

A

R

the revelation of Jesus Christ

About the Cover:

In the final chapter of the book of Revelation, Jesus describes himself as “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” The first (Α) and last (Ω) letters of the Greek alphabet are used as a metaphor to symbolize his eternal nature and sovereignty—not only in that of creation and last things, but in all that is found in between.

By encapsulating the book with these two letters, we are reminded that Jesus Christ is the central figure of our study and of our lives.

The lettering was handcrafted by a member of River Oaks Community Church.
We thank her for using her time and her talents to glorify God.

the revelation of Jesus Christ

©2016 River Oaks Community Church

River Oaks Community Church
1855 Lewisville-Clemmons Road
Clemmons, NC 27012

riveroakschurch.org

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV)

table of contents

INTRODUCTION	i
KEY WORDS	iv
UNIT 1	1
UNIT 2	7
UNIT 3	15
UNIT 4	21
UNIT 5	27
UNIT 6	33
UNIT 7	41
UNIT 8	49
UNIT 9	55
UNIT 10	61
UNIT 11	67
UNIT 12	73
UNIT 13	79
SOURCES CONSULTED.....	84

the revelation of Jesus Christ

Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

INTRODUCTION

The Greek word for revelation (*apokalypsis*) means an “unveiling,” “uncovering,” or “disclosure.” Throughout the New Testament, this word is used to describe the unveiling of spiritual truth (Romans 16:25, Ephesians 1:17), of Christ’s incarnation (Luke 2:32), and of the glorious appearing at His second coming (1 Peter 1:7). In all biblical references, the word *revelation* refers to “something or someone, once hidden, becoming visible.”

As we begin our 13-week study on the book of Revelation, we can ask ourselves the question: “What exactly is being unveiled?” The short answer might be that it is the unveiling of Jesus Christ in glory, the vision of a final victory, and the splendor of eternal worship, to which the rest of Scripture merely alludes. These have all become visible through “the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants” and made “known by sending his angel to his servant John” (Revelation 1:1).

The longer answer has actually been the subject of debate and speculation since the early centuries of the church. Given the interpretive challenges of its vivid imagery and symbolism, its drastic contrast of beauty and evil, this should not come as a total surprise to us. Add to this the high level of sensationalism generated from various theories and explanations—such as creative-license depictions of the many-horned beast, the dragon, and the plagues—and you have perhaps the least-understood and most-misrepresented book in the New Testament. It’s little wonder that the book of Revelation, some say, is the only book of the Bible that we spend more time reading commentaries on than we do actually reading the book itself.

So how do we reconcile the short answer with the long answer? I believe we do this by dedicating this season of our discipleship to the teaching, meditation, and study of

God's Word. We approach this apocalyptic letter (yes, it is a specific first-century literary genre—more on this in Unit 2), with an open mind and a desire that God will grant us divine insight that will encourage, embolden, and inspire worship as never before. While strengthening our own interpretative convictions, let us keep in mind the words of the early twentieth-century theologian and scholar, Albertus Pieters, who wrote of Revelation:

None of these schools of interpretation can claim any monopoly on scholarship or faith. Each group numbers many fine scholars and devout Christian believers. Therefore complete certainty in regard to the interpretation of the Apocalypse is not to be had. It is our duty to do the best we can, to study the various systems and accept the view that seems to us right, but always with a certain amount of reservation and of respect for the opinions of others.¹

The objective of this study is to establish total engagement with the book of Revelation in ways we have never experienced. We will emphasize the most central themes: worship (Revelation 4:10-11 is perhaps the most ultimate image of this in the Bible), absolute kingship (did you know that the word *throne* is used forty-six times in Revelation?), and victory that brings complete and final restoration to God's creation (Revelation 22 takes us back to Genesis 1 and 2).

¹ Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 4-5.

Additionally, through our study, we will address the subject matter that often tends to either excite us or scare us away: the aforementioned creatures and plagues, the “666” mark of the beast, and the rider on a white horse. We will learn more of the most common interpretational schemes: the preterist, historicist, futurist, and idealist views. With chapter 20, we will encounter one of the most controversial chapters in the Bible as we consider the “thousand years” understanding of post-, pre-, and amillennialism.

This sermon guide and small group workbook has been formatted to allow sufficient space for recording your notes, thoughts, and questions. We encourage you to utilize it both on Sunday morning and throughout the week as you meditate on the scriptural passages and reflect on the questions. Each unit will provide a short commentary or background for the week, a series of study questions, and a section we are calling Table Talk—with questions designed as conversation starters for family, friends, or co-workers.

Finally, it is not uncommon for people to change their personal views on the interpretation of Revelation. In fact, Steve Gregg, the author of *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*, admits to having changed his understanding several times over. It is also likely that the person next to you in the pew (or in the small group circle) will not interpret this book exactly as you do. It's okay; go back to Mr. Peiter's advice and “accept

the view that seems to us right, but always with a certain amount of reservation and of respect for the opinions of others.”²

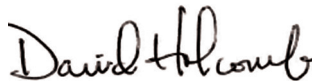
Ultimately what we can all agree on, when it comes to this great book, is that the thought of placing ourselves in the footsteps of John, on the threshold of the great eternal throne room of God, attempting to take it all in, would leave us absolutely awestruck. Consider how we might emerge from this experience? How would you and I approach our worship in the here-and-now, after having a glimpse of worship in the ever-after? Revelation is purposed to provide us that glimpse.

May our time in this great book change us, and may we in turn live a life that is full of worship in preparation for an eternity when we will sing:

Holy, holy, holy,

Lord God Almighty,

Who was and is and is to come (Revelation 4:8).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Holcomb". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

David Holcomb
Minister of Discipleship, River Oaks Community Church

² Ibid.

key words

Below are definitions to forms of key words and phrases that are found throughout the workbook. In the study, they will be identified with bold letters.

1. **“already/not yet”**-a theological concept identifying God’s kingdom as having *already* been ushered in through Christ’s victory over death, but having *not yet* reached its full expression or culmination. We are *already* in an eschatological period, but we do *not yet* see it in its glory. With an *already/not yet* perspective, the cross marks the beginning of the end (Hebrews 2:8-9).
2. **allegorical view**-a perspective in which ideas or moral principles are presented symbolically or metaphorically, often using fictional events and characters in narrative. An allegory is similar to a parable, but often much longer and more complex.
3. **Armageddon**-the term is likely taken from the Hebrew words referencing the mountain (har) of Megiddo (magedon). Megiddo was a military stronghold in the Old Testament and is thought to be the reference found in Revelation 16:16 and location of the climatic final battle in the mountains of Israel. Others believe Armageddon has taken on a symbolic meaning representing the event itself and not the locale.
4. **canon**-from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning “a measuring rule,” the biblical canon refers to the group of books considered to be spiritually superlative, by which all others were measured and found to be of secondary value. The canonization of Scripture occurred under divine inspiration and was completed for the Old Testament by the early first century AD, and the New Testament by AD 367.
5. **dispensationalist**-one who upholds to a theological system referred to as dispensationalism, which asserts that time—past, present, and future—is divided into dispensations, or eras, during which God deals with humanity in specific ways (for example, much of the Old Testament was the “dispensation of law,” while the current era is the “dispensation of grace.”)
6. **eschatological period**-from the Greek word *eschatos*, meaning “last things.” Eschatology is the study or doctrine of “last things,” the period of time when the last things are set in motion.
7. **Eusebius’ History**-Eusebius (ca AD 265–339) was the Bishop of Caesarea and is considered the “father of church history.” He was an advisor to Constantine and a highly productive writer. His work, *Eusebius’ History*, is considered to be the best original source of early church history, including extensive documentation of events and people from the time of the apostles to around AD 325 and the Council of Nicea.

