

The Book of Revelation

LESSON
THREE

THE KING AND HIS
KINGDOM



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The Book of Revelation

Lesson Three

The King and His Kingdom

INTRODUCTION

After Jesus was arrested, he was brought before Pontius Pilate, and Pilate asked him if he was the king of the Jews. Jesus didn't answer the question directly. Instead he said, "My kingdom is not of this world ... my kingdom is not from this place." Now Pilate knew Caesar and he had seen his palace. He had a very definite idea of what a king should look like. And this man standing before him looked nothing like a king. Imagine how unbelievable Jesus' words must have seemed to him.

Perhaps even believers today may be tempted to question whether or not Jesus is actually king. After all, if we look around us, it's easy to see opposition to God's reign throughout this world. But Jesus' answer to Pilate's question is actually one of the most prominent themes in the book of Revelation. Jesus does reign as king, but his kingdom is not from this world. And the book of Revelation gives us hope that his kingdom is coming. We can experience it now in part, but we will experience it fully when Christ returns. And because final victory in this world belongs to Christ, John calls us to love him and to remain loyal to him until he returns.

This is the third lesson in our series on *The Book of Revelation*, and we have entitled it "The King and His Kingdom." This lesson will explore how the central theme of the kingdom of God runs through the entire book of Revelation and unites all its various teachings.

In an earlier lesson, we said that God rules his kingdom in ways that resemble ancient international treaties, especially those between great emperors or suzerains and the vassal kingdoms that served them. We also highlighted three features of these treaties or covenants that are shared in common with God's relationship with his people: the suzerain's benevolence toward his vassal is paralleled by God's benevolence to his people. The loyalty or obedience the suzerain required from his vassal is paralleled by the loyalty God requires of his people. And the consequences for the vassal that would result from the vassal's loyalty or disloyalty are paralleled by the blessings God grants to those who are faithful to him and the curses he brings against those who are unfaithful to him. All three of these covenant features are prominent throughout the book of Revelation.

Our lesson on "The King and His Kingdom" will divide into four parts that roughly follow the basic contours of these ancient covenants. First, we'll consider the kingship that God holds as the divine suzerain or emperor, as well as the kingship that Jesus holds as God's vassal king. Second, we'll explore the way Revelation highlights God's benevolence toward his covenant people. Third, we'll look at the requirement of loyalty that God demands from his people. And fourth, we'll turn to the consequences that result from loyalty and disloyalty to God. Let's start with the kingship of God as the divine suzerain and Jesus as his vassal.

KINGSHIP

Our discussion of the kingship of God and Jesus will focus on two matters. First, we'll survey God's kingship as the suzerain over all creation. And second, we'll describe Christ's kingship as God's vassal or servant king. Let's begin by looking at God's kingship.

GOD'S KINGSHIP

Many parts of Scripture, such as Psalm 103:19, describe God as the omnipotent king and ruler over all creation. He has complete power and authority over everything he's created. And he exercises that power and authority by governing the universe and all its creatures.

God has the right to rule over all creation because he is the creator. He made it. It belongs to him, and he has the right to rule over it. And there's a passage in the Psalms — Psalm 24:1-2 — that makes it very clear that this is true: “The Lord owns the earth and all it contains, the world and all who live in it, for” — or because — “he set its foundation upon the seas and established it upon the ocean currents.” So he owns it. He rules over it because he made it. It belongs to him.

— Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.

God doesn't derive his authority from outside of himself. He is his own authority. His attributes, all of them, are authoritative. But of course, it's not the kind of authority we're used to as human beings, which can be tyrannical, or capricious, or arbitrary. It's authority that is good because God is good. But we can trust his authority because he has an amazing track record. The greatest proof of his authority is, of course, sending his son to die for our sins and to be raised up for our justification. No other philosophy, no other god remotely comes to this kind of answer. So God's authority is in itself, but it's proven over and over again in Jesus Christ.

— Dr. William Edgar

The book of Revelation frequently speaks of God as the great king over all creation, and emphasizes his active, powerful reign over the universe. We see this in John's greeting to his readers in Revelation 1:4-6. We see it in the description of the heavenly throne room throughout Revelation 4-5. We see it also in the fact that a multitude from every nation gathers before God's heavenly throne and praises him in Revelation 7:9-10. We can even see it in the fact that the angels do the same thing in

verses 11 and 12. And we see it in the constant references to God on his throne throughout the rest of the book.

As just one example, listen to how John greeted the churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 1:4-6:

John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen (Revelation 1:4-6).

Notice how many references there are to God's kingdom in these few short verses. God is on his throne; Jesus rules over the kings of the earth; and the church is the kingdom that serves God.

The topic of the kingdom of God is a massive topic in Scripture, and everyone pretty much agrees that it was the central message of Jesus' teaching. So what does the kingdom of God mean? Ultimately, it means that God is king, that God is sovereign, that God is Lord, that he is the sovereign Lord of the universe. In terms of its statement or its references in Scripture, it really has two main focuses or foci in Scripture. One is that God is the sovereign Lord of all things from beginning to end — throughout history, in every time, in every place, God is king. The other is the manifestation of that kingship in terms of his lordship over human history and over human beings.

— Dr. Mark L. Strauss

The kingdom of God is the rightful, true reign of God in willing people who rightly recognize God's rightful claim on their lives, who lovingly, trustingly, fully and willingly surrender to the sovereign lordship of God. Now, that means that the church is in some way the visible manifestation of the kingdom of God. The church is the way that God's kingdom is made visible in creation, in history, right now. But that surrender that we experience now is only a precursor. Ultimately, God will renew all things. God will destroy every enemy. God will remove every impediment from our perfectly knowing him and our completely obeying him. He will remove those impediments. That's the ultimate promise of God. But right now, we participate in an anticipatory way willingly, lovingly, freely by acknowledging in Jesus Christ God's salvation and God's lordship over our lives. And

through that, the church bears witness to the ultimate gift of the kingdom that is promised in the *eschaton*.

— Dr. Steve Blakemore

Just like ancient near-eastern emperors, God appointed servants to carry out his commands — vassals who would rule over and administer his kingdom on his behalf. In general terms, God assigned this role to the human race, under the headship of a succession of covenant administrators.

As we saw in a prior lesson, the covenant administrations developed in six major covenants that God made with his people: the covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Christ. The first two covenants — those made with Adam and Noah — identified God as the suzerain king over the entire earth, and marked the human race as the vassal nation that carried out his will on earth. Under the terms of these covenants, God's sovereignty still extends to all the nations of the earth; every single person is accountable to him.

After his covenants with Adam and Noah, God made covenants with Abraham, Moses and David that extended his kingship in a special way over the nation of ancient Israel.

As just one example, listen to what God said to the nation of ancient Israel in Exodus 19:4-6:

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:4-6).

In this passage, God reminded the Israelites of the benevolence he had shown them when he redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. He mentioned the Israelites' responsibility to demonstrate their loyalty through obedience to the covenant he was making with them. And he indicated the consequences of blessings they would receive if they were obedient to the covenant.

In the covenant with David in particular, God established David's dynasty as the conduit of God's blessing and judgments for his people. This covenant is mentioned in passages like 2 Samuel 7:1-17, Psalm 89 and Psalm 132. It states that David's sons were God's vassal kings. They represented the entire kingdom of Israel before God. As in all other covenants, God showed benevolence, expected loyalty and reminded the house of David of the consequences of his blessings and curses.

Later in Israel's history, David's descendants failed so badly that the entire nation of Israel was cursed and exiled by God. But even in exile, the prophets of Israel predicted that in the last days God would renew his covenant through a righteous Son of David. In Jeremiah 31:31, the prophet Jeremiah referred to this renewal as a new covenant. This new covenant would be God's ultimate display of benevolence. He would transform the hearts of his people so that they would be loyal to him. They would enjoy his unending covenant blessings, and would never be cursed again. At the same time, God would

render eternal judgment on all those who opposed him, his vassal king and the people of his kingdom.

God's covenants with David and ancient Israel were always intended to extend their blessings beyond David and Israel. God's reign over David's house was supposed to benefit the entire nation of Israel, and Israel's blessings were supposed to benefit the entire world. We can see this in Psalms 2, 67; Isaiah 2:2-4; and Amos 9:11-15. God would send a redeemer through David's house, and that redeemer would save Israel. And through Israel, he would rescue the entire creation.

Right now, God is redeeming the church through Christ, and incorporating us into his holy, covenant people. As a result, the church is now one kingdom with the Old Testament nation of Israel.

Listen to how this covenantal relationship is expressed in Revelation 1:5-6:

Jesus Christ ... loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Revelation 1:5-6).

These verses indicate that because Jesus died to free us from our sins, we're now God's special possession and nation. We even bear the same title God gave to Israel in the Old Testament: "a kingdom and priests."

God gave this title to ancient Israel in Exodus 19:6, where one of the covenant blessings was that Israel would be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Many people through the centuries have argued about the nature of the kingdom of God. It's a clear description that we find in the Bible, and yet just exactly what it means has been a source of a lot of controversy. I think we can say, though, that in its essence, at the bottom, the kingdom of God describes God's rule in the world, in the church and in the individual human heart, so that if you and I are living God's life according to the Scriptures, we can say that we are participating in the kingdom of God.

