

# 2021 Community Groups

## WEEKLY GUIDE

### December 19

This week our passages are, once again, very challenging to interpret, so if they bring up more questions than answers for you, you are in good company. Pastor Aaron shared this week with the teaching team that these passages are even challenging for him. There have been many biblical scholars over the centuries with differing interpretations who are still faithful to Jesus, and to the authority of Scripture. Our focus continues to be **on seeing a clearer picture of Jesus.**

#### Community Prayer:

Lord, as we look at these passages, we ask for your help and guidance. There is so much we don't know, but what we do know is this; you are good, you are loving and you are ultimately in control. We ask for your wisdom to guide us through our time of study and reflection. In Jesus' name, Amen

#### Opening Questions:

1. There are warning signs on just about everything these days. Have you ever seen a warning sign that seemed completely unnecessary? If so, what was it?
2. Have you ever seen an important warning sign so many times that you stopped paying attention? If so, what and why?

Exploration: Read the passages below...what can we learn about God's heart for the world from these passages?

There are 3 Themes that help understand these passages:

- Warning - that offers repentance
- Window - that leads to witness
- Worship - that prompts prayer and singing

We begin in Revelation 8. What is being described here will be fulfilled in the future. Keep in mind that this is not meant to be sequential or chronological. As John, the writer of Revelation often does, he goes over the same scenes again and again offering new insights and perspectives.



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Revelation 8:1

There is total and complete silence for ½ an hour. No one in heaven was singing "Holy, Holy, Holy" there were no declarations of "Worthy is the Lamb"... there was just... SILENCE.

Out of this breathtaking silence, John begins to see the grim reality of what is about to happen. Silence prepares us to actually listen, it prepares us to receive.

3. When was the last time you purposely sat in total silence? Share about that experience?

Revelation 8:3

Before the seventh seal is opened and anything happens in this chapter the prayers of God's people are offered up to God. These are most likely cries of believers in great tribulation calling out to God for help and for justice. These kinds of prayers might be for those affected by evil atrocities, for injustice toward children or for sin that runs rampant, destroying bodies, relationships and communities.

Author, NT Wright says, "Prayer, even the anguished prayer of those who do not understand what is going on, is a vital element in this mysterious co-operation."

4. What do you think NT Wright means by this "mysterious co-operation?"
5. Share about a time in prayer where you felt that you were in total cooperation with God.

Romans 8:22 & 26

More potent and more powerful than the dark forces of this world are the prayers of God's people... and there is a sense of anticipation that God will answer... but there is pain to come!

6. If you feel comfortable, share about a time when you simply didn't know how or what to pray for a situation. What did you do?



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Revelation 8:6

In chapters 4, 11 and 16 we read about thunder, earth shaking rumblings and lightning flashes. It is in this context that the trumpets sound.

### **The 7 Trumpets**

Revelation 8:7

**Trumpet 1: A Plague on Vegetation** Some have tried to explain this as nuclear war, pollution, meteors... but they aren't the central message and may distract us from the message... God is bringing judgment, He is not passive!

Revelation 8:8

**Trumpet 2: A Plague on the Sea** Something 'like' a mountain thrown into the sea, ecological disaster, again, possibly a meteor.

Revelation 8:10-11

**Trumpet 3: A Plague on Fresh Water** Bitter and even poisonous water. Evil has poisoning effects; this is a direct contrast to God using Moses to provide fresh water for His people.

Revelation 8:12-13

**Trumpet 4: A Plague on the Heavens and Darkness on the Earth** The earth is plunged into darkness.

It is important to note that the destruction described here is not total, but only impacts one third of each element.

7. What do you think God is doing by not bringing total destruction in these verses?

Revelation 9:1-6

**Trumpet 5: Locusts from the bottomless pit** Locusts are a consistent example in the Bible pointing to God's judgment. This kind of plague tortures but does not kill: even death is not an escape.

Revelation 9:13-19

**Trumpet 6: An Army of Destruction** A demonic army is unleashed upon the earth and it will be terrible.

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### **Warning that offers Repentance**

It is very clear in Revelation that the things to come will be bad, but these are warnings ahead of time. These are warnings not given to scare us but warnings that offer people a chance to repent.

Revelation 9:20-21

8. Why do you think people ignore warnings, even important ones?

"The supreme threat to our own world is not communism, capitalism, socialism, or any other ism or lie, but God, coming to judge the world and each of us in his righteousness." Gerhard Krodel

Revelation 10:1-2, 9-10

We can only speak the truth to others when we have received the truth for ourselves. The truth is sometimes both sweet and bitter.

9. What are some biblical truths that you find both sweet and bitter?

### **Window - that leads to witness**

"The two witnesses are a symbol for the whole church in its prophetic witness, its faithful death, and its vindication by God." NT Wright

Revelation 11:15-18

#### **Trumpet 7: Coming to an End**

This does not just announce the end but a new beginning. This trumpet sounds as an announcement of both the final wave of judgments seen in the coming chapters, but also as a declaration of joy at the coming kingdom of God and His victorious reign. It is a sobering call to worship!

### **Worship that prompts prayer and singing**

Worship even when we don't feel like it and being in an environment of worship when we desperately need it, has the power to bring about a shift in perspective, it gives us reminders we desperately need.

10. Has there ever been a time in your life when the last thing you wanted to do was worship, but it was exactly what you needed? Share about that experience.



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### **The Takeaway:**

Remember the 3 Themes we looked at when we started:

#### **Warning**

- God gives the world numerous warnings that call people to repentance
  - *How might you stay alert and respond to the warnings God has given you?*

#### **Window**

- A view into what is happening in the heavenly realm that shows us a greater picture of Jesus
  - *Take some time in this Christmas season to reflect on the truth of who Jesus really is.*

#### **Worship**

- A heavenly response of worship that invites us to join through singing and prayer
  - *How might you engage in a deeper expression of worship during this Christmas season?*

***\*\*Take some time to pray for all who might attend our Christmas Eve services, especially those who don't yet know Jesus.\*\****