8. **hermeneutics**-from the Greek meaning “interpretation”; the study of the principles for sound, systematic interpretation of Scripture.
9. ***Left Behind***-a series of sixteen best-selling novels, published between 1995 and 2007, by authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, dealing with a pretribulation, premillennial, eschatological viewpoint of the world’s end. The series has been adapted into four motion pictures.
10. **Nicolaitans**-a group of heretics in the cities of Ephesus and Pergamum and recorded in history by early church fathers, including Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Theodoret, as having been started by the deacon Nicolas. It is not clear what exactly Nicolas was teaching, but it was obviously counter to biblical truth.
11. **Rapture**-a phrase used by premillennialists to refer to the church being united with Christ at his second coming (from the Latin *rapio*, meaning “caught up”). The primary scriptural teaching is 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. One is determined to be a pretribulationist, midtribulationist, or posttribulationist based on *when* one believes the rapture will occur.
12. **Reformation**-a sixteenth-century movement for renewal within the Catholic church that resulted in the formation of various Protestant churches. Prominent reformers included John Calvin, John Knox, Ulrich Zwingli, and Martin Luther, whose posting of *95 Theses* (95 statements primarily concerning the selling of indulgences) upon the doors of a castle church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517, is said to have sparked the theological debate that fueled the Reformation Movement.
13. **Septuagint**-Greek word for “seventy,” used to refer to the earliest translation of the Hebrew Scripture into Greek during the third-century BC. It is often referred to as the LXX (Roman numerals for seventy). Tradition has it that seventy scholars completed the full translation in seventy-two days.
14. **tribulation (Great Tribulation)**-a seven-year period of divine judgment upon the earth, including global food shortages, plagues, natural disasters, and widespread death and destruction. This period of time will be initiated by the “abomination that causes desolation” (Matthew 24:15) and will usher in Jesus’ return to earth in great glory.

NOTES

NOTES

R

unit 1

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches." -Revelation 1:9-11a

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

In beginning Week 1 of our study, it is especially critical that we have a solid understanding of the historical and cultural context in which Revelation was written. Below you will find background information for the author, date, and setting. We encourage you to research these topics through the sources provided in the back of this guide and discuss them further with your group or study partner. Establishing these details early in the series allows us to better appreciate and understand what is to follow.

Who? From both internal (scriptural) and external (historical and early church writings) evidence, most scholars agree that the author of Revelation was John the Apostle, author of the fourth Gospel and three epistles. Some will note minor differences in style between Revelation and John's other writings, but they are easily explained by the fact that John's situation on Patmos would not have allowed for an *amanuensis* (a secretary), as he likely had for the writing of his other letters. Importantly, both Revelation and John's Gospel give us some similar theological language that are only found in these two documents, making it more certain that John the Apostle is in fact the author of Revelation. For example, we find in both: Jesus is the Word (John 1:1, Revelation 19:13), Jesus is the Lamb (John 1:29, Revelation 5:6), Jesus is a witness (John 5:31-32, Revelation 1:5), as well as similar translations of Zechariah 12:10 (John 19:37, Revelation 1:7)—which, by the way, are only translated in this manner in these two books, even differing slightly from that of the **Septuagint** translation.

When? Revelation was most likely written in the late first century, sometime between AD 94-96. This was near the end of Emperor Domitian's reign (AD 81-96). There are some who believe John was exiled to Patmos by Emperor Nero (AD 54-68) in the early '60s. However, the evidence overwhelmingly points to the later date. Historically, we know that Nero persecuted Christians, but primarily as "scapegoats" and really only in the region of Rome. Domitian, on the other hand, extended persecution into Asia (home of the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3), and he did so as a consequence for refusing to worship the emperor—which might be important to understanding Revelation 13:15. Externally, there are writings from the early-second century Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, (born in AD 81 - martyred in AD 167, according to *Eusebius' History*), establishing the start of the church in Smyrna after the time of Paul, thus impacting our understanding of Revelation 2:8. And finally, early church fathers Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius, all support John's Revelation as having been written during the time of Emperor Domitian.

Where? The island of Patmos, one of many small barren islands in the Aegean Sea off the southeast coast of present-day Turkey, was home to a Roman penal colony in the first century. Criminals and political prisoners were exiled there by the emperor's orders. Revelation 1:9 tells us that John was exiled here for his faith. It is on Patmos that John receives the "revelation of Jesus" and records what was revealed to him. Interestingly, we are told by the church historian Eusebius, that because of public sentiment against Domitian's cruelty, his successor, Emperor Nerva (AD 96-98), released all the prisoners from Patmos, including Christians, and John returned to his home in Ephesus.

REVELATION 1: JESUS REVEALED

2) “I am the Alpha and Omega” (1:8). This verse speaks to the first and last, but what else might be implied? (Have you ever used the phrase “from A to Z,” or “from soup to nuts”?)

3) How will you and I be blessed from reading, hearing, and obeying John's words (1: 3)?

4) What are the three titles given Jesus in 1:5? How are they significant?

5) Does Jesus provide a principle for interpretation in 1:20 when he speaks of the seven stars and seven golden lampstands as “mysteries”? Does the term “mystery” make you uncomfortable when used in discussions regarding our faith? Why or why not?

TABLE TALK

In reviewing John's introduction (1:1-2) and his situation (1:9)—in addition to the background information provided for this unit—can you envision being in his sandals? What strikes you most about the cultural and historical context of Revelation? Do you think your view of imperial persecution is an accurate one? Were you aware of the many early-century authors and their writings directed to these churches? Can you imagine being exiled on an island? Do you know where the Island of Patmos is located? Did you know there is a Patmos, Arkansas (Population: 61)?

R

unit 2

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. –Revelation 1:3

προφητεία (*propheeteia*)

prophecy - the act of interpreting divine will or purpose; a gifted faculty of setting forth and enforcing revealed truth; a matter of divine teaching or purpose; a gifted faculty of setting forth and enforcing revealed truth; a matter of divine teaching

READING REVELATION

As with all of the biblical genres, one of the first keys to our study of Revelation is to understand the type of literature in which it is written. With this case, however, we face a unique set of difficulties. For one, Revelation is one of the only books to blend different literary genres, and it does so with three of them: apocalypse, prophecy, and letter (epistle). To complicate matters further, the primary one—apocalyptic—no longer exists as it did in early-century culture. It is easier for us to understand how the originally-intended reader would have understood most other biblical writings—such as psalms, epistles, narratives, and even prophecies. So it's no wonder that the style makes it a challenge to read, yet it is critical to our interpretation of Revelation.

