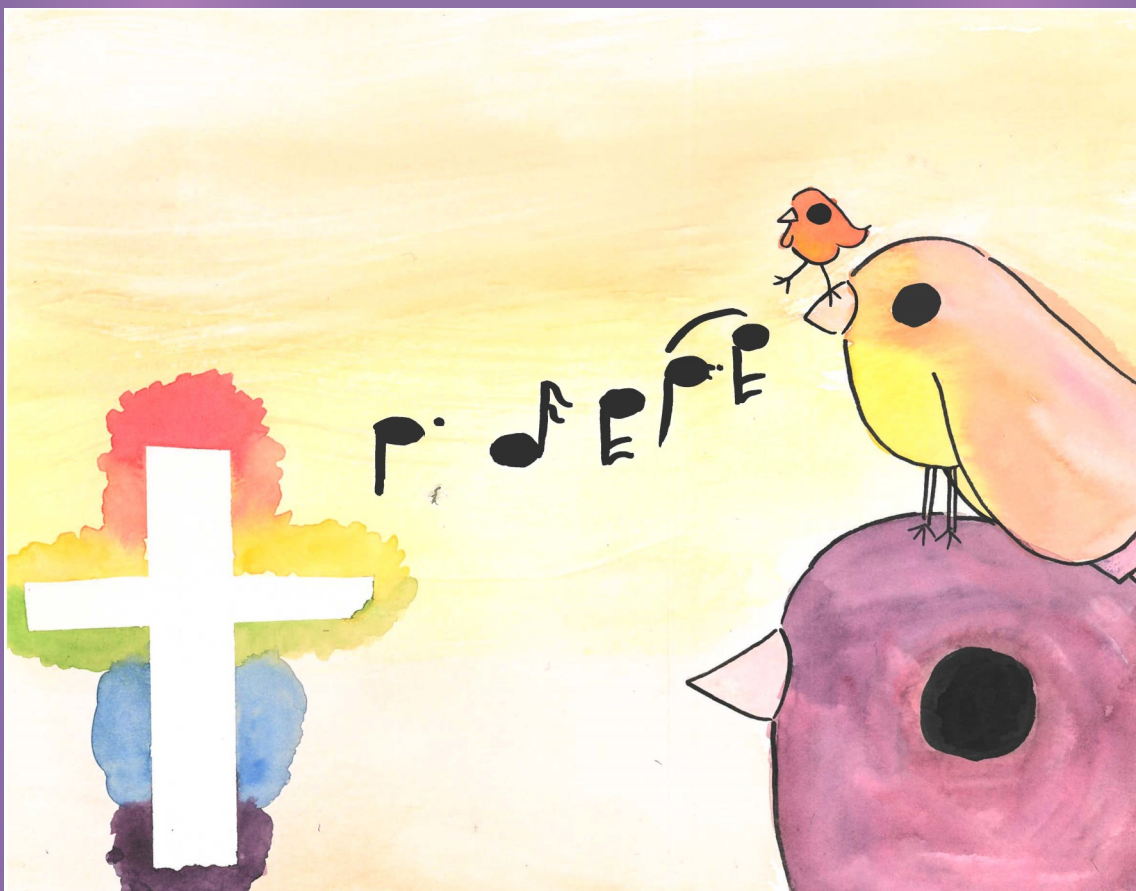


RHYTHMS OF THE GOD-LIFE

REVELATIONS THROUGH
PARAPHRASE, POETRY, AND PRAYER



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Revelations

Introduction

Imagine: 1,000 years from now a scholar researches an ancient document written in code:

And I saw a woman in a long, flowing gown of red and white wearing a blue crown. In her arms were held the multitudes of the earth, and in her hand was a torch whose brightness blinded kings and those who would make war against God's people.

The scholar is uncertain what to make of the cryptic passage until she unearths a book written by 20th century historian David McCullough: *1776*. Suddenly the scholar understands the passage is more poetry than prose. She scribbles a note to herself:

The woman is obviously Lady Liberty dressed in the colors of the American flag. The torch in her hand is the light of liberty and the multitudes are those of whom it is said "give me your tired, your poor...."

She continues to scribble, "A translation might be:

America is the land of liberty whose light shines into all the world drawing people to its shores; its freedom is a challenge to all dictators who would oppress their own people; its religious freedom a special source of strength against tyranny and oppression."

Interpreting Revelation is like trying to interpret a bit of U.S. history out of context. Indeed, the majority of Revelation's verses have a referent point in either the Hebrew Bible or Roman culture, which I cite in the nearly 300 footnotes that follow. Knowing these referents is key to understanding Revelation's symbolism. One can read this devotional without reading the footnotes, of course, but reading them and connecting them to the symbols in the text will deepen one's understanding of John's message.

If it seems outlandish to suggest an ancient reader would be able to recognize almost 300 Hebrew Bible

references while reading Revelation, consider our modern lexicon of phrases:

Four score and seven years ago....

Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.

Most readers of this work will recognize these saying as quotes from a U.S. president, actor, and astronaut, and the list of such quotes is nearly endless. Even if a reader could not name Abraham Lincoln, Clark Gable, or Neil Armstrong, the setting of the quote and its symbolic connotations would be understood.

In Revelation, symbolism conveys the message in a similar way that emojis communicate. If I type the symbols for "eye + heart + u," I am saying, "I love you." If I type the symbols for a church steeple + an infinity symbol I am saying either, "The Church is eternal," or, "This sermon is sooooo long!"

Symbols convey meaning beyond themselves. We know this in our society through politics (the American flag), economics (the Apple logo), and entertainment (the Oscar statue). The symbol itself is the message; the message is found in the symbol. By symbolism, John²⁸⁶ conveyed his message. John follows the books of Ezekiel and Daniel²⁸⁷ in using the literary genre known as apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature is visually communicated, like a well-crafted movie in which the story is communicated as much visually as through dialogue. Revelation is better seen than read.

John wrote under house arrest on the Isle of Patmos, just off the west coast of modern Turkey, during the general persecution of Emperor Domitian (c. 95 CE). John used the coded language of apocalyptic literature to critique the Roman Empire. He denounced "Babylon"

²⁸⁶ Due to stylistic and linguistic differences between the works, most scholars argue the author is not the same John who wrote the Gospels and letters but a disciple known as John the Elder.

²⁸⁷ It is significant that both Ezekiel and Daniel were also written by authors living under political occupation—Ezekiel under Babylonian rule and Daniel under Greek rule.

rather than Rome; and foretold its eventual demise. Because he wrote symbolically, his allusions to Rome were oblique enough not to attract his jailors' attention.

Revelation is more than social critique, however; it is also John's pastoral appeal to a persecuted people. John wrote to give hope to those languishing under Domitian's ire: The Emperor seemed to be in control of all history, but the Emperor's control was an illusion according to Revelation. Jesus, the Lion who looks like a Lamb, is the First and Last, the One who holds the keys to life and death, the only one who can open the Book of Life, the one riding the white horse to war against the Dragon and the Beast, the one who will be victorious! All of these images will unfold in the pages to follow. Revelation says less about the specifics of history and more about who holds the ultimate destiny toward which history travels.²⁸⁸

I blend symbolism and meaning into the text of this interpretive paraphrase. English translations of the Bible name the symbols (e.g. trumpets, seals and lamps, etc.). By contrast, I convey what these symbols *mean*. Therefore, "the translation" will read differently than what you are used to reading when you open Revelation. When forced by literary considerations to choose between naming the symbol or describing its meaning, I describe its meaning.

An example of how literary considerations influence my interpretive paraphrase is found in Revelation 4:3. The New International Version translates Revelation 4:3 as,

And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.

In my interpretive paraphrase I convey that in ancient, Hellenistic culture, jasper and ruby symbolize holiness and passion. While I found no good way to work in the words "jasper and ruby" except in a footnote, I was able to convey both the symbol and its meaning of the emerald rainbow (with a footnote to two verses in Ezekiel). My version of Revelation 4:3 reads as follows:

²⁸⁸ Christians proclaim the risen Lord Jesus as victor over death, victor over sin, victor over the powers and principalities! How can it be that the followers of Jesus are suffering persecution? This is the existential question that plagues John's people and to which John offers pastoral encouragement.

On the throne sat The Glory, whose radiance shone with holiness and passion, with an emerald rainbow—symbol of the Messiah—encircling the throne.

Footnotes will be especially helpful. Revelation uses what preachers call a "diamond" approach for its literary form. That is, it looks at the same thing (the diamond in this analogy) from one direction and then the next, with the light that shines upon the diamond giving the viewer a different perspective each time (though discussing the same diamond). A better-known example of this literary technique is found in Matthew 13 where Jesus says, "The kin-dom is like..." seven times in a slightly different way each time (e.g. "mustard seed," "treasure hidden in a field," etc.)

This diamond approach is used in chapters 6-20 to describe the conflict between God and evil, and God's eventual victory, from five perspectives, but each time it is the same cycle being described: conflict with evil / victory.

A brief outline to introduce you to this cycle and prepare you for what you will read below follows:

- Chapter 1: Describes God and Jesus as those in charge of heaven and earth.
- Chapters 2-3: Jesus encourages and challenges seven churches.
- Chapter 4: Worship prepares the Church for conflict.
- Chapter 5: Jesus, not Caesar, controls history.
- Chapters 6-7: First conflict with evil / victory cycle: the four horsemen of the apocalypse (unlocking seven seals).
- Chapters 8-9: Second conflict with evil / victory cycle: a series of plagues (blowing seven trumpets).
- Chapters 10-11 Conflict pauses for an interlude as Scripture is read; (second conflict cycle concludes in 11:15-19).
- Chapters 12-15 Third conflict with evil / victory cycle: the Dragon and two Beasts are introduced.
- Chapters 16-18 Fourth conflict with evil / victory cycle: the grapes of wrath (pouring out seven bowls).
- Chapters 19-20 Fifth conflict with evil / victory cycle: final judgment of the Dragon)
- Chapters 21-22 Description of the new heaven and new earth.

A final note: In *Revelation*, I refer to God by using the term The Glory. The Glory is Revelation's theme and an apt description of the One to whom the book points.

Revelation 1:1-6²⁸⁹

The unveiling of what is, has been, and will be²⁹⁰ was given to me by Jesus the Anointed, and it was given to Jesus by The Glory. Jesus unveiled who holds the future by sending a celestial messenger to me, his servant John, who witnessed everything. And everything I saw and heard I wrote down—The Glory’s Message and Jesus’ Witness. Sacred joy overshadows the one who reads to the Body the truth embedded in this message. Sacred comfort overshadows those who hear this message, heed its truth, and allow it to move beyond their minds and into their hearts, for what follows is a message of hope: The *kairos*²⁹¹ is near.

John, to the seven churches in Turkey: may you be overwhelmed by lovingkindness and *shalom*²⁹² from The Glory—who was before the beginning of time and who will be after then end of all things and who is in every moment in between, the eternal present. And lovingkindness and *shalom* be also from Jesus the Anointed, who speaks the truth of all that has happened to him—descending into death’s dark depths and arising into eternity’s first light, the promise for all who will follow. He

²⁸⁹ The churches to whom John wrote were under general cultural and specific political persecution. The Revelation is not written to 21st century Christians wanting to know a timeline for the future but to 1st century Christians needing pastoral encouragement to endure in the face of massive trials! In chapter one John begins his encouragement by focusing on the person at the center of all things: The Glory found through Jesus.

²⁹⁰ The Greek text uses *tachei genesthai*, which means “immediately happen” and is often translated as “soon come to pass.” This raises the issue of time perspective in Revelation, which has clear references to past events (e.g. quoting Jesus’ words from the cross in 16:17, 21:6 and Paul’s writing to the Thessalonians in 3:3, 16:5), present-at-the-time-of-writing references to Rome (e.g. 18:11-15), as well as what appear to be future events (e.g. Revelation 21-22). The inclusion of past, present, and future lead most mainline interpreters to adopt what is known as the amillennialist view, which interprets Revelation as focusing on the timeframe between Jesus’ Cross and his return (i.e. Parousia). The amillennialist view is used in this interpretive paraphrase (see extended note 1 in Appendix A).

²⁹¹ Greek has two words for time. *Chronos* depicts “linear, chronological time.” *Kairos* depicts the “key moment” when transformation comes (e.g. when the expecting mother tells her partner, “It’s time.”)

²⁹² *Shalom* is the Hebrew word for “peace” and means more than merely the absence of conflict but the positive presence of social, spiritual, physical, and economic wellness for the entire community.

is sovereign above Caesar and above all who rule upon the earth. To Jesus who loves us and has liberated us to live the God-life through the giving of his own life; to Jesus who has called us into the kin-dom to serve as those who bring The Glory to people and people to The Glory; to Jesus be the radiance of a love that defeats death itself and wins an eternal victory.

Huzzah! Huzzah! Amen.

Good start.

Can you finish?

Talking a good game

*Doesn’t solve problems IRL.*²⁹³

God, it’s me. Here at the beginning of Revelation, John conveys my theology well: You, O Glory, and your son Jesus are light, life, and love. Why, then, is life sometimes so difficult? Why, then, does “Caesar Domitian” persecute your Church? When, then, shall justice roll down like a river; righteousness like an ever-flowing stream?²⁹⁴ Where, then, are you, O Glory, in our hour of need?

Revelation 1:7-20²⁹⁵

Look! See! He who is fully human, archetype of all humankind, comes.²⁹⁶ He to whom The Glory has given all authority arrives for all to see; even those who crucified

²⁹³ IRL: In Real Life.

²⁹⁴ c.f. Amos 5:24. (NIV)

²⁹⁵ Chapter one proclaims the fundamental message of Christian hope: Jesus has defeated sin, death and the grave. He was before Caesar and will be after Caesar. Caesar can take your life, but only Jesus holds the keys to death and the afterlife. However, the chapter also raises the existential question that plagues John’s people: How can it be that the followers of Jesus are suffering persecution? The chapter is the beginning of John’s response to this existential question. Note to the reader: John clearly does not mind mixing metaphors! In fact, his style is to pile symbol upon symbol to hammer home his point: The Glory is in their midst, even though their present circumstances might suggest otherwise. Take hope, therefore, because The Glory who has redeemed the beloved will restore them.

²⁹⁶ c.f. Daniel 7:13: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.”

him will behold his majesty.²⁹⁷ All humankind will grieve their broken ways, for he will teach them to desire the God-life. So shall it be! Amen!

“I am that I am,” says The Glory.²⁹⁸ “I will be who I will be. I have always been and will always be—the eternal present who yet arrives, the Sovereign over all sovereigns.”

I, John, your brother who shares with you the *koinonia*²⁹⁹ of suffering, kin-dom, and enduring patience in Jesus, was on the Isle of Patmos because of my devotion to The Glory’s Word and trust in Jesus’ witness. On the day of resurrection (the day after the Jewish sabbath), I was overwhelmed by the Spirit and given a vision mystic and transcendent. The voice of a trumpet declared, “Write! Put down into words what you see and send it to the seven churches who live in central and western Turkey.”³⁰⁰

I turned to see the voice and encountered The Glory in the throne room of heaven.³⁰¹ Standing beside The Glory was Jesus, the Son of Humanity to whom The Glory had given all authority in heaven and on earth. He was a sight to behold. Jesus was dressed like the High Priest³⁰² yet looked like the Ancient of Days.³⁰³ No clay feet for Jesus, but rather feet of bronze that would endure, a

²⁹⁷ c.f. Zechariah 12:10: “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”

²⁹⁸ c.f. Exodus 3:14: “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’”

²⁹⁹ The Greek word *koinonia* translates as “fellowship” and conveys a deep sense of spiritual and social kinship. *Koinonia* was a hallmark of early Christian communities and a cause for Roman suspicion of their motives—the Romans assuming something political must be the source of the Christian community.

³⁰⁰ The seven churches are in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

³⁰¹ The text refers to seven golden lampstands, which could be found in the Tent of Meeting and, later, in the Jerusalem Temple. The lampstands symbolize The Glory’s presence; c.f. Exodus 25:31-40, especially 25:31: “Make a lampstand of pure gold... Then make seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it. Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold.”

³⁰² c.f. Exodus 28:4: “These are the garments they are to make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so they may serve me as priests.”

³⁰³ c.f. Daniel 7:9: “As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.”

sign of his eternal kin-dom.³⁰⁴ His voice thundered like the sound of a raging river³⁰⁵—a sure sign that he is the God of Israel—and a sword³⁰⁶ was in his hand—the prophetic word of judgment that requires people to choose whom they will serve: The Glory or another. Jesus’ presence shined like the radiance of the sun.³⁰⁷

When I saw him, I fell at his feet, utterly overwhelmed. Jesus placed his hand upon me and said, “Be not afraid. I am the beginning and end of all creation, from A to Z.³⁰⁸ Though once dead, I live. Look! See! I live forever. Death and the afterlife are my possessions, for I have authority over them. I have the keys to unlock every door that leads through death to life.

“Write what you have seen. Describe what is, has been, and will be. Let my people know that they are not alone! My celestial messengers watch over each church. Their gatherings become the place where The Glory is revealed; their worship becomes the very throne room of heaven.”

*The eye beholds
only what it can imagine.*

*The heart sees
for what it can hope.*

*Look! See!
It is Jesus.*

³⁰⁴ c.f. Daniel 7:31-45, especially verses 44-45: “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.”

³⁰⁵ c.f. Ezekiel 43:2: “I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory.”

³⁰⁶ c.f. Isaiah 49:2: “He made my mouth like a sharpened sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.”

³⁰⁷ c.f. Exodus 34:29: “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.”

³⁰⁸ c.f. Isaiah 44:6: “This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: ‘I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.’”

God, it's me. John's vision begins in heaven's throne room, and we are directed to cast our vision toward Jesus. He is the center of our hope, always has been and always will be. Beyond pandemic panic, Jesus stands. Through wars and rumors of war, Jesus stands. Alongside inflation and election debates, Jesus stands. We are drawn to him as the center of our vision, for only he unlocks the door to your presence and peace. May I rest in Jesus today.

Revelation 2:1-7³⁰⁹

Write to the gathering of chosen ones in Ephesus; to their celestial messenger write. Write the words of Jesus,³¹⁰ who directs the messengers and holds his churches by the hand.

"You are filled with lovingkindness and make The Glory happy through your good works and perseverance through pain. You do not tolerate deception and manipulation from those who claim to be sent by Jesus but who practice depravity. Instead, like the tortoise, you continue ever forward for my name's sake. You endure for the sake of the God-life.

"Yet you struggle with brokenness—your false self must diminish that your true self might grow. You have lost your first love! The first blush of passion you once had for me has become blasé. Reignite the flame of your love, for without love passionately expressed you cannot shine my

³⁰⁹ Revelation 2-3 contain seven letters to seven churches. Interpreters use different lenses through which to understand these letters (see endnote 2 in Appendix A). The lens through which we look either distorts or clarifies that which we see. I paraphrase chapters 2-3 as referring to seven historical churches. It has the advantage of speaking a message of challenge and comfort to the churches of the 1st century, but any church in any century can hear all of these messages as if they are spoken to them and be challenged and comforted. Ockham's Razor is a famous philosophical tool which says, "Take the simplest viable solution." This historical lens meets the test of Ockham's Razor.

³¹⁰ I repeat in the paraphrase certain phrases (this first sentence and a half among them). In the Greek text, some of these phrases are actually repeated for each of the seven churches, while some of them are implied by the rhetorical structure of the message. The common themes embedded in Jesus' message to the seven churches are (1) All churches are filled with grace and please The Glory, (2) all churches are filled with sin and must grow, (3) The Glory promises grace and life to all who endure, and (4) the Spirit speaks to these seven churches, and through them, to all churches.

light. I know you are trying—you reject the followers of "The Destroyer,"³¹¹ who lure you to indulge your most base appetites without even a hint of chagrin. Good for you that you reject them, but you can do better than merely rejecting what destroys you.

"If you can hear, listen, for the Spirit speaks to the churches! I, Jesus, promise life, light, and love to all who endure and persevere. To whomever prevails against their most base appetites, I will give eternal nourishment: You shall eat from the tree of life!"³¹²

"Love is a marathon, not a sprint."

*Deepening over time,
a flower blossoming, blossoming, blossoming
into bloom.*

*"Yes, but sometimes lovers need to run."
Across a meadow, into each other's arms,
falling into ecstatic embrace amidst your
blooming flowers.*

God, it's me. I remember my first love of you. I was 17 and wrote a seven-page letter to my parents about why they should believe in Jesus. I am older now, wiser. My faith is both deeper and more cynical. I would gladly return to that first blush of love, especially if I could leave behind my impetuous youth. What does it look like to return to my first love? How would I act if my first love of you were to return?

Revelation 2:8-11

Write to the gathering of chosen ones in Smyrna; to their celestial messenger write. Write the words of Jesus, who was before the beginning and will be after the end, who died and was raised to life.

"You are filled with lovingkindness and make The Glory happy, even as you suffer persecution and poverty.

³¹¹ English translations say, "Nicolaitans," followers of Nicolas, whose name means "conqueror" or "destroyer" in Greek. Scholars debate the sin of the Nicolaitans, but the majority opinion (guess) is they practiced and taught that engaging in the indulgences associated with Greco-Roman culture was acceptable (under the false argument that Christian liberty allowed license).

