

The Book of Revelation Bible Study Material

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Preface

This Bible study is designed to highlight the major points of Revelation in eight weeks. I encourage you, the participant, to maximize your learning by working through the study questions for each week prior to coming to class. These questions are not designed as a test of your knowledge and should not be treated as such. Instead, they are provided to help you begin to ask important questions about the interpretation and contents of Revelation. We will focus on each of these questions when we gather together.

You will also find questions for personal reflection at the end of each session. They are open ended questions which have no right or wrong answers and are designed to help you meditate and pray about how the contents of Revelation apply to your life. I encourage you to bring your insights to class to share with others.

There is perhaps no more misunderstood book of the Bible than Revelation. Yet it has a clear message for all who would devote themselves to its pages. May God bless our study of His Word!

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Simplified Outline for Revelation

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Outline of Revelation with Notes

I. Introduction

A. The Prophet is Commissioned

1. The Prologue (1:1-8)

John calls his letter the “revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is from Jesus Christ but is also about Jesus Christ. The primary purpose of Revelation is to reveal Christ and not to satisfy curiosities about the four horsemen, the Antichrist, etc. Its purpose rather is to show how Christ has received all glory and dominion in heaven and earth and how he controls all things for his good and gracious purposes until his glorious appearing at the last day. That is, whereas in the Gospels Jesus did not always or fully use his divine power and glory (his state of humiliation), in Revelation he makes full use of it (the state of exaltation) to limit/conquer evil, to protect his people and give them His victory, and to bring in a new heaven and earth.

Revelation falls under the literary genre called apocalyptic, which is characterized by the presentation of visions and heavy use of symbolic language. First century Christians of Asia Minor, those to whom John wrote, would recognize many of these symbols and images from their Scriptures, and so we also will regularly turn to the Old Testament when interpreting the contents of Revelation. This is true right away with the phrase the “seven Spirits” of God, which in light of Is. 11:1-3 is most naturally understood as the Holy Spirit, who brings the seven-fold gifts of God.

The time is near! This is a regular theme of the latter days. See also Matt. 24:36-44 and 1 Thess. 5:1-11. Though God’s people do not know when Christ will return, through faith in Christ they are always ready and will not be taken by surprise.

The seven churches are all located in Asia Minor along Roman roads. The Concordia Self-Study Bible has a map on page 1948. As with the letters of Paul, the message is not only to these seven but to all God’s people.

2. The Commissioning Vision (1:9-20)

Similar to Ezekiel (chapter 2) and Isaiah (chapter 6), here John is commissioned as a prophet.

John turns and sees one “like a son of man.” This messianic title goes back to Daniel 7:13-14, where Daniel sees in a vision how this person, worthy of divine worship, receives from God all glory, power, and dominion. This “son of man” thus establishes an everlasting kingdom. This was the messianic term which Jesus regularly applied to himself. See Mark 14:61-62. Revelation reveals how Jesus, the exalted Son of Man, exercises his authority throughout the end times and finally establishes his glorious kingdom in the new heaven and earth.

This is the only complete description of Christ in all his glory, but it is a theological description. Note, for example, where Christ stands; in the midst of the lampstands (the churches). See Matt. 18:20.

B. Prepare to Receive the Prophetic Message (Letters to the seven churches, 2:1-3:22)

The letters prepare us for the message of Revelation and for the suffering to come. Each follows a standard format: addressee, description of Christ, “I know”, good identified (except Sardis and

Laodicea), sins/failings identified (except Smyrna and Philadelphia), "Whoever has an ear...", a Gospel promise.

C. The Inaugural Vision of Heaven

1. The Vision of the Throne of God and Heavenly Court (4:1-11)
2. The Sealed Scroll and the Lamb Worthy to Open It (5:1-14)

This is a two-part vision, where God is praised as creator (chapter 4) and Christ as powerful Redeemer (chapter 5). The message of chapter five cannot be over emphasized. All the events of Revelation/the end times, here represented as the sealed scroll, fall under the mighty power of the Lamb. See Romans 8:28f. This constitutes an important message to the persecuted.