According to Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, authors of *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, apocalypses were well known to both Jews and Christians, with several dozen “popular” ones available between 200 BC to AD 200. Revelation is unique, certainly, but it does share similar characteristics with all literature of this category. Let's examine some of the common attributes of apocalyptic writings:

- The great concern is not of activity within history, but with a future history and a coming judgment. Much like some of the OT prophetic literature (Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and parts of Isaiah), these works were born out of great persecution, or in time of great oppression, for which the reminder of a future salvation brought great hope and encouragement.
- Unlike prophetic works, apocalyptic books are literary works. In other words, the prophets were spokespersons of God, called to speak to the people, and then later collect and record these “speeches” into written word. But an apocalypse is a form of literature from the beginning. Notice that in Revelation 1:19, John is told to “write, therefore, what you have seen.”
- Almost all apocalypses are presented in the form of visions, symbols, and dreams, with somewhat cryptic language. The imagery is often political, theological, cosmic, and prophetic. There is a strong emphasis on good overcoming evil.
- The images of apocalyptic writings are often forms of fantasy rather than reality, compared with the use of symbolic language from the nonapocalyptic prophets and Jesus, who used tangible, identifiable analogies and examples: salt (Matthew 5:13), vultures and carcasses (Luke 17:37), senseless doves and half-baked cakes (Hosea 7: 8, 11).
- Because they are literary, apocalypses are generally highly stylized. They tend to divide time and events into neat packages, with a fondness for the symbolic use of numbers. The numbered sets are typically arranged, not to express chronological order, but an overall theme, such as judgment.

John’s Revelation fits all of these common characteristics. However, there are two more it does not fit, and these two make Revelation an even more unique writing unto itself. First, most apocalyptic literature is pseudonymous, or written under a false name. John made himself known immediately in addressing the churches. Some commentators believe that John did not feel the need to do this because he already had a sense of living in the “end times,” that is, the **“already/not yet” eschatological period**. Other writers, particularly other Jewish writers who remained anonymous, did not share that same belief, and were solely looking to a coming age.

Secondly, and somewhat attached to the idea of a pseudonym, was that apocalypses were normally written from a perspective of a time past, where the writer was told to “seal the scroll” for a “later day,” with the later day being the time it was actually written. Again, John blends more of the prophetic element into this letter with this forthright declaration to read immediately—no need for sealing the letter.

Lastly, not all scholars hold the view that Revelation is an apocalyptic writing; they view Revelation as strictly prophetic. This is usually based on the grounds of John's use of "prophecy" in 1:3 and 22:6-7. This seems to be more a matter of the uniqueness of Revelation to exist in both categories, and to a degree that of semantics, as the category of prophecy can be broadened to include apocalyptic views. It's also important to note that prophecy was not simply understood as "predictions for the future"; rather, it was seen more as literally interpreting God's divine will and purpose for his people through revealed truth and divinely-inspired teaching.

STUDY QUESTIONS

REVELATION 2: LOSING YOUR FIRST LOVE

- 1) For each of the churches in chapter two, for what did Jesus praise them? What did Jesus have against them? Summarize their strengths and weaknesses.

Ephesus:

Smyrna:

Pergamum:

Thyatira:

- 2) Each church letter is addressed to “the angel.” Who is this? Who is “the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand” and “walks among the seven golden lampstands”? Do you recall what that represents from chapter 1:20? (Note: the Greek word for *angel* can mean “angel” or “messenger.”)

3) What does it mean to abandon your “first love” (2:4)? Have you had a time when you felt like you had abandoned your first love? Why? What does it take to reclaim that love?

4) Who were the “Nicolaitans” (2:6)? Hate is rarely something for which to be commended, yet it is here? Why? Do we have **Nicolaitans** today?

5) Revelation 2:11 says, “He who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.” What does that mean?

TABLE TALK

Can you name the various literary genres* that are presented in the Bible? These early chapters are most like the “letters” that we might expect to receive or send today. Revelation was sent as a circulating letter, intended to be read by one church, and then sent on to the next one. Would you like to receive letters like that today? How would you respond to a letter that emphatically said, “He who has an ear let him hear”? In a day of limited communication, can you imagine the joy and expectation that one would have had in receiving a letter? That great urgency and joy should guide us in reading the letters that have been preserved for us in Scripture.

**The recognized literary genres in the Bible include: Historical Narrative, Law, Wisdom, Psalms, Prophecy, Gospel, Epistle, and Apocalyptic.*

NOTES

R

unit 3

John to the seven churches that are in Asia ...

—Revelation 1:4

As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

—Revelation 1:20

THE SEVEN CHURCHES



The seven churches to which the letter is addressed are actual, historic churches. They represented major cities within distinct districts of Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey. In supporting the idea that the letter was intended to be read and circulated amongst the churches, it is often noted that the churches are addressed in sequence of how that delivery would have likely played out. The letter would have arrived at the port near Ephesus and then traveled clockwise through the churches until it reached its final destination in Laodicea (see map).

Though most of the interpretative debates in Revelation occur within chapters 4-20, there are a few varying opinions on what the churches represent. Some believe that the letters are strictly intended for these specific churches with very specific concerns. Others have formulated a view that the churches represent the various ages, or future periods, during which the church will be identified by one of these seven “types.” In evaluating these views, it seems that there are elements of both that are applicable.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

The churches addressed were certainly in need of encouragement, commendation, and correction. It is equally important to observe that they do seem to represent the varying conditions of the church that have perennially existed throughout history. The bottom line is that what Christ says to these churches is a relevant warning to the church in all times.

Beyond the geography and the church representation, we should not lose sight that in Revelation 1:12-16, John turns to see the lampstands (seven churches) and “in the midst of the lampstands,” he sees Jesus. In this we should know that Jesus is central to his church—in its ENTIRETY. To emphasize this point, we see the use of the number seven throughout this “apocalyptic” writing as the number of completeness. What an awesome reminder that *we* are not central to our church, *He* is. We should also be careful to realize that Jesus is not simply in the midst of River Oaks, but in the midst of his global, universal, ecumenical church. All lampstands will bow down to God’s glory. Amen.

REVELATION 2: WHEN JESUS HAS “A FEW THINGS AGAINST YOU”

2) “Hidden manna” ... “a white stone” ... “a new name”(Revelation 2:17). What? Have you ever considered this trio of spiritual gifts as something to desire?

3) Who was “Jezebel” in the Old Testament (1 Kings 16:31-33, 2 Kings 9:22)? What was Jezebel in Thyatira doing wrong (2:20-21)? How important is orthodox teaching today?

4) What can you do to “hold fast” (2:25)? Hold fast to what?

5) On several occasions Jesus refers to himself as “the One who has the sharp, two-edged sword” (1:16, 2:12, 2:16, 6:8, 19:15, 19:21). What does this sword represent? (See Hebrews 4:12 and Ephesians 6:17). Does this representation affect how we see the theme of this letter, or the value Jesus places on the sword?

TABLE TALK

Have you ever thought about what it must look like to God when he “stands in the midst” of his churches? Does it matter that we think or speak of the church as *our* church or *my* church or *your* church, rather than *his*, *God’s*, the *Lord’s* church? Do we sometimes forget that we are not the only “lampstand”? How can we live out a life that reaches across denominational lines for His glory? The letters to the churches should remind us that, despite external persecution and cultural deprivation, God is perhaps more concerned about the internal disorder we often find within the church itself.

