to read Revelation, and then put it down, because it is just incomprehensible!

However, if we keep in mind the history of the period after Christ, then you begin to see light. For that reason, it is very important to

read Revelation together with a good commentary that can outline the background history for you. For the first readers of Revelation, it was simple, because they saw the things happening around them. This section deals with a specific period in history, but more importantly is that we must see in this, that through even the most terrible stages in history, God is still in control.

The angel tells John that the beast first was and that he is now gone. This animal is exactly the opposite of Christ. Jesus was and is and will be! The animal is thus an imitation of Christ, and it's origin and destiny is the destruction. The Roman emperor Nero is usually associated with this. According to legends, after his death, Nero would return from the underworld to reign (he would come out again from the underground - verse 8).

The animal has seven heads. "They are seven mountains," the angel explains, adding that wisdom and understanding are needed to understand it. Rome is built on seven hills, and the woman, as we saw yesterday, is

associated with Rome. “The seven heads are also seven kings,” the angel says, to make it even more mysterious and complicated. This means that it is probably the succession of Roman emperors.

However, these emperors are not alone in the fight against Christianity. There are the ten horns of the beast, representing ten kings who are given authority for a short, measured period (symbolically one hour) to wage war together with the beast. This indicates a full number of (10) Partian rulers who will arrive. They are allies and soulmates of the beast, and they pursue the exact same goal, to conquer the believers. This collective muster of power leads to war against the Lamb and his followers. According to a Greek legend, Nero, who has since come alive again, would first go up against Rome with the Partiers, and then the joint forces would begin the fight against the Lamb and his followers.

Now it's the woman's turn, and the angel explains about her fate. The waters where the woman lives represent the whole world,

except of course the followers of the Lamb. The ten rulers (ten horns) and the beast turned against the woman, and they manipulate her destruction in all kinds of ways. They hate her, strip her naked and deserted, eat her meat and burn her with fire. Just like a kicked-out prostitute, Rome is left naked and abandoned after being "used". All her wealth and promiscuity are something of the past. She is destroyed. Indeed, the evil forces of the beast and the strange forces worked together to fulfill God's plan to bring Rome to a fall. God allowed the evil to destroy himself!

Scrolling through the history books, we so often see how evil governments, rulers or people bring about their own downfall. An example of this is the world of the Al Mafone Mafia in America. These villains' biggest enemy was not the police force who tried so hard to control them, but their own soulmates. A mafia leader's life was not worth a penny, because there was always someone else who had aspirations to

become a leader, and then many fellow villains were killed cold-bloodedly in this fight. In our own country, the gangs on the Cape Flats conduct terror, but their biggest enemy again is other gangs. The lives of people who live violently usually come to a violent end.

By contrast, the attitude of someone who radiates the love of Jesus is contagious. For example, a person who is excited and happy and walk into his workplace, with the love of Jesus shining brightly on his face and radiating from him, eventually causes everyone around him to be excited and cheerful.

Let us try to make a difference today, and cheer up the world around us with Jesus' invincible love.

Prayer:

Lord, please make me an example of Your wonderful light and love today.

Babylon is Falling!

Revelation 18: 1-10

The culmination of God's judgment execution now begins when an angel with great authority emerges from Heaven. Surrounded by a glow of glory, he imposes a jubilant poem about the judgment on Babylon. You will remember that Babylon is actually symbolic of the city of Rome.

I don't think we realize today how huge and powerful the Roman Empire was in those years. They absolutely dominated the whole known world by brute force, and made and destroyed just as they pleased. The empire spanned the entire southern half of Europe, Germany, France, Portugal and Spain and covered the whole area as far as Turkey and Syria in the east. The south extended to Egypt and the entire northern coastal region

of Africa. It was a breathtakingly large area that included the whole Mediterranean area.

The epicenter of this powerful government was the city of Rome, with the emperor sitting on the throne, imagining he himself was God. Rome was thus the epicentre of the whole, mighty Roman empire. A prosperous city with culture that was overwhelming. Today, there are still numerous statues and buildings dating back to that heyday. Certainly the most famous of the gruesome Roman culture, the Colosseum, where many Christians had to suffer inhumanly for their faith, today appears as the skeleton of Rome's evil bloodlust. Indeed, it is now only a hollow, dead skeleton, and the bloodthirsty cry of blood-hungry and violence-hungry Romans will never rise from it again!

