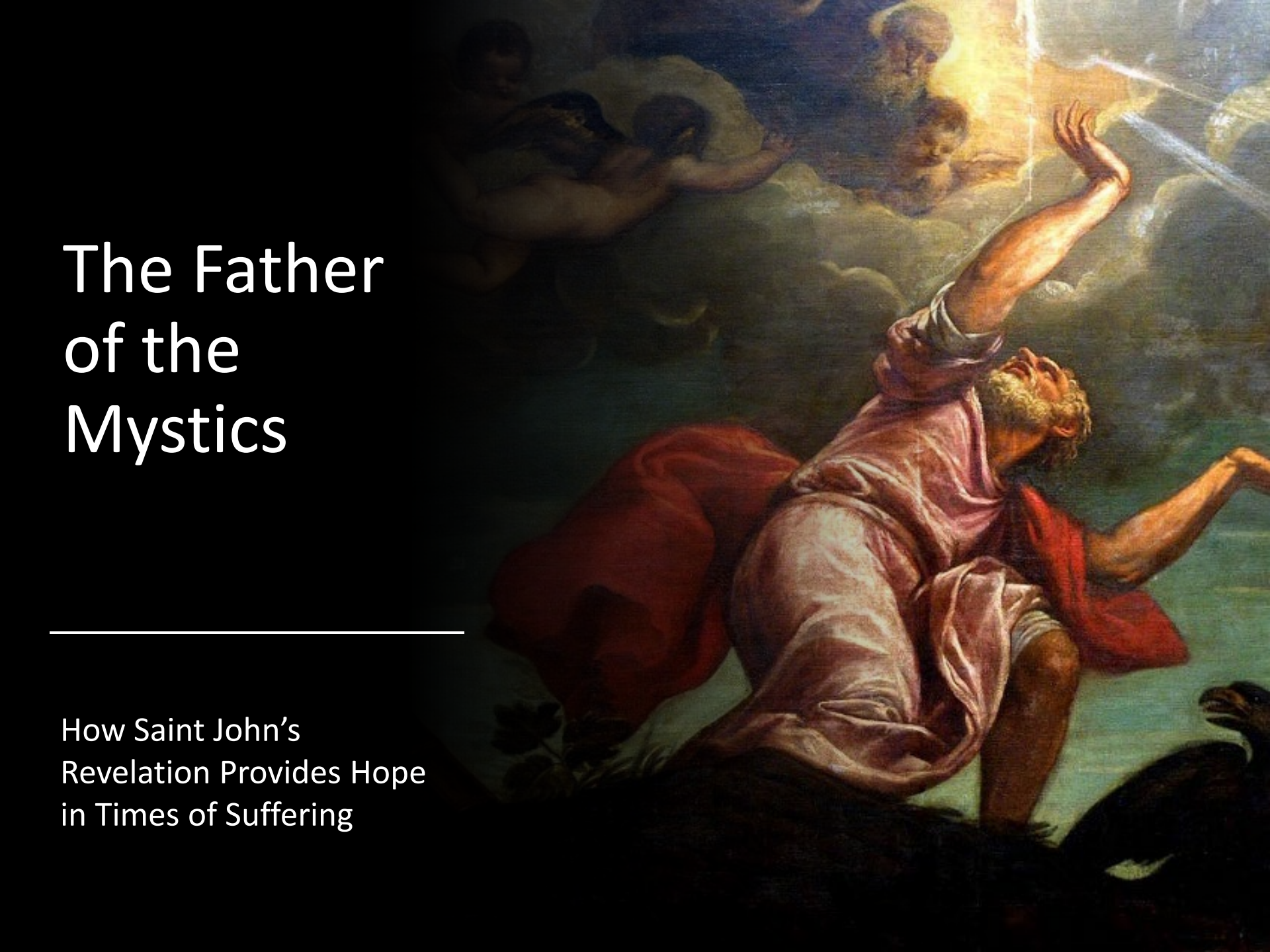
The Father of the Mystics

How Saint John's Revelation Provides Hope in Times of Suffering



Apocalypse Defined

Apocalypse – to unveil or reveal; making something known that was previously unknown; from “apocalypto” meaning “*I reveal*”; hence the synonymous term *revelation.*

Peeling back the veil from what we think we see and understand to reveal God’s point of view

Disclosing heavenly perspectives or secrets

Apocalyptic Literature Defined

Apocalyptic Literature – writing style that uses very vivid, exotic, and strange images and symbolism to communicate transcendent ideas.