R

unit 4

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. –Revelation 3:20

AHA! MOMENTS

Throughout all of our studies, I become most excited about the, “Aha!” moments. Those times when the light bulb comes on and God’s Word ~~speaks~~ SCREAMS at me with fresh insight and exciting revelation (wordplay intended). This week is one of those moments.

For years, I have assumed the common evangelical interpretation of the verse above, without giving any thought to critical study, or in reading it within the context for which it was written and as one for whom it was originally intended (rule number one for intentional Bible study). Perhaps some of you have done this as well with the verse above. You know, it clearly is intended to mean that Christ is knocking on the door of our heart, and if we hear his voice and respond by opening our heart to him, he will come in. Or does it?

Qualifier: The spirit of that evangelical application is probably still an accurate one. No need to change the message. But if we are using it to explain this passage of Scripture, then I think we are misinterpreting and misleading.

In context, the church at Laodicea had become tepid, lukewarm, of use for nothing. Just as a visitor who would taste of the water supply in his city, neither hot nor cold, and immediately spit it back out because of its horrid taste, so too was God ready to spit out this prideful, hypocritical, and useless church. In essence, Christ had been kicked out of his own church. They no longer saw a need for him. And so there He is, outside of the doors in Laodicea, speaking to believers, “knocking on the doors of that local church.” If only one would hear his voice again and open the door.

By the time this letter had reached Laodicea, all of the other churches would have likely read it and been warned as well. If this was not enough to turn their hearts, while also giving grave warning to others, then perhaps nothing short of a miracle would. May we never become so lukewarm that Jesus stands outside our door, only to knock and wait for us to open it.

STUDY QUESTIONS

REVELATION 3: LUKEWARM FAITH IS NO FAITH AT ALL

1) For each of the churches in chapter three, what did Jesus praise them for? What did Jesus have against them? Summarize their strengths and weaknesses.

- Sardis:

- Philadelphia:

- Laodicea:

2) In Revelation 3:14, we see three more titles for Christ. What is the significance of these titles? How do we interpret, “The beginning of the creation of God” (see John 1:2-4, Colossians 1:15-18, Hebrew 1:2)?

- 3) In context, why does God prefer that we are either “hot” or “cold”?
- 4) What is the appeal of living a lukewarm life? How can we avoid living a lukewarm life? How does 3:20 relate to being lukewarm?
- 5) Think about Jesus advising believers to “buy from me gold refined by fire,” and to “anoint your eyes with salve” (3:18). What might be the benefit or purpose of these? (See Job 23:10, Proverbs 27:21, Zechariah 13:9, John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 2:14-16)

TABLE TALK

In explaining the importance of living out our faith in obedience to God and with a passion for knowing him and his Word better, talk about the idea of lukewarm water. Have you ever taken a lukewarm/cold shower when you were expecting a hot one? Have you ever had a glass of lukewarm/hot water when you were expecting cold water? The idea is that both cold and hot water have distinct purposes, which can be used for necessary chores and luxury pleasures alike. However, lukewarm very rarely does. God is saying that we, as his church, are purposed to serve, love, and enjoy him. When we are not fulfilling our purpose, we are of little to no value.

As we conclude the letters to the churches, an additional thought this week might be to consider the idea of persecution and remaining steadfast as a local body of believers. Why does persecution typically lead to a more devoted church? Is there any mention of persecution or trials at the church in Laodicea? Think about early-century Rome, or even twentieth-century China. God's model for growth very rarely involves comfort. Thoughts? Implications?

R

unit 5

“In Revelation 4:10-11 we find, perhaps, the ultimate image of worship...these representatives of Christ’s church are clothed in white, and they’re even wearing crowns. Yet they fall down in reverence and worship before the eternal King who sits upon His throne. They cast all that they are and all that they have before Him, and they sing: You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power.”

–Dr. David Jeremiah

ENTERING THE THRONE ROOM

Moving from the letters to the churches, we now encounter two chapters that help to further set the stage for the Revelation drama to unfold. Chapters 4 and 5 provide breathtaking visions of worship and praise, and the church is reminded that God reigns in sovereign majesty. It is in these moments that Christ, the only one worthy, opens the sealed scroll and the great Revelation event will commence. But before moving to the drama itself, there are a few important themes to these chapters that make it central to the entire book.

First, in 4:6, John notes that “before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.” From ancient times, the seas were seen as chaotic, rough, evil, and a place of beasts. Yet in front of the throne, the sea is like glass. Whether this is a crystal floor or an actual sea, the indication is that in God’s throne room there is no chaos. God is, has been, and will always be in control.

The chapters also emphasize the worship and praise that exists in God’s presence. The churches and the creatures alike fall down to worship. They lay all that they are and have before Him.

Epigraph. Dr. David Jeremiah, *My Heart’s Desire: Living Every Moment in the Wonder of Worship* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 53-54.

But perhaps even most thrilling, and it is a concept that is at the very core of this book, is the word *throne*. It is used nearly 50 times in Revelation, and it speaks of “sovereignty, reign, and order.” Amidst the chaos, there is absolute kingship in heaven. With all that John marvels at, the central image is the throne and the fact that it is not vacant. Our God rules, and if the believers who read this book in the first-century church would take hold of that single image, then the panic, the persecution, the trials, and the despair of this world could be overcome. That message from the throne room is true for us today as well.

Finally, all heaven bursts out in praise (what a scene that must be!) as the Lamb who is worthy, the Lamb—whom we are reminded is also the Lion—takes the scroll (to be continued)....

REVELATION 4 AND 5: WORTHY IS THE LAMB

2) Did you notice the reference to the “rainbow around the throne?” What has the rainbow signified in times past (Ezekiel 1:28, Genesis 9:12-17)? What are “jasper” and “sardius” like?

3) Describe the four creatures in Revelation 4:7-8. What are they saying about the One seated on the throne? What are they tasked with doing?

- 4) Some liken the creatures to those of Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6, while others see them as the cherubim referenced in Psalm 99:1. How do you explain them? What is most important about them? Do the types of creatures/species represent all things?
- 5) Why does each elder have a “harp” and “golden bowl” (5:8)? How do these two tools serve the believer today? What might we deduce from these items being included with the “prayers of the saints”? (Think worship.)

TABLE TALK

Worship. It is central to the book of Revelation because it is central to being in the presence of God. What do you think about when you hear the word *worship*? What does it mean to be in a “worship service”? Have you ever thought about worship as extending past the time of praise? Do we actively worship in our time of Scripture and teaching, and as we observe the sacraments? Does worship only occur in the service? On Sundays? At church? Can we even imagine an eternity of falling before the throne and worshiping God? Spend time this week discussing worship and the different ways in which believers worship. Talk about our tendency to speak of right and wrong, rather than personal preferences. Also consider worship as not being concerned about our own comfort or entertainment, but rather whether or not God is pleased.

R

unit 6

“Ask most people—Christian or non-Christian—what they think the book of Revelation is about, and chances are they will tell you it is a book about the ‘end of the world.’ But this futurist view is only one of four traditional Christian ways of looking at the Bible’s most enigmatic book.”
-Plain Truth Ministries

DECODING THE SYMBOLS

As John watches the Lamb open the first of seven seals to the scroll in 6:1, the various **hermeneutical** theories for reading Revelation come into play. Of the many interpretive positions that are held for understanding the imagery and symbolism of chapters 6-20, four generally-accepted ones are taken most often. These four primary approaches are outlined below. It should also be noted that many contemporary scholars have found an acceptable interpretation by recognizing that perhaps no single theory is perfectly aligned, and therefore a more blended approach should be considered. In other words, many will claim a priority view, but—in practice—they find a combination of theories best suited for fully understanding this book. This approach, though not as specific or defined, makes up a fifth mainstream category of interpreters. It is likely that most of us will align ourselves closely with one of these five views.