³¹² c.f. Genesis 2:9: "The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

Yet you are rich in the God-life! I know about those who claim to belong to The Glory but actually serve the Accuser, a gathering of abusers. Be not afraid regarding what they are about to heap on you. I speak truth: the Accuser's servants will imprison you. You will be tested and learn anew your trust in The Glory brings you strength.³¹³

"If you can hear, listen, for the Spirit speaks to the churches! I, Jesus, promise life, light, and love to all who endure and persevere. The second death³¹⁴ cannot touch you."

I wake up anxious.

Did I really have a final exam for a class I never attended?

No, thankfully, it was just a dream—nightmare actually.

I am awake now and concerned.

*What if the test is not a dream but reality—
the world unhinged, coming for me, for you, for us?*

God, it's me. It's easy to feel dread these days—just watch the news or mention politics, gender or the climate with someone from "the other side." It's easy to be concerned, even anxious, about inflation, the stock market, and one's job. I wonder if the historians who predict a civil war is on the horizon are correct. O Glory, save me from the time of testing! Or, better yet, make me strong when the test comes, that I will shine the life, light, and love of Jesus to all whom I encounter—friend or foe.

Revelation 2:12-17

Write to the gathering of chosen ones in Pergamum; to their celestial messenger write. Write the

³¹³ c.f. Daniel 1:12-15: "Please test your servants for ten days. Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see. So the king agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food."

³¹⁴ The Palestinian Targums are Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible written in the 1st through 3rd centuries C.E. Though contemporaneous (and later) with the writing of Revelation, the Targums give a rough approximation of how the term "second death" was used during this time period; c.f., for example, Targum Jeremiah on Jeremiah 51:17: "They shall die the second death and not live in the world to come."

words of Jesus, whose two-edged sword inflicts forces a choice between friend or foe.³¹⁵

"You are filled with lovingkindness and make The Glory happy. You live amidst pagan temples devoted to Zeus, Apollo, Athena, Dionysus, Aphrodite, and Aesculapius, which lay together in the grove called the Nicephorium;³¹⁶ you are surrounded by the Accuser. Yet you all abide in me—remaining true to the character and integrity by which I am known. You abided in me rather than abandon your trust, even as your bishop, Antipas, was martyred.

"Yet you struggle with brokenness—your false self must diminish that your true self might grow. There are some among your gathering who seduce people into idolatry and sexual immorality. There are some also who indulge in the license of Greek culture and teach others to do likewise, as Balaam did.³¹⁷ Turn around! Turn toward me! If you do not, I will confront you with my words; my splendor will overcome you.³¹⁸

"If you can hear, listen, for the Spirit speaks to the churches! I, Jesus, promise life, light, and love to all who endure and persevere, and I will reveal to you The Glory's mysteries and Their provision.³¹⁹ I will declare you innocent by giving you a white stone,³²⁰ symbols that you are made whole and complete, your true selves. You will be vindicated!"³²¹

³¹⁵ c.f. Psalm 149:6-7: "May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples...."

³¹⁶ The Greek text translates as, "Where Satan has his throne," which, scholars believe, may have been inspired by the Nicephorium's many pagan temples.

³¹⁷ c.f. Numbers 31:16: "They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the LORD in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the LORD's people."

³¹⁸ c.f. Isaiah 49:2: "He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.'"

³¹⁹ The text uses the symbol of manna; c.f. 2 Maccabees 2:4 where Jewish tradition held the ark of the covenant was not lost but hidden, and within the ark, among other things, would be a sample of manna from the desert wanderings.

³²⁰ Roman courts would display a white stone to symbolize acquittal.

³²¹ c.f. Isaiah 62:2: "The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow."

*Character counts
in a culture that invites depravity.*

*Integrity matters
more than ever when “anything goes.”*

*Vindication comes
not from me but from Thee.*

God, it's me. I am intrigued by the notion of the Nicephorium: a grove of pagan temples. What is the modern equivalent? Times Square? The D.C. Monuments? Hollywood Boulevard? The seedy lane of strip clubs? The row of sweat shops? O Glory, the ancients had nothing on us moderns, for the temptations to betray our true selves is as ever present now as it was then. Help me, O Glory, to choose well—to conform to your loving-kindness in what I do and in how I do it.

Revelation 2:18-29

Write to the gathering of chosen ones in Thyatira; to their celestial messenger write. Write the words of Jesus, in whose sight justice comes and cannot be averted,³²² whose kin-dom lasts for eternity.

“You are filled with lovingkindness and make The Glory happy. Your *agape*³²³ and your trust, your service and perseverance continue to grow.

“Yet you struggle with brokenness—your false self must diminish that your true self might grow even more. You tolerate those³²⁴ who, like Jezebel,³²⁵ lead people astray

³²² The paraphrase conveys the meaning of the symbols “eyes like blazing fire” and “feet are like burnished bronze”; c.f. Daniel 5:6: “His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.”

³²³ *Agape* is one of several Greek words for “love” and connotes a perfect, selfless, outpouring of benevolence toward others. The New Testament has different words for different kinds of love, including, *agape*, *eros* which is “sexual love,” *philo*s which is “deep friendship or brotherly/sisterly love,” (thus the reason Philadelphia is The City of Brotherly Love), and *storge* which is “empathy or a close bond.” There are seven Greek words for love, of which the New Testament uses four.

³²⁴ Scholars debate whether Jezebel refers to a particular woman or symbolically to people who lead others astray. The majority opinion sides with a symbolic interpretation, so I refer to them in the plural rather than to her in the singular.

into sexual immorality and the indulgences of Greek culture. Such people even claim to be guided by the Divine Spirit! I have given them time and space to turn away from their immorality. They refuse. Therefore, I will give them over to themselves. They will suffer through leaping into their avarice, betrayal, and corruption, which lead to death—spiritually, morally, and often physically. The gatherings of my people will then recognize I search hearts and minds and let justice have its day.

“To those in Thyatira who do not tolerate Jezebel I say this: Good for you for rejecting the teaching that leads you astray! You have rejected the so-called mysteries of the Accuser; therefore, the only obligation I place on you is to keep on keeping on. Continue to walk the long obedience that leads to the Day when my kin-dom will be unveiled in its fullness.³²⁶ I, Jesus, promise life, light, and love to all who endure and persevere. When the Day of my unveiling comes, I will share with you my moral authority over the Nations,³²⁷ and you will shine like the brightness of the heavens³²⁸ and lead many into right relationships. If you can hear, listen, for the Spirit speaks to the churches!”

*I've been watching Handmaid's Tale on Hulu:
Why are women always blamed
(as if no man in Thyatira was a “Jezebel”)?*

*Handmaid's Tale is set in mythical “Gilead,”
yet depicts authoritarian violence against women.
Where is the Balm in Gilead?*

³²⁵ c.f. 1 Kings 16:31: “He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians and began to serve Baal and worship him”; c.f. also 1 Kings 18:19: “Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.”

³²⁶ c.f. Psalm 2:7-9: “I will proclaim the LORD's decree: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.’”

³²⁷ c.f. Numbers 24:17: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel....”

³²⁸ c.f. Daniel 12:3: “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

*Long ago, men turned away from The Glory's justice:
Giving ourselves over to desire,
my wife, my daughter, and my sisters suffer.*

God, it's me. I repent of my assumptions about my primacy of place in a society designed by and for men. I try not to be "that guy," yet know I am (at times). O Glory, may I grow ever more honest in my relationships, ever more self-aware, ever more willing to serve not to be served. As I walk away from the indulgences of this culture, may I lead others to join me—may we journey together until there is a balm in Gilead.

Revelation 3:1-6

Write to the gathering of chosen ones in Sardis; to their celestial messenger write. Write the words of Jesus, who is imbued with the seven³²⁹ spirits—symbol of the fullness of the Divine Spirit—and holds in his hand the seven stars—symbol for each gathering and the whole Body.

"You struggle with brokenness—your false self must diminish that your true self might grow. I know who you are; you're not fooling me. You have a strong reputation as 'The Church Alive' and 'The Happening Congregation' but it's all a mirage. Your hearts are dead. Wake up! Stir yourselves from your slumber!³³⁰ Nourish what is about to die—the God-life within you and your true selves (which remain incomplete, not fully formed). Recall what you have seen. Recite what you have been told. Remember to embrace the Way of Jesus. If you do not awaken to the God-life, you will remain in your slumber and miss the moment of my unveiling.

"Yet a few of you in Sardis, who I know by name, make The Glory happy. You refuse to pollute yourselves but seek purity and integrity in how you live the God-life.³³¹

³²⁹ In biblical numerology the number seven refers to the divine perfection.

³³⁰ c.f. Proverbs 24:33-34: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man."

³³¹ c.f. Ezra 9:10-11: "But now, our God, what can we say after this? For we have forsaken the commands you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: 'The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other.'"

I, Jesus, promise life, light, and love to all who live the God-life in this way. Your names are written forever in the Book of Life!³³² As you endure and persevere, continuing to trust in me, I will speak your name before The Glory and all heaven. If you can hear, listen, for the Spirit speaks to the churches!"

*I get concerned
when like a roller coaster my faith ascends
only to descend again.*

*Mercurial as my faith may be
the time to worry is when my faith descends
never to ascend again.*

God, it's me. I pray I will live until I die—live in you, live for your justice and joy, live until the shalom of Jesus escorts me into your unveiled presence. Until that moment, help me to hear "The Shema,"³³³ practice Micah's to-do list,³³⁴ and walk the way of Jesus.³³⁵ Though I may fall, help me not to fail. When I slumber, awaken me with your trumpet call.

Revelation 3:7-13

Write to the gathering of chosen ones in Philadelphia; to their celestial messenger write. Write the words of Jesus, who is holy and true, who alone is given authority and dominion over David's House to welcome and to cast out, to usher in and prevent from entering.³³⁶

"You are filled with lovingkindness and make The Glory happy. I know what you do—you have but meager strength, yet you struggle to keep my Word and honor my Name. Look! See! I have opened the door to David's House to you and no one can shut it. Fear not the crowd surrounding the Accuser, who claim religion yet practice deceit, manipulation, and cruelty. I will see to it they are humbled and acknowledge the truth: I love you! As you have obeyed my exhortation to endure and persevere, I will surround you, guard and protect you, and keep you

³³² c.f. Daniel 12:3: "...at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered."

³³³ c.f. Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

³³⁴ c.f. Micah 6:8.

³³⁵ c.f. Luke 4:18-19, among many.

³³⁶ c.f. Isaiah 22:22: "I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open."

from the trials that test every human heart upon the whole earth.

“I will be unveiled for all to see. Embrace the God-life you have and trust that no one can take it from you. I, Jesus, promise life, light, and love to all who endure and persevere. I will establish you and in me will be your strength.³³⁷ Never again will you leave my presence. I will inscribe The Glory upon your heart and Jerusalem upon your hands; indeed, the New Jerusalem shall be your home.³³⁸ I will make you new creation.³³⁹ If you can hear, listen, for the Spirit speaks to the churches!”

*Word to the oppressed:
Come you who are weary,
whose labor degrades, whose dignity is denied.*

*I AM with you.
I WILL BE always with you.
I open the door of my heart to you.*

*Good luck to anyone trying to shut it.
Ain't never going to happen.
The door to my heart is always open—to you.*

God, it's me. I receive comfort hearing these promises, yet I acknowledge they are written for people other than me: those whose labor degrades, whose dignity is denied. They are written to those around the globe and in my own community who live paycheck to paycheck, who live in food deserts, whose vote is denied. Though they may feel as if their prayers are not heard, I know you hear and heed each word they speak, even the sighs too deep for words. O Glory, may I be your instrument of blessing to answer their prayers.

³³⁷ c.f. 2 Chronicles 3:17 where the Temple's two pillars are named, Jachin and Boaz, which in Hebrew mean “I will establish” and “In him is strength.”

³³⁸ c.f. Ezekiel 48:35b: “And the name of the city from that time on will be: The Lord is there”; c.f. also Jeremiah 33:16: “In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.”

³³⁹ c.f. Isaiah 65:17: “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”

Revelation 3:14-22

Write to the gathering of chosen ones in Laodicea; to their celestial messenger write. Write the words of Jesus, who says it and it is so, for he is trustworthy and true, the sovereign over all the Cosmos.

“You struggle with brokenness—your false self must diminish that your true self might grow. I also know what you all do, that your ‘yes’ means ‘maybe’ and your ‘no’ means ‘we’ll see.’ You are neither passionate nor apathetic, neither fire nor ice. You must choose the God-life! So because you dance the God-rhythms tentatively, because you embrace the God-life with restraint, I will vomit³⁴⁰ you out of my mouth, until you choose not to defile yourselves.

“You think that because you are wealthy and have every luxury you can want, need, or imagine that The Glory holds you in high esteem. You say to yourselves, ‘We are living the good life!’ But you are not living good lives. More than this, the lives you are living are actually just sad: misery and sorrow embrace within you, ignorance and shame are your best friends. You are naked.³⁴¹ Hear me! Heed my words! Seek what belongs to The Glory, for it cannot be destroyed. Open yourselves to the Refiner's fire³⁴²—that the dross of your false self might be purged and only your true self remain. Then you will be clothed in glory, The Glory will be your covering.³⁴³

³⁴⁰ c.f. Leviticus 20:22: “Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out.”

³⁴¹ c.f. Genesis 3:7, 9-10: “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid’; c.f. also Isaiah 47:3: “Your nakedness will be exposed and your shame uncovered. I will take vengeance; I will spare no one.”

³⁴² c.f. Malachi 3:2-3a: “But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.”

³⁴³ c.f. Zechariah 3:3-4: “Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ Then he said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.’”

“Be not disheartened. I seek to compel and to convince, to educate and train³⁴⁴ those whom I love. So be eager and enthusiastic about the God-life. Dive into the deep waters that renew and refresh. Open your minds to new ideas and your hearts to fresh experiences. I am right here before you! I am waiting, just waiting, always waiting! Whoever opens themselves to me, I will join them for Sunday dinner, and it will be a feast to remember. Even better, it will change the way you are living.

“I, Jesus, promise life, light, and love to all who endure and persevere. You will sit beside me in heaven just as I sit beside The Glory. What a celebration that will be! If you can hear, listen, for the Spirit speaks to the churches!”

*The rain came early to the desert.
The man stepped on to his patio—
not quite cool yet absent the promised heat to come.*

*Absent the brutality of an Arizona summer,
the man sipped his coffee.
“Life is good,” he thought. “Comfortable.”*

*The maid delivered his oatmeal a few moments later.
“Just the way I like it,” he complimented her.
“Berries, nuts, and not too hot, not too cold.”*

*The man smiled at her.
The maid averted her eyes, lowering her head,
returning the man’s gesture as best she could.*

*“Yes, quite comfortable,” he thought.
“Complacent,” she thought.
“Complicit,” say the prophets.*

God, it’s me. Help me repent of complacency and complicity—to see others in their dignity and humanity, to act with compassion and advocate for justice. Help me look beyond my own comfort to the cries of others. May I choose not to defile myself. May I choose you.

³⁴⁴ The Greek words used are *elencho* and *paideno* which are usually translated as “rebuke” and “to discipline.” However, *elencho* also means “to compel or convince” and *paideno* also means “to educate or train.” I lean into these latter definitions for the paraphrase because the words of Jesus seek to invite growth rather than convey punishment.

Revelation 4:1-11³⁴⁵

After hearing the celestial messenger speak Jesus’ words of encouragement and challenge to the seven churches, I continued in my vision mystical and transcendent. I looked and saw beyond the veil that separates earth from heaven—the curtain between them was open to me! And the voice of the trumpet spoke to me again, saying, “Come! Enter! I will show you the divine necessity,³⁴⁶ that which The Glory has proclaimed must happen—what is, has been, and will be.”

I was taken by the Spirit into the throne room of The Glory. On the throne sat The Glory, whose radiance shone with holiness and passion,³⁴⁷ with an emerald rainbow—symbol of the Messiah—encircling the throne. Worship of The Glory was the foundation of both heaven and earth.³⁴⁸

Surrounding the throne were the elders of Israel and the Church—all The Glory’s people together as one voice and singing praise to the One who sits upon the throne. They had been made pure, their true selves, and wore golden crowns upon their heads. From the throne came lightning and thunder,³⁴⁹ as on the mountain when Moses stood before The Glory: the presence, the radiance, the splendor overwhelmed! Seven Spirits, representing the fullness of the Divine Spirit, encircled and permeated the throne, which was set upon baptismal waters³⁵⁰ and The

³⁴⁵ In Revelation 4-5 we see that worship precedes the Great Battle between The Glory and evil (Revelation 6 – 20). Before the battle, the Body prepares through worship.

³⁴⁶ The Greek word is *dei*, which is translated as “necessary” and has the connotation of being a divinely ordained event.

³⁴⁷ The text refers to “carnelian and jasper,” which are precious jewels associated in ancient cultures with holiness and passion.

³⁴⁸ c.f. Ezekiel 1:26-28: “I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.”

³⁴⁹ c.f. Exodus 19:16: “On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.”

³⁵⁰ The phrase “baptismal waters” is interpretive, as the symbol refers to a huge bowl, like a baptismal font, that stood at the entrance to the Jerusalem Temple and was called “the Sea”; c.f. 1 Kings 7:23-25: “He made the Sea of cast metal, circular in shape, measuring ten cubits from rim to rim and five cubits high. It took a line of thirty cubits to measure around it. Below the rim, gourds

Glory's promise never again to destroy the earth with a flood.³⁵¹

In the center of the throne were four living creatures covered with eyes.³⁵² They see all—behind and before, above and below, within and between—and represent The Glory's omniscience. The four living creatures were like the best from among all creation: the noblest like a lion, the strongest like an ox, the wisest like a human, and the swiftest like an eagle. Each living creature had six wings: with two they covered their face to convey reverence, with two they covered their feet to convey humility, and with two they flew like the wind to accomplish the Glory's will.

The four living creatures live for all eternity to worship before the throne. Day and night they sing, directing all to the deeper dimensions of worship—rooted in eternity and pointing to The Glory's sovereignty, a political act of rebellion against the alleged power and control of Caesar, both divine decree and human necessity. The four living creatures never pause their worship of The Glory as they sing:

Holy! Holy! Holy!³⁵³
The Glory!

Who was before the beginning of time,
Who will be after the end of all things,

encircled it—ten to a cubit. The gourds were cast in two rows in one piece with the Sea. The Sea stood on twelve bulls, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east. The Sea rested on top of them, and their hindquarters were toward the center. It held two-thousand baths.” (So, the Sea was more the size of a modern swimming pool than baptismal font.)

³⁵¹ c.f. Genesis 9:11: “I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

³⁵² c.f. Ezekiel 1:4-6: “I looked, and I saw...an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, but each of them had four faces and four wings.”

³⁵³ c.f. Isaiah 6:2-4: “Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.

“At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.”

Who is in every moment in between—
the eternal present!

As the four living creatures sang of glory and honor and thanksgiving to The Glory, the elders of all the people fell to their faces. They removed their golden crowns and lay them at The Glory's throne to proclaim their allegiance, their worship, and their confession of The Glory as the true sovereign over all the Cosmos. The elders also sang:

Worthy! Worthy! Worthy!
The Glory—our Lord and our God!³⁵⁴

No Caesar lays hold of authority, honor and power!³⁵⁵
The Glory created all things: praise be forever!

*Lightning and thunder
convey glory, honor and authority
to speak without interruption.*

*To whom is such power given?
To whom, to whom, to whom?*

*I am silenced before the One
to whom glory, honor and authority
cannot be taken away.*

God, it's me. Too often our worship is shallow—about us rather than you. Too often we enter worship asking what it will do for us rather than what we will do (and become) for you. Too often we neglect to remember that worship brings us into your direct presence. Too often do we forget that we do not worship alone but with the communion of saints! Forgive us! Renew our worship that it may be a sacred act. Free us through our worship to live only for you.

³⁵⁴ The song the elders sing is deeply subversive. In the text, the elders proclaim The Glory to be “our Lord and our God,” which usurped the title by which Caesar was known.

³⁵⁵ The elders also proclaim the attributes of “glory, honor, and power belong to The Glory.” Roman culture argued these attributes are Caesar's exclusive possession. Again, the song the elders sing is deeply subversive!

Revelation 5:1-14⁸⁵⁶

As I continued to look into The Glory's throne room, I saw someone holding a scroll with writing on both sides, a symbol of The Glory's power!³⁵⁷ But the scroll was sealed, not just with one seal but seven seals. No one could read it,³⁵⁸ for no one in heaven or on earth could open the scroll! I heard a celestial messenger, mighty in voice and visage, cry out, "Who can open the scroll that holds the names written in the Book of Life? Who can open the scroll that foreshadows the divine necessity that The Glory has proclaimed must happen— what is, has been, and will be? Who controls the destination to which the arc of history must bend?"³⁵⁹

I looked, expecting someone to come forth. I looked upon the strongest and wisest in human history, but they could not. I looked upon the idols and deities of the Romans, but they could not. I looked upon the fearsome force of nature itself, but it could not. I wept, for nothing nor no one could open the scroll. No one was able. No one was worthy.

Then one of the elders from among the tribes of Israel and the sent ones³⁶⁰ of the Church called out to me, "Weep not, child, but look! See! The Lion of the tribe of

³⁵⁶ In chapter five John offers his persecuted parishioners encouragement: The Glory is in control of history, even though their lives suggested otherwise. It is neither Caesar nor any other political, economic, or social oppressor that ultimately guides the destinies of life and death. In chapter five no one can be found to open the scroll (of unfolding human history) except the Lamb that was slain (Jesus) because the scroll was sealed with seven seals (completely and utterly closed except to Jesus' will.)

