

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 3

The King and His Kingdom

Forum



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Lesson Three: The King and His Kingdom

Forum

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Question 1:

What gives God the right to rule as king over all creation?

God's reign as the king over all creation is a central theme in the book of Revelation. Throughout the book, we see God governing the universe with absolute authority. But unlike human rulers, God's authority doesn't come from anyone but himself. So, what gives God the right to rule as king over all creation?

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

What gives God the right to rule as king over all creation is the fact that he is the Creator. We see that so clearly in the book of Revelation in the fourth chapter when John is given the vision of "[the one] seated on the throne," as he's called — it's God the Father clearly — and first we hear the four living creatures praise God the Father for who he is in himself, that he's all-holy, that he's almighty, that he is eternal. But then the choir expands. Twenty-four elders who are part of God's heavenly court sing praise to God because he is the Creator. "By your will [all things] exist and were created," and therefore he is worthy to be honored, worthy to be praised.

Dr. Matt Friedeman

God has a right to rule over all of creation for a very simple reason: he created all creation. He has the "patent" on all creation, if you will. And so, having the patent on all creation, he knows the purpose for that which he created, he knows the design, he knows how it best operates, and he knows what can destroy it — what can cause it to break down... He knows everything about it. And so, the right to rule? Well, if I'm the created, I perhaps want to look back at the Creator and say, "Now, how do I best operate?"

Dr. John Oswalt

God, as the sole creator of the universe, has the right not only to describe what the parameters are but also how it is that we will fulfill the purposes of creation. So in that sense, as the ruler, as the one who establishes what the rules are and how those are performed, it is completely appropriate for God to be described as King.

Question 2:**In what sense is Jesus a vassal king rather than a suzerain?**

In the book of Revelation, we see God the Father as the great suzerain or ruling king and Jesus as the vassal or servant king, which might seem to be inconsistent with what we know of Jesus' nature as God. In what sense is Jesus a vassal king rather than a suzerain?

Dr. Simon Vibert

The language of “vassal king” as opposed to “suzerain king” speaks about delegated authority, and Jesus as great David’s greatest Son was of that line of kingship. And even as David had his authority as king delegated from the Father, so too Jesus did as well — God being that one with all authority. In fact, he is the one of whom Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me,” and therefore sends his disciples in the Father’s name to make disciples of all nations.

Dr. Stephen Um

What we find in the Scriptures is a picture of a king who is a servant king. We find somebody who finds a paradoxical kingliness, which is so unique in any culture. What we find in the Gospels is that there is a picture of a Messiah who has come to fulfill all of the prophecies about this suffering servant in the Old Testament, primarily in the book of Isaiah... So you have a reference in Isaiah 6, for example. This is what it was of Yahweh. It says that he is high and lifted up. And that’s clearly making a reference to Yahweh in the Old Testament. But then you have a reference of the same verbal combination of being lifted and exalted or lifted and glorified in Isaiah 52:13 where it says, “Behold my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up.” And that is referring to the suffering servant, the Messiah to come, not Yahweh. And then you go to Isaiah 57 where it says, “For thus says the one who is high and lifted up.” That’s a reference to Yahweh. So, in other words, you have this Hebrew combination of being lifted up and exalted, and it is attributed to Yahweh, and then also the suffering servant who will be the Messiah. Now, you come to the Gospels, and you have in the person of Jesus Christ who comes as this king who is the one who fulfills all of these prophecies about the suffering servant in the book of Isaiah. And in the Gospel of John, this is the way John exploits those terms ... The Son of Man was lifted up. And it also says the Son of Man was glorified. And you would normally think that those terms, because we’ve seen them in the Old Testament, they are references that would make a reference to the ascension of Jesus,

or the resurrection of Jesus, or the transfiguration. But actually, John uses those terms to refer to the death of Jesus, which clearly shows that it is an upside-down, paradoxical, ironic kingship. So what does this mean? How can we as Christians who believe in a king, who is a servant king, how can that sort of paradoxical kingliness become a reality for us? The Gospels say essentially: the way up is down. To be exalted is to be humbled. To understand the resurrection is to first understand death and suffering. To know if you want to be first, you must be last. If you want to be a leader, you must first learn to follow. This is the radical nature of the counter-cultural call and life for the kingdom of God.

Dr. Paul Chang, translation

We see Jesus as a vassal king because of his loyalty to his master. Our High King is God, and he will faithfully grant all of the grace and blessings of the covenant to us, the citizens. We receive grace because of the loyalty and obedience of our vassal king.

Question 3:

Did the book of Revelation undermine the authority of the Roman Caesar?

The Bible clearly teaches that God is our ultimate authority. And yet, we have human governors and kings who rule over us as well. Scripture tells us to honor these human authorities. But in the book of Revelation, the imperial powers stand in opposition to God's ultimate rule. So, did the book of Revelation undermine the authority of the Roman Caesar?

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

Revelation 13 raises the question whether the book of Revelation undermines the authority of the Roman Caesar, of the emperors who were in power at the time when John received those revelations. I think our answer has to be no and yes. No, in the sense that Revelation 13 does not undermine what the apostle Paul tells us elsewhere in the New Testament, in Romans 13 that the governing authorities of the state are appointed by God. They are his ministers of justice. They have a legitimate function; they are established by God. So no, Revelation was not given as a tract to urge Christians to armed insurrection against Rome. On the other hand, Revelation 13 does show us the dangers of a government that oversteps its bounds. Because in portraying — in John's day, in "the beast" — portraying Rome in its divine presumption, in a sense, the visions given us there do undermine Caesar's claim to ultimate allegiance, ultimate trust. We know that many of the churches, many of the cities to which the Revelation was first given in western Asia Minor, had received huge amounts of what we would call today "federal relief aid" in the midst of various earthquake damage. A lot of "federal" money, we might say, flowed from the capital of the empire to that part of the world. And they were very grateful. They praised the emperors as their

benefactors... There are parallels to the temptation to us today to look to the government to supply all of our needs and to give it an allegiance that it does not have a right to have. So, Revelation upholds implicitly that there is a legitimate function for human government, but as we read it in the context of the whole New Testament. But at the same time, Revelation warns us against the presumptions of government to claim divine worship and allegiance and trust that belong really only to God himself.

