

Weekend@Home Pt1

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[0 : 00] Revelation chapter 21, beginning at verse 1. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 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.

He who was seated on the throne said, I'm making everything new. Then he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. Thanks be to God for his word.

Excellent. Well, you can keep that open. The plan for the talks today, and then tomorrow as well, is they're not really, they're not expository talks. I'm not going to take a passage and explain every bit of the whole passage.

[1 : 21] These are doctrinal talks. That is to say, I'm going to work on a verse, and then range through the Bible to explain that verse. And so simply, today's talk, this first one is on verse 1.

The next talk later on will be on verse 2. And then tomorrow's session will be on verse 3. So we're just explaining those three ideas. The first will be about the place. What will the new heaven and earth be like as a place?

The second one will be on the people. What will the people be like? What will we be like in the new heaven and the new earth? And the third one will be about what it's like to be in the presence of God. Three Ps. Pick place, people, and presence.

Just to say on the questions box, I don't know what you're like with questions, but what I'd really love to get in that question box is a real random assortment of really odd questions.

Will the animals talk? I don't know. What will steaks taste like? I don't know. I would love really random questions which are genuinely engaging in what will this be like?

[2 : 23] What will it look like to see that or to hear that or to taste that or to touch that? I really want you to get your juices flowing. And the truth is, I probably won't know how to answer 75% of those questions.

But that doesn't matter because the idea is to be excited and range and think about this. A lot of Christians don't think about the new heavens and the new earth. We are often people that go, oh, it's so far away.

I can't imagine what it's like, so I won't think about it. Yorkshire people do that. I don't know why I've done that in Yorkshire. But we should do that. I mean, if you're about to get married and you've never experienced being in a wedding yourself as the person who's getting married, you don't therefore go, oh, I can't imagine what it's going to be like, so I won't think about it very much.

You think about it all the time because you're really excited about it. And Christians should likewise be that way. I don't know all the answers. I can't dot all the I's and cross all the T's.

But I'm tremendously excited about it. And the more the excitement of that fills my mind and my heart, just like there's that engaged couple looking forward to getting married, it just changes the whole outlook of the way you come out of the house and walk around.

[3 : 32] It totally transforms your mindset and transforms your life. Now, what I'm going to do first of all is show you a video. Now, I'm not a big athletics fan, but this is an athletics race.

And I remember it. It's quite old now. It's about 15 years old. I think it was the 2004 Olympics. And I just remember it because I was playing pool in a pool hall at the time and it was on the telly.

And, you know, even if you don't like athletics, you do stop and watch big races, right? This is an Olympic race, an Olympic final. So we thought we'd stop and watch it. And it's the men's 4x100m relay.

In those days, the US had their four runners were four of the top six fastest people in the world that year. So four of the top six were in the America's four.

In other words, they were going to win it by a leg, you know, easily. And the Brits were there. We had an all right team. We're making up the numbers, but we'll give it a go. So we're going to watch this race. It's quite a quick race.

[4 : 33] America's in lane five. We're in lane three. Okay? So we're cheering. Imagine this is live. All right, come on. All right. So we're in lane three.

They're in lane five. Come on, Team GB. Let's go for it. There we go. We're in lane three. America's in lane five.

Come on, Team GB. Come on. Come on, put your legs up. Good change. Well done. Come on, come on. We're doing quite well. It's hard to tell at this stage.

It's always when they come around the last bend. But you can really tell. Oh, I think we're like this. We're in lane three. That's okay. You can do it. Go on, son. Go on, boys.

Go on, son. Here we go. Last leg. Now watch this. Last leg. Watch this. We're in the lead. Look, we've got it. Look. Oh, look. Look at the Americans. Go on, son. Go on, son.

[5 : 28] Go on, son. No, the American. Look at him. Look at him go. Look at him go. Whoa. We've done it. We won. Now watch the replay. Watch the end of the replay of this.

