

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 96 OF 104

Everlasting Dominion

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Daniel 7-12
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 147-150
Gospels	John 12:9-50
General New Testament	Revelation 3-4

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to fix a throne in the middle of your class's imagination. Daniel sees dominion handed to the Son of Man and never taken back. John watches a King ride into His own city knowing exactly what the week holds. The Psalter ends with every breathing thing joining a song already in progress. And the Revelation shows a door opened in heaven with worship going on behind it that has never once stopped. Nothing in any of these readings depends on circumstances improving.

Doctrinally, this is one of the heaviest weeks in the program. Daniel 7 establishes the everlasting kingdom given to the Son of Man at His enthronement, which is the ascension, not a future earthly reign. Daniel 9 must be taught with the seventy weeks running continuously to Christ, His covenant, and the destruction of Jerusalem, with the gap theory named and rejected. Daniel 12 gives one resurrection with two outcomes. And Revelation 3 and 4 must be kept in their first century setting, with 3:20 recognized as a word to a church rather than a formula for conversion.

Formationally, the thread is where a person's eyes are fixed. Laodicea looked at its bank balance and concluded it needed nothing. The rulers in John 12 looked at the Pharisees and kept quiet. Philadelphia had little strength and kept His word anyway. Daniel was told to go his way and rest, and to stand in his lot at the end of the days. Ask your class this: if you actually believed that the government of the universe is settled and that Christ is reigning right now, what is the first thing you would stop being afraid of this week, and what would you do on Monday that you have been putting off?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Daniel 7-12, and do not try to cover all six chapters evenly. Give the hour to three passages: the Son of Man receiving dominion in 7:13-14, the seventy weeks in 9:24-27, and the resurrection in 12:2-3. Settle the seventy weeks carefully; it is the week's hardest work.

Second session: Take up Revelation 3-4. Spend the first half on Laodicea, since it is the letter most likely to describe a comfortable congregation, and the second half on the throne room, reading chapter 4 aloud. End with the elders casting their crowns, and let the class sit with that image.

The other two readings: Ask the class to read John 12:9-50 in one sitting and to mark every response to Jesus they can find. For the Psalms, assign one of the four to each person to read aloud every morning, and tell them you will ask on Sunday what it did to the start of their days.

The Ancient of Days

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 7 covers the same ground as chapter 2, but from heaven's side, and the difference in imagery is the point. Nebuchadnezzar saw a magnificent statue; Daniel sees four beasts clawing up out of a storm tossed sea. Empires look impressive from a throne room and predatory from underneath. A little horn rises with a mouth speaking pompous words, and then, abruptly, the vision shifts: thrones are set, the Ancient of Days sits, His garment white as snow, a river of fire before Him, the court seated and the books opened. The beast is slain, and One like a Son of Man comes with the clouds and receives dominion, glory, and a kingdom that shall not pass away.

Chapters 8 through 11 fill in the middle of the picture with startling precision. The ram is named as Media and Persia and the goat as Greece (8:20–21); the great horn broken and replaced by four is Alexander and his generals; the later horn that takes away the daily sacrifices and defiles the sanctuary answers to Antiochus the Fourth, who did exactly that in 167 B.C. Chapter 9 interrupts the visions with Daniel reading Jeremiah, calculating the seventy years, and praying a confession that is worth reading aloud to any congregation. Gabriel comes with an answer far larger than the question: seventy weeks, decreed for his people and his holy city.

Chapter 12 closes the book with the plainest statement of resurrection in the Old Testament. Many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt, and those who turn many to righteousness shall shine like the stars forever. Daniel is told that the words are sealed until the time of the end, asks how long, and is told to go his way, rest, and stand in his lot at the end of the days. The book ends with an old man told to live out his days in peace.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Chapter 7 is dated to the first year of Belshazzar, so it happens before the events of chapters 5 and 6, and it is the last chapter written in Aramaic.
- The book pivots here from court narrative to apocalyptic vision, the same literary family as Ezekiel's and Zechariah's visions and as Revelation.
- Daniel 9 begins with Daniel reading Jeremiah 25:11–12 and 29:10 and understanding that the seventy years of desolation were nearly finished. Scripture prompts his prayer, and prayer prompts the revelation.
- A week in Daniel 9 is a period of seven, and the context requires weeks of years, so seventy weeks is four hundred ninety years decreed upon Daniel's people and city.
- Daniel 11 is the most detailed predictive passage in the Old Testament, tracing the wars between the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria down to a persecutor who desecrates the sanctuary.
- "Son of Man," drawn from Daniel 7:13, became Jesus' own favorite self designation, and He used it before the high priest at His trial in a way no one in the room could misunderstand.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Daniel 7:13–14 shows One like a Son of Man brought to the Ancient of Days and given a dominion that will never pass away. Read Matthew 26:63–64 and Acts 1:9 alongside it, and discuss where that scene is fulfilled and when His reign began.*

