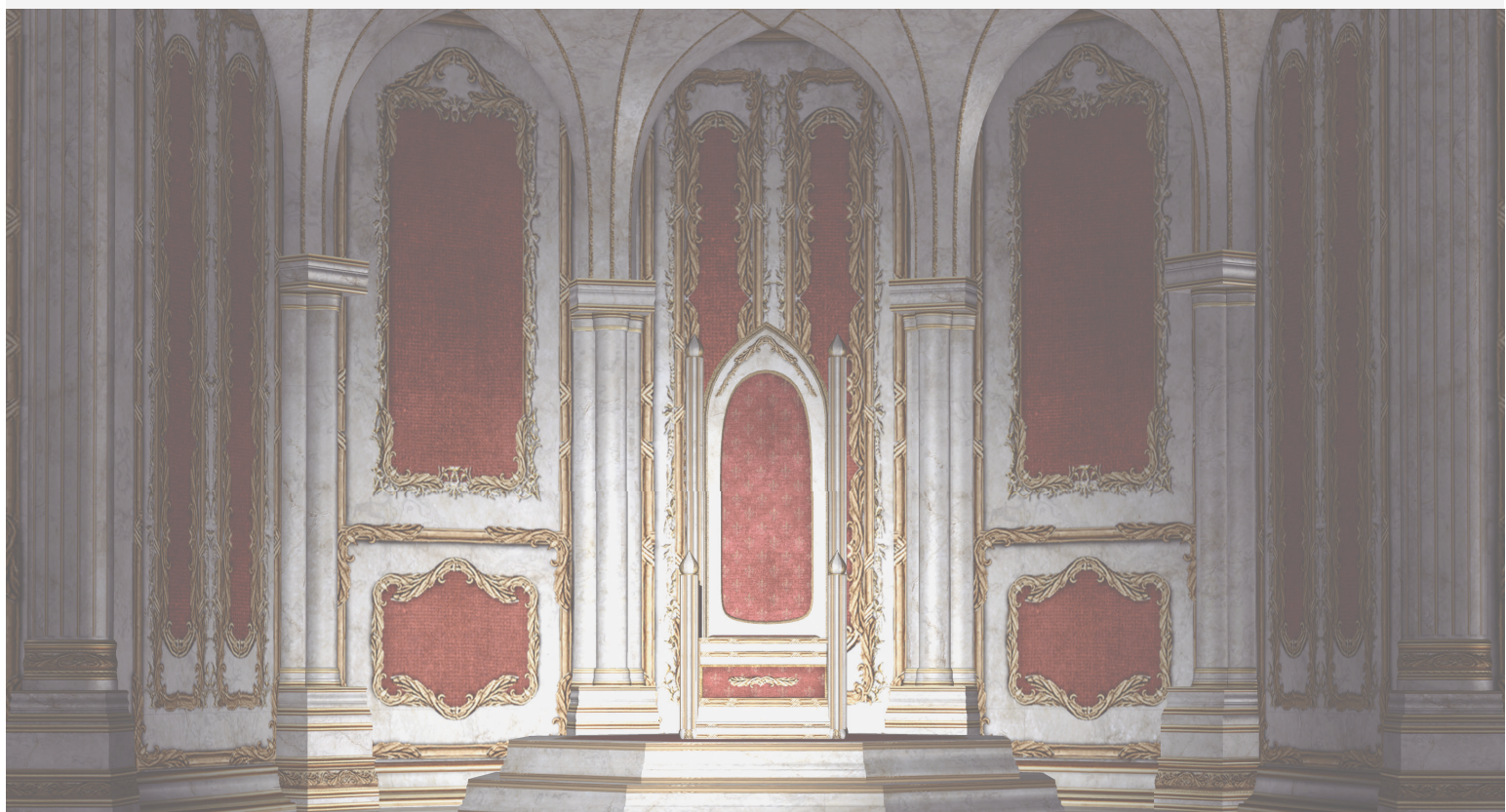




STUDY GUIDE

TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION



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INTRODUCTION TO STUDYING REVELATION

Many people consider the book of Revelation intimidating. But God meant it to be profitable for us (2 Tim. 3:16–17). If we have a proper starting point, it can be both exciting and spiritually edifying. This booklet is meant to provide a short introduction and then questions for each major section of the book of Revelation. It is suitable for use in individual study or a group study. The questions are grouped according to the paragraphs of Revelation, so that people can choose to study a single paragraph during an individual or group study, or go over several paragraphs at one sitting. In most cases, study can begin with the introductory material here, before proceeding to study the individual paragraphs and chapters.

People who want more information can turn to commentaries on Revelation. I myself have provided a short introduction and commentary: Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000). For fuller treatment, you may turn to Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001). The best technical commentary is G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999). This last commentary is also available in shortened form, about half the size of the original: G. K. Beale and David Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

The Purpose of Revelation

Many people either fear the Book of Revelation or have an unhealthy interest in it. But God designed this book for a very different purpose. Revelation is meant to produce in you comfort, courage, hope, and praise. Do you believe that?

Look at the very beginning of Revelation. Rev. 1:3 says, “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.” God knew that many people would feel timid about this book—that many would say to themselves, “I can’t understand it.” So he gave you special encouragement to read it. Make a point of reading it once or more during the next few months.

In the verse I just quoted (1:3) we already receive a hint about the contents of Revelation. God tells us to “keep what is written in it.” Revelation does not give us information just to tickle our fancy. We are meant to “keep” it, to take things to heart. We ought to be transformed by what we read, to become more faithful servants of Christ. The Book of Revelation is a very practical book.

Note also what it says in 1:1: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.” To whom is the Book of Revelation written? Not to PhDs, to experts, to prophecy fans, to a narrow inner circle of specialists. God writes it to “his

servants”—the servants of Jesus Christ. If you are a follower of Christ, this book is for you. You can understand it, because God knows how to communicate to you. In addition, let me say the obvious. The Book of Revelation is a revelation, “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1). “Revelation” means an unveiling, a disclosure, a display of who God is and what he promises to do. The Book is not a concealment, a puzzle, a riddle, as some people think. It is not a puzzle book but a picture book. Its message is so clear that a child can grasp it and be encouraged.

1. What is the purpose of Revelation?
2. In what way is it accessible to ordinary readers?
3. How might reading it be an encouragement?

The Message of Revelation

How can I make such bold claims? I will tell you. The message of Revelation is this: God rules history, and he will bring it to its consummation in Christ. The heart of this message is expressed in Revelation 4 and 5. John is given a vision of God seated on his throne (4:2). Here is the king of the universe. He is no idle monarch. His will and his orders created the universe long ago (4:11). His will now is that the whole universe should join in praise of the Lamb (5:11–14). From his throne issue the orders for governing history up to its climax, the time when Christ appears. At that time we will say, “Hallelujah! For our Lord God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come” (19:6–7). God shows us in Revelation how he is in control, how powerful he is, and what the future must bring. We come to know that God’s promises are trustworthy and that his power is invincible. Hence we can begin to praise God even now, and to sing “Hallelujah!” over his reign. Do you begin to see how encouraging the Book of Revelation can be?

Look again at Revelation 1:1. God shows “to his servants the things that must soon take place.” What is the word “must” doing there? Things “must” take place only because God rules over history and makes sure that they do take place. In the very first verse of Revelation God already hints at the theme that will develop in the course of this book. As we move further into chapter 1, God is introduced as “him who is and who was and who is to come” (1:4). God is. He is self-sustaining, all-sufficient. God was. He always has been, from eternity. He is the creator and owner of all things. God “is to come.” The future that must come is the future defined by God. God will come himself! God will appear, and will ring down the curtain on the course of history.

