

Ask Jeff
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Alright, it is time to get started. Based on the last couple of weeks, we want to be punctual because there's lots of information that hopefully we desire to learn tonight. I do want to call your attention first to the yellow sheet of paper that hopefully you received upon entrance to our center tonight. This is our circle of concerns otherwise known as our prayer sheet. I want to remind you as always, please don't throw this away upon your departure. Make this a part of your life, however you do so to pray for the needs of the people in our church and connected to our church throughout the week. Also, remind you that if you know anyone or any situation that we need to be aware of, please contact us in the church office so that we can update it as regularly and as quickly as possible. Obviously we have those that we have in hospital facilities, assisted living facilities, but I always want to remind you on the back are those serving in our military and those that are serving on the mission field both local and international.

So without further ado, let's pray and we'll get started.

Heavenly Father, as we gather tonight, we do so not in the name of a church or in the name of a physical location but in the name of Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world. So Lord, as we come boldly before your throne of grace, there are some folks that we love dearly that need an extra dose of your grace tonight. Some of them in physical positions where doctors aren't optimistic and neither is the family and, Lord, we just need you to show up and we need you to answer our prayers and be the healer that you say that you are. In other situations there are relationships and finances and things that just appear like they're absolutely out of control and can never be brought into control. Lord, we pray that you would be the healer of those situations though not physical maybe even fiscal. Lord, we pray tonight for any and all folks that are on our hearts, maybe not on this sheet but that are on our hearts, and they need a touch of your grace, they need a touch of your mercy, they in some cases need healing, in other cases they need restoration, in other cases they just need peace that passes all understanding. Lord, we know that you're beyond capable of touching and addressing all these issues so we yield them and surrender them to you and so while we're in this room tonight, Lord, we just pray that you would guide us in all ways of which we go. May we be centered on your word. May we not deviate to the right or to the left. May we find ourselves right in the middle of the pages that you've given us for instruction. Wherever we go, Lord, may you receive the attention, may you receive the honor, and may you give us answers tonight so

that we're able to be better equipped to serve you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I do want to welcome you formally tonight to Wednesday nights here at First Baptist, Opelika. Really there's two parts tonight. We're going to begin with what we call Ask Jeff. This is the opportunity that you have to ask any question you want in regards to the Bible, Christianity, philosophy, faith, etc. The majority of you the means by which you submit a question is via the internet, Facebook page, fbcopelika.com/askjeff or go to the Facebook page, my Facebook page, Ask Jeff or Jeff Meyers. You can do so either way. Some of you are old fashioned and that's fine where you just write on a scrap piece of paper, give it to one of us, put it in one of the receptacles. Either way is great with us, we just want your questions. Once we receive those questions, they go in a database, they are pulled at absolute random, and then we address them.

Now once those questions are pulled, many of you who are veterans on Wednesday night know the most entertaining part is when your hand goes in the air. One of the reasons it's entertaining is we cannot filter you when you ask a question live, okay? So we can filter when it's submitted electronically. Second of all, we have absolutely no idea what's coming so it's just a wonderful time. We're going to do that for about 30 minutes and then we're going to transition to the continuation of our book of Revelation study.

Now last week, I pulled a question with about 6 or 7 minutes left that could not be answered in 6 or 7 minutes, and so I'm going to take kind of a little bit of liberty tonight and tell you that when the 30 minutes of Ask Jeff is over, we're just going to transition to the book of Revelation because if we don't, we're never going to finish, okay? And I would like to finish before Jesus comes back. I'm just saying. I would like to do so.

So here we go. Let's pull up the good old app here. Alright, in Ezekiel 12, anytime you have a question about Ezekiel it's going to get fun, in Ezekiel 12:10 and throughout the book, who is the prince?

That's a great question. Go to the book of Ezekiel. If you haven't read where that is lately, don't be afraid to use the table of contents. It's right after Lamentations. The book of Ezekiel and some of you may be aware of what I'm about to share with you, the book of Ezekiel, there was one major mainline denomination that about 100 years ago did not let anybody read the book of Ezekiel under age 30 because they thought it would cause mental illness. Ezekiel is just one of those books. It is unique in all facets. It's what we call one of the exilic prophets. All of the words that the Lord gave Ezekiel, he did so while Ezekiel was in Babylon under the captivity that started with Nebuchadnezzar and of course, they were released under Cyrus when Nehemiah and those guys went back.

But the book of Ezekiel has all kinds of images and dreams and visions and just wild things that many times are completely unexplainable but when you get to Ezekiel 12, there is a vision of a prophet. In fact it begins in verse 1, "The word of the LORD also came unto me, saying, Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a

rebellious house." Isn't that the message of the prophets? Almost all of them is God has a message for his people but they don't want to hear it. "Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee stuff for removing, and remove by day in their sight; and thou shalt remove from thy place to another place in their sight: it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house." In other words, "I'm going to try to get your attention." "Then shalt thou bring forth thy stuff by day in their sight, as stuff for removing: and thou shalt go forth at even in their sight, as they that go forth into captivity. Dig thou through the wall in their sight, and carry out thereby. In their sight shalt thou bear it upon thy shoulders, and carry it forth in the twilight: thou shalt cover thy face, that thou see not the ground: for I have set thee for a sign unto the house of Israel." There's this sign that's going to take place. Now remember, in the Old Testament particularly, a sign is an almost an over-supernatural event. Now don't get me wrong, supernatural is supernatural but a sign is only something God can pull off.