Read the direction of travel carefully. The Son of Man does not come down to earth in Daniel 7:13; He comes with the clouds to the Ancient of Days and is given dominion. That is an ascension scene, not a second coming, and Acts 1:9 records a cloud receiving Him out of their sight. At His trial, when the high priest demanded to know whether

He was the Christ, Jesus answered by quoting this verse and Psalm 110 together, and the council tore their clothes because they understood the claim exactly.

So the reign began at the ascension and enthronement, which is precisely what Peter preaches in Acts 2:33–36: God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ, seated at His right hand. Verse 14 says the dominion is everlasting and shall not pass away, and verses 18, 22, and 27 say the saints receive and possess the kingdom. Colossians 1:13 says Christians are in it now, and Revelation 1:9 has John calling himself their companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. There is no earthly, political reign still waiting to begin.

Question 2. *Daniel 9:24 lists six things the seventy weeks were decreed to accomplish, and 9:26–27 has an Anointed One cut off and sacrifice brought to an end. Read those six purposes aloud and decide together whether they sound like things still waiting or things already finished in Christ.*

Read verse 24 slowly: to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Every one of those is the language of the cross. Hebrews 9:26 says Christ appeared once at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Romans 3:21–26 says the righteousness of God apart from law has been manifested. These are accomplished things.

Then follow the arithmetic the text gives. From the command to restore and build Jerusalem to Messiah the Prince is seven weeks and sixty two weeks, sixty nine in all. After that, Messiah is cut off, but not for Himself. In the middle of the seventieth week He brings sacrifice and offering to an end, which is exactly what Hebrews 10:8–10 says the cross did, and then the people of the prince who is to come destroy the city and the sanctuary, which Rome did in A.D. 70. The weeks run continuously to Christ and the end of the Jewish order. Say plainly that the popular scheme which stops the clock after the sixty ninth week and postpones the seventieth to a future tribulation has to insert a gap of two thousand years into a text that has no gap in it, and has to make the covenant maker of verse 27 an antichrist rather than the Anointed One of verse 26. Neither move comes from the passage.

Question 3. *Daniel 12:2 says many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life and some to everlasting contempt. Which practical difference should an awakening like that make in an ordinary Tuesday?*

Start by noticing what Daniel says and does not say. One awakening, two outcomes, both in the same sentence. Jesus says the same thing in John 5:28–29: the hour is coming when all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth, some to the resurrection of life and some to the resurrection of condemnation. Paul tells Felix there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust (Acts 24:15). This is one event at the end, not two separated by an age.

Then make it ordinary, because that is where doctrine either lands or evaporates. If everyone you work with will be raised, then no conversation is trivial and no person is merely scenery. If you will be raised and stand before Christ, then the hidden things matter as much as the public ones. Ask the class to name one specific thing about this coming week, a decision, a relationship, a purchase, a conversation, that would look different if Daniel 12:2 were as real to them as their calendar.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Set the four beasts of Daniel 7 beside the four metals of Daniel 2 and match them up. Which kingdoms correspond, and what does the change from a gleaming statue to a row of predators add to the picture?*

The lion with eagle's wings is Babylon, the head of gold. The bear raised up on one side with three ribs is Medo-Persia, the chest and arms of silver. The leopard with four wings and four heads is Greece, divided among Alexander's successors, the belly and thighs of bronze. The dreadful beast with iron teeth is Rome, the legs of iron. The change of imagery adds the moral verdict. Chapter 2 shows what empires look like to the men who build them; chapter 7 shows what they look like to the people they devour, and to God.

2. List the six things Daniel 9:24 says the seventy weeks will accomplish. Read Hebrews 9:26 and Romans 3:21–26, and write beside each one where it was accomplished.