³⁵⁷ Ancient papyrus was woven together and so was smooth on one side and bumpy on the other side. Therefore, people only wrote on the smooth side. That this papyrus was written on both sides symbolizes an act of The Glory's power; c.f. Ezekiel 2:9-10: "Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe."

³⁵⁸ c.f. Isaiah 29:11: "For you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll. And if you give the scroll to someone who can read, and say, 'Read this, please,' they will answer, 'I can't; it is sealed'; c.f. also Daniel 12:4: "But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."

³⁵⁹ The Greek text does not indicate what is written on the scroll at this point in Revelation; however, c.f. Revelation 6ff.

³⁶⁰ The Greek word *apostoleos*, which usually is translated as "apostle," is from the verb meaning "to send"; thus "sent one."

Judah³⁶¹—Strength from David comes, the Root of David³⁶² upon which the House of Israel is built, approaches. He has won victory over death and the grave and proved victorious over all the schemes of the Accuser. He can do it. He can open the scroll. Seven seals are no match for he who is sovereign over all human history."

I turned toward the One to whom the elder pointed, expecting to see a great lion. Instead I saw Jesus, like a lamb that had been slain.³⁶³ Though slain, he had all power and authority. Through his sacrifice, the Divine Spirit was sent to the four corners of the earth. Jesus, the Lion who looked like a Lamb, strode forward and took the scroll from the right hand of The Glory. The four living creatures and the elders fell prostrate in worship with songs, prayers and incense ascending.³⁶⁴ The four living creatures sang a new song:

Worthy! Worthy! Worthy!

Taking the scroll, breaking the seals – Yes, he can!

You, O Crucified Messiah,
ransomed people from their slavery,
from every tribe and clan and nation,
from every tongue and dialect!³⁶⁵

You form and transform them into a kin-dom
to bring people to The Glory,
to serve not to be served,
to join you in the work of bringing heaven to earth!

Then I looked and heard the voices of the heavenly host—celestial messengers numbering in the

³⁶¹ c.f. Genesis 49:9-10: "You are a lion's cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his."

³⁶² c.f. Isaiah 11:1: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."

³⁶³ c.f. Leviticus 4:32-33: "If someone brings a lamb as their sin offering, they are to bring a female without defect. They are to lay their hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered."

³⁶⁴ c.f. Psalm 141:2: "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice."

³⁶⁵ c.f. Isaiah 42:10: "Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them."

thousands and ten-thousands,³⁶⁶ a multitude that seemed to go on forever. They encircled the throne and were joined by the living creatures and the elders. All of them joined together in singing praise to the Lamb:

Worthy is the Lamb!
Though slain he lives:
to him is given sevenfold doxology!³⁶⁷

Then their voices were joined by every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth as together they sang:

To The Glory and to the Lamb: Doxology!
Praise to the four corners of the earth!³⁶⁸

The four living creatures said, “So be it!” And the elders once again fell prostrate in adoration.

*The couple sat anxiously
waiting for the oncologist to join them.
The small, well-lit room
not matching their spirits.*

*The mother watched as her infant
failed to latch on to her breast.
Glassy eyes presaged
dread, sorrow, and a mother’s lament.*

*Rage for a time, O Elite!
Lift your voices in haughty self-congratulation.
The kairos is coming when the Lion stalks and
the Lamb is no longer prey.*

*God, it’s me. I sometimes forget that I am not in
control of my own life, and certainly not history. I may*

³⁶⁶ c.f. Daniel 7:10: “A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened”; c.f. also Psalm 148:7-14: “Praise the Lord from the earth...kings of the earth and all nations, Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.”

³⁶⁷ The text translates as “power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.” The significance of seven acclamations is to convey the divine perfection of the doxology.

³⁶⁸ The text translates as “praise, honor, glory, and power.” The use of four symbolizes the act of praise goes throughout the earth, to the four corners.

control a certain, few choices, yet I am acted upon more often than I act—the river of culture, with me in its midst, flows to places I prefer to avoid. How much more are the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalized acted upon? How much less influence and autonomy do they have? O Glory, I trust that you direct the course of history. I trust that when the river of culture flows toward turbulent falls, even there and especially there, you embrace me and them with your love. O Glory, do not let us go!

Revelation 6:1-17³⁶⁹

I continued to watch and saw the Lamb open the first of the seven seals from the Book of Life, and then heard one of the four living creatures command in a voice like thunder, “Go forth to battle!”³⁷⁰ I looked and saw a white horse,³⁷¹ the animal of war!³⁷² Its rider held a bow and wore a crown. He rode out as a conqueror committed to triumph³⁷³ over the riders who were to follow.

When the Lamb opened the second seal, the second living creature called out, “Come do what you

³⁶⁹ The battle begins! Having prepared us for the coming conflict in previous chapters, the Revelation now enters into a description of that conflict between The Glory and evil. For John’s flock, who were living in the midst of persecution, Annie Dillard’s question reverberates: “What in Sam Hill is going on?” Revelation 6-7 answers Dillard’s question.

³⁷⁰ The Greek word *erchomai* can mean either “come” or “go,” so scholars argue whether the four horsemen of the apocalypse are coming or going, and, whichever it is, from where are they coming and to where are going? Are they coming from heaven or earth? Are they going to heaven or earth? The interpretive paraphrase conveys the rider on the white horse as going from heaven to earth and as the other riders coming from earth to heaven to engage the battle between them. The invitation for the riders to come is less a command and more a sense of resignation similar to Jesus’ words to Judas, “What you do, do quickly” (c.f. John 13:27).

³⁷¹ In Revelation 19:11-16 the rider on the white horse defeats the Dragon and two Beasts.

³⁷² In the symbolism of the 1st century the ox was the animal for farming, the donkey the animal for transportation, and the horse the animal for war.

³⁷³ c.f. Psalm 45:3-4: “Gird your sword on your side, you mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously in the cause of truth, humility and justice; let your right hand achieve awesome deeds.”

must.” I looked and saw a red horse³⁷⁴ whose rider was given the power of war; social evil was the arrow in his quiver. He had the power to rob the earth of its peace and inspire murder and mayhem (and he was good at his job). The sword in his hand was drunk upon bloodshed.

When the Lamb opened the third seal, the third living creature called out, “Come do what you must.” I looked and saw a black horse whose rider was given the power of famine; ecological evil was the arrow in his quiver. He reveled when food was scarce and mocked those who could not pay inflated prices for their basic food supplies.³⁷⁵ Yet he was not allowed to touch the oil or the wine; deep roots he could not touch for limits had been placed upon him.

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, the fourth living creature called out, “Come do what you must.” I looked and saw a pale horse whose rider was given the power of disease and plague;³⁷⁶ biological evil was the arrow in his quiver. The rider had a name, Death, and the afterlife followed closely behind him. The riders were granted the power over only a portion³⁷⁷ of the earth, for The Glory also placed limits upon the extent to which their evil could be inflicted.

When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under The Glory’s altar all those who had been slain for being steadfast and true to the Word; for giving testimony on behalf of justice and joy their lives were taken. “How long, O Glory, sovereign over all the Cosmos,” they cried out, “until we are vindicated?”³⁷⁸ How long must we wait until our oppression is overturned and we see your justice and

joy?” Each of them was given a pristine robe, symbol of their purity and integrity, and encouraged to endure a little longer and wait patiently until the full number of their siblings could be gathered, all who will be slain for dancing the God-rhythms and living the God-life.

When the Lamb opened the sixth seal, I saw heaven’s power burst forth as a kaleidoscope of light and wind, as if The Glory’s own Breath was rushing through the midst of the earth. Sun and moon and stars were darkened.³⁷⁹ Mountains were brought low and islands displaced.³⁸⁰ No one could escape The Glory’s call for justice and right relationships. All who had once scoffed at The Glory’s command to let justice roll down like a river and right relationships like a never-ending stream³⁸¹ were found hiding in dark corners and the crevices of caves. The Elite of the earth—captains of industry and rulers of nations, the famous and the fabulous—could not escape having to give an accounting for their actions. Overwhelmed by it all, they cried out, “Who can stand in this Day?”³⁸²

*Wars and rumors of wars,
famine and global warming,
pestilence and plague,*

*Who will stand in their way?
Who will stand against their fomenting chaos?
Who will stand for the least, the last, and the lost?*

³⁷⁴ c.f. Zechariah 1:8-10: “During the night I had a vision, and there before me was a man mounted on a red horse...I asked, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who was talking with me answered, ‘I will show you what they are...They are the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth....’”

³⁷⁵ The text refers to wheat and barley.

³⁷⁶ c.f. Leviticus 26:25: “And I will bring the sword on you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. When you withdraw into your cities, I will send a plague among you, and you will be given into enemy hands”; c.f. also Ezekiel 14:21: “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments—sword and famine and wild beasts and plague—to kill its men and their animals!’”

³⁷⁷ The portion delineated in the text is one-fourth. The point is less about the percentage and more that it was limited in scope (c.f. also a similar use of proportional limitations in chapter 8).

³⁷⁸ c.f. Psalm 43:1: “Vindicate me, my God, and plead my cause against an unfaithful nation. Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked.”

³⁷⁹ c.f. Joel 2:28-32, especially 2:31: “The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD”; c.f. also Isaiah 13:10-11: “The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and humble the pride of the ruthless.”

³⁸⁰ c.f. Haggai 2:6-7: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

³⁸¹ c.f. Amos 5:25.

³⁸² c.f. Malachi 3:2: “Who can stand the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?”; c.f. also Nahum 1:6: “Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger?” Yet, in a powerful turn of events, Revelation 7 opens a window into heaven, and John sees the answer to this question.

*Only One who is faithful and true,
who sets boundaries and limits lest all be destroyed,
who looks like a Lamb yet roars like a Lion.*

God, it's me. Though I seek peace, may I stand with you against war and famine and disease. Though I desire only to live under your shalom, may I stand with victims of abuse, betrayal, and corruption for whom your shalom is a mirage. Though I trust "you got this," may I stand with you as you overturn injustice and oppression. O Glory, even more than wanting to be on "the right side of history," I want to be on the right side of your will.

Revelation 7:1-17

I continued to watch and saw four celestial messengers standing at the four corners of the earth. They were holding back the four winds³⁸³ that harm and destroy, for The Glory had commanded them to protect those who belong to the kin-dom from dangers that would come were it not for The Glory's providential will. The messengers have the authority to release the winds, but I heard the messenger from the east command them, "Wait! Do not allow any harm to come to the gatherings of The Glory's people until they are properly sealed with the sign³⁸⁴ that they are part of the kin-dom who belong to The Glory."

I heard the number of those who were sealed with the sign of their being chosen, beloved, and anointed: 144,000³⁸⁵—symbol for the fullness of those whom The Glory has chosen and called from before the beginning of time! They came from among all the twelve tribes of Israel and were the fruit of all the twelve sent ones of Jesus, not

³⁸³ c.f. Jeremiah 49:36: "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree."

³⁸⁴ c.f. Deuteronomy 6:8: "Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads"; c.f. also Ezekiel 9:4: "...Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."

³⁸⁵ In Hebrew numerology, the number 1,000 represents a veritable infinity similar to the English usage of "oodles" or "gajillion." The number 144,000, therefore, is 12 tribes of Israel times 12 apostles of Jesus times a gajillion (12 x 12 x 1,000 = 144,000). That 144,000 is a symbolic number for "all those who belong to The Glory" is indicated in 7:9 where the crowd is said to be too numerous to count.

just a few but a vast multitude too numerous to count. They had been gathered from among every race and nation, every tribe and clan and family, every tongue and language. They wore the pristine robes of purity and integrity and waved palm branches³⁸⁶ of exultation and celebration. But what was most remarkable to me was this: They were standing!³⁸⁷ They were able to stand for the Lamb had made them whole and complete. And so they sang their praise:

Rescue and healing come from The Glory,
who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!

The innumerable gathering of heavenly beings and earthly vessels fell prostrate in worship before The Glory, as they continued to sing the seven-fold doxology:

Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen!
Forever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever and ever!

Then one of the elders surprised me by asking me a question, "This vast gathering in pristine robes, who are they and where do they come from?"

"Surely I do not know!"

"They are those who have been chosen and called from before the beginning of time—who belong and have always belonged to The Glory. They have fought the good fight and run the race to completion. They have endured persecution and overcome it. They wear pristine robes that have been washed by the Lamb himself, just as they have been made clean, whole and complete. Enoch spoke of them when he said,

Before The Glory they will sit,
serving before the throne,
sheltered by the One who is Eternal Light.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ c.f. Nehemiah 8:14-15: "They found written in the Law...that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month... 'Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from...and shade trees, to make temporary shelters....'"

³⁸⁷ Here is the answer to the question asked in Malachi 3:2 and at the end of chapter 6: "Who can stand when the Day comes?" The answer is all those who have been made whole and complete by the Lamb.

³⁸⁸ c.f. Enoch 45:4: "And on that day I will cause My Chosen One to dwell among them and I will transform Heaven and make it an Eternal Blessing and Light."

“The truth-teller Isaiah also spoke of these who wear pristine robes and stand before the Lamb,

Hunger never again! Thirst never again!³⁸⁹
Though the sun beat down upon you,
and scorching heat wither you.
The Lamb will be your shepherd;
the Lamb will lead you to springs of living water;
the Lamb will wipe away all your tears!
Death shall never again have dominion over you.”³⁹⁰

*“Great is Thy Faithfulness” is not my favorite hymn.
Hard to sing, for me,
usually pitched just a wee bit too high for my voice.*

*As I stood in the basketball venue,
with 19,000 others—beloved of Jesus all,
singing “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” became easy.*

*The God-life is
intended to be lived in
community.*

*God, it's me. Thank you, O Glory, that I can stand
before Jesus and stand with him. Thank you that I
do not stand alone but with a great cloud of witnesses
and together with brothers and sisters. Together we
sing your praise. Together we seek your kin-dom.
Together we serve your people. May our service bring
others whom you have called, whom you love and have
always loved, into the eternal gathering that will be
our joy to behold. Amen!*

³⁸⁹ c.f. Isaiah 48:9-10: “Say to the captives, ‘Come out,’ and to those in darkness, ‘Be free!’ They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. They will neither hunger nor thirst...He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water.”

³⁹⁰ c.f. Isaiah 25:8: “...He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth.”

Revelation 8:1-13³⁹¹

When the Lamb opened the seventh and final seal, thus demonstrating his sovereignty over all the Cosmos, I heard only the sound of silence. No voice. No trumpet. Only a pause as all heaven listened to the peoples’ prayers. All the prayers from the four corners of the earth were gathered together by a celestial messenger who held a golden censer³⁹² in his hand. This messenger took the censer filled with prayer, added to it the passion of The Glory’s own Spirit, and flung it to the earth: And Heaven burst forth upon the earth!

Seven of the celestial messengers, who had witnessed the power of prayer to unveil The Glory’s will, were handed seven trumpets³⁹³ and prepared to sound them. The first messenger sounded her trumpet and The Glory’s justice sprung forth as on the day when Pharaoh was overcome by plagues:³⁹⁴ hail and fire, mixed with blood.³⁹⁵ The Glory’s justice would have consumed all things but in mercy only a limited portion of the earth was consumed.

³⁹¹ In chapters 8-9 John circles back to revisit the same period of time dealt with in chapters 6-7—the time period between Jesus’ cross and his return. In chapters 8-9 John deals with the issue of conflict between God and evil from a slightly different perspective than that which is found in chapters 6-7. Here in chapters 8-9 John speaks of the spiritual conflict as it relates to prayer, judgment, sin and repentance. See endnote 1 in Appendix A on John’s use of time.

³⁹² The text uses the symbol of golden censers, which were used in the Temple for prayer; c.f. 1 Kings 7:50 (not quoted in full as the verse lacks clarity without greater context).

³⁹³ c.f. Leviticus 23:23-26: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of sabbath rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts...The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement’”; c.f. also Numbers 31:6: “Moses sent them into battle, a thousand from each tribe, along with Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, who took with him articles from the sanctuary and the trumpets for signaling”; and, finally, c.f. Joshua 6, the battle of Jericho narratives.

³⁹⁴ c.f. Exodus 9:13-25, especially verse 24: “...hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation.”

³⁹⁵ c.f. Ezekiel 38:22: “I will execute judgment on him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him”; c.f. also Exodus 7:20: “Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood.”

The second messenger sounded his trumpet and The Glory's fury was unleashed against all abuse, betrayal, and corruption in the Cosmos, yet once again only a portion was consumed. Had The Glory not withheld Their full fury, all creation would have been destroyed.³⁹⁶

The third messenger sounded her trumpet, and I witnessed the princes of the earth stripped of their glory and thrown down from their places of privilege³⁹⁷—their power and honor and glory became a mirage. In their arrogance, these princes had polluted the waters of the earth, making all creation bitter. Thus these princes are called "Wormwood," whose name means "bitter."

The fourth messenger sounded his trumpet and earth was undone: day became night.³⁹⁸ Through the darkness The Glory was revealed, and The Glory's sacred promise made good: oppressors may rise for a time but shall not abide in the kin-dom. The night reigned over a third of the day so only a portion was consumed.

I watched and listened with dread in my heart. Above me flew an eagle³⁹⁹ pronouncing, "Woe! Woe! Woe!" as in the days of Moses who warned the Israelites and the truth-teller Hosea who warned the kings and priests against arrogance, abuse, and injustice. I dreaded what might come next, for there remained still three messengers prepared to sound their trumpets.

"Disney Princess Theology"
aligning always with the weak,
never the strong;

always the Hebrew slaves, never Pharaoh,
always the exiles, never Babylon,
always the disciples, never the Pharisees.

³⁹⁶ c.f. Exodus 12:13: "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."

³⁹⁷ c.f. Isaiah 14:12: "How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!"

³⁹⁸ c.f. Exodus 10:21: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.'"

³⁹⁹ c.f. Hosea 8:1: "Put the trumpet to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the LORD because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law"; c.f. also Deuteronomy 28:49: "The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand."

*Judgment of the weak, of slaves, of exiles,
and even stumbling disciples seems unfair,
but what if I am none of these?*

God, it's me. I thank you for the gift of prayer. That all heaven awaits my heart is stunning (and encouraging). May my prayers ascend that they may descend, empowered by your Spirit, emboldened by your fury, able to transform your judgment into justice. I confess: I am strong not weak, Pharaoh not the Hebrews, Babylon not the exiles, more a Pharisee than a disciple. O Glory, in your mercy forgive. In your mercy renew. In your mercy I find my only hope.

Revelation 9:1-21⁴⁰⁰

The fifth messenger sounded his trumpet and a star descended from heaven to earth—the Accuser thrown out of heaven and down into the abyss. When the abyss was opened it poured forth smoke, as the Accuser unleashed his fire and fury upon the earth. This is the source of persecution of those who belong to The Glory and have been sealed by the blood of the Lamb.

Like locusts⁴⁰¹ overwhelming Egypt during the plagues or the undoing of the heavens described by Joel,⁴⁰² so the Accuser's fury and fire tormented people and nations, especially those who belonged to The Glory. The torment was fierce but boundaried by The Glory's providence: green grass could not be touched, and the

⁴⁰⁰ Revelation 9 is difficult to paraphrase because several of the symbols lack a clear referent in either the Hebrew Bible or Roman culture. For example, locusts refer to several passages in the Hebrew scriptures, but the multi-hued locusts do not. Because of this lack of specific referents, interpreters have used chapter 9 to conjecture fanciful meanings (e.g. the colorful locusts are the Ottoman Turks or modern helicopters). Mainline scholarship deems it best to maintain consistency and integrity in form; that is, be consistent in the way one interprets. In the absence of a clear referent, I have chosen to paraphrase broadly: Clearly what John describes is disturbing for his readers, even bleak.

⁴⁰¹ c.f. Exodus 10:1-20, especially 10:4: "If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow"; c.f. also Joel 1:4: "What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten."

⁴⁰² c.f. Joel 2:1-2: "Blow the trumpet in Zion...Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness...such as never was in ancient times nor ever will be in ages to come."

locusts' oppression would die with the swarm.⁴⁰³ These days of oppression will be awful to live through. Those targeted for persecution, especially those who belong to The Glory, will wish for death that does not come quickly enough.

Those who swarm like locusts came from the east, from beyond Israel, riding horses prepared for battle.⁴⁰⁴ They dressed like ancient enemies: wearing a crown upon their heads, growing their beards like men but braiding their hair like women—all according to the customs of those living beyond Israel.⁴⁰⁵ They swarmed with ferocity to do the Accuser's bidding: chaos and anarchy, sorrow and suffering followed in their wake. There was no escape from their wrath, only patient endurance, for they were equipped to accomplish complete destruction, but The Glory limited their power. Their king was the one who slithered up from the abyss, whose name is Destroyer.⁴⁰⁶

This is the first sorrow and suffering, yet there is more to come.

The sixth messenger sounded his trumpet. I heard a voice coming from the altar in the Temple, from the four horns decorated with gold that mark the four corners of the altar. This is a place of refuge for the guilty. This voice spoke with The Glory's authority, saying, "Release the four messengers who are bound and who come from beyond the great river Euphrates."⁴⁰⁷

With their release evil descended upon evil, and humanity was caught up in the maelstrom. Evil did the

Accuser's bidding. The Glory gave humanity over to themselves, to the Accuser, and to the ten thousand times ten thousand⁴⁰⁸ of the Accuser's servants. The result was brutal, bloody yet boundaried, for The Glory had set limits on what would be allowed.