Revelation is above all a God-centered book. This book is designed to stir your imagination. It sets before you in indelible pictures the truth that we most need to take to heart: God is the King! All the nations are as nothing before him (Isa. 40:17). “He does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’ ” (Dan. 4:35). His goodness, his magnificence, his beauty, his bounty, are the source of all blessing (Rev. 22:1, 4:2). The climax of history comes when “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords, who will wage war against God’s enemies until all are subdued to

him (Rev. 19:16; 1 Cor. 15:24–25). We find our fulfillment as we serve and praise this marvelous King (Rev. 19:1–10).

1. What is the message of Revelation in a nutshell?
2. How does the message of Revelation have a practical thrust?
3. How do you react to the message of God's rule over history?

How to Read Revelation

How then do you read the Book of Revelation?

- Read it prayerfully. Jesus Christ is the source of this Book (Rev. 1:1). He alone can give you spiritual eyes and hearts to understand it. Pray to the Lord that he would interpret this book to your heart.
- Focus on the central theme. Read Revelation to see what it says about God ruling history and bringing it to consummation in Christ. Read for the big picture. Don't be discouraged when you do not understand some detail. Most people who get into difficulty fail right here. They want to understand the details and to predict future historical pinpricks before they have even begun to absorb the central message. They are doing things the wrong way around. Nobody can properly understand the details of a book without first understanding the main points.
- Be God-centered. Otherwise, you will be like someone who takes holds of a knife by the blade instead of the handle. Or you will be like someone who tries to understand a beautiful painting by looking in a magnifying glass at each blob of paint on the canvas.
- Focus on the hope for the coming of Christ. Watch how the whole book points forward to Christ's return.
- Let the images "soak into you." Get involved in the Book. Don't try to puzzle it out. Enjoy it. Sing about it. Cheer for the saints. Detest the beast. Rejoice in God's power and glory. Praise the Lamb.
- Pay attention to Old Testament themes and images that are used in a fresh way. The book of Revelation has many allusions to Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and the breadth of the Old Testament. Becoming familiar with the Old Testament will help you deepen your appreciation of Revelation, even though the basic message of Revelation comes through to all the servants of Christ.
- Recognize that the central part of the book is a prophetic vision given by God to John. Prophetic visions are full of symbols. They are symbolic representations of spiritual truth, not photographic copies of events.
- Use this book in times of distress, persecution, and death. Christians of all ages testify that it speaks powerfully to people in deep trouble.

1. What are some guiding principles in reading Revelation?
2. How do these principles help to keep readers on track with the message?

The Organization of Revelation

Many people feel lost when they read Revelation. One vision comes after another until they are disoriented. Actually, the book of Revelation is carefully and beautifully organized. It is like a Persian rug. To those who become familiar with it, it reveals an intricately interwoven pattern of exquisite beauty. But the patterning is so complex that a newcomer can feel the need for guidance.

The theme of Revelation is—remember?—that God rules history and will bring it to its consummation in Christ. So what is the most important event? Naturally, the second coming of Christ, which brings history to its climax. When we mark off the descriptions of the Second Coming, Revelation divides itself neatly into parts. Seven visionary histories each lead up to a description of the Second Coming. Before these histories begin, there are two introductory sections, containing a vision of Christ and his messages to the churches. Here is an outline.

The first part of the outline is based roughly on Rev. 1:19. Part III of the outline is divided so that each “cycle” leads up to a description of the Second Coming. Each cycle pictures for us some aspect of the events leading up to the Second Coming. But each takes a different focus. In addition, the later cycles contain more intense judgments and lead up to the Second Coming more quickly. By the time that we come to cycle 6, the whole cycle focuses on the Second Coming rather than the events leading up to it.

To organize your thinking about these cycles in a convenient way, use the analogy of warfare. In cycle 1, the 7 seals, God sends out 4 horsemen, indicating that he commissions the warfare. Cycle 2 describes effects on the earth. In cycle 3, symbolic histories indicate the depth of the conflict and opposition between the two armies and their leaders. Cycle 4 describes further effects on earth, more intense and comprehensive than before. Cycles 5, 6, and 7 describe the final elimination of the opponents: the elimination of Babylon the seductress (17:1–19:10), the elimination of the powerful persecuting foe (the beast, 19:11–21), and the elimination of the ultimate source of evil (Satan, 20:1–21:8).

1. What is the overall organization of the book of Revelation?
2. How does this organization help you understand where the book is going?

Holy War

In Revelation two kingdoms and two armies are poised opposite to one another. The kingdom of God will triumph, but it is opposed by the kingdom of Satan. God controls the whole course of the battle, but it is waged partly among unseen angelic and demonic powers who operate alongside and behind human beings. Human beings have their own role to play, because their commitments and actions display their loyalty to God or to Satan.

We must realize that in all of history, this spiritual battle is going on. Revelation enlightens our spiritual eyes to see the true state of affairs in this universe and in our lives.

The principal actors characteristically appear in visionary form in Revelation. They are brought

on stage one by one, as if in a drama. Then God pronounces judgment on them, in the form of rewards or punishments. They are then taken off stage in the reverse order, as the following outline shows.

The characters form two groups. God and his servants are opposed by Satan and his servants, who endeavor to counterfeit God's work. We may diagram the relations as follows:

1. What is the most basic conflict in Revelation?
2. Who participates on the two sides of the conflict?
3. Where are you in the conflict?
4. How does understanding the conflict help in applying the message to ourselves?

The Challenge of Revelation

Revelation challenges you to see the world and your life for what it is: a scene of spiritual warfare. There are no noncombatants, no truces, no mercy from the Satanic opponents. But there is victory, brought to a climax when Christ returns. In the meantime, you must be loyal to Christ, your commander and chief. You must obey him, worship him, honor him, praise him without compromise in all your life.

You must beware primarily of two kinds of threats: from the Beast and from the Prostitute Babylon. The Beast represents persecuting power. The state, especially in totalitarian countries, threatens to make it difficult for Christians, to impoverish them, to cause them pain, even to kill them if they do not compromise. You must not give in to the Beast, and you must pray that your brothers and sisters in other countries would be strong in faith, looking to their reward from Christ.

The Prostitute represents seduction by pleasure, prosperity, and economic advantage (see Rev. 17:4, 18:3,19). In Western countries, the blandishments of unbridled pleasure seduce Christians into surrendering their purity. You must stir yourself up to see the consequences of unlawful pleasure (18:4–8), the beauty of holiness (19:7–8), and the superiority of the lasting pleasures of fellowship with God (22:1–5). Pray that your fellow Christians also would be pure in all their lives.

1. In what ways does the spiritual conflict appear in our own times and cultures?
2. How does Revelation help us to respond?

Major Options for Interpreting Revelation

Over the course of church history, interpreters of Revelation have disagreed with one another primarily about the question of the time of fulfillment of the prophecies of Revelation. There are four major schools of interpretation.