— Dr. John Oswalt

What is the kingdom of God? Well, certainly we could describe that a number of ways, but I think a very helpful way is by saying it is where God's kingdom is established — it's a realm in which God's kingdom is established through his king which leads to the praise of God, the glory of God, and has ramifications in all sorts of ways for life on earth. And so we see the kingdom of God very prominently in the teaching of Jesus. And what we find in the New Testament is Jesus is that king who is powerfully bringing the kingdom of God into our world. The technical term is eruption. There's an in breaking; there's a very powerful entrance of God into our world by means of his messianic King. A great way to say what the kingdom is comes from

Geerhardus Vos, and he says, the kingdom comes where the gospel is spread, hearts are changed, sin and error overcome, righteousness cultivated, and a living communion with God established.

— Dr. Brandon Crowe

God's goal has always been to extend his heavenly kingdom to earth, and to populate earth with faithful people. In heaven, God's will is already done perfectly. But on earth, his creatures often refuse to do his will. They refuse to acknowledge God as king, and the kingdoms of this world often oppose God's reign. So, when Jesus prayed the Lord's Prayer, his petition was that one day all of these opposing kingdoms would be defeated, so that only God's kingdom would remain.

Listen to how Revelation 11:15 talks about that future day:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever (Revelation 11:15).

God's special kingdom will endure until it conquers and fills the whole world. This is the final destination of biblical prophecy. When Jesus returns in glory, God's special reign will encompass every kingdom on earth. This same hope is taught in Jeremiah 31:31-34, Zechariah 14:9, and many other passages of Scripture.

God's kingship far surpasses the analogies found in the ancient Near East. In the ancient world, human suzerains never fully lived up to the benevolence they promised in their covenants. They never perfectly evaluated the loyalty of their subjects, and they never perfectly dispensed covenant consequences. But in God's covenant our divine suzerain fully lives up to his benevolent promises. He perfectly evaluates our loyalty. And he dispenses perfect discipline and judgment in the form of consequences of covenant blessings and curses. And as we're about to see, he sent Jesus Christ as his royal Son to be perfectly loyal to God on our behalf and to bear the consequences of our disloyalty so we can have salvation in him.

With this understanding of God's universal kingship in mind, we're ready to turn to the related theme of Christ's kingship as God's servant or vassal king.

CHRIST'S KINGSHIP

Jesus's kingship needs to be understood in light of the ancient Davidic kingship because Jesus is the ideal David. He is HaMashiach, the Messiah. And of course in the Old Testament, the Davidic kingship is patterned after something that we see in the ancient Near Eastern world, so-called suzerain-vassal relationship where the suzerain, the king, rules over his subjects, usually by treaty. And David is God's chosen ruler over the world. And so there's a sense in which God chose David to be his vice-regent to rule on his behalf. And of course Jesus is the one who ultimately fulfills that.

— Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.

It might sound strange to think about Jesus as a vassal or servant king rather than as the suzerain of the universe. After all, Jesus is God, and God is the creator and ruler of everything that exists. We affirm very strongly that Jesus is fully divine, but it's important to remember that Jesus isn't only God. He's also fully human. And as a human being, he sits on the very human throne of his father David, who held the human office of king over God's vassal nation, ancient Israel. In this sense, Jesus' kingship is a human office. And therefore, Jesus is God's vassal, just as David was in the Old Testament.

The covenantal structure of the Bible is really rooted in the treaty agreements between ancient Near Eastern kings. And oftentimes the suzerain would be the great king and there would be a vassal king related in this covenant with the great king. The book of Revelation talks about Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as the King — the Davidic king. And so that language reveals a couple of things. One of the things is it shows that Jesus not only reveals who God is, but he also reveals true humanness, the full nature of what it means to be a human being. And so in his role in the New Testament as the son of David, the Son of God language actually, oftentimes, most often, refers to his role as the Davidic king, the Messiah. And in that sense, he represents a historic people. In the case of the book of Revelation, it's the people of God spread throughout all the nations, and he is our king, our representative to the Father, or the suzerain. So he is our king in history, in time, a full human being who represents his people to the Father. Of course, also, he represents God to us, but that doesn't diminish the fact that he's fully human as well and represents us to God.

— Dr. Greg Perry

The name Christ is a title that directly refers to the office of Davidic king. The word Christ simply means anointed one. It's an Old Testament term that was frequently applied to Davidic kings because they were anointed when they took office. We see this in places like 2 Chronicles 6:42; Psalm 2:2, 6; Psalm 18:50; Psalm 20:6, 9; and Psalm 45:1-2. This is also why Jesus is called God's Christ in places like Revelation 11:15 and 12:10. He's God's anointed one — his vassal king.

As the great Son of David, Jesus fulfills all the aspects of the new covenant that were anticipated in the Old Testament. In him, God's greatest benevolence is displayed. Christ himself kept all the requirements of loyalty on our behalf. He suffered the consequences of covenant curses when he died in our place. And he received the consequences of covenant blessings when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

Jesus secured his place as God's human vassal king by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. His death took away any power that sin had to condemn and ruin God's people.

As we read in Revelation 12:10-11:

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 12:10-11).

Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, Satan has been defeated. And Christ now has authority in God's kingdom so that his salvation can come to his people.

And Jesus' obedience earned him the reward of resurrection from the dead and a seat of authority far above any created authority, whether human, angelic or demonic.

As he said after his resurrection in Matthew 28:18-19:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-19).

Of course, in his divine nature, Jesus never received authority. He always had it. But when he rose again from the dead, Jesus said that God the Father gave him kingly authority over the nations, meaning that he had become the Father's human vassal king over the entire heavens and earth.

After his resurrection, when Jesus ascended into heaven, he was enthroned as king. The New Testament makes this clear in passages like Hebrews 1:3, 10:12, and 12:2, when it says that Jesus sat down at the right hand of God the Father. This imagery indicates that the Father is the great high king or suzerain, and that Jesus his Son is the human vassal that serves and represents him. Jesus is the final king over David's house, and over all other human kingdoms on earth. And through him the entire world will be renewed. Since his enthronement, Jesus has reigned as king over the church. And he's been expanding his kingdom by bringing salvation to the ends of the earth.

In stark contrast to human kings, God has sent his Son as the perfect vassal king to purchase our redemption at the cost of the cross. He demonstrated his loyalty in his earthly life and suffered the consequences of our disloyalty and he did it on the cross. He gave his life to purchase our forgiveness and loyalty, and he continues to defend and protect us. We should respond to his gracious rule with loving reverence expressed in loyal obedience to our benevolent God and king.

Now that we've explored the suzerain kingship of God the Father and the vassal kingship of Jesus, let's consider the way the book of Revelation describes God's benevolence in terms of the kingdom of God.

BENEVOLENCE

God's benevolence as the suzerain of the covenant can be seen in many ways throughout the book of Revelation. Without a doubt, his greatest benevolence was

sending his Son to die for our sins. This theme is mentioned in places like Revelation 1:5; 5:9-10; 7:14; and 14:3-4.

But we also see God's royal benevolence for his people in the way he calls us to himself and makes us part of his kingdom, as in Revelation 1:6; 11:15; and 17:14.

In his kindness he exempted his people from many of the judgments that were threatened against unbelievers in the book, as in Revelation 7:3-4 and 9:4.

Even the prophetic warnings to the churches in Revelation are benevolent opportunities for us to repent. God restrained his judgment so that people would have the opportunity to escape condemnation. John recorded this type of benevolence in Revelation 2:5, 16, 21 and 3:3, 19.

But probably the most frequent way God's grace and kindness are seen in Revelation is through his defense of his people in the midst of spiritual war. So, in this lesson, we'll focus our discussion of God's kingly benevolence specifically on the way he protects his people from being destroyed by these conflicts.

Well, Spiritual warfare is the reality of any serious Christian in my estimation. It's understanding that there is a spirit world, that there is a Satan, and that those spirits — that Satan — doesn't like us. If Satan attacked Jesus, then you can rather imagine Satan is going to attack the life of the believer today, and we've got to be ready for it. If the first thing that happened when Jesus goes to Decapolis is he sees a spirit-filled person, a demon-possessed person, you can imagine there are such things as demon possession today, and we've got to take it very seriously, and we've got to make sure that we're holy as he is holy in order to take it seriously.

— Dr. Matt Friedeman

In the New Testament, spiritual warfare isn't primarily our own internal struggles against sin, but an ongoing war between God and the evil spiritual powers at work in this world. And one way God engages in this conflict is by defending his kingdom against these evil forces. As we mentioned in an earlier lesson, the book of Revelation often discloses the workings of the supernatural realm of God and the preternatural realm of angels and demons, and talks about their influence in the natural realm where we live. And the essence of all spiritual warfare in the lives of Christians is that these preternatural forces are in combat with each other, that they influence our world, that demons try to harm our lives and to make us disloyal to God, and that God employs angels to protect us from demonic influence and activities.