Qualifier: Throughout our time in Revelation you will likely discover your pastors’ beliefs embedded in the teachings. However, for the purposes of this guide, we have intentionally allowed for personal study and group discussion to move you to your personal conclusions. We will continue to stress that Revelation is a complex book, and yet it is inspired Scripture, profitable for teaching, instructing, and reproving. Developing a personal theology towards it is of great benefit for all believers. We will do well to familiarize ourselves with the strengths and weaknesses of the different views. At the same time, we affirm that the meaning of the passage is conveyed by the Author and not determined by the reader. While we maintain a level of respect for the views of others, we recognize there is a “right” view, since the Holy Spirit inspired these words for a specific reason.

Epigraph. “4 Views of Revelation” from *Plain Truth Ministries Online*, March/April 2003. <http://www.ptm.org/03PT/MarApr/4ViewsRev.htm>

The primary interpretive approaches to the book of Revelation are:

- **Preterist:** belief that most of the prophecies were fulfilled during the time of the Roman Empire, with the majority of symbolism referencing the political and cultural evil of early centuries. This is the least-favored view, as it creates some conflict with dates in regards to correlating the events of Revelation against the suspected time of John's writing. Some preterists consider the vision to have spanned past, present, and future events, thus rectifying the date concerns.
- **Historicist:** belief that the prophecies have been fulfilled throughout history and are still being fulfilled today. Most of the **Reformation**-era leaders (Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Wesley, Knox, Wycliffe, Tyndale) generally held to a historicist position. They viewed Revelation as a survey of church history, from apostolic times to the present, with specific historical events aligning with the book's symbolism. Concerns with this view are that it is especially "euro-centric" and that it seems to rob any meaning from those to whom it was written.
- **Futurist:** belief that most prophecies beyond Revelation chapter 3 are yet to be fulfilled. This position sees the fulfillment of these events as coming at the end of history and ushering in the eschaton, or "last things." It originated in 1585 with a Spanish Jesuit priest for the purpose of refuting the Protestant reformers. Futurists tend to take a literal view of Revelation, and often ignore the style of writing God inspired John to incorporate into this book. **Rapture** and **dispensationalist** language are most prevalent with this approach.
- **Idealist:** belief that most prophecies portray the ongoing conflict of spiritual realities, and may have many fulfillments throughout history. The idealist scheme takes an **allegorical view** of those passages depicting chronological events (seals, trumpets, the emergence of the beast) and interprets central themes of good over evil, of Christ over Satan. At issue is the lack of support to Revelation's own claim to specific events (Revelation 1:1, for example).

REVELATION 6 TO 9: THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD

1) What is the significance of the “seven seals” (6:1)? Can you identify what occurs with each seal?

3) Who are the 144,000 Jewish believers mentioned in 7:3-4 and 9:4? Why were they “sealed”? Is there a correlation to the twelve tribes of Israel?

- 4) Chapter 7, verses 15-17, concludes with ten eternal blessings enjoyed by this great multitude. Can you list these blessings?
- 5) Why is there “silence in heaven for about half an hour” (8:1)? See Habakkuk 2:20, Zephaniah 1:7-8; Zechariah 2:13. What must that be like?
- 6) When reading of the seven trumpet blasts, do you see God speaking through the OT prophets? (Job 38:22-23; Ezekial 21:32, 38:22; Joel 2:30-31)

7) Do you believe the “locusts” (9:3, 7-11) represent insects, demons, a spiritual plague, or apache helicopters?

8) Some say Revelation 9:20-21 are two of the saddest verses in the entire Bible. Why? Do you see any parallel to 2 Thessalonians 2:11?

TABLE TALK

Unit 6 covers a lot of ground, so you might find it helpful to take more time this week to work through all of the study questions. I also encourage you to talk through the various interpretive theories that have been discussed. From your history, the Sunday message, your group discussion, or from personal research, how do you read these difficult passages in chapters 6 to 9? Have your thoughts changed since we began the study? Have you strengthened your convictions? In Unit 7, we will discuss the millennial views and how that might also help clarify what we are reading.

NOTES

R

unit 7

...seized Satan and bound him for a thousand years. –Revelation 20:2

...so that he might not deceive the nations until the thousand years were ended.
–Revelation 20:3

They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.
–Revelation 20:4

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.
–Revelation 20:5

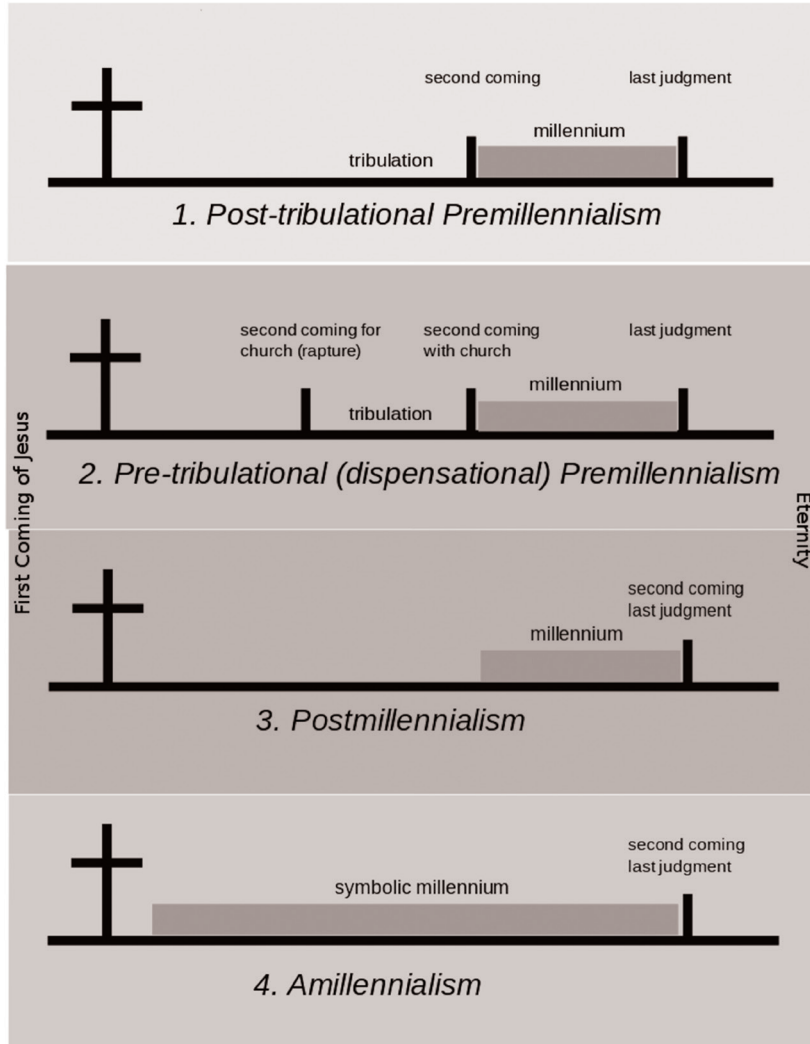
...and they will reign with him for a thousand years. –Revelation 20:6

...and when the thousand years are ended ... –Revelation 20:7

THE MILLENNIUM

The term *millennium* (Latin for “thousand years”) has generally been adopted to refer to the period of time found in chapter 20 of Revelation. Although we are not yet to this period in our study, the position held as it relates to the millennium can impact how you might interpret the judgments, the **tribulation**, and other key passages.

