

**Revelation: Faithfulness in the Shadow of  
Empire**

A Convergent Chapter for Teachers and Theologians

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## Introduction — The Problem of How We Read Revelation

*Thesis: Revelation trains the Church to remain loyal to Christ under empire. It is not a codebook for predicting history, but a prophetic-pastoral confrontation of idolatrous power. The question is not 'When is the end?' but 'To whom do you belong?'*

Few books in Scripture have been more weaponized, merchandised, or misunderstood than the Apocalypse of John. It has been used to terrify congregations, predict political events, sell bestselling paperbacks, and justify every conspiracy theory with a cross stapled to it. The result is a strange irony: the book given to fortify the Church against fear has been used largely to produce fear.

For the past two centuries — which is not long in the life of the Church — readers have been conditioned to treat Revelation like a secret codebook about the end of the world. “Read the headlines,” we’re told. “The prophecies are unfolding!” Each new war, recession, alliance, oil treaty, technology, or cultural shift becomes the next proof that the end is finally upon us.

And every time, the predictions fail.

Yet the method remains unquestioned.

The modern prophetic industry assumes Revelation is primarily concerned with our moment, as though John's original audience — real Christians in real cities under real pressure — were simply props in a drama written for people twenty centuries later. But texts do not work like that. The prophets spoke to their own people first. The apostles wrote to real assemblies who needed real guidance. And John wrote Revelation not as an esoteric puzzle for the distant future but as a pastoral-prophetic resistance document to communities suffering under the Roman imperial machine.

If our reading of Revelation makes the original audience irrelevant, we have already gone wrong.

This is the central thesis of this chapter:

Revelation was written first to train the Church in faithfulness under empire, and second to anchor the Church in the hope of Christ's final and visible reign.

It is about endurance before it is about chronology.

Courage before speculation.

Loyalty before timelines.

To read Revelation well is not to decode history — it is to resist idolatrous power, remain faithful to Christ when loyalty is costly, and live toward the future God has already secured in the resurrection.

Everything else follows from that.

## **II. The World of Revelation: Rome as the Totalizing Empire**

Revelation is not written in a vacuum. It emerges from the collision of the early Christian proclamation — Jesus is Lord — with the dominant political theology of the ancient world — Caesar is Lord.

Rome was not merely a government. It was a meaning-making system:

- Rome defined reality.
- Rome defined peace.
- Rome defined morality.
- Rome defined identity.

Religion was not personal belief. Religion was public loyalty. To worship the emperor was to acknowledge the world as Rome told it was.

This is why the earliest Christian confession was politically dangerous.

To say Jesus is Lord was not a spiritual slogan. It was a rejection of the empire's claim to ownership. It meant:

“Caesar does not define truth.”

“Rome does not define justice.”

“The empire does not determine who we are.”

That kind of dissent is never tolerated quietly.

When Revelation was written — whether under Nero (mid-60s) or Domitian (mid-90s) — Christians were facing not just persecution but pressure to assimilate. The imperial cult was everywhere: coins, festivals, trade guilds, civic rituals. To refuse to participate meant economic vulnerability, social exclusion, alienation, and in some regions, death.<sup>1</sup>

Revelation answers this moment not by promising escape — but by revealing the empire as it truly is.

So John does what Jewish apocalyptic prophets had done for centuries:

- He pulls back the curtain (ἀποκάλυψις = unveiling).
- He exposes the empire's propaganda as blasphemous parody.
- He shows the Lamb enthroned while the Beast postures and decays.
- He gives the Church a way to interpret reality without adopting the empire's story.

This is why Revelation must be symbolic.

Symbolism is not confusion — it is survival literature. It is what you write when the empire reads your mail.

Hippolytus understood this in the early third century when he wrote *On Christ and Antichrist*, noting that Revelation does not describe one enemy of God but the recurring pattern of empire that exalts itself as divine. Tertullian says the same in *Ad Nationes*, calling Rome the “beast of iron teeth” — echoing Daniel's fourth kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

The early Christians did not interpret Revelation as forecast, but as exposure:

Rome is not reality — the Lamb is.

The Beast is not sovereign — the Lamb is.

The empire will fall — the Lamb will stand.

Revelation was not meant to frighten Christians.