Saint John uses this literary genre to write the Book of the Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation).

Examples of Apocalyptic Literature

"…I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast… and had seven heads and ten horns… She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries… drunk with the blood of the saints…"

Revelation 17:3–6

Examples of Apocalyptic Literature

"The horses and the riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur… their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury…"

Revelation 9:17–19

Examples of Apocalyptic Literature

Revelation 12:2

Describes a woman with child and a great red dragon poised to devour the child as soon as it's born.

A Message of Hope

- *Hope*; **not** fear, terror, or dread
  - Present age under Satan's power
    - Therefore good people suffer and are persecuted
    - But Satan's time is short/temporary/limited
  - God is sovereign
    - Always in control
    - He will set everything right
    - His plan cannot be thwarted

How **NOT** to Read John's Apocalypse

NOT a "linear discourse".

NOT "ordered prose".

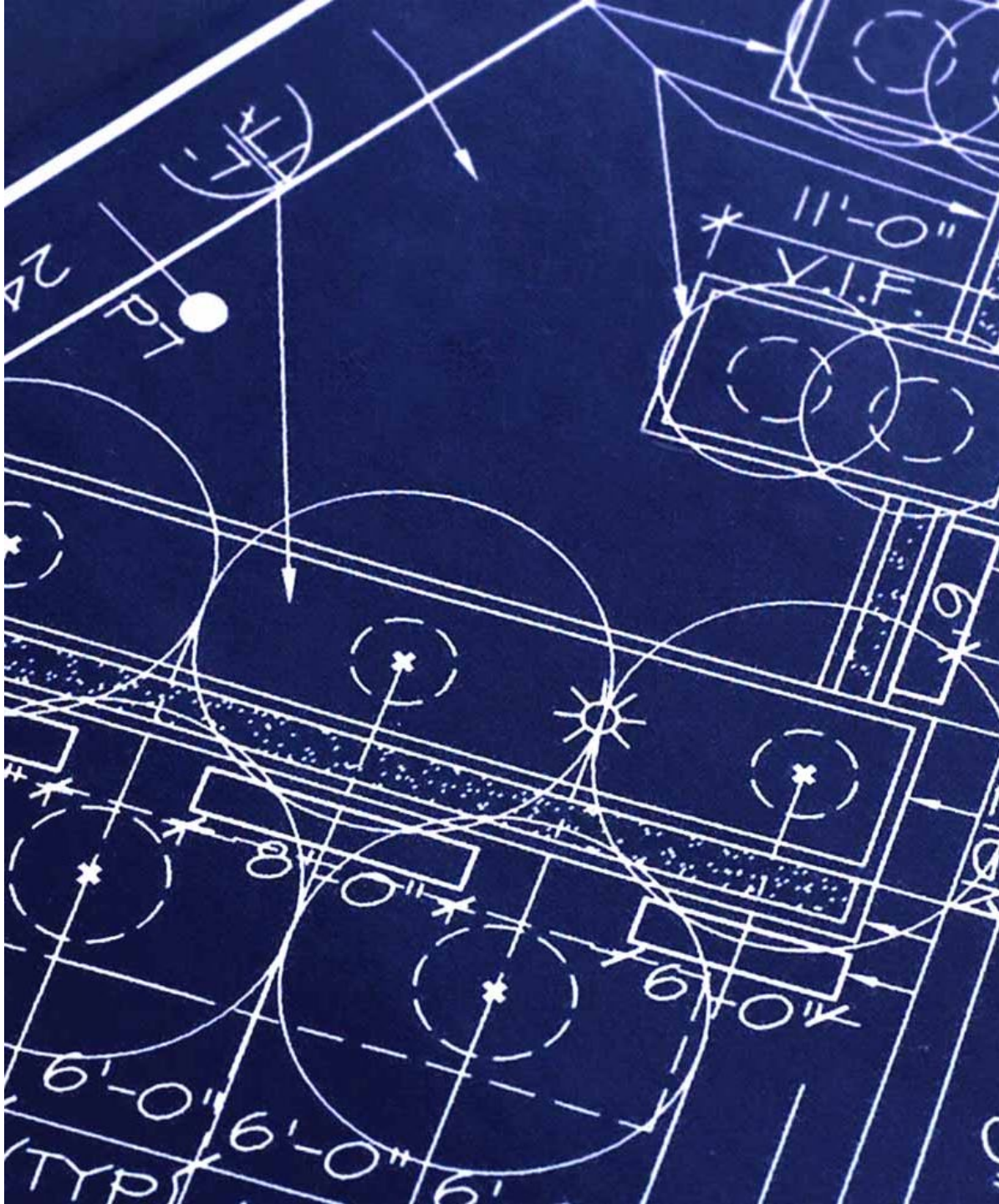
it IS a painting, a work of art

Two Common Errors

(1) Coded Blueprint for the Future

Describes some single, future period of history.

Attempts to draw strict one-on-one correspondences between items in the Revelation and future people and events.



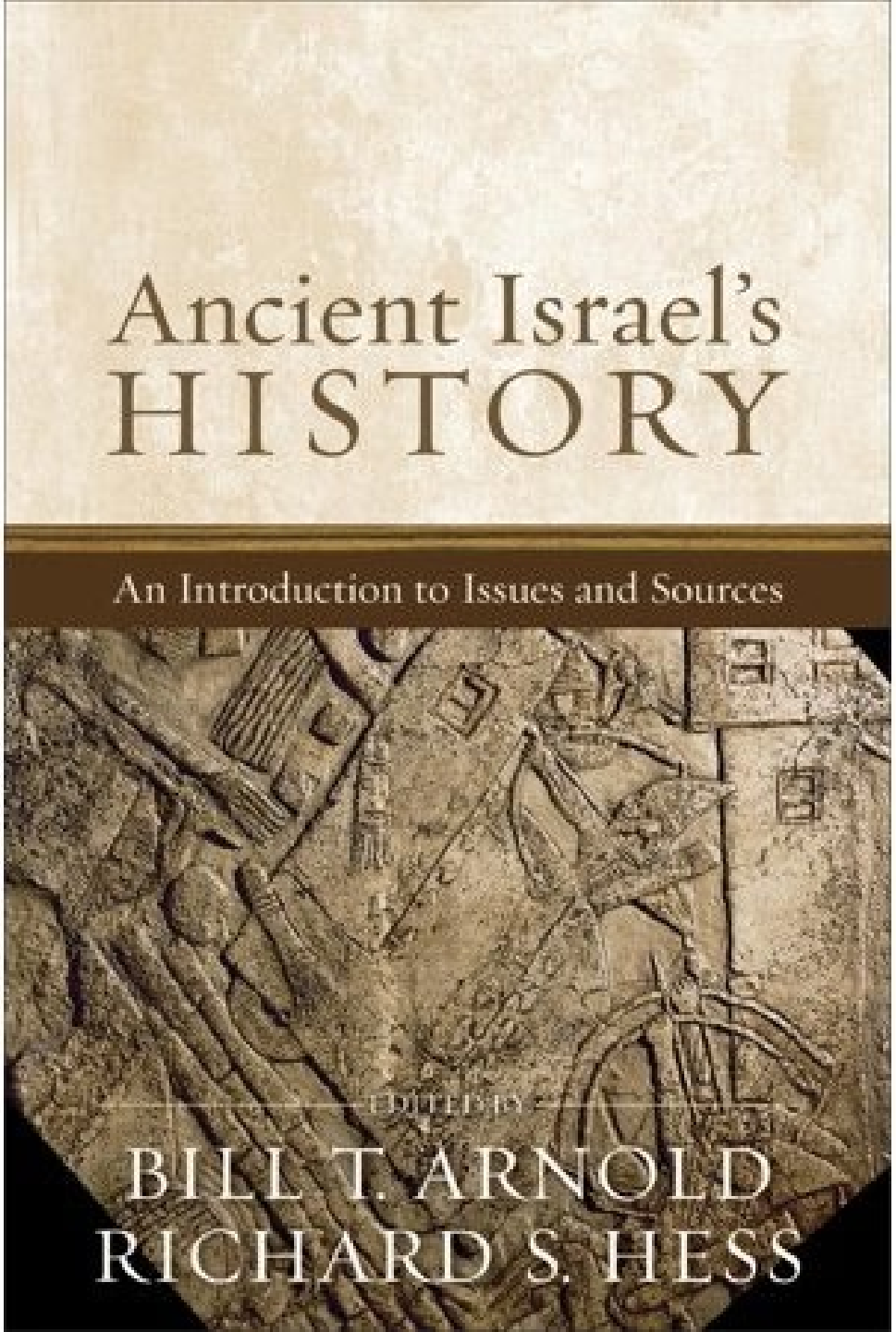
Two Common Errors

(**2**) **History Textbook**

Describes John's own time period and nothing more.