Verse 7, "And I did so as I was commanded: I brought forth my stuff by day, as stuff for captivity, and in the even I digged through the wall with mine hand; I brought it forth in the twilight, and I bare it upon my shoulder in their sight. And in the morning came the word of the LORD unto me, saying, Son of man, hath not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said unto thee, What are you doing? Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; This burden concerneth," here's the verse, "the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel that are among them. Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity. And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby: he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with his eyes. My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there. And I will scatter toward every wind all that are about him to help him, and all his bands; and I will draw out the sword after them. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries. But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come; and they shall know that I am the LORD."

Now you may be wondering, why did you read so many verses? Because when you just go into this verse 10 and just look at this concept of who this prince is, you have to kind of get a whole big picture of what's really happening. The people of Israel are in captivity. The Babylonians have taken them. They are in absolute exile and what is their desire even though they're rebellious? Their desire is to be released. Their desire is for freedom. Now one of the beauties of the Old Testament prophets is there's multiple layers of fulfillment. In other words, there is what we call the initial, maybe the historical layer, how it's fulfilled in their day and in their time, and then there's the prophetic element of how they are addressed in the future.

There are times and it is possible here in Ezekiel 12 that you can actually have three various levels. Allow me to explain. 1. It says there is a prince that will take them out of the wall and release them and they shall be free and they shall be blessed. People have

discussed through the years, is this addressing Cyrus, the Gentile Persian leader who allowed them to go back home? Is this referencing Nehemiah who actually built the temple? Lots of questions there but what we do know is that their freedom was realized in their lifetime. There was a time where the Lord allowed them to go back to Jerusalem, they broke out of the wall and they were "free" to rebuild the city and to rebuild the temple. More importantly, though, this prince, this character is seen as a deliverer who we ultimately know was the person of Jesus Christ. We know Jesus Christ was the ultimate deliverer of the Israelite people and to this chapter the Israelites were incredibly rebellious to the person of Jesus Christ. I mean, after all, they said, "May his blood be on us and on our children."

But what's most unique about Ezekiel is that because it takes place during the exile, there are those that when you read it think from this perspective, that Ezekiel isn't just about coming out of Babylonian captivity but there is a picture in Ezekiel that eventually this time period that we're going to study in the book of Revelation known as the great tribulation, that it's also a future prophetic fulfillment of how they will come out of that horrific time period, that exile of what the Bible makes it very clear that it's not the Babylonians who are over them, it is the Antichrist who is over them, and it speaks that there will be a prince that rises up.

Those of you that were here last week, somebody asked the question about Revelation 12, remember where it talked about the woman who gave birth, and the man-child that was caught up into heaven, and that he was a deliverer, and it's a picture of Jesus Christ absolutely, but when you take Ezekiel 12, you take Revelation 12 and various other passages and put them together, there is the thought, there is the idea that even during that tributational exile, that seven years of literal hell on earth, that the Lord will raise up not just 12,000 out of the 12 tribes, 144,000 from chapter 7 of Revelation, but there will be a very specific individual much like David was in 1000 BC, or much like Nehemiah and Ezra were when they came out of captivity, much like ultimately Jesus Christ is for the entire world.

So I know that I haven't been incredibly specific with an answer. We do know that this prince is a deliverer, we know that he is a redeemer, we know that he comes out of the rebellious house of Israel for their sake and to relieve them from captivity. Is it just coming out of Babylon? Probably not just that. Is it only about Jesus? Probably not. Most likely it's also involving future aspects of the book of Revelation for when you read Ezekiel, you're going to have the rebuilding of a temple, you're going to have the rise of an antichrist, you're going to have all kinds of similarities with the book of Revelation.

Now let me give you a hint tonight. If anybody comes up to you and says, "Well, I've read through Ezekiel and I know what everything in Ezekiel means," run away because you can read it and you can reread it and it is one of the most difficult books in all of the Bible and I believe, personal opinion here, that when the events of what are known as the book of Revelation begin to happen in real time and begin to happen in fruition, I believe that those individuals experiencing those times who when they have access to the book of Ezekiel can then read it and go, "Aha, that's what it was talking about," because they're

actually living out the prophecies where you and I are not in that position today, and so oftentimes we're wondering could it be, might it be? We don't really see clearly but nonetheless, there is at least a picture here of something that God does from Genesis to Revelation when his people are in captivity, when his people are hostaged to sin, he always provides a deliverer. Always. It is up to his people of whether they will embrace the one whom he's provided to deliver.

Any Ezekiel questions? Anybody? Nobody? You're like, let's get past Ezekiel. Thank you. Let's move on. Alright, now, I appreciate that.

Okay, let's go back to the beginning. In Genesis 3:1, oh, this is going to be fun, the serpent talked to Eve. At that time, did all the animals talk or just the serpent because he was Satan?

That is a fabulous question that we're not only going to go to Genesis 3, we also need to go to 2 Corinthians 11 to answer this question. So go on back to Genesis 3, this is a chapter that we're very familiar with because this is where it all went south. Everything was fine for you and I until chapter 3. Now let me remind you of something, if it hadn't been Adam and Eve that had sinned, it would have been you and me, okay? So humanity, we struggle with sin, all of us do.