It was written to fortify them.

### **III. The Beast: What It Was Then, What It Always Becomes**

If you ask most modern Christians who the Beast is, you'll usually get a specific name:

- A politician they dislike
- A tech billionaire
- The Pope
- The United Nations
- A pop star (no, Beyoncé is not the Whore of Babylon — calm down)

The instinct is always the same: the Beast must be a single individual.

One villain. One mastermind. One Antichrist.

But that's not how John portrays the Beast — and it's not how the early church understood it.

The Beast is not a person.

The Beast is a system.

A power structure.

A way of organizing the world.

A Beast is what happens when human authority demands what belongs only to God.

A Beast is what empire becomes when it:

1. Expects allegiance instead of accountability.
2. Defines virtue as obedience to power.
3. Uses fear to shape conscience.
4. Offers peace in exchange for worship.

Rome was not a “type” of Beast.

Rome was the Beast in John's day.

Not symbolically — functionally.

Rome required worship as loyalty.

Rome absorbed identity.

Rome promised peace through domination (Pax Romana = peace by sword).

Rome killed dissent to maintain order.

When Revelation says the Beast,

John is naming empire-as-god.

And the early Christians knew it.

### **666 Is Not a Prophecy Number — It's a Signature**

Revelation 13:18 says the number of the Beast is 666.

Not a spooky code.

Not a technology warning.

Not a puzzle for YouTube preachers.

It is gematria — letters-as-numbers.

Write “Nero Caesar” in Hebrew letters:

נרון קסר →

$$50 + 200 + 6 + 50 + 100 + 60 + 200 = 666$$

John is not being mysterious. He is being blunt in a way Rome’s censors wouldn’t detect.

Nero is the face of the Beast in his time.

Not the final Antichrist.

Not the only example.

But the template.

And Irenaeus — the bishop taught by Polycarp, who was taught by John — confirms this in *Against Heresies* 5.29–30. He says:

The number refers to a name, and the name is known among those who understand the times.

But the important thing is not the number, but that we refuse the Beast’s way of life.

The early church did not obsess over decoding the Beast.

They focused on not becoming like it.

### **Empires Don't Need You to Love Them — Just to Agree With Them**

Rome didn't need Christians to worship with enthusiasm.

Just compliance.

Just silence.

Just nodding along.

Just going with the flow.

This is how power always works:

It doesn't demand devotion first.

It demands normalization.

Most Christians aren't tempted to bow dramatically.

They are tempted to slowly blend in.

The Beast's first victory is not martyrdom.

The Beast's first victory is yawning indifference.

The early church mothers and fathers knew this:

- Hippolytus said the Beast is recognized by its demands, not its appearance.
- Irenaeus said the Beast's mark is visible in the lives of those who conform to the world.
- Justin Martyr said worship is revealed by habit, not ceremony.

Which means:

The Beast doesn't win by conquering the church.

The Beast wins by making the church comfortable.

That is the warning.

Not helicopters.

Not microchips.

Not barcodes.

Assimilation.

## **The Beast Is Not Future — It Is Recurring**

John's message is not:

“Watch for a new Beast someday.”

John's message is:

The Beast is always rising somewhere.

The Lamb is always reigning.

Choose your allegiance.

This is why Revelation matters now:

- Not because we can identify the Beast on the news
- But because we must recognize when the world asks for our worship

The Beast is any empire, ideology, market, or movement that demands:

- Identity
- Loyalty
- Moral conformity

in exchange for comfort, status, or safety.

Which means the real question is never:

“Who is the Beast?”

The real question is:

Where is the Beast asking me to bow today?

And Revelation answers:

Do. Not. Bow.

Even when it costs you.

Especially when it costs you.

#### IV. The Mark: Allegiance of Mind and Hand

If the Beast in Revelation represents a system that demands worship, then the mark of the Beast represents the acceptance of that system's values. It is not an implant, chip, tattoo, barcode, QR code, biometric scan, or hidden signal embedded in consumer technology. None of the early Church believed this, because none of them read Revelation as a technological forecast. They read it as a call to discern what governs conscience and behavior.