II. The Prophecy

The prophecy is organized into three cycles of seven, with an interlude between the second and third cycle. This suggests that we should not interpret Revelation in a linear fashion, especially since the end of the world is described in chapters 6, 11, 14, 16, and 20. Revelation, instead, presents repeated overviews of the end times.

The first two cycles, the seals and the trumpets, also have interludes between the next to the last and last items. Any unmatched items in such a structure tend to receive the emphasis. Thus, the primary emphases in the first two cycles are that God preserves his people (the interlude of the first cycle) and that the God's word is still proclaimed (the interlude of the second cycle). The primary emphasis, the heart, of the book is chapters 12-14.

Each cycle describes what occurs repeatedly throughout the latter days, the time from Pentecost to the end. For when the latter days occur see Acts 2:17, 1Ti 4:1, 1 Jn 2:18. We should expect that the events described here will escalate as the end draws near. See Mt 24:8,12; 2Ti 3:1.

A. The First Cycle of Seven: The Seals - Tribulations among mankind.

1. The First Four Seals: The Four Horsemen (6:1-8)
2. The Fifth Seal: Suffering of the Saints (6:9-11)
3. The Sixth Seal: The End and Its Terror Described (6:12-17)
4. Interlude: God's People Preserved in Suffering (7:9-17)
 - a. The 144,000: The Church Militant
 - b. The Heavenly Multitude: The Church Triumphant
5. The Seventh Seal: Introduces the Second Cycle (8:1-5)

The horsemen are a matched set, and inasmuch as the last one is identified not as a person but as death (6:8), we should probably not interpret the prior three as individuals either. These horsemen symbolize tyranny, warfare, economic upheaval/famine, and death.

The fifth seal answers for how long and why God's people suffer. The sixth seal, on the basis of similar language in Mk. 13:25-26, Joel 2:21, Is. 34:4, and Jer. 4:23-26, describes the end of the world.

The focus of the cycle is that God preserves his people in suffering. John presents a two-part picture, the Church militant, which is sealed by God and fights against evil, and the Church triumphant, which is dressed in Christ's righteousness and rests from its labors.

The 144,000 are found here and in chapter 14; 144,000 virgin, Jewish males if taken literally. But see Numbers 2 for the military arrangement. See Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-9; and Gal. 3:29 on how Paul

at times will predicate of the Church the terminology of the Jews. See Amos 5:2, Jer. 31:3-4, and 2 Cor. 11:2 for how virginity and sexual purity were employed as metaphors for spiritual fidelity. The number (12 x 12 x 1000), taken symbolically, points to all God's people. Thus, what we have here is a picture of the Church militant, in perfect formation, sealed unto God, absolutely pure in its dedication to Christ - those who by the grace of Christ yet carry the fight against evil on earth.

The seventh seal, which one would normally expect to announce the end, here in fact introduces (or contains) the second cycle of seven. But note the emphasis upon the prayers of the saints as the second cycle is introduced.

B. The Second Cycle of Seven: The Trumpets - Tribulations that are to come to pass as the result of evil.

1. The First Four Trumpet Blasts: tribulations in nature. (8:6-13)
2. The Fifth Trumpet Blast: evil from the abyss. (9:1-12)
3. The Sixth Trumpet Blast: destruction sweeps over humankind. (9:13-21)
4. Interlude: God's Word Still Proclaimed
 - a. The Gospel is still proclaimed. (10:1-11)
 - b. The saints witness. (11:1-14)
6. The Seventh Trumpet Blast: The End and Rejoicing. (11:15-19)

The first four trumpet blasts, which herald death in creation by the repeated phrase "one third", are probably best understood as visual representations of the curse of creation resulting from sin. See Gen. 3:17. Evil, like a disease, infects all of creation. The fifth trumpet blast depicts by way of an unearthly locust plague (a common scourge of the ancient Middle East) the torments caused by evil angels (see Eph. 6:10-12 and 1Pet. 5:8-9) while the sixth portrays the last battle, later called Armageddon (16:16).