The six are finishing the transgression, making an end of sins, making reconciliation for iniquity, bringing in everlasting righteousness, sealing up vision and prophecy, and anointing the Most Holy. Hebrews 9:26 places the putting away of sin at Christ's one appearing to sacrifice Himself. Romans 3:21–26 places the manifested righteousness of God and the propitiation in Christ's blood, received through faith. Prophecy is sealed, that is, completed and confirmed, in Him, and the Most Holy is anointed in the person and work of the One whom God anointed (Acts 10:38; Luke 4:18).

3. Daniel 12:2 describes two destinies coming out of one awakening. Read John 5:28–29 and Acts 24:15, and write down how many resurrections the New Testament actually describes and when they occur.

One. John 5:28–29 puts both the resurrection of life and the resurrection of condemnation in a single hour when all who are in the graves hear His voice. Acts 24:15 speaks of one resurrection of both the just and the unjust. Daniel 12:2 has both groups awakening together. The New Testament knows nothing of two resurrections separated by a thousand year earthly reign; the dead are raised, the living are changed, and judgment follows (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10).

4. Trace what Daniel does in 9:1–19 before Gabriel ever arrives. How much of that prayer is confession, and what is he confessing that he did not personally do?

He sets his face toward God with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes; he acknowledges God's covenant and mercy; and then almost the entire prayer is confession. He confesses sin, iniquity, rebellion, departure from God's commandments, and refusal to listen to the prophets, and he does it in the first person plural: we have sinned, we have rebelled, to us belongs shame of face. Daniel is the one man in the book against whom no fault is recorded, and he prays as one of the guilty. That is a picture of intercession worth sitting with, and it is the opposite of the way most of us pray about our nation.

5. Daniel 12:3 says those who turn many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever. Name one person you will talk with about Christ before this month ends, and write the date next to the name.

Answers will vary. The date is the important part; a name without a date is a wish. Listen for a plan that fits the person's actual life, a lunch, a ride home, a text that opens a door. Daniel 12:3 is one of the few places in the Old Testament that attaches eternal significance to turning others toward God, and it ought to be quoted more often than it is.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The seventy weeks of Daniel 9 must be taught as running continuously to Christ, His covenant, and the destruction of Jerusalem. Reject the gap theory that postpones the seventieth week to a future tribulation. It requires a two thousand year interval the text never mentions, and it turns the covenant maker of 9:27 into an antichrist instead of the Anointed One named in 9:26.
- Daniel 7:13–14 is an enthronement scene, and its fulfillment is the ascension and reign of Christ, not a future earthly kingdom. Tie it to Acts 2:33–36, Colossians 1:13, and Daniel 2:44. This is the same doctrinal ground you established in week ninety four, and it is worth stating again.
- Daniel 12:2 teaches one general resurrection of the just and the unjust, as John 5:28–29 and Acts 24:15 confirm. Do not allow a scheme of multiple resurrections divided by a millennium.
- Do not attempt to trace every king in Daniel 11, and do not map the visions onto modern nations. The point of these chapters is that God announces history in advance and that His kingdom outlasts every empire in it. Keep the class there.

Let Everything Praise

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These four psalms are the doxology of the entire Psalter, and each of the last five begins and ends with Hallelujah. Psalm 147 is built on a pattern your class will enjoy finding: a line about the vastness of God's power followed immediately by a line about His attention to the weak. He gathers the outcasts of Israel and heals the brokenhearted; He counts the stars and calls them all by name. He covers the heavens with clouds and gives food to the young ravens. Greatness and tenderness are not in tension in this psalm; they are the same fact said twice.

Psalm 148 is a summons issued to the whole created order, starting at the top and working down: angels, hosts, sun, moon, stars, waters above the heavens, then sea creatures and depths, fire and hail, snow and clouds, stormy wind fulfilling His word, mountains, trees, beasts, birds, and finally kings, princes, judges, young men, maidens, old men, and children. Human beings are near the end of the list, not the beginning, and there is a lesson in that. All of creation is already doing what we are being invited to join.

