



# REVELATION

## GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 2

### CONVERSATION STARTER

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If you could compete at an Olympic level in any one sport or activity, what would it be and why?

### GOD'S JUDGMENT: WHAT'S IT FOR?

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Revelation features a lot of imagery that calls to mind destruction and devastation: hail, fire, waters turning to blood or poison, locusts. And that's just our reading for this week! It can be a terrifying thought to think of these things happening. But Revelation is not warning us about *future events* but of *present realities*. The message of Revelation is one that echoes through all generations—past, present, and future—because every generation experiences the injustice brought on by oppressive regimes. New Testament scholar Michael Gorman says it this way: “What some of us need is not to question the cries of the oppressed, but **to feel more fully the realities of injustice**, especially when it is perpetrated by the Babylons of our own day.”

In chapter 8, we witness the cries of the oppressed rising up before God. And we know from other biblical stories, that God cannot hear the cries of His people and not act on their behalf. God cannot allow injustice to stand forever. And so the trumpets blow. These trumpets are good news for those begging for deliverance (*God is fighting for us!*). But God's primary motivation is not the punishment of evil-doers, but a warning. The trumpets are an invitation to *turn around*, or repent, from the things that bring darkness and death. Just like in the Exodus story, God hopes these events will *wake people up* to who really controls the world. It's like God is saying, *Stop trusting in forces that only wish you harm to save you!*

But the people of Egypt, or Babylon, or Rome, or our modern empires do not repent (Rev. 9:20). This is the great tragedy. Instead of putting their trust in God, they cling to

the works of their own hands and the empty worship of idols. Revelation shows that God's judgment is not enough to turn people around. So what is? Revelation invites us to *hold on*, to wait and see how God will ultimately renew the world.

Meanwhile, the message of Revelation echoes to us today. We, also, tend to worship anything and everything in place of God: entertainment, power, politics, possessions, success, you name it. We, also, cling to the works of our hands, the little empires we construct for ourselves. And God is calling us to *wake up*. As N.T. Wright says, “Repentance is more than just expressing regret for a few peccadilloes. **It is a radical, heartfelt, gut-wrenching turning away from the idols which promise delight but provide death.**”

Where might God be calling you to *turn around*? To unclench your hands and stop courting death and disaster? This week's practice will help you explore these questions.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week or last? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. Take a moment to review and discuss this week's [Visual Guide: God and the Olympic Games](#). What races does our culture call us to run? In other words, what do we strive for? What are we called to dedicate our time, efforts, and energy to? What prize is promised as a result, and can it actually deliver?
3. How do you personally understand the concept of God's judgment? What emotions or thoughts does it evoke in you?
4. If God did not deal with evil, would God be just? Would God be God?
5. Reflect on the tension between God's judgment and His love. How do you reconcile the idea of a loving God with the reality of His judgment?

## WEEKLY PRACTICE

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All of us have areas where we need to *repent*, or turn around. This week, find a quiet place where you can spend a few moments in prayer using the words of Psalm 139 as your guide. Pray these words of the Psalmist and then simply listen. Be patient. Allow God to bring images or thoughts to your mind. Ask God to highlight places where you may be worshiping things that are not God, or trusting in the work of your own hands instead of trusting God.

*“Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

To close, pray aloud before God the Prayer of Confession. This prayer is meant to be an act of humility and reconciliation, reminding us of our need for God’s endless mercy and grace, and our need to extend God’s mercy and grace to those around us.

*Merciful God,  
We confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done and what we have left undone.  
We have not loved You with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We justly deserve Your judgment.  
For our sake, and the sake of your son, Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us.  
Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,  
so that we may delight in Your will  
and walk in Your ways that lead to glory.  
Amen.*