But in chapter 3, verse 1, it says, "Now the serpent." Now not the snake, the serpent. Allow me to share with you what I call the square and rectangle rule. A square is always a rectangle, a rectangle is not always a square. Those of you that are mathematicians explain that to your table because I don't really understand it, I just know it's true. A square is always a rectangle, a rectangle is not always a square. A snake is always a serpent, a serpent is not always a snake. Now in Revelation 12, interesting that we just alluded to, it calls Satan "that old serpent."

So it says here, "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Now you know the story well, I know the story well. God forms Adam out of the dirt. He breathes his Spirit into him. He becomes a living soul. God then allows him to name all the animals. The Bible says in Genesis 2:18 that there was not found a helpmeet for him, so he puts Adam out cold, Adam wakes up, there is Eve from his rib, from his side, not his head not to rule over, or his feet to stomp on but from his side to be a helpmeet with. The two of them are doing great in the garden of Eden. Everything is going well until this event.

Now up until this point, let's think about who do we know that are a part of the universe? God foremost we know because he created it all. We have the angelic host of which one by the name of Lucifer fell to whom we now know as Satan, the accuser who is obviously the one being addressed here in Genesis 3. So we have God, we have the angelic host, we have Adam and Eve, and we have all the animals. Those are the only characters that we have. So here in the garden, the serpent is engaged in a conversation with Eve. Now what's interesting about this conversation is that it's a higher level thinking kind of

conversation. They're rationalizing, they're justifying. It's not just, "Hey, how are you? What do you want to do? Do you, do you not?" I mean, they're thinking this is good for food, it'll make me wise, it'll make me like the gods. And so the question we've got to ask ourselves is this a boa constrictor or is it something else?

And I want you to go to 2 Corinthians 11 to show you what I think the answer may be because I believe, ladies, that you get a bad rap in this passage. Now so a woman is talking to a snake, remember it was a man who was talking to a donkey, just think about that for a moment. 2 Corinthians 11:14 it says, "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." Now I want you to think about angels generally speaking in the Bible. They show up to humanity and humanity thinks they're human. Think about Abram and Sarah before Isaac, the child of promise, is born. Remember the angels that come and then ultimately go to Sodom and Gomorrah. They said, "There are two visitors among us." They are the angelic host. In fact, those angels in the book of Genesis look so much like humans that when they went to Sodom and Gomorrah, the humans in Sodom and Gomorrah wanted to be with the angelic beings because they thought they were other humans. The book of Hebrews says we've entertained angels unaware. And so all throughout Scripture the picture we get of "angelic beings" as a general rule of thumb is a human-like expression, not with wings, that's just for cherubim, and every time they show up, ladies don't get offended, they're always male. Every time. I'm sorry Hallmark, that's what the Bible says. I'm just telling you.

Now the Bible says Satan can transform himself into an angel of light. Isn't that what it just said? There's even a child's toy and a movie series out now called Transformers. In that series of books and in that movie, what do you have? You have an object that looks like a car with just a few maneuvers now looks like a monster. Or you have entity A that can turn into entity B. I think what 2 Corinthians 11 is saying is that Satan himself deceives, in fact, that's back in verse 13, he deceives people oftentimes by presenting himself not as red with horns and a tail, but he looks like one of the good guys.

Why is that important to Genesis 3? Could it have been an actual slithering snake that spoke? Absolutely. A donkey speaks later in the book of 1 Samuel, I mean, it could happen. But I want you to put yourself in the position of Adam and Eve, specifically Eve in Genesis 3. The garden of Eden, this incredible place protected by God, pure in all aspects, you get the idea that their existence was supplemented not only by the animal kingdom, it was also supplemented by the angelic kingdom, and doesn't it just make perfect sense that the enemy, Satan, who wanted nothing more than to derail humanity from God's plan, presents himself as one of the good guys, presents himself as one of the guys who they had trusted and had conversation with and been entertained by. You see, that's the thing that Satan does so well is he always comes looking like what you trust and think has your best interest at hand, and not necessarily the worst. And the serpent when it speaks to Eve, addresses what God had said in chapter 2, verse 16, "Did God not say?" In other words, you're dealing with an entity who knows what is happening and knows what has occurred.

So I'm of the opinion could it have been a literal slithering snake? It could have been but I'm more apt to say when it says that it was a serpent, that Satan did in Genesis 3 what he does in our lives today, he comes in the form of somebody or something you trust, you respect and you value, and then deceives you to biting the bait, the hook, and derailing you.

Now ladies, I want to give you a little bit of credit tonight. What sounds more credible to you? What makes you as the female gender sound more intelligent and wise? You listen to a snake or you listen to an angel of light? An angel of light. Why? Because we've all been subject to not seeing through what was really before us. And so the Bible doesn't say it was a snake, the Bible says it was a serpent.

Now later on when God curses the serpent, he says, "On your belly you will go." And everybody says, "Oh well, if he's on his belly, it's like a snake that slithers around on its belly." However, that verse about him being on his belly is in the context that the Messiah will step on his head one day and crush him, and I think rather than saying the snake that used to stand upright on its tail is now going to slither on the ground, it's saying this person, this entity known as Satan who has now deceived humanity, from this point forward is crushed, he is defeated. He may win some battles, he will not win the war.

Sir, your hand was up. What can I do to help you?

[unintelligible]

Oh, okay, see, there we go. I took care of that.

So serpent questions? Genesis questions? Garden of Eden questions? No questions. We answered it. Okay, alright. I guess the barbecue landed heavy tonight. Oh, no, yes, sir?

[unintelligible]

Yes.