Psalm 149 moves the praise into the assembly of the saints and adds a startling image of high praises in the mouth and a two edged sword in the hand. Psalm 150 abandons argument entirely. Where, why, and how are answered in a rush, and then the last line: let everything that has breath praise the Lord. A collection that opened with a man deciding what to do with his life ends with the whole universe singing. That is the direction the life of faith runs.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalms 146 through 150 form the closing Hallelujah collection, each opening and closing with "Praise the Lord." They function as the doxology for the entire book.
- The Psalter is arranged in five books, and each ends with a doxology; Psalm 150 serves as the doxology for the fifth book and for the whole collection.
- Psalm 147 fits the period after the return from exile, with its references to the Lord building up Jerusalem and strengthening the bars of her gates.
- The instruments named in Psalm 150 belong to the temple worship prescribed under the Law of Moses, a covenant fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8:13).
- Psalm 149's language of vengeance on the nations is covenant language about God executing judgment through Israel under the Old Covenant, and it must not be carried over into Christian practice.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 147:3–4 puts binding up the brokenhearted and naming every star in back to back lines. Why set those two side by side, and what does that pairing offer a person who is in pain right now?*

Because the psalmist refuses to let us choose between a God who is vast and a God who is close. If He were only vast, the broken heart would be beneath His notice. If He were only tender, His comfort would be sympathy without power. Setting the two lines together says that the One who has the capacity to name a hundred billion stars is the One bending over you, and that His attention is not a strain on His resources.

For a person in pain, the practical comfort is that God is not overextended. Most suffering people quietly assume they are too small to warrant God's attention or too complicated to fix. Psalm 147 says neither. Ask the class which half they actually struggle to believe, His power or His care, and note that the answer usually reveals more about their history than their theology.

Question 2. *Psalm 147:10–11 says God takes no pleasure in the strength of a horse or the legs of a man, but in those who fear Him and hope in His mercy. Which of your strengths have you been offering God that He never asked for?*

The horse was the ancient world's tank, and strong legs were a soldier's survival. The psalm is not saying strength is bad; it is saying strength is not what pleases God, because strength was never the point. What pleases Him is people who fear Him and hope in His mercy, which is to say, people who have stopped relying on what they can supply.

Press the modern equivalents. We offer God our competence, our reputation, our giving capacity, our record of attendance, our theological accuracy, our usefulness. None of these is wrong, and none of them is what He asked for. Ask each person which strength he would be most embarrassed to lose, and whether his relationship with God would survive losing it. That question usually finds the horse.

Question 3. *Psalm 150:6 ends the whole collection with everything that has breath praising the Lord. After a hundred and fifty psalms full of lament, complaint, fear, and confession, why does the book end this way, and what does that say about where faith is headed?*

Because praise is where the whole thing is going. The Psalter does not end in unbroken praise because the troubles were resolved; the laments were never retracted, and Psalm 88 still ends in darkness. It ends in praise because God is who He is and the outcome is certain. That is the same logic that runs through Revelation, which your class is starting now: the trouble is real, and the Lamb still wins.

This also shapes how a congregation worships. Praise is not a report on the week we had. If it were, half the room could not sing honestly on any given Sunday. Praise is a declaration about God that is true regardless of the week. Ask the class what it would mean to sing on a hard Sunday, and note that the person beside them may be doing exactly that.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Psalm 148 summons to praise God, in the order it appears, from the highest heavens down. Where do human beings show up in that list, and what does their placement suggest?*

It begins in the heights with angels and hosts, then sun, moon, and stars of light, then the waters above the heavens; then it turns to earth with sea creatures and depths, fire, hail, snow, clouds, stormy wind, mountains, hills, fruitful trees, cedars, beasts, cattle, creeping things, and flying birds; then kings, peoples, princes, judges, young men, maidens, old men, and children. People appear near the end, after the weather and the livestock. We are not the center of the choir; we are latecomers to a song already in progress.

2. *Psalm 147 alternates between God's power over creation and His care for individuals. Mark every shift as you read. Which argument is the alternation making?*

The shifts run right through the psalm: He heals the brokenhearted and He counts the stars; He lifts up the humble and casts the wicked to the ground; He covers the heavens with clouds and He feeds the young ravens; He strengthens the bars of your gates and He gives snow like wool; He sends out His word and it melts the ice, and He declares His word to Jacob. The argument is that the God of the galaxies and the God of your gate are the same God, and that His word governs both. The last shift is the most important: the God who commands the weather has spoken to His people.

3. *Psalm 150 names instruments used in temple worship under the Law of Moses. Read Colossians 2:14–17, then Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, and write out what the New Testament authorizes for the praise of the church.*

Colossians 2:14–17 says the handwriting of requirements was wiped out and nailed to the cross, and that the old regulations were a shadow of things to come, the substance being Christ. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 describe the church's praise as speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in the heart to the Lord, teaching and admonishing one another. The New Testament authorizes singing, and it is what the church did. The instruments of Psalm 150 belonged to a temple, a priesthood, and a covenant that Christ fulfilled and took away.