The angel's announcement was simple: "She has fallen! Great Babylon has fallen!" Just like that! And then the jubilant lamentations follows. For anyone with ties to Rome, this is a lament. But all the believers rejoiced! In an

extremely dramatic song, the angel described how this once lively city fell into a state of decay. The city had to pay for all the godless wickedness that prevailed there over the years. "She is now haunted by demons and unclean spirits; all kinds of filthy and hateful birds live in her." (18: 2)

The immorality of the city was a crime! Kings, by way of speaking, had immoral association with her, and the businessmen enriched themselves from her wealth. The influential ones accepted Rome's claim to divinity because they took advantage of it.

Then another voice sounds from Heaven, the voice of God, and He speaks to all His children. He tells the believers to leave the city. They must not partake of her sins or her punishment. The sins of the city had accumulated up to against Heaven. (verse 5) God is righteous, and sin cannot go unpunished. For this reason, Babylon (Rome) will now taste the judgment of the righteous God. From the same sinful brew that she had provided for the nations, she will

now have to drink herself, and she will receive a double portion in return. Pestilence, famine, sorrow and fire overtook her.

This immoral woman sat showing off as if she was totally untouchable. "I sit as queen on my throne," she says to herself, delighting in all that is bad. "I will never ever need to mourn!" She is so full of herself that she never even thought of God! She didn't need Him! That's what she thought!

But then God's judgment strikes her. Her fall is massive! The gigantic fall of this infamous woman is bitterly mourned by all her partners: rulers, businessmen and mariners. Lamentations sound, and the kings cry miserably, bitter at the terrible loss of lustful communication with Rome. The rulers are crying and lamenting, for their once-powerful ally has disintegrated in an instant (verse 9). They are stunned, because it can't be possible! Rome, then, was so absolutely indestructible?

"How awful, how awful!" the kings lament, "The great city, Babylon, the strong city!" They are shocked. They simply cannot understand it. "Judgment came upon you in an instant!"

Edward Gibbon wrote a massive book of 6 volumes in 1776 on the fall of Rome, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Today, believers often become discouraged when we see the terrible injustice played out before our eyes. And sometimes we ask, "But doesn't God see these things? How can He allow powerful people to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor?" We see Rome (North Korea?) thriving and doing godless things. We see how many believers are being brutally persecuted around the world, and we ask, "Lord, are you not going to do anything about it?"

However, it is not for us to judge. God's righteous judgment will also strike this Babylon!

Prayer:

Thank You Lord, that we can leave all judgment to You. Thank you also that You have redeemed my terrible sins by Your infinite grace.

Everyone is Crying

Revelation 18: 11-24

The world is flabbergasted over the fall of the great and wonderful city of Babylon (Rome). The men of great power - the kings and rulers, were surely hit the hardest by her fall, for was it not precisely she who gave them so much pleasure? Wasn't she the one responsible for having so much bloodthirsty entertainment?

However, business people are just as sad about all their profitable deals with the wealthy, spendthrift client which has suddenly dried up. Rome was extravagant indeed! It is said that Emperor Nero once ordered roses from Egypt and paid an astronomical amount of money for it. The list of luxuries mentioned in verses 12 and 13 is an example of the life of the wealthy of Rome, who lived a lavish life of parties and

doing nothing. "Gold and silverware, precious stones and pearls, fine purple and bright red silk garments, all kinds of scarce wood, all kinds of ivory and all kinds of precious wood, of brass, of iron and of marble, cinnamon and spices, of incense, of fragrant oil and scented water, wine and olive oil, wheat and flour, cattle and sheep, horses, wagons and slaves and even the lives of people." Yes, indeed, they even bought slaves (human lives) to do their work for them.

The businessmen and kings are watching the ruin of the city at a distance, afraid to approach, because then they may also be struck by God's judgment. In one single moment all the fabulous wealth they depended on was destroyed.