A reaction against the coded blueprint folks

Collapses Revelation completely into John's own time period.



Examples of the "Coded Blueprint" Mistake

The 7 trumpets of Rev 8-9 predict comets that appeared in the 17th Century (Felgenhauer)

The first four trumpets of Rev 8:7-12 predict the zealot terrorism that occurred during the French Revolution (Coleridge)

The 5th seal of Rev 6:9-11 predicts David Koresh and his Waco movement (David Koresh)

Rev 8 predicts mobilized ballistic missile launchers (Hal Lindsey)

The Whore of Babylon from Rev 17:5 predicts the Roman Catholic Church (Jack Chick)

The Church of the Pope is the Synagogue of Satan (see Kovacks & Rowland, who cite numerous examples)

The Pope and Hitler were 2 of the 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse (Jack Chick)

1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6
R O N A L D W I L S O N R E A G A N

Examples of the “Coded Blueprint” Mistake

1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6

B A R N E Y P U R P L E L I Z A R D

6 6 6

Examples of the "History Textbook" Mistake

The first four trumpets of Revelation 8:7-12 tell the story of the collapse of the Roman Empire (Mede).

Trumpet #2 in Revelation 8:8-9 refers specifically to Alaric the First (Mede).

Revelation 8–9 represents the corruption of doctrine and the resulting heresies and factionalism that plagued early Christianity (The Geneva Bible).

The beast of Revelation 13 refers exclusively to Nero (see Kovacs & Rowland, who cite several examples).

Two mistakes, the same mistake

"Coded blueprint" and "history textbook" make the *same mistake*.

- Both forget the artistry
- Both read apocalyptic literature like "ordered prose".
- Both reduce John's vision to a single period of time.

A Recurring Phenomenon

- Six visions retell the same story
- Every generation of the Church will experience the growing pains of being saved from a fallen world
- The story of the Church in every time period

Three-part story

(1) Purifying trials

Reality of suffering, purifying trials, and tribulation suffered by God's faithful in a fallen world

(2) God's illuminating perspectives and judgments

God's enlightening perspectives and judgments regarding what's happening on the earth.

(3) Salvific unity with Christ

The salvation that awaits the faithful

Six Major Visions

1. Seven Letters to the Churches
2. Seven Seals
3. Seven Trumpets
4. Seven Visions
5. Seven Bowls
6. Seven Final Visions

	Purifying Trials	God's Illuminating Perspectives and Judgments	Salvific Unity with Christ
(1) Seven Letters	3:8	3:9–10	3:11–12
(2) Seven Seals	6:9–11	6:12–17	7:9–17
(3) Seven Trumpets	8:3–5	9:15	11:15–19
(4) Seven Visions	13:7–10	14:14–20	15:2–4
(5) Seven Bowls	16:4–7	16:17–20	19:1–10
(6) Seven Final Visions	20:9	20:9–15	21:1–22:5

The Question of the Hour:

WHY would God give John six similar visions?

Reason #1: These retellings show us that this doesn't just happen once but we all have to go through it.

Each generation of the Church experiences the purifying trials of a fallen world, God's enlightenment, and being united to Christ.

The Question of the Hour:

WHY would God give John six similar visions?

Reason #2: These retellings capture that this is all heading somewhere very exciting for the followers of Christ.

The Question of the Hour:

WHY would God give John six similar visions?

- In the seven seals, Death and Hades "were given authority over a quarter of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and plague, and by means of the beasts of the earth" (6:7–8).
- In the "seven trumpets", John says "When the fourth angel blew his trumpet, a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were struck" (8:12).
- In the "seven bowls", John depicts the fourth bowl as being poured out upon the sun, without specifying *any* fractional limitation (16:8–9).