But again, the focus of this cycle (the interlude) is not upon the tribulations caused by sin and evil, but upon the mission of the Church in the latter days during the time of torment. First, John is recommissioned by a mighty angel. Then the temple is measured, symbolizing how God knows and will protect his Church (see Ezek. 40 and Zech. 2:1-5), making this vision similar to the sealing of the 144,000 in chapter 7. Finally, a picture of the Church in mission follows, pictured as two witnesses, like Moses and Elijah, proclaiming the Word of God to an unbelieving world, always laying down their lives but rising again.

The two witnesses are active for 1260 days. This time is referenced elsewhere in Revelation as the time the Gentiles trample the holy city (42 months, 11:2), the time the woman is hunted by the dragon (1260 days, 12:6), the time God protects the woman in the wilderness (3 ½ years, 12:14), and the time Satan afflicts the woman's offspring (42 months, 13:5). See Dan. 9:25-27, a highly debated section of Scripture, where half way through the last week a coming ruler puts an end to sacrifice and sets up the abomination of desolation, leaving 3 ½ years of persecution.

According to Josephus (War 1.32), Antiochus IV desecrated the temple in Jerusalem for 3 ½ years, and this illustrates the commonly understood connection not only between Daniel 9 and Antiochus "Epiphanes," but also the background for John's use of the term.

Alternatively, 3 ½ years was the commonly accepted length of time for the drought during the prophetic activity of Elijah against the worshippers of Baal (Luke 4:25).

It is difficult to decide in favor of one allusion against the other, but Daniel seems preferable. Either way, the 3 ½ years in Revelation clearly bring to mind a time of persecution, spiritual warfare, and testing. In view of Rev. 12:14, where the woman (the Church) is protected in the wilderness for this amount of time, and in view of the cyclical nature of the outline of Revelation,

this period of time is best understood as a metaphor for the latter days, from Pentecost to End, when thought of as a time of persecution and testing.

- C. The Cosmic Struggle Between Christ and Satan.
1. The Woman, Child, and Pursuing Dragon. (12:1-18)
 2. The Dragon Marshals His Forces
 - a. The Beast from the Sea. (13:1-10)
 - b. The Beast from the Earth. (13:11-18)
 4. The Conquering Lamb and the 144,000 on Mt. Zion. (14:1-5)
 5. Defeat of the Dragon and his Beasts Prophesied. (14:6-13)
 6. Vision of the Harvest and the End. (14:14-20)

In some respects, this is the heart of the book (see comments about structure above). It is the big picture, how God summarizes history, how his purposes are unfolded. It places the rest of Revelation in perspective.

The beast from the sea is a composite of the beasts mentioned in Dan. 7:4-6, where the animals represent worldly empires. John is thus probably picturing for us a composite of worldly empires. This would make the first beast a political beast.

The beast from the earth is a religious beast, taking the appearance of the lamb (Christ) and deceiving people to become idolatrous.

These two beasts work together and together are used by the Dragon to war against the people of God. Historically, we might associate these activities with Caesar worship and the persecution of Christians in the Roman empire, but the picture extends beyond that.

The dragon and the two beasts also constitute within the book of Revelation a type of anti-trinity. In this and several other ways, such as the marking of those who follow the beast, John draws our attention to how evil, in attempting to usurp divine power and worship, parodies or mimics that which it intends to supplant.

666 is a frustrating number. The letters of a name might be turned into numbers and added together to reach a sum, and this seems to be what John wants us to do when he calls upon his readers to calculate this "man's number." But Irenaeus, an early Church father only two generations removed from John, was clueless, and all attempts for an identity have been unsatisfactory. The alternative is to take the number as a symbol – not 777, a number that might be associated with God, but 666, which, as John tells us, is a "man's number."

More importantly, note how the second beast parodies the marking of the 144,000 and makes it an economic hardship for people without the mark. John was not thinking of a universal pricing code or mark of bank credit, but was portraying the consequences in this world of not bending the knee to Satan.

Note most importantly that the beast from the sea is identified not primarily by a calculator (at least not yet) or by the presence of miracles (which are always subject to interpretation) but by what he says (13:11). He speaks like the dragon, who is himself the father of lies.