He's very exciting. As he should be. Go on, son. Well done. Watch this. Watch this. Watch this. Watch this. Watch this. Watch this. Watch this. Watch this. Watch this.

Very good. 0.01 seconds we won that play. In fact, the American guy's leg was in front of his, but it's the top half of your body that actually counts crossing the line.

And his nose was a bit longer than the other guy, I think. Great. You can stop it there. Thank you very much. So just to click us onto the next slide in the PowerPoint, I just want to show you the face of Mark Lewis Francis.

There he is. There's his face as he's doing that last leg with the American guy, whose name I've now forgotten, who was totally catching him up. Now, there's one thing about his face right there.

[6 : 30] I can tell you something about him just in that frame in that moment. I'll tell you what he's not thinking about. He's not thinking, I wonder if I've left the iron on. He's not thinking, I wonder if that girl I fancy down my road is watching me in Malaika right now.

He's not thinking, well, I'm really struggling with my job and I hate my life and I hate my family and I ought to think about changing. There is never possibly ever in the history of humanity a more single-minded man at that moment.

All he's got in his head is, I've got to hit that finish line. Really, really hard and fast. Totally focused. Totally pure. There's the verse on screen that comes from Philippians 3.

Paul says this, one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

There's a sense in which the focus should be just like his because that is everything. There's all this other stuff, isn't there, in life. There's all these weeds and there's family and all these things that matter.

[7 : 45] So there's family and there's job and there's all these things that we do. Things I desire, my leisure time, all these things that matter. And yet really, what we're all about is in a race.

And what we really want to be focused on is hitting that finishing line. That's my aim for these sessions, is to try to help encourage you and exhort you to run like he's running right there in that picture.

Just click us onto the next slide. This week, my daughter did a craft. She's three. This is a rather terrifying looking heart with eyes on.

And it beautifully illustrated the point I was going to make this very weekend. And here it is. This is what Paul prays for the Ephesians. I pray that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened in order that you might know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

Let me read that again. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.

[8 : 50] There's a sense in which you can see things with your physical eyes. You understand things. But then there's the eyes of your heart. It's a horrible picture, isn't it?

But the eyes of your heart, in one sense, it's knowing in your knower. Do you know there's knowing and then there's knowing? There's something that you know so intimately and so deeply that it affects your desire.

It's what I really long for. It's what I really want. And so his prayer there for the Ephesians is that they know, they see with their hearts the hope to which we've been called.

And so I think what I'm trying to do, as well as to exhort you to run to that finishing line, is to try to open the eyes of our hearts as much as we can. Lord, help us. Because I want us to somehow see something we can't see.

If I could, I would love you to be able to touch and taste and feel and see and sense what we're going to be doing for the rest of forever. Because the more your eyes are open to it, the more excited you are for it, the more you run to hit that finishing line.

[9 : 54] Does that make sense? So let's give it a go. I know some of us are more conservative and more cautious and others love to go for it. Let's try to imagine what it will be like. Well, let's use the scripture to guide us.

Let's not go way off, but let's use the scripture to help us imagine and taste and see it. And the bigger our eyes of our hearts are opened, the more we'll live for it and run for it.

So that's what we're trying to do. Okay, I've got a whole bunch of points. We're thinking about the place, first of all. Then it will be the people later on and then tomorrow, the presence of God. So let's just focus on what will the place be like.

Let's go to our next slide. The new heavens and the new earth will be an uncursed place, not a perfect place. And this is an important point.

This is Revelation 21.1. This is our key verse. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. We'll come on to that a bit later. This is Genesis 1 language.

[10 : 54] A new heavens and a new earth. Just like the first was created and was physical and real and, of course, it's tangible and touchable. So heaven is not a floaty, floaty place on a cloud with a harp and where we're all ghosts.

We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth. A new physical existence. A new reality. One that is uncursed. The order of events very crudely will be something like this.