First, the Roman Empire interpretation (which scholars call "preterist") believes that the bulk of the prophecies were fulfilled in the first few centuries, especially in connection with the fall of the

Roman Empire. The beast of Rev. 13:1–8 represents the Roman Empire in its persecution of Christians. An alternate form of this approach connects the prophecies primarily with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Second, the Final Crisis interpretation (“futurist”) believes that the prophecies will be fulfilled at the second coming of Christ and in the events of final crisis immediately preceding the Second Coming. The beast represents the final Anti-Christ who will severely persecute God’s people during the final crisis.

Third, the Church History interpretation (“historicist”) believes that the prophecies are fulfilled in the history of the church from the first century until the Second Coming. The narrative of Revelation is assumed to be in exact chronological order. The early chapters (for example, Revelation 2, 3, and 6) relate to events in the first few centuries, the middle chapters (Revelation 13) relate to events of the Reformation, and the later chapters (Revelation 18, 19) related to events immediately before the Second Coming. The beast represents the Pope in Reformation times.

Fourth, the General Principle interpretation (“idealist”) believes that the prophecies depict general patterns of conflict that repeatedly occur throughout the period between the first and second comings of Christ. The beast represents state persecution of Christians throughout this age.

In my opinion, all of these except the Church History interpretation have considerable merit. The Roman Empire interpretation is relevant, in view of the detailed knowledge of the seven churches displayed in Revelation 2–3, the threat of persecution that those churches experienced (2:10, 13), and the thematic connections between Revelation 2–3 and the rest of the book. We cannot ignore that Christ was expressing his concern and encouragement to those people back there, not merely writing directly to us now.

The Final Crisis interpretation is relevant, in view of the fervent hope that Rev. 22:20 expresses for the Second Coming, and the way in which earlier parts of the book all lead up to passages that use language associated with the Second Coming. Second Thessalonians 2 clearly indicates that a final crisis preceding the Second Coming will involve a climactic outbreak of a pattern of wickedness that exists earlier (2 Thess. 2:6–8).

The General Principle interpretation is relevant, in view of the fact that Revelation claims to be relevant to all the servants of Christ (1:1), and in view of the fact that Paul teaches us explicitly that there is a general pattern of conflict (2 Thess. 2:7). The General Principle approach also explains how the Roman Empire interpretation and the Final Crisis interpretation can in a sense both be right, since both are looking at one manifestation of the general principle. Part of the power of the symbolism of Revelation lies in its fluidity: it is capable of being applied to a multiplicity of cases through church history, and thereby serving to encourage and instruct Christians in every generation. Even the Church History interpretation is not entirely wrong, since it too finds events that are one manifestation of the principles of Revelation.

In view of the element of truth in these approaches, I recommend that we anticipate the possibility of fourfold fulfillment of the great bulk of prophecies in Revelation. (1) Any particular prophecy finds a fulfillment of a preliminary kind in the Roman Empire period. (2) The prophecy finds a climactic fulfillment in the Final Crisis. (3) The prophecy finds fulfillment throughout the age, in that it sets forth a general pattern delineating the character of spiritual war throughout. (4) The prophecy finds fulfillment now, in our time. Our time is not necessarily special, but simply because we live when we

live, we are obliged to think through with greater care what the implications of Scripture are for our present situation.

1. What are the four major options for interpreting the book of Revelation that have been adopted over the course of church history?
2. Which have you heard about most from popular media?
3. In what way might there be some truth in each of them?

For Further Reading

Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000.
Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001).

1

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

Chapter 1 is important. It has a prologue in 1:1–3 that explains the origin of the book and sets the tone for the whole of the book of Revelation. It introduces the human author (John) and Christ in his glory (1:12–20), who will give messages to the seven churches (Rev. 2–3) and is the key to the book (Rev. 5:5).

(An individual or a group studying Revelation can choose to take a whole chapter at a time, or go more slowly by taking paragraphs one by one.)

A. Read Rev. 1:1–5

1. Who is the human author?
2. Is anyone else involved in the production of the book? If so, who? Why? [draw diagram of transmission]
3. To whom is the book addressed? (verses 1 and 4)
4. How are the contents of the book described? (verse 2)
5. What benefit is promised?

6. What is the meaning of “revelation”?
7. What role does Jesus Christ have?
8. What hints are there about understanding the book?
9. How does the book have practical value to us?
10. Compare Dan. 2:28 with v. 1, “soon.”

B. Read Rev. 1:4–8

1. What themes are introduced?
2. Who is the source of blessing in v 4–5?

3. How is God named and why? (verses 4, 8)

4. Who are the seven spirits?

5. What do we praise God for?

6. What do we learn about the character of God?

7. What event is predicted?

8. Why is important to mention these things?

9. What should we take to heart (v 4)?

C. Read Rev. 1:9–16

1. What is the situation for John?

2. How might this affect the practical value of the book?

3. What is being said through the description in 12–16?

4. Where is Christ standing?

5. What do the features mean?

6. What is the OT background? (See Dan. 7:9-10, 13-14; Ezek. 1:26-28.)

7. What do we learn about Christ?

D. Read Rev. 1:17–20.

1. How does John respond and why?

2. What does the response tell us about Jesus?

3. How does Jesus describe himself and why?

4. What encouragement do we receive from him?

5. How is this whole vision (1:12–20) an encouragement to you?

6. What are the promises to us implicit in this passage?

2

CHRIST'S MESSAGES TO EPHESUS, SMYRNA, PERGAMUM, AND THYATIRA

Rev. 2–3 contain seven messages from Christ to seven churches of Asia Minor (now, Western Turkey). The difficulties of these churches also include lessons for us today (“He who has an ear, let him hear . . .”).

Read each message to each church separately.

A. Questions on Rev. 2:1–7 (the church in Ephesus)

1. Who writes the message?
2. Where does the description of Jesus come from? What does it reveal about Jesus?
3. How does Christ show his glory?
4. What commendable things are true of the church at Ephesus?

5. What is their failure?

6. What is the remedy?

7. What promises and threats does Jesus give?

8. How is our church like or unlike Ephesus?

9. What temptations and assurances apply most forcefully to your life?

B. Questions on Rev. 2:8–11 (the church in Smyrna)

1. How does Jesus describe himself? What does it reveal about him? How is this relevant to other believers and to us?
2. How does Christ show his glory?
3. What commendable things are said about the church at Smyrna? Are there any failures?
4. What promises does Jesus give?

5. How is our church like or unlike Smyrna?

6. How do you see these promises as applying to you?

C. Questions on Rev. 2:12–17 (the church in Pergamum)

1. How does Christ show his glory?

2. What commendations does Christ give?

3. What are the difficulties and threats at Pergamum? [For information about Balaam, see Num. 22-24. For the temptation set up by Moab, over which Balak was king, see Num. 25:1-5.]

4. What do you think is the principal difficulty or root difficulty?

5. What does Christ call for?

6. What promises and threats does he give?

7. In what ways is our church like or unlike Pergamum?

8. How does this passage challenge you or comfort you?

D. Questions on Rev. 2:18–29 (the church in Thyatira)

1. How is Christ described, and why (see v. 23)?
2. How does Christ show his glory?
3. What commendations does Christ give?
4. What criticisms does he make?
5. Who is “Jezebel” and what is she doing? [For information about the Old Testament Jezebel, see 1 Kings 16:31; 18:4, 13; 19:1-2; 21:1-16; and 2 Kings 9:7-10, 22, 30-37.]

6. What seems to be the central problem?

7. Why do you think people are tempted in this way?

8. What promises and threats does Christ give?

9. How is our church like or unlike Thyatira?

10. How does this passage challenge you or comfort you?

E. General:

1. Can you find a general pattern in the organization of the seven messages? What are common features? What commonalities are there in order?