"Antichrist" is a term found only in the letters of John, where the apostle states that although the Antichrist will come, many antichrists have already appeared and the spirit of the antichrist is already at work in the world (1 John 2:18, 4:3). John's statements are similar to those Paul makes about the "man of lawlessness" in 2 Thess. 2:1-12. If these two apostles are using different terms to speak about the same person and events, then we would conclude that the Antichrist is one seated within the visible church who claims Christ's own authority for himself and thus attempts to take the place of Christ and fight against God. Many such individuals have already appeared

and have thus fulfilled the sign of the Antichrist. Both apostles point to a final Antichrist, who will appear immediately before Christ's return. If we were to locate an image in Revelation associated with these ideas from John and Paul, it would be the beast from the earth, who has "horns like a lamb" (appears to have Christ's own authority), but speaks like the dragon and strives to lead all into idolatry.

The vision of the harvest is a two-part vision; the wheat harvest for the righteous (Matt. 13:24-30) and the grape harvest of God's wrath (Is. 63:1-6). This is the third time the end of the world is pictured in Revelation.

D. The Third Cycle of Seven: The Bowls of God's Wrath - Judgment upon Evil.

1. Preparation for the Last Plagues. (15:1-8)
2. The First Six Bowls of God's Wrath. (16:1-16)
3. The Seventh Bowl: The End. (16:17-21)

This last cycle is laden with Exodus imagery. The final judgment is pictured as a cosmic exodus from slavery in a foreign land and a final homecoming to the eternal promised land. There is no interlude here because there is no longer any delay. Things rush to their fulfillment as God cuts the days short.

III. The End: Close-up

A. Judgment and Overthrow of the Forces of the Dragon.

1. Judgment of the Harlot. (17:1-18)
2. The Fall of Babylon. (18:1-24)

B. Victory Celebration

1. The Song of Victory (19:1-10)
3. The Vision of the Crowned Victor Going to Receive Victory. (19:11-21)

C. The Judgment and Overthrow of the Dragon Himself

1. The Millennium: Restricted in His Power (20:1-6)
2. His Final Doom (20:7-10)

D. The New Heaven and Earth

1. The Vision of the Resurrection and Last Judgment. (20:11-15)
2. The Vision of the New Heaven and New Earth. (21:1-22:5)

IV. Epilogue - The Promise of Christ's Coming (22:6-21)

In the final section, John shows us in detail the final judgment upon evil and the rejoicing and eternal bliss of God's people. The second beast, the religious beast, is now named the harlot, a well-known religious metaphor of apostasy (see Ezekiel 16, 23; Hosea 1). The first beast, the political beast, is now named Babylon, the archetypical political enemy of God's people.

Through these entities Satan had fought against the people of Christ. John's readers would identify the seven hills upon which the woman sits as Rome itself, the center of the empire and the imperial cult. The seven kings in unity with Satan may be identified as those empires which fought against and held captive the people of God: Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, the Seleucids (most notably Antiochus IV), Rome, and one to come. Satan himself has been bound ("now is not"), a reference to the restriction of his activity during the millennium (see below). At the conclusion of this period of time he will be loosed and will gather all the nations for one last attempt to destroy the Church, but will himself go to his destruction. This final battle, also called Armageddon, has been referenced several times already (9:13-21, 16:12-16). Here the

seventh kingdom yet to come should be connected to the ten kings, who will ally themselves with the beast for this purpose. God, however, will not allow this and keeps Satan bound until the full number of the elect have come to faith (Matt. 24:14).

Indeed, Satan's judgment begins with his being cast into the abyss and bound for 1000 years, a time when the saints take part in the "first resurrection" and rule with Christ on earth. When Satan is loosed, note how he goes out to deceive the nations (20:7), evidently something which he could not do while bound. Thus, his binding should be understood as a restriction of this intent to deceive all the nations to make war against the Church.