When we die, our bodies sleep. They rot. And our spirits go to be with Christ in heaven, in paradise, which is better by far than this.

Even that. But only as spirits. And those who do not trust in the Lord Jesus. One of the descriptions is prison. Like it's a holding place.

Then when Jesus returns, all of the dead are raised. All the spirits, both down and up, receive new bodies, new physical existences.

[11 : 56] Just like Jesus had a new body when he was raised from the dead. All of our spirits will be clothed with new physical bodies. And those who trusted in Jesus will live in this new heaven and new earth.

A new world. Like this. But the real thing. The uncursed one. And those who did not trust in the Lord Jesus and his name is not in the book of life. Will live forever in a physical body in this place called hell.

Which is the counter opposite of all the things that we're going to talk about this weekend. About how wonderful the new earth will be like. It's the exact opposite for hell. We won't talk about hell and we should.

It's a good thing to think about. It's not a fun thing to think about. But it will be a place of torment. A place of darkness. A place of angst. A place of terror.

A place of anxiety and fear and trepidation. A place of lawlessness. So both existences are eternal and physical with physical bodies.

[12 : 56] And here's how C.S. Lewis puts it in The Great Divorce in the next slide. C.S. Lewis. He writes very imaginatively about heaven I find.

He's talking about the new Narnia. This is the end of the series in the last book The Last Battle. The new Narnia. That's the new heaven. New earth if you like. Is as different as the real thing is from a shadow.

Or as waking life is from a dream. The new one was a deeper country. Every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more.

I can't describe it any better than that. If you ever get there you'll know what I mean. I love that description. It's almost like he describes this life as the shadow lands. These are the shadows. The reality is to come.

Now if this is real and we all know this is real. Somehow that's even more real. Even more vibrant. Every taste. Every touch. Every sight. Is even more the real thing than this was.

[13 : 55] Than this is. It's totally physical. Not a spiritual floaty floaty thing. Now one of the biggest mistakes many Christians make is that we imagine it as a place of perfection.

I read a very excellent book which I encourage you to read by a man called Randy Alcorn. An American guy called Heaven. And one of his main points in his book is that we have a Plato view of the world.

Plato was a philosopher, ancient Greek. And he had this idea of the world of forms. And the world of forms which like our heaven in one sense. Is a place where all the things that we have here exist but in its perfect form.

You know. There's a perfect plastic stand. Because this one isn't quite perfect. It's a bit dented and a bit kind of feeble. But there's a perfect one there. And there's a perfect kind of thing of me. Or a perfect chair.

It's the idea of perfection over there. And we kind of do that with heaven. Plato's influenced our thinking. So we imagine it's what we've got here but the perfect version. The Bible never speaks like that.

[14 : 59] But the Bible speaks of it as a place that's uncursed. Remember in Genesis God made the world and it was very good. This is great. But then when Adam and Eve sinned.

The curse came on the world. And it's the curse that has affected everything. And the curse involves hardship in work. The ground. Remember brings up weeds.

In giving birth for ladies. In division between God and people. In division between people and people. Adam and Eve. The division between the world and people. So all the division and all the angst.

All the hardship. And of course suffering and death came in. That's the curse. And the new heavens and the new earth is the place where the curse is lifted. So on the next slide we can see Romans 8. Consider our present sufferings are not worth comparing. With the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation. For the children of God to be revealed.

[15 : 58] For the creation was subjected to frustration. Not by its own choice. But by the will of the one who subjected it. That's God. In hope. That the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage.

To decay. And brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. There's a sense in which the whole of creation is in this tension. Come on. We're in bondage here. We're in prison. This world is in prison.

And I cannot wait to be set free. And the moment we're set free. Sorry. The creation is set free. It's when the children of God are revealed. That is to say. When we are given new resurrection bodies. When our sinlessness is cemented. And no more sin can exist. Then the problems that Adam and Eve and we all have brought to the world are gone. There's no more sin.