"How terrible! How awful for the great city!" they lament. "She used to dress herself in linen, purple, and scarlet, and cover herself with gold ornaments, precious stones, and pearls! And in one hour she has lost all this wealth!"

The seamen are also plunged into misery, because they made a lot of money from this extravagant customer for whom they had to transport huge loads of luxuries. They too are standing from a distance to behold the terror. Just like the businessmen and kings, they are too afraid to venture near the fallen city. They suddenly lost an extremely valued customer. Now they are throwing dust over their heads while screaming, crying and lamenting to show how terribly grieved they are for their terrible loss. “How terrible! How awful for the great city!” (verse 19).

Along with their lamentation, a song of joy rises from Heaven, for as the millstone which the angel throws symbolically into the sea sinks, so does the godless city of Rome sink into the depths of oblivion. Merry music and art, trade deals and festivals will never take place there again. The cheerful sounds of games and theaters are extinguished. The city is dead.

“Rejoice in that, Heaven, and you, believers, apostles and prophets! God executed the

judgment with which she struck you, over her. " (v. 20)

Now only do we see to what extent the city itself was struck by God's judgment. Absolutely everything comes to a standstill. Sadness descends upon the city, and the cheerful music dries up, because suddenly there is no more work for an artisan. The industries are crunching to a halt. All the luxurious things made for the rich are no longer needed. There is no use for it anymore.

Even the mill's wheel stops turning, and a deadly silence descends over the city. The drone of a mill grinding flour dies away. Food will not be made there again.

And the cheerful laughter of a bride walking towards her handsome groom will no longer be heard in the gloomy city. Grief hangs over the city like a heavy, pitch-black curtain. "Babylon was punished because the blood of prophets and of God's people was found in the city; yes, the blood of all those who have

been killed on earth." (v. 24). The flickering flames of cheerful torches will no longer illuminate the streets, and darkness descends upon the city. Darkness symbolizes that sin led to the fall of the city.

This section must be a comfort to us as believers, but also an admonition, because so often we cry out revenge when someone who commits terrible crimes escape unpunished. Remember: God's judgment is fair, and we should not worry about it. God's time is also very different from our time. We want to get impatient if something doesn't start right away. God's judgment will come at the right time - at God's time.

The next chapter begins with great rejoicing and a "Praise the Lord!" And suddenly we forget about all the bad things, because there's great excitement.

Prayer:

Thank You Lord, that we can leave all judgment to You. Thank you also that You

have redeemed my terrible sins from Your
great grace.

The Wedding of the Lamb

Revelation 19: 1-10

"Dad, he asked me to marry him!" One single sentence from my daughter Anita has huge consequences! Immediately, planning begins. The right place for the reception must be found, a theme, a cake must be designed, a budget must be drawn up. I'm getting lame in the knees! But the excitement is GREAT!

Daughter-in-law Claudette graciously takes over the planning. Meetings are held until the midnight hours, and every possible and impossible possibility is looked at, pondered over, considered, dreamed about and the excitement grows ever greater. Her dress - there must be bright gem stones and pearls on it, and of course it must be sparkling white - as it should be!

Finding a place to host the reception is absolutely a nightmare. This place is not good enough, that one is too expensive, the other too far and another is just not suitable! Eventually we find one, but there are many shortcomings. The place is old and dilapidated, but with a lot of potential. With good planning and a lot of sweat it can be made beautiful enough for a fairy tale wedding!

The closer the big day gets, the greater the excitement, and the more everyone runs back and forth to get everything ready in time. And the emptier my pocket becomes!

Finally, the day breaks, and everyone's nerves are gone. The bride emerges, and after a full half day of makeup, titivating, hair etc. everyone is gasping in admiration. She has never looked so beautiful! She appeared shining with joy and excitement, donned in a sparkling white dress with shiny beads and pearls sparkling in the bright sunlight.