Concerning the millennium, the apostolic writers maintain that the saints rule with Christ now in the kingdom of grace (1 Pet. 2:9-10, Rev. 1:6), exercising the authority of Christ in his name (Jn. 20:21-23, Mt. 16:17-19). These are components of the standard amillennial view of Rev. 20:1-6. Consult the CTCR document entitled "The 'End Times'" for more information about the millennium. On this view, the first resurrection would be coming to spiritual life through faith in Christ. The second resurrection, not mentioned in Revelation, would be bodily resurrection on the last day. Similarly, the second death is identified as damnation to hell (20:14). The first death, not mentioned in Revelation, presumably would thus be physical death. The number, 1000, would emphasize the completeness of the reign of Christ's people on earth.

The description of heaven is a theological, not geographical, description. Note, for example, that it is pictured as a perfectly cubed city dressed as a bride, an impossible image if taken literally but which makes perfect sense if taken metaphorically. The people of Christ, his bride, dwell in the very presence of God, inside the most holy place, which was a perfect cube in the tabernacle and temple.

Finally, the Revelation of Christ ends with an invitation and a prayer. The invitation; Let whoever desires it come and freely take from the water of life. The prayer; "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Session 1: How To Read and Understand Revelation. - Chapter 1

The questions for this section are taken from chapter 1. Read chapter one and then answer the questions as best as you can. Don't worry about providing right or wrong answers. The important thing at this point is that you begin to study, ponder, and pray about the meaning of the text.

1. What does verse one tell you about the contents of the book of Revelation?
2. In class we will refer to the following:
 - a. Apocalyptic literature
 - c. The purpose and interpretation of figurative language
3. Name the seven churches and find them on an atlas. Why is the letter addressed to these seven?
4. What are the "seven spirits" of God, or what is meant by this phrase? (Isaiah 11:1-3.)
5. Who is the "Alpha and the Omega" in verse 8? (The phrase also occurs in Rev. 21:6 and 22:13. Who is the Alpha and the Omega in those places?)
6. Where is Patmos and why was John there? In class we will talk about the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire.
7. What is meant by "in the spirit on the Lord's day?"
8. Each element of the description of Christ has meaning. Using the following verses, speculate about the meaning of each item. (Daniel 7, Daniel 10, Ezek 1:24, Prov. 16:31, Matthew 17:2, Hebrews 4:12) Robe, hair, eyes, feet, voice, mouth, face.
9. Is there any significance to where Jesus is standing?
10. Why would Jesus appear to John like this?
11. Is there any similarity between this opening vision and that found in Isaiah 6?

Personal Reflection

1. What ideas or images do you find striking in this section?
2. What do you learn about the end times from this section?

3. What do you learn about the love and grace of God in this section?
4. What question do you have for class about this section?

Session 2: Christ's Letters to the Church and the Inaugural Vision (chaps. 2-5)

Beginning with chapter two and continuing through chapter three, Jesus has John record letters for any who would read and ponder the book of Revelation. In these letters Christ tells his people what they must know before they are prepared for the end times. Read the section and try to answer the questions. Again, do not worry about getting right or wrong answers. Pray for the Holy Spirit to enlighten your heart and mind

After Jesus has spoken individually to his people, preparing their hearts and minds for the prophecy to follow, the Spirit takes John into the heavenly court to see God the Father sitting upon his throne in heaven (chapter 4) and the enthronement of Jesus Christ (chapter 5). Thus John was reminded that no matter how evil or horrible the future might appear, God was still on his throne and Christ is glorified above all things. Indeed, the exalted Christ controls all things for his gracious purposes.

Concerning the Letters of chapters 2 and 3:

1. Each letter follows a common outline. Compare three letters together and list the points of this outline.
2. What is the message to Ephesus?
3. What is the message to Smyrna?
4. What is the message to Pergamum? For help, what do we know about Balaam from Numbers 22?
5. What is the meaning of the hidden manna and the white stone?
6. What do we know about Jezebel from 1 Kings 19:1-2; 21:1-28 and how does that help our understanding about the message to Thyatira?
7. What is the message to Sardis?
8. What is the message to Philadelphia?
9. What is the message to Laodicea?

Concerning the Inaugural Vision:

1. What parallels can you find between the Old Testament descriptions of the LORD and the description in chapter 4? Look at Isaiah 6, Exodus 19:16-19, Ezekiel 1 (especially verses 4-11).
2. Note that the one on the throne is surrounded by a bow. What significance might there be to this picture?
3. Who are the twenty-four elders?