The Accuser's calvary rode forth with passion and a burning desire to destroy. Looking demonic they rode forth. Speaking demonic desires they rode out. Acting with demonic intent they struck. The Accuser would be found in all that they did, for all was designed to destroy.⁴⁰⁹ And destroy they did, even a third of the earth (yet again The Glory would not allow them to go beyond).

Though humanity watched in horror, still they did not turn away from what they saw and heard. As Pharaoh⁴¹⁰ in the days of the plagues, people continued to pursue idolatry, injustice, and oppression of others. People chased riches and ruin and gave themselves over to twisted pleasure, power, and privilege. Though humanity saw and heard all the Accuser's work, they refused to turn away.

*Eternal battle
seen in Dachau and Auschwitz
fought in the Donbas
famine, disease, the climate itself boiling in rage.*

*Are we to believe evil is boundaried?
Do you mean to say it could be worse?
But for your mercies travel all of us, O Glory,
a pilgrimage to the abyss.*

God, it's me. This is pretty bleak, yet an honest description of "Man's inhumanity to man." The battle rages in every human era, every culture and country, every heart. The battle rages and all seems lost. Where, O Glory, is the rider on the white horse in this recounting of the battle? Where is the One present between the Cross and the Coming of the Day? Is

⁴⁰³ The text notes the locusts will be at work for five months, which is the typical lifespan for a locust.

⁴⁰⁴ c.f. Joel 2:4-11, especially 2:4-6a, in which the horde is depicted as a blend of human soldiers and swarming locusts: "They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. At the sight of them, nations are in anguish...."

⁴⁰⁵ Scholars suggest the enemies depicted were from the Arabian peninsula.

⁴⁰⁶ The Greek text uses the Hebrew name *Abbadon* and its Greek synonym *Apollyon*, which mean "Destroyer."

⁴⁰⁷ The Euphrates marked the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. Beyond the Euphrates were the "Parthian Hordes" or "Parthian Menace," whom the Romans feared. John seems to be saying here that one day Rome will be overcome by another army kept ready for this very hour.... The Euphrates is also associated with the first sin ([Genesis 2:10-14](#)), the first murder ([Genesis 4:16](#)), the first organized revolt against The Glory ([Genesis 11:1-2](#)), the first dictatorship ([Genesis 10:8-10](#)), and the first war confederation ([Genesis 14:1](#))—so a happy place 😊

⁴⁰⁸ c.f. Psalm 68:17: "The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary."

⁴⁰⁹ c.f. Psalm 11:6: "On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot."

⁴¹⁰ c.f. Exodus 7:2-4: "You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites."

redemption to come in chapter 10 or perhaps chapter 11? Can the mess we have made of things ever be redeemed? O Glory, in your mercy, give us the patient endurance we need, or all will be lost. O Glory, help me endure, for I do not want to lose my way.

Revelation 10:1-13⁴¹¹

Then I saw a celestial messenger mighty in appearance, coming down from heaven. Indeed, he was The Glory robed in a cloud as on Mount Sinai⁴¹² with a rainbow⁴¹³ as a head covering as seen by the truth-teller Ezekiel. The Glory, whose face shone like the sun and voice roared like a lion, whose feet traversed both land and sea, spoke with the sound of seven thunders—the number of divine wholeness. The voice thundered justice made whole and complete, but I am not allowed to bear witness to what I heard. The voice thundered once again, “Seal up what you have heard, for there are mysteries mortals shall not know nor be allowed to express. What humans cannot imagine is seen clearly by The Glory. This I declare as the One who created heaven and earth and all living things!”⁴¹⁴

“The *kairos* is near when all pause is ended, and the fullness of my purpose will be accomplished. When the seventh messenger sounds her trumpet, the *kairos* of my purpose will be fulfilled, just as foretold by truth-tellers from ages past and sent ones of present times: Jesus will be unveiled as sovereign over all the Cosmos and all people made one—the dividing wall of hostility broken down.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹¹ The battle pauses for an interlude—a vision behind the scenes in the heavenly courts. After describing the battle between The Glory and evil from two perspectives (chapters 6-7 and 8-9), we see and hear assurance that The Glory has a purpose which cannot be thwarted.

⁴¹² c.f. Exodus 14:24: “During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion.”

⁴¹³ c.f. Ezekiel 1:28, previously cited.

⁴¹⁴ c.f. Daniel 12:3-4: “This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking: ‘Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.’”

⁴¹⁵ These verses are not referenced specifically in the text of Revelation; the reference made is to The Glory’s purpose; therefore, c.f. Ephesians 1:9-10, 2:14, and 3:4-6.

After saying this the voice thundered once again, “Take the scroll from the messenger whose feet stand upon land and sea. Take it and eat it. Consume its message. It will taste as sweet as honey upon the lips and then sour the stomach, for the purposes of The Glory are good but difficult.”⁴¹⁶ I took the scroll and ate it, and it did indeed taste sweet in my mouth but then soured my stomach. And I was told, “The days of honey are not yet arrived. There are still difficulties to confront: truths to speak to cultures and countries, to royals and to the rich, to every language and tongue upon the earth.”

*Limits to my vision
not even Hubble or Webb can see.*

*Mysteries beyond my conceiving
neither Tolkien nor L’Engle imagined.*

*So I consume your Word
bitter and beautiful, sour and satisfying.*

God, it’s me. I am told the mystical vision is both transcendent and sublime, that it changes not only a person’s perspective but also the person. How I long to see a vision of you robed in a cloud, rainbow upon your head, and hear your voice thunder. Alas, I have only glimpses of your glory—Spirit nudges of assurance or guidance along the way. What I do have, though, is your Word, which I crave. Your Word, which I consume, is indeed both bitter and sweet. Portions of it make my heart sing! Portions make my mind wonder. I will spend my life seeking its understanding, accepting its mystery, and living its truth.

⁴¹⁶ c.f. Ezekiel 3:1-3: “And he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel.’ So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.’ So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.”

Revelation 11:1-19⁴¹⁷

I was handed a reed to use as a measuring rod and told to measure the Temple, just as the truth-teller Ezekiel had once measured the Temple.⁴¹⁸ I was told to measure all of the Temple, including its worshipers, who know The Glory and are known. I was surprised because the Romans had destroyed the Temple two decades before my vision (though what is *chronos* to The Glory). Then I remembered the Temple is not built of bricks and mortar but of those who have been chosen and called, those in whom the Divine Spirit dwells. I was to measure only the inner courts of the Temple for The Glory had given the outer courts over to the Nations to do what they must.

The Nations will trample Jerusalem and destroy all they are allowed to destroy but only for a time. Like the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, whose reign of destruction and blasphemy was limited to three and one-half years,⁴¹⁹ so the Nations will be limited. Yet in the midst of these three and one-half years, The Glory shall maintain two witnesses to the truth, even if what they speak is filled with grief and lament.

These two witnesses are Moses and Elijah—who represent the Torah and the truth-tellers from throughout the ages. They are the ones the truth-teller Zechariah called “the two olive trees” and “two lampstands who serve The Glory before the whole earth.”⁴²⁰ The two witnesses speak truth and bear witness to The Glory’s purpose, that all will be made whole and complete. When they speak,

⁴¹⁷ The interlude, or pause, begun in chapter 10 continues in chapter 11 and does not cease until 11:14. Beginning with 11:15, the second depiction of the battle between The Glory and evil (described mostly in chapters eight and nine) resumes and is consummated with The Glory’s victory in 11:15-19.

⁴¹⁸ c.f. Ezekiel 40 in which Ezekiel, while in exile, was given a vision of the Jerusalem Temple, which lay in ruins. The Temple was being rebuilt and restored for the people’s worship of The Glory.

⁴¹⁹ “Three and one-half years” (or 42 months or 1260 days) is the length of Gentile rule under the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who desecrated the Temple (“the abomination of desolation”) by, among other things, hanging icons of himself in the Temple and placing a carved image of a pig on the Temple altar!

⁴²⁰ c.f. Zechariah 4:11-14: “Then I asked the angel, ‘What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?’ Again I asked him, ‘What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?’ He replied, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ ‘No, my lord,’ I said. So he said, ‘These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.’”

The Glory’s truth burns away all falsehood.⁴²¹ When they speak, The Glory’s truth is enacted. When they speak, The Glory’s truth transforms what is not into what can be.⁴²² In their words, The Glory’s justice is unleashed not by might but by the Divine Spirit.⁴²³

Yet the Accuser will not be easily dissuaded. The Accuser will persecute and kill through the power of moral decadence as in Sodom, political power as in Egypt, and religious oppression like those who crucified Jesus. The persecution will be fierce, even to the point of desecrating the dead⁴²⁴ and gloating about their ways!

Yet neither will The Glory be easily dissuaded. The persecutors will think they have won victory, but The Glory is the One who breathes new life into the dead, even those like Jesus and Lazarus who were three days and four days dead.⁴²⁵ When the time of the Nations is brought to an end, Moses and Elijah will lead a parade into heaven, into The Glory’s throne room itself. The earth will tremble and quake⁴²⁶ before The Glory’s justice, which will be made whole and complete. All in heaven and those upon the earth will be struck with awe and reverent The Glory—some in praise and others in anguish.

This is the second sorrow and suffering, yet there is still a third to come.

The seventh messenger sounded her trumpet and praise burst forth in heaven, a multitude of those whom The Glory has chosen and called sang,

⁴²¹ c.f. 2 Kings 1:10: “Elijah answered the captain, ‘If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!’ Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.”

⁴²² c.f. Ezekiel 37:1-14, especially 37:4-5: “Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.’”

⁴²³ c.f. Zechariah 4:6: “So he said to me, ‘This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.’”

⁴²⁴ The text uses the symbol of “three and one-half days,” which refers to the custom of ensuring that a corpse was buried properly within three days. To leave a corpse unburied for longer than three days was a grave insult (double entendre intended). I paraphrase this as “desecrating the dead.”

⁴²⁵ c.f. Ezekiel 37:14: “I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.”

⁴²⁶ c.f. Psalm 18:6-7: “In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears. The earth trembled and quaked and the foundations of the mountains shook....”

The kin-dom in heaven and earth have become one!
The Glory and Jesus the Anointed reigning forever!

The twenty-four elders who were seated on
thrones surrounding The Glory fell prostrate, singing,

We give thanks to The Glory,
who was before the beginning of time,
who will be after the end of all things,
who is in every moment in between,
the eternal present.

The Nations raged yet your justice prevailed!
Chronos has become *kairos* for renewal and reward.
The *kairos* for accountability has arrived—
to depose the destructive forces that destroy.

I saw heaven unleashed and unbound, the fullness
of The Glory unveiled: thunder, lightning and hailstorms
from heaven.⁴²⁷ The Nations trembled, the powers were
overturned, the principalities undone.

*Moral arc of history
bending then breaking
shattered by avarice, betrayal, corruption*

*How long, O Glory,
shall you forget
those for whom Jesus died?*

*Into swirling chaos steps
a whisper
that sets free.*

*Chaos ignores but cannot
mute the whisper—
its voice guarded by the One who repairs the broken arc.*

*God, it's me. Give me a voice to use for justice,
compassion, and peace. May my voice not be silenced—
neither by the Accuser nor my own fear. May my voice
whisper in hidden corners and shout in the streets.
May my voice comfort the afflicted and afflict the*

⁴²⁷ c.f. Exodus 9:23: “When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt....”

comfortable. May my voice bear witness to Torah and prophets' truth until the Nations rage no more.

Revelation 12:1-17⁴²⁸

With the echo of praise from the twenty-four elders ringing in my ears, I saw a great sign in heaven: the woman⁴²⁹ foretold by Isaiah the truth-teller—she who is the instrument of our deliverance, before whom even her own people will give reverence.⁴³⁰ The *kairos* was at hand for her to give birth—our Deliverer approaches! Then another great sign appeared: the Accuser, like a giant, red⁴³¹ Dragon. The Accuser, now looking monstrous with seven heads and ten horns, wearing seven crowns,⁴³² sought to usurp The Glory's authority. It spoke proudly and

⁴²⁸ Chapter 12 begins the third depiction of the battle between The Glory and evil that occurs between the Cross and the Coming of Jesus to restore the kin-dom in its fullness. Please note as a reminder that this is the same battle described in chapters 6-7 (depiction one) and then in chapters 8-9, ending in 11:15-19 (depiction two). In chapters 6-7 the key image was a rider on a white horse waging war against three horses symbolizing war, disease, and death. In chapters 8-9 the key image was trumpets being sounded, which alludes to Joshua and the battle of Jericho narrative (Joshua 6). Here in chapter 12 the third depiction begins with a symbolic reference to the birth of Jesus and establishment of the Church.

⁴²⁹ Scholars most often interpret the woman to be either Mother Mary or the Church, though the reference in Isaiah is to Jerusalem. I paraphrase the woman as a reference to Mary giving birth to Jesus. For the Isaiah reference, c.f. Isaiah 66:6-13, especially 66:7, 11: “Before she goes into labor, she gives birth; before the pains come upon her, she delivers a son... For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance.”

⁴³⁰ c.f. Genesis 37:9: “Then Joseph had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. ‘Listen,’ he said, ‘I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.’”

⁴³¹ Red (or scarlet) was the color associated with Roman power.

⁴³² There is no clear referent. Daniel 7 is the most likely referent, though even in Daniel 7 the symbolism is unclear. Lacking specificity and clarity, this symbol (these symbols) lead to interpretive mischief. There is robust debate among literalist interpreters regarding the meaning—from arguing they depict different departments within Roman government to listing ten, specific emperors who could be the intended meaning (with the list of ten differing from commentator to commentator). Caution is advised. In the interpretative paraphrase I lean toward the non-literalist interpreters who understand the symbols and numerology to refer to the way oppressive human systems (like Rome) tend to multiply and become pervasive.

multiplied his arrogance, creating an entire system of abuse and oppression that permeated all I could see, even to the horizon, and infected all it touched. The Accuser mimicked The Glory through its displays of power.

The red Dragon, its giant maw spread wide, squat in front of the woman about to give birth; it prepared to consume her child the moment it was born. (You who remember Herod know that of which I speak.)⁴³³ Yet the child was The Glory's will and set resolve and so was rescued from the mouth of the Dragon, swept into heaven and The Glory's embrace. The woman's son was also The Glory's Son, as the Psalmist proclaimed:

Ruler of all Nations! Dispenser of Justice!
He whose rule scatters the wolves of oppression.
He who shatters systems of tyranny.⁴³⁴

For three and one-half years the woman was in the wilderness, protected by the Divine Spirit. The great, red Dragon could not touch the woman. To say the Dragon was angry is an understatement. War erupted in heaven! It wasn't a fair fight.

The celestial messenger Michael led an army of messengers to fight the Dragon. The Dragon and its army fought back and were no match for Michael. The great Dragon—the ancient serpent,⁴³⁵ the devil, Satan, the Accuser—who seeks to obscure the God-life from all humanity, was thrown down, thrown down, thrown down, thrown down!⁴³⁶ Heaven would never again be home to the Dragon.

⁴³³ This sentence is not in the text but added as an interpretive note because the symbolism refers to Herod's "slaughter of the innocents" in Matthew 2:16-18.

⁴³⁴ c.f. Psalm 2:7. Note that I interpret the reference to "rod of iron" in the Psalm as associated with Psalm 23, the work of a shepherd to guard the flock rather than a royal beating a subject..

⁴³⁵ c.f. Genesis 3:1: "Now the serpent was craftier than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'; c.f. also Isaiah 65:25: "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,' says the LORD."

⁴³⁶ Four times in the next five verses the Greek verb *ballo* is used, which means "to cast, hurl, or throw." The use of repetition creates emphasis in the text. Admittedly, my use of "thrown down" four times *in the same sentence* is excessive, but I bet, O Gentle Reader, you remember the point. Shout out to my friend, the Rev. Dr. Doug Kelly, for his "Berkeley Banana Bombs"

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven: "Now is the *kairos*, the kin-dom come, earth becoming as it is in heaven! The Accuser of our beloved, who accuses them before The Glory day and night, has been thrown down out of heaven! Our beloved have triumphed over the Accuser through the gift of love shed by the Lamb and the gift of his teaching the kin-dom Way. Our beloved loved The Glory and the Lamb more than life itself. They did not betray their ideals even in the face of death! Therefore rejoice and shout thanksgiving you who dwell in The Glory's embrace! But sorrow and suffering to the earth, for the Accuser has been thrown down from heaven and is in your midst. Be wary and aware! The Accuser's fury is filled to the brim and overflowing. Its fury spills upon the ground itself, into lakes and rivers; its fury distorts human thinking and hunts human hearts. The Accuser knows its time is short."

When the Dragon saw that it had been thrown down from heaven, never again to be allowed into The Glory's direct presence, it pursued the woman.⁴³⁷ The woman, and all whom she represents—the fullness of the Body—were lifted up on eagles' wings⁴³⁸ and carried into the wilderness⁴³⁹ to be cared for by the Divine Spirit. For three and one-half years, the Body (whom the woman represents) was guarded from the Dragon, who was not allowed to touch them, though not for lack of trying. The Dragon attacked and sought to engulf the Body with flood waters but was prevented—the earth itself swallowed the flood—for the Body was protected throughout this time.

Stifled for a time, the Dragon's fury boiled to overflowing and was unleashed on the woman's offspring—all those who abide in Jesus, following the Way, who have not seen Jesus in the flesh yet trust the testimony about him. These are the persecuted people to whom this vision of hope speaks.⁴⁴⁰

sermon on Revelation 12 that informed my understanding of the text.

⁴³⁷ The symbolic meaning of the woman seems to have shifted from Mother Mary to the Church founded in Jesus (c.f. note 960).

⁴³⁸ c.f. Exodus 19:4: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."

⁴³⁹ c.f. Deuteronomy 32:10: "In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye...."

⁴⁴⁰ This last sentence is not in the Greek text but would have been understood, assumed, and experienced by John's 1st century readers.

*Danny Parsons beat the snot out of me.
I was seven, and he was eight.
I remember his fury as if it was yesterday,
not having lost many fights in my day.*

*Seven-year-old me would have had Danny thrown down
(if it had been up to me which, thankfully, it was not).
Now I understand that his fury
may have reflected his home life.*

*Who is the one who should be “thrown down”?
Not the Dannys of this world, I think, but
those for whom abuse and oppression are set resolve,
those for whom heaven will never feel like home.*

God, it's me. Teach me to see all people with “Jesus Eyes”—seeing them not as they present but as they truly are. Help me to look beyond outer countenance to perceive inner character. Help me to attend with compassion the pleas of the poor and heed the prophet's call for the people, cities, and countries devastated by greed, injustice, and ecological disaster. O Glory, in these days of constant judgment, make me an instrument of your peace.

Revelation 13:1-10⁴⁴¹

And I saw one who opposed The Glory and the Lamb, an Opposer (also called an antichrist) that looked like a Beast, rising from the chaos that is the sea. This Beast was most impressive in appearance!⁴⁴² It had political

⁴⁴¹ John now adds two more personifications of evil to the mix to form an unholy trinity. These two, both called Beasts, are empowered by the Dragon and are given power (“ten horns”), wisdom (“seven heads”) and glory (“ten crowns”), but also carry a blasphemous name. They are ferocious (like a leopard, bear and lion) and the world follows after them (13:1-4). The perpetual question people probe is this: “Who is the antichrist?” to which there are three kinds of answers: (1) a modern politician, (2) generally anyone who opposes The Glory, or (3) Caesar. See endnote 3 in Appendix A for a more in-depth explication of these options.

⁴⁴² The text describes the first Beast's appearance as having ten horns, seven heads, and ten crowns. This passage does not contain an obvious referent. As noted above, symbols without a clear referent in Jewish literature (Hebrew Bible, apocrypha, or pseudepigrapha) or Roman culture induce speculation and conjecture from some interpreters. These symbols seem like they might suggest power (“ten horns”), wisdom (“seven heads”), and

power, secular wisdom, and social pizzaz. It derided The Glory and the Lamb. The Beast I saw stalked its prey as Empires have always done, just as the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks had done before Rome.⁴⁴³ The Accuser, looking like a Dragon, collaborated with the Beast, giving it power, privilege and authority to use in its drive to control all policy and all people, both wealthy or wise as well as least and last. The Beast wanted it all for itself, and the Dragon was happy to accommodate it, for the Beast served the Dragon's purposes.

Though the Beast had received a death blow⁴⁴⁴ (the power of the emperor having been diminished following Nero's death), yet did the Beast survive (with emperor Vespasian restoring power and dictatorial rule to the Roman throne). In awe and appreciation, all the Empire paid homage to the Beast and followed it willingly. They followed the Beast and worshipped the Dragon, saying, “Who is like the Beast? Who has such power, such authority? Who speaks with lips dripping arrogance and is applauded? No one can stop the Beast!”

The Beast (who is an antichrist who opposes the Way of Jesus) spoke arrogantly, defaming The Glory and ridiculing the Lamb. It was allowed its moment—three and one-half years—allowed to distort the God-rhythms and speak against the God-life. It even spoke against heaven itself! It was allowed to wage war against those whom The Glory had chosen, called, and named. It was even allowed to overwhelm them. Every nation and every country, every language and every tongue, every tribe, clan, and family was touched by the work the Beast enacted. The whole earth was given over to the Beast and its purposes; all

glory (“ten crowns”). Please note the humility and lack of declarative phrases in the previous sentence.