A vintage model A Ford is the wedding car. I climb into the back seat next to her. As far as we drive, the crowds along the streets applaud us, horns blow and dogs barking hysterically! At the entrance to the estate where the reception is held, we climb onto a horse-drawn carriage. The last distance is covered by the bride and her proud father (that's me!) in a fancy spider-carriage with two proud horses, complete with the driver dressed in tophat and dress-coat, and tripping up to the excited waiting crowd.

The wedding has finally begun!

Revelation 19 begins with a song of thanksgiving from a great multitude rising up from Heaven: "Praise the Lord!" The rejoicing in Heaven is great, for God's judgment has struck the evil city, and all the terrible things the city has done to the believers have been requieted. God's judgment execution was not fueled by personal vengeance but because He is righteous and just. Justice finally prevailed. "Praise the Lord!"

And then John heard a big noise, like a huge body of water, thundering, swirling - a huge crowd of people who were very excited. "Praise the Lord! Praise God!" cheers the crowd. What is everyone so excited about? The wedding of the Lamb has arrived!

In many places in the Bible, the relationship between God and His people is described as a marriage. In the Old Testament, Israel is described as the woman in the marriage, and again and again she is unfaithful. In the New Testament, Christ is the Bridegroom and the church, or believers, the bride. According to marriage practices in Israel, the groom first goes to the bride's house to fetch her, and then they leave for the groom's house, where the wedding feast then takes place.

Seen in this light, we as the Bride of the Lamb are waiting excitedly for the Bridegroom, Christ, to come and fetch us and take us to the great wedding feast in Heaven. Isn't that a beautiful image? The bride (you and I) are wearing the most beautiful wedding clothes, delicate, bright white and

shiny. Oh, of course it is not our natural clothing, because it is filthy dirty and stained purple with sin, but this new garment we now wear is washed bright and clean in the precious blood of the Lamb.

Which bride is not bursting with anticipation on that day as the minutes slowly tick off for the big moment? My little girl was so excited she could hardly wait! You and I should also be so excited already, because the Bridegroom is already on his way to fetch us. When exactly He is going to be here, we do not know, but I can already hear the crowds humming with excitement in the distance!

The big question is whether we are ready. If He, the Bridegroom, were to come here now - are you already wearing your bright white clothes, and are you ready to go? Only those who have accepted Jesus as Saviour are part of the bride. If you have not already done so, you have no part in the wedding. Maybe today is the right time to take that step.

Prayer:

Lord, the excitement roars in me, for I know I am part of the Bride of the Lamb, and I look forward with great anticipation to that day of the great wedding feast!

Rider on the White Horse

Revelation 19: 11-21

A rider on a horse caught my imagination when I was a young boy. I read the most wonderful stories of heroes during the Anglo-Boer War, daring boldly on horseback to draw up against the mighty British Empire. Today, the heroism of men like De la Rey, inseparable from his trusty horse, is still triumphantly sung, and then huge crowds of people rally to stand together and sing patriotically. If the Khaki's had not played dirty, and started waging war on women and children, the outcome of the war would have been very different!

Yes, the equestrian hero on his horse is naturally very romanticized, and many fictional characters have formed in people's imagination, such as the Rider in the Night and all his contemporaries, all characters that

left our children gaping with wonder. A triumphant rider on a proud horse, preferably a snow-white one, is a picture that extorts great respect.

It is therefore no wonder that this image is also part of John's vision. With this triumphant image of the Rider on the white horse, the final series of visions is introduced. The last time we saw Jesus riding on the back of a riding animal, it was a humble donkey on which He entered Jerusalem. It was the eve of the greatest crisis ever in human history, and Jesus was the chief role player. Shortly after His triumphant entry, He was tortured, humiliated, mocked, and nailed to a cursed cross. In this vision, however, the picture is totally different. Now He is the triumphant Rider on the white horse who rules and judges, also those who at the time so cruelly condemned Him with their bloodthirsty screams: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! "

When this Rider emerges from heaven on the white horse, He instills fear, for His eyes

blaze like fire, and the many rulers' crowns symbolize His unlimited power, majesty and dominion. The sharp sword that protrudes from his mouth fills everyone who comes up against Him with fear and trembling. His white clothes were already stained with blood from the terrible judgment being performed. What makes it even more frightening is the huge army that ascends with Him from Heaven, all dressed in shiny white clothing. These heavenly armies are angels and martyrs who ascend with Christ, and they also ride on white horses. However, only the unbelievers, the dragon and his fellow operatives need to fear. The believers can cheer and rejoice, and look upon Him with wonder, for it is He who has delivered us. Indeed, we have already been judged, and on the basis of His great redemption we have been declared righteous.