4. In Canaanite mythology the sea represents chaos. See also Revelation 13:1 and 21:1. What is the significance of a glassy sea?
5. What do the four living creatures represent?
6. In chapter five, what does the scroll represent? See Zechariah 5:1-4 and Ezekiel 2:9-3:3.
7. Why does the scroll have seven seals and why can no one open it?
8. Who or what is the lamb? What do the seven horns and the seven eyes of the lamb signify?

Personal Reflection

1. What ideas or images do you find striking in this section?
2. What do you learn about the challenges which confront the people of Christ?
3. What do you learn about the love and grace of God in this section?
4. What question do you have for class about this section?

Session 3: The Seals – Christ’s People Preserved (chaps. 6:1-8:1)

In this section we will consider one of the more misunderstood images of Revelation, the 144,000. In this image we see how Jesus will always be with and protect his people. To do so, however, we really must begin with chapter 6. The seals show the wicked behavior of humans to each other throughout the end times. Within this cycle the focus rests upon how Christ protects his people.

1. What do each of the four horses represent?
 - a. White horse represents...
 - b. Red horse represents...
 - c. Black horse represents...
 - d. Pale horse represents...
2. Who are pictured when the fifth seal is opened? What is their question and how does God respond? See also Matthew 24:14.
3. What is described when the sixth seal is opened? (See Joel 2:31, Mark 13:24-27, Isaiah 34:1-4, Jer 4:23-26.)
4. Who are the 144,000?
 - a. How are they described in chapter 7?
 - b. How are they described in Revelation 14:1-5?
 - c. What are possible interpretations for the number 144,000? (A good commentary or study Bible might provide some hints.)
 - d. What does it mean for the 144,000 to be sealed by God? (See Ezekiel 9:1-6)
 - e. Is there any similarity between Numbers chapter 2 and the vision of the 144,000?
5. What is the identity of the "great multitude"?

Personal Reflection

1. Remember that the focus of this first cycle of seven is not the hardship shown as each seal is opened, but the interlude – the two-part picture of God's people? What is the message of these two images?

2. What do you learn about the end times from this section? As we see these things going on around us, what should our focus be?
3. Mary is a friend of yours, and one day she states that she is afraid that the United States will enter another war. Her older brother, who just entered the Marines, may go to fight. What might you say to Mary?
4. Jack's parents just got divorced and for several weeks now he has been very depressed. When you finally have a chance to talk to him, he states that he cannot understand why God allows such things to happen. How might you reassure Jack?

Session 4: The Trumpets – Christ’s People Witness (chaps. 8-11)

In this section we will again see horrible things happening on earth, this time as a direct result of evil. Yet, as in the first cycle of seven, there is an interlude, the focus of this cycle, in which we see that God’s word is still proclaimed throughout this period. The image of the two witnesses characterizes how the people of God give testimony to Christ before he returns. After you ask for God’s blessing, read this section and answer the questions as best as you are able.

1. What does 8:3-5 suggest about prayer?
2. What is described after each of the first four trumpet blasts?
3. Who is the star that falls from heaven when the fifth trumpet is blown? See verse 11 and also Isaiah 14:12-15. What happens when the fifth trumpet is blown?
4. What happens when the sixth angel sounds his trumpet? When might this happen?
5. Who is the mighty angel, what does the scroll signify, and what significance is there in having John eat the little scroll?
6. What possible significance is there in measuring the temple at this point? (See also Ezekiel 40 and Zechariah 2:1-5.)
7. What do the "two witnesses" in chapter 11 do?
8. Who are the two witnesses?
 - a. In Zechariah 4, the olive tree and lampstand represent the priesthood and royal house. In what sense are God's people priests and kings? (See 1:6)
 - b. What great figure of the Old Testament prophesied that it not rain for a long period of time?
 - c. What great figure of the Old Testament struck the land with plagues, like turning water to blood?
 - d. Do you recall anywhere else in the Bible where God's people went about two-by- two to witness to the world?
 - e. How long will the witnesses prophesy? Should this period of time be taken literally or figuratively? (Look at Rev. 12:6 to help you answer. There the people of God are protected from Satan for the same amount of time.)
 - f. Considering all of the above, with whom should the two witnesses be identified?
9. What will the people of the world do to the two witnesses?
10. What will God do to the two witnesses?