Comparison of Christian millennial teachings



In the entire Bible, only this single chapter, near the end of Revelation, mentions a thousand-year reign of Christ. Yet, as mentioned in the introduction, it is easily one of the most controversial chapters in Scripture. Many Christians have associated this chapter with the same period of time depicted in OT passages that describe a “golden age” of the Messiah (Psalm 72, Isaiah 2:1-4, Ezekial 34, Daniel 2). However, the chronological relation of this period to Christ’s Second Coming, and whether these passages are to be understood literally or in the spiritual sense (i.e., 2 Peter 3:8), have never been answered with unanimity by the church.

Three predominant views can be distinguished from one another. However, there are many variations within each. The general definitions for the millennial interpretations include:

1. **Premillennialism:** This view holds that we are currently in the church age (Christ’s first coming), and we are to expect a literal seven-year tribulation period before Christ’s second coming. Believers will either be raptured before (pre-tribulation premillennialism) or after (post-tribulation premillennialism) this seven-year period that ends in Armageddon. Christ and the saints will reign from his throne in Jerusalem for a literal thousand years. That will be followed by the Final Judgment, in which all the dead will be raised and judged, and God will usher in a new heaven and new earth. Premillennialists are often accused of having a pessimistic outlook; however they will point to Scripture depicting that outlook as a promised reality.

2. Postmillennialism: Unlike premillennialism, this view has an extremely positive outlook. As the church continues to grow and prosper, a massive conversion will occur, with Jesus drawing all people to himself. There will be a literal thousand-year period of peace on earth. At the end of this period, Satan will make one last attempt to rule and will be thwarted by Christ's Second Coming and Final Judgment. This view does not believe in a literal rapture or tribulation period.
3. Amillennialism: (means "no millennium") This view does not take literally the thousand-year reign. The symbolic millennium refers to the current age, which Christ ushered in with his "binding of Satan" at the cross (Revelation 20:2). There is neither rapture nor tribulation, although the church suffers now the effects of sin and Satan's evil. These trials will escalate until like "fire from heaven that devours the wicked" (Revelation 20:9). Christ's Second Coming will bring the Final Judgment and God's new heaven and earth. Those in this position are said to live in hope, but expect the worst.

REVELATION 12: THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

- 44-

4) Is Revelation 12:14 literal, or is it depicting something else? (See Exodus 19:4).

5) Who are the “rest of her children who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (12:17)?

TABLE TALK

Have you or anyone you know ever read the *Left Behind*³ books or watched the movies? What about any other “end times” form of entertainment? Do you think they help us understand Revelation? Do you think they contribute to misinterpretations? From the overview of millennial theories, can you determine which view these movies or books have taken? Have you formed any personal convictions in terms of pre-, post-, or amillennial positions?

3 Tim, LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Left Behind series (Carol Streams: Tyndale House)

NOTES

R

unit 8

This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666. –Revelation 13:18

THE NUMBER OF MAN

It is probably prudent to begin with a qualifying statement on how unwise it is to speculate too much on the meaning of the number “666.” Even John Nelson Darby, the nineteenth-century theologian considered to be the father of modern dispensationalism and futurism, acknowledged that—in regards to this number—he has no idea what it represents:

I confess my ignorance as to the number six hundred and sixty-six. I cannot present you with anything satisfactory to myself. We find, answering to the number six hundred and sixty-six, the words apostasy and tradition, but I cannot say anything positive on the point.⁴

That said, there is one generally-accepted suggestion that seems to make most sense in context. The number six falls one short of seven, the number most often referred to as God’s perfect number. Thus, six represents the imperfection of man and highlights the fact that the Antichrist will indeed be a man and not of the perfect God. Repeating this “number of a man” three times would seem to reiterate and underscore man’s identity.

Aside from equating 666 to that of imperfect man, various theories have used Greek, Latin, and Hebrew alphabet designations to “discover” the name of the Antichrist. The most popular adaptations have resulted in equating the Antichrist to Caesar Nero by using the Hebrew letters for his name, to the Pope by translating the Latin numeral values to the official Latin title of Vicarius filii Dei, and even to the reincarnation of Judas Iscariot with a similar Greek letter–number system.

⁴ Gregg, 305.

STUDY QUESTIONS

REVELATION 12 AND 13: SATAN AND HIS ANGELS

- 1) Chapter 12 holds a key New Testament theological truth. In two visions, we are told of Satan's attempt to destroy Christ, resulting in his own defeat instead. This is consistent with the recurring NT framework of the "**already/not yet**." Christ has come (*already*) and we are living in the end times (*already*), but he is coming again (*not yet*) and he will bring final victory (*not yet*). Here Satan is revealed as a defeated foe (*already*) whose final end is still to come (*not yet*). So we can rejoice because the "salvation has come ... our God" (*already*), yet there is woe to the church because Satan is taking vengeance on God's people (*not yet*). Does this make sense? Does it change how we view this period of the first coming of Christ if it means we are living in the "already" today?

- 2) Who are the first and second beasts in chapter 13? Is there a difference?

3) Where have you heard, “If anyone has an ear, let him hear,” before? Is there anything missing from this statement? Why might that be?

4) How might the early church have understood Revelation 13:14 and other references to the images of the beast and the requirement to worship the image? Does this affect your understanding of the preterist’s view?

5) What are your thoughts on the mark of the beast—666?

TABLE TALK

Economic and societal persecution has historically been as prevalent towards Christians as that of physical persecution. Chapter 13 tells of a time when, unless one bows to the image and takes the mark of the beast, there will be extreme limits on what one can buy and sell. What might that be like? Should that move us in any way regarding present-day social and economic persecution? Have you come across any additional explanations to the number 666?

NOTES

R

unit 9

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim. -Revelation 14:6

μεσουράνημα (*mesouranēōema*)

directly overhead-this word was used in Greek to indicate the moment for which the sun was at its zenith, the midheaven that was highest and brightest, allowing the most people to hear and see

A FINAL CHANCE

The vision of these three angels urging people to change their allegiance from the beast to the Lamb is a powerful passage. We see in 14:6-13 a last call to repent and believe, as the first angel shares with the whole world the good news of the Lamb. He says to “fear God and give him glory ... judgment has come ... worship him.”

But then apparently because not all, or maybe not any, respond to the first angel, a second angel appears. This time the message is that the great symbol of idolatry, false religion, self-pleasure, and fornication, has been defeated. In other words, the one to whom unbelievers had looked is no more; come to the One who will always be.

Yet again, this apparently required a third angel to appear and this time the warning is more severe. There is a definite progression in the intensity as the angels give all of the people their version of the parental, “I’m going to count to three ... 1, 2, 3”!