At the sun, John sees an angel standing. Everyone can see him there. He invites all the birds of prey to come to the banquet to eat the flesh of the wicked. This heinous

meal stands in stark contrast to the marriage supper of the Lamb. If you have ever seen vultures devouring a carcass, you will understand how horrible the sight would be of raptors that tear apart and devour the bodies of the evil kings and rulers and all their companions. This call comes on the eve of the big battle, the biggest battle of all, that will take place. The kings and rulers are already mobilizing their armies for this mother of all wars!

Then the animal, or Antichrist, as well as the false prophet is captured. They are thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulphur. Just imagine what it would look like if you looked into an active volcano! This is the place of eternal punishment, or Hell. The rest of the wicked are killed by the judgment of God that comes out of the rider's mouth, and the birds of prey celebrate gluttonously, until they are satisfied. With this image, the full judgment execution of God is depicted on the wicked.

These are shuddering images that are sketched for us, and if we read this pericope on its own, we can so easily form the picture of a God of revenge and cruelty. However, when we read it against the backdrop of the rest of Revelation, we see a completely different picture - the image of a gracious God who gives, over and over and over again, pleading and begging people to turn to Him. This final and abominable judgment is only upon those who have utterly refused to obey God's urgent pleas.

In our next meditation, we also see how the devil finally comes off second best, and then the big day that all believers have been waiting for so long - the new Jerusalem!

But now I'm moving ahead with the story!

Prayer:

It is with great awe that this morning we behold Your omnipotence and dominion, Lord, and we worship You for You are gracious. Your judgments are just and fair.

The End of Satan

Revelation 20

The passage we read this morning has led to many interpretation differences, and believers have been involved in fiery debates about this. The differences, however, are such that they do not affect the essence of our faith. Some people see in this that there is another millennial reign of peace (the "chiliasts"). Others believe that Jesus will come twice. Then there is also the issue of the "rapture". If we read this section on its own or try to interpret it too literally, you can easily come to all kinds of conclusions. However, this pericope must be read within the framework of the whole message of Revelation in order to understand it correctly.

We have now come to the end of Satan and evil, as well as the final judgment. John sees in his vision an angel coming from God - he

has access to the depths of the earth, or the abode of evil. The angel comes and binds Satan with a big chain. It is symbolic of limiting his power. He is kept in the underground for a thousand years, and then released for a short while. We cannot interpret the thousand years as a literal time, but once again, as we have seen so often in Revelation, this is a symbolic number that indicates that he is bound for the full period God has designated for him. In light of the message of Revelation as a whole, we can understand from this that Satan is bound for the period between Jesus' first coming (2000 years ago) and his Second Coming. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, He overcame Satan. So he is bound. The short time that he is released for indicates the terrible intensity of his attack shortly before the end.

You might ask yourself the question, why then do we see so much of the devil's activities when he is put in shackles in damnation? Often you see that a very influential prisoner is locked up in prison, but

can still exert his influence outside the prison. He has his accomplices who do his job for him. He is locked up, but by no means powerless. However, when we look at the evil of the world around us today, you wonder if we might not already be living in the time when the devil was detached! Personally, I think the end time should be very close now, because everything is simply accelerating at a giddy speed.

Meanwhile, John also sees in his vision "souls" that sit and reign on thrones. These are people who have died for their faith, as well as all the believers who have already died. They experienced the first resurrection only after they died. If I understand this passage correctly, then there is no first resurrection for the unbeliever, and he remains dead until the Second Coming. However, if we read the parable that Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16), then it looks different. So we can only guess. There will also be a second death, but believers who have experienced the first

resurrection will not experience the second death, they have been acquitted!