The language of forehead and hand in Revelation 13:16–17 is lifted directly from Deuteronomy 6:4–8, the Shema:

“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.” (Deut. 6:8)

In Deuteronomy, God's instructions were to shape the mind (forehead) and actions (hand). To bear God's name and commandments on the forehead and hand meant that one's thinking and doing were aligned with God's will.

Revelation deliberately reverses this pattern.

The Beast marks those whose thoughts and actions are aligned with the empire.

So the contrast is not between those who have a physical mark and those who do not; the contrast is between:

The mark is liturgical before it is ethical — it is about worship.

This is why Irenaeus says in *Against Heresies* 5.29:

“The name of the Beast is the name of apostasy, a name of him who would place himself as lord. The number is that of a man — meaning those who conform themselves to him.”

The “number of a man” is not an identification puzzle.

It is a warning against conformity to the world’s understanding of power.

Justin Martyr makes the same point in *Dialogue with Trypho* 43:<sup>6</sup>

“Those who do what is righteous bear the seal of God. It is recognized in their deeds, as a soldier bears his commander’s mark.”

The early Church understood:

- The mark is not given accidentally.
- The mark is not forced without consent.
- The mark is chosen through loyalty.

This is why the Beast in Revelation does not attempt to deceive believers by disguise. It does not need to.

It simply offers:

- Economic security
- Social belonging
- Stability
- Safety
- Acceptance

In exchange for undivided loyalty.

The Beast does not say, "Worship me."

The Beast says, "Be reasonable."

The mark is not the moment of dramatic betrayal.

It is the accumulation of compromises made respectable over time.

It is not the moment someone says:

“I deny Christ.”

It is the moment someone says:

“This is simply how the world works.”

### **The Mark Is Not a Fear of Contamination — It Is a Warning Against Assimilation**

The early Christians did not fear symbols, objects, or state-issued tokens.

They feared the love of comfort that replaces faithfulness.

The danger was not technology.

It was ease.

Not coercion.

But participation.

To receive the mark is to accept the empire's definition of:

- Success
- Value
- Identity
- Goodness

without question.

Revelation's warning is therefore not primarily about the end times.

It is about the present — in every generation.

For the mark appears whenever the world rewards those who surrender conscience and penalizes those who refuse.

And so the question Revelation asks the Church is not:

“Do you know the signs?”

The question is:

Who shapes your mind?

Who directs your hands?

To whom is your loyalty given?

This is the mark.

## **V. The “Rapture” That Was Never a Doctrine**

One of the most persistent misunderstandings in modern Christian thought is the belief that believers will be removed from the earth before a final period of tribulation — the “Rapture.” This idea is now so common in popular preaching that many assume it is ancient. But historically, the “Rapture” as taught today is new, and the early Church would not have recognized it.

The doctrine in its current form did not come from the apostles, the Church Fathers, the Councils, or the historic creeds. It entered the Christian imagination in 1830, when a young Scottish woman named Margaret MacDonald claimed to have a vision of believers being taken away from the earth before judgment. The idea was later systematized by John Nelson Darby, and finally injected into mainstream evangelicalism by the Scofield Reference Bible (1909), whose study notes were read as though they were Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

Footnotes became doctrine.

Doctrine became identity.

Identity became fear.

But the early Church knew no such escape.

The earliest Christian writings — from 1 Clement to The Shepherd of Hermas, from Ignatius to Hippolytus — consistently teach that believers will endure tribulation, not avoid it.

Hippolytus writes in *Commentary on Daniel 2.8*:<sup>7</sup>

“The Church shall not fly from tribulation, but shall be proven in it, as gold in the furnace.”

Tribulation, for the early Christians, was not a sign of God’s abandonment, but of alignment with Christ.

So Why Do Some Believe Jesus Said We Would Be “Taken”?

The most commonly cited passage is Matthew 24:40–41:

“One will be taken and one will be left.”

But Jesus explicitly tells us how to interpret this phrase — He compares it to the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37–39). And in Noah’s day:

- Those who were taken were the ones swept away in judgment.
- Those who were left were the ones preserved by God.

So in Jesus’ own analogy:

- “Taken” = removed under judgment
- “Left” = those who endure and live

To want to be “taken” in this passage is to want to be in the flood.

This passage teaches the opposite of rapture theology.