[unintelligible]

Yes. Great great question. In fact, go back to Genesis 3. This is the end of the chapter. I'm going to answer this in a very unorthodox way. The question at hand is: the way that the garden is left, God is guarding it from humanity's entrance again and it gives very specific boundaries about where the garden of Eden was and why do we, I'm going to go ahead and elaborate on your question, why do we not see it as it's described in Genesis 3? It says in verse 23, "Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." The reason I say I'm going to answer it in an unorthodox way, one of the things I love about the book of Genesis is it's absolutely tied to the book

of Revelation and the book of Revelation is absolutely tied to the book of Genesis. The next time that the tree of life is of a very much pragmatic tangible reality for humanity is in the last chapter of the Bible. The tree of life from this point is forbidden from humanity. When you get to Revelation 22, it says that we are to eat of the tree of life forever. So the only time in which humanity has access to the tree of life after Genesis 3 is in Revelation 22.

Now this is why it's important to the question. Where is this garden of Eden? Where is this east gate? Where are these cherubim? And where is this flaming sword? Now I am not a very good cartographer as far as drawing maps are concerned, but the Bible makes it very clear that the garden of Eden is between two rivers known as the Tigris and Euphrates. That is not drawn to scale and that's probably not right but just work with me tonight. You've got the Tigris and Euphrates and we have what we know as the garden of Eden. Interesting, the Bible mentions in the book of Genesis two other rivers that are contained as a part of the garden of Eden, and it doesn't matter how much study we've done, how much geology that we've tried to understand, nobody anywhere ever has found any evidence of those other two rivers.

Now a skeptic might say, "Well, of course, because the Bible is chock full of errors, it's really mythology," yet at the same time there's 25,000 other geographical locations and personalities that we have discovered and found that validate everything the Bible has said. Why can't we find these two rivers? Why can't we discover them? What is going on here? The interesting thing is the garden of Eden is on the other side of sin. The garden of Eden is when sin had not occurred yet so everything is great. When you get on the other side of the story, Revelation 21 and 22, we find ourselves again in a garden type environment called new Jerusalem, and when you read about new Jerusalem in Revelation 21, something is interesting about this "city." It's not two dimensional, it's three dimensional. The Bible says and I'm going to use our Gentile Western configurations here, I'm not going to go into all the cubits, the Bible says it is basically in a square or a cube that goes from Boston to Orlando to Dallas basically up to South Dakota and across. That's how large new Jerusalem will be. But it's not two dimensional for it is described like a cube, that it actually has length and width, height and depth to it, and it says that the walls of the city of Jerusalem are as high as they are wide.

And the reason I brought that up to answer your question is, one day in the future the city of new Jerusalem will descend according to the word of God. There is a tree of life that is present that humanity again has access to, and that place is described as three dimensional. If you and I go over to the Middle East today, this is two dimensional. Is it possible that the original garden of Eden, is it possible the original garden was not limited to the two dimensions that you and I are subject to today but was possibly even three dimensional in its original nature, and those two rivers that we have no record of just like when you read Revelation 22. It says there's a river that flows from the top to the bottom. By the way, that's a 1,200 mile long river that goes vertical, not horizontal. It's possible that what you have in the garden of Eden in just a loss of humanity's provision and protection, we've also lost the possible grandeur of all.

Obviously now that's a desert area, an interesting thing is what we know as the new Jerusalem is pictured as a cube but it's also called not really a pyramid but Jesus is called the cornerstone. The only item that has a cornerstone that's also a headstone is a pyramid. And so many have thought it's not a cube, it's really maybe a double pyramid, so to speak. If that's the case, then what we know as this garden of Eden, new Jerusalem, would have a pyramid shape basically. If you read God's original land directions for the Promised Land, it is a triangle in nature. You know what we call Israel today, kind of that black-eyed pea, the Holy Land? The original when he said from this river to that river, from this location to that location, is in this shape which is the exact same shape that new Jerusalem will be if it sits "in its pyramidal form." And is it possible that the garden of Eden we lost more than just land mass, and that this entrance the cherubim, I hate to use the term as in a spiritual context, not we're spiritualizing it, but we can't see it with our eyes because we've been removed from.

Did that help at all or did I just make it more confusing? Y'all don't have to say, answer, I'm looking at him because I probably confused everybody. Alright, I've got two minutes. I saw another hand, did I not see another hand? I thought I saw another hand. I apologize. Oh, yes, sir? I apologize.

[unintelligible]

Okay, the question is: is it possible that the garden of Eden was destroyed with the flood? It's absolutely possible. The flood had more ramifications than I think we give it credit for and the way that I want to best describe this in two minutes or less before we get to the Revelation study is this. When you have time or maybe you're just intrigued or you can't sleep at night and you want to help falling asleep, go back and read Genesis 5 and then read Genesis 10. You say, "Well, why would that help me fall asleep?" Because it's So-and-so begat So-and-so that begat So-and-so that begat So-and-so and that's a snoozer, folks, I mean it really is. But what's interesting and here's the answer to your question, in Genesis 5 you've got Methuselah living 969 years, Lamech that lives 777 years. Noah doesn't even start building a boat until he's 500. By the time you get to Genesis 10, you see that the age range of humanity slowly but surely begins to diminish and by the time you get to Genesis 11 with what we know as the Tower of Babel, the lifespan of humanity is much like it is today in its 70s or 80s and you know, sometimes further and sometimes a little less.