There is a pause from the angels, and a voice from heaven provides assurance that all who die in the Lord will “be blessed ... and shall rest from their labors.” Isn’t that a comforting thought today?

Finally, pause is over, and this time an angel appears with a sickle, and it is not pleasant for those who did not listen.

STUDY QUESTIONS

REVELATION 13 AND 14: ENDURANCE THROUGH TRIBULATION

- 1) Why is it significant that “the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion” (14:1)? Is this in heaven or on earth? (See Isaiah 24:23, Psalm 48:1-2.) Why were 144,000 with the Lamb? Did they have the mark of the beast?
- 2) Describe all that John heard as “they sang a new song” (14:2-3).
- 3) What is John referring to in 14:4 relative to the 144,000? In what way are they “first fruits to God and to the Lamb”? To what extent are we reserved for God (James 1:18)?

4) What are the messages of the three angels (14:6-12)? Who is “Babylon the great”? Do the angels want all the people to fear Satan or fear God? Why?

5) How might 14:12-13 encourage us to persevere even now?

6) There is a great harvest occurring in 14:14-20, but instead of grain, what is being harvested?

TABLE TALK

Do you sometimes need a call for endurance to “keep the commandments of God and your faith in Jesus” vibrant and full? How can we get that encouragement today? How can we provide that encouragement to others? This chapter, regardless of our interpretation, should remind us that God calls us to share the Gospel, to give the warning, to provide the encouragement. It should also remind us that judgment, in whatever form or fashion, will be real. How do we live in light of that knowledge?

NOTES

R

unit 10

“I remember once in the Holy Land seeing a sign in the shape of an arrow along a road. It said, ‘Armageddon, 4 kilometers.’ If ever there was a sign that made you wonder whether you wanted to continue down a road, this was it.”

–Benedict J. Groeschel

GOD’S WRATH

One of the confusing aspects in reading Revelation can be in keeping up with the seals, trumpets, and bowls. Realizing that they may or may not represent a chronological accuracy, they are nonetheless provided to us in an ordered pattern. An easy way to remember the sequence is that the first six seals are opened, with their impact felt over one-fourth of the earth, and then the seventh seal results in silence and brings before God the seven trumpets. These seven trumpets blast forth calamities, with their impact felt over one-third of the earth, and the seventh one gives way to the seven bowls of wrath. These bowls are poured out over all the earth until the seventh one brings about God’s proclamation: “It is done,” indicating that final victory is near. The chart on the following page gives us a high-level overview:

Epigraph. Benedict Groeschel, *After This Life: What Catholics Believe about What Happens Next*, from *GoodReads*: https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/44285, Benedict_J_Groeschel

OVERVIEW OF SEALS, TRUMPETS, AND BOWLS

SEVEN SEALS (one-fourth of earth)					
Seal 1	white horse/conquest				
Seal 2	red horse/war				
Seal 3	black horse/famine				
Seal 4	pale horse/death				
Seal 5	the martyrs				
Seal 6	earthquake				
Seal 7	silence →→→	SEVEN TRUMPETS (one-third of earth)			
		Trumpet 1	hail and fire		
		Trumpet 2	sea to blood		
		Trumpet 3	water poisoned		
		Trumpet 4	darkness		
		Trumpet 5	locusts (first woe)		
		Trumpet 6	angels kill men (second woe)		
		Trumpet 7	worship/natural disasters →→→	SEVEN BOWLS (all of earth)	
				Bowl 1	sores
				Bowl 2	sea to blood
				Bowl 3	water to blood
				Bowl 4	sun scorches
				Bowl 5	darkness
				Bowl 6	river dries up
				Bowl 7	“It is done!”

STUDY QUESTIONS

REVELATION 15 AND 16: WORSHIP IN HEAVEN, WRATH ON EARTH

- 1) Revelation 15:3-8 refers to Moses and the sanctuary of the Old Testament. What is meant by these references? Why is the temple “filled with smoke” (15:8)?
- 2) What are the seven bowls of God’s wrath reminiscent of (16:2-12)?
- 3) Why is 16:15 inserted into the middle of these plagues? What does it mean spiritually to “keep one’s garments on”?

4) Where is **Armageddon**? Why do you think this final battle will occur here?

5) Upon pouring out the final bowl, God says, “It is done!” This is more literally translated, “It has been and will remain done.” What does this remind us of? What assurances can we take in this?

TABLE TALK

Is it any wonder that today so many refuse to repent and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and Savior when, we are shown, even amongst plagues and the world's end, there are still those that blaspheme God and resist. Why is that? There are theological reasons to this to be certain, but are there reasons you can think of as to why man resists God? We have reached Armageddon in our study. What do you usually think of when you hear that term?

R

unit 11

Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. –Genesis 11:9

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it. –2 Kings 25:1

Then the king gave Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego even greater authority in the land of Babylon. –Daniel 3:30

THE FALL OF BABYLON

Particularly in her fall, the Babylon referred to in chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation is probably not the historical city of Babylon that is found some 300 times throughout the Bible. Though it possibly could speak to the actual Babylon (located in what is modern-day Iraq), most commentators view John's Revelation as referencing either Rome, some future city of excess and sin, or a symbol for all that is evil and remains in the world at this final hour. Some commentators have called Babylon both "every city" and "no city" at the same time.

But if it is not the actual Babylon, then why take that name? It seems that Corinth would have been equally displeasing to God. And why would John have not felt inspired to explicitly name Rome as the "great prostitute"? Even the early Roman historian Tacitus described Rome as the place "where all the horrible and shameful things in the world congregate and find a home" ⁵

5 *Internet Sacred Text Archive*, s.v. "The Works of Tacitus," tr. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/tac/a15040.htm>

Regardless, it does seem apparent from both church and secular manuscripts that Babylon would have been an identifiable code name to first-century readers who knew the Babylon of old—a city of great military might, who used her political-economic power to oppress others. As the world’s largest city between the years 600–300 BC, Babylon was the symbol of excess, pleasure, and corruption. This, coupled with the history that can be found in Old Testament Scripture (most of it not exactly favorable to God’s people), would make the name “Babylon” ideal for symbolism.

So in a time when Rome would have been referred to as a modern-day Babylon, history would bring about many additional “modern-day Babylons.” And it’s from this perspective that we see the likely culmination of all ungodly excesses and powers falling under God’s great wrath.

REVELATION 18: THE FALL OF BABYLON

2) Does the angel's proclamation in 18:2-3 help you picture the evil that took place in Babylon? Is it too much of a stretch to see examples of this today? How should we, as believers, respond?

3) With the fifth bowl, the world was plunged into darkness, but now the earth is made bright. How?

- 4) What is a possible explanation for God's expression of vengeance in 18:6-7? Can you recall any other time that retaliation has been spoken of in these terms? Would Romans 12:17-19 apply?
- 5) Notice how chapter 18 closes, specifically in verse 24. Why do you think it closes this way (think about the originally-intended audience)?
- 6) Bonus Question: In chapter 17, verse 5 speaks to the name on the woman's forehead. Why would first-century readers know instantly what this was alluding to?

TABLE TALK

As believers we have been “sent into the world, but we are not of this world” (John 17:16-18). As you look at the way Babylon is described, does it make you think any differently about how comfortable we can sometimes become in the world? This is not a loaded question, and the yes/no is not as important as the fact that we at least consider the practices, behaviors, and attitudes that Babylon perpetuates. It seems that the angels are pleased to inform her that there will be no more of the music, the lights, the merchants, the sorcery, the deceit, the wealth It is done.