### **What About 1 Thessalonians 4 — “Caught Up in the Air”?**

This is the other pillar of rapture teaching:

“We who are alive... will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord.” (1 Thess. 4:17)

The key word here is ἀπάντησις (*apantēsis*) — a technical Greek term.<sup>9</sup>

In the ancient world, when a king or dignitary approached a city, the citizens would go out to meet him and then escort him back into the city in royal procession.

This is not evacuation.

This is welcome.

Paul is saying:

- Christ returns.
- The saints rise to meet Him.
- They escort Him to earth to reign.

This is precisely how early Christians understood it.

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.35:

“When the Lord returns, the righteous shall rise and welcome Him, and creation shall be renewed for the Kingdom.”

There is no flight.

No escape.

No evacuation narrative.

The hope of the early Church is not to leave the world, but to see the world set right.

The Early Christian Expectation Was Always: Endure, Witness, Reign

The Church believed:

- Christ will return publicly, not secretly.
- Resurrection will be bodily, not spiritual only.
- The Kingdom of God will be on earth, not in a disembodied realm.
- The Church's role is not to flee suffering, but to remain faithful through it.

The modern rapture doctrine offers escape.

The gospel offers endurance and inheritance.

The rapture says:

“We will be taken away.”

Revelation says:

“The Kingdom of God will descend.” (Rev. 21)

The rapture says:

“This world is not our home.”

The resurrection says:

“This world will be our home — healed.”

**Why This Matters**

The rapture produces fear of the world.

Revelation produces faithfulness within the world.

The rapture trains us to look for signs.

Revelation trains us to look for idols.

The rapture says:

Prepare to leave.

Revelation says:

Prepare to reign.

The difference is not small.

The difference is the shape of Christian discipleship itself.

## **VI. The Millennium and the Renewed Earth**

If Revelation exposes the empire for what it is, and if it calls the Church to endure until Christ appears, then the natural question follows:

What exactly are we enduring toward?

Modern Christianity has inherited an idea that heaven is our final home — a place of immaterial bliss, detached from bodies, from earth, from history. But this idea is foreign to Scripture and to the early Church. It is not what the apostles believed, not what Jesus taught, and not what the first Christian theologians defended.

The biblical hope has always been:

Resurrection. Restoration. Reign.

Not escape.

Not disembodied existence.

Not the abandonment of creation.

The Kingdom of God comes not to remove us from the world, but to renew the world we were made for.

### **The Resurrection Is Physical Because Christ's Resurrection Is Physical**

The entire Christian hope rests upon the bodily resurrection of Jesus:

- He eats.
- He touches and is touched.
- He speaks.
- He walks.
- He bears scars that are healed, yet remembered.

He is not a spirit.

He is not a vision.

He is not a symbol of hope.

He is the firstfruits — the pattern of what humanity will be in the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:20–23).

What He is, we will be. (1 John 3:2)

If the resurrection is physical, then the future is physical.

Which means the earth itself must be restored.

### **The Millennium: The Reign of Christ with His People**

Revelation 20 does not speak in allegory:

“They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:4)

The earliest Christians took this at face value — not because they lacked symbolic imagination, but because Christ’s resurrection made bodily reign plausible.

Justin Martyr writes in Dialogue with Trypho 80:<sup>12</sup>

“We know a resurrection of the flesh, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, rebuilt, adorned, and enlarged.”

Papias, bishop of Hierapolis and hearer of John's disciples, writes (fragment preserved in Irenaeus):<sup>11</sup>

“There will be a time when creation will be renewed, the earth will yield her fruits abundantly, and the righteous shall reign.”

And Irenaeus summarizes the consistent apostolic teaching in *Against Heresies* 5.32:<sup>10</sup>

“The promise of the inheritance belongs to the creation, which God renews. For the creation itself shall be restored to its primeval state, and the righteous shall reign upon the earth, glorified.”

Not heaven instead of earth.

Heaven transforming earth.

The world is not discarded.

The world is healed.

### **The New Jerusalem Descends — It Does Not Remove the Church**

Revelation 21 is explicit:

“And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of  
heaven from God.” (Rev. 21:2)<sup>15</sup>

Heaven moves toward us.

God dwells with humanity.

The separation between divine and created life is overcome.