Finally, the big day arrives for Satan, where he is released. For the last time, he shows his muscles as he calls the wicked nations from all over the world for the war of all wars. The nations are called Gog and Magog, symbolic of the wicked nations that are as numerous as the sand of the sea. In their millions they go up against Jerusalem, the beloved city, until the whole city is surrounded. Then God hits them with sulphur and fire from Heaven, and the entire army is consumed by God's fire. The devil is thrown into the lake of fire together with the beast and the false prophet, where they are tormented forever.

Finally, the final judgment arrives. God sits on a large white throne. So great is the power and majesty of God's appearance that all creation makes way before Him. The old dispensation with its sinfulness cannot exist before God's glory. All appear before the throne for final judgment. No one is omitted,

and two books are opened. Everyone is judged on what he has done with his life. This does not necessarily mean that his deeds can save him. In the second book the names are written of those who have eternal life, those who are in Christ. This is the citizenship register. If your name is not there, then a good life will not affect your salvation! Those whose names do not appear in the Book of Life are thrown into the lake of fire. Short & sweet! But what about the others? What happens to them? We'll come to that that answer soon!

Is your name in the Book of Life? Mine is definitely - I know!

Prayer:

Thank you, gracious Heavenly Father, that You also wrote my name in the Book of Life. You receive all the honour for it, because it was not my deeds that caused it, but only the ransom that Your Son, Jesus, paid for me on the cross.

Everything New!

Revelation 21: 1-8

"I see a new Heaven coming,
an earth, new and free.

The sea and everything that separates
disappears.

God Himself is coming to live with us."

How wonderful it would be to sing this inspiring song with the congregation again with gusto after lock-down time! When you sing it, you see in your mind's eye a glittering new world without any blemish or sin, and the breathtaking city of Jerusalem, built of pure gold and the most beautiful gems and giant pearls from which the gates are carved.

The daily spiritual of the past few weeks have been extremely depressing in a sense,

because we only read about the devil's frightening march against all that is holy, and the horrible things he and his associates do to believers. We also read of God's awful judgment over evil, but how He, at the same time pleaded so urgently for their repentance.

Many years ago, a group of us spent one morning very early sitting on top the Drakensberg Mountains at Giants Castle to experience the sunrise. It was bitterly cold and still pitch dark, and at our feet a gaping abyss of 1000m high. I am greatly distressed to sit there defenceless. But gradually it begins to change, and the terrifying darkness makes way for dawn. Soft pastel colours begin to form over the vast hillside landscape that unfolds before us - a fluffy orange, a powder-puff-soft red. The night was over! The day in it's full glory was on it's way!

John also describes this wonderful vision he experiences, of the renewal of Heaven and earth, where the perfect communion with God has now arrived. Yes, the old dispensation has disappeared. The first

Heaven and earth, perfectly created by God, was totally destroyed by man and Satan's sin. The old earth where pain and suffering, because of sin, is such a terrible reality, is now being replaced by a brand new world of everlasting perfect glory with God. Even the sea disappears, because in ancient act of thinking it was considered the abode of evil. The evil has now been destroyed, and with it his abode.

In a dramatic way, John describes how the new Jerusalem descends from Heaven. It must be a moving sight because elsewhere he describes that the city is twelve thousand kilometers long and wide and high. It is so unimaginably large that South Africa will fit into it a hundred times. Then on top of that, that dizzy height, which almost reaches the moon!

In stark contrast to the notorious immoral woman, Babylon, this city is described as an ornate celestial bride prepared in blushing glory for God. The new Jerusalem now becomes God's abode with the people, so

God comes to stay with the believers in full glory and splendour, where they can see Him face to face as He sits on His throne.

God made a covenant with Abraham at that time. He told Abraham that He would be a God to him, and Abraham to Him a people. Now, this covenant is once again made true when a loud voice from Heaven announces that the believers are God's people and that He abides with them. All the pain and suffering of the old dispensation, the voice says, is something of the past, for God himself will wipe away their tears. Death will no longer be a horror because it simply will no longer exist.