Dr. Greg Perry

The book of Revelation is written at a time of great challenge to Christian faith, particularly the churches in Asia Minor where the imperial cult was at its height. So in some ways, the book of Revelation challenges the authority of Rome, and also the authority that Caesar claims for himself as a god, particularly in Asia Minor. This of course runs head on into the claim that Jesus is the Lord and not Caesar. So, we see in the symbols of Revelation and the visions that are very similar to some of the apocalyptic literature of the Old Testament that this happens when God's people are in a situation in relation to foreign states that are challenging the ultimate authority of Israel's God, or of the Lord Jesus in this case. So, the book of Revelation is giving comfort to those who face martyrdom, that in the end, Christ's authority is superior to the authority of Rome and to Rome's Caesar.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Part of the context of the book of Revelation in the first century is clearly the issue of the worship of the emperor, the worship of Caesar which was increasingly becoming a significant part of Roman culture and context of the Roman Empire and Roman religion, and the demand that Caesar be acknowledged as the absolute supreme lord and even as a god. Well, of course, the Christians absolutely would not worship Caesar as a god, and so, to say Jesus is Lord is really to challenge what was becoming fundamental to religious and civic life in Rome. So, it was certainly a challenge to the Roman Empire — the book of Revelation — to say that Jesus is the sovereign Lord of the universe. When he comes he will conquer every human authority, and he will reign supreme as Lord. That was a direct challenge to the Roman Empire in its claim that Caesar alone is lord.

Question 4:**What attitude should Christians have toward government today?**

Human history has shown us that all governments are capable of both good and evil acts. Unlike Christ, no merely human government or ruler has ever been perfectly righteous. Still, as authorities over society, our governments have a far-reaching impact on both Christian and non-Christian alike. So, what does this mean for believers? What attitude should Christians have toward government today?

Dr. Greg Perry

The authority of human governments is really rooted in Christ's authority and in God's authority. Paul wrote in Romans 13 that the government and the governor and the king, are servants of God to do two things. One is to do good to those who do righteously and to praise them, and secondly to punish those who are wrongdoers, those who do not do justly. So there's a very clear mandate that we see about the role of government in Scripture that is rooted in God's justice and in God's goodness. So when human governments aren't acting in accord with their mandate from God and from the Lord's authority, we see encouragement in Scripture to suffer for doing good, and that when we suffer for doing good, we're entrusting our self to the ultimate authority of God. Even though we may be suffering the consequences of an unjust situation, an unjust governor, an unjust king or mayor, that our ultimate confidence is in the one who judges rightly, who gave government their role in the first place. So the role of government and its authority is really rooted in God's authority. So that means that government should act a certain way, but it also means that they're there by God's appointment, and therefore, we are to submit ourselves to their authority because God's put them there as his servants.

Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner

I think it's helpful to think of two passages in Scripture when we think of the scriptural view of governments today, and that's Romans 13 and Revelation 13. Romans 13 clearly teaches us that God ordains whatever governmental authority is in charge. So God is sovereign, whatever the government is — we think of the Old Testament, from Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, to governments today — God has sovereignly determined what the government is, and believers are called upon to submit and obey governmental authority ... But now let's consider Revelation 13. Revelation 13 speaks of the beast. I take the beast there in Revelation 13 to be the Roman Empire of John's day. So, behind the beast is Satan. So, John is telling us that the government is fundamentally satanic in Revelation 13. So, it's quite interesting that when put together with Romans 13 where Paul says governments are ordained by God. Is there is a contradiction there? I don't think there is. In Revelation 13, we're told again and again that the beast's authority was given to it. And I think it's quite clear that passive verb, it "was given," the authority of the government was given by God himself. So even the most evil governments, let's think back to Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament. Nebuchadnezzar was an evil ruler. But God gave him that authority. The correlation between divine sovereignty and human responsibility is complex and not simplistic. God is sovereign. And yet the evil that governments do, they are still held responsible for. So, God's sovereignty does not mitigate or rule out human responsibility. So, on the one hand, Christians are to obey the government. They are to be inclined to obey what the government says. On the other hand, there should be a recognition that all governments have a tendency to want to arrogate total power to themselves. All governments want to be totalitarian. That is true in the United States, and that is true in every part of the world, that governments tend to want to take such authority. And — what I think John is teaching us — they tend, therefore, to become demonic. They tend to oppose the gospel of Jesus Christ and the people of God. Romans 13 tells us the solution to that is not a call to violent

revolution or rebellion against the government. Christians are to be inclined to obey the government. But Christians are to live with their eyes wide open, recognizing that governments want to take on virtually a god-like role in our lives and want to control our lives, and actually end up calling for worship. So that we must be on our toes. We must be submissive to the government where we can, and most cases that is what we will end up doing. But we must also critique governments and point out where governments are arrogating themselves a kind of authority that belongs only to God and beware of governments resisting the Christian gospel as well. So, it calls for a nuanced response, and I think it's very helpful to think of Romans 13/Revelation 13. The two together balance out what the Scripture says about government today.

Question 5:

How much freedom and power does Satan currently have to affect our world?

The book of Revelation depicts Satan as a defeated foe, no longer able to influence the nations. Christ's death and resurrection dealt a blow that Satan will not overcome. But even though Satan is defeated, we still live in a fallen world. So, in the meantime, between Christ's first coming and the final consummation, how much freedom and power does Satan currently have to affect our world?

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

As we think about what the Scripture says about the power of Satan, even today, to affect our world, we see several themes developed. On the one hand, clearly Satan is active. Paul talks about the way that Satan controls the minds and the hearts of unbelievers. He talks about — 2 Corinthians for example — Satan blinding the minds of unbelievers and holding them in darkness... In Ephesians 2, he talks about unbelievers living according to the spirit of the power of the air; so he's in control of their thoughts and their minds. And of course, Satan threatens believers as well. Peter says in 1 Peter 5 that Satan is prowling like a roaring lion, seeking for people to devour, and so he calls believers to be vigilant, to watch out. Paul himself also says in Ephesians that Christians should not let our anger or our disputes fester over a period of time because that gives the Devil a foothold, an opportunity. So there still is definitely the influence of Satan in our temptation. But the book of Revelation, in particular, also emphasizes that now, as the result of the death of Christ, Satan's power is curtailed in some decisive ways. Actually, you see this even in Jesus' public ministry, that part of the forerunner of some of what John sees in the book of Revelation is Jesus' announcement that his power to expel demons from people who had been oppressed by demonic possession is because he himself, Jesus, has now bound the strongman, Satan; that Christ in his first coming has come to bind Satan and to set Satan's captives free. As a result, in the book of Revelation, we see that the cross of Christ has set Satan's captives free.

Dr. Greg Perry

In the Gospels we see some extraordinary passages of Jesus' encounters with demons that teach us something about the level of freedom that Satan and his demons have to influence things in the world. The book of Revelation, in particular in chapter 20, talks about the binding of Satan to restrict his activities in some way. And it seems that what we see from the Gospels and from the book of Revelation is that the restriction of Satan mainly has to do with restricting his ability to deceive the nations, as the witness of God's people goes forth and the good news of the gospel, that during this time of witness — as the gospel writers have put it — that Satan's activities are restricted. It doesn't mean that he can't do anything, but it means that he can only do what he's allowed to do. Now we see this in other parts of Scripture as well — whether it's the story of Job or the encounters that Jesus has with the demons in the Gospels — that he has power over them. And so Revelation 20 and the binding of Satan seems consistent with what we see in the Gospels regarding the power of Jesus over Satan. Not that he can't do anything and isn't active in spiritual warfare, because he is, and we see that depicted in Revelation as well. But that his activities are limited and not ultimate, and that, in particular, the good news is going forth and spreading throughout the world to every tribe, language and nation during this season of witness.