4. *Psalm 149:6 puts high praises of God in the mouth and a two edged sword in the hand. Read Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12, and 2 Corinthians 10:3–5, and describe the only sword a Christian carries.*

Ephesians 6:17 calls the sword of the Spirit the word of God, the only offensive weapon in the armor. Hebrews 4:12 says the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit and discerning the thoughts of the heart. 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 says our weapons are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds. The Christian's sword cuts thoughts and arguments, never people.

5. *Choose one psalm from 147 through 150 and read it aloud, standing, first thing every morning this week. On Sunday write down what changed about the way your days began.*

Answers will vary. Reading aloud and standing are both deliberate; praise spoken out loud with the body engaged is a different experience from praise thought about. Ask the following week how it changed the tone of the first hour of the day. Do not accept "it was nice." Ask what specifically was different about how they treated the first person they spoke to.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 150 names instruments, and someone will ask. Answer plainly and kindly: those instruments belonged to temple worship under the Law of Moses, a covenant fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17). The New Testament pattern for the church is singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). State the conviction without scorn for people taught otherwise.
- Psalm 149:6–9 is Old Covenant language about God executing judgment through Israel. It is not a warrant for violence of any kind. Christians fight with the word and with prayer (Ephesians 6:17; 2 Corinthians 10:3–5).
- Do not let these psalms be read as though praise depends on circumstances being good. The Psalter ends in praise with its laments still standing. That is the point, and a class full of people in hard seasons needs to hear it said.
- Psalm 147:20 says God has not dealt so with any nation regarding His statutes, which described Israel's unique position under the Old Covenant. Do not transfer that language to any modern nation.

The Hour Has Come

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The chapter turns on a request that seems minor: some Greeks in Jerusalem for the feast ask Philip whether they might see Jesus. Philip tells Andrew, they both tell Jesus, and His answer has nothing to do with scheduling. “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” Throughout John, the hour has not yet come; now the Gentiles are at the door and the hour arrives. The glory He means is the cross, and He explains it with a farmer’s image: unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit.

Then He applies it to everyone listening. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me. The pattern of the Master becomes the pattern of the servant, which is why this chapter is so uncomfortable. Jesus then admits His own soul is troubled and refuses to pray for escape, and the Father answers audibly from heaven, the third and last time in the Gospels.

The rest of the chapter is John’s explanation of unbelief, and it is sobering. Though Jesus had done so many signs before them, they did not believe, which John says fulfills Isaiah. Then the saddest verses in the chapter: many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Jesus’ final public words follow, and they are a warning about His word judging in the last day.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is the last public teaching in John’s Gospel; from chapter 13 forward Jesus speaks only to His own disciples until the arrest.
- The palm branches and the cry “Hosanna” carried nationalistic expectations. The crowd wanted a king who would deal with Rome, which is exactly what He refused to be.
- Riding a donkey instead of a warhorse deliberately fulfilled Zechariah 9:9 and announced a King who comes in peace.
- The Greeks in verse 20 are probably Gentile proselytes who had come to worship at the feast, and their arrival signals the wider ingathering to come.
- The voice from heaven occurs three times in the Gospels: at the baptism, at the transfiguration, and here. Jesus says plainly that this one was for the crowd’s sake, not His own.
- John writes his summary of unbelief with two quotations from Isaiah, and adds that Isaiah said these things when he saw His glory and spoke of Him, which is a striking statement about the identity of the One Isaiah saw in the temple.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus answers the request of some Greeks by announcing that His hour has come and then talking about a grain of wheat that has to be buried (12:23–26). How does that one image explain both His cross and what He asks of anyone who follows Him?*

The image says that fruitfulness runs through death, not around it. A seed kept safe in a jar stays exactly what it is, one seed, forever. Buried, it stops being a seed and becomes a harvest. Jesus is explaining His own cross: the glory is not in avoiding it but in going through it, and the fruit is everyone who will ever be saved. That is why the arrival of Gentiles triggers the announcement.

Then He extends it, and this is where a class gets quiet. The one who loves his life loses it. The servant follows where the Master went. Christianity is not a program of self improvement with a cross added as decoration; it is dying to a self centered life so that something can grow. Ask the class for the practical shape of that: the ambition surrendered, the grudge released, the time given away, the right insisted upon and then let go.