The biblical story does not end with humanity ascending to heaven.

It ends with heaven and earth united, without separation.

The Church does not abandon creation.

The Church inherits creation made whole.

This is why Romans 8 speaks of creation as \*groaning, waiting for the “revealing of the  
sons of God” — meaning that the world’s healing is tied to the resurrection of humanity.

Creation does not watch us leave.

Creation watches us be restored — and then joins us.

## **Why This Matters for Discipleship Today**

If the goal were escape, then endurance would be unnecessary.

If the plan were evacuation, then faithfulness under pressure would be optional.

If the world were destined only for destruction, then justice would be sentiment and mercy a distraction.

But if the world will be renewed —

if bodies matter —

if creation will be healed —

if kingship is real —

Then:

- Holiness matters
- Justice matters
- Community matters
- Embodied faith matters
- Steadfast witness matters

The Kingdom is not waiting for us elsewhere.

The Kingdom is coming here.

Which means the life of the Church now is training for the world that is coming.

As Irenaeus says:

“The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” (Against Heresies 4.20.7)

Fully alive means resurrected, restored, relational, embodied, rooted.

And faithful.

## **VII. The First Tribulation and the Final One**

The difficulty for many interpreters is that Revelation speaks in two horizons:

- (1) the immediate suffering of the first-century Church, and
- (2) the final, universal judgment and renewal of creation.

The mistake is assuming we must choose one and discard the other.

Modern readers tend to fall into two errors:

1. Preterism that collapses everything into the first century (and leaves no meaningful future hope).

2. Futurism that collapses everything into the end times (and strips Revelation from its original hearers).

Revelation does neither.

Revelation speaks as apocalypse — a genre that reveals patterns in history that culminate in final resolution.

### **Rome Was a Real Tribulation**

The Christians addressed in Revelation were experiencing pressure that was:

- Economic
- Social
- Judicial
- Religious

They were losing trade access, family reputation, legal standing, and sometimes their lives.

To refuse participation in the imperial cult was to accept marginalization.<sup>1</sup>

Revelation †did not promise escape from this pressure.

It promised that Christ saw it, judged it, and would overthrow the empire that demanded such allegiance.

As John says to Smyrna:

“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

(Rev. 2:10)

This is not the language of evacuation.

It is the language of steadfast courage.

### **The Final Tribulation Will Not Resemble Rome Politically — It Will Resemble Rome Theologically**

The final tribulation is described not as one empire or one government, but as a global consolidation of allegiance:

- Not centralized around military power, but around shared meaning.
- Not enforced first by violence, but by worship.
- Not starting with terror, but with normalization.

This is why Revelation uses Beast, False Prophet, Babylon, and Dragon imagery:

- Beast — coercive political power
- False Prophet — persuasive religious/ideological justification
- Babylon — economic seduction and cultural glamour
- Dragon — the spiritual power animating the system

This is not simply “the future.”

This is the recurring shape of empire through all history — and it will culminate in a final and global form.

Rome was local and early.

The final iteration will be comprehensive and ultimate.

The Church is not told to avoid the final tribulation.

The Church is told to overcome it.

As Jesus says:

“The one who overcomes, I will grant to sit with Me on My throne.” (Rev. 3:21)

The goal is co-reign, not escape.

### **Endurance Is the Shape of Christian Faith**

This is where Revelation’s call becomes pastoral, not predictive.

Revelation is not concerned with when the final tribulation occurs.

It is concerned with what kind of people the Church must be whenever it happens.

The early Church understood suffering not as interruption, but as the normal environment of faithfulness.

Origen, On Prayer 29:<sup>14</sup>

“Tribulation is not sent to destroy the believer, but to reveal what is true.”

Revelation forms Christians who are not:

- Alarmed by suffering,
- Seduced by comfort,
- Or discouraged by the apparent success of the wicked.

The Lamb is enthroned.

The outcome is already secured.

The only question Revelation asks is:

Do you remain loyal?

## **VIII. Why Revelation Matters Today**

Revelation is often treated as either:

- A codebook for the paranoid, or
- A symbolic poem for scholars to debate safely.

Both misreadings avoid the book's central demand:

Do not give the empire your worship.