Question 6:

In the Old Testament, did angels and demons influence national interactions and wars?

Accounts of angels and demons engaged in battle appear frequently in the book of Revelation. These scenes help us understand how the preternatural realm affects major world events like national diplomacy and global conflict. But did this type of interaction occur only in the New Testament, or do we see something similar in the Old Testament? In the Old Testament, did angels and demons influence national interactions and wars?

Dr. John Oswalt

The question of the Old Testament's understanding of the invisible world is an important one. The Old Testament writers clearly are trying to combat the pagan idea that this world is just a dim reflection of the real world, which is the invisible world, and that the important things are happening behind the scenes. The Old Testament is wanting to combat that and to say, no, this world is real and the decisions and the actions that are taken here are real. However, making that point, the Old Testament is still not going to say there isn't an invisible world. It *is* going to say that. And so it's interesting to see how the interaction comes. So you find the angel of the Lord speaking, for instance, to Samson's mother and telling her about what is going to happen, and in this way influencing the choices of Samson's father and mother in their own understanding. When you come to the book of Daniel, you find the

statement of the angel, that the angel of Persia and the angel of Greece are warring — they're called the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece. And so this suggests this is a real world. Humans do affect the directions of history, but there are things going on in the background as well that we cannot discount.

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

When people ordinarily think about warfare, they think of it as a purely human affair. Oh yes, even Christians will do this. They'll say that God is sovereign over everything, but then wars and conflicts among nations, political movements of those sorts take place because of human factors. Well, that's true enough. The Bible does tell us that wars are started by people, they're fought by people and those kinds of things. But the Bible also gives us another perspective on international conflict and shifts of power, and it's the perspective and insight into the invisible world behind these things. You see, in the Bible — contrary to the way most evangelicals believe — in the Bible God controls the world, but he does this by many instruments, in fact, creatures in the heavenly places, creatures that are good and creatures who are evil, angelic creatures, we would normally say, and then demonic creatures as well. Psalm 82 strongly suggests that God has actually assigned the nations to these various demons and angels, that they have responsibility for them, because in Psalm 82 the Lord Yahweh presides over the assembly of the gods — gods with little “g” — these are the angels and the demons and the spirits in the heavenly places. And he holds them responsible for what's going on in their nations, the injustices, the lack of attention to the poor and the like. And God says, “You are gods, but because of the way you have treated and led your nations, you will die like men.” And so the idea here is that God does control it all, but that he does this by means of these preternatural creatures. And in addition to that, we find that when there are conflicts between various nations, they almost always involve some kind of angelic force fighting against an evil force. For example, when Moses says that he's going to free the Israelites from Egypt and God says, this is what's going to happen. I'm not only going to bring down Pharaoh, I'm also going to bring down the gods of the Egyptians. And so it's extremely important for us to realize that when Moses delivered Israel from Egypt, he wasn't just dealing with human beings. He was also dealing with the principalities and the powers that were ruling over Egypt, the gods of the Egyptians. And then go a step further. In Daniel 10 is one of those rare... It's a very unusual passage, but it gives us a glimpse into this unseen world of the ways that demons and angels, or spirits, actually affect international conflict. What happens there is that Daniel is that receiving a message from God. He's prayed to God, and he's receiving a message from God about the end of the Persian Empire. And when this message comes, an angel is sent with the message toward Daniel, but it takes a long time for him to get there. In fact, along the way he's met by a character called the prince of Persia. Now this prince of Persia is not a human being because he's about to wrestle with the angel that God has sent from heaven to Daniel. And so this prince of Persia is himself a preternatural creature, perhaps a demon. And as this angel comes to Daniel with the message, the demon, the prince of Persia, stops him, and they start wrestling and fighting, and the angel can't get free of him, and so the message can't get through to Daniel. And, of course then what happens is the

archangel Michael, the one who has been given authority over Israel is sent, and when Michael comes, he's able to defeat the prince of Persia and free this messenger angel who goes on and brings his message to Daniel. So we see that these angelic and demonic creatures have great interest in what goes on in the various nations of the world. In fact, when Satan took Jesus to a high place and he showed him the Gentile nations and he said, "If you'll just bow to me, I'll give you all of these nations." Well, that was a sincere offer because Satan and his minions had control over the Gentile nations at that time. God had assigned them to these nations. That's why they were full of darkness, full of evil, and under the judgment of God. Of course Jesus rejects that and waits for God to give him the nations of the earth, but it shows that behind the visible world of conflict — the visible world of struggle among various nations in the world — lies an invisible world that we must never forget.

Question 7:

How does the book of Revelation depict spiritual warfare?

The New Testament contains numerous examples of spiritual warfare. Encounters between Jesus and demonic forces are common. And Jesus' disciples also cast out demons in his name. But in the book of Revelation, we come across a somewhat different picture of spiritual warfare than we find elsewhere. How does the book of Revelation depict spiritual warfare?

Dr. Dan Doriani

The book of Revelation depicts spiritual warfare through a variety of images. In a way, we should say it's all set up by chapter 1, the vision of Christ in his magnificent splendor and power. And then we get images of Satan opposing Christ. For example, in chapter 12 we have the scene where Satan, or the dragon who is Satan, wages war against Michael the archangel. Now that's not quite war against Jesus — and that's important — because, see, it wouldn't be a fair fight: Satan against Jesus. So it's got to be angel against angel. Satan is not equal in power to God. So, since he's a created being, an angel, a spiritual being, he has to fight another created being, Michael. He loses. Satan can't even beat an angel, although he does cause some trouble. No doubt about that. But then as you go through chapter 12 of Revelation you see that... He tries to devour the woman, who represents the church, with the river of water, tries to accuse. None of it works. He kind of goes limping away, and then he gets some other helpers. There is a beast that comes from the sea. There is a beast that comes from the earth. And these are his allies, almost, really, an unholy trinity — if we have God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit — we have Satan and the sea beast and the earth beast and later on the harlot. The harlot, of course, is seduction. And the beast that comes out of the sea represents power — horns, threatening. And then we have the representation, of course, of earthly power. So behind the persecution of the church, behind those who try to force people to give up their faith, whether through arms — swords, guns, or by economic privation — that's an ally of Satan. That's the beast

that comes from the sea. Then there's a beast that comes from the earth. And that earth beast, also allied with Satan, tries to get people to worship falsely. It shows signs and wonders and tries to lead people astray. And so, we see that there are these forces in this world. The harlot is sensuality, wealth, the pleasures of this world. The beast that comes out of the sea is brute power. And then the beast that comes out of the earth is the deluded religions of the world. All those are pictures of the way in which Satan wages war against God and his church.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

Spiritual warfare in the book of Revelation is perhaps one of the most descriptive themes contained within it. We see this especially in the way that angels function. They are summoned from the throne to cast judgment upon the nations ... It's almost as though you are watching a play. I mean, imagine watching a play, and then the curtains are drawn and you realize that it's... the puppets are just being held by wires. And you say, and you go, "Oh, okay, now I see what's really going on." That's sort of what Revelation does, is it pulls back the curtains to the way that we perceive reality, and it gives us what is true reality, the way that God sees events... that which God calls godly and ungodly, righteous and unrighteous. We're really reading about the way God views human affairs. And so what we find then is not simply humankind managing itself, but we instead see God alone managing history and all these inimical forces attacking the church, and the angels playing a big role, and the saints playing a role. And it's this cosmic display. It's this cosmic theater. But we already know who's going to win.