⁴⁴³ The text speaks of “leopards, bears, and lions.” Again, we have a symbol without a clear referent. While leopards, bears, and lions populate the pages of the Hebrew Bible, there is no special meaning other than the obvious biological one: they're predators. When given symbolic meaning, leopards, bears and lions refer to The Glory (c.f. Hosea 13:6-7), which is problematic because the predators in chapter 13 are The Glory's enemies. These symbols seem to refer to the previous Empires (before Roman rule) that occupied and oppressed Israel in a predatory manner.

⁴⁴⁴ The vast majority of interpreters agree this symbol should be taken allegorically. Some spiritualize the symbolism (e.g. Easter resurrection was a death blow to Satan, who yet rallied to wage war against the Church) while most find a historical referent. When Nero died in 69 C.E. the power of the emperor was diminished (due to Nero being an unreliable personality). It was not until emperor Vespasian that the autocratic authority was restored to the role of emperor.

except The Glory's beloved, whose names are written in the Book of Life and who are protected by the Lamb—he who was slain, even Jesus the Anointed. This is a difficult truth for those who belong to The Glory, who are the persecuted flock of the Lamb. As the truth-teller Jeremiah spoke:

Captivity comes, unwelcome though it may be;
vengeance sought is vengeance received.⁴⁴⁵

This calls for patient endurance from all, especially from those who are chosen, called, and named by The Glory.

*Who has not asked humanity's pervasive question,
the question asked in hospital rooms and funeral parlors:
Why?*

*Who has not proclaimed, the child's sense of the world,
echoing across playgrounds:
It's not fair!*

*And what word do we hear from on high,
if any response ever comes?
Endure.*

God, it's me. I look around at the fundamental unfairness of the world and wonder where you are? As I sip coffee in the mountains, I wonder why you allow others to suffer heat. As I watch the news on my big screen, I seethe to see photos of refugee camps—come on, Glory, what's up with that? On vacation I am dismayed the hotel staff get paid so little. At bedtime, as I tuck my children into bed, praying you would keep them safe from the dangers of violence and addiction, I congratulate myself, thinking, "What more could I do?"

Revelation 13:11-18

Then I saw another who opposed The Glory and the Lamb, (also an antichrist and also looking like a Beast). This second Beast had two horns like a lamb⁴⁴⁶ but spoke

⁴⁴⁵ c.f. Jeremiah 15:2: "And if they ask you, 'Where shall we go?' tell them, 'This is what the LORD says: 'Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.'"

⁴⁴⁶ The second Beast has two horns (rather than ten), the significance of which is that it is utterly normal looking.

like a Dragon. It was given authority by the first Beast, to undergird its political and secular power by adding a religious veneer. It even mimicked the works of the truth-teller Elijah!⁴⁴⁷ The second Beast gave speeches and dollars and performed great deeds in service of the first Beast's desire to dominate all the earth. Its influence equaled that of the first Beast and its ability to deceive surpassed it, yet all was done to secure the first Beast's ability to slay and enslave all humankind.

The second Beast empowered the first Beast's use of money as the means for goodness, glory, and blessing. It emboldened the belief that economics define human value. Those who did not bow before the first Beast were killed. No one was spared: great and small, rich and poor, big boss and frontline worker. All participated in the unjust systems created by the first Beast. No one could escape. And so it was said that all who had the mark⁴⁴⁸ of the Beast upon their head or hands belonged to the Beast, for people's thoughts were defined by these systems and their every action dictated by them. Understanding this requires wisdom not fear. The Beast is known, and we know the Beast—we see it as it truly is. We are not fooled, not one bit. The number⁴⁴⁹ of the Beast is Neron's name: 666.

⁴⁴⁷ The text says the second Beast causes fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people, as Elijah did on Mt. Carmel; c.f. 1 Kings 18, especially 18:38: "Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench."

⁴⁴⁸ Roman coins bore the image of Caesar and the inscription, "Our Lord and god." All persons were required to pay an annual tax using these coins as their assent to Caesar's lordship. When Christians refused to pay the tax because they considered the practice idolatrous, they were punished with legal and political consequences, including persecution during the time when Revelation was written. These verses caution against how easy it is to let go of the true worship of The Glory in order to participate in the powers and principalities of economic and political power. Martin Luther said that we worship anything or anyone we put as a priority before The Glory. In Luther's understanding, the "image of the beast," a coin with which to buy and sell, would be giving ourselves over to the realities of our economic well-being even at the expense of living the God-life.

⁴⁴⁹ The Greek and Hebrew alphabets served as numbers as well as letters, so someone's name could be added up to form a number. We all know the number of the beast, right? Of course we do: it's 666. But wait! Some ancient manuscripts put the number of the beast at 666 and others put it at 616! What's going on with the manuscripts? It seems that Nero, the notorious emperor and persecutor of Christians, spelled his name both as Nero and as Neron, depending upon the geographic region of the empire. In those parts of the empire where the name was spelled Neron, the

*The book was scary!
Innocuous on the outside:
white cover with red lettering.
Inside, though, it purported to name “the Antichrist!”*

*I was 17,
a newly minted Christian,
desperate to know the truth,
intrigued to read the Antichrist was...Anwar Sadat!*

*Months passed,
Sadat was assassinated.
Unconcerned about his family or geopolitics,
I only worried about that book’s sales!*

*I stewed.
How could the book have gotten it so wrong?
My 17-year-old self took matters into my own hands:
I read Revelation!*

*I studied and studied,
still desperate,
still intrigued,
still understood next to nothing!*

*Years passed,
I browsed curriculum in the Christian Book Store,
a pastor plum out of ideas, running on fumes,
when I saw it: The Book!*

*Same white cover, same red lettering,
like the first Beast with a fatal head wound,
the book had come back to life.
Who, I wondered, is the Antichrist now?*

*Less desperate,
less intrigued,
I peeked between the covers:
Saddam Hussein!*

number of the beast was “666.” In those parts of the empire where the name was spelled Nero, the number of the beast was “616.” This comes as close to proof as possible that John is saying that Nero is the antichrist. But wait! Nero had been dead for 20 years by the time John wrote the Revelation, so how could he be the antichrist? Clearly, John is using Nero as a symbol to convey meaning: the antichrist is that person, any person, who fights against The Glory and persecutes The Glory’s people. John refers to Nero as the archetype of evil in ways similar to modern allusions to Hitler, Stalin, or Bin Laden.

*Fool me once,
shame on you.
Fool me twice,
shame on me.*

God, it’s me. I admit, no, I confess! I am still intrigued, (still curious at least) about the antichrist. Even though the actual words of your Word point to two “beasts,” I still think in Hollywood terms about the one “antichrist.” Even though 1 John talks about “antichrists” in the plural,⁴⁵⁰ I wonder and can’t seem to get it out of my system. Perhaps I am avoiding what your Word means by what it says: The systems created by those who oppose you serve to slay and enslave. Maybe not me, specifically, but billions around the world are caught in the web of economic destruction undergirded by religious deceit. O Glory, it is so much easier to argue for “regime change” of a Hitler, Sadat, Saddam, or Bin Laden than to advocate for systemic change that impacts my pocketbook. Is this why I am so enamored of the one “Bogeyman” interpretations about the antichrist? O Glory, help me perceive the ways I am caught in the web. Help me understand the ways I help create the web in the first place. In your mercy, forgive, redeem, and renew.

Revelation 14:1-5⁴⁵¹

Then I looked and saw a most glorious sight: the Lamb standing in triumph, standing on Mount Zion!⁴⁵² With the Lamb was all Israel and all the Body,⁴⁵³ all those who bore the Lamb’s name upon their foreheads and hands, whose minds, hearts, and actions defied the two Beasts⁴⁵⁴ and served The Glory. These are the gathering of those who dance the God-rhythms and live the God-life.

⁴⁵⁰ c.f. 1 John 2:18.

⁴⁵¹ The Revelation’s structure has descriptions of conflict (chapters 6, 8-10, 12-13) followed by descriptions of triumph (chapters 7, 11). Chapters 14-15 are the descriptions of triumph that follow the conflict with the Dragon and the two Beasts.

⁴⁵² c.f. Psalm 2:5-6: “He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ‘I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.’”

⁴⁵³ See note 916 regarding the “144,000” in 7:1.

⁴⁵⁴ The majority of subsequent references to the Beast in the text of Revelation use the singular form to refer to the first Beast. As an interpretive choice, I paraphrase using the plural form to remind readers there are actually two Beasts—a political Beast

Then I heard The Glory's voice, which sounded like the roar of rushing waters,⁴⁵⁵ as the truth-teller Ezekiel had heard, and loud peals of thunder⁴⁵⁶ as the Psalmist proclaims. And I heard all those who were gathered, who were singing praise—their voices a symphony of harps and lyres.⁴⁵⁷ They sang a new song to The Glory, a song of praise for joy unending. They sang before The Glory's throne with all heaven listening; the heavenly host rejoiced in their song. Only the gathered in heaven could learn the song, for they had been renewed—made whole and complete, their true selves.

The gathered are those who refused to defile themselves with the two Beasts, refused the invitation to allow idolatry to dine with them at Sunday dinner and turned injustice away when it came calling at their door. They remained pure in heart and so look upon The Glory's face.⁴⁵⁸ They danced the God-rhythms and lived the God-life. The Way of Jesus was their life path, and he bought them out of their slavery to the Dragon and two Beasts. These gathered that I saw are but the firstfruits of The Glory's harvest (for surely more will join them). The Dragon speaks lies and deceit drips from the lips of the two Beasts. Not so the gathered! They speak and live The Glory's truth and have been made blameless by the Lamb.

Sing!

*Sing a new song.*⁴⁵⁹

Sing, you who are beloved.

and religious Beast. While 1st century Christians would have been most concerned about the political Beast (Caesar Domitian's persecution), modern readers are reminded of our role either to conform to or confront the pattern of behavior (read: systemic oppression and injustice) of the first Beast.

⁴⁵⁵ c.f. Ezekiel 43:2, previously cited.

⁴⁵⁶ c.f. Psalm 68:33: "...to him who rides across the highest heavens, the ancient heavens, who thunders with mighty voice."

⁴⁵⁷ c.f. Psalm 150:3: "Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre...."

⁴⁵⁸ The Greek text translates as "remained virgins," which is a reference to Hosea 2:2-8 where the prophet engages in an extended metaphor that Israel is The Glory's unfaithful wife. Thus, the reference to being a virgin is less about one's sexual practice or marital status but symbolizes fidelity to The Glory. Given our culture tends to become anxious when talk turns to sex, I have chosen for the paraphrase to avoid referring to the literal symbol and focus on the symbol's meaning, (c.f. Matthew 5:8).

⁴⁵⁹ c.f. Psalm 98:1: "Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him." c.f. also Psalm 96:1.

Sing, you who are too broken to know your belovedness.
Sing, you who are too afraid to hope it may be true.
Sing, for you are beloved.

Sing the new song about The Glory's love.
Sing about the love that will not let you go.
Sing!

God, it's me. Rebuke my idolatry of power and privilege; renew my practice of servanthood. Rebuke my toleration of injustice; renew my commitment to seek justice for all. Rebuke my silence; renew my song—may it be a song of praise for unending joy.

Revelation 14:6-12⁴⁶⁰

Then I saw three of the celestial messengers flying amidst heaven, each with a message to proclaim to those who live on earth. The first messenger proclaimed the Good News about Jesus the Anointed to all who live on the earth—to every country and every culture, to every language and every tongue, to every city, town, village, and hamlet. He instructed all humankind: "Revere The Glory! Be in awe and wonder! The *kairos* of *shalom* has come; therefore, honor and serve the One who made the heavens and earth, the sea and all that is within them!"⁴⁶¹

The second messenger then proclaimed: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!"⁴⁶² Fallen is Rome the Magnificent! Fallen are all Citadels of human power, glory, and self-importance! They force all humankind to imbibe

⁴⁶⁰ The timeline of this passage is essential for its interpretation. The proclamations regarding punishment that follow in 14:9-12 are centered on the here and now and not the afterlife. Therefore, drawing an inference about hell being a place of eternal torment *from this passage* is an exegetical error. See notes in this passage for a fuller description of the interpretive boundaries needed for a proper exegesis of this passage.

⁴⁶¹ c.f. Psalm 24:1-2: "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters."

⁴⁶² The text only mentions Babylon. However, for the sake of the interpretive paraphrase, I expand the pronouncements against Babylon to include also Rome and all Citadels of power and carry this expanded metaphor into chapter 18; c.f. Isaiah 21:8-9: "Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: 'Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground!'"

their adulteries: idolatry and injustice that bring anguish and destruction upon the earth.”⁴⁶³

The third messenger then proclaimed: “All who bear the image of the two Beasts and practice its ways in their thinking and doing, they, too, will be given over to The Glory’s wrath,⁴⁶⁴ which allows human agency to set its own course. We⁴⁶⁵ will drink deeply from the cask of insolence and arrogance until there is no love in our hearts. We will imbibe ignorance and infidelity until we are devoid of mercy. The Lamb and his messengers will watch our torment⁴⁶⁶ in grief and sorrow, for it will continue and

⁴⁶³ The text only names Babylon, but commentators agree the reference is to Rome. Some will ask, “Then why didn’t John just say Rome?” The most likely answer is that Roman authorities would not have taken kindly to having their authority directly confronted, so Babylon, the power that oppressed The Glory’s people 400 years before, is used to represent Rome. In the paraphrase, I carry this representation forward to include all great cities who subvert the God-life.

⁴⁶⁴ In Pauline thought, the wrath of God is not the kind of punishment stylized by Genesis 19:28 (i.e. Sodom and Gomorrah) but a giving over of humans to human agency. Three times in Romans 1:18-32 Paul says The Glory’s response to human idolatry is to allow human freedom (c.f. “gave them over” in 1:24, 26, and 28). The consequences of The Glory’s giving humans over to themselves are pervasive. Though most readers focus on sexual immorality, this is merely the most obvious example of The Glory’s wrath. The passage climaxes (pardon the pun) with a more comprehensive list of consequences in 1:29-31: “They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.” See the next note for further implication of The Glory’s wrath as giving humans over to our own agency.

⁴⁶⁵ The transition from the third person they to the first person we is intentional and interpretive. As mentioned in a previous note, the vast majority of humankind participate in the broken, human systems that allow injustice and oppression; therefore, it seems “meet and right” to include ourselves in the consequences (i.e. wrath) of The Glory’s having given us over to human agency.

⁴⁶⁶ While the most obvious referent here is to Genesis 19:28, I note the distinction between fire and sulfur: Both burn but only fire consumes while sulfur torments but does not consume. This distinction will become significant later in Revelation (c.f. 20:10 vs. 20:14). In the current passage, the distinction is significant in that sulfur is said to torment those who think in conformity to and practice the oppressive systems of the Dragon and two Beasts, which is basically 99.9% of humanity. The Glory’s beloved are not spared participation in the consequences of a society dominated by abuse and betrayal, corruption and greed, deceit and manipulation. Moreover, though The Glory’s beloved (you and me, Gentle Reader) struggle against direct practice of these

continue. Our false selves do not have the capacity to end it. Our broken systems will not repair themselves.”

This invites chagrin, regret, and repentance from those who belong to The Glory! And accompanying our repentance must be patient endurance, for the world created by human agency, the world guided by the Dragon and the two Beasts, is not an easy world in which to dance the God-rhythms, to live the God-life, or to walk the Way of Jesus.

*Wars and rumors of wars
Civil war on the horizon.*

*Fires rage and hurricanes rush
Creation itself subjected to frustration*⁴⁶⁷

*Where is love?
Where is mercy?*

*Who shall endure?
Who can escape?*⁴⁶⁸

God, it’s me. Forgive my complicity in the world’s brokenness, O Glory. Forgive my participation in broken systems that I did not invent but from which I certainly benefit. Forgive my indulgence of that which brings me indulgence while oppressing others. Forgive me that “I wish I could quit” but cannot. O Glory, what shall become of me? What shall become of us?

Revelation 14:13-20

Then I heard a voice say, “Write! Sacred to The Glory are those who die in Jesus. They will rest from their toil—weariness and fatigue shall stalk them no longer, and all the ways they have been a blessing will be carried forward, remembered and celebrated.”

I looked and saw before me the Anointed, who represented all humankind and yet also stood in the place of The Glory,⁴⁶⁹ as one who is co-equal in power and

things, we yet participate in the cultural systems created by human agency; the result of The Glory giving us over (see previous note).

⁴⁶⁷ c.f. Romans 8:20.

⁴⁶⁸ See the next verse (14:13) for an answer to this question.

⁴⁶⁹ c.f. Daniel 7:13: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.”

authority and dominion. One of the celestial messengers called to the Anointed, calling him “Son of Humanity,” as the truth-teller Daniel had seen and heard in a mystical vision. The messenger said, “Son of Humanity, it is time for the harvest!” So the Anointed, seated in the place of authority, swung the harvest sickle and justice was fulfilled. The whole earth was harvested with the justice decreed when the Anointed swung his sickle.

Another messenger came out from The Glory’s presence, and he also had a harvesting sickle, while another messenger had the Refiner’s Fire from the altar that was placed before The Glory. This second messenger said to the first, “Swing! Swing your sickle⁴⁷⁰ for the harvest has come—the *kairos* of The Glory’s justice is fulfilled. Harvest the grapes of wrath,⁴⁷¹ for The Glory’s justice shall fill all the earth, from north to south and from east to west,⁴⁷² from head to toe all humankind will be immersed in The Glory’s justice. There shall be no escape.”

*The Army of the Potomac*⁴⁷³
Patton’s Fifth Army

Ghandi’s reform
King’s movement

More than my daddy’s belt
Much more than prurient accounting

Renewing all
Restoring justice

New creation
As it was in the beginning

⁴⁷⁰ c.f. Joel 3:13: “Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!”

⁴⁷¹ c.f. Isaiah 63:3; “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath....”

⁴⁷² The text refers to “1,600 stadia,” which is a term for distance; specifically, the distance between Dan in the north of Israel to the Gulf of Aqaba in the south of Judah (1,600 stadia or roughly 180 miles). The reference is to the totality of the judgment “from top to bottom.”

⁴⁷³ One of the most famous literary uses of “the grapes of wrath” and “trampling out the vintage” comes from Julia Ward Howe’s *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, which was inspired by the army of the Potomac during the Civil War.

God, it’s me. Make me an instrument of your peace.⁴⁷⁴ Where there is hatred, let me bring love. Where there is despair, let me bring hope. Where there is darkness, let me bring your light. O Glory, let me not seek as much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love, for it is in giving that I receive, it is in pardoning that I am pardoned, it is in dying that I am raised to eternal life.

Revelation 15:1-8⁴⁷⁵

Then I looked and saw yet another great phenomenon in heaven: the fulfillment of The Glory’s justice. Seven⁴⁷⁶ celestial messengers, each with a judgment to be poured out, consummated The Glory’s wrath—the joy of redemption—that had begun by giving us over to ourselves. It was finished.

And I saw a huge, bronze bowl, like the one that had stood before the entrance to the Temple in Jerusalem. The bowl contained water for cleansing and fire for purging and looked like a great, glassy sea.⁴⁷⁷ In this sea all who belonged to The Glory could swim and be refreshed, renewed, and celebrate their victory over the two Beasts. They celebrated for they did not succumb to the Beasts’ ways of thinking and transactional practices of relating to one another. Instead, they endured with patience, trusting The Glory would restore *shalom* to the earth. The people stood upon the shores of the sea with musical instruments, with harps and lyres, and sang the song of Moses,⁴⁷⁸ servant of The Glory, and the song of the Lamb.

Amazing the works!
Wondrous the ways!
The Glory is just and true!
The Glory is sovereign over the nNtions!
Who fills all with awe!

⁴⁷⁴ c.f. The Prayer of St. Francis.

⁴⁷⁵ Chapter 15 continues the depiction of The Glory’s triumph and promises The Glory’s presence, comfort, and love.

⁴⁷⁶ The number seven is prominent in this chapter: seven messengers, seven judgments, seven golden bowls. As a reminder, seven is the symbolic number for divine completeness, wholeness, and perfection.

⁴⁷⁷ c.f. 1 Kings 7:23-26: “He made the Sea of cast metal, circular in shape...The Sea stood on twelve bulls, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east. The Sea rested on top of them...It held two thousand baths.”

⁴⁷⁸ c.f. Exodus 15:1-8: “I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.”

Who leads all to reverence!
All nations will honor and adore The Glory,
for The Glory's justice has been unveiled.

After this I looked and saw the dwelling place of The Glory—like the Tent of Meeting in the desert and the Temple in Jerusalem.⁴⁷⁹ In that place the *shekinah*⁴⁸⁰ overwhelmed all who encountered The Glory and yet they were able to endure. From this dwelling place came the consummation of The Glory's justice—the seven messengers each with a judgment to be poured out—but now they were dressed in honor with golden sashes,⁴⁸¹ as Aaron and the priests had been dressed. One of the four living creatures gave the celestial messengers seven bowls, like those upon the altar in the Tent of Meeting and the Jerusalem Temple, the bowls that are used for cleansing the people and proclaiming their forgiveness.⁴⁸² The bowls were filled with justice from The Glory, the One who lives and has always lived and will always live. In the presence of The Glory, the throne room filled with smoke⁴⁸³ from the might of Their power, and no one could enter until The Glory's justice was made whole and complete, the creation made new when all would live the God-life.