Revelation is for Christians who live in systems of power that promise security, identity, and meaning, if only they surrender conscience.

And that is every Christian in every generation.

The Beast Today Is Not Identified by Politics, But by Worship

The Beast appears wherever:

- Success is valued more than righteousness
- Power is admired more than holiness
- Comfort is chosen over truth
- Truth is reshaped to protect belonging

Revelation is not warning you about a barcode. It is warning you about your price.

- What would make you be silent?
- What would make you compromise conviction?
- What would make you reshape discipleship into something safer?
- What would you trade faithfulness for?

The Beast asks these questions every day.

Not with threats, but with incentives.

Revelation answers:

The Lamb is worthy of your loyalty — even when loyalty costs.

Faithfulness is not dramatic.

It is daily.

Quiet.

Stubborn.

Steady.

**The Church conquers not by overthrowing empire, but by refusing to be absorbed into it.**

## **IX. Conclusion — Revelation's Spine**

All of Revelation can be summarized in one sentence:

Revelation was not given to help the Church predict the end, but to help the Church remain faithful until the end.

The Beast falls.

Babylon collapses.

Empires rot.

Systems age.

Nations rise and fade.

But the Lamb stands.

And those who stand with Him will reign.

Not elsewhere.

Not as ghosts.

Not as memories.

But in resurrected bodies, in a renewed creation, under the King who was slain and is  
alive forevermore.

Our task now is not to calculate.

Our task is not to fear.

Our task is not to speculate.

Our task is simple:

Stay loyal.

The Lamb wins.

Live like it.

## Endnotes

1. For the historical context of Revelation and the imperial cult, see S. J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).<sup>1</sup>
2. Tertullian describes Rome as the fourth beast of Daniel — “with iron teeth” — in *Ad Nationes* 1.14; cf. *Against Marcion* 3.13.<sup>2</sup>
3. Hippolytus argues that “every kingdom which exalts itself against God is the Antichrist” — not only one ruler — in *On Christ and Antichrist* 14–15.<sup>3</sup>
4. The gematria connecting “Neron Caesar” (נרון קסר) to 666 is explained in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.1–3. Irenaeus explicitly warns against speculative identifications beyond this demonstrated pattern.<sup>4</sup>
5. On marks in Scripture signifying allegiance rather than physical branding, see *Deut.* 6:4–8; cf. *Exod.* 13:9, 16. John’s reversal of the Shema imagery indicates worship-patterns, not biometric identifiers.<sup>5</sup>
6. Justin Martyr identifies obedience as the sign of divine allegiance — “sealed in deed” — in *Dialogue with Trypho* 43–44.<sup>6</sup>
7. Hippolytus rejects any doctrine of escape from tribulation and teaches that believers are refined in suffering in *Commentary on Daniel* 2.8.<sup>7</sup>
8. The origins of 19th-century rapture doctrine are documented in Mark S. Sweetnam, *The Dispensations: Margaret MacDonald and the Origins of the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014). Also see Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 59–87.<sup>8</sup>
9. The meaning of ἀπάντησις (“to go out to meet and escort a king back to the place of arrival”) as used in 1 *Thess.* 4:17 is demonstrated in secular Greek usage (e.g., Plutarch, *Caesar* 66.1; Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.100–103) and in *Matt.* 25:6.<sup>9</sup>

10. Irenaeus affirms resurrection and reign on a renewed earth in *Against Heresies* 5.32.1–3, explicitly rejecting a purely spiritual eschatology.<sup>10</sup>
11. Papias' millennial expectation is preserved in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.33.3–4, and Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.12.<sup>11</sup>
12. Justin Martyr affirms a restored Jerusalem and earthly reign in *Dialogue with Trypho* 80–81.<sup>12</sup>
13. On creation's participation in redemption, see Romans 8:18–23; cf. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 104–128.<sup>13</sup>
14. Origen describes tribulation as the proving of the believer in *On Prayer* 29, contrasting purification with destruction.<sup>14</sup>
15. The unity of heaven and earth at the end of history is stated in Rev. 21:1–3. The direction of movement is downward — from God to humanity — not upward.<sup>15</sup>
16. For the argument that Revelation forms ethical identity rather than predictive timeline speculation, see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), especially chapters 1–3.<sup>16</sup>

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