Question 8:

How does the Holy Spirit empower us for spiritual warfare?

Spiritual warfare isn't something that occurred only in biblical times. We still face the enemy's attacks today. But as frail human beings we're not strong enough to overcome these attacks on our own. Left to our own devices, we'd fail every time. Thankfully, we're not expected to fight these battles alone. As followers of Christ, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit to give us strength. How does the Holy Spirit empower us for spiritual warfare?

Dr. Glen Scorgie

I don't think that a Christian should go looking for opportunities to engage in spiritual warfare. Some people may disagree with me on that. But I think that when these situations present themselves, a bold Christian, strengthened from the inner self through Christ, should not be intimidated. And the Holy Spirit plays a very vital role in the Christian's engagement in spiritual warfare. One of the texts of the New Testament relevant to this is the one that says that God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love and self-control. This is a very profound and succinct insight, I believe, into the ministry of the Holy Spirit, because anyone who is engaged in

spiritual warfare will attest that the immediate emotional response is often fear: fear of peril, fear of intimation, fear of defeat, a strong sense of discomfort and vulnerability. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in, because to counter that, there is a Spirit who brings to us a divine authority and a power that is actually not of us but more than equal to face the challenge. So, having done all, to stand. Often when we feel threatened, we become very un-Christ-like. When we're under threat, we snarl like an animal trapped. And I don't think it's any accident that there's a necessary ministry of the Holy Spirit to sustain a gracious tone of equipoise when you're dealing with spiritual warfare and some of the nasty opponents that you will encounter, both supernatural and very human. To be able to navigate that kind of challenge without anger and wrath and mean-spirited speech, is the work of the Spirit who is a spirit of power and love. But I love that last little insightful addition — he is also a Spirit of self-control — because under the duress of spiritual warfare, the great temptation is not to fight always, but to flight, to flee, to run away, to cut and run, and to lose it, in every sense of concentration on the truth, emotionally. And the Spirit comes alongside as the spirit of self-control. Now there are many other functions of the Holy Spirit, vital functions in spiritual warfare like purging us of the sin that leaves us vulnerable so that we can go into it holy, put the armor on, so to speak, a spirit of discernment and all that. But that simple little verse — God has not given us a spirit of fear but a spirit of power and love throughout, and a sound mind, not going to give way to frightening and ridiculous speculations but rooted and anchored in the truth. Sound mind, self-control, beautiful.

Dr. David Garner

When you open the Bible to the very first chapters of Scripture, you find in Genesis 1 that God is the Creator. You also discover very quickly that there is a deceiver in the midst. And after the good creation, the very good creation has been established and he has made male and female, Adam and Eve, in his image, we find the testing, the temptation taking place in the Garden. In that passage, we find that this tempter, none less than, actually, the archenemy of God himself, Satan himself, actually tempts Adam and Eve to believe something about God that they ought not believe. The *modus operandi*, the way in which Satan functions through Scripture, as he is described later, is as the deceiver. He is seen as the accuser of the brethren, but he's also seen as the one who masquerades as an angel of light, but he is a deceiver. And in his deception, he is constantly taking the things that are true, that he knows to be true about God, and contorting them, making them seem appealing, making them seem close enough to the truth to lure the hearts and minds and souls of men. Well, in view of that, what we find in Scripture in terms of the arming that we need, like Ephesians 6 will speak about, is that we have need of the sword of truth. The truth is our greatest tool to combat the Enemy. Think about the way in which Jesus engaged Satan in his temptation in Luke 4 and in Matthew 4. How does he respond to Satan? He responds to Satan with the very Word of God. Jesus recognizes that the battle is to be won at the revelation of God. It is by using the tools of Scripture that we are armed to combat the forces of evil. So what does that mean for us as Christians? What does that arming look like? That means we need to do what Psalm 1 says. We need to be people who meditate on the Law day and night. We need to be people who delight

ourselves in the instruction of the Lord, because the way in which we will be able to discern error is only by having our minds and hearts shaped by the revelation of God in Christ. Paul speaks a bit about this in 1 Corinthians 2 when he talks about the outpouring of the Spirit, that we have not been given any other spirit than the Spirit of God who gives to us freely all things, and it is that Spirit that actually shapes our minds and directs us to be able to see the clear truth, the clear revelation of Scripture.

Question 9:

How do Christians today experience the temptation to idolatry?

The temptation to turn to idol worship is a prevalent theme in the Old Testament. Many times, the nation of Israel compromised its covenant faithfulness by worshipping something other than God. And in the New Testament, idols had a strong hold on popular culture as well. But in many parts of the world today the type of idolatry seen in the Bible is not all that prevalent. So, how do Christians today experience the temptation to idolatry?

Dr. Greg Perry

I think idolatry is, according to Scripture, about ultimate meaning and value. And so when we, as image-bearers of God in these different aspects of our work, or our worship, or our family life, or our civic life, begin to give ultimate meaning to created things, or to these different roles in creation that we have, then we fall into idolatry. So if our job really is where we get our sense of ultimate value or meaning, then it's become an idol to us. And we can see how our job has become more important than our relationship with Jesus if we've lost a sense of kingdom vocation about our job, and it's really about my career — sort of a "careerism" — is one expression of idolatry. So it's about *my* career path, not what the Lord Jesus would have me do to represent him in my work, in my relationship with employees, or with other managers. Or in our family life, we can make an idol of our family. All idols are good things because God has made everything good. And so, what's evil is really just a perversion of the good. So in our family life, if we are really finding our ultimate sense of value and meaning in the success of our children, in the influence our children might have in their schools, or in their careers, or in their sports ventures, then we're falling into idolatry and not seeing that God has entrusted our children and our relationship with our spouse as an instrument of bringing honor to the Lord Jesus Christ, which may well mean sacrifices... So there's these, I guess, checks where we see, what's of ultimate value and meaning? Is it created things? Or is it this sense of kingdom vocation that comes from being image-bearers of God and then having these different parts of our lives in the right place, in the right order in relation to the lordship of Jesus.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Tong, translation

Humans have the desire to worship, so they'll put whatever they revere most in front of them as the object of worship. True honor belongs only to God, so you can esteem, admire, and respect people, but not worship them, because humans are only the shadow and image of God. God is the true foundation. To worship him is to worship him alone, to serve him alone. If you idolize another person, esteeming him or her to the point of replacing God, then you've stolen God's authority, status, and power. You aren't to treat people like you treat God. Anyone who places people above everything or uses anything else to take God's place, will surely suffer, as they have offended God and offended themselves.

