

Reading Schedule for August 20-26, 2018

We are entering in to some of the more challenging prophecies of the Book of Revelation this week. There has to be symbolism because we know that Babylon no longer exists, for example. The topics of the beast, the message of the 144,000, the identity of the great prostitute . . . each is actually interpreted in various ways. The overall message is one of intensity, judgment and hope for the saints.

August 20 – Revelation 14:1-13: “A second angel followed and said, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,’ which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” (v.8) Babylon was the name of both an evil city and an immoral empire, a world center for idol worship. As ancient Babylon had carried Judah into captivity, so in John’s day Rome was the pagan power with domination over the kings of the earth. John probably did not dare to speak against Rome openly, and so applied the name Babylon to this enemy of God’s people. The persecution of believers through Rome was very intense, and is anticipated in a similar way, and even more extensive as we approach these last days. Babylon also represents society’s lure of material prosperity and pleasure, seducing the unwary into adultery and all kinds of sexual immorality that represents rebellion against the Lord. These realities can lure a believer in sinful ways. How will you fortify yourself against Babylon?

August 21 – Revelation 14:14-20: “The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath.” (v.19) This imagery caught my attention. A winepress was a large vat or trough where grapes were collected and then smashed. The juice flowed out of a duct that led into a large holding vat. The winepress is often used in the Bible as a symbol of God’s wrath and judgment against sin, as mentioned in Isaiah 63:3-6, for example. These are disturbing images as they are related to God’s judgment. God has promised a harsh harvest for those who reject him. The Lord will trample nations who have trampled down his truth and his people. Blessed are those who have had their sins forgiven, and blessed are those who lead others to God’s mercy. How do you respond to this intense message?

August 22 – Revelation 15:1-8: “I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed.” (v.1) The seven last plagues are also called the seven bowl judgments. We will begin reading about them tomorrow. Unlike the previous plagues these are universal and they will culminate in the destruction of all evil and preclude the end of the world. There is something about God’s justice that causes us to worship his greatness. It says that all the nations will come and worship before him for his righteous acts have been revealed. The Apostle Paul mentions this reality in Philippians 2:9-11, as every knee will bow before the Lamb. The song of the Lamb celebrates the ultimate deliverance of God’s people from the power of Satan. How does God’s greatness stir up worship in you? What does it mean to you that God will bring justice to the world?

August 23 - Revelation 16:1-21: “Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.” (v.15) In my Bible this is written in red ink. Jesus summons us to spiritual vigilance. Even as we are reminded of his rebuke to complacent churches like Ephesus,

Sardis and Laodicea in Revelation 2 & 3. Because he is coming like a thief, his return will be at an unexpected moment, so stay alert and be properly spiritually dressed. The Bible affirms time and again that the Lord’s return will be sudden and unexpected. It also tells us to stand firm in faith and resist the devil. Are you ready for his return, or have you lacked preparation for Christ’s return? These words match what Jesus said in Matthew 24:36-42. It is possible that Jesus could return very soon. What do Jesus’ words mean to you concerning the urgency connected to his return?

August 24 - Revelation 17:1-18: “I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God’s holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.” (v.6) I have contemplated the meaning of this verse, and with the help of some interpretation, it is pointing to the fact that many of God’s people will be martyred. In a power-addicted society, evil people will conspire to squelch the witness for Jesus Christ and put the saints to death. Throughout history, people have been killed for their faith. This is happening in a very extensive way in our world today. More believers have been martyred in the 20th century than all the other centuries combined. This predicts even a greater intensity with persecution and martyrdom for many. How do you respond to these intense words that are associated with the culmination of the age?

August 25 - Revelation 18:1-24: “Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: ‘Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!’” (v.10) This chapter shows the complete destruction of Babylon, John’s metaphorical name of the evil world power and all it represents. Something that tries to block God’s purposes will come to a violent end. I have always thought of the wrath of God and the Day of the Lord as a swift judgment on the earth. This chapter affirms this complete destruction and sudden judgment on the evil city, with the idea of it being wiped out in a single hour, as can be the interpretation of verse 10, 17 and 19. Whether we are to take that literally or not, the Lord is not intending to prolong his swift judgment on the rebellion, rejection and evil prevalent in our world as the world comes to an end. How do you respond to this chapter on the fall of Babylon?

August 26 - Revelation 19:1-10: “Then the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’” (v.9) This is my favorite verse in the chapter, and one of the things that I anticipate in heaven . . . the marriage supper of the Lamb. The blessing of the meal as God’s people gather in celebration cannot be fathomed. It will be more glorious than we can envision - the messianic banquet that has been predicted by Isaiah, spoken of by Jesus, and now foretold by John. Accompanying this great meal will be absolute joy and unending worship. Just think, all faithful believers will be gathered around this marvelous wedding supper. What is your response to these words as they anticipate such a miraculous event? Could this be the event Jesus is pointing to in Mark 14:23-25? The Lord’s Supper is a forerunner for this magnificent meal in heaven.

PRAYER: Pray for the launch of the fall season with community groups, outreach to our neighborhood school, a worship album and many more opportunities to expand God’s kingdom.