The topic of spiritual warfare is very complicated for Christians because it manifests differently for each person. And one result of this is that when Christians discuss the topic, they often go to extremes. One extreme is that people try to explain everything that happens in terms of nature or science, and they ignore the reality of spiritual warfare. But not everything that happens can be easily explained by science. Another extreme is that people look for demons behind every

bush and see spiritual confrontation in everything. I think the truth is somewhere in between. When we get ready for worship services, or actively participate in spiritual, evangelistic projects, or help other people spiritually, we often encounter spiritual opposition. It might manifest as an illness, or an official's unwillingness to help you. It might be obstacles appearing from nowhere, that you can't explain in ordinary ways. In fact, our material world is thoroughly permeated by the spiritual world. And that's why many physical processes that take place in our lives may be echoes of events in the spiritual world. But the cause of these events isn't the main point. They may have spiritual causes, or even be the result of our sin. But wherever we are and whatever happens to us, we have to understand that our Lord protects us. We can rely on his power — his strength. We can draw support from him. And this gives us confidence, no matter what spiritual manifestations we encounter. The reality is that we belong to our Lord, body and soul. And apart from our heavenly Father's will, not a hair can fall from our head. That's why in any spiritual confrontation, we can be calm and sure that the victory will be the Lord's, and — with him — ours as well.

— Rev. Ivan Bespalov, translation

Christians are assured victory in spiritual war. There's nothing the demons can do to destroy our salvation, or to shake our inheritance in God's kingdom. Spiritual war can be disheartening and trying and even frightening. But because of God's benevolence, it can never succeed against us in the long run.

We'll divide our discussion of God's covenant benevolence into three parts. First, we'll look at the way God defended his kingdom in the Old Testament. Second, we'll see how he defended his kingdom in the New Testament outside the book of Revelation. And third, we'll focus on his benevolent protection in the book of Revelation itself. Let's begin with God's benevolence in the Old Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is filled with accounts of battles. Israel was frequently at war with neighboring nations. And the Israelites even fought among themselves at various times. But even though most descriptions of wars in the Old Testament highlight human beings that fought with physical weapons, Scripture occasionally pulls back the veil to show us that invisible spiritual battles were also taking place. And in fact, these invisible battles greatly influenced the success or failure of the human armies.

These invisible battles were always fought between God and his holy angels on the one side, and Satan and his demonic armies on the other side. Although most of the human armies that opposed Israel believed that they were following other gods, verses like Deuteronomy 32:17 made it clear that the false gods of the nations were actually demons.

In the Old Testament, angels and demons are portrayed sometimes as being a part of or standing behind geopolitical conflict. It seems as if the angels and the demons had a hand in how these events and how these conflicts would play out. For instance, we see in Daniel 10 an instance where Gabriel, an angel, comes to Daniel and says, “I heard your prayer. I left a while ago to come find you, but I was held up with a conflict including the angel Michael involving the kings of Persia.” Now to a certain extent, these are mysterious texts and it’s hard for us to understand exactly what that means and how these events would have played out, and what the process would have been of this conflict. But we see that angels and demons are in some way standing behind or affecting geopolitical conflict. For the Old Testament audience, these conflicts between nations were not strictly human or natural events, but they all had a supernatural backdrop. Angels were in conflict with demons. Supernatural hosts were battling in the same way that the earthly hosts were battling. They understood this backdrop to everything that occurred around them, and so Daniel would not have been surprised to find that Gabriel might have been withheld or might have been hindered in his coming to him because of something that was going on with the princes of Persia.

— Dr. Scott Redd

One set of examples that highlights the invisible battles fought between angels and demons can be found in Exodus 7–15. In the days of Moses, God’s people were enslaved by the Egyptians. But God led his angelic armies into battle against Egypt and their pagan gods, in order to rescue his people from their tyranny. He began by sending ten plagues against the Egyptians, including his angel of death that killed the firstborn in every Egyptian household. Then, in a climactic display of his power, he delivered his people by drowning the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.

Throughout the entire Bible, one of the main ways that God is revealed, both Old Testament and New Testament, one of the main ways he is revealed is that he is a warrior. One of the most famous passages of course is Exodus 15:3 where Moses is singing at the Red Sea after the defeat of the Egyptians and he says, “Yahweh the Lord is a warrior, Yahweh is his name.” Yahweh is short for a longer expression for God, Yahweh Sabaoth which means Yahweh of the armies. And so even there, what’s being said by Moses in Exodus 15:3 is that at the very heart of who God is, at the essence of who God is, is this idea of warrior. God is a warrior.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Then, in Exodus 15:11, Moses sang:

Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11).

Moses and his readers knew the answer to this question. No god is like the Lord. After all, the Egyptian gods were completely incapable of stopping the true God from destroying the entire Egyptian army.

The Old Testament is full of examples like these. God frequently identified himself as Israel's warrior king that led them into battle. But these battles weren't just against human enemies; they always involved God going to war against the false gods of the nations.

For instance, in 2 Kings 19, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, taunted Hezekiah, king of Judah, because he believed the Assyrian gods were stronger than Israel's God.

So, in 2 Kings 19:17-19, Hezekiah offered this prayer to God:

It is true, O Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands. Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God (2 Kings 19:17-19).

Hezekiah understood that a battle with the Assyrians wasn't just against Sennacherib and his armies. It was a spiritual battle between the Lord and the gods of Assyria. That's why he prayed not just for victory in battle, but for the Lord to be exalted over their gods.

And God answered his prayer. That night an angel put to death 185,000 men in the Assyrian armies, and Sennacherib returned home in defeat. Hezekiah's army didn't even have to face the Assyrians in battle. God's spiritual power completely destroyed the human army.

One of the most significant depictions of the Lord in the Old Testament is God's role as king, and as a king, he would have multiple duties just like any other ancient Near Eastern king, multiple duties and functions that give light to his office as king. One of those functions would have been a warrior function. You see, in the ancient Near East, the king was considered the leader of the hosts, the leader of the armies of his nation, and as such, he was also the greatest warrior. So God, or the Lord being a warrior throughout the Old Testament depicts God as a king who is a warrior king. He goes out and defends, he fights for, he delivers, and he protects his own people. God's role as a warrior king is a cause for consolation and comfort, but also a cause for confidence. As we go out into the world around us, God's people can be sure that their God is a warrior and that he

goes out and fights for them, and he protects them, and he defends them, and the victory will be his.

— Dr. Scott Redd

Old Testament stories of war aren't always explicit about the spiritual conflicts between the true God of Israel and the false gods of the nations. But even so, the Old Testament consistently demonstrates that physical battles are greatly influenced by spiritual battles.

Now that we've seen how God demonstrated his benevolence by defending his kingdom in the Old Testament, let's turn our attention to his benevolence in the spiritual warfare of the New Testament.

NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, spiritual warfare does not involve earthly military forces. So, its descriptions of God's benevolence in spiritual war primarily address invisible conflicts in the preternatural realm, and how these spiritual conflicts influence the natural realm. Now, just like in the Old Testament, God, angels and demons are still involved in human wars and international politics. But the focus of God's benevolent protection in the New Testament is how he keeps his faithful people safe from demonic powers.

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament mentions many different ways that God benevolently protects his people. So, for the sake of time, we'll limit our discussion to just two. First, God's benevolent protection in spiritual war is expressed in Christ's victory

Christ's Victory

The New Testament presents Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension as a victory not only over sin and its consequences, but also over God's spiritual enemies.

Jesus' life conquered the demons in many ways, especially as demonstrated through exorcisms. We see this in passages like Matthew 12:25-28, where Jesus taught that he was able to drive out demons with great power and force because the kingdom of God had come.

And regarding Christ's death, listen to what Paul wrote in Colossians 2:15:

Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15).

In this verse, the powers and authorities are demonic powers. And they have been disarmed and defeated because of what Christ did on the cross. We see this same idea in Hebrews 2:14.

Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven also extended God's benevolent protection to his people. For example, they resulted in Jesus receiving authority over all his spiritual enemies, so that he could protect and bless the church. This idea is clearly taught in Matthew 28:18-20, Ephesians 1:19-23, and 1 Peter 3:22.

A second way the New Testament talks about God's royal benevolence in spiritual war is by describing the Holy Spirit's power that enables us to resist the devil and his schemes.

Holy Spirit's Power

Jesus gained power over all his and our spiritual enemies when he lived in obedience to God, died on the cross, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. But at the present time, he hasn't used that power to destroy our enemies completely. In fact, God still allows the demons to influence the world in various ways. But he's also empowered us by his Holy Spirit, so that we can resist them. We see this Galatians 3:2-3, Ephesians 3:16, Colossians 1:9-11, and many other places.

As just one example, listen to James 4:5-7:

The spirit he caused to live in us ... gives us more grace... Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:5-7).

Here, James taught that the grace we receive from the Holy Spirit empowers us for spiritual war, in this case by keeping us loyal to God and helping us resist demonic temptations and influences.

I think the first thing the Holy Spirit does to empower us for spiritual warfare is to make us aware of the spiritual realm. We tend to gravitate toward just what we can see and feel. But to become aware that there is a spiritual realm that we engage in and have a battle within is so important. So he makes us aware of the spiritual realm in the first place. He gives us conviction of sin. As we overcome sin in our lives, the first thing is to be aware of that sin, and then he empowers us to overcome sin. Also, to lead us to prayer and engage the battle at that front is vital in his role in our lives.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

In Ephesians 6, Paul used the metaphor of a soldier's armor and weapons to describe the ways God protects us in spiritual war. Specifically, he talked about Christians putting on the full armor of God.