2. What does this imply for the whole church (“universal church”)?

3. What are the promises to the “one who conquers”?

3

CHRIST'S MESSAGES TO SARDIS, PHILADELPHIA, AND LAODICEA

[Review Rev. 2.]

Continue to read each message to each church separately.

A. Questions on Rev. 3:1–6 (the church in Sardis)

1. How does Christ show his glory?
2. What does Christ commend?
3. What does he criticize?
4. What is the central underlying problem?

5. What does Christ call for?

6. What does Christ threaten? promise?

7. How is our church like or unlike Sardis?

8. How does this passage challenge you or comfort you?

B. Questions on Rev. 3:7–13 (the church in Philadelphia)

1. How does the description of Christ relate to the rest of the message (see v. 8)?

2. How does Christ show his glory?

3. What does Christ commend?

4. What does he criticize?

5. What does he promise and/or threaten?

6. How is our church like or unlike Philadelphia?

7. How does this passage challenge you or comfort you?

C. Questions on Rev. 3:14–22 (the church in Laodicea)

1. How does the description of Christ relate to the rest of the content?

2. How does Christ show his glory?

3. What does Christ commend? (maybe nothing?)

4. What does he criticize?

5. What is the central problem?

6. What does Christ threaten and promise?

7. How is our church like or unlike Laodicea?

8. How does this passage challenge you or comfort you?

D. General

1. When you compare all seven churches, how do they differ? How are they similar?

2. How does Christ show his glory in each message?

3. What have you learned by looking at the similarities and differences?

4. What lessons do you think are most relevant to your church and to other churches in your area of the world?

4

GOD ON HIS THRONE

Rev. 4 is a visionary picture of God's sovereign rule over creation and history, a rule that guarantees his final victory.

Read Rev. 4.

1. How does John come to see the vision?

Who is instrumental in it?

In what respects is John unique and in what respects like us?

2. What features stand out in this vision?

3. How does the vision make you feel?

4. What is central to this vision?

5. How do the surrounding things enhance our understanding of God?

6. What are we supposed to learn about God from the vision as a whole?

7. How do you think the vision is related to the later actions of God in Revelation?

8. How do the 24 elders and 4 living creatures express their relation to God?

9. What do they thereby say about our relation to God?

10. What do the songs show about the singers?

11. What do the songs show about God?

12. How does this vision connect with the final new Jerusalem of Rev. 21–22?

5

THE LAMB TAKES THE SEALED SCROLL

Rev. 5 shows that the Lamb alone is worthy to accomplish redemption and thereby bring God's purposes to pass.

Read Rev. 5.

1. What individuals and groups are involved here?
2. What do we learn about the Lamb before he is even introduced?
3. See Dan. 9:2; 12:4 for divine books with plans.
4. How is the Lamb described? Who is he? What do we learn about him?

5. How is he worthy?

6. What do we learn about redemption?

7. How should we react to the descriptions of worship?

8. How does this vision anticipate the end of all things?

9. How does this vision challenge you in your relation to God?

6

THE LAMB OPENS SIX SEALS, BRINGING JUDGMENTS

In Chapter 6, the Lamb opens six of the seven seals on the scroll. The visions emphasize God's rule over history, including disasters. The six visions lead up to the second coming of Christ, which is described in the sixth seal (see the seven cycles of judgment described in the introduction).

A. Read Rev. 6:1–8.

1. What are the principal actors involved in these scenes?
2. Where is the starting point for the action in each scene?
3. Where did the sealed book come from (hint: look at 5:1–3, 7)?
4. What do you think is in the sealed book (hint: look at Dan. 7:10; 12:4)?

10. How is this fulfilled? When? Hint: when in history would be the most natural times of fulfillment? John's time (Roman Empire)? Just before the Second Coming? Repeatedly?

11. Under whose plan does the rider act?

12. What are the second, third, and fourth riders like? What is predicted in each case? (Maybe draw a diagram, with several columns: number of rider, number of living creature, color of horse, description of significance of the rider and horse?)

13. What lessons are there for believers? What should be our reaction to calamities?

B. Read Rev. 6:9–17.

1. (Review: what is the origin for the sealed book? Whose authority does it represent?)

2. What does John see with the fifth seal?

3. What is the historical issue raised by this vision?

4. What is God's plan for martyrs?

5. How does this vision answer the question of God's justice?

6. How does this vision serve as a comfort to people suffering persecution on earth?

7. What do we learn about rewards for martyrs?

8. Does this passage have implications for Christians who are not literally martyred? Does it express a larger principle?

9. What events happen under the opening of the sixth seal?

10. What effects happen to various parts of the creation?

11. What happens to various groups of people? What are the groups? What is their emotional reaction? What does their reaction indirectly show about what is going on in the world as a whole?

12. What do we learn about God and the Lamb?

13. What benefit does the passage have for believers? for unbelievers?

14. When do these events take place?

7

INTERLUDE: PROTECTION FOR THE SAINTS

Rev. 7 has two scenes, 7:1–8 and 7:9–17, which describe God’s protection and comfort for his people. The numbering in 7:1–8 indicates that God knows each individual. The vision of the great multitude emphasizes the international scope of God’s people and the vastness of their number.

Rev. 7 forms an interlude between the sixth seal (6:12–17) and the seventh seal (8:1). It is like a dramatic pause, which keeps the reader waiting for the final act that will unfold with the seventh seal.

There is much confusion about the 144,000. It helps to remember that those who believe in Christ the Jewish Messiah are the true Jews (3:9; 5:10). The 144,000 are identified later, in 14:4, as those “who follow the Lamb wherever he goes”—i.e., the followers or disciples of Christ. In agreement with the symbolical, visionary character of Revelation as a whole, the numbers are symbolical.

A. Read Rev. 7:1–8.

1. What is the function of the four angels? Can we infer whose authority is behind them?
2. How does the announcing angel indicate a distinction for the 144,000?
3. What do you think is the meaning of the sealing?

4. Who is being sealed?

5. Is the number 12 significant in these verses? If so how? What Old Testament background is the logical background for the use of this number?

6. What is the significance of the multiple of 1,000?

7. What tribes are listed? Make a list, and compare it to the list in Numbers 1.

- a. What tribe is missing in Numbers 1? [Levi: see Num. 3]

- b. What tribe is missing in Rev. 7:1–8?

- c. How is the missing tribe made up for in each case, so that the total is still 12?

- d. What is special about Levi? Num. 3:5; 8:14–16 (and others).

- e. What is special about Dan? Judg. 18.

8. What is the significance of this numeration?

9. What is the guarantee (see Rev. 7:3; 9:4; 14:3–5)?

10. Where do John's readers in the seven churches fit into this vision? (Hint: Christians are the true Jews, 3:9; 5:10.)

11. Where do we fit in?

12. What do you think is inscribed in the seal? See Rev. 14:1; 3:12. What difference does it make?

B. Read Rev. 7:9–17.

1. What participants are there in the heavenly scene?

2. What are the characteristics of the great multitude?

3. What are they doing? What about the elders and the living creatures?

4. How are we supposed to react to this scene?

5. What do we see about God?

6. What have the multitude been rescued from?

a. On the “tribulation,” see Acts 14:22; 2 Thess. 1:6–7.