Why is that important? I believe and we don't have time tonight obviously to go into all of it, Noah's ark and the story of the Noah's flood was more than just a lot of water. It changed everything. It's possible that it changed our atmospheric conditions. It's possible it changed geography. In fact, the Bible says water came from the heavens and out of the ground. I mean, it was a cataclysmic event like none other. That's why God put a rainbow up and said, "I'm never going to do it this way again."

To your point, yes, it's absolutely possible that if it wasn't three dimensional, if it was only two dimensional, that this would have been destroyed. However, what I find intriguing is cherubim can't be destroyed. So if it as a location was destroyed, then I

guess their assignment was dismissed. All I know is that what we know as the garden of Eden, what we know as paradise, what we know as the tree of life, according to the Bible will never be experienced again until we get to Revelation 22. And yet today there are people who are still looking for it. We call it different names like the fountain of youth and other terminology, looking for that place where we can find eternity. But it is absolutely possible it was destroyed in Noah's flood. It's absolutely possible that it was originally three dimensional and now it's only two dimensional.

I know you're thinking, "But you didn't really answer the question." No, no, you see, that's the problem, your questions only produce more questions, and that's why I love this because we can just keep digging and searching. But I promise you because we're about to go into Revelation, almost everything we study in the book of Revelation at some point has a connection to the book of Genesis. Why is that? Because it's not just 66 individual books of the Bible, it is his Bible, it's his word, and it's all connected.

How was that for a transition into Revelation? Let's go to Revelation 1. Revelation 1. I know we're making very slow in some of your perspectives, maybe even tedious progress but trust me, you're going to get your fill of open seals, you're going to get your fill of the beast and the Antichrist, you're going to get your fill of all that. But as we lay out chapter 1 of the book of Revelation, very critical to kind of lay out the ground rules, so to speak, and tonight the focus of verses 5 through 8 before we get to the island of Patmos, before we get to the actual vision that John has that is a part of what we know as the book of Revelation, we have a description, a quick summary of the person of Jesus Christ. Why is this critical? The very first verse, the very first phrase, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." If we miss Jesus Christ for the seven seals, we've missed Revelation. If we miss Jesus Christ for the beast, we've missed Revelation. We cannot lose focus that he is the focus of the book of Revelation.

So it's going to be laid out beginning in verse 5, it says,

5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, 6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. 8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Now as we conclude verse 8 of Revelation 1, essentially we have read through what we might call the prologue of the book of Revelation because when we pick it up in verse 9, we're on the island of Patmos, John is in the Spirit, we'll discuss that next week. He receives this incredible vision known as the book of Revelation but everything in the first eight verses gives us kind of the foundation for how we're going to look at, interpret and

understand the book of Revelation, and the end of this prologue focuses on who the person of Jesus Christ is.

And I love verse 5, in fact, if I've ever had the privilege of signing a book for you or someone on your behalf, I always sign my name and then I put Revelation 1:5. I love verse 5 of Revelation because it says Jesus, who is the faithful witness, the first begotten of the dead, the prince of the kings of the earth, who loved us and washes us from our sins in his own blood. That is the gospel in one verse. That's everything we need to know about who Jesus Christ is, who we are in light of him, and what he has done on our behalf and what we need to do to respond.

The first thing we see about Jesus here is his threefold office. He is a prophet. He is a priest. And he is a king. When you go into your Old Testament, you do not have anybody who fulfills all three of these roles. Most individuals in the Old Testament were either a prophet, or a priest or a king. Now several key individuals held two of these positions but nobody held all three. David, King David was a king and he was a prophet. Samuel was a priest and a prophet. Melchizedek, who Hebrews 7 gives allusion to who he might be, was a king and a priest. But nobody in the Old Testament is all three. You remember what happened when King Saul tried to be a priest when God didn't call him to be a priest? The kingdom was removed from him. But Jesus is called the prophet, a priest, and a king, the gold, the frankincense and the myrrh that whom we know as the wise men brought him in those early days.

As a prophet, the faithful witness. A witness is one who testifies. A witness is one who verifies, who declares what the truth is. And a prophet is not just somebody who foretells what's happening down the line, it's also somebody who forth-tells what is truth.

Deuteronomy 18:18 it said in the words of Moses that the Messiah one day would come in like fashion as him, and Jesus Christ himself in Mark 6, he called himself a prophet. He called himself one. He said, "A prophet is not honored in his own country."

Remember he was up in the Nazareth area, up in the Upper Galilee, and people didn't want to hear what he had to say. People weren't interested in his teachings and he said he was without honor. So Jesus Christ himself acknowledged he was a prophet. Nobody questioned Jesus' prophetic nature in Scripture, not even the Pharisees questioned that he was a prophet. Everybody knew he was a teacher. Nicodemus called him a great teacher that came from God. He was a prophet.

It's the priest part that we struggle with because a priest is a mediator, a priest is someone who is and in between, who goes in between. In Hebrews 7 it says that there are the priests and Hebrews 10 says this as well, that go in daily and regularly to make the sacrifices of man, but Jesus Christ has an unchangeable priesthood. Now think about it, in Mark 2, one of the most famous stories in the ministry of Jesus, there's a man who is a paralytic, cannot walk on his own. The house is crowded, no one can get in. His four friends, you know the famous story, they cut a hole in the roof and they lower him down. They lower him down and Jesus' first statement to him was, "Your sins are forgiven." He was declaring he was a priest. He was declaring he could mediate between God and man, and remember the Pharisees began to mumble, "Who is this guy that thinks he can

forgive sins?" And Jesus responded, "Just so you'll know that I'm able to forgive sins, take up your bed, rise and walk." Have you ever wondered why did Jesus do it in the order he did? Because if he had said, "Get up and walk," and he walked and then said, "Oh, by the way, your sins are forgiven," they would have said, "Oh, he can't really do that." But when he declared his sins were forgiven and then he declared him able to walk, it verified his priesthood.