Subtle the difference
Fire that destroys
Fire that purges.

⁴⁷⁹ c.f. Exodus 40:34-35: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle"; c.f. also 1 Kings 8:10: "When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD."

⁴⁸⁰ *Shekinah* is a Hebrew word meaning "dwelling" and refers to the experience of being in the direct presence of The Glory.

⁴⁸¹ c.f. Exodus 28:39-41: "Weave the tunic of fine linen and make the turban of fine linen. The sash is to be the work of an embroiderer...put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests."

⁴⁸² c.f. Exodus 24:6-7: "Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.'"

⁴⁸³ c.f. Isaiah 6:4: "At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke."

Significant the distinction
Judgment that punishes
Justice that restores.

Salvation:
made empty
to be made whole.

God, it's me. Your justice forces a recognition: our world is not as you would have it. I am not as you would have me. I need a swimming lesson: in the great, glassy sea where cleansing and purging refresh and renew. I need immersion into the deep waters of baptismal mercy that forgiven I may be free from the powers that distort my thinking and lead me to relate to others only according to the benefit they give me! I need your forgiveness, O Glory, that I may be free to live as you would have me live. O Glory, in your mercy, hear my prayer.

Revelation 16:1-21⁴⁸⁴

Then I heard a loud voice from the throne room commanding the seven celestial messengers to make whole and complete the fulfillment of The Glory's justice. The voice sent the messengers, saying, "Go! Pour out my justice upon the land and sea, upon rivers and springs, upon the sun and the two Beasts. Let it pour out upon Babylon, upon Rome, and upon all Citadels of human oppression. Let it open the floodgates of restoration. Nothing shall remain untouched; all shall be renewed."

One by one five of the messengers poured out upon the earth their bowls, which had been filled with The Glory's justice. As in the days of Moses when The Glory confronted Pharaoh, The Glory's justice flowed.⁴⁸⁵ With blood and darkness and death it flowed. With festering sores, fire and scorching heat it flowed. Upon those who practice the ways of the two Beasts it rained. Upon the living and the dead it rained. Upon all those who, like Pharaoh, understood the power and majesty of The Glory yet refused to turn toward the God-life it rained. Even when it was understood that the ways of the Dragon and the two Beasts led to sorrow and suffering, they refused to

⁴⁸⁴ Chapter 16 begins the fourth conflict with evil / victory cycle as an extended *midrash* (or commentary) on the Exodus narratives that tell the story of the ten plagues inflicted upon Egypt.

⁴⁸⁵ c.f. The plague narratives in Exodus 8-12.

turn away! Their distorted thoughts had become entrenched, and their broken practices had become addictions. For them, there was no turning back, no turning back.

Then I heard the voice of the messenger in charge of the waters shout,

Harmony and hope come from The Glory,
who is the eternal present,
who lived before all time.

Those who shed the blood of the beloved,
who opposed those who spoke truth to power,
have drank the cup prepared by their deeds.

And I heard those gathered around The Glory's throne respond:

Amen! Just and true is The Glory's justice,
which restores all things,
which brings new creation.

Then I looked and saw the sixth celestial messenger pour out her bowl on the great river Euphrates,⁴⁸⁶ which boundaries Rome's eastern border and holds back the dreaded Parthian hordes. When The Glory's justice was poured out, the water dried up, and Rome's protection disappeared.

Rome fought back. I saw three unholy messengers, who bore the image of the Dragon and the two Beasts upon them and croaked like frogs. Their croaking was a crescendo of cacophony as they spewed deceit and manipulation that rallied their armies. They manufactured alliances and honed their skills for battle as they prepared for war against The Glory.

And I heard the Lamb proclaim:

Watch! Be alert! I come like a thief in the night.⁴⁸⁷
Blessed is the one who abides in me, who stays awake and remains clothed in the robes with which I dress you. You will not go into the world naked or ashamed.

⁴⁸⁶ The sixth bowl poured out is on the River Euphrates (16:12), the area of the Parthians, who were the people on Rome's eastern, hostile border. When the judgment is poured out even on the Euphrates, it "prepares the way for the kings from the East" (i.e. for Rome's destruction).

⁴⁸⁷ c.f. 1 Thessalonians 5:2: "...the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."

Then the armies of the Dragon gathered for battle in the valley of Megiddo,⁴⁸⁸ the place of many battles throughout Israel's history, known in Hebrew as *Har-Meggedon*.

Then the seventh messenger poured out his bowl and so consummated the fulfillment of The Glory's justice. "It is finished!"⁴⁸⁹ proclaimed the voice from the throne. The Glory, power unleashed and majesty unbound,⁴⁹⁰ descended with flashes of lightning, peals of thunder and an earthquake⁴⁹¹ that transformed creation and made all things new.

The Nations shattered and scattered into parts and pieces,⁴⁹² each seeking its own salvation. The Glory triumphed over Babylon and Rome and all Citadels of self-importance. The wine of justice filled the cup to the brim, and The Glory's *shalom* touched all the places where the cup overflowed—not one place was spared, for the wine of that cup flows forever. Nothing remained untouched; all was renewed.

"It is finished!"
Words from the Cross—
past event projecting forward,
the arc of moral history finding its compass.

The battle is won,
even as it is still being fought,
nothing remains untouched,
all will be renewed.

God, it's me. It's hard to read Revelations and not see its images as literal expressions of your anger and fury, our just comeuppance for tolerating injustice and

⁴⁸⁸ c.f. Judges 5:19: "Kings came, they fought, the kings of Canaan fought. At Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo...."

⁴⁸⁹ c.f. John 19:30.

⁴⁹⁰ c.f. Joel 3:16: "The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel"; c.f. also Exodus 19:16ff.: "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast."

⁴⁹¹ c.f. Matthew 27:50-54, 28:1-2 and Hebrews 12:26-28.

⁴⁹² c.f. Daniel 2:44-45: "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces."

welcoming oppression. Where, O Glory, is the line between literal and symbolic, between prose and the poetic? I trust the prophets, truth-tellers from ages past, who spoke in symbols and used them to provoke imagination and evoke repentance. I trust, even more, that your character is love. You may love us just as we are but too much to let us stay that way. May your justice begin with me, O Glory, and may I be even a minor character in the narrative that leads toward the horizon of your victory.

Revelation 17:1-18⁴⁹³

Then one of the seven celestial messengers came to me and said, “Come! I will show you the sentence handed down for the Great Prostitute whose power rests on many waters and might lays upon many lands.⁴⁹⁴ It sells itself for human oppression. The powerful purchase it and pretend it means something. The rich use it to satisfy their lusts that are never sated. Influencers get intoxicated on the access the Great Prostitute brings.”

Then the messenger carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness where I saw the Great Prostitute of our time. I saw the way it lied about The Glory and paraded around in self-importance. I saw its bling, meant to impress with its wealth—layer upon gaudy layer of gold, precious stones, and pearls. Its purple and scarlet outfit⁴⁹⁵ gave away the secret of its identity as much as the name inscribed on its forehead:

Babylon,⁴⁹⁶ Rome, and All Citadels of Power
Whores Who Pretend to Give Love
Liars about What Really Matters

The Great Prostitute was drunk on the blood of The Glory’s beloved, having persecuted those who bore witness to Jesus.

⁴⁹³ Chapter 17 includes the famous quotation associating Babylon the Great with the Great Prostitute. As previously noted, references to Babylon are clearly intended as references to Rome.

⁴⁹⁴ Rome’s greatness, like empires before it, was described as “sitting on many waters.”

⁴⁹⁵ Purple and scarlet were colors traditionally associated with Roman clothing, especially its governmental and military leaders.

⁴⁹⁶ c.f. Jeremiah 51:7: “Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD’s hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore, they have now gone mad.”

I was astonished when I saw the Great Prostitute, for its opulence was not what I expected. Then the messenger explained to me, “What you see is an illusion. The Great Prostitute mimics but cannot become The Glory.⁴⁹⁷ It exults in its power but cannot match The Glory’s majesty. It brags of its riches but what is any human wealth compared to the beauty of the earth and skies that belong to The Glory? It boasts that it will yet become as The Glory already is, but to its proud, ‘Not yet!’ The Glory responds, ‘Not ever.’ It was born of death and into death it leads all who follow it, whose names are not inscribed in the Book of Life that was written before the beginning of time.

“This calls for wisdom and discernment yet let me be clear: The Great Prostitute is ‘the city on seven hills.’⁴⁹⁸ It knows great power—it’s military sits on many waters—yet its time is coming to an end. Its rulers have reigned over many peoples yet never been sovereign over heaven and earth. Caesar Nero, ‘the beast who once was, now is not, and is yet to come’ will not actually return—*Nero redivivus*⁴⁹⁹ is urban legend not something real. There is only one who has died and returned to life: Jesus the Anointed. Indeed, Caesar Domitian is like all others before him—destined for destruction.

“The Great Prostitute will rule human affairs for yet a while longer. For a moment it lingers but for eternity it is doomed. For this moment it has but one purpose: to wage war against the Lamb, but its purpose is folly and its destruction assured. The Lamb will triumph for he is Sovereign over all creation; he is Sovereign above Caesar. With the Lamb will be all whom he has chosen, all whom he has called to himself, all who have abided in him through trust.”

Then the messenger said to me, “Here is the divine irony: The waters you saw where the Great Prostitute sits refer to people—gatherings great and small, even nations. They lie with the Great Prostitute yet despise it, drink of its cup only to spew the wine out when it looks away. When the *kairos* arrives, the peoples of this earth will leave the Great Prostitute naked, ashamed, and unable to cover itself, for it will serve their purpose no more. The

⁴⁹⁷ The text of 17:8 says, “who was, now is not, and is to come,” which is similar to 4:8, “who was, and is, and is to come.”

⁴⁹⁸ This is the clearest and most direct reference linking Rome with the Great Prostitute.

⁴⁹⁹ Nero Redivivus: some Romans believed a superstition that Nero would return to life or that Domitian was Nero reincarnated, as both Caesars were renowned for their enmity against Christians.

Great Prostitute is the Citadel that rules over the peoples—
for now only and only for this moment.”

*Lying about life—
no joining of lives
only genitals.*

*Deceptive fantasies—
fundamental impoverishment rather than
gift with sacramental qualities.*

*Promise of success, ecstasy, and meaning
that we can get for the price of a
depersonalized identity.*

*Using a gift to do evil—
the problem is not the pleasure but the belief:
love can be purchased.*

*Worship under the Great Prostitute—
spiritual sacrilege
transactional salvation that cannot transform.⁵⁰⁰*

God, it's me. Guide me to protect my mind, that I
would perceive the significance of ideas and beliefs
that define meaning. Lead me to guard my heart,
that I would not share it as a transaction but only
give myself to another for transformation. Strengthen
me to safeguard my will, that I may live more deeply
into my true self, honoring your image within me.

Revelation 18:1-24⁵⁰¹

After this I looked and saw another celestial
messenger coming down from heaven. She radiated
authority and grandeur as she proclaimed:

Fallen! Fallen are Babylon and Rome and all Citadels
of human glory, honor, and power.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰ This poem is adapted from Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*. (New York: HarperOne, 1991), pages 147-148.

⁵⁰¹ Chapter 18 concludes the fourth conflict with evil / victory cycle as a diatribe against the political and economic oppression of “Babylon,” which John intends for his readers to understand refers to Rome (and which I extend the metaphor to encompass “all Citadels of human power”). Of note is that chapter 18 appears to be a *midrash* (or commentary) on large portions of Ezekiel 27 and Jeremiah 51 (see notes in this section).

These cities have become wastelands of idolatry and
toxic dump sites of injustice. The stench of their
corruption has become unbearable!

All the Nations have caroused with them: drinking
their maddening wine,⁵⁰³ succumbing to the seduction
of their beds and fevered dreams of affluenza.⁵⁰⁴

Then I heard another voice from heaven, saying:

Come out of these Citadels, my beloved! Run from
their broken ways.⁵⁰⁵ Flee their abuse, betrayal, and
corruption. Do not get mired in their greed or weighed
down by the accumulation of their evils, for the
accounting of their debts and trespasses is piled as high
as the heavens.⁵⁰⁶ They will receive double payment⁵⁰⁷
for their debts and the serving of their grief shall be
supersized. They will gag on the luxuries with which
they gorged themselves. In their hearts they boasted, “I
am the queen bee forever,”⁵⁰⁸ and, “No harm will ever
come to me,”⁵⁰⁹ yet their ruin will come in an instant—
the height of their success will see their collapse. They
are more fragile than they imagined and less mighty
than The Glory to whom justice is owed.

⁵⁰² c.f. Isaiah 21:9: “Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: ‘Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground!’”

⁵⁰³ c.f. Jeremiah 51:7-8a: “Babylon was a gold cup in the hand of the LORD, making the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore the nations have gone mad.”

⁵⁰⁴ c.f. Ezekiel 28:4-5: “By wisdom and understanding you have gained your wealth and amassed gold and silver for your treasures. By your great skill in trading, you have increased your wealth, but your heart has grown proud because of it...”

⁵⁰⁵ c.f. Jeremiah 51:45: “Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the LORD.”

⁵⁰⁶ c.f. Ezra 9:6: “I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.”

⁵⁰⁷ This seems to be an allusion to—yet reversal of—the comfort given Judah while in exile; c.f. Isaiah 40:2: “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.”

⁵⁰⁸ c.f. Isaiah 47:7: “Yet you said, ‘I will be a queen forever.’ These things you did not consider nor remember the outcome of them.”

⁵⁰⁹ c.f. Isaiah 47:8: “Now then, listen, you lover of pleasure, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, ‘I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.’”

First the rulers and politicians will tremble when they see the Citadel's ruin, for they will recall all the ways they fornicated with it through idolatry and tolerance of injustice. They will seek to distance themselves from the Citadel, crying out,

Sorrow and sadness! Guilt and shame!
The mighty Citadel a shadow of its former glory!
In a single hour its *kairos* arrived—
swift and thorough its destruction.⁵¹⁰

Then the industrialists and influencers will watch the Citadel's destruction with fear, as they recall nights of seduction followed by mornings of regret. They will weep over their lost opportunities, for no more can they extort the Citadel over its greed and avarice. They will watch in horror as luxury markets vanish and their profit margins disappear; even their ability to exploit workers will fade away.⁵¹¹ They, too, will cry out,

Sorrow and sadness! Guilt and shame!
Purple and scarlet—the colors of
glory, honor, and power—
have become symbols of
ruin, disaster, and death.
In a single hour its *kairos* arrived.⁵¹²

Finally every sea captain will look away from the Citadel's ruin and turn their gaze to other shores. They will see the once prosperous Citadel no longer holds the promise of prosperity and will exclaim, "Their loss is our loss!" They, too, will cry out,

Sorrow and sadness! Guilt and shame!
So much wealth upon the seas—gone forever.
In a single hour its *kairos* arrived.⁵¹³

⁵¹⁰ The set of three woes found in 18:9-20 (from kings, merchants, and sea captains) are an extended reflection on Ezekiel 27:30-36. Here, c.f. Ezekiel 27:30-31: "They will raise their voice and cry bitterly over you; they will sprinkle dust on their heads and roll in ashes...They will weep over you with anguish of soul and with bitter mourning."

⁵¹¹ This single sentence paraphrases 18:11-15, which scholars describe as an accurate depiction of the economic consequences that occurred when Rome's economy collapsed.

⁵¹² c.f. Ezekiel 27: 32-34: "As they wail and mourn over you, they will take up a lament concerning you: 'Who was ever silenced like Tyre, surrounded by the sea?' When your merchandise went out on the seas, you satisfied many nations; with your great wealth and your wares you enriched the kings of the earth."

Rejoice, beloved of The Glory.
Rejoice, sent ones and truth-tellers.

Judgments inflicted are now justice received.
The meal they served their prisoners
has become their feast.

Then a celestial messenger of great strength picked up a millstone of heavy burden that lay around the necks of the beloved, removed it from them, and tossed it into the sea, for the oppression of the Citadel was no more. The messenger said,

Thrown down is the Citadel of oppression;
thrown down the city of injustice.⁵¹⁴

Never again shall the Citadel rise;
never again shall it trample the beloved.⁵¹⁵

No joy shall be found in all the Citadel⁵¹⁶—
neither music nor singing,
neither love nor laughter,
nor the enchantments used to seduce nations.

For in you was found murder and mayhem—
the blood of truth-tellers flooded your streets,
The Glory's own beloved were slaughtered.

Aquinas, great doctor of the Church:

*One who is not angry at injustice is immoral,
for anger looks to the good of justice.
If you can live amid injustice without anger,
you are immoral as well as unjust.*

Doctor, what is your diagnosis of my condition?

⁵¹³ c.f. Ezekiel 27:35-36: "Now you are shattered by the sea in the depths of the waters; The merchants among the nations scoff at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more."

⁵¹⁴ c.f. Jeremiah 51:48: "'Then heaven and earth and all that is in them will shout for joy over Babylon, for out of the north destroyers will attack her,' declares the LORD."

⁵¹⁵ c.f. Jeremiah 51:64: "Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted."

⁵¹⁶ c.f. Jeremiah 25:10: "I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp."

God, it's me. COVID has shown us: We are vulnerable—not just to disease but to dis-ease. We are uneasy with each other, uneasy with our jobs, uneasy in our common life, uneasy in our churches, uneasy with ourselves (many of us). O Glory, I do not ask to return to an “easy” life but to a life made whole and complete through your love. I ask to return to a life in which all dis-eases are confronted by a commitment to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with you.⁵¹⁷

Revelation 19:1-10⁵¹⁸

After seeing the millstone of heavy burden lifted from the necks of the beloved, I heard the sound of a great crowd rejoicing:

Hallelujah!
Wholeness and God-life are birthed of The Glory!
In The Glory comes the splendor of transformation!

Hallelujah!
Integrity and faithfulness are born of justice,
and the Great Prostitute is exposed for all to see.

Hallelujah!
The blood of those who belong to The Glory
drips from the Prostitute's lips and is upon its hands.

Again the great crowd rejoiced:

Hallelujah!
The Great Prostitute's judgment is forever!

And the twenty-four elders of Israel and the Church, along with the four living creatures, fell prostrate in worship before The Glory. They, too, rejoiced:

⁵¹⁷ c.f. Micah 6:8.

⁵¹⁸ Chapter 19 describes the conflict with evil – victory cycle with two metaphors: the marriage meal (19:1-10) and military battle (19:11-21). The marriage meal bespeaks relationship, connection, and intimacy, while military battle bespeaks overcoming enemies, being set apart, and valor. There are parts of our true selves that connect with the marriage meal: the connection with Jesus, being Jesus' beloved. Other parts of our true selves connect with battle: struggle and courage in the Christian life. The marriage meal challenges one toward a deeper intimacy and communion with Jesus. The image of battle challenges one to recognize that we do not live in a spiritually benign culture, for there are people and values that war against Jesus.

Hallelujah!
Amen and amen!

Then a voice came from the throne itself, quoting the words of the Psalmist:

Praise The Glory, all who are beloved!
Praise The Glory, all who are in awe!
Praise The Glory, all who are great or small!⁵¹⁹

And I heard The Glory's voice, which sounded like rushing waters and peals of thunder,⁵²⁰ join with the great crowd's rejoicing:

Hallelujah!
The Glory is sovereign above the earth!
The Glory is sovereign above the Cosmos!

Rejoice and sing praise!
The wedding⁵²¹ of the Lamb has come,
his bride has prepared herself for this *kairos*.

Rejoice and sing praise!
The bride has dressed herself in purity and integrity,
through right relationships and acts of justice.

The celestial messenger said to me, “Write this down: Sacred joy is reserved for those invited to the wedding supper⁵²² of the Lamb, for they will experience knowing and being known. They will share their hearts, and the Lamb will be with them forever.” And then he

⁵¹⁹ c.f. Psalm 135: “Praise the LORD. Praise the name of the LORD; praise him, you servants of the LORD”; c.f. also Psalm 115:13: “...He will bless those who fear the LORD— small and great alike.”

⁵²⁰ c.f. Ezekiel 43:2 and Exodus 19:6 (previously cited).

⁵²¹ c.f. Hosea 2:19-22: “I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In lovingkindness and in compassion, And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the LORD”; c.f. also Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

⁵²² c.f. Isaiah 25:6-8: “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.”

added, “This isn’t a guess, and I’m not making this up. These words are direct from The Glory’s lips.”

Upon hearing this stupendous message of hope, encouragement and invitation to joy, I fell prostrate at the messenger’s feet. “Stop!” he commanded. “I am but a fellow servant with you and all the beloved who bear witness to Jesus. Worship only The Glory, for it is the Divine Spirit, who speaks the truth about Jesus, who gave me these words.”

The groom waited.

Joking with friends in a back room.

High fives when the preacher arrived: “Kairos!”

The bride prepared.

Friends admiring and encouraging.

Getting ready for “The Walk.”

Their eyes met from opposite ends of the aisle.

Joy danced in the soft light.

Journey to consummation being fulfilled.