The Question of the Hour:

WHY would God give John six similar visions?

- The fourth seal affected one quarter (6:7–8).
- The fourth trumpet affected one third (8:12).
- The fourth bowl had no such restrictions (16:8–9).

The Question of the Hour:

WHY would God give John six similar visions?

Purifying trials are heating up.

Labor pains

Leads to a birth: the end of this current age, and the restoration of paradise.

Satan knows his time is short.

The Question of the Hour:

WHY would God give John six similar visions?

Reason #1: This doesn't just happen once but we all have to go through it.

Reason #2: This is all heading somewhere very exciting for the followers of Christ.

The Question of the Hour:

WHY would God give John six similar visions?

Reason #3: Our Lord is trying to move us from our own upside-down and very limited perspective more and more into God's point of view.

- He does this by "turning the kaleidoscope" with each vision…

In the seven letters
we start on planet earth

The Question of the Hour:

WHY would God give John six similar visions?

In the seven seals
we move to heaven

The Question of the Hour:

WHY would God give John six similar visions?

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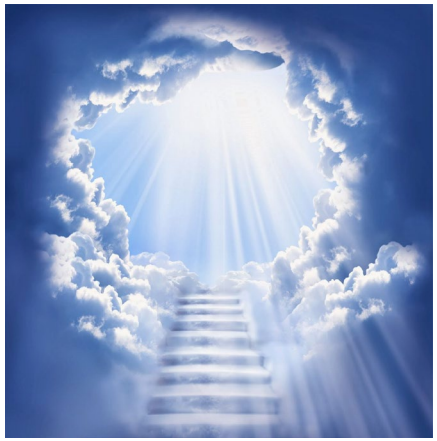

See what God has done here?

7 Letters → 7 Seals

The Apocalypse as “Kaleidoscopic”

The Apocalypse as "Kaleidoscopic"

Purgation, illumination, and union are "the beads"

Each vision "turns the kaleidoscope"

A deeper secret to reveal each time.

The Apocalypse as "Kaleidoscopic"

The seals reveal heaven's vantage point to what's happening on the earth.

The trumpets reveal the problems in nature that happen because of the fall — natural disasters, disorder, alienation, and rebellion.

The bowls reveal that God's judgments mean different things for different people.

The final set of visions reveals Christ's VICTORY!

The Question of the Hour:

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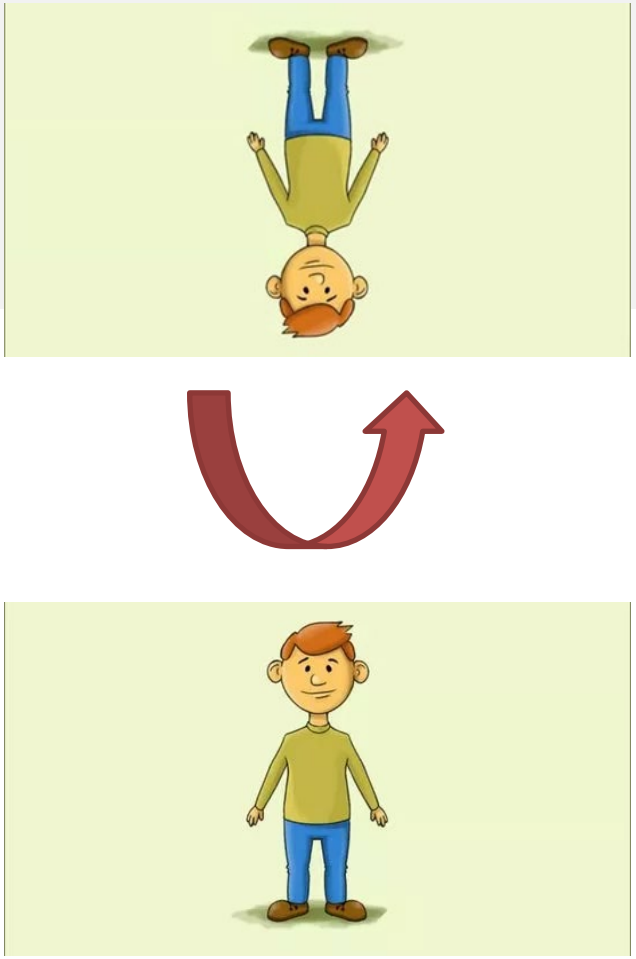
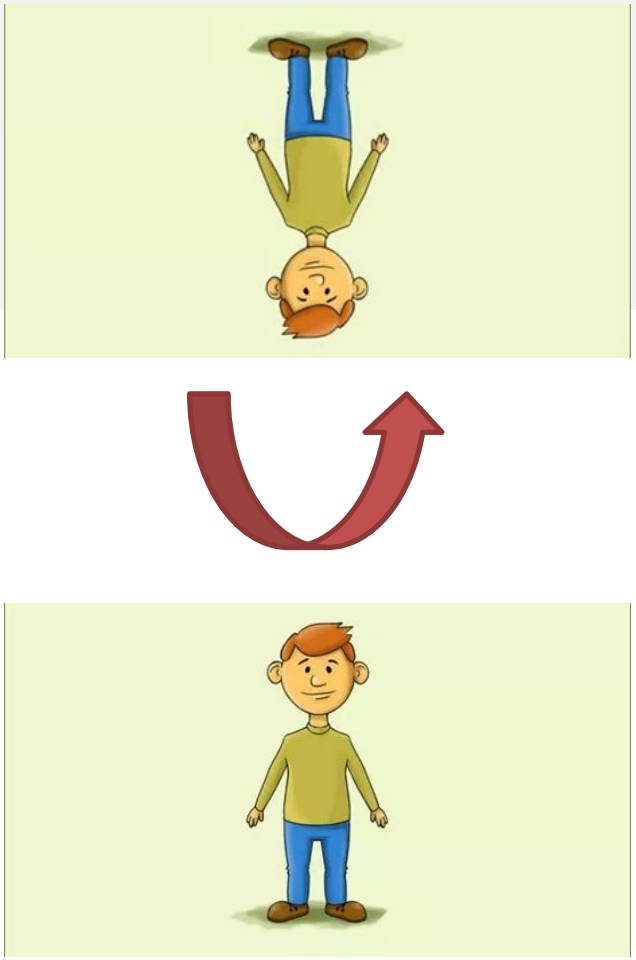
Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up



Lifting up neighbor higher than self, loving one's enemies…

…that's NOT how we do "kingdom" here on earth.