But you and I know not just the fact that he did that testimony but the fact that the tomb is empty. 1 Corinthians 15 says it's empty, he is raised from the dead, and because he's raised from the dead, he is an unchangeable priesthood. According to 1 Timothy 2:5, he is the only mediator between God and man. He's the only one.

So he's a prophet, he's a priest, and he's a king. Now there's a phrase that is used in this verse that we're going to have to get a little nitpicky with. Notice what it calls him in relationship to the kings of the earth. What is he? The prince. Now later in chapter 19 of Revelation, he's the King of kings and he's the Lord of lords, but here on the front side of Revelation, before the seals are opened, before the book is opened, before any of the judgments take place, how is Jesus described? He's described as a prince. Now let's use human earthly terms here. Is a prince currently in charge? No, but he is a successor to the throne. Do any of you ever feel sorry for Prince Charles? You wonder is his mom ever not going to be queen? I mean, you just wonder about that some days. That poor guy has spent almost seven decades hoping he was going to sit on the throne. His entire life has been waiting, watching for that day.

Why is that significant? Jesus here is called the prince of the kings of the earth. Now I put these verses on your sheet and we could spend all the rest of our time just on this one statement but I don't want to do that tonight because in Matthew 4 and Luke 4, we have what we know as the famous temptation of Jesus Christ, you know what it was, by Satan in the wilderness. Turn the rock into bread. Descend from the top of the temple, let the angels protect you. But then there's the third one. You remember what Satan offers him. He takes him to a high mountain, he says, "All the kingdoms of the world, they're yours. Just bow down." Now does it not surprise you that Jesus didn't say something like, "Well, you can't offer that to me. They're not yours either." What did Jesus say? Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan. You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shalt thou serve."

Interesting that Jesus did not deny the fact that he had access to the kingdoms. You get to 2 Corinthians 4 and it says that Satan is the god of this world, and what I think is one of the most critical verses in all the book of Revelation is found in Revelation 11:15 when it makes this statement, it says that the seventh seal is opened, the seventh vial is opened, and it says and now the kingdoms of the earth have become the kingdoms of our Savior Jesus Christ. I've got news for us: we can talk about King Jesus as far as our heart is concerned, but you can't talk about King Jesus as far as an earthly reign is concerned today. He is not yet seated on the throne. He is not yet there in Jerusalem. There is a time coming according to Revelation 20 where he will be seated on the throne, he will "take over," and he will be in charge of every square inch of planet earth. But until then he's the

prince. What's important about that? The prince is one who is in waiting to, in other words, it's guaranteed, succession is coming.

So when it says that Jesus is the faithful witness, he's a prophet, he's the first begotten of the dead, he's a priest, he's the prince of the kings of the earth, but one day he is going to be the King of kings because it says when he descends, that is actually written on his thigh, "King of kings and Lord of lords." So he's got a threefold office but then he has a threefold action.

1. Very important: he loved us. One of the statements that you often hear in our worship service usually during one of the announcements at the beginning is God loves you so much and there's nothing you can do to change about it. It's true that he loved us. For God so loved the world. We're sitting in a room right now that is named after that verse, "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." He loved us so much, he washed us. He washed us. He cleansed us. He took that which was dirty and grimy and nasty and gross and he made it clean again.

But it's this next statement that gets me: his own blood. Acts 20:28 talks about shepherding the flock of God. It talks about ministering to the church of Jesus Christ. It says the church which Jesus purchased with his own blood. Hebrews 9:22 says there is no remission of sins apart from the offering or the sacrifice of blood. And so he does with his own blood and what's his promise to us? He says, "I've made you kings and priests." I've got good news for you. You don't have to get Pentecostal on me tonight but if you've ever wanted to rule the earth, you're going to get a chance. You're going to get a shot at it because according to this, it says he's made us kings, he's made us priests, but what is he currently? He's a prince. We reign with him when he reigns, we don't reign ahead of him. Don't get ahead of him for when he comes, it says later that we will descend and come with him. It says that we will reign with him.

We're called kings, we're called priests and I put a verse on your outline there from the gospel of Luke 19. This is the parable of the pounds. Remember there's a parable of the pounds, there's also the parable of the talents. In the parable of the pounds, there's one who has five pounds, one who has two pounds, and one who has only one pound, and we typically when you hear sermons and Bible studies on that parable, we always talk about the one, the one who hid it and he buried it and he feared his lord, his master, and he comes and he chastises him and says, "Give it to the one who has 10 because the one who made 5 made 5 more for 10, the one who had 2 made 2 more and made 4." And the Lord comes and just admonishes him and says, "Man, you did absolutely everything I wanted you to do." What's interesting and I put this on in Luke 19:17 and 19 is what Jesus says in this parable about the pounds. To he who had 5 and made 5 more, he says, "Congratulations, you shall be the ruler over," listen to this, "10 cities." And the one who had 2 that became 4, "You shall be ruler over 4 cities." I don't want to get the cart in front of the horse but at the very end of the book of Revelation 20, Jesus Christ descends and he sets up his throne, his kingdom, and he reigns and guess who reigns with him? You and me. We're the kings. We are the priests. We'll elaborate that more later but the picture

you get is that the more faithful you are now, the more you govern later. The more we try to govern now, the less we may have later. It's amazing how we always get things backwards as humanity.