7. How? (note: the blood of the Lamb, verse 14)

8. What is their reward? What details do you see? How are they reassuring?

9. Where do John's readers fit in to this passage?

10. Who is represented by the great multitude?

11. Where do we fit in?

8

THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS AND THEIR JUDGMENTS

Rev. 8:1, with the opening of the seventh seal, belongs with the first six seals that were opened in Rev. 6. [If desired, a group can study 8:1 along with Rev. 7 or even with Rev. 6, instead of with the rest of Rev. 8.]

The judgments from the seven trumpets make up a second cycle of judgments leading up to the second coming of Christ, which occurs with the seventh trumpet in Rev. 11:15–19. (See the seven cycles of judgment discussed in the introduction.) God through his angels controls all the events. Beginning with the fifth trumpet, the judgments fall specifically on those who are in rebellion against God—not on the saints. These judgments, like those under the seven seals (6:1–8:1), show God as the righteous judge and ruler over history, who will punish evil and bring his purposes to pass.

A. Read Rev. 8:1.

1. What is the location and the action?
2. How does the action link with the preceding chapters (6–7)?
3. What is the significance of silence? Hint: look at Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; see also Isa. 41:1; 47:5; Zech. 2:13.

4. What is next logically after the events of the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12–17)?

B. Read Rev. 8:2–13

1. Who are the principal actors in this section?
2. Where do they come from? How is this significant? What does it say about the significance of the events that follow?
3. What does the smoke of the incense stand for? What happens to it? How does it move?
4. What significance does this show about the prayers of the saints?

5. How may this picture influence your understanding of yourself and your relation to God?
6. What event follows immediately the offering of the incense? What is its significance? (Compare Rev. 4:5.)
7. What disaster comes as a result of each of the first four trumpets? What part of the world is primarily affected in each case? Do you see any pattern?
8. Are any of these disasters reminiscent of the plagues of the exodus? How?

9. Why do these disasters happen? What significance does this picture have for our understanding of disasters?
10. Within human history, what time periods could this section be talking about? Recall how the same question arose with respect to the opening of the seven seals. What main possibilities are there, which interpreters may have chosen?
11. How does verse 13 help to introduce the last three trumpets? How do they belong together? What kind of events can be expected?
12. Is there any positive lesson that we may take away from these verses?

9

THE JUDGMENTS OF THE LOCUST PLAGUE AND THE VAST ARMY

Rev. 9 includes the judgments associated with the fifth trumpet (9:1–12) and the sixth trumpet (9:13–21). The trumpets were first introduced in 8:2–5. These more elaborate judgments continue to underline God's power as righteous judge and ruler over history.

For background, read Rev. 8:2, 6.

A. Read Rev. 8:13–9:12.

1. What sets the action going?
2. Where does the action originate?
3. What is the sequence of events issuing from the bottomless pit?
4. What kind of power do the locusts have? Are these ordinary locusts? What is special about them?

5. What distinctive groups of mankind are described? Who is immune and why?

6. Compare 9:4 with 7:3–4, 9, 16–17. What does 9:4 imply about the people belonging to God?

7. Compare 9:6 with 8:7. What kind of shift in focus do we see? Why?

8. What are the locusts like, according to 9:7–11? What is your emotional reaction to the description? What does it say about the seriousness of God's judgment?

9. What is the significance of the names in verse 11? Does your Bible or Bible notes explain the meaning? What information and emotional load does this add to our picture of the locusts?

10. What should we learn from the description, if we belong to God's people? If we do not?

B. Read Rev. 9:12–21.

1. Who are the principal actors in this section?
2. What is the significance of the altar, in verse 13?
3. What do we learn about the timing of the events? (see verse 15) Where does the great army come from? What should be our emotional reaction?

4. What are the three plagues coming from the horses? Is there any Old Testament analogy? (Hint: see Gen. 19:23–25; Luke 17:28–29. Jude 7.) How is this significant?

5. What is people's reaction to the plagues (verses 20–21)? What does this say about the human heart?

6. What do we learn about the human condition? Our own and the rest of mankind?

7. What do we learn about God? about history?

8. How should we respond to this message?

10

A SCROLL CONTAINING PROPHECIES FOR JOHN

Rev. 10:1–11:14 makes up an interlude, between the end of the sixth trumpet (9:13–21) and the beginning of the seventh trumpet (11:15–19). Its function is parallel to the function of the interlude or pause in Rev. 7. It focuses on God’s care for the saints, and it functions also as a dramatic pause, increasing readers’ expectation for the final act, the blowing of the seventh trumpet in 11:15.

Rev. 10 has two main participants, the mighty angel of 10:1 and John the prophet. It expresses the importance and authoritative content of the prophecies that John conveys in the book. These prophecies come from God himself, through the hand of the angel—they are not a human invention. John’s role also offers us a model that ordinary Christian witnesses may imitate in a subordinate way.

Read Rev. 10:1–11.

1. Who are the main participants in the action?
2. What is the angel like? What does it say about him? What does it imply about God?
3. What happens with the seven thunders?
4. What does the sealing imply about human knowledge of the future? What can we learn?

5. What does the oath reinforce?

6. What time period and events do you think are introduced with the seventh trumpet?

7. What do these events have to do with the plan of God?

8. What do we learn about God?

9. What is John told to do with the scroll and why?

10. What do you think are the contents of the scroll? [Hint: see Ezek. 2:1–3:4.]

11. What does it do in John's digestive system, in two stages?

12. What is the significance of these two reactions?

13. How do we respond to the prospect of the seventh trumpet?

14. What do we learn about the nature of God's word?

15. How may we respond to this vision from God?

16. How is John an example to us?

17. How are we to act as bearers of God's word?

11

MEASURING THE TEMPLE AND WITNESSING

Rev. 11:1–14 continues the interlude between the sixth trumpet (9:13–21) and the seventh trumpet (9:15–19), and interlude that began in Rev. 10.

The temple (11:1) is the symbol for God dwelling with man (Rev. 21:3, 22). This visionary passage is accordingly to be understood as a symbolic representation of what happens to God's true temple, the church (1 Pet. 2:5), especially during the period from Pentecost onward. Similarly, the two witnesses are related to the witness of the church (compare 11:4 with 1:20, regarding the lampstands).

A. Read Rev. 11:1–13.

1. What is measured and what not?
2. Why are some parts left out?
3. What seems to be the significance of measuring? Compare Rev. 21:15–17. (Ezek. 40:3, 5. etc.)

4. What is the significance of 42 months? Compare Rev. 11:3 (1260 = 42 X 30 days/month). Also Rev. 12:6, 14. 3 1/2 years = 42 months. Dan. 7:25; 12:7.

5. How are the witnesses identified? (Compare Rev. 1:12, 20. Zech. 4:3, 11, 14. Note Zerubbabel, 4:6, 7, 9, 10; Joshua the high priest, 3:1.)

6. What do you think they symbolize? Can the lampstands help in interpreting the meaning?

7. Who in the Old Testament did things like the witnesses? (Rev. 11:6; Ex. 7:17; 1 Kings 17:1.) Who in the New Testament is a “prophet” in a broad sense? Acts 2:17–18.

8. What happens at the end of the task of the two witnesses prophesying? What is its significance? How is it like what happened to Jesus? What does the likeness say about the plan of God for the witnesses?