Listen to his words in Ephesians 6:12-13:

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and

against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand (Ephesians 6:12-13).

Then in verses 17 and 18, Paul went on to say that the Holy Spirit plays a critical role both in forming this armor and as our motivation and power in battle. Listen to what he said:

Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions (Ephesians 6:17-18).

Until Jesus returns to finish what he started, the New Testament calls us to engage in spiritual warfare against the preternatural forces that are still at work in this world. And it promises that the Holy Spirit will give us the tools and the strength to do it.

As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:4:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Our weapons have divine power because they come from the Holy Spirit. And they are effective against every spiritual danger, from false teachings to the devil himself.

Let's face it, the Evil One is going to give us grief on earth. When that happens, the question is, is there any hope? Am I all by myself? Is God aware of this and doing something about it? And the resounding answer is, yes he is, and he has offered us abundant power to overcome any attack of the Evil One. Now one of my favorite passages along that line I'd like to read to you just now. 1 John 4:3-4, John says, "...but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." God promises we have greater power. And it is a power struggle. The Evil One has a lot of power, more than we have, except for the fact that we have God.

— Mr. Steve Douglass

Now that we've seen how God demonstrated his benevolence in the spiritual warfare of the Old Testament and New Testament, let's turn our attention to the way he protects his people and fights against their enemies in the book of Revelation.

BOOK OF REVELATION

And I think what the book of Revelation teaches us, particularly in a chapter like chapter 12, is that what's going on on the earth is related to what's going on in the heavenlies and that spiritual warfare really has to do with what's really going on in history and what's really going on in our lives, and that spiritual forces are engaged in history, that the great dragon Satan is at work and behind the beast and that these are related, and that the protection that Christians need is in actual churches and communities that exist in Laodicea and at Ephesus, but their protection is also in the Lamb, in the risen Lamb. So the interconnection between what's going on in the heavenlies with Satan and with Jesus and the battle that's going on there is manifest in history, not only in the first century but now. And we see those things going on in the world now where Christians are suffering for their faith. It's not just political forces that are at work. It's demonic forces that are at work.

— Dr. Greg Perry

Throughout the book of Revelation, John alerted Christians to the spiritual conflict that has been going on since humanity's fall into sin, and that will continue until Christ comes again. John symbolically described this spiritual conflict as warfare between the beast and the woman in Revelation 12, and as the warfare of the beast of the sea and the beast of the earth in Revelation 13. John wanted his readers to know that the persecution they were experiencing, and the temptations they were facing, resulted directly from the spiritual conflict between Christ and his enemies.

Like the Old Testament, John pointed out that spiritual battles between angels and demons affected human politics. We see this, for example, in the way the kings of the earth gather to battle against God in Revelation 16:14-16. Another clear example is the explanation that the heads of the beast in Revelation 17, as well as its horns, are earthly kings. And of course, John's original audience was itself suffering persecution from earthly governments that were moved at least in part by demonic forces.

But like the New Testament, John also explained that the spiritual battles fought by his original audience took place primarily in the preternatural realm. They were personal struggles to remain loyal to Christ, to resist sin, and to advance God's kingdom through the gospel; they were not calls to take up arms against other human beings. But in every case — whether he was speaking about cosmic struggles, or human politics, or personal struggles — John assured his audience that God was their benevolent protector. He would guard them against overwhelming attacks, strengthen them to remain faithful, and eventually grant them unchallenged peace.

The book of Revelation focuses a lot on spiritual warfare. It pictures a radical dichotomy between God and Christ and his servants on one side and Satan and his servants on the other side. That's to help us to understand that it's a question of allegiance — are you following God

or are you following self and in the process really belonging to the kingdom of Satan? Seeing that radical dichotomy is important for us. The second thing I would draw attention to is that it is asking about our commitments. It's asking about where our minds are going, where our hearts are going, not simply our external behavior. The third thing I think that's involved is that Satan is a counterfeiter, that he has things that are close enough to the truth to suck people in, but they're fake, and identifying that fake character which can still be attractive is one of the challenges for us today.

— Dr. Vern S. Poythress

In response to the stresses and problems caused by spiritual war, the book of Revelation offers its readers at least three different ways to think about God's benevolent protection. First, it emphasizes that Christ has already secured victory for all his faithful people.

Revelation emphasizes that Christ's life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension secured our ultimate victory in spiritual war. Revelation chapters 4 and 5 present this victory clearly, with Jesus pictured as the slain Lamb of God that is found worthy to open the scrolls of judgment against God's enemies. Christ's victory over his enemies didn't put an end to the fighting. But it did ensure that eventually his enemies will be utterly destroyed, and his faithful people will perfectly be blessed. In this sense, God's benevolence and protection take the form of sealing us in victory. There is no way we can fail to conquer because the victory already belongs to Christ. We simply have to persevere until he brings it to pass.

A second way Revelation calls attention to God's benevolent protection in spiritual war is by reminding us that the Holy Spirit is presently applying Christ's victory to the lives of believers.

When Christ secured our victory in spiritual war, he won the right to share the blessings from that victory with his faithful people. And in his benevolence, he appointed the Holy Spirit to apply those blessings to our lives, or as we might say, to distribute those blessings to us.

Many of these benevolent blessings relate to things we see in the book of Revelation. For instance, the Roman Empire has fallen. In fact, all the powers throughout history that have tried to extinguish the church have failed. Far from being defeated, God's kingdom is advancing to every nation, tribe, people and language. And according to Revelation 7, it will eventually complete that task.

The third way that Revelation highlights God's benevolent protection in spiritual war is by reminding us that when Christ returns, God will end this battle by finalizing his victory over our spiritual enemies by utterly destroying them.

Revelation gives us confidence that when Christ returns, Satan and his followers will be ultimately destroyed. They will be rendered entirely powerless to tempt and trouble us. Their punishment will limit them so greatly that it will be impossible for them to fight any longer.

Revelation 17 and 18 describe the punishment of the great prostitute, Babylon, and the punishment of all the kings and inhabitants of the earth that followed her.

Revelation 20 recounts the final defeat of the dragon and his armies. And Revelation 21 and 22 teach that the new heaven and new earth will be completely free from the presence of evil.

When all God's enemies have been rendered powerless, the great spiritual war will end, and God's faithful people will live in uninterrupted peace. This will be the ultimate expression of God's benevolence and protection; we will be completely safe forever.

Throughout the book of Revelation, we can see God's benevolence in providing for and protecting his people. Jesus purchased victory for God's people on the cross, and rose again so that his victory could be applied to all God's faithful people. At the present time, the church experiences that victory in part. We have God's sure promise that when Christ returns, we'll fully enjoy that victory. All Christ's enemies will be judged, and we'll receive our glorious inheritance in the new heavens and the new earth.

So far in our lesson we've examined the covenant kingship of God and Christ as suzerain and vassal kings, and explored how Revelation highlights God's benevolence toward his covenant people. So, at this point, we're ready to turn to our third major topic: the loyalty God requires us to demonstrate as citizens of his kingdom.

LOYALTY

As we've seen, at least three features of our relationship with God parallel ancient suzerain-vassal treaties or covenants: God's benevolence toward us as his people; the loyalty or obedience God requires from us as his vassal kingdom; and the consequences of blessings in response to obedience, and curses in response to disobedience. At this point we want to focus on the loyal service God expects of the people he saves by his grace.

When he wrote the book of Revelation, the apostle John was conscious of the church's covenant relationship to God. And one of the reasons he wrote was to encourage the churches in Asia Minor to remain loyal to God throughout the challenges they faced. He wanted them to remember all the kindness God had shown them, as well as the blessings God offered, so that they would live in faithful obedience to the Lord.

You'll recall from a previous lesson that the churches addressed in Revelation faced many temptations to compromise their loyalty to God. John's original audience faced at least four different types of temptation to be disloyal to God.

First, the trade guilds had their own patron deities, and they required their members to worship these false gods. This tempted believers to engage in idolatry in order to gain the opportunity to work and conduct business.

Second, the Roman Empire required its subjects to worship its gods and its emperor. This tempted Christians to worship pagan gods in order to avoid punishment from the government.

Third, Judaism put pressure on Christians to abandon Christ. Judaism was given a special exemption from pagan worship, and Christianity was originally covered by this exemption. But as Judaism distanced itself from Christianity, this exemption ceased to

apply to the church. This tempted many Jewish Christians to abandon Christ and return to traditional Judaism, in order to avoid Roman persecution.

Fourth, wayward Christians throughout the Roman Empire compromised their faith by engaging in pagan practices and sexual immorality. And they encouraged others to follow them in their sin.

These temptations posed significant challenges to the loyalty of churches in Asia Minor. In this context, one important reason that John wrote was to undercut their loyalty to these rival groups, and to strengthen their loyalty to God.

Our examination of the theme of loyalty will focus on two primary expressions of loyalty found throughout the book of Revelation: perseverance and worship. Let's look first at Revelation's call to perseverance.

PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance can be defined as:

Remaining faithful to God in belief and actions despite temptation, opposition or discouragement.

To persevere is to overcome any and all forces that would incline us to abandon our faith in God or to rebel against him in a total and final way.

In response to the many temptations believers in Asia Minor faced, John repeatedly called his readers to persevere or overcome. These exhortations can be found in every letter to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, and throughout the rest of the book, too.

In the letters, we see them in Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; and 3:5, 12, 21. We also see them in places like Revelation 14:12; 16:15; 18:4; 20:4; 21:7; and 22:7, 11, 14. It's no exaggeration to say that perseverance is one of the most prominent themes in the entire book of Revelation.

In the central part of Revelation we see the language of overcoming a lot, just like we see it with the letters to the seven churches. In 11:7 and 13:7, we see the beast, or the evil one, overcoming the saints, or overcoming God's spokespersons, the witnesses for God, killing them. And yet, in 12:11 we get a heavenly perspective on the same conflict, and that is that they overcame him — in context, they overcame the devil — they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives even to the point of death. And Revelation goes on to speak of how these overcomers are standing before God's throne because they've triumphed over the beast like the Lamb who was slain. He's the conquering lion, but he's also portrayed as a lamb. Like the Lion who was the Lamb who overcame by martyrdom, these God's people overcome not by fighting the world, but they overcome through faith in God and through their testimony, because even when the world does its worst to us, we

overcome because we belong to God himself. The seven churches of Asia Minor each had different tests and that each were called to overcome. We each have different tests. We might be jealous of somebody else's tests or dreading somebody else's test, but we have our own, and yet each of us is called to overcome. Whatever the test is, the promise comes at the end of the book of Revelation in 21 that those who overcome, God says, "I will be their God and they will be my child."

— Dr. Craig S. Keener

We'll mention five types of perseverance that John highlighted in the book of Revelation, beginning with perseverance in faith.

In Hebrews 11:1, Scripture defines faith in this way:

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1).

It can be hard to trust God when the circumstances of our lives don't reflect the types of protection, provision and blessing we read about in Scripture. When things are going badly for us, it's easy to think that we've made a mistake, that we've been deceived, that the God of the Bible isn't real, and that we don't owe him any loyalty. And this was just as true in the first century as it is today. So, one of John's great concerns as he wrote the book of Revelation was to convince his readers that things were actually much different than they appeared on the surface. The world was much worse than it looked; and the kingdom of God was much better than anything they could imagine.

John's original audience faced many temptations to believe that things like pagan gods and the Roman Empire were a great source of blessing. Outwardly, these were powerful forces that offered security, pleasure, and prosperity. And by contrast, the Christian life was hard. Believers had difficulty in business. They were persecuted by the government. And the church didn't offer them anything like the worldly pleasures they could get from the pagans. These temptations made it easy for the churches in Asia Minor to abandon their faith in God, and to exchange it for faith in the world.

In response to these circumstances, John insisted that his readers be strong in faith. He wanted them to be confident in their belief that the systems of the world weren't as good as they looked, and that as hard as the Christian life might be, it's the only road to true security, pleasure and prosperity.

This is why the book of Revelation repeatedly describes worldly, sinful powers and desires as monstrous, ugly, deceitful, and corrupt. Yes, the kingdom of Satan and his followers wears a beautiful costume. But if we could see it as it really is, we'd be repulsed by its hideousness. And the same thing is still true today.

No matter how tempting sin is, and no matter how difficult and discouraging life can be as a follower of Christ, it's critical that we persevere in our belief that God is who he says he is, that he will do what he says he will do, and that he will bless us if we remain loyal to him.

Although perseverance in faith is the most important type of perseverance, the book of Revelation emphasizes that true faith manifests itself in other types of perseverance, too. For example, a second type of perseverance mentioned in Revelation is steadfast love for God.

The book of Revelation calls all believers to keep their love for God alive and strong. For instance, in Revelation 2:19, the church in Thyatira was praised for expressing their perseverance in love and faith. By contrast, in Revelation 2:4, the church in Ephesus was rebuked for losing its first love. This failure was so great that the Lord threatened to remove their lampstand, that is, he threatened to eliminate the church.

A third type of perseverance mentioned in Revelation relates to our Christian witness to others.

Churches that were faithful to Christ in John's day inevitably stood in stark contrast to the culture around them. So, John portrayed the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 as lampstands shining in the darkness of the world. As the letter to the church in Ephesus teaches us, when Christians compromised with the world, they lost their distinctive witness, and this effectively extinguished their witness to the world.

We see something similar in Revelation 7:10, where the great multitude in white robes gathered around the throne to praise God by repeating the proclamation that had been their witness to the world: "Salvation belongs to our God." Salvation couldn't be found in Caesar or in any other source, but only through the work of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. And this single truth made the witness of believers critically important. Unbelievers needed to see that their own worship was false and misled, and that only the church possessed the true message of life and hope.

A fourth way Revelation calls Christians to persevere is in moral purity.

Exhortations to moral purity are found frequently in the seven letters to the churches. For example, in Revelation 2:12-17, Jesus rebuked the church in Pergamum for accepting those who not only committed acts of sexual immorality but also encouraged others to join in their practices. And in Revelation 3:14-22, Jesus rebuked the church in Laodicea for worldliness because they valued wealth and comfort over their loyalty to Christ.

The fifth kind of perseverance we'll mention is standing firm in doctrine.

There are plenty of people all over the place who believe that they love God. But if their idea of God is completely wrong, not the true God, then the more they "serve" God, the further they fall from God. Doctrine is the basis of service, like a tree whose roots are underground and invisible. Many people see its branches and fruit, but they don't see how the root influences that fruit. Many shallow Christians today don't focus on doctrinal issues, but serious Christians know that doctrine is the basis of everything — it's very important.

— Rev. Dr. Stephen Tong, translation

Revelation consistently calls believers to maintain true doctrine, and not to compromise with worldly ideas. For instance, in Revelation 2:1-7, Jesus praised the

church in Ephesus for their fidelity to true Christian teaching, and for having the discernment to distinguish between true and false apostles. And in Revelation 2:20-23, the church in Thyatira was rebuked for its doctrinal compromises, specifically for tolerating the false prophet Jezebel.

The book of Revelation calls the church to persevere in a wide variety of ways. But Christians that find themselves challenged in these areas don't always know what to do in order to overcome the trials, temptations and suffering they face.

Thankfully, Revelation doesn't just teach us that we need to persevere. It also gives us practical instruction on how to persevere.

I think the practical steps that we can take to persevere in the face of trials — It's interesting, in the book of Revelation which is full of all kinds of really chaotic historical or other kinds of situations for Christians, that the practical steps are the same that they are in all of Scripture, that the people of God are called to faithfulness, to obedience, to what they know, what has been revealed to them. They're called into community, to stay together, to believe together, to worship together. They are called to testify together. Whatever the context, whatever the persecution, our perseverance is focused on what God wants us to be all the time, whether things are good or bad, and that is to live holy lives. And so I find the book of Revelation and other books like that very encouraging; it challenges to live holy lives, but also encouraging to say this is not an impossible thing. Even in the most critical of circumstances, the people of God are to maintain the means of grace and to speak forth the name of Christ, and to live in such a way where their responses to evil are distinctly different from other responses for those who are without Christ.

— Dr. William Ury

The book of Revelation lifts the veil of deception promoted by sinful human governments that oppose God. It discloses the beauty and wonder of God's kingdom and the power of Christ. It shows us that God loves his people and promises to bless them in his glorious kingdom. And it assures us of the future blessings we'll receive in the new heaven and new earth, if we faithfully persevere until the end. In short, it gives us every reason to be faithful to God, and to persevere in faithfulness throughout our entire lives, and throughout history, until Jesus returns to make all things new.

Death couldn't hold Jesus after he was crucified, and on the third day he rose from the dead. Something similar is true of the present circumstances of the world. Many earthly powers and groups oppose God, and many of God's people suffer. That can make life really discouraging. But we need to remember that even when life looks the most discouraging, God is still in control, and he still has our best interests at heart. And no matter what, he'll make good on his promises. Our present suffering isn't worthy of being compared with the glory we'll receive when Jesus returns. And that should motivate us to stand firm in our faith and commitment, be steadfast in love, to maintain our witness, to preserve the purity of our doctrine and of our lives. Because just as the darkness of Jesus'

death was followed by the light of his resurrection, the darkness of our present difficulties will eventually be followed by the light of his return and the fullness of his kingdom.

Now that we've seen how the book of Revelation exhorts perseverance in our loyalty to God, let's look at the way it encourages us to express our loyalty in worship.

WORSHIP

Despite the fact that John's original audience was suffering great persecution, the book of Revelation has a remarkable emphasis on worship. Revelation 4 and 5 describe an amazing scene of worship in the heavenly throne room, with twenty-four elders seated on thrones surrounding God's throne, and four living creatures flying in the throne room and praising God. Similar scenes of worship occur in over half of Revelation's 22 chapters.

While that might seem surprising at first, Revelation makes the connection between suffering and worship clear. Regardless of our present circumstances, even in times of distress, God is still perfect, holy, and good. And he's working all things together for our ultimate benefit, so that in the age to come he will bless us with our full inheritance in Christ.