Question 2. *John 12:42–43 says many of the rulers believed and would not confess Him, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Where does that same trade show up in your week, and what has it already cost you?*

Name how ordinary this is, or the class will assume it is about cowardly first century officials. These men believed. They were convinced. And they calculated what confession would cost them among people whose opinion they valued, and they stayed silent. The trade is not between belief and unbelief; it is between two audiences. John says they loved one kind of praise more than the other.

Ask where the trade happens now. It is the conversation at work where faith would have been relevant and was left out. It is the family gathering where a compromise is easier than a word. It is the social media post left unwritten, or written for the wrong applause. Then ask the cost question, because it always has a cost: the friend never invited, the child who learned that faith is a private matter, the quiet erosion of one's own conviction. What is not confessed tends not to survive.

Question 3. *In 12:31–32 Jesus says that now is the judgment of this world and that being lifted up will draw all people to Himself. Which moment is He calling “now,” and how does a cross judge and draw at the same time?*

The “now” is the cross, days away as He speaks. He says now is the judgment of this world and now the ruler of this world will be cast out, and John adds a note in verse 33 that He said this signifying by what death He would die. The cross is where the world's verdict on Jesus and God's verdict on the world are both delivered, and where Satan's claim on humanity is broken (Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 2:15). It is past, not future.

And the same event draws. Lifted up on a cross, He draws all people, meaning all kinds without distinction, Jew and Greek alike, which is precisely what the Greeks at the door have just prompted. Be careful here: this is not universal salvation and it is not an irresistible pull. John 6:44–45 explains the drawing as being taught of God and hearing and learning from Him. People are drawn by the preached cross and must come. Ask the class what actually drew them, and note how often the answer involves someone else's sacrifice.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Zechariah 9:9, then John 12:12–16. Which part did the disciples fail to understand at the time, and what does John say finally made sense of it for them?*

Zechariah 9:9 tells the daughter of Zion to rejoice because her King comes, just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt the foal of a donkey. John says his disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done them to Him. The resurrection and ascension reorganized their memory. Much of what is confusing in the moment becomes clear after we have seen more of what God is doing.

2. *List what Jesus says about His hour in John 2:4, 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, and 12:27. Trace how the language changes as the Gospel moves forward.*

In John 2:4 He tells His mother His hour has not yet come. In 7:30 and 8:20 no one lays hands on Him because His hour had not yet come, and John says so as an explanation of His safety. In 12:23 He announces that the hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified, and in 12:27 He says His soul is troubled and refuses to ask the Father to save Him from this hour, because for this purpose He came to this hour. The hour moves from not yet, to protection, to arrival, to acceptance.

3. *John 12:37–41 quotes Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:10. Read both passages in Isaiah, and explain how people could watch sign after sign and still not believe.*

Isaiah 53:1 asks who has believed our report, showing that the rejection of God's servant was foreseen. Isaiah 6:10 speaks of eyes blinded and hearts hardened. The hardening is judicial, the settled consequence of persistent refusal,

not God arbitrarily preventing people from believing. Matthew 13:15 quotes the same passage and puts it in the active voice from the human side: their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed. Light that is repeatedly refused eventually stops being seen. Signs cannot overcome a will that has decided.

4. *Trace the responses in this chapter: the crowd, the chief priests, the Greeks, the rulers, and the Pharisees. Which thing does each group's response appear to depend on?*

The crowd responds to the spectacle of Lazarus, so their faith rests on a wonder and will not survive a crucifixion. The chief priests respond to the threat to their position, so they plot against Lazarus as well. The Greeks respond with a simple desire to see Him. The rulers respond to social pressure and stay silent. The Pharisees respond with exasperation, saying the world has gone after Him. Each response depends on what the person had at stake, which is a pattern worth pointing out gently, since it is still true.

5. *Jesus said the one who loves his life will lose it. Name the one thing you are currently protecting that He is asking you to lay down, and take the first visible step toward laying it down this week.*

Answers will vary. Push for something the person is actually gripping rather than an abstraction: control of an adult child's choices, a career track, a reputation, money that has quietly become security, an old grievance that feels like justice. The first visible step is the part to insist on, because the laying down of a life happens in small public acts long before it happens all at once.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- John 12:32 does not teach universal salvation. Christ draws all kinds of people, Jew and Gentile, and the drawing is through the preached word (John 6:44–45). Men still must come, believe, and obey.
- The quotation of Isaiah 6:10 in 12:40 must not be read as God preventing people from believing. It describes judicial hardening after repeated refusal, and Matthew 13:15 states the same passage from the human side: they closed their own eyes.
- Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is often used to support a political or nationalistic kingdom. The donkey is the correction. His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), and the crowd that shouted Hosanna scattered within the week.
- John 12:31 says the ruler of this world is cast out now, at the cross. Do not let this be pushed into a future event; Colossians 2:15 and Hebrews 2:14 place Satan's defeat at Calvary.