Dr. Matt Friedeman

Well I think Christians today do experience temptations to idolatry just like nonbelievers do. I'd like to think eventually you get to a maturity level where they're not quite as tempting, but I do believe it's still a problem. And, you know, the big areas have always been in every culture around the world: money, sex and power. But I think you can also look at some other things. For instance, something as silly as games. You look at that and you think, "Well, what do you mean by games?" If you give football — whether it's American football or soccer which is played all around the world — if you give that more attention and time and emotional energy than you give your worship to the Lord or the reading of Scripture, you may have a problem.

Question 10:

If blessings only come to those who persevere, what happens to us when we fail?

In the book of Revelation, Jesus called the churches in Asia Minor to overcome sin and the spiritual forces that warred against them. And he promised blessings to those who persevered and curses to those who ultimately did not. So, what about us today? If blessings only come to those who persevere, what happens to us when we fail?

Dr. James M. Hamilton

Well thankfully, when we fail to persevere, Jesus says to us what he says in the letters: "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline." And so, the discipline that God brings into our lives, if we hear the word of God, this is discipline that's meant to call us to repentance. And so, we can hear the word of Christ speaking to us as he says, "Be zealous and repent." So when we fail to persevere, we should still fix our eyes on Christ and hear him summoning us to turn from our sin and trust in him and press on to receive the promised blessings that he offers.

Dr. Stephen Um

I think the first place to start when we think about this issue about loyalty to God is to realize that apart from the grace of God that has been demonstrated in the person of

Jesus Christ that we will not have the ability to be loyal to God. I think that's the first place to begin in realizing that we need to rely on a power or a grace that is outside of us ... And what we need to understand is that if we think that the loyalty comes from within us apart from what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ, then we will fail even though we're trying so desperately to be loyal. So we need to look at the loyalty of another. We need to look at the fact that Jesus Christ was the perfect servant who came to meet the demands of the radical nature of the Law. And that loyalty, and that fidelity, and that allegiance, and that obedience, and that service now gets imputed to us, and therefore we are justified... The Bible says that we are justified when we recognize that when we are humble, we will be exalted — Luke 18 — rather than trying to exalt ourselves, because we will be humbled.

Question 11:

How does the book of Revelation encourage believers?

John's central purpose in writing the book of Revelation was to encourage believers. But with the book's apocalyptic imagery and use of metaphor, this purpose can sometimes be hard to see. So, how does the book of Revelation encourage believers?

Dr. Jonathan T. Pennington

The book of Revelation can be very confusing. We all know that when we read it, but really its main function is to give encouragement to believers through the power of the hope and the vision that it gives us. I always like to describe it as a lot like going to a movie or a play where you're so enthralled with it during it that afterwards when you come out you feel like your whole view of the world, and your approach, and your values, and the things you care about are seen through a different light because you've experienced some great story that has changed how you even think about the world. The book of Revelation is like that in that when you enter into it and hear its story, it's like a pulling back of the veil on the true reality of how Jesus is worshipped in heaven even though he's despised on earth, and that gives great hope and encouragement to believers that the one they're following, the risen Christ, truly is at the center of the universe and being worshipped and that someday he will come and make that worship, that heavenly worship, an earthly reality. So the great hope for believers is encouraged and strengthened by the book of Revelation with this kind of visionary power that it gives.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

The book of Revelation encourages believers in what it shows us about the future and about the present. We'll take the future first. That's a little out of order, but it's right, because Revelation shows us that the future holds for us the return of Christ, his defeat of all of his and our enemies and his welcoming us into the new heavens and the new earth where he will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more warring or crying or pain. That is secure, that is sure, because Christ holds the

key of death and Hades. He's in control, he's risen from the dead, and that is the hope to which we look. Revelation also encourages believers by reminding us that Christ is now in control, although it doesn't always look like it on the plain of history. But if you think of the visions that accompany Christ's breaking of the seals on the scroll, beginning in Revelation 6 when he is the triumphant Lion — the Lion who has come as the Lamb to be slain — and he begins to open the seals. And we find visions of the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse, as we call them, released on the earth to wreak various forms of damage, imperial expansion, warfare, bloodshed, famine, disease, death. We might look at their world — well, it looks a lot like our world — and wonder whether things are in anyone's control. But the fact that the Lamb has the scroll, and even these providential expressions of judgment that cause great harm to many on earth come in response to his breaking the seals, assure us that even now in the midst of our trials, our Savior is fully reigning at the Father's right hand, and he has providential control of everything that happens everywhere in the world.

Dr. David W. Chapman

I think when we ask how does the book encourage believers one of the very important things to say is that we can get lost very easily in the details of the book of Revelation as we're trying to figure out what each and every symbol means, and I think it's almost more important to see what's the big picture. If we were to read through, or better, just listen to the book of Revelation in a single sitting, what will we get out of it? And I think what we would hear is in the midst of the travails of this life, there is a Lord and Savior, a Lord and Savior who is in control over all of history in whom we can trust, and because that is true, we can persevere in the now. We can be sure to be his people in the now, knowing that he is going to be victorious and that ultimately we'll be vindicated even in the midst of the travails of our life now. So we can live holy lives unto him, we can encourage one another to do the same. We can indeed overcome, to use the word that occurs so frequently in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation.

Dr. Simon J. Kistemaker

The Lord Jesus Christ encourages the believers, and all we have to do is go to these seven epistles to the churches in Asia Minor and there you'll find repeatedly the word "overcomers." And Jesus is encouraging us and is focusing our attention on being overcomers. That is, in spite of all the difficulties we are experiencing, we nevertheless are victorious in the Lord Jesus. Why? Because he overcame. On the cross he overcame the suffering and the death. He who created life, who created the universe, this Lord says, I conquered, and therefore we conquer and we continue to conquer.

Question 12:

How does our worship on earth reflect heavenly worship?

As God's ambassadors on earth, we're called to serve and worship God. The book of Revelation reveals a beautiful picture of how God is worshipped in heaven. So, is this what our earthly worship should look like also? How does our worship on earth reflect heavenly worship?

Dr. James M. Hamilton

Creation is already like a temple or a tabernacle in the sense that this place was created as a world in which God would be known, served, worshipped, and present with his people ... There are truths stated in texts like Psalm 78:69 which says, "You built your sanctuary like the heavens like the earth which you founded," and so the tabernacle and then the temple, they are replications of the earth in the sense that this is where God is worshipped, this is where God is known, and this is where God is served, and this is where God is present with his people. So, for those who know him, that's what this realm is for, and we are the image of God in his temple fellowshiping with him and worshipping him.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

If we can speak of the furniture, so to speak, of heaven, you find the ark of covenant in heaven, you find a sea just like the sea in the temple, you find harps. You find so many things that resemble the temple in the Old Testament, so that you put all these things together and you say, what does heaven look like? The way it's portrayed in Revelation, it's portrayed as a temple. And what are people doing there? They're worshipping God continuously. Then you look at the scenes on earth. You have people worshipping the beast, you have God's people suffering, but you have all these hymns of worship to God throughout the book of Revelation, and I think it calls us to look beyond our sufferings, to look beyond our trials, and to get the heavenly perspective by worshipping the God of heaven, the God who reigns over all, the God who is the beginning and the ending and who has the future in his hands. And as we worship God, that's like a foretaste of what the world to come will be like.