But then it says the location upon the earth later on in Revelation 5:10. It says we'll be kings and priests on the earth. What's the requirement? Obedience. Just turn one page over to chapter 2. We'll be in the seven churches of Revelation very shortly but verse 26 and 27, by the way, all seven churches it says, "To he who overcomes," and there's what we might call a salvific promise or an eternal promise, we'll not be hurt of the second death, we'll eat of the tree of life, these wonderful promises. But 26 and 27 of chapter 2 is the only overcometh statement that includes a clause of not just overcoming but behavior connected to it. It says, "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father." And so it basically says, and we'll describe this more later, those who are in Christ Jesus, those who are of his reign, that if we are faithful and if we are obedient, we shall reign with him and the amount we reign over is determined to the amount of obedience that we possess.

Now I labeled this on your outline: his punctuality, "Behold, he cometh." One of the things that is so important to me about the study of the book of Revelation is that none of you nor myself, nor anybody you know anywhere, can tell you when all this is going to happen. Nobody. Now the Bible says there are seasons, Jesus even said this in regards to the fig tree. He said, "When you begin to see it bloom, know that the end is near." Here it says, "Behold, he cometh," and when he does, "all eyes shall see."

Now I want to delineate between two very important eschatological or end time events. There are two separate events that will occur in your life in regards to the return of Jesus Christ. Now people have debated and discussed the timing of the first one but not the second one. The first one is the catching up of the saints of God. Oftentimes we use the term rapture, to be caught up. And people always want to talk about, we'll discuss this in days ahead, is it before this time period, during this time period, after this time period? Well, for the sake of our discussion tonight, that time is not of necessity to know because there's coming a time where he's going to call you, his children, up, but then there's a time where we're going to return with him.

Now notice what this verse says, when he returns, "Behold, he comes in the clouds; and every eye will see him." Now think about those passages that we often call "rapture passages." Two were in the field, one is taken, one is left. Two are at the mill, one is taken, one is left. And it says, behold, in the twinkling of an eye and the sound of a trump, it just happens. All of those passages that describe us going up to be with the Lord no matter what the timing is, give an idea that those that are not taken with him are not of an understanding of what's just happened around them. In Revelation 1 it says every eye shall see him in the clouds. What happens in Revelation 19 when Jesus Christ descends? He comes out of the clouds, it says he's pictured on a white horse, it's the famous battle of Armageddon, and every eye sees him. What's important about this verse in chapter 1 is

it's not describing the event when we go to be with him, it's describing the event when we come back with him.

Now I made this statement in our very first gathering and I want to make it again because I think it is so critical. There is nothing that has to happen before Jesus Christ comes for us. There is a lot that has to happen before Jesus Christ comes back with us. There are some things that have to happen before he comes back with us that may occur before he comes back for us. What's critical to our understanding tonight is we see in these verses we read Jesus is prophet, he is priest, he is king, he loves us, he washed us, he is one day going to reign and we shall reign with him, and when he comes back it says that every eye will see him.

I want you to think about the clouds in relationship to Jesus Christ. His ascension in Acts 1, he ascends into the clouds. It says in Revelation 19, when he comes back he descends from the clouds. And so once again that old gospel song is right, "Keep your eye on the eastern sky, behold, redemption draweth nigh." It says that every eye will see him. He'll come with the clouds, every eye, and what's the mentality of folks? What does it say? They're wailing. So let me ask you an honest question: as a believer in Jesus Christ, if he came out of the clouds tonight, would you be wailing? I'd be celebrating, "It is over!" No more pain, no more sorrow, no more agony, no more raising teenagers. I mean, none of that stuff. It's over. That's right. I done gone Pentecostal now.

As a believer in Jesus Christ, if he were to descend tonight, it would be a celebration. This passage says that when ever eye sees him, they weep and they wail because they pierced him. This verse in the very beginning of Revelation isn't describing the event where we're caught up with him, it's actually describing the event when we come back with him because as we'll see not only in Revelation 19 but in chapter 16 and in chapter 14, the picture that you get when Jesus Christ descends when he's pictured on that white horse with his armies behind him, is that humanity is not pleased to see him. Humanity is fighting against him and angry with him, and the reason you see this wailing is because immediately after the physical return of Jesus, judgment is ensued and the picture that you get at that famous Armageddon event, and we'll kind of unpack this when we get there, it's almost as if humanity fights against Jesus and about midway through the battle goes, "Oh-oh, we're on the wrong side." But by that time it's too late.