9. What is to be our response and the response of the original readers of Revelation?

10. What does the passage say about our witness bearing?

B. Read Rev. 11:14–19.

1. Where does this passage fit in the sequence of Revelation? [Hint: see Rev. 8:2, 6, 13.]

2. What do the events say about God's kingdom?

3. How does the passage answer the feeling that martyrdom is a defeat?

4. What kind of negative judgment does the passage describe?

5. In the Old Testament, what was the problem of access to the ark? [Heb. 9:7–8; 10:19–22.]

6. What does the appearing of the ark signify?

7. What impression is given through the lightning and thunder?

12

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON AND THEIR SYMBOLIC HISTORIES

Rev. 12:1–6 introduces the woman and the dragon. The woman is a visionary representation of the people of God, while the dragon is a visionary representation of Satan, the great opponent, “the deceiver of the whole world” (12:9). Following the introductory scene come symbolic histories that represent in visionary form what happens to the dragon (12:7–12) and the woman (12:13–17).

Rev. 12 is the first portion of a third cycle of judgments, which lead up to the second coming of Christ in 14:14–20. (See the discussion of seven cycles of judgment in the introduction.) After the opening scene in 12:1–6, which introduces the woman and the dragon, there may be seven main scenes: the history of the dragon (12:7–12), the history of the woman (12:13–17), the history of the beast (13:1–10), the history of the beast from the earth (the false prophet, 13:11–18), the history of the 144,000 (14:1–5), the history of three angelic proclaimers (14:6–11), and the history of the one like a son of man (14:14–20). Rev. 14:12–13 forms a small interlude.

A. Read Rev. 12:1–6.

1. Who are the two principal characters?
2. What is the woman’s clothing?
3. What other visionary passage contains sun, moon, and twelve stars? [Gen. 37:9–10.] What people are associated with the symbolism as a whole?

4. What does the pregnant woman stand for? [Hint: look at Isa. 54:1, 5. Then Gal. 4:26–27.]

5. Who is the son born? Ps. 2:7.

6. Who is the dragon? Rev. 12:9.

7. What are the dragon's purposes?

8. What do we learn about spiritual war?

9. What does God do to protect the woman?

10. What comfort does the passage provide for us?

11. What is the significance of the 1260 days? Remember discussion on 11:3.

B. Read Rev. 12:7–12.

1. Describe the conflict. Who are the main participants?

2. For Michael, look at Dan. 10:13, 21. An angel, 10:16, 20.

3. What is the result of the battle? What happens to Satan? What does it signify?

4. How is the result described with respect to God's side of the battle? (verse 10)

5. What were the means used by God's side to achieve victory? (verse 11)

6. What comfort can we take from these verses? What warning or caution?

C. Read Rev. 12:13–17.

1. What is the dragon's first attack?

2. What does God supply to the woman? Does it help? What do you think?

3. What weapon does the dragon use? What does it signify? What comes out of his mouth? [Hint: Rev. 12:9, "deceiver"; John 8:44.]

4. How does the woman escape? What does it signify about the effectiveness of the dragon's approach?

5. What is the time period? [Hint: time is one year. So $3 \frac{1}{2}$ years. = 42 months = 1260 days.]

6. Who else does the dragon attack? Who is it?

7. What comfort and what warnings are there for us?

13

THE BEAST AND THE FALSE PROPHET

The beast in Rev. 13:1–10 is a visionary representation of persecuting power. He threatens to destroy anyone who refuses to worship him. The second beast, a beast from the earth (13:11–18) is later called “the false prophet” (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). He represents the power of deceit and propaganda that encourage worship of the beast.

The two sections in Rev. 13 include the sequence of symbolic histories leading up to the second coming in 14:14–20.

A. Read Rev. 13:1–10.

1. What are the chief features of the Beast? What does it do?

2. What does the Beast remind you of? [Read Dan. 7:1–8.]

3. What does the Beast signify?

4. What lessons can we learn from this passage about the ways of Satan? About the ways of God?

5. How does the Beast manifest himself now and in the future? [hint: Satan has multiple attacks and multiple defeats? Is the beast similar?] In communist countries. In the USA and free world.

6. What are our responsibilities in the light of the Beast's activity?

B. Read Rev. 13:11–18.

1. Where does the second beast come from?
2. What does it do?
3. What ties does it have to the first beast?
4. In its activities, how does it differ from the first beast?
5. Describe its deceiving activity. How does this relate to Satan's work?

6. What things make the deceit effective?
7. What is its name? See Rev. 16:13; 19:20 (20:10).
8. What would it mean for there to be multiple manifestations of the principle?
9. What is the function of the mark of the beast?
10. What permission does it give to those who have it?
11. How does this put pressure on believers?

12. How is the mark of the beast related to another name, Rev. 14:1? (Deut. 6:8.)
13. Why 666? [what might 6 symbolize in the context of opposition to God? One short of 7?]
14. What do we learn about our responsibilities in the light of the false prophet?

14

THE 144,000, THE ANGELIC PROCLAIMERS, AND ONE LIKE A SON OF MAN

Chapter 14 continues with the last three symbolic histories: the history of the 144,000 (14:1–5), the history of three angelic proclaimers (14:6–11), and the history of one like a son of man (14:14–20, representing the second coming of Christ).

A. Read Rev. 14:1–5.

1. Where does the scene take place, and with whom?
2. What is the main action? What does it signify?
3. What is the significance of the name in verse 1? See 13:16–18.
4. What is the significance of Mount Zion? What is located there in the Old Testament? See Mic. 4:1–2; Ps. 2:6; 9:11. Ps. 65:1; 69:35; 84:7. Isa. 60:14*. Mic. 4:7.

5. What about the number 144,000? Why this number? Is it symbolic? See 7:4. [Note the privilege given to those sealed in 9:4.]

6. What other characteristics belong to the 144,000?

7. Why virgins? [hint: see 14:8; 17:4–6.]

8. What is the significance of being called firstfruits? [Hint: see 2 Thess. 2:13; James 1:18.]

9. What is our relation to the 144,000? And what can we learn from it?

B. Read Rev. 14:6–13.

1. Who are the main initiators?
2. What does the first angel do?
3. To whom? For what purpose?
4. What should be our response?
5. What does the second angel do?
6. What temptation does Babylon represent?

7. What lesson does the angel give about Babylon?

8. What should we learn practically from the message?

9. What does the third angel do?

10. What happens to the worshipers?

11. Why?

12. How is this consistent with the character of God?

13. Why is the picture so grim?

14. What should we learn and how should we respond?

15. What words of more comforting kind occur near the end of our passage?

16. What is promised?

17. How is it encouraging?

C. Read Rev. 14:14–20.

1. What happens in the opening scene of the vision?
2. Who is the one “like a son of man”?
3. What is the significance of how he is described?
4. What is the second major figure? What does he do?
5. What is the significance of the angel coming out of the temple? [hint: who is in the temple?].
6. What worldwide event is in view? What is signified by the reaping?

7. What do the next two angels do (verses 17 and following)?

8. What is gathered?

9. What is done with it?

10. In the light of the endpoint, what do the grapes signify?

11. What happens to the blood? What is the significance?

12. How should this picture shape our hope for the future?

15

THE PRELUDE TO THE JUDGMENTS OF THE SEVEN BOWLS

Revelation 15–16 contain the fourth cycle of judgments leading to the second coming of Christ (see the introduction for a discussion of the seven cycles of judgment). A number of parallels connect the seven bowls with the seven trumpets of Rev. 9–11. For example, the first four judgments introduced by the trumpets fall on the earth (dry land, 8:7), the sea (8:8–9), the fresh water (8:10–11), and the heavenly bodies (8:12). The first four bowls in 16:2–9 deal with the earth (16:2), the sea (16:3), the fresh water (16:4–7), and the sun (16:8–9). But the judgments associated with the bowls are more intense. The imagery has moved closer to the climactic judgment of the second coming itself.