Personal Reflection

1. Do you recall a time when you were aware that God was using you as a witness?
2. What are some things which prevent God's people from witnessing about Christ?
3. What do we learn about Christian witness in the end times from the image of the two witnesses?
4. Jenny does not like to witness about Christ. "I always feel so embarrassed about talking to others concerning my faith. I don't really know what to say." What might you say to Jenny to encourage her?
5. Jack doesn't like to talk about his faith to others on the baseball team because he thinks they will reject him. What might you say to Jack?

Session 5: The Book Interlude – Christ’s People Victorious over Evil (chaps. 12-14)

This week we will examine one of the well known sections of Revelation - the part concerning the Antichrist and the number 666. God's people have throughout history tried to identify who this is, proposing all sorts of people from Nero Caesar to Hitler. But remember, the focus of this section is not the Antichrist but on God's victory in Christ.

1. Chapter 12 provides a picture of a story. The woman stands for the people of God, the child stands for Christ, and the Dragon stands for Satan. Interpret this picture by rewriting this chapter in your own words.
2. What does the beast from the sea represent? (See Daniel 7:4-6. What did the animals represent there? A good study Bible or commentary will help.)
3. What does the beast from the sea do?
4. What does the beast from the land represent?
5. What does the beast from the land do?
6. What does the number "666" represent? To whom does it apply? In class we will talk about the Antichrist.
7. In preparation to fight against the woman and her offspring (remember chapter 13?), the dragon has marshaled his forces. Who stands with the Lamb in opposition? (See also Ephesians 6:10ff.)
8. Summarize the message of the three angels. How does this correspond to the message of the Church?
9. What is the promise found in verse 13.
10. What thoughts, feelings, impressions do you get as you read about the forces of the lamb and how they oppose the forces of the dragon?
11. What is described in verses 14-20? (This is a vision which combines elements of Matt 13:24-30 and Is 63:1-6.) Why are there two images of the harvest?

Personal Reflection

1. Where do you suppose the spirit of the antichrist is prevalent today?
2. What part do you play in exposing this spirit?
3. How can you have victory in the fight against evil?

4. What question do you have for class about this section?

Session 6: The Bowls and the Last Judgments – The Cosmic Exodus (chaps. 15-19)

In chapters 12-14 of Revelation we saw a picture of a great drama. These three chapters summarize in picture form all of human history as it records God's acts of salvation. This grand sweeping view of all things concluded with a vision of judgment day. Now the prophecy of John speeds to its conclusion. In chapters 15 and 16 John provides a generalized picture of God's final acts of judgment upon all forms of evil. Chapters 17-20 then provide close up views of God's judgment upon the "anti-church" (the harlot of chapter 17), worldly governments which, in league with Satan, persecute the people of God (Babylon in chapters 18-19), and finally Satan himself (in chapter 20). We will study only chapters 15-19 for next time. After asking for the Holy Spirit to enlighten your heart and mind, read these chapters and answer the questions.

1. This chapter presents a vision which is laden with Exodus imagery. What elements can be traced back to Exodus?
2. How does the Exodus imagery effect our understanding of God's final judgments and the second coming of Christ?
3. What thoughts, feelings, impressions do you get as you read about the first five bowls? (Think about the purpose of the plagues in Egypt. Also think about modern famines, diseases, etc.)
4. What is described with the pouring of the sixth bowl?
5. With what or whom is the prostitute to be identified?
6. What is the identity of the beast with seven heads and ten horns? Where are the seven hills mentioned in 17:9? Who are the seven kings mentioned in 17:10? Who are the ten kings mentioned in 17:12-14?
7. What does Babylon signify? In what sense do "the kings of the earth commit adultery" with Babylon? (18:3) What is the final destiny recorded for Babylon in chapter 18?
8. Who is the white rider chapter 19? What does he do?