They pierced him. Why? Well, all of our sin pierced him. Your sin pierced him. My sin pierced him. Everybody's sin has pierced him and they are his enemy at that point because they've rejected him, they've rebelled against him, and they're actually literally fighting against him and here's his proclamation. I love this in verse 8, "I am Alpha and Omega." You remember where that statement first shows up in the Old Testament? It's Exodus 3:14. Moses is just minding his own business. He thinks he's gotten away with murder. Now you know where you get the phrase from, you thought you got away with murder, that comes from Moses. He thought he'd gotten away with murder. He's just out minding his own business hanging out with his father-in-law and all of his property, until all of a sudden there's this bush that is burning but it's not being consumed. The Lord speaks out of it and says, "Take off your shoes, you're on holy ground." They begin to

have a conversation about the people being let go out of Egypt's bondage and Pharaoh's tyranny, and Moses asked a very good question, in fact, probably a question you and I would have asked. He said, "Based on my background, based on my history, based on all the things I've done, they're not going to listen to me. Who do I even tell them said, 'I'm here'?" And God's words were, "Tell them I am that I am. Not I was. Not I will be but I am." You see, we saw earlier in this chapter that around the throne it said that he that is and was and is to come, and we see later that the angelic beings say he that was and is and is to come, but when God describes himself he doesn't say was, is, is to come, he just says, "I am. I am Alpha and Omega. I am beginning and the end."

You know, there are seven times, in fact, you're going to see there's eight on your outline here, but there are seven main times in the gospel of John, which obviously would parallel the book of Revelation because of who the Lord used to give the vision to, that we have these famous "I am" statements. In John 6 he says, "I am the bread of life." In John 8 he says, "I am the light of the world." Now I put an asterisk on John 8. In John 8, Jesus is once again discussing, debating, and let's just be Southerners for a moment, he's fighting with the Pharisees, and in that they're having a battle because the Pharisees are calling him an illegitimate child. Now you think about that for just a moment. What was Mary and Joseph's testimony? He was born of the Holy Spirit. When someone came to Joseph and said, "Is that your boy?" He said, "No, not really." So what did that make him in their physical eyes? An illegitimate child, in fact, this is one of the biggest accusations the enemies of Jesus used against him saying, "How can you be the Messiah when you came from an illegitimate conception?" Alright? But what happened here, Jesus turns and says, "You want to know who your father is? Your father is the devil." Now where I come from, those are fighting words. I don't know about you. And they're getting in this big disagreement and they're saying, "How could you be of God? You have an illegitimate birth." They say, "Oh, you're just a carpenter," like somebody who works with wood is somehow below everybody else. And they keep going and keep going, and finally Jesus makes this statement, he says that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob rejoiced when they saw his day, and they just berate him, they just, I mean, they verbally beat him up once side, down the other. "Who do you think you are?" And he makes this statement, he said, "Before Abraham was, I am."

Now you and I hear the words "I am." In Hebrew it's Yahweh, pronounced later Yehovah or Jehovah. Don't think English. Don't think "I am." Let me tell you what Jesus was saying, "Before Abraham was, you're looking at God right here. I'm the same God who was in the burning bush. I'm the same God who took the dirt and formed Adam. And I'm the same God that made your nasty self." No, he probably didn't say that because it says that Jesus did not sin with his mouth. "I am." It's not one of the seven "I am" statements but it's a profound example.

When Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," he's not just saying, "I'm bread that's never going to go bad." He's literally saying, "I'm the same God of the burning bush with Exodus." Then you get to John 10 and he says, "I'm the door. I'm the good shepherd." John 11, "I'm the resurrection and the life." John 14, "I'm the way, the truth, the life." John 15, "I am the true vine."

Those are those seven what we know as "I am" statements but what I find intriguing here in verse 8 when he says, "I am Alpha. I am Omega. I am beginning and the end." There's a passage in John 18:5-6, one of my favorite passages in the entire Passion story of Jesus. He's in the garden of Gethsemane, he's been praying all night. Remember the disciples went to the side, they couldn't stay awake and pray. They fell asleep. And it says that Judas came with a group of 500 soldiers and they came to arrest Jesus. You know the story well. Jesus made this statement, "I gathered in the temple and the synagogues with you in the day, you come at night with swords and staves. What is happening?" To which one of them says, "Are you Jesus of Nazareth?" You remember his response? "I am." Remember what happened? Five hundred of them all fall back when he said, "I am." In the presence of God when he said, "I am," whoosh.

Now you want to know the stupidity of humanity? They got back up. Have you ever thought of that? They got back up and they came and arrested him. Why is that so critical to our understanding? It's because in just next week when we look at the vision John has on the island of Patmos, John's going to fall dead at Jesus' feet. Jesus is going to put his hand upon him and say, "Don't fear. I have the keys to death and hell. Don't worry about this. I've got this." We're not just dealing with any person, we're dealing with God himself, "I am."

And finally in Hebrews 12 when it talks about that we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses, he doesn't say that he is the Alpha and the Omega or the Greek letters for the beginning and the end, he says, "I am the author and the finisher of your faith." The reason I wanted to put so much focus tonight on these verses is it would be a travesty in any of our lives or all of our lives if we got to the end of the book of Revelation and we knew all about the seals and all about the vials and all about the mark and all about Armageddon and the kings of the earth and all these different things, and in all that study somehow we missed Jesus. Let us not forget even in this book that deals so much with earthly events, that Jesus must remain the center of it or we'll be off-center from all of it. And I'm convinced that a lot of erroneous teaching on the book of Revelation and a lot of spurious teaching on the book of Revelation is because they relegated Jesus to the outside of it rather than to the center of it. Do not forget as we go forward he is the center.

Next week, he's going to have feet of melted brass, he's going to have red eyes, and a sword coming out of his mouth. It's going to be good stuff. We're about to get into the crazy stuff of Revelation next week. We'll pray and we'll dismiss.

Lord, thank you so much for your truth of your word, but more than that, thank you, thank you, thank you for Jesus. It's in his name we pray. Amen.

God bless. Please take your kids home.