While the book of Revelation offers many reasons for us to worship God, in this lesson we'll focus on three ideas that are summarized in the praise offered to God by the twenty-four elders in Revelation 5.

Listen to what the elders proclaimed in Revelation 5:9-10:

You were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth (Revelation 5:9-10).

The elders mentioned at least three reasons to praise God. First, Christ purchased or redeemed people from every tribe and language and people and nation. Second, Christ appointed these redeemed people to be a kingdom and priests. And third, he has ensured that in the future, they will reign on the earth.

Our exploration of loyalty expressed in worship will parallel this threefold emphasis of Revelation 5:9-10.

First, we'll see that Christ's work of redemption in the past makes God worthy of worship.

Second, we'll focus on worshiping God because he has given us honor in the present by appointing us to be his kingdom of priests.

And third, we'll see that he deserves our worship because of the blessings we'll receive in the future when we reign over the new heavens and earth. Let's look first at Christ's work of redemption in the past.

Past Redemption

Revelation frequently demonstrates that God is worthy to be worshiped by all his creatures. And it gives us beautiful pictures of how the saints in heaven worship him. And one reason Revelation gives us for worshiping God is the work of salvation that Christ has done for us.

Revelation 14:1-4 presents us with a beautiful picture of the redemption we have already received in Christ. In verse 1, John described believers as having the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father written on their foreheads. In verse 4, John wrote that believers were purchased from among men, and that we are presented as an offering to God and to the Lamb. And in response to this great salvation, the believers offered worship and praise to God, expressing their thanks in a new song.

Every believer should have the same response to the salvation we've received. We've all been purchased by Christ, and we've all been presented as an offering to God and to the Lamb. And we should all respond in thankfulness and praise, worshiping God and his Christ with joy and singing.

When we face hardships, it can be easy for us to doubt God's goodness, and to forget the good gifts he has given us in our salvation — gifts like forgiveness, a restored relationship with our creator and Lord, and eternal life.

We often need to be reminded that the redemption Christ has already accomplished for us and applied to us makes him worthy of our worship, regardless of our circumstances. God loved us enough to enter this sinful world, to endure tremendous sufferings and persecution, and to die on a cross for our sins. No other suffering or hardship in this world is worthy to be compared with the suffering that Christ endured for us. And that makes him worthy of all worship, praise and thanks.

Now that we've looked at how Christ's work of redemption in the past should inspire our loyal worship, let's turn to the honor God has given us in the present by making us his kingdom of priests.

Present Honor

At the present time, God reigns on his throne in his heavenly temple. And he calls his people on earth to be his kingdom of priests.

In the Old Testament, both kings and priests were highly honored because they had been chosen by God to represent him in his relationship with his covenant people. But they were allowed to prosper in these honored offices only as long as they were loyal to God as their great suzerain. We see this with regard to Old Testament kings in passages like 1 Kings 3:13-14, Jeremiah 34:4-5, and Daniel 4:34-37. And we see the connection between priestly loyalty and honor in places like 2 Chronicles 26:18, and Lamentations 4:12-16.

But even though only a select few in the Old Testament were chosen as kings and priests, the Old Testament looked forward to a day when all of God's faithful people would be both kings and priests on the earth.

As God told Israel in Exodus 19:5-6:

If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6).

According to the book of Revelation, the day that the Old Testament foresaw is already here. The church is now a kingdom of priests that reigns over the earth. We see this explicitly in Revelation 5:9-10, and 20:6, and it's implied in many other passages.

You know, God told Israel in Exodus 19 that God had chosen them to be a royal priesthood, an imperial priesthood as it were. And that language in Exodus 19 is used by Peter in the New Testament to refer to the church. And so this is the perspective that we're to have not only on ancient Israel as a whole but also on Christians as a whole, that we are a royal priesthood, a chosen people, a royal imperial priesthood. Now I know in many respects that sounds strange, because when we think of priests, what we normally think of is that priests do just a very limited number of things; they offer sacrifices, they pray, occasionally they sing, maybe they blow trumpets and are in choirs and things like that. But in reality, what the Bible is saying is that every legitimate, God-ordained activity on the earth from the beginning to the end has been an act of royal priesthood for those who serve God. It's not as if we have just some things that we do that are ministries to God — service of worship to him — and then other things that we do for ourselves or for no good reason at all. Rather, every single thing that we do as Christians is to be done heartily as unto the Lord because it is unto the Lord, whether it's your six days of work, whether it's sleeping, whether it's raising your children. Whatever it is, it is an activity of a royal priest because our job is to move the holiness of God throughout the world in anticipation of the new world to come when everyone who is left will live in this wondrously cleaned, holy, sanctified earth, and they will serve God forever as his royal priests.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Of course, there are many implications of this truth. For example, Christians are God's ambassadors on the earth. We are called to minister to him and to others. We are obligated to govern the earth responsibly, and so on. But the implication we'll focus on in this section of our lesson is that this honor should inspire us to worship.

For instance, in Revelation 5:8-14, there is a beautiful scene of worship in the heavenly courtroom. As part of this scene, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders all praise and worship Jesus the Lamb with harps, singing and incense.

Listen to what they sang about God's faithful people in Revelation 5:10:

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth (Revelation 5:10).

An important reason that Jesus deserves worship is that he has honored his people in the present by appointing them to serve as his priests, and as kings that will reign on the earth.

We see something similar in Revelation 4:10-11. In that passage, the elders in heaven responded to the honor and royal authority they had been given by falling down in front of Jesus, laying their crowns at his feet, and praising him.

Another example can be found in Revelation 7, where innumerable believers have been sealed as God's servants. Their response to the grace and honor they have been given is to praise the Lord for his goodness, mercy, and power.

And in Revelation 1:5-6, the apostle John himself modeled this behavior for us. Listen to what he said there:

To him who ... has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! (Revelation 1:5-6).

In these verses, John demonstrated that the church in all ages should respond to the honor we've received by worshiping the Lord that has blessed us as his kingdom of priests.

It may seem strange to talk about ministering to God or blessing God when we realize that he's independent, he has no unmet needs; he's completely self-sufficient. But in his relationship with us, we can bring him joy in the way we obey him or worship him, or live out our faithfulness. And so daily faithfulness, daily obedience and worship of God actually blesses God and brings delight to his heart. And that's really the primary motivation for living as a Christian. It's not so we don't have bad things happen to us or that God will get mad at us, but that we are able to bring delight to the heart of our creator in the way we live.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

We sometimes forget that as God's priests, believers actually minister to the Lord in heaven. That is, we perform the services that maintain the heavenly temple, and that please its Lord. For instance, Revelation 5:8 assures us that the prayers of the saints are golden bowls full of incense in God's heavenly temple. And in Revelation 8:3-5, these prayers go up before God, and he responds by sending judgments upon the earth.

God's people today have the honor of being his kingdom of priests. God has brought us into his kingdom, and has appointed us the task of spreading his kingdom throughout the world. And as his priests, we even have the honor of ministering to him in his heavenly temple. Think of it — we work directly for the creator and ruler of the entire universe. He has given us authority over his creation, and he listens attentively to us

when we render him service and prayer. He even listens to our prayers, and uses them as means through which he blesses his faithful people and judges those who oppose his reign. And how should we respond to this great honor? By giving him our thankful obedience and our sincere worship.

Having looked at Christ's work of redemption in the past and our honor in the present, we're ready to see that God deserves our loyal worship because of the blessings he's promised to give us in the future.

Future Blessings

The book of Revelation calls the church to worship God because of the great blessings he'll grant us in the judgment when we begin our everlasting reign with Christ over the new heavens and earth. One way it frequently encourages us to worship God is by providing examples for us to follow.

Consider the example provided by the elders in heaven in Revelation 11:16-18:

The twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign... The time has come for ... rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great — and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:16-18).

In this vision, John saw the future day of judgment. On that day, all God's faithful people will receive everlasting rewards, and all God's enemies will be sent into everlasting destruction. As part of this scene, John observed the elders worshiping God because he had blessed them both with rewards and with the removal of their enemies. By this example, the churches in John's day would have understood that God also deserves our worship now, in the present time, because these same future blessings have been promised to us.

Another example can be found in Revelation 7:9-10, where we read this account:

There ... was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-10).

In this passage, the multitude John described was wearing white robes and carrying palm branches. According to Revelation 7:14-17, the white robes symbolized the blessings they had received. They had been brought through the tribulation, and their sins had been forgiven through Christ's blood.

Moreover, they had been admitted into God's everlasting kingdom, and received their everlasting reward. And how did they respond to God? By worshiping him. And their example would have inspired John's original audience to do the same, because the same blessings would be given to them, too. And the same has also been true for believers in every age.

And something similar is true of the palm branches the multitude carried. According to Leviticus 23:40, palm branches were regularly used in the Feast of Tabernacles to point to the ultimate salvation that the Lord would bring. And when Jesus entered Jerusalem during his triumphal entry in John 12, one of the details we're told is that the crowd welcomed him with palm branches, indicating their belief that he was bringing the messianic kingdom of God. So, the palm branches carried by the multitude in John's vision probably indicated that the people had received the future blessings of God's kingdom. And of course, they expressed their thanks for these blessings by worshiping the one that blessed them.