Personal Reflection

1. What ideas or images do you find striking in this section?
2. What do you learn about the end times from this section?
3. What do you learn about the love and grace of God in this section?
4. What question do you have for class about this section?

Session 7: The Kingdom of Christ and Satan's Doom (chap. 20)

This week we continue with the close up view of God's final judgments upon evil. In chapter 20 we will read about the millennium, one of the more controversial and misunderstood concepts in Revelation. But if we keep in mind what the rest of the Bible says about the kingdom of Christ, we will understand better this section of Revelation.

1. In chapter 20, what does it mean for Satan to be bound during the thousand years?
 - a. What is he unable to do until he is loosed (see verses 7-8)?
 - b. The only other verse in the entire Bible which refers to Satan being bound is Mark 4:27. What does the binding of Satan mean there?
2. How and where does Christ exercise his authority? Consult the following passages:
 - a. Matt. 28:18, Eph. 1:20-22
 - b. Eph. 2:19, John 8:31-32
 - c. 2 Tim. 4:18, Matt. 25:31-32
3. How and where do Christ's people rule during the thousand years? Consult 1 Peter 2:9-10 and John 20:21-23.
4. What is the "first resurrection" mentioned by John? Consult Eph. 2:4-6, John 5:24. What would be the second resurrection?
5. What is the "second death" mentioned by John? See 20:14. What would be the first death? Consult Eph. 2:1 and Rom. 5:12.
6. How are the dead judged on the last day? See also Eph. 2:8-10.

Personal Reflection

1. What ideas or images do you find striking in this section?
2. How and where is the kingdom of Christ manifest at your congregation? What part do you play in this kingdom?
3. How do you proclaim the kingdom of Christ at home? At work? At school?
4. What question do you have for class about this section?

Session 8: The New Heaven and Earth (chaps. 21-22)

We will conclude our study of Revelation by looking at John's vision of heaven. After praying for God's guidance, read these sections and answer the questions in preparation for the next session.

1. In what sense is the Church a "bride" of Jesus? (Isaiah 54:5-8; Hosea 2:14-20)
2. Where else in the Bible is heaven compared to a wedding?
3. If we interpret verse sixteen literally, how long, wide, and tall is the heavenly city? What would be a figurative interpretation of 12,000 stadia?
4. Where else is the tree of life mentioned in the Bible?
5. What is the final prayer of Revelation?

Personal Reflection

1. What ideas or images do you find striking in this section?
2. What do you learn about the end times from this section?
3. What do you learn about the love and grace of God in this section?
4. What question do you have for class about this section?

Notes

Further Reading

Brighton, Louis. *Revelation*. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999.

(This is the standard reference commentary on Revelation from a Lutheran perspective.)

Caird, G. B. *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.

(This is an older but reliable commentary. Caird tends to interpret Revelation in light of John's own background and historical situation.)

CTCR. *The "End Times:" A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism*. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1989.

(This is an excellent presentation and critique of the various teachings about the millennium.)

Franzmann, Martin H. *The Revelation to John*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976.

(This is a brief but helpful overview of Revelation from a Lutheran perspective. It has the least depth of the commentaries on this page.)

Morris, Leon. *Apocalyptic*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.

(This small book discusses the characteristic features of apocalyptic literature. While the book is not strictly about Revelation, it will provide much helpful information about its unique literary features.)

Morris, Leon. *The Revelation of St. John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.

(This commentary is part of a larger set called the "Tyndale Commentaries on the New Testament." Written from an evangelical perspective, it provides helpful information without burying you in detail.)

Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.

(This commentary, like Morris' is well balanced and from the evangelical perspective. It contains slightly more detail than the former.)

Pate, Marvin, ed. *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998

(Though somewhat technical and not written from a Lutheran perspective, this book may be recommended to those who wish to get a more in depth overview of the contrasting and often contradictory ways scholars interpret Revelation.)

Book of Revelation bible study with verse by verse commentary to make understanding Revelation bible prophecy and antichrist easy.Â Note also that the book of Revelation ends with a severe warning telling us not to add or take away from the prophecies written in this book or there are very serious consequences. Revelation 22:18-19 â€œFor I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: 19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his.