For the first time in Revelation, we hear God's own voice from the throne when He says, "Look, I make everything new." Humans and all creation are totally renewed by a perfect new relationship with God. This is what all of creation had longed for so passionately. God further states that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This means

that He is the origin and destination of everything and everyone, and just as the first and last letters of the alphabet include the entire alphabet, so God embraces the entire creation. He also says that those who are thirsty can come to drink the water of life. In perfect communion with God, no one will ever have to suffer thirst again.

Believers can now share in the victory that God has achieved. The reward is to receive everything and live in complete communion with God. To have an intimate, personal relationship with Him. Indeed, we are His heirs, His children, and we share in it all! This wonderful truth carries us as believers, God's children rejoicing throughout all the final events!

Prayer:

Oh Lord, it is with joy in our hearts that we read Your Word this morning and see the wonderful things through John's eyes. Thank you for that wonderful prospect of what awaits us!

The New Jerusalem

Revelation 21: 9-22: 5

After John hears the voice of God, an angel takes him to a high mountain, and shows him the new city, Jerusalem, which we read about yesterday. It is a breathtaking sight, and John describes in great detail what he sees, because everything is too wonderful. The images he uses are, of course, once again full of symbolism and figurative language to bring home certain truths.

John tells us that the whole city glitters like a crystal clear opal, a gem always associated with God. It merely emphasizes that the city is full of God's presence and glory. His glory is radiant and glittering. The high wall with twelve gates emphasizes the fact that there is sufficient access for all followers of the Lamb, while at the same time the wall serves as a separation between the believers inside

and the unbelievers outside the city. Therefore, the entrances are guarded to allow only the believers to enter. We see that the names of the twelve tribes of the people of Israel were written on the gates, and the names of the twelve apostles on the foundations. The symbol of this is that the faithful people of both the Old and New Testaments share in the city.

The city is now measured by an angel with a golden measuring rod. By this, the angel wants to say that this is God's property that has room to all who belong there. The city is in the form of a cube - a huge cube of 12'000x12'000x12'000 kilometers. Again, symbolism is involved. The holiest of holies in the temple was in the form of a cube, and this simply emphasizes that God's presence fills the entire city.

The 144m high wall indicates God's complete protection for all the inhabitants of the city. The wall is built out of opal, which once again emphasizes the divinity, or rather God's presence in it. The foundations of the wall

are decorated with twelve gems, reminiscent of the twelve gems on the breast pocket of the high priest. The twelve gates in the city wall were each carved from a single pearl.

The city itself is of pure gold, and so are the streets. Not only is it indescribably valuable, but also has eternal value. If we now look at a whole picture of the golden city and the precious gems, and how it is reminiscent of priestly things, then we must conclude that the whole city, just like a priest, is in the service of God. The whole city is a temple because God and the Lamb are present there, and so it is also pertinently mentioned that there is no temple building in the city at all, because it is now totally redundant!

Another wonderful aspect of this city is that the natural light of the sun and moon is completely excessive, for the glory of God illuminates the city. The resplendant glory of the Divine Presence serves as a source of light to live in. So there is no distinction between day and night. In fact, there is no longer such a thing as night!

The city gates are never locked anymore, they are open all day long because evil has already been destroyed. Moreover, only believers have citizenship in this city. This, of course, they received on the basis of the sacrifice of the Lamb.

After John stared in amazement at this wonderful city, the angel shows him another miracle: the river with the water of life. This river flows crystal clear from the throne of God and the Lamb. It is symbolic of God who gives life, eternal life. There is a tree between this wonderful river and the main street - the tree of life. This tree bears fruit throughout the year, twelve times a year. You remember the tree of life in Paradise? It was described right at the beginning of the Bible, at the beginning of human history. And now this story concludes God's love for man with a similar tree. So now paradise has been restored, and the total peace that had to prevail in the Garden of Eden can finally be fulfilled. Physical and mental illnesses no longer exist, and there is a complete absence

of sin. Even the sun and moon are now unnecessary, for God's glory illuminates everything and everyone. In perfect fellowship with God, the triumphant believers now reign forever in a wonderful and perfect fellowship with God and the Lamb.