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up



God delights in using the foolish things of the world to confound the wise

The preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who don't believe

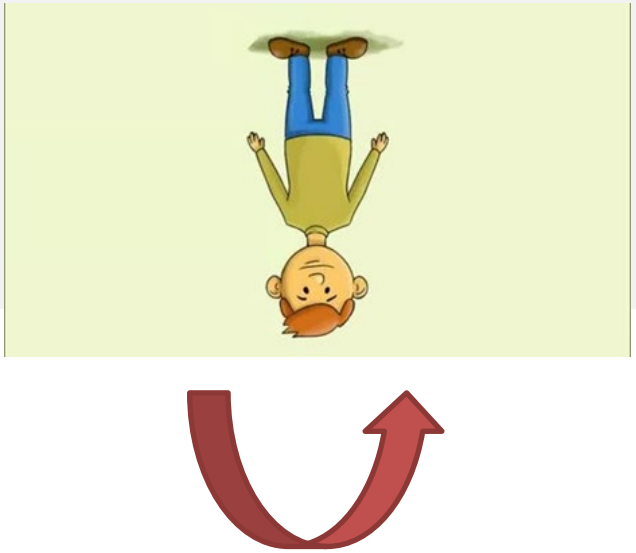
In losing your life you will find it

In dying to yourself you will live

Blessed are you when you are persecuted

Consider it joy when you face trials

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up



The meek will inherit the earth

Blessed are you when people insult you

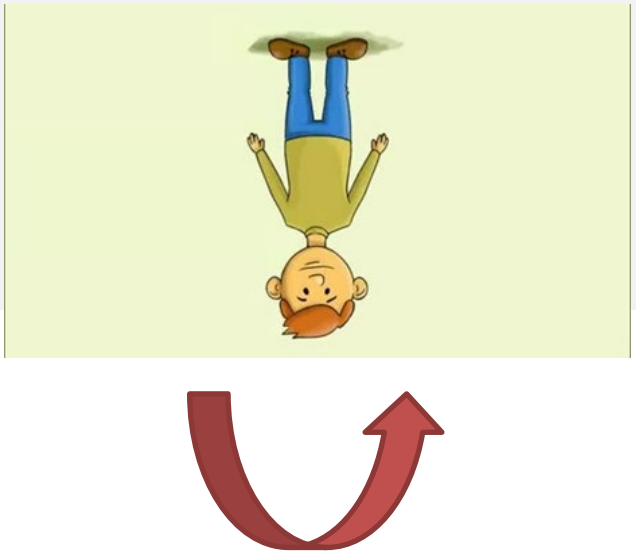
With the Lord a day is like a thousand years…
…and a thousand years is like a day

I must decrease so that Jesus may increase

The first will be last and the last will be first

This kingdom of this world favors power, approval, wealth, fame; but according to the kingdom of God, all are equal in Christ Jesus.

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up



God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble

Children are first in the kingdom of heaven

In my weakness, God's strength is made perfect

Professing themselves to be wise they become fools

The King of all Kings born in a manger

The power of the powerful isn't for the favor of a few elite people, but rather a gift to be given to the least of these.

On Christmas Day, we get the birthday present.

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

Does the Covenant come to a great Assyrian noble?

No, it comes to a Semitic wanderer named Abraham who just couldn't stay put in the land of Ur.

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

The covenantal promises are handed down to Abraham's first-born son, Ishmael, according to cultural norms, right?

No, it passes on to Isaac, Abraham's second-born.

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

Well from there it goes to Isaac's oldest son Esau, according to tradition, right?

No, the second-born Jacob gets it.

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

At least Jacob will favor the eldest, according to custom, right?

No, he plays favorites with little Joseph, who eventually gets to be the right-hand-man to the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

Jesse's oldest son gets to be Israel's King after Saul, right?

No, Jesse's little shepherd-boy peeping-tom becomes the great King David.

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

The Bible is about models of saintly behavior, covenantal heroes from beginning to end, a Church of the Pure, right?

NOPE

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

Noah gets drunk and naked

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

Sarah hooks up Abraham with their slave girl Hagar until Sarah gets jealous and Hagar bolts

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

Rebekah teams up with Jacob to deceive Isaac

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

Uncle Laban is a conman who tricks Jacob into marrying the ugly daughter; Jacob wakes up screaming after the wedding night

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

Joseph's brothers throw him into a well and sell their little brother to the Ishmaelites for about eight ounces of silver (envious over a jacket)

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

King David has a soldier killed to steal the soldier's wife for himself, after seeing how hot she was while spying on her while she was taking a bath

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

Then there's Jesus's dream-team of disciples…

Getting Flipped Right-Side-Up

The group includes a thieving tax collector, a racist who hates people from Nazareth, and a cowardly fisherman as just a few of the members of this motley crew.

The Question of the Hour:

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Reason #1: This doesn't just happen once but we all have to go through it.

Reason #2: This is all heading somewhere very exciting for the followers of Christ.

Reason #3: Our Lord is trying to move us from our own upside-down and very limited perspective more and more into God's point of view.

Mysticism is about us being connected to God in the most intimate, close, happiest relationship possible.

But we start out upside-down, fallen,
in the wrong place,
under the wrong ruler,
valuing the wrong things.

In our Christian growth we get **purged** of our distorted and limited understanding and our silly attachments, **illuminated** to God's point of view, and **united with Christ**.

The whole process feels like getting flipped on our heads, but we're actually getting set straight.

Summary

What Our Sufferings *Look Like* to Us:

- Permanent
- Meaningless

The Truth God Reveals about Our Dark Nights:

- Temporary
- Extraordinarily Meaningful

BONUS

A Few Bonus Insights:

- "666" refers to BOTH Nero AND whoever the current "anti-Christ" is in any time period
- Yes, there will be a final anti-Christ, and he'll be the worst--but every generation deals with these very misled individuals
- (1) Dragon symbolizes Satan… (2) Sea Monster symbolizes fluid earthly governments… (3) Land Beast symbolizes anti-Christ individuals…….. It's all Satan's unholy parody of the Trinity
- Whole book sets an intentional LITURGICAL setting

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

(2 Corinthians 4:17)

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

(Revelation 21:4)