Chapter 15 offers the opening scene, preparing for the seven judgments of the seven bowls. The source of the bowls is in the temple of God (15:5), from the living creatures (15:7), who serve in the presence of God and his throne (4:6). The plagues issue ultimately from God and his rule.

A. Read Rev. 15:1–4.

1. What topic for the next chapters is introduced here? What primary theme may we expect in the chapters (Rev. 15–16)?
2. Who is present? What earlier scene is this like (see Rev. 4:6)?
3. How are the redeemed described and why?

4. What two songs are mentioned and why? What do you think is the relation between the two?
[Hint: see Ex. 15:1.]

5. What are the contents of the song? What does it say about God? What does it reveal about the hearts of the singers? What attributes of God are emphasized? Why?

6. What does it say about the nations?

7. What does it ask for in our response?

B. Read Rev. 15:5–8.

1. What is the new location in these verses? What is the significance of the location? What does the temple signify?
2. What are the principal actors?
3. What does the clothing signify?
4. What object is passed, and from who to whom? Why? What does the source of the bowls signify?

5. What happens to the temple in the final event? What does it show about God? What does it imply about what is to come?

6. How does the passage set expectations and a mood for the plagues?

7. What does the revelation from God ask for us in response?

16

THE SEVEN JUDGMENTS FROM THE SEVEN BOWLS

Revelation 16 gives a visionary depiction of the plagues that come from the seven bowls in the hands of seven angels, who have been commissioned by God on his throne.

A. Read Rev. 16:1–9.

1. Where do the bowls come from? What does this imply about God's relation to the events?
2. What different disasters happen with the first four bowls?
3. What regions are affected in each case?
4. What plagues earlier in history are comparable?

5. Can you compare these four disasters with what happens with the first four trumpets (8:6–12)? What strikes you as a main difference between the two? Which is more severe?

6. With the third bowl, what do we learn about the basis for what happens? What is the bearing of *justice*? What is the principle of justice here? [Hint: see Obad. 15. Rev. 18:6.]

7. What is the ultimate source of justice?

8. How does the insight into justice change our view of what is happening? How does it change our *evaluation*?

9. With the fourth bowl, what does the reaction of the people reveal? What is their problem?

10. What is the lesson for us here?

B. Read Rev. 16:10–21.

1. What disasters happen with the last three bowls?
2. What relation do all the disasters (including the first four) to the plagues of Egypt?
3. What relations can you see between the last three bowls and the last three trumpet plagues (9:1–21; 11:11–15)?

4. What indication is given of the character of the people on whom comes the fifth plague? Why is their character relevant? What do they *not* do? Why not? What does this say about how we evaluate what is going on? What lesson is there for us?

5. What role is played by demonic spirits? Who are the spirits, and where do they come from? What do they do? What event are they pushing people toward?

6. What comfort is there for saints? What should we learn from this passage?

7. What happens with the seventh bowl? What indications are there that this is a climactic end?
[Hint: earthquake; fall of Babylon. See verse 20 compared to 6:14.]

8. What contrast do you see between repenting and not repenting? What is the point for us?

17

THE FALL OF BABYLON THE PROSTITUTE

Babylon the Prostitute is a visionary depiction of false worship, especially as it is driven by lustful desire, for money and sex and pleasure.

A. Read Rev. 17:1–6.

1. Who introduces the scene? What is the authority behind him?
2. What is the principal character like? What is she like in appearance? What is she like morally? What actions of hers show her character?
3. Who is mentioned as interacting with her?

4. What do we learn about the major groupings of people through this description?

5. What danger does she pose to the saints?

6. What do we learn about how to respond to her?

7. What in our day is like this figure? How is she manifesting herself?

8. How should we respond?

B. Read Rev. 17:7–18.

1. What is the relation between the woman and the beast?
2. How is the name of the beast in verse 8 like and unlike the name of God?
3. What is the major polarity among “dwellers on earth”?
4. What is the significance here of the number seven? If so, what does it imply about the number six (in verse 10)?
5. What two instances of war are there? [Hint: verse 14; verse 16–17.]

6. How does this pattern of war play out today?

7. What is God's relation to the warfare? [Hint: verse 17.]

8. In the time of the Roman Empire, how was the prostitute manifest herself? [Hint: verse 18.]

9. What courage and cautions should we take away from this passage?

18

SEVEN MESSAGES ABOUT THE FALL OF BABYLON

Revelation 18 contains seven messages about the fall of Babylon, which took place in Rev. 17. First comes a mighty angel, who announces the fall (18:1–3). Then another voice exhorts God’s people to depart from her (18:4–8). Then come four messages from allies and admirers of Babylon, who lament her fall: the kings of the earth (18:9–10), the merchants of the earth lamenting the loss of goods (18:11–14), the merchants of the earth lamenting the loss of the city (18:15–17), and the shipmasters and seafaring men (18:18–20). A final, climactic message from a mighty angel declares that Babylon will never be revived: it will be “no more” (18:21–24).

A. Read Rev. 18:1–8.

1. Recall from 17:1–6 who Babylon is.
2. What has happened to Babylon?
3. In answer to what sins has her fall happened? [Note three areas of sin mentioned in verse 3. Drunkenness as well as two others.]
4. What does the second message (18:4–8) tell people to do and why?

5. What more do we learn about Babylon's sins?

6. What do we learn about justice [hint: verse 6]? From where does justice come?

7. What does God want our reaction to be to this whole passage?

B. Read Rev. 18:9-19.

1. Who is active in the different wailings?

2. What is common to all three groups?

3. What different sins are revealed for each group?

4. What is revealed about the inclinations of the heart of these groups?

5. What more is revealed about the attractions of Babylon?

6. What should our reaction be? [hint: verse 20]

C. Read Rev. 18:20–24.

1. What do we learn about Babylon?

2. What do we learn about the saints?

3. What do we learn about the justice of God?

4. What particular sin of Babylon is singled out? Why?

5. What should be the reaction of the saints? [hint: 19:1–2]

4. Who is celebrating in verses 4–8? Why? What do these verses say about God?

5. Who is the Bride?

6. What is the preparation of the Bride? What does she do? What does God do for her? [on purification, see Zech. 3:1–5.]

7. Who is the bridegroom?

8. What other event belongs to the marriage? [Hint: verse 9, the marriage supper.]
9. What is the significance of the marriage supper? Why is it mentioned here?
10. What do the verses 9–10 say about true worship?
11. How should these verses encourage Christians in distress in this life?

B. Read Rev. 19:11–21.

1. Who is the principal actor in these verses?

2. What time period is the passage talking about?

3. What names are given to Christ, and what do they tell us?

4. What are the principal characteristics of Christ?

5. What does Christ actually do?

6. What do we learn about his helpers?

7. What do we learn about his opponents?

8. How are the opponents destroyed?

9. If we take 19:11–21 together with 19:1–10, there are two feasts. What are they? How do they compare and contrast?

10. How should this passage affect Christian believers now?

20a

THE THOUSAND YEARS

Revelation shows in visionary form various truths concerning the period of a thousand years during which Satan is bound and saints reign. This passage has been controversial, and has been interpreted in a number of ways during the centuries of church history. Given the controversy, people studying Revelation may be helped by a short summary of the main positions adopted by various interpreters. (See below. The same material is available in printable form at <http://frame-poythress.org/definitions-of-millennial-positions/>.)