When we're revealed. When we're raised and resurrected with new bodies. It's like the whole of creation goes. Ah! At last! And that is the picture that the Bible gives of. It's not think of everything.

[17 : 00] Think of the perfect thing here and make it perfect. It's all of the curse gone. That bondage lifted. And so one of the things to meditate on in this physical world.

Let's just go through a whole bunch of meditations. One of them is that if it's this physical place and it's the real thing and not the shadow lands. It will be a place that's utterly beautiful. That's the next slide.

The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be destroyed by fire. The earth and everything will be laid bare. That's what happens to our one.

Now that doesn't necessarily mean that, I don't know, theologians disagree.

Will it be a totally new world? Maybe. Because the old one was destroyed by fire. Or will it be the same one but renewed? Because this one was kind of burnt up and then a new one built on top of it.

Yeah, it may be. I don't know. It could be either of those two could be true. It could literally be there is a new Glasgow in the new heavens and the earth. That's possible. And it says there, the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light and the lamb is its lamb.

[18:07] So this is idea of utter beauty. You don't need the sun. You don't need the moon. The glory of God is there. I mean, I don't know. What's the most amazing thing you've ever seen? Imagine what that would look like in the new heavens and the new earth.

When you have new eyes, new bodies. And it's not the sun that's shining on it, right? The sun is just a shadow, ironic pun. When it's the glory of God is shining on that very thing.

Every colour, everything will be more vibrant. Everything will be more beautiful. Every mountain or valley or sea or desert or forest. You know, this will be the new earth.

But more, the real thing. Some people are, many people are absolutely desperate to go travelling. I don't know if you're one of these people. I've got to go to Asia. I've got to go to South America.

I'm sure it's fun travelling. Don't let me discourage you from that. Me, I'd be fine. I'd be happy to die having never seen South America or Asia. Because I'm not going to spend a year travelling around the world.

[19:10] I'm planning 10,000. Maybe 20,000 years. I haven't quite worked it out. We have got all the time in the world to see the real thing for the rest of forever.

What a wonderful place it will be. Beautiful. Now the next one. Safety and peace. I found that picture on that.

That's a peace sign. I thought that was quite funny. Anyway, there we go. This is what Isaiah 11 says. The wolf will live with the lamb. The leopard will lie down with the goat.

The calf and the lion and the yearling together. And the little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear. The young will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den.

And the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain. For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

[20:08] I love the idea of my little Annie, three-year-old. Go and play with the snakes, Annie. Because it's a place where it's a beautiful, beautiful image of a whole world covered with the knowledge of God.

And it's not just I understand about God. It's the whole of creation living for God, in God. It's a place of extraordinary safety.

You wouldn't have to worry about walking home at night. You wouldn't have to worry about going to the rough area of town. There ain't no rough area of town. I mean, zoos will be petting zoos.

If there are zoos. Hello, lions. Could you imagine? I don't know how to imagine it. Life, but without any anxiety of anyone ever hurting you in any way.

What would that peace be like? Unbelievable. Wonderful. And therefore, no more wars. I mean, that's the next slide. Stick us on to the next slide.

[21:14] I love this verse from Micah. Nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war anymore.

It's this idea of taking your sword and bashing it and making it into something to do farming with. You know, take your nuclear missile and bash it up and turn it into a washing machine or something. I don't know.

It's productive rather than destructive. Imagine all the nations of the world. Imagine all the tension between North Korea and the United States and therefore the whole world.

Or Russia or Syria. Or any number of countries where there's wars going on. There always is, isn't it? Imagine a world in which you never worry about that. There isn't a fear of the next nuclear war.

There isn't a fear of invasion. There's just total peace the whole time. And what would it be like, you know, if you're totally safe, there'll be no more locks on doors, no keys anymore.