Jesus is already victorious over God's enemies. And every believer can look forward to great blessings in the future, both in heaven when we die, and in the new heavens and new earth when Jesus returns. And that gives all of us a reason to praise and to worship our victorious God.

When we think about what it means to worship God, quite often we look at the created order, we look at our understanding of the cross of Christ and the forgiveness of sins we have, that we have been adopted as his children. We look at all of these as present possessions. We can say with David in Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork." We see beauty all around us; we're thankful for these things. We look at the Scripture language about the completed work of Christ and what our present privileges are as sons of God and as forgiven people, and we praise God for that. But one of the elements that we have in Scripture that we are to be just as secure in and just as sure about are all those blessings that we have yet future. In fact, I think the Scripture indicates that the things that we have promised in the future are much more abundant and much more glorious than anything we even have now.

— Dr. Thomas J. Nettles

God deserves worship for things that haven't actually happened in our lives yet because we're so sure they will happen. The Christian faith is one of hope and confidence in God's sovereign goodness and power, and so when he promises something's going to happen, we're able to give him praise and worship for the assurance that that's actually going to happen. We can worship God for everything he has done, is doing, and will do.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

The theme of loyalty to God is expressed in many ways in the book of Revelation. But as we've seen, the book of Revelation highlights worship and perseverance as two of the best ways we can express our loyalty to God in the present world. Now, this isn't always easy. In fact, the more we suffer, the harder it can be to persevere, and the less motivated we can feel to worship. But John made it clear that even in the worst of times, God still gives his people the strength they need to remain faithful to him. And John also pointed out that we have overwhelming reasons to worship God, no matter what our present circumstances are, and that because of the salvation we've received in the past, the honor we possess in the present, and the glorious blessings we'll receive in the future.

Now that we've explored God's kingship and benevolence, and considered the loyalty he requires from us, we're ready to see what Revelation says about the consequences that result from loyalty and disloyalty to God.

CONSEQUENCES

In this section, we'll focus on the consequences that humanity will receive when Christ returns to bring in the kingdom of God in all its fullness. The book of Revelation mentions many rewards and blessings for obedience, and many punishments and curses for disobedience. And quite a number of these can be experienced in the present age. But at this point in our lesson we're going to focus on the consequences that will come when Christ returns.

All evangelical Christians look forward to the time when Christ will return to render final judgment on both the just and the unjust. In an earlier lesson, we suggested that this final judgment is depicted in the cycles of judgment in the four visions John received. While not everyone agrees with this view, most Christians still affirm the general nature of the judgment that John described.

Final judgment is a necessary consequence of the covenant God made with Christ as his vassal king. Christ is reigning as king to bring about the renewal of heaven and earth, so that the creation will fully display the glory of God. In order for that to happen, goodness must be rewarded and blessed, while wickedness and rebellion against God's reign have to be punished and eliminated.

We'll explore the consequences of loyalty and disloyalty to God in two parts. First, we'll look at the final curses that will fall on those who've been disloyal to God. And second, we'll consider the final blessings of the new heavens and new earth that will be given to those who've been loyal. Let's turn first to the final curses against God's enemies.

FINAL CURSES

The book of Revelation lists at least three elements that will be included in the final curses against God's enemies. The first one we'll mention is the destruction of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

The dragon and his followers have opposed God throughout human history. Satan was there in the Garden of Eden, tempting Eve to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And his forces have tried to defeat God and his kingdom ever since. But when Jesus returns, Satan will finally be completely defeated. Revelation 19:19-21 teaches that the beast and the false prophet will be captured and cast into the lake of fire. And 20:9-10 shows that the dragon himself will also be defeated and thrown into the lake of fire, where he won't be able to harm any of God's faithful people ever again. And all the demonic forces that have fought alongside him will share in that everlasting destruction.

A second final curse will be the defeat of enemy kings and nations.

In several places, Revelation describes the destruction of the kings and nations that are God's enemies. For instance, Revelation 6:15-17 explains that the kings of the earth, as well as the generals, the rich and the mighty, will wish that the mountains would fall on them to save them from the wrath of the Lamb. This appears to represent Christ's judgment against all human authorities that oppose his reign.

In Revelation 19:15-21, Jesus appears on his white horse, leading the armies of heaven, and strikes down the kings of the earth so that he can rule in their place.

And in Revelation 16:19, God makes Babylon drink from:

The cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath (Revelation 16:19).

As we saw in a prior lesson, Babylon is symbolic of human and governmental forces that oppose Christ's reign. And this verse vividly portrays that all these nations and their rulers will be forced to suffer the full wrath of God because of their disobedience.

A third final curse will be the condemnation of unbelievers.

Not only are the rival kings and nations destroyed at Christ's return, but every unbelieving inhabitant of these nations will receive God's final judgment as a direct consequence of his or her personal rebellion against God. For instance, in Revelation 14:17-20, two angels gather all the unbelievers from the earth and throw them like clusters of grapes into "the great winepress of God's wrath." And in Revelation 20, all those whose names are not written in the book of life are tossed into the lake of fire.

Listen to John's description of this in Revelation 20:12-15:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books... If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:12-15).

Here John described the future punishment of all unbelievers. They will each be thrown into the lake of fire to suffer God's never-ending wrath because they have sinned against him.

When we think about the world around us and people who are unbelievers, what is it that we should think about them? What attitude should we have towards them? We can be tempted to have an attitude of superiority about ourselves and especially if they have mistreated us or if they mock us, that kind of thing. But I think that Jesus would want us to have the attitude of desiring to serve them, to have compassion, to view them as the lost because we don't know who is going to turn, and so we want to serve them by preaching the gospel to them and hope that they will respond. When we think about on the other side of judgment, what is our attitude to be then? And there should be I think a sense of pity and sadness towards them. And we would want to have at that point a clear conscience that we did love them while we had the opportunity to tell the gospel to them and that they won't be able to point the finger to us and say, "You knew, why didn't you tell me about this Christ?" So we need to be living with them with a view to the future, not condemning them in advance, but serving them and helping them find rescue in Christ.

— Dr. John E. McKinley

Since the book of Revelation shows so clearly that all of God's enemies will be condemned and destroyed in the final judgment, our attitude toward unbelievers today should be one of courage, compassionate witness, and humility. Courage because we know that ultimately the victory belongs to Christ. We must not be intimidated by the threats that might be brought against us by unbelievers who hate our faith and hate our Lord. At the same time, we need to have compassion. We recognize that the delay, at least as we perceive it, the delay of Christ's return, as the book of Revelation shows us, is for the sake of the gathering in of all of God's people. Even the providential judgments that are associated with the trumpets are warning signals, warning sounds, calling people to repentance. Of course they come to repentance through the gospel, and so we need to bear witness. We also need humility, because the reminder that rebellion against God will in the end bring judgment reminds us of what we ourselves deserve. We are not superior to those who are unbelievers today. We were once enemies and God brought us by grace through faith into union with Jesus.

— Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

As frightening as the curses of the last judgment sound, we have to remember that those curses are absolutely just. Unbelievers will be judged because they deserve to be punished for their disobedience. God is king over his creation, and it's sinful and rebellious to disobey him. And as painful as it might be to acknowledge, God's justice

demands that sin and rebellion be punished. In this sense, punishing the wicked is a central aspect of God's righteous kingship.

Now that we've seen how the consequences of sin and disloyalty are poured out in the final curses, let's look at the consequences of final blessings that will be granted to God's faithful people in the new heavens and new earth.

FINAL BLESSINGS

In God's final judgment against sin, all the spiritual and governmental forces that opposed his reign will be eradicated from this world, and all unbelievers will be judged along with them. And after creation has been purged of God's enemies, the universe itself will be renewed, resulting in a new heavens and new earth for God's faithful people to enjoy forever.

Revelation 21:1-5 describes the new creation this way:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ... a loud voice from the throne said, ... "the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:1-5).

We'll mention three final blessings of the new heavens and new earth that John said would come to those who had been loyal to God. First, there will be a complete renovation or renewal of creation.

Renovation of Creation

Revelation 21:1, 4 speaks of the first heaven and first earth passing away, indicating that they will cease to exist in some sense. We find similar ideas in places like 2 Peter 3:10-11, which talks about the present world being destroyed in order to make way for the new one.

But Revelation 21:5 describes the new heavens and new earth in terms of renewal, indicating that rather than completely vanishing, the old creation will be renovated or renewed. This same idea is also present in passages like Romans 8:19-22. These passages teach that there will be substantial continuity between the two creations, and not just a resemblance. Revelation 21:24-26 even states that the glory and splendor of the nations will be brought into the New Jerusalem, suggesting that redeemed aspects of our present lives will be carried into the new heaven and new earth.

As a result, most theologians conclude that the present creation won't be completely taken away and replaced. Instead, it will be radically transformed.