Dr. Matt Friedeman

I think one of the weak parts of what we do is worship. I find out that when I teach my people to pray in the church where I pastor, we always talk about the four parts of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Beautiful stuff, but I've found in the evangelical tradition the "A" part of that, the adoration, is really the weakest part. And I think we've got to find a way not only to worship with our songs, with our lips, but also with our lives. I'm thinking right now of Revelation. One of the things that's going to be done quite a little bit in heaven is worship. All over Revelation you see these songs that come: "Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever, Amen." Beautiful stuff. That's the stuff that ought to be on our lips all day long, not just on Sundays but all over our life all day long. What do the songs of heaven have to do with us and how we live the day? How we handle our finances today, whether we go to see that movie or don't go to see that movie, or whatever else it might be, our lives are to be lives of worship, our lips are to be lips of worship. It's what we'll be doing in heaven that ought to have impact on what we're doing today.

Dr. Greg Perry

We have this incredible scene in the book of Revelation of those who believe in the Lamb gather to worship and to acclaim him from every tribe, language and nation on the earth. And there's really a couple of things going on in chapters 4 and 5 where we see, on the one hand, images from the heavenly council that are very familiar from the Old Testament, but there's also something else that is very related to what's going on in the history at that time in Asia Minor, and that is in every Roman city there would be these acclamation assemblies. Every time there was a city-wide event, the society would be represented in every strata. And so there was these thrones in the first couple of rows of the theater. And we see the thrones, of course, in the book of Revelation 4 and 5, and we see this great multitude of people. And what they would do in the acclamation ceremonies is sort of reaffirm the benefaction of Caesar, the benefaction of the elders of the city and how they had brought blessing and prosperity — and even sometimes they would use the word salvation — to their city. And so these great acclamation assemblies brought honor, honor to the city leaders, and honor to Caesar, and to the gods who were seen to protect the city. And so what we see in the ministry of Christians on the earth in their worship and in their witness in society is bringing honor and acclamation to the true King, to the true Creator, the true Savior who has brought blessings to our cities and to our lives and honoring him with their life, not only with their worship but with their witness and with their wealth, and the ways that they would benefit the city themselves, to bring this sort of honor to Jesus as the Lord, the *Kurios*, instead of falsely attributing it to others.

Question 13:**According to Revelation, what is the goal of human history?**

Throughout the years, many authors have written on eschatological matters. And this shouldn't surprise us. People have always wondered about the end times. We want to know, why are we here? What is our ultimate purpose? What is God's plan for us and the world? In the book of Revelation, John often addressed these themes. So, according to Revelation, what is the goal of human history?

Dr. Peter Walker

The final two chapters of Revelation give us an incredible account of the goal of human history, where God is taking the world. John has this vision of seeing a new heaven and a new earth, the heavenly Jerusalem coming down like a bride dressed for her husband, and then this promise that God is dwelling amongst his people. So, the overriding impression is that God is going to be with his people, and he is going to be wiping away tears, and everything that was just evil is going to be removed, and God is going to be restored amongst his people. They are going to worship him and enjoy him forever. There's a big question there about what that means for our own present creation — is that something that is going to be completely got rid of, and God is

going to do something completely different? This new heaven and new earth, what does that mean? Well, the Greek word there for “new” may actually speak not just of something *completely* new, as so much as a renewal. And it may therefore be that actually what’s being portrayed to us is the *renewal* of our creation. So it’s not as though God gets rid of the old creation — that was a load of junk, and let’s start something else — nor, indeed, does he create something which is totally disembodied and completely different to our normal created life. On the contrary, he saturates the whole of our creation with his divine presence and reality. The one great difference is sin and death have been removed. And if that’s the case then — that what we’re looking forward to as Christians is the renewal of creation — I think this can give us a real positive emphasis to our created life, to living in this world, to how we care for our environment as well, but also to make sure that in the present we do works and deeds which are signposts of the future kingdom. So, God is not going to be removing us out of this present world into something completely different; he’s instead going to be renewing this human world, this embodied world, and flooding it with his meaning. There’s a verse in the Old Testament, isn’t there, that the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. And I think that’s the biblical hope. It’s slightly more this-worldly than we sometimes think. Perhaps God is going to remove us to some completely different place. Instead, the biblical hope is this-worldly; God is going to renew his creation. It was good at the beginning, and it will be very good at the end.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

According to the book of Revelation, the goal of human history is the whole earth being transformed into the visible and immanent temple, garden, realm, throne of God. And it’s the very same purpose with which the Bible opens in Genesis 1 and 2, that God made a world that was very good, but he made a garden in which his presence was immanent and visible, and it was a holy place, and the man and the woman were told to spread the Garden in effect to the whole world by multiplying, filling it, subduing it. And of course, in the Fall, that program is interrupted, but yet in the promise in the Garden — that there would be a seed of the woman which would bruise the serpent’s head — that promise is ultimately fulfilled. And so the earth becomes a place where the glory of God is not hidden any longer, but it’s an earth filled with the glory of God. And there’s no temple in this new earth, because God and the Lamb are its temple. There’s no need for a temple because God himself is our dwelling place in a perfect and full and final way. All the effects of the curse have been removed, except the signs of our redemption, the crucifixion scars of Jesus Christ. There is no sun or moon because the sun and moon, which derive their glory and their light from God himself. He is present, and he is its light day and night. There is life. The Tree of Life, which was in the Garden of Eden, to which access was barred because of our sin, now is open and available in its life-giving presence. And there is life in the Spirit that is the never-ceasing flow of life that comes from the throne of God, like the waters that fill the earth and bring life in Ezekiel’s vision, and in John’s promise to the woman at the well. So it’s a place of no sorrow or pain, but it is a place of immeasurably more glory than if the Fall and if sin had never happened, because God is not only the consummator of an un-fallen creation, but he’s the victor

over a fallen creation.

Question 14:

How will the new heaven and new earth be both familiar to and different from the current heaven and earth?

The final chapters of Revelation tell of a new heaven and a new earth that will far surpass the world we know now. The first earth will pass away, and God will make all things new. So, if God is making all things new, how will the new heaven and new earth be both similar to and different from the current heaven and earth?