Isn't this a wonderful thing to look forward to? This description that John gives is enough to excite any believer, and to look forward with great expectation to the end times.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I am so looking forward to the perfect life with You. Please give me the power to live this life on earth to the fullest for You. And when I experience pain and sorrow, strengthen my knowledge that it is only temporary, and that the perfect is waiting for me.

Jesus' Second Coming

Revelation 22: 6-21

We have come to the end of Revelation. For me personally, it was a great experience to write about this treasure trove of symbolism and imagery. I felt so terribly unworthy to dare tackle Revelation, and I must honestly say this morning that I was very scared to do so, and prayed a lot before I could dare to write about this wonderful book.

For me, personally, it was a revelation, for I regarded it for many years as a closed and incomprehensible book that can only be understood by a handful of very clever men. I have always dared to read only some familiar passages from it. However, for me, Revelation gained new meaning the moment I read how the various commentaries explained it. Now, to me, Revelation is no longer the book of fear, judgment, and total

mystery, but the book of God's inexplicable great love and grace. I hope you have experienced this as well.

John emphasizes that what is written here is true. After all, the angel told him that!

At the time, there were numerous apocalyptic writings in circulation, similar to Revelation. Today, many similar books still appear. However, most of their contents are very suspicious, and cannot pass the test of reliability and truth. But Revelation is totally different, which is why John emphasizes that this book is true and reliable. We can't help but believe the contents! After all, the book's origin is the Lord God! I believe with all my heart that it was the Holy Spirit who gave John the inspiration and instruction to write this precious book. For example, when we read that the coming of the Lord Jesus is near, it is from His own mouth that we hear it (Rev. 22:7). John therefore confirms also that his testimony is reliable, because he has seen and heard everything. It was not just a flight of the imagination, but these

brehtaking visions were God's special disclosures to John.

Many other apocalyptic books are sealed until it is the right time to read them, or only a few privileged people get access to them for perusal. However, John is instructed to reveal the contents of the book so that every person on earth can hear the wonderful message that the coming of the Lord Jesus is near! Indeed, we see it so clearly today in everything that is happening around us. For the unbeliever, there is a tightness around the heart as the world speeds to its end. Global warming, and now the dreaded Covid 19 instill fear in every unbeliever as they see the end of the earth approaching. And every time a doom prophet predicts that an invisible planet is about to hit us or some major catastrophe, such as the Mayan prediction of the end of everything in December 2012, panic prevails among the unbelievers. For the believer, however, it is with great anticipation that we look at these things, for we know that Jesus is coming soon.

Jesus also tells John that He will bring a reward. There is no consensus on these words. Would that mean that you would after all be rewarded in Heaven for what you did on earth? Will the person who has sacrificed his entire life for the Gospel receive a greater reward than the one who was just a passenger? Some theologians believe that everyone will receive the same reward, and that there will be no distinction in Heaven. After all, the reward is to live in perfect communion with the Lamb. It is not your deeds that are rewarded, but your deeds nevertheless show whether you are a follower of the Lamb or not.

At the end of Revelation, I have to ask myself if Jesus' return is a terrible mountain ahead of me, or a wonderful event to look forward to? John is exhilaratingly excited about the Second Coming, and the whole creation longs for that day to come. For the believer there is nothing to fear, for I have already been acquitted of judgment. That is why I can

cry out with a huge crowd of believers:
"Come Lord Jesus, come soon!"

However, my question to you this morning is whether you feel the same way about it? Are you also looking forward to Jesus' return with great longing? Or do you have fear in your heart, because you don't know if you will see the inside of Heaven? When you sit with that terrible anguish, Jesus begs you to come and drink from the water of life. It's free! You don't have to pay anything for it!

My prayer is that you yearn with me: Marana ta! Come Lord Jesus, come soon!

Prayer:

Thank you Lord Jesus, for the great privilege You have given me to read and study this wonderful book. Thank you for all the messages of grace and love that are contained in it, and that you have strengthened and comforted me again. Marana ta! Come Lord Jesus!

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