[22:15] There won't be, like I say, fearful walks home at night. There'll be no more drunken street brawls on a Saturday night. There'll be no paedophile predators. There'll be no road rage. There'll be no thief. There'll be no muggers.

There'll be no more police or security guards or judges or insurance or customs. I don't know. Lots of things are totally changed. It would be massively transformative. A world piece of peace and love and safety.

Amazing. Okay, that's another thought. Here's the next one. Remember, we're talking about the lifting of the curse. And of course, death and health is one of the big ones, isn't it? I'll just read that bottom one because that's the key one, isn't it?

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away. Isn't it weird? Death and mourning and crying and pain is just the norm. We live with the expectation of it.

And there'll be a time where we'll just go, oh, that was the old thing. That was the old thing. 1 Corinthians. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

[23 : 17] Where, oh, death is your victory? Where, oh, death is your sting? What are you going to do to me, death? Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. What will it be like to live in a world without funerals and cemeteries and life insurance and obituaries and euthanasia and murder and fear?

There's no need to live the life to the full while you're young because it just goes on and on. There's no need. Long-term planning.

You will be planning for the next 100 years, the next 1,000 years, not for the next decade. No more hospitals or ambulances, medicine, cancer, car accidents, broken limbs, mental illnesses, Alzheimer's, anorexia, no more depression, no more ME or cystic fibrosis or paralysis or multiple sclerosis.

There's a description in Revelation 22 of the water of life flowing from the throne and the tree of life all along the banks with the leaves which are for the healing of the nations.

It's just a place of healing. It would be so wonderful, wouldn't it? The cast, the shadow of death which is cast over all of us because we're all aging is just totally lifted.

[24 : 46] It would be a wonderful place. Let's have the next slide. It would be a place of great prosperity and abundance. Let's have a look at some of the prophets in the Old Testament. Amos.

The days are coming, declares the Lord, when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from the hills. I love the idea.

You know, you can imagine in the ancient world there's one person, I don't know, let's say it's an orchard. One person's cutting the apples and dropping them down and the other person's coming behind with a basket and picking them up. The guy with the basket has gone on ahead of the guy. There's just so many of them. It's just ridiculous. And this idea of, I mean, you've seen waterfalls, haven't you? You can get up to a waterfall with a wine glass. Oh, great vintage.

You know, there's just so much wine, it just kind of flows from the mountains. Similarly in Joel. In that day the mountains will drip new wine and the hills will flow with milk. All the ravines of Judah will run with water.

[25 : 42] A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of Acacias. It's just a picture of wonderful abundance. There'll be no more poverty, no more poor people.

Everyone will have everything they need. Have I got the next slide? Yeah, this one, Isaiah. I love this one. On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all the peoples. A banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations. He'll swallow up death forever. Isn't that an amazing picture? That is like a shroud that's over us. Death is gone. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all the faces. He'll remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.

The Lord has spoken. Brilliant. That's the way it is. Jesus talks about this stuff as well. He talks about the wedding banquet, doesn't he? Or there's the parable of the lost son who's come into the banquet.

[26 : 44] There's a classic way to speak of heaven as a banquet. A place of abundance and joy and feasting that goes on and on and on. I don't think that means we're literally eating dinner the whole time for the rest of forever.

It's a picture. It's a metaphor of how you feel. How do you feel when you go to a place like that? You know, you've been to a wedding reception or you've been to a great feast and everyone is just, yes!

It's like that.

It's how you feel. The next one is rest and contentment. Then I heard a voice from heaven, Revelation 14.

Right. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labor for their deeds will follow them. Or Micah. I love this.

Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree and no one will make them afraid for the Lord Almighty has spoken. There's a sense not only of joy but a place of rest.

[27 : 45] Your own vine, your own fig tree. A place where you rest from your labors. There's a peace, isn't there? Sometimes you get it. Just fleetingly on holiday where you go somewhere like this chap with his book and you just think, oh.