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

When it comes to the relationship between the new heavens and the new earth and the heaven and earth we live in now, I think there will be a lot more continuity between the two than we tend to think. We tend to overly spiritualize or make it overly mystical, but the Bible says that the heaven and earth that we now know will be restored, which includes the physical realm, and so I think we will laugh and eat and drink and play and enjoy walks on the beach in ways we tend not to think. Now the thorns and thistles and relentless difficulty and twistedness of life in a fallen world will be gone, and every tear will be wiped away, but it will also include the physical realm.

Dr. John E. McKinley

When we look at depictions of the new earth and compare them to the present order of situation, we find, yeah, similarities and differences. Similarities are helpful because it means it's not going to be so totally strange to us. So I think it's going to be a physical place. It's described that way. I think that's realistic. There's going to be gender and ethnicity. The kings of the nations are going to bring their glory into the New Jerusalem. We'll still have our sense of ourselves as either male or female. And there's also going to be rich relationship among people. The differences are that there's not going to be any pain, or death, or sin. With death removed as the consequence for sin that means that there's no sin. There's going to be no sense of separation from God, and there's going to be total wide-open space for people to have relationships; the full extent of *shalom* where people can be open and accessible to God and to one another.

Dr. Mark Strauss

It's clear from the book of Revelation that the new heaven and the new earth is really a restoration of creation as God intended it to be. God created a perfect world, human beings rebelled against him, creation entered a fallen state. And so it's a restoration. But there is a measure of tension in Scripture itself. Peter, for example, talks about the heavens and earth being destroyed with a fire, and so, particularly in our concern for the environment today, we ask whether creation is good and will be ultimately restored into a pristine state or whether it will be wiped out and rebuilt from the ground up. And I have to say there's a measure of tension in there. What we do know, however, is that creation is good. When God finished with creation in Genesis, he

pronounced it good. And so the new creation will be intimately related and closely related to the kind of creation God originally made in Genesis. So there is that continuity. And what that means is we do need to regard God's creation and the whole world as a precious gift from God. And so we should be concerned with environmental issues and with the preservation of the goodness that God created in it.

Question 15:

Given that all Christ's enemies will be condemned in the final judgment, what attitudes should we have toward unbelievers?

Nothing in the book of Revelation should fill Christians with mixed emotions like the lake of fire in Revelation 20. While we rejoice that the enemies of God will finally be defeated once and for all, many of those "enemies" are family, friends, or co-workers we've known and prayed for. Given that all Christ's enemies will be condemned in the final judgment, what attitudes should we have toward unbelievers?

Dr. Matt Friedeman

We believe that there's going to be a judgment day, and we believe that unbelievers will be condemned and condemned to eternal damnation. So understanding that, what should our attitude be towards them? I think Jesus said very simply, "love your neighbor." And I believe when he said that... It's interesting, the story in Luke that comes next, and that is, there was a man of another race that reached out to a man of another race in order to have compassion on him. There was a Samaritan that reached out to a Jew. They did not like each other, they were enemies, and yet the story of the good Samaritan is the story of a man reaching out to another man and they're not supposed to like each other. I think even today there are people we're not supposed to like. You can just imagine. It's woven into the warp and the woof of our world we're not supposed to like. And yet Jesus, I believe, gives us the grace to reach out in a wonderful and compassionate way to touch those who perhaps are enemies, or the untouchables, or the unlovable, and he definitely wants us to love them. And I do believe he is still working miracles today bringing those unbelievers, those untouchables, to a relationship with him.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Tong, translation

We aren't to treat all unbelievers as enemies, because we're to love unbelievers. They're the people we are to preach the gospel to, the chosen people of God that we must win back. If we treat the unbelievers as enemies, we lack the power and the love to preach the gospel to them. I went to Taipei for the first time in 1970. The people there were loudly praying for mainland China, but they all hated the communists bitterly. I told them: "You hate the communists this much? If a communist was brought before you, how could you preach the gospel to him while you hate him? When you pray for the mainland, you can't stop at your words and ideals. You must ask God to give you the ability to love atheists, love communists, and love those who

oppose Christianity. Only then can you bring them back before God.” That’s the way it is. So many people are like Paul was before his conversion, temporarily placed into the opposing camp. How did he become Christianity’s greatest evangelist, the greatest proclaimer of the gospel? Aside from Jesus, Paul was the bravest warrior, witness, and hero for the gospel in all of the New Testament. Today, we must be aware of two things: first, we need to understand that some people are still in the enemy camp. How do we rescue them and bring them before the Lord? Second, we must realize that the enemy has placed his agents among us. We are to expel them. We must do both of these things.

Dr. Robert G. Lister

Christians, in their attitude towards unbelievers, need to start with the careful reminder that we’re not God. And we can be glad that we’re not God. Not being God means, among other things, that we’re not responsible to pass final judgment on anyone. And so, while we can trust that the Lord of all the earth will do right in what he does with any individual, that’s not a role that’s assigned to us. And we know that while unbelievers are yet living, while they’re yet breathing, one of the things that God is doing is being kind to them in giving them yet more opportunity to repent. God’s demonstrating patience to people who already deserve to be under judgment that they might have more opportunity to repent. And so one of the things that we would do as creatures and not the creator, is seize that opportunity to pray for them, to share the gospel with them. Many of us have loved ones who are not believers and are committed to be in prayer for those loved ones as well as unreached peoples around the world. So we have to differentiate our role from God’s role, trusting God to do his and to do his in a way that no one will have a claim of injustice against God, while also recognizing that while unbelievers are living, they have an opportunity to repent, and we want to present them with that opportunity as much as we possibly can. The other thing that’s critical to remember is that we were once unbelievers ourselves, and if we had a holier-than-thou attitude or a superior-to-unbeliever kind of attitude, that would betray a misunderstanding of what we were and that the only difference between us and them now is God’s grace in our lives, and it’s nothing intrinsic to us. And so we can celebrate God’s work in our lives and seek by prayer and evangelism God’s work in their lives as well, trusting that the Lord will call his sheep to himself in ways and times that are appropriate to the outworking of his plan.

Question 16:

What practical steps can we take to persevere in the face of trials and suffering?

Many times we read through Scripture and want to ask, “So, now what am I supposed to do?” Life can be difficult and can leave us feeling wounded and anxious. But it helps to remember that many people in the Bible’s original audiences were also hurting and needed encouragement. And the Bible does provide us help in

this area. What practical steps can we take to persevere in the face of trials and suffering?

Dr. Steve Douglass

There are so many practical steps that Christians can take that time really doesn't allow for a full coverage of that subject. I want to just tackle one segment — our perspective. Sometimes I find if I think right, that I will then feel right, and do right. And the most important perspective that I have to bring to trials and difficulties is a perspective about God. Because, see, I can doubt that God is aware, or that he loves me, or what's this thing about the sovereignty or the control of God over everything? Or, how did that happen? So what I find is there are three really important things to remember about God when a crisis hits. The first is that God is indeed sovereign. Let me sample a passage of Scripture for you:

To the King ... immortal, invisible, the only God, be glory and honor forever and ever (1 Timothy 1:17).