A Door Standing Open

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The last three letters are the hardest and the kindest. Sardis was a city famous for a citadel captured twice because nobody thought it needed watching, and the letter tells the church to be watchful and strengthen the things that remain. Philadelphia is commended without any rebuke; they have a little strength, have kept His word, and have not denied His name, and He sets before them an open door that no one can shut. Laodicea, a wealthy banking city known for black wool and an eye ointment, is told it is poor, naked, and blind, in its own three specialties.

Do not miss what Jesus offers Laodicea. He rebukes and chastens those He loves, tells them to be zealous and repent, and then says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” The door is the door of a church that has shut Him outside, and the invitation is to any individual in it who will hear His voice and open. That is one of the most tender sentences in Scripture, and it is spoken to the congregation He has just threatened to spew out of His mouth.

Chapter 4 changes the camera angle entirely, and everything that follows in the book depends on it. A door stands open in heaven, and immediately there is a throne, and One sitting on it. Around it are twenty four elders on thrones, seven lamps of fire, a sea of glass, and four living creatures who never stop saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.” The elders cast their crowns before the throne. Whatever Rome does to the seven churches, this is the reality behind it: God reigns, and heaven is not anxious.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Each letter follows the same structure: a description of Christ drawn from chapter 1, an assessment, a command, and a promise to the one who overcomes.
- Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea were real cities with known features, and the letters use those features deliberately: an unwatched citadel, a city of earthquakes, and a banking center famous for wool and eye salve.
- Laodicea’s water came by aqueduct and arrived tepid, unlike the hot springs at nearby Hierapolis or the cold water of Colossae. The image of lukewarmness would have been immediately recognizable.
- The throne room vision of chapter 4 draws heavily on Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, both of which your class has read this year.
- The twenty four elders and the four living creatures are symbolic figures in a symbolic vision. Various explanations have been offered; the text does not identify them, and neither should we insist.
- Chapters 4 and 5 form one scene and should be read together, so the class should know that the Lamb enters next week.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Sardis has a name for being alive and is dead (3:1). How does a congregation’s reputation outlive its life, and what would an honest reading of that verse turn up about ours?*

A reputation is built on things that used to be true, and it takes years to catch up with the facts. Sardis presumably had a history, a building, a name in the region, perhaps a memory of better days. What it did not have was life. Jesus says its works are not found complete before God, which means the outward activity continued while the substance drained away. And He adds a grace note: a few names have not defiled their garments.

Ask the honest question about your own congregation carefully and constructively. What are the works we do because we have always done them? Where are we living on a reputation earned by people who are now buried in our cemetery? Jesus prescribes five things in 3:2–3: be watchful, strengthen what remains, remember what you

received, hold fast, and repent. Ask which one the class would start with, and let them answer specifically rather than generally.

Question 2. *Laodicea says it is rich and has need of nothing, and Jesus calls it wretched, poor, blind, and naked (3:17). Which of those two assessments would an outsider have made, and what does the size of that gap teach us about self evaluation?*

An outsider would have made Laodicea's assessment, not Christ's. They were genuinely wealthy, and after an earthquake they famously rebuilt without imperial help. By every visible measure they were fine. The gap between their self assessment and Christ's is the point of the letter, and it is terrifying, because it means a church can be entirely wrong about itself while feeling entirely settled.

Draw out the lesson about self evaluation. Feeling fine is not evidence of being fine; our instruments are not reliable on ourselves (Jeremiah 17:9; 1 Corinthians 4:3-4). What corrects us is Christ's own assessment in His word, and the honest speech of people who love us. Ask the class when they last let Scripture tell them something about themselves they did not already believe, and whether anyone in their life is positioned to say a hard thing to them.