God, it’s me. What a great metaphor! Who doesn’t like a good wedding feast? May my heart rejoice with friends and neighbors celebrating your eternal love that makes all things new. Who hasn’t felt joy at the beauty of two hearts bound together? May my heart be bound together with Jesus—now and forever. Who doesn’t desire to know and be known—love deepening over time, teaching us our true name? May I learn anew that my true name is Beloved of The Glory.

Revelation 19:11-21

Heaven opened before me, and I saw once again the rider on the white horse. His name was Trustworthy and True. He rode to wage war against the Dragon and the two Beasts. He rode to wage war against the Citadels of oppression and injustice. With justice he rode, for right relationships were his determination and *shalom* his destination.⁵²³ His eyes bore the look of fire,⁵²⁴ burning with

⁵²³ c.f. Isaiah 11:4-5: “But with righteousness He will judge the poor and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be the belt about loins and faithfulness the belt about His waist.”

⁵²⁴ c.f. Psalm 97:3: “Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side”; c.f. also Isaiah 66:15: “See, the LORD is coming

a desire for equity and equality that would not be denied. There was a deep truth about him that no human could ever comprehend. Though he himself was the king and wore a golden crown, still did he lead his army of celestial messengers into battle. The messengers’ armor was fine linens of purity and integrity.

The rider was dressed in a robe splashed with his own blood,⁵²⁵ for his power had been revealed in weakness and his glory unveiled in humiliation. His sword was sharp, for it was the Word of God, and he wielded it to bring down nations, as the Psalmist declared:

Sovereign is the Anointed,

whom The Glory has chosen.

He will rule the nations with moral strength—
with equity and equality will break all chains.⁵²⁶

With ferocity of intent he trampled upon the grapes of oppression. The strength of his winepress transformed them into the wine of justice, and all heaven and earth finally knew his full name:

Sovereign above all sovereigns!

The Glory that outshines all glory!

And I saw a celestial messenger standing, with the sun blazing behind him as if he was born of it. He cried out to the scavengers encircling the carnage of the battle, “Come and eat until your stomachs are full, for the battle is over and The Glory’s victory complete.”⁵²⁷ And the vultures of the air feasted upon the Vultures of the Earth—

with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.”

⁵²⁵ c.f. Isaiah 66:1-3: “Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? ‘It is I, proclaiming victory, mighty to save.’ Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? ‘I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing.’”

⁵²⁶ c.f. Jeremiah 23:29: “‘Is not my word like fire,’ declares the LORD, ‘and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?’” c.f. also Psalm 2:9: “You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

⁵²⁷ c.f. Ezekiel 39:17: “Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals: ‘Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice. I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood.’”

on the rulers and politicians, on the industrialists and influencers, even on every sea captain who once called the Citadel home port.

Still the Beasts and their minions were not finished venting their anger. They waged useless warfare that would lead to one and only one conclusion: their defeat. The first Beast was captured—its secular power stripped from its paws. The second Beast was also captured—its religious veneer exposed for the lies it proclaimed. Both were thrown into the lake of sulfur⁵²⁸ that burns but does not consume. Their torment is forever. Those who followed them in their thinking and acting (those who bore the Beasts' mark upon their heads and hands) were defeated by the Word spoken by the rider on the white horse. Their defeat was absolute.⁵²⁹

*It shall not always be this way—
children going hungry,
wives trembling in fear,
fathers sneaking across the desert.*

*It shall not always be this way—
white faces assuming cultural deference,
billionaires claiming the tax system impoverishes them,
nations transgressing sovereign boundaries.*

*It shall one day be different—
parents unafraid while their children play in the park,
health and wellness a human right,
elders cared for with dignity and tenderness.*

*It shall one day be different—
the lion will lie down with the lamb,
the earth will be filled with the knowledge of The Glory,⁵³⁰
the moral arc of history arriving at its horizon.*

God, it's me. I do not value war, per se, but then this is no ordinary war—no land grabs, no supply lines, no political support or strategic timing required. The weapons—being trustworthy and true, Jesus' Cross and Word—define the kind of war being fought: the battle for justice and right relationships. This battle is not a military battle but a spiritual one, a battle for hearts and minds. This is a battle for my heart and

⁵²⁸ See note 997 on the distinction between fire and sulfur (Revelation 14:10).

⁵²⁹ Note, however, they are not thrown into the lake of sulfur.

⁵³⁰ c.f. Isaiah 11:6-9.

my mind. O Glory, I give to thee. I give to thee. Take my heart, use my mind, let me give my life to this battle, for it must be won. It must be won.

Revelation 20:1-15⁵³¹

And I looked and saw a celestial messenger coming down from heaven, holding the keys to Death and the afterlife and a chain in his hand with which to imprison the Dragon and the two Beasts. The messenger grabbed the Dragon—the ancient serpent, the devil, Satan, the Accuser—and imprisoned it for the enormity of time.⁵³² The messenger took the Dragon and threw it down, threw it down, threw it down—into the realm of Death, locked away with a seal upon the lock.⁵³³ It was powerless except for the briefest⁵³⁴ of moments when its mayhem and manipulation distracted people from the God-life.

I saw the thrones of those given the authority to pronounce The Glory's justice. Behind and around them were gathered those whose lives had been martyred for their witness to Jesus and the truth of the Word. These martyrs had not worshiped the Beasts, nor participated in the thought-life and ways of living that conformed to the pattern of this world; that is, they had refused the mark of the Beasts upon their heads and hands. Though they had been martyred, they were alive, standing beside Jesus. With Jesus they will govern for the enormity of time. (The rest of the dead would remain so for the same enormity; that is, forever.) For the martyrs, this is the first resurrection, for they were raised to live with Jesus. Sacred

⁵³¹ Revelation 20 describes a 1,000-year reign, which commentators interpret in one of three distinct ways, using the terminology of Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism. See endnote 1 in Appendix A.

⁵³² The text says, "1,000 years," which is symbolic; c.f. Psalm 90:3-5: "You turn people back to dust, saying, 'Return to dust, you mortals.' A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning..."

⁵³³ c.f. Daniel 6:17: "A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed"; c.f. also Job 12:13-15: "Wisdom and strength belong to God; counsel and understanding are his. What he tears down cannot be rebuilt; the man he imprisons cannot be released. If He holds back the waters, they dry up, and if He releases them, they overwhelm the land..."

⁵³⁴ The Greek word used is *mikron*, indicating something very small.

joy embraced them, and holy comfort pervaded their true selves that had been made whole and complete. The second death—the annihilation—will have no power over them, but they will stand with Jesus and celebrate the God-life for the enormity of time.

When The Glory determines the *kairos* has come for the fulfillment of the kin-dom—for the horizon of hope to live fully present in human hearts and communities—the Accuser will be permitted a final stand, and it won't be nearly enough. Nations will come from the north—Gog and Magog as the truth-teller Ezekiel foretold⁵³⁵—as Israel's invaders have always come. They will appear invincible, numbering in the oodles and gajillions. They will seem ubiquitous, thick upon the ground like so many cockroaches in a hot and humid Texas summer. They will be defeated by the fiery might of The Glory.⁵³⁶ And their leader, by whatever name it is called—the Dragon, the serpent, the devil, Satan, the Accuser—will be thrown into

⁵³⁵ “Gog and Magog” do not refer to two specific nations, but the nations aligned against The Glory's people, who are innumerable “like the sand on the seashore” and “from the four corners of the earth.” (In Hebrew, Magog literally translates as “place of Gog,” so some translators see this as not two locations but one.) As is John's custom, Gog and Magog are used as an archetype of those who would oppose The Glory's people. That Gog and Magog come from the north is an allusion to the nations who conquered and oppressed Israel and Judah: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome—all of whom invaded from the north. Interpreters who believe Gog and Magog are actual nations (e.g. “Christian Zionists”) look for a battle, which in turn distorts political alliances and theology toward Israel in the Middle East. Conversely, interpreters who understand Gog and Magog as archetypes accept that there are innumerable enemies and innumerable ways for people to battle against The Glory, thereby preparing one for spiritual, ethical, and social justice conflicts without inculcating political views that see nations, *a priori*, as enemies; c.f. Ezekiel 38-39, especially 38:14-16: “Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘In that day, when my people Israel are living in safety, will you not take notice of it? You will come from your place in the far north, you and many nations with you, all of them riding on horses, a great horde, a mighty army. You will advance against my people Israel like a cloud that covers the land....’”

⁵³⁶ c.f. 2 Kings 1:10: “Elijah replied to the captain of fifty, ‘If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.’ Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.”

the lake of sulfur⁵³⁷ along with the two Beasts, their defeat consummated for the enormity of time.

Then I saw a throne of purity and integrity⁵³⁸ and the One sitting upon it,⁵³⁹ who said, “Let there be *shalom*,” and it was so. Before this sovereign One even the heavens and earth receded, fleeing from the presence of One so majestic and radiant.⁵⁴⁰ But the dead, whether rich or poor, powerful or peasant, weren't afraid to stand with the One. Regardless of status, the dead stood beside the One on the throne as people's stories were told.

A second book, the Book of Life, was opened. Together these books told the story of The Glory's justice—each person's life told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about how they lived the God-life (or not). And when every story had been told and every accounting given, Death and Hell were tossed into complete, utter darkness. Never again would these twin devils harm or destroy on God's holy mountain. Never again would Death or Hell be allowed to dominate people's going out or coming in. Death and Hell were thrown into the lake of fire to be consumed. This is the second death, which is reserved for those whose names are not inscribed in the Book of Life. The second death is the final chapter of their story.

*Knowing the story
without reading the last page.*

⁵³⁷ See note 997 on the distinction between fire and sulfur (Revelation 14:10). Note they are thrown into the lake of sulfur.

⁵³⁸ c.f. 1 Kings 10:18: “Then the king made a great throne covered with ivory and overlaid with fine gold.”

⁵³⁹ c.f. Daniel 7:9-11: “As I continued to watch, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took His seat. His clothing was [pure] as [newly fallen] snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from His presences. Thousands upon thousands attended him, and myriads upon myriads stood before him. The court was convened, and the books were opened. Then I kept watching because of the arrogant words the horn was speaking. As I continued to watch, the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire....”

⁵⁴⁰ c.f. Psalm 114:3-7: “The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back; the mountains leaped like rams, the hills like lambs. Why was it, sea, that you fled? ...Tremble, earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob...”; c.f. also Psalm 18:15: “The valleys of the sea were exposed, and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, LORD, at the blast of breath from your nostrils.”

*Confident of a happy ending
even though the chapters are foreboding.*

*I open the book
with One reading over my shoulder.*

*This story is scary!
And I am not afraid.*

God, it's me. I am encouraged! Knowing the end of the story emboldens me to write each chapter with hope and each page with courage. Seeing the horizon of my destiny makes me want to get up in the morning—Let's do this! But you know, O Glory, that my poetic heart sometimes battles with my pragmatic head, so help me find a balance, for I don't want to be "so heavenly minded that I am no earthly good." What kind of story would that be? Help me to know that, on this day, it is enough that I seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you.

Revelation 21:1-8

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,⁵⁴¹ for the first heaven and first earth had departed, and the sea, the place of primordial chaos, was no more. I saw the new Citadel—called Trustworthy and True, David's city, Jerusalem reborn—descending in beauty from the foundations of heaven. The new Citadel was not like the Citadel that served the Dragon and the Beasts, for it was dressed in a wedding gown⁵⁴²—the Lamb's bride prepared for intimacy and communion. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! See! The Glory's presence

⁵⁴¹ c.f. Isaiah 65:17: "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind"; c.f. also Isaiah 66:22: "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure."

⁵⁴² c.f. Isaiah 61:10: "I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels"; c.f. also Isaiah 62:4-5: "No longer will they call you Deserted or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah (my delight is in you) and your land Beulah (married); for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

overshadows the beloved—the *kairos* of salvation has become the *chronos* of new creation. The Glory will abide with the people and the people with The Glory.⁵⁴³ Never again will the people's brokenness destroy right relationship. Always and forever they will dance the God-rhythms with The Glory. The Glory will remove all sorrow; tears shall not be shed nor lament heard anymore, for The Glory has destroyed Death.⁵⁴⁴ New creation has come and will live forever."

The Glory, who sat upon the throne, then said, "Let there be new creation!" And it was so. And The Glory said, "Write these words, which are trustworthy and true: It is finished!"⁵⁴⁵ I am the first and the last, the One who was before the beginning of time and who will abide after the end of all things. To those who thirst I will give water without cost⁵⁴⁶ from the spring that bubbles up from the water of life. To those who endure and persevere I will give the inheritance of a new heart and new home.⁵⁴⁷ But to those who pervert justice and themselves, who practice deceit and manipulation, who claim the power of life and death is in their own hands, they will be sent to the only home their hearts have ever known: away from my presence. They will be thrown into a lake that burns with fire and sulfur.⁵⁴⁸ This is the second death—annihilation—and they shall be no more.

⁵⁴³ c.f. Ezekiel 37:27-20: "My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever."

⁵⁴⁴ c.f. Isaiah 65:19: "I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more"; c.f. also Isaiah 25:6-8, previously cited.

⁵⁴⁵ c.f. John 19:30, previously cited.

⁵⁴⁶ c.f. Isaiah 55:1: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."

⁵⁴⁷ c.f. Jeremiah 24:6-7: "My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart."

⁵⁴⁸ The Greek text describes the lake into which people are thrown as *kaiomene puri kai theio*, which translates literally as "burning with fire and sulfur" and not as the NIV translates, "fiery lake of burning sulfur." This suggests a more severe punishment than found in 20:14 (where only fire is mentioned); however, this verse still refers to a fire that consumes.

*Why
focus on
the second death
when offered as promise
is new heaven and new earth?*

*Why
be enthralled
with burning lake
when The Glory's presence
will be direct, personal, intimate?*

*Please people:
Get your priorities straight!*

God, it's me. I rejoice in the promise of new heaven and new earth. I praise your name for the promise of new creation. That I will be part of that new creation astounds and amazes me. That I will be new creation fills my heart with wonder. May the awe I feel as I contemplate such wonders inspire my courage, direct my speech, temper my actions, and guide my living that I may seek your honor in all that I do.

Revelation 21:9-27

Then one of the celestial messengers said to me, "Do you want to see something cool? Let me show you the Lamb's bride!" And the messenger carried me away in yet a deeper vision mystic and transcendent,⁵⁴⁹ and I saw up close the new Citadel called Trustworthy and True, descending in beauty from the foundations of heaven to the highest place on earth, above all mountains, supreme in its majesty and splendor.⁵⁵⁰ Like precious jewels, it appeared priceless.⁵⁵¹ Like Fort Knox, it appeared perfectly safe, with high walls on every side guarded by The Glory's own messengers.⁵⁵² All who had been chosen and who

⁵⁴⁹ c.f. Ezekiel 3:14: "The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the LORD on me."

⁵⁵⁰ c.f. Isaiah 2:2: "In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it."

⁵⁵¹ c.f. Tobit 13:16: "For Jerusalem shall be built up with sapphires and emeralds, and precious stone: thy walls and towers and battlements with pure gold."

⁵⁵² c.f. Isaiah 26:1: "In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its

belong to The Glory were present there—from the 12 tribes of Israel to those who received the testimony about Jesus from the 12 sent ones of the Church.

The messenger who spoke to me took out a measuring rod to measure this new Jerusalem. The city measured with precision and perfection exactly the same as the Holy of Holies in the old Jerusalem Temple⁵⁵³—the place where The Glory's *shekinah* had been known, the place where immediacy became intimacy and nearness became oneness. Now this thin place⁵⁵⁴ had become thick, with The Glory's presence imprinting upon all who lived in the city.

The city itself was majestic and beautiful.⁵⁵⁵ Its walls were made of holiness and integrity; its streets paved to endure and never tarnish, as smooth as glass. Even the foundations of the walls were majestic and beautiful, filled with priceless things to evoke wonder, capture the imagination, and swell the heart. The gates were made of pearls so huge a camel could walk through the gate. There was no duplicity anywhere to be found.

walls and ramparts. Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter"; c.f. also Zechariah 2:5: "And I myself will be a wall of fire around it," declares the LORD, "and I will be its glory within."

⁵⁵³ I omit the exact measurements but acknowledge they suggest a cube-shaped city. However, it is too literal to exclaim, "Heaven is a cube!" as one literalist preacher so exclaimed at a church camp I once attended. In Hebraic culture, a cube was considered the perfect geometric shape. The symbolism is that the new Jerusalem will be a place of wholeness and peace.

⁵⁵⁴ Spiritual writers use the phrase "thin place" to describe certain locations around the world where the veil between heaven and earth seems thin (e.g. Iona for Scottish Presbyterians, the Vatican for Catholics, or Sedona for New Age Arizonans).

⁵⁵⁵ In 21:18-21, a series of precious stones is listed, including jasper (walls), gold (streets), sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, ruby, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, turquoise, jacinth, and amethyst (foundations), and pearls (gates in the walls). Most of these precious stones do not have a specific symbolism attached to them other than that they are, well, precious; c.f. Ezekiel 28:12-13: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: carnelian, chrysolite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared"; c.f. also Isaiah 54:11: "O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted. Behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and your foundations I will lay in sapphires. Moreover, I will make your battlements of rubies, and your gates of crystal, and your entire wall of precious stones."

I looked around but saw no Temple in the city, which perplexed me at first. Then I realized the city doesn't need a Temple, for The Glory and the Lamb are present there. Neither does the city need the sun or moon for the light and splendor of The Glory and the Lamb shine upon all who abide there.⁵⁵⁶ Even the Nations will see the city's light and be guided into *shalom*, and the rulers and Elite will bring their riches to share among all—returning their power and reversing their privilege. The city gates will never close, so all who long to become their true and best self might find refuge there,⁵⁵⁷ all who desire to dance the God-rhythms and live the God-life will be welcome there. But those who refuse to be redeemed, who bathe in deceit while wallowing in abuse, betrayal, and corruption, will never live there. Their names are not inscribed in the Book of Life.⁵⁵⁸

*“Heaven is a cube!”⁵⁵⁹
proclaimed the literalist preacher.*

*My youth group kids turned to look at me,
perplexed looks upon their faces.*

*Tracy silently mouthed the words,
“A cube?”*

*Later that night we debriefed our day at church camp,
a robust and rousing conversation it was!*

*What is heaven?
What is the longing of your heart?*

*Beware, preachers, when describing the afterlife!
No eye sees nor mind imagines the glory that awaits.⁵⁶⁰*

*God, it's me. I am thankful you make me worthy of
heaven—not that I deserve it but that I am loved*

⁵⁵⁶ c.f. Isaiah 60:19: “The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.”

⁵⁵⁷ c.f. Isaiah 60:11: “Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that people may bring you the wealth of the nations—their kings led in triumphal procession.”

⁵⁵⁸ c.f. Isaiah 52:1: “Awake, awake, Zion, clothe yourself with strength! Put on your garments of splendor, Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again.”

⁵⁵⁹ c.f. note 1084.

⁵⁶⁰ c.f. 1 Corinthians 2:9

with a love that will not let me go. I am thankful that heaven's gates remain wide open—that the hope belongs not just to folks like me but to others as well (and perhaps others first and foremost). I can't wait to get there—what a reunion it shall be! Just not today, O Glory. Until that day, make me your servant that heaven may be found on earth. In my life may I evoke wonder, capture the imagination, and swell the hearts of those who hear your Good News.

Revelation 22:1-21

Then a celestial messenger showed me the Garden, restored beyond its original perfection. The river of the water of life ran through it,⁵⁶¹ with fish from every sea. The throne of The Glory and the Lamb were the headwaters for its clear as crystal water, which ran through the middle of the Citadel, refreshing all who live there. On each side of the river were trees that delighted the eyes with their colors and the nose with their aromas—twelve different kinds of fruit were harvested every month!⁵⁶² Never again would there be hunger, and the fruit of the trees healed the nations. The curse of Adam had been reversed.⁵⁶³

The throne of The Glory and of the Lamb will be the center of the Citadel, and all who are called to serve will serve—it will be their heart's joy. They will see The Glory and the Lamb face to face,⁵⁶⁴ and they will be transformed—the Lamb's character will be their character, the Lamb's thoughts will be their thoughts, his ways will be

⁵⁶¹ c.f. Ezekiel 47:9: “Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live”; c.f. also Joel 3:18, Zechariah 14:18, and Psalm 105:41.

⁵⁶² c.f. Ezekiel 47:7, 12: “When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river...Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

⁵⁶³ c.f. Genesis 3:17: “Cursed is the ground because of you, through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life”; c.f. also Zechariah 14:11: “It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure.”

⁵⁶⁴ c.f. Isaiah 52:8b: “When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes”; c.f. also Job 19:26: “And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God...”

their ways.⁵⁶⁵ Fear will disappear like the morning mist, never again to hold hostage the heart. The light that brings security and peace, that shields the heart with *shalom*, will be The Glory and the Lamb, who will reign sovereign above the Cosmos forever and ever.

Then the messenger said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. You can count on them, assured they speak the truth as The Glory has decreed it—the same One who inspired the truth-tellers from ages past inspires these words of what is, has been, and will be.”

Then I heard the voice of the Lamb cry out, “Look! See! I shall be unveiled when *kairos* and *chronos* embrace! Sacred comfort is given to those who embrace these words. Sacred joy will be shared by those who live them.”

I, John, heard and saw these things in a vision mystic and transcendent, yet as real as my own birth. Upon hearing them I fell prostrate at the messenger’s feet. “Stop!” he commanded. “I am but a fellow servant with you and all the truth-tellers and all who will live according to these words. Don’t worship me. Worship only The Glory!”