R

unit 12

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

*I can only imagine when that day comes,
And I find myself standing in the Son
I can only imagine when all I will do,
Is forever, forever worship you
I can only imagine,
Surrounded by your glory, What will my heart feel
Will I dance for your Jesus, Or in awe of you be still
Will I stand in your presence
Or to my knees will I fall
Will I sing hallelujah
Will I be able to speak at all
I can only imagine*

-Mercy Me ⁶

⁶ Bart Millard, composer and writer, *The Worship Project*. "I Can Only Imagine" (Released 1999: INO/Curb Records).

IN HIS PRESENCE

For the analytical and curious sorts, chapters 20 and 21 are full of detail and specifics. From the measurements of the city to the types of construction materials to the specificity of judgments, there is a lot of information to consider. Not that all of our questions are answered, or that we are completely clear on how exactly it will all work, but in these two chapters we move from the disturbing realities of wrath and war to the beauty of heaven and the anticipation of our eternal home. We see evil and sin forever gone, and we now realize that the culmination of God's great plan of reconciliation is occurring. He is in control, on the throne, and reigning, both now and forever. We can set aside theories of interpretation and views on tribulation, and we can all worship in his presence. Can you imagine?

REVELATION 20 AND 21: HEAVEN

2) Why does God allow Satan to be released from the Abyss (20:7)? Are there reasons given in Scripture? How is Satan successful in his attempt to “deceive the nations”? What does that tell us about the nature of man?

-75-

4) Where will we live for eternity: heaven, a new heaven, or a new earth? Perhaps it's a renovated "Jerusalem" (21:1-10)? Ultimately, regardless of its GPS coordinates, what makes eternity paradise (21:3, 22)?

5) What are your thoughts of the eight evil characteristics listed in 21:8? Are these consistent throughout all of Scripture? Throughout the New Testament?

6) What does God say will be absent in paradise (21:22-27)?

TABLE TALK

As you read the description of these final days, what surprises you most? What excites you most about the new heaven and new earth? If you could ask John one question about what he saw—but didn't record—of this eternal paradise, what would that be? What do you imagine it might be like in the presence of God? We are told that it is never night, yet there is no need for nature's light, the sun, or the moon. How does that work? In 21:25, we are told this new city will have gates, but no need to close them—no more keys, locks, or alarms!

R

unit 13

In the beginning

...The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen

BOOKENDS TO THE GREAT REDEMPTION PLAN

In the beginning—exactly 54 verses in two chapters—there existed a garden paradise in a newly-created world. In this garden existed humanity in perfect relationship with God, communing with him daily and enjoying his pleasure. This existence was blessed, not cursed, and provided man with access to the Tree of Life (a source of eternal existence).

Enter sin—and the termination of this garden existence. Now God will orchestrate his plan for reconciling humanity, and we will see it unveiled in his Word. Through the inspiration and preservation of an entire narrative, picking up in verse 55, and continuing for the next 31,000 verses, the **canon** of Scripture methodically brings us to this point of restoration.

Arriving at the conclusion—the final 48 verses across two chapters—we are offered great hope. Man has once again been brought into perfect a relationship with God—an existence no longer accursed ... one in which communing with God no longer takes place across a divide where we hide ourselves from God's face. And there, in this new garden, is the Tree of Life—an eternal blessing to man once more. Greater still is the one thing missing from our opening scene ... the snake. In this final victory, we are assured that our new existence will be free from evil. Sin will not exist, forever and ever.

Revelation is important because all of Scripture is important. But Revelation does something worth noting. Revelation brings the narrative of Scripture full circle. Revelation demonstrates that we were not abandoned, even after we chose to disobey. God still desired a perfect relationship with us. Revelation shows us that throughout history, all of God's people—from Abraham to you and me—have played a critical part in this plan. Revelation provides us with a view of how God intended to be worshiped by His creation, so that we might remain ready for that final trumpet and His return. And in bookending God's Word as it has been provided, this *Omega* to the Genesis *Alpha*, Revelation amazes us as we marvel at the completeness of God's Word.

REVELATION 22: THE LAST PRAYER

1) Is it possible that the reference to the saints reigning “forever and ever” (22:5) might look something like that in Genesis 1:26? What does this imply about our heavenly purpose?

2) Why is the phrase, “I am coming quickly,” repeated three times (22:7, 12, 20)? It’s been almost 2,000 years. Is that soon? How should this word be understood?

3) Consider 2 Peter 3:11-18. Do we live each day with this thought? Why or why not?

4) What is meant by “adding to this book” in 22:18? What is the consequence of this? What “book” does this refer to?

5) Revelation 22:17 speaks of the one who is spiritually thirsty. What is the “water of life” he is referring to? In terms of thirst, have you ever been spiritually thirsty? Where do you drink?

TABLE TALK

Having completed this thirteen-week series on Revelation, how would you describe this book to someone who says, “Revelation is too difficult; it’s a bunch of sci-fi language and bad stuff.” What has been the most impactful new insight that you have gained through this study? Has Revelation affected the way that you worship? The way you anticipate the future? Have you shifted any of your previously-held beliefs in terms of interpretation? And lastly, have you (at least once) visualized yourself standing inside the throne room and felt the need to fall to your knees? If not, you might want to read chapter 4 one more time.

Come Lord Jesus. Amen.

NOTES

sources consulted

Bock, Darrell, ed. *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

Burge, Gary M., Lynn H. Cohick, Gene L. Green. *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Cruse, C.F. *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014.

Dowley, Tim, ed. *Introduction to the History of Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.

Elwell, Walter A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

Fee, Gordon and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

Flowers, Sonny. "Introduction to Revelation: Teaching Outline"/Dr. Stout NT 650. Carolina Evangelical Divinity School.

"4 Views of Revelation." *Plain Truth Ministries Online*. March/April 2003. <http://www.ptm.org/03PT/MarApr/4ViewsRev.htm> (Accessed December 2015)

Grams, Dr. Rollin. *Cities of the Revelation and the Book of Revelation*. Lectures 13.1 and 13.2 of New Testament Survey, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, attended July 23, 2014.

- Gregg, Steve, ed. *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997.
- Groeschel, Benedict. *After This Life: What Catholics Believe about What Happens Next* from *GoodReads*. https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/44285, Benedict_J_Groeschel (Accessed December 2015)
- Holmes, Michael W. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians). Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.
- Internet Sacred Text Archive*, s.v. "The Works of Tacitus." Translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/tac/a15040.htm> (Accessed December 2015)
- Jeremiah, Dr. David. *My Heart's Desire: Living Every Moment in the Wonder of Worship*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002.
- LaHaye, Tim, and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind* series. Carol Streams: Tyndale House, 2007.
- Lamorak. "Millennial Views." Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0. *Commons*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Millennial_views.svg#/media/File:Millennial_views.svg (Accessed December 2015)
- MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Study Bible* (ESV). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2011.
- Millard, Bart, composer and writer. "I Can Only Imagine." Artist: Mercy Me. *The Worship Project*. Released 1999; INO/Curb Records.

NOTES

NOTES