Question 3. *Chapter 4 opens with a throne, and the throne is occupied. After seven letters full of problems, why does the vision begin here, and what would be different about your week if that throne were as real to you as your calendar?*

Because the throne is the answer to the letters. Seven congregations facing persecution, poverty, false teaching, compromise, and their own lukewarmness, and the first thing John is shown is that the government of the universe is settled. The vision does not begin with armies or judgments; it begins with a throne, occupied, surrounded by unceasing worship. Everything else in Revelation happens downstream of chapter 4.

Make the last part concrete. A person who genuinely believes there is a throne prays differently, works differently, and worries differently. He can lose an argument, a promotion, or an election without losing his footing. Ask the class what they treat as the real center of gravity in a normal week, and what one practice might move the throne from a doctrine they affirm to a fact they live on. Most will answer prayer, and they will be right.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Philadelphia has only a little strength (3:8) and receives one of the richest promises in the seven letters. List what Jesus commends in them and everything He promises them.*

He commends them for keeping His word and not denying His name despite having little strength, and for keeping His command to persevere. He promises an open door no one can shut, that those of the synagogue of Satan will come and worship before their feet and know that He has loved them, that He will keep them from the hour of trial coming on the whole world, that He comes quickly and they should hold fast, and that the overcomer will be a pillar in the temple of God, will go out no more, and will have the name of God, the name of the city of God, and Christ's new name written on him. A weak church with a faithful record receives the strongest promises in the seven.

2. *Revelation 3:20 is usually quoted to unbelievers. Read it in its context, noting who is being addressed in 3:14 and what Jesus says in 3:19. Who is on the other side of that door, and what changes when you read it that way?*

Verse 14 addresses the angel of the church of the Laodiceans, and verse 19 says that as many as He loves He rebukes and chastens. So the door is the door of a church, and the ones inside are Christians who have shut Christ outside their own congregational life. That makes the verse far more searching than its usual evangelistic use. It is not primarily an invitation to an alien sinner; it is Christ asking His own people to let Him back in. The individual note matters too: if anyone hears My voice and opens, singular, one person at a time.

3. *List everything present in the throne room of Revelation 4 and what each person or object is doing. What is the whole scene occupied with from beginning to end?*

There is a throne with One sitting on it, described in stones rather than in features; a rainbow like an emerald; twenty four elders in white with golden crowns on twenty four thrones; lightnings, thunderings, and voices; seven lamps of fire; a sea of glass like crystal; and four living creatures full of eyes, each with six wings. The living creatures

do not rest, saying, “Holy, holy, holy”; whenever they give glory, the elders fall down, worship, and cast their crowns before the throne. From beginning to end the scene is doing one thing: worship. That is what heaven is occupied with while Rome is occupied with itself.

4. *Revelation 4:11 gives the ground on which God is declared worthy. Compare Revelation 5:9. On which two bases is worship offered in these two scenes?*

Revelation 4:11 declares God worthy to receive glory, honor, and power because He created all things and they exist by His will. Revelation 5:9 declares the Lamb worthy because He was slain and redeemed us to God by His blood, out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. Creation and redemption are the two grounds of worship in Scripture, and they are the two things no one else has ever done.

5. *Jesus counsels Laodicea to buy gold refined in the fire, white garments, and eye salve. Name which of the three you most need, and say plainly what buying it will cost you this week.*

Answers will vary. Gold refined in the fire suggests faith proved by trial (1 Peter 1:7); white garments suggest righteousness and the covering of shame; eye salve suggests the ability to see one’s own condition. Listen for what the person names and what he says it will cost, since Christ tells them to buy. Self knowledge, in particular, is usually purchased by allowing someone to tell us the truth.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Revelation 3:10 is a promise to a first century congregation about an hour of trial coming on the world of that day. Do not make it a proof text for a pre-tribulation rapture; compare John 17:15, where Jesus asks not that they be taken out of the world but kept from the evil one.
- Revelation 3:20 is addressed to a church, to Christians who have shut Christ out. It may be applied by extension, but do not build an invitation system on it. The New Testament’s response to the gospel is hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27), not a prayer at a door.
- The twenty four elders, the four living creatures, and the sea of glass are symbols in a symbolic vision. Note the main suggestions if asked, and refuse to be dogmatic where the text is silent.
- Keep the throne room in the present tense. Revelation 4 is not a preview of a distant future; it is the reality behind the persecuted churches of chapters 2 and 3 as they read the letter. God reigns now, and that is the comfort the book exists to give.

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Hosea 1–8 · Ecclesiastes 1–2 · John 13 · Revelation 5–7

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