And it's just brilliant, isn't it, for a moment. But you just try to hold on to it because you know Monday morning is coming and it all comes back. Imagine the feeling of rest. Again, I don't think we're going to sit and read books for the rest of forever.

We'll come on to that later. But again, it's a brilliant picture. A brilliant metaphor of how you feel in your soul. A place where everything is right.

And it will never not be right. There's not this sense of, oh, it's right for now but I'm just waiting for it. Just this certainty of it always being right. The certainty of deep rest. Shalom.

Here in your soul. This is all good. Well, the last one is righteousness and justice. This is one of the ones I've been thinking about recently.

[28 : 44] I'm really excited by it. Jeremiah says, In those days and at that time I will make a righteous branch sprout from David's line. He will do what is just and right in the land.

He's talking about Jesus. Jesus is going to reign with justice and righteousness. As Isaiah puts it.

You know, this is the famous verse. Mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom. Establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness. From that time on and forever. It will be a place of amazing justice and righteousness.

You see, when Jesus comes back on that judgment day, it will be amazing because every wrong will be totally right. If you work in the, you might be a lawyer or something like that.

Every court decision today is made by a jury or a judge. Going on evidence that other people have said that they themselves haven't seen.

[29 : 43] And the evidence is never going to be full. It's never going to be quite enough. And the judge themselves has an impure heart. Their motives are never pure. So every decision, you can never, it's almost impossible to get a 100% right decision any time.

You do your best. Imagine the moment when God, who sees all things and who knows the intention of every person's heart behind every act that's ever happened.

Who's seen it all and who himself is totally righteous and pure. Without any spot or blemish on him. Decides every decision of everything that ever happened.

And it's all done. And every person, there will not be a single person, but there will be no appeals. Can I have a second opinion on that?

It will be an extraordinary thing that for the rest of forever, everything will be right. All the wrongs will have been righted. It will be totally fair. That will be wonderful.

[30 : 43] And on and on and on and on. It will be an amazing place. I could go on. There's lots of other things we could talk about. I'm just going to stop there and give you one final application.

Given how amazing heaven will be and how terrifying hell will be. Hell will be the opposite of all these things, actually. Where heaven is a place of beauty, hell is a place of darkness.

Where heaven is a place of safety, hell is a place of fear. Where heaven is a place of health, hell is a place of torment, torture. Where heaven is a place of abundance, hell is a place of poverty.

Where heaven is a place of rest, hell is a place of gnashing of teeth. Where heaven is a place of justice hell is a place of lawlessness so given the contrast when we allow the eyes of our hearts to see these things when you see how totally extraordinary and wonderful the new heaven, the new earth will be and how totally terrifying and awful hell will be if we could just see it if we could just open our eyes and not allow ourselves to be blinkered life is a no brainer you've just got to run as hard as you can to hit the finishing line and make sure that nothing else not a single other thing in life hinders you from getting there and we're all prone to making totally dumb decisions and going off track and I pray for all of you and I pray for me it would be the most stupid thing you've ever

done and maybe you know someone who's done that has given this up for this don't do it run hard Mark Lewis Francis is that the last slide? I can't remember there he is one thing I do forgetting what is behind and straining to what is ahead I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus let's pray we've just taken a very short time father to meditate and think about how extraordinary your grace will be for us in the place the new earth how amazing it will be and I pray you'd you'd stir up in us so many questions to think about it what will it be like what will it be feeling like how will it be open the eyes of our hearts father give us a taste a desire a hunger for the grace that you will give us it will be abundant you are such a good and gracious God we've done nothing to deserve this you've done this all by your amazing grace so please even now as we chat as we think as we discuss stir our hearts the eyes of our hearts help us to see and I pray for all of us father that no one in this room would not be there [33 : 48] I pray all of us would run really hard would strain by your grace that you would keep us we have confidence in you father and one day wow what a place we long for it father we pray all these things in his name Amen