Then the messenger told me, “These words are not to be sealed up. Write!⁵⁶⁶ Write these words for the *kairos* is near. There are some who can neither hear nor heed these words—that is not your concern. There are some who are unable or unwilling to dance the God-rhythms—they are not your concern. Let those who choose defilement live defiled. Let those who choose right relationships live with integrity and *agape*.⁵⁶⁷

The Lamb said again, “Look! See! I shall be unveiled when *kairos* and *chronos* embrace! I bring with me the fulfillment of what each person has done.⁵⁶⁸ What is

⁵⁶⁵ This is a reversal of Isaiah 55:8-9: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

⁵⁶⁶ c.f. Isaiah 30:8: “Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness.”

⁵⁶⁷ c.f. Ezekiel 3:27: “But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you shall say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says. ‘Whoever will listen let them listen, and whoever will refuse let them refuse; for they are a rebellious people.’”

⁵⁶⁸ c.f. Isaiah 62:11-12: “The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: ‘Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’ They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of

precious remains, and what is dross is discarded. I am the beginning and the end of all creation, from first to last and from A to Z.⁵⁶⁹

“Sacred joy is given to those who allow me to wash their robes, for they will be pristine and nap beneath the shade of the tree of life. They will freely enter the gates of the Citadel, and no one will stop them or check for their papers. Left beyond the gates will be those who had no desire to dance the God-rhythms or live the God-life. They degraded themselves and others, destroyed themselves and the creation, and refused to dance.

“I, Jesus, sent my celestial messenger to give you these words for the gatherings. They are for their comfort, encouragement, and hope. I am the Root of David and David’s Branch,⁵⁷⁰ the Bright Morning Star. My testimony is trustworthy and true.”

The Divine Spirit and the beloved—they who are the Lamb’s bride—say together, “Come! Welcome! Be at peace in this place. Let the one who is thirsty come and drink from the water of life, for which there is no cost;⁵⁷¹ drink from the spring that will never run dry.”

I warn those who hear these words: Do not add to them⁵⁷² but speak the message of comfort, encouragement, and hope found within them. The Glory will add plagues to the life of the one who adds to the words of this scroll. The Glory will remove that person from the Citadel, and they shall neither walk its streets nor nap beneath the shade of the tree of life.⁵⁷³

The Lamb, who gives personal, eye-witness testimony to the truth of these words, says, “Yes, my *kairos* is near.”

the LORD; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted.”

⁵⁶⁹ c.f. Isaiah 44:6, previously cited.

⁵⁷⁰ c.f. Isaiah 11:1: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit”; c.f. also Zechariah 6:12-13a: “Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne.’”

⁵⁷¹ c.f. Isaiah 55:1, previously cited.

⁵⁷² c.f. Deuteronomy 4:2: “Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.”

⁵⁷³ Confession: As one writing an interpretive paraphrase, this verse gives me some trepidation. I only pray my efforts have been faithful and will be judged with grace.

Amen! Come, Jesus. Come, Anointed One! May the lovingkindness of Jesus the Anointed be with all The Glory's beloved.

The Glory wins.

Love wins.

Justice wins.

Joy is birthed.

Hope is fulfilled.

Trust is rewarded.

Justice wins.

Love wins.

The Glory wins.

God, its' me. My heart bursts in anticipation of the moment when longing transforms into fulfillment, when hope turns into your presence, and I see you face to face. Teach me that this burst of anticipation is not intended exclusively for me, for it is a communal hope. Indeed, it is a hope for new creation—heaven and earth restored. Teach me to live more deeply into this hope for new creation that my daily life may be a part of the life of your kin-dom—on earth as it is in heaven. Give me the strength to dance your God-rhythms and live your God-life until present hope turns into eternal joy.

Appendix A: Extended Endnotes for Revelations

1. How does John understand or use time? Is Revelation focused on the past, present, or future?

Revelation projects both backward, forward, and to the present time (as understood by John, the author). It describes the past: the birth of Jesus, slaughter of the boys of Bethlehem, and the holy family's escape to Egypt (12:1-6); Jesus' words on the Cross (16:17, 21:6); and Paul's description of the return of Jesus (3:3, 16:5). It describes the 1st century present by addressing actual congregations (chapters 2-3) as well as describing Roman economic practices (18:11-15). It describes the future hope of a transformed heaven and earth (c.f. 21-22).

The reality that past, present, and future are all described argues strongly that readers look not only for "future attractions" in Revelation but understand that John is addressing his contemporaries. Readers will benefit from understanding the scope of John's focus encompasses (1) Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, and ascension; (2) Jesus' return (what commentators sometimes call the Parousia, after the Greek word meaning return); and (3) the years *between* Jesus' Cross and Parousia.

Understanding John's scope and focus helps readers understand the ancient literary form I described in the introduction as a diamond approach—looking at the same event from different perspectives. As noted in the introduction, chapters 6-20 describe from multiple perspectives the spiritual conflict that occurs between The Glory and evil. This conflict was "finished" on the Cross, yet the battle continues toward the inevitable fulfillment of The Glory's ultimate victory.

A second area of debate among commentators revolves around what happens when Jesus returns. Revelation 20:2 describes the Dragon as being bound for "1,000 years" and then released. Commentators use three different interpretive lenses to understand what is meant by 1,000 years, with their perspectives being shaped by their relative literalism versus their comfort with interpreting the text symbolically. Here are the three interpretive lenses used regarding the 1,000 years:

A. *Premillennialists*: Jesus will come to establish 1,000 years of peace, after which the Accuser will be released so that he and Jesus can go mano-a-mano in a final battle. Theological tone: pessimism.

B. *Postmillennialists*: Jesus will come after 1,000 years of peace brought about by the Holy Spirit and the Church's preaching. Jesus is present spiritually during this time, followed by his Parousia (second coming). Theological tone: optimism.

C. *Amillennialists*: Jesus already reigns because of his cross and resurrection, so the 1,000 years is symbolic, representing a very long time. During this entire period, the Accuser's power is limited (Luke 10:18) even though the "last days" have begun (Acts 2:17, Hebrews 1:2). Jesus will restore all things at the end of this 1,000 years of his kin-dom's rule (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). Theological tone: realism.

The premillennialist view seems to look for a physical battle where there need not be one, which distorts one's social and political perspective. The postmillennialist view seems hopelessly out of touch with reality, although it raises its voice periodically throughout history. The last time postmillennialism was in vogue in the U.S. was during the Progressive Era around the turn of the 20th century. Both the postmillennialist and premillennialist views have the difficulty of explaining how Jesus can reign for 1,000 years and then have everything "go to hell." Contrasting these views, the amillennialist view conforms to the general scope of the rest of the book (a symbol is a symbol is a symbol...) and solves the difficulty of having to explain the reemergence of the Accuser after the victory of Jesus. In the amillennialist view, the victory of Jesus on the cross and through the resurrection is the kin-dom "now" while the final, post-1,000-year victory is the kin-dom "not yet."

2. The three interpretive lenses used by scholars to understand the messages to the seven churches are:

A. *Seven Epochs in Church History*: Some interpreters divide church history into seven, distinct time periods. However, these time periods are constantly changing and, therefore, quite arbitrary. The "seven epochs" of an interpreter in 900 C.E. look very different from an interpreter today or an interpreter 1,000 years from now.

- B. *Seven Kinds of Churches*: Some interpreters distinguish between different church archetypes. However, it is virtually impossible to assign churches to a category with sufficient theological perspective and cultural humility. If there is an interpreter with such skills, this “lens” could be valid.
- C. *Seven Historical Churches*: Some interpreters say the letters were written to the seven churches in Asia Minor with which John the Elder was known to have associated. These were actual, historical churches for which we have evidence both in the New Testament and extra-canonical writings. John’s message of challenge and comfort coheres with the known needs of these churches, which is helpful if John’s purpose in writing was to minister to his flock.

The lens through which we look either distorts or clarifies what we see. The first two lenses have the disadvantage that they force the interpreter to see church epochs, church denominations or individual churches judgmentally, “Oh, that church on the corner is a Thyatiran kind of church because the pastor’s spouse is like a Jezebel.” The third lens, however, has the advantage of speaking a message of challenge and comfort to the churches of the 1st century, but any church in any century can hear all of these messages as if they are spoken to them and be challenged and comforted. Ockham’s Razor is a famous philosophical tool which says, “Take the simplest viable solution.” This third lens meets the test of Ockham’s Razor.

2. Who is the Antichrist / Beast?

A. *Answer #1: a particular political figure*

A particular person, such as the book which made the case for Anwar Sadat being the antichrist. I read the book about a month before Sadat was assassinated. Other traditional favorites include: the current pope (mostly it is fundamentalist Protestants who put this forward), the current leader of Russia or the current strong man of the Middle East (e.g. Saddam, the Ayatollah, Bin Laden, etc.).

B. *Answer #2: generally anyone who opposes The Glory*

In a general sense, the antichrist is anyone that opposes The Glory’s purposes, especially those in positions of secular power, beginning with Rome and continuing into our time with Nazism, Communism, radical Islam, and (perhaps) Christian nationalism. Note that there are actually two Beasts: one is clearly the secular power (13:1-10), while the second beast is a power that speaks with a religious veneer (13:11-18) yet supports the first Beast and is used for the Dragon’s purposes.

C. *Answer #3: Caesar*

A third option is that the antichrist is the Roman Caesar (c.f. note 980), which is how I paraphrase chapter 13. However, option #3 does not preclude one of the other options from also being correct, so.... Let the eternal debate continue (but please be kind to one another while debating).

Appendix B: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Bible Study

Format

1. *Choose a facilitator.* The person who leads can be the same person each week or rotate among participants. The facilitator's job is not to teach but to create a safe space for everyone to share their perceptions and understanding of the material without being interrupted, talked over, or argued into silence. For all activities, participants may share or pass.

1. *Round 1—NOTICE*

Write⁵⁷¹ and then share five (5) "I notice..." statements about the passages's textual or literary content (e.g. "The word joy is repeated," "The speaker is Moses," "The younger son went to a distant country"). Focus only on the text's content but not meaning or ethics (e.g. Not, "I think this means," or, "What I hear God saying is..."). There will be an opportunity to focus on meaning and action in later steps.

Focus = DATA and DETAILS.

2. *Round 2—WONDER*

Write and then share four (4) "I wonder about..." statements or questions. Questions can focus on textual content, theological meaning, or ethical expression (e.g. "I wonder about how this passage relates to Psalm 119?" "I wonder why David was so angry?")

Focus = INQUISITIVENESS.

3. *Round 3—THINK*

Write and then share three (3) "I think..." statements about what this passage means. These three statements are the cognitive and intellectual expressions of your engaging Scripture (e.g. "This passage expresses God's mercy," or, "God hates injustice.").

Focus = CLARITY AND COHERENCE.

4. *Round 4—VALUE*

Write and then share two (2) "I value..." statements that describe the two values to which you are being called by the passage (e.g. "I am called to express humility," or, "God wants me to value corporate unity"). There may be many values implicit in the passage, but only write the two values to which you are most strongly being called today.

Focus = CORE CONVICTIONS.

5. *Round 5—COMMIT*

Write and then share one (1) "I commit..." statement that says one action to which you will commit as a response to this passage (e.g. "I will give you my full attention when you speak," or, "I will honor the sabbath this week by...").

Focus = ACTION

6. Close by praying for each other!

⁵⁷¹ Writing can be done either before or during the study.

Appendix C: P⁸ Bible Study

Format

2. *Choose a facilitator.* The person who leads can be the same person each week or rotate among participants. The facilitator's job is not to teach but to create a safe space for everyone to share their perceptions and understanding of the material without being interrupted, talked over, or argued into silence. For all activities, participants may share or pass.

3. *Round 1—PARAPHRASE*

Have each participant choose one passage of Scripture from the assigned text that stood out for them. It may have stood out because it inspired them, or challenged them. It may have stood out because it caused them to wonder or answered a question. Invite each participant to share the passage that, for them, stood out and speak to why they chose the passage they did.

(Alternate I) The facilitator chooses one to three verses or short sections of a passage for the group to discuss. For each verse or section, invite participants to respond with what they notice, appreciate or wonder about. Invite participants to respond also to the core comfort, conviction, or challenge they hear in the verse or section.

(Alternate II) The facilitator chooses one to three verses or short sections from an English Bible. Invite participants to write their own paraphrase. If they choose to do so, participants may share their paraphrase with the group.

4. *Round 2—POETRY*

Have each participant choose one passage of poetry from the assigned text that stood out for them. How did the poem speak to them? What insights into Scripture or life did the poem invite? Invite each participant to share the poem that, for them, spoke to them.

(Alternate I) The facilitator chooses one or two poems for the group to discuss. How does the poem tell the Scripture "slant"? What insights or wonder does it invite? What questions or challenge does it provoke?

(Alternate II) Facilitator chooses one or two verses or short sections from Rhythms. Invite participants to write a poem based on the verse or section. If they choose to do so, participants may share what they write with the group.

5. *Round 3—PRAYER*

Have each participant choose one prayer from the assigned text that stood out for them. What in the prayer spoke? Did the prayer evoke "amen" or "may it never be," or some other kind of response? Invite each participant to share the prayer that, for them, stood out and why they chose the prayer they did.

(Alternate I) The facilitator chooses one or two prayers for the group to discuss. How does the prayer reflect the Scripture? How does it flow from Scripture to life? What insights or wonder does it invite? What questions or challenge does it provoke?

(Alternate II) The facilitator chooses one or two verses or short sections from Rhythms. Invite participants to write a prayer based on the verse or section. If they choose to do so, participants may share what they write with the group.

6. *Round 4—3P FREE-FOR-ALL*

Invite participants to share something they have written from the assigned text. It may be their own paraphrase, a poem, or prayer. Invite each participant to share something they have written.

7. Close by praying for each other!

Appendix D: Writing Exercises

Poetry Writing Exercises

1. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your poem. (C) Write a Haiku that focuses on the word or phrase.

Five syllables

Seven syllables

Five syllables

The Haiku may express wonder, insight, challenge, inquiry, lament, rejoicing or whatever the Spirit leads!

Write! _____

_____.

2. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your poem. (C) Write a Cinquain that focuses on the word or phrase.

One word

Two words

Three words

Four words

One word

The Cinquain may express wonder, insight, challenge, inquiry, lament, rejoicing or whatever the Spirit leads!

Write! _____

_____.

3. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your poem. (C) Write a free verse poem that focuses on the word or phrase. The poem need not rhyme but it may. The poem can have one stanza or several. The point is not to explicate or summarize the word or phrase but to engage the Word. The poem may express wonder, insight, challenge, inquiry, lament, rejoicing or whatever the Spirit leads!

Write!

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Prayer Writing Exercise

1. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your prayer. (C) Write a prayer that uses one of the literary themes listed below:

ACTS Prayer	/	Colloquial Alternative (different order from ACTS)
Adoration		Please!
Confession		Thank you!
Thanksgiving		Oops!
Supplication		Wow!

(D) Additional challenge: using the same passage, choose one of the other literary themes above and write another prayer. It's okay to write four prayers that each have a different literary focus!

Write!

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Write!

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Write!

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Paraphrase Exercises

Ephesians 1:17-18a (literal Greek): “ ...

so that the God of the Lord of us Jesus Christ the Father the of glory may give to you (spirit / breath / wind) of wisdom and revelation in (knowledge / perception / intuition) of him being enlightened the eyes of the heart in order for you to (know / remember / appreciate) you what is the hope of the calling of him....”

Write a paraphrase: _____

_____.

Philippians 1:20 (literal Greek): “...according to the earnest expectation of me that in nothing I will be ashamed but in all (speak openly / frankness / bluntness) as always and now will be magnified Christ in the body of me whether by life whether by death.”

Write a paraphrase: _____

_____.

Colossians 3:4 (literal Greek): “...(when / whenever) the Christ (made visible / manifest / made clear) the life of you all then (and / but / also) you all with him (made visible / manifest / made clear) (in / by / with) glory.”

Write a paraphrase: _____

_____.

2 Thessalonians 2:11 (literal Greek): “...and because of this (send / permit) to them the God working (wandering / deceit / delusion) for the (believing / faithing / trusting) them what falsehood....”

Write a paraphrase: _____

_____.

1 Timothy 2:4 (literal Greek): “...who all humanity (desire / will / intend / design) (preserve / heal / rescue / save) and to (know / perceive / intuit) truth (come / go).”

Write a paraphrase: _____

_____.

Comparison of the New International Version (NIV) and The Interpretive Paraphrase (TIP)

Ephesians 1:17-18a (NIV): “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^u of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.”

Ephesians 1:17-18a (TIP): “I pray continuously to The Mystery, who is our strength in splendor and in song and who sent Jesus the Anointed, who is sovereign above the cosmos. I pray They will gift to you all Their Divine Spirit to make y’all wise: able to perceive truth and grow in experience of Jesus. I pray the vision of your hearts may shine forth to remember and appreciate the hope that burst forth within all y’all when The Mystery called you to Themselves.”

Philippians 1:20 (NIV): “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

Philippians 1:20 (TIP): “I will be rescued through bluntness as I proclaim Jesus in words and deeds, with eagerness and enthusiasm matching the very best of our beloved. In body and soul, I will be rescued. Whether I live or die, I will be rescued.”

Colossians 3:4 (NIV): “When Christ, who is your^l life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Colossians 3:4 (TIP): “Be assured, whenever Jesus is unveiled for others to see, you also will be seen with him, a reflection of his light and life.”

2 Thessalonians 2:11 (NIV): “For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie.”

2 Thessalonians 2:11 (TIP): “The Hope will permit them to wander about as they seek their delight in their false self.”

1 Timothy 2:4 (NIV): “...who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

1 Timothy 2:4 (TIP): “...for Their design is for all people to be made whole and complete through the God-life and dance the God-rhythms as if they know the beat by heart. More than mere wish or desire, The Root has willed what They intend.”

Appendix E: One Year Reading Plan for Rhythms of the God Life

Hebrews

- Week 1: Introduction and Hebrews 1-3
- Week 2: Hebrews 4-6
- Week 3: Hebrews 7-10
- Week 4: Hebrews 11-13

James

- Week 1: Introduction and James 1-2
- Week 2: James 3-5

1 and 2 Peter

- Week 1: Introduction and 1 Peter 1-2
- Week 2: 1 Peter 3-5
- Week 3: 2 Peter 1-3

1, 2, and 3 John

- Week 1: Introduction and 1 John 1-2
- Week 2: 1 John 3-5
- Week 3: 2 John and 3 John

Jude

- Week 1: Introduction and Jude

Revelations

- Week 1: Introduction and Revelations 1, 4-5
- Week 2: Revelations 2-3
- Week 3: Revelations 6-7
- Week 4: Revelations 8-11
- Week 5: Revelations 12-15
- Week 6: Revelations 16-18
- Week 7: Revelations 19-20
- Week 8: Revelations 21-22

About *Rhythms of the God-Life*

“...an interpretive paraphrase rooted in the Greek text that gives wings to God’s Word through paraphrase, poetry, and prayer. By providing cultural insights to help the reader understand the Word’s meaning, *Rhythms* seeks to capture the beat and harmony of the original text yet also convey wisdom, ethics, and hope for today.”

“...a comprehensive study of biblical scripture, and a confronting, immersive read...with an ability to fascinate even the less experienced reader on the subject through an accessible authorial voice and an in-depth analysis of the language....[The author’s] choices of focus allow deeper analysis on the history of the text, and creates a layered approach that can be used in a contemporary setting. It is a compelling and well researched read, showing the author’s deep knowledge and understanding. The assured writing style, attention to detail, and clarity of the research set out in the work make this work one that will intrigue and fascinate.”

Revelation 20: 1-3

And I looked and saw a celestial messenger coming down from heaven, holding the keys to Death and the afterlife and a chain in his hand with which to imprison the Dragon and the two Beasts. The messenger grabbed the Dragon—the ancient serpent, the devil, Satan, the Accuser—and imprisoned it for the enormity of time. The messenger took the Dragon and threw it down, threw it down, threw it down—into the realm of Death, locked away with a seal upon the lock. It was powerless except for the briefest of moments when its mayhem and manipulation distracted people from the God-life.

About the Author

The Rev. Dr. Brad Munroe is Pastor to the Presbytery for the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and the Presbytery de Cristo. He earned his Doctor of Ministry from San Francisco Theological Seminary, receiving the Outstanding Contribution to Ministry award for his dissertation in which he coined the phrase “blended worship.” He is also the author of *Waging Peace: Developing Interpersonal Skills for Conflict Transformation* and numerous devotional works and curriculum that can be downloaded at www.BradMunroe.org.

Revelation 21:9-14

Then one of the celestial messengers said to me, “Do you want to see something cool? Let me show you the Lamb’s bride!” And the messenger carried me away in yet a deeper vision mystic and transcendent, and I saw up close the new Citadel called Trustworthy and True, descending in beauty from the foundations of heaven to the highest place on earth, above all mountains, supreme in its majesty and splendor. Like precious jewels, it appeared priceless. Like Fort Knox, it appeared perfectly safe, with high walls on every side guarded by The Glory’s own messengers. All who had been chosen and who belong to The Glory were present there—from the 12 tribes of Israel to those who received the testimony about Jesus from the 12 sent ones of the Church.

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“IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE VERB...”