Well, we see in Revelation that there certainly are elements in the New Jerusalem that seem to be very reflective of, and in fact, identical with images that we see in Genesis 2 and 3 with the beginning of creation,

things like the tree of life. And so we have to ask ourselves, what does that represent? Well, there are probably different ways to interpret that, but I think a surface level reading of that is that there are going to be elements of the New Jerusalem that in fact will comport very nicely with creation as it was originally offered and put forward. So in one sense there's going to be a change that's on the horizon with the new age, but it's not going to be an altogether change. There will be vestiges of that creation that God originally worked that are still very much at play and in place. So we don't really see an exchange of one reality for another, but rather we probably see a transformation of the current reality — a makeover of sorts — into this new reality. And images and symbols like the tree of life help to highlight that continuity between the two realities.

— Mr. Bradley T. Johnson

This transformation will be a thorough renovation, making the world even better than it was when it was first created. The entire creation will be holy and pure, perfectly fit for God to inhabit.

As the angel announced in Revelation 21:3-4:

Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away (Revelation 21:3-4).

Another critically important aspect of the renewal of creation is mentioned in Revelation 22:3, where we're told:

No longer will there be any curse (Revelation 22:3).

In the new heavens and new earth, the curse that God placed on Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden will finally be lifted. Passages like Genesis 3:17-19, 5:29, and 8:21, make it clear that the present heavens and earth have been thoroughly cursed and corrupted by humanity's fall into sin. The ground resists our attempts to grow food. Wild animals act violently against us. Natural disasters like floods, earthquakes and hurricanes bring suffering to people all over the world. And micro-organisms cause disease and even death.

But when Christ returns, he'll liberate the world from every aspect of this curse. John described the blessings of the renovated creation in various ways, including as a holy city, the New Jerusalem, dressed as Jesus' bride and shining brilliantly with the glory of God. And one of the richest symbols John used in this context was the picture of the river of life that flows through the New Jerusalem and nourishes the tree of life.

Listen to what he wrote in Revelation 22:1-2:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1-2).

These beautiful verses picture a river coming from God's throne that nourishes the tree of life, which in turn heals the nations. These themes go all the way back to the book of Genesis. Genesis 2:10 speaks of a river that flowed from Eden and watered the Garden of Eden and the tree of life. This river is remembered as a river of delights in Psalm 36:8, and as a river whose streams made glad the city of God in Psalm 46:4.

And an extended discussion of this river is found in Ezekiel 47:1-12. In Ezekiel's vision, a trickle of water flowed from the temple and grew into a river that was so large it couldn't be crossed. The water brought life wherever it flowed, and even turned the salty Dead Sea into fresh water.

Listen to what God said about this river in Joel 3:17-18:

Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her. In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of acacias (Joel 3:17-18).

In Revelation 22, this river of life becomes ever greater. It flows from the throne of God and the Lamb, right down the middle of the New Jerusalem, indicating that the ultimate source of all life and healing is God himself.

In John's vision, this abundant source of life waters the tree of life that stands on each side of the river. The tree produces an abundance of fruit that is so effective that even its leaves can be used for the healing of the nations.

As we read about the New Jerusalem at the end of the book of Revelation, we see lots of elements that recall the Genesis account and the Garden of Eden, and there's a reason for that, and that is that, really, the New Jerusalem is the restoration of creation as it was intended to be. And so we see God creating human being and placing them in a perfect place. And it's true that in the garden they're meant to mature and probably to reach a state of ultimate glorification which then, of course, went sideways when they rejected God's purpose and turned from him. But really, in Eden we see what God intends, what he wants for human beings, and so we would expect in the New Jerusalem to see the restoration of that perfect relationship between human beings and God that we were created to have.

— Dr. Mark L. Strauss

When we look in the book of Revelation we see depictions of the New Jerusalem. We find that it contains elements from the Garden of Eden, things like the tree of life. Why is this, from the first book of the Bible to the last book of the Bible? I think that partly what it's showing is that there is a total reversal of the destruction that came through sin and that God has made everything right. Sin has not ruined what he intended, and he has brought it not just back to where it was in the beginning, but he has brought it to perfection. It's not a creation that can fall anymore, but it's a creation that will endure forever.

— Dr. John E. McKinley

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God cursed them and banished them from the garden, especially so that they wouldn't eat from the tree of life and live forever. But when Christ returns, the river of life will water the tree of life again, and all the nations will have access to its fruit. All of redeemed humanity will be healed. There won't be any more sin, sickness or disease. Natural disasters will never occur again. All nations will govern themselves in righteousness and peace. And all of God's creation will fully display his glory.

A second final blessing God's faithful people will receive in the new heavens and new earth is that the entire world will be a global temple for God's presence.

Global Temple

Throughout the Old Testament, God set aside holy spaces where he manifested his presence in a special way. Genesis 3:8 indicates that he walked in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. And other passages in Scripture indicate that this was because the garden was his sanctuary or temple.

For instance, Genesis 2:15 says that Adam was placed in the garden to work it and take care of it. The Hebrew word for "work" in this verse is *avad*. And the word for "take care" is *shamar*. This is significant because in Numbers 3:8, Moses used these same words to describe the job of the priests that served in the temple. In other words, Adam and Eve did priestly work in the garden, and this indicates that the garden was God's earthly sanctuary.

Beyond this, the river and trees in the eschatological temple of Ezekiel 47:7 strongly resemble the river from the Garden of Eden, as well as the tree of life, which are described in Genesis 2:9-10.

And when Ezekiel 28:13-14 refers to Eden as the "mount of God," it uses the same vocabulary that the ancient world used to refer to mountains that had temples built on top of them.

After the Garden of Eden served as his earthly sanctuary, God also manifested his special presence in the tabernacle. We read about this in Exodus 40:34-38.

And after the tabernacle, God began to manifest his special presence in the temple, as we read in passages like 1 Kings 8:10-11, and 2 Chronicles 7:1-3.

Hebrews 8:5 explains that these earthly sanctuaries were actually intended to be copies of God's heavenly throne room, where his special presence is always clearly manifested. But in the new heavens and earth, God's presence won't be limited to a small space like a garden or a single building. Instead, God will manifest his special presence throughout the entire world.

Listen to how John described the city of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:22-23:

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp (Revelation 21:22-23).

Revelation looks forward to the time when a temple won't be needed in the New Jerusalem. Instead, God will manifest his special presence everywhere. He'll bless his people by dwelling among his people, and the nations will walk in his light. When that time comes, God's glory will fill the world as completely as the sun now lights the day.

As we read in Revelation 21:3:

The dwelling of God will be with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God (Revelation 21:3).

In the new heavens and new earth, God's special presence will be with all his people, throughout the whole world

The renewal of the world will create this global temple because of the work of Jesus Christ. In Revelation 1, Jesus walked among the seven lampstands in the heavenly throne room, symbolizing God's presence among his churches. But when Christ returns, he'll establish his special reign throughout the entire creation, so that the whole world will be God's temple, and his special presence will be manifested everywhere.

A third final blessing John mentioned is that God will establish the never-ending earthly reign of Jesus Christ as king.

Never-Ending Reign

Revelation 21 and 22 indicate that the center of the new earth will be its capital city: the New Jerusalem. And the center of the city will be God's throne. God's throne symbolizes his rule as king. And when Jesus returns, he'll be enthroned in the New Jerusalem, ruling over the entire world on behalf of his Father.

First Chronicles 29:23 indicates that all the Davidic kings had shared the honor of sitting on God's throne in Jerusalem. But only the last Davidic king, Jesus Christ, will be enthroned in the New Jerusalem, and only his reign will never end. All those who are

redeemed will live in the new creation with him, acknowledging his authority and power, bowing in obedience to his throne, giving him honor and glory, and, as we read in Revelation 22:5, even sharing in his everlasting reign.

Some people live to be 70, others 80, 90 and 100, and then that's the end. Not on this new earth. We live on this earth eternally. Why? Because the Lord Jesus Christ will be with us all of the time. You say, well, he should be in heaven. No. He is Lord of heaven and earth. He will be on this earth as the Son of Man eternally. And now what else would you like to have? Living with Jesus eternally or without him? And therefore, I would say I'm looking forward to being with the Lord Jesus Christ on this renewed earth forever and ever.

— Dr. Simon J. Kistemaker

Christ's reign in the new heavens and new earth will be absolutely perfect. He'll provide everything his people need. There won't be any sin, any corruption, any sickness, or any death. Nothing will detract from our joy. Every blessing of God's covenant will be ours forever.

As believers, we should long for Christ to rule over us in the new heavens and new earth. And we should live in faithful loyalty to him right now — even when we're tempted and persecuted — knowing that after we persevere in faithfulness, we'll share in the greatest blessings God has ever envisioned for his creation.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson we've reviewed the book of Revelation by focusing on the themes of the king and his kingdom. We've examined the concept of kingship, explored God's royal benevolence, considered the importance of human loyalty to the king, and described the consequences of blessings for loyalty and curses for disloyalty.

The hope of all Christians is that one day our King will return. This hope motivates us to endure, and to overcome every trial we experience in life. No matter what hardships we face because of our faith, we have every reason to demonstrate our loyalty to God and his Christ because we know that his word is true. Jesus will return to reign over us and to reward us. And until that happens, we trust in the promise he gave us at the end of the book of Revelation: "Yes, I am coming soon." And our response is the same as John's: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"

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