That sounds like somebody who's got it together. ... A second thing that we need to remember about God is that he loves us. You might think, okay, okay, he's sovereign, but I'm not sure how he thinks about me. Well, he loves you. He loves you. "For God so loved the world that he sent Jesus" — John 3:16. "In all things, God works for the good of those who love him." He loves us, we respond in love. That's how it works — Romans 8:28. I know I've heard people say, "If God really cared about me, he never would have let this happen." Well, think about your theology for a moment. God does care about you. Maybe you're misinterpreting the event, but there's no question God cares about you. And the third thing to remember about God is he is aware. Some time ago there was a big, worldwide financial crisis, and we felt that in the United States. And I heard many people say, "Didn't God know that I had to keep this money in order to have my needs met?" And the answer is, yes, I believe we can safely say God knew what your needs are. God is certainly aware. In Psalm 139 we find out that God is aware of everything about us. It's not a question mark. He is ... So as you face some kind of crisis in your life, just take stock of who God is, and you can relax. He's in control. He really, really does love and wants to provide for us. And he's perfectly aware of what is going on.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Life is filled with suffering. Ever since the fall of humanity, God has cursed the world and brought a relentless difficulty to every day. The world has difficulty and pain and suffering woven throughout. And especially if we pay attention, we will find that an undeniable fact. So how, then, do we find peace and joy in the midst of all the trial. Well, it comes through depending on God, the Creator, and the one who cursed everything, and his redeeming work, if we're ever going to have hope. The Bible says that when you see things from God's perspective, that, as hard as the suffering is in this life, it's a slight, momentary affliction compared with the surpassing weight of glory that will be revealed. Paul says in Romans 8 that the struggles of this present time, the suffering of this present time isn't even worth comparing with the glory

that's going to be revealed. So, when we are able to trust God in his sovereign goodness, that he is all powerful, he's all good, as he's working out his plan, and even in the midst of suffering, often *mostly* in the midst of suffering, God is refining us, and redeeming us, and in the process of restoring what was lost in the Fall. That's where we find our hope; in the God who's working everything out for good, and for his glory.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Tong, translation

I'm certain that suffering itself has value. The Bible says that suffering for the sake of righteousness is better than suffering because of sin because suffering for the sake of righteousness is equal to the will of God as discussed in the Bible. And it is the cross that people must bear ... Psalm 119 has these three sentiments: "before I was afflicted I went astray," "it was good for me to be afflicted," and "because I was afflicted I am refined as pure gold." When these three sentences become the motto of a person in suffering, he or she can overcome it and not be consumed by it.

Dr. John E. McKinley

Somehow in God's sovereignty, he perfects his people through suffering. It was the case for Jesus, we're following in his steps, and so we can expect to have difficulty in life. We're assured in the midst of that that God is going to bring us through even as much as we're sure we're going to have suffering. And in Romans 8, Paul tells us that we are more than conquerors through all these things, that we are to count them not as somehow God abandoning us, but God using them just like a good coach for an athlete to train us, to bring us closer to him to fight against our real enemy which is our sin in ways we obstruct God by our fears and hold back from him. So the apostles rejoiced when they suffered. They thought it was a great thing to be counted worthy, to suffer for the name. Certainly, persecution for the sake of Christ is easier to bear, but all kinds of sufferings that come to us are redemptive, whether it's cancer or a difficult sickness, or trouble at work, or financial distresses, these things are all God's materials to transform us. And then we cry out for help. We cling to God, we identify with Christ, and we have a communion of suffering with our fellow believers and find God comforting us in that. So we should have gratitude in a weird kind of way that we are being treated as children, and this is discipline, where God is discipling us and helping us to become like Christ through these difficulties that we go through.

Question 17:

How important is it to remain faithful to Jesus?

John wrote the book of Revelation to encourage his readers to remain faithful to Christ in the midst of suffering. John's original readers faced both persecution and temptation and needed to know, just like we do today, why they shouldn't give up. How important is it to remain faithful to Jesus?

Dr. M. William Ury

I think Jesus placed this concept of faithfulness before his disciples, before us, so continually. He did that because he wanted to emphasize the relationship at the base of all salvation ... Way back when I was just becoming a disciple of Jesus, somebody preached a sermon, and I'll never forget the four points. He said every disciple has to have a heart for God, to be available to Jesus, to be faithful to him, and to be teachable. Now, 39 years later I've thought to myself, it really doesn't get much deeper than that. Faithfulness is what Jesus offered to us as the joy of walking with him, knowing him intimately, but he also wants my responsiveness daily to him. He's not forcing me to obey him. He's not making me follow a law. He says, I need a faithful heart no matter what your emotions are today, no matter what you feel is going on in the world, badly or good, I need a faithful bride. I need a faithful servant, a faithful lover of my own heart. And that's what I think he was getting at with guys like me who tend to look at the world in terms of how I can define spirituality. The Lord says there's something much deeper than that. I want a faithful heart. Just like a married couple, that's the foundation of true love. Faithfulness no matter what comes down the road. So the Lord requires faithfulness, but he also enables faithfulness by his Holy Spirit's presence.

Dr. James M. Hamilton

The book of Revelation is out to teach that remaining faithful to Jesus is more important than staying alive, so people are called, for instance in Revelation 2, to be faithful unto death because Jesus is worth more than life. And so everything, *everything* rests on whether or not we're faithful to Jesus. If we're not faithful to him, we lose everything. If we are faithful to him, we gain more than we could ever imagine.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Jesus placed such a strong emphasis on faithfulness to God. He did this because faithfulness is an expression of trust. It's an expression of realizing God really does deserve our faithfulness, our trust, our obedience, our devotion, above all else. When you disobey doctor's orders, you're not just saying something about the orders; you're saying something about the doctor. And when you disobey God, you're not just saying something about his commands that you're disregarding, you're saying something about the God who gave those commands. And so, faithfulness is an expression of trust. It's an expression of seeing God for who he is, and then of course, doing what he says. And so when Jesus comes, he submits to the will of the Father as the Son, but he also displays for us what our lives as human beings should look like, obeying God, being faithful to him. Jesus becomes the faithful one, the one who we put our faith in because he always expressed faithfulness to God by obeying God. So, faithfulness to God is an expression of obedience, it's an expression of daily devotion and trust in who he is. Paul in Romans talks about the Christian life in his apostolic ministry as one that should lead to the obedience of faith. It's a beautiful expression, which in some ways summarizes the Christian life. We see God for who he is, we put our faith in him, and that naturally leads to obedience. We obey the God that we trust.

One of the major themes that runs through the book of Revelation is the theme of the kingdom of God. We see this in the book's vivid imagery depicting God in his throne room and Jesus as his vassal king. John reminds us that we have a king who is worthy of our honor and allegiance, who will one day bring the coming kingdom that far surpasses anything we know now. And as we persevere through our suffering and trials, we can be assured that he is faithful and that we will be richly blessed when Christ returns in glory.

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