Definitions of Millennial Positions

Agreements and Differences

Bible-believing people all agree that at some future time Jesus Christ will appear openly and bodily to the world in the Second Coming and will begin visibly to reign. But they do not all agree on the exact character of all the events preceding and following the Second Coming, nor do they all agree on the order of events. People have held three main positions over the course of church history, namely premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism.

The differences among these positions are complex, involving questions concerning the interpretation of a considerable body of OT prophecy as well as various NT passages. Rev. 20:1–10 is only one of the passages involved in the discussion. It just happens to be the case that the names of the positions have been derived from the Latin word “millennium,” meaning 1000 years, because of the mention of a period of 1000 years in Rev. 20:2–7.

Premillennialism. Premillennialism argues for the following series of events. (1) The present age continues to be a mixture of good and evil, believers and unbelievers. (2) Christ returns (the Second Coming). Christians living and dead receive resurrection bodies. There is a judgment on the unbelievers who are alive. (3) Christ inaugurates a visible reign over the nations, a time of great peace and prosperity lasting for 1000 years (some think longer). (4) Shortly before the end of this period, Satan instigates a great rebellion (described in Rev. 20:7–10). (5) God puts down the rebellion, and there is a final judgment of those alive and of the wicked dead. (6) The eternal reign of God begins (the consummation).

Amillennialism. Amillennialism has the following sequence of events. (1) The present age continues with a mixture of good and evil. (2) Satan instigates a final rebellion near the end of the age. (3) Christ returns (the Second Coming). Christ judges all people, living and dead. Believers receive

resurrection bodies, and unbelievers are cast into hell. (4) The eternal reign of God begins (the consummation).

Postmillennialism. Postmillennialism has the following sequence of events. (1) The present age becomes better and better as more people become Christians and the blessing of God is poured out on them. There will come a future age of spiritual prosperity when Christian faith will dominate in this world. (2) Christ returns (the Second Coming). Christ judges all people, living and dead. Believers receive resurrection bodies, and unbelievers are cast into hell. (3) The eternal reign of God begins (the consummation).

Dispensationalist premillennialism. A variation of premillennialism arising the 19th century has the following series of events. (1) The present age continues with a mixture of good and evil. (2) Christ comes to rapture the church. All believers are caught up to heaven and receive resurrection bodies. Unbelievers are left on earth and do not see Christ. (3) Seven years of tribulation begin, during which God's wrath is poured out on unbelievers and a Jewish remnant converted to faith in Christ bears witness to the truth. (4) At the end of the tribulation Christ appears visibly, unbelievers are cast into hell, and believers living on earth enter a period of 1000 years during which Christ rules over the nations visibly. (5) Satan instigates a rebellion near the end of the period (Rev. 20:7–10). (6) God puts down the rebellion and judges all the dead and all the people who lived in the 1000 year period. (7) The eternal reign of God begins (the consummation).

A. Read Rev. 20:1–10.

1. Who are the two principal characters in verses 1–3?
2. On whose behalf is the angel acting?
3. What happens to Satan?

4. How is Satan described, and what does that tell us about him?
5. In what respect does it say that Satan is restricted?
6. For how long?
7. What are the options for how we interpret the 1000 years? [Hint: we have seen that some aspects of Revelation are symbolical. What about numbers in Revelation? Generally speaking, how do we interpret them?]
8. In verses 4–10, certain people are singled out as favored. How are they described? Who are they? What favor do they enjoy?

9. The word *millennium* means “a thousand years.” What are the three main interpretations (understandings) of the millennium? What are the options as to when it occurs relative to the occurrence of the Second Coming? [Hint: if he wishes, the leader can pass out copies of “Definitions of Millennial Positions,” a one-page summary available at <http://frame-poythress.org/definitions-of-millennial-positions/>.]
10. If a person reads Rev. 19:1–21:8 as passages occurring in *chronological* order, what millennial position does the complete sequence appear to support? [Answer: premillennialism.]
11. Why does not everyone take the premillennial position? Since there are three major positions, what reasons do you think people might have for believing in one of the other positions? [A hard question, if people have no previous knowledge.]

- a. Ask, “What about the idea of the passages being in chronological order? Have we seen exceptions earlier in Revelation?” See Rev. 12:1–6.
- b. Let’s follow what happens with the nations. Look at 20:3. What happened to the rebellious nations in 19:11–21? So is anyone left to rebel? Could a nonchronological, recycling understanding deal with this?
- c. Also, more complex, let’s look at allusions backward.
- Rev. 19:17–18. Compare Ezek. 39:17–20. Do these refer to the same event?
 - Rev. 20:8. Compare Ezek. 39:1–2, 6. Do these refer to the same event?
 - Do Rev. 19:17–18 and 20:8 refer to the same complex of events? What might be the implication for recapitulation (cycling back to an earlier time)?
- d. What do we learn about first and last things? This leads to the second section of study, given below.

B. Study of first and last things.

1. What do we learn about “first” and “last/second” things in Rev. 20:1–15? See verses 5, 6, 14. See also 21:1. Compare some of Rev. 19:1–22:5 with Genesis 1–2. First heaven and earth; marriage; garden; tree of life. See also 1 Cor. 15:42–49.
2. What is characteristic of the first things? Of the last things? What corresponds? What is different?
3. How does the first resurrection fit into this correlation between first and last things? [Hint: it is “first”; so preliminary.]
4. How may Rev. 20:1–10 encourage those under persecution? How does it encourage us?

20b

THE LAST JUDGMENT AND THE NEW WORLD

Rev. 20:11–15 depicts the Last Judgment, with a focus on its negative aspects (the lake of fire). Rev. 21:1–8 depicts the positive result of judgment, in reward for God’s people. It culminates the age-long purpose of God, in saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man” (21:3).

[Because 20:1–10 is so challenging, it is better in most cases not to try to cover the whole of Rev. 20 in one study. This series of study questions has accordingly grouped together 20:11–15 and 21:1–8, as suitable for one study session. Or, if your study goes at a slower pace, you may choose to do 20:11–15 in a study by itself, and then 21:1–8 the next time.]

A. Read Rev. 20:11–15.

1. Who is the principal actor in these verses?
2. What do we learn about God?
3. What is the basis for judgment?
4. Who is being judged?

5. What is the “book of life”? Whose names are written in it? See Rev. 13:8, 17:8. See also John 6:39–40.

6. What is the result? Or rather, what are the two results?

7. Where is there further description of what happens to those whose names are in the book of life?
[Hint: look at 21:1–8.]

8. How should we as Christians respond?

B. Read Rev. 21:1–8.

1. What happens in terms of the big, cosmic picture?

2. What is the principal sight within this cosmic picture? [the holy city Jerusalem]
3. How is it described, and why?
4. Who has brought it about?
5. How is the relation with God and man described? How does this contrast with previous times?
6. What positive promises are given as to how it will be different?
7. What does the passage say about God and his role in the events?

8. What two types of people are distinguished in the last few verses (6–8)?

9. What positive promises are made to the one group?

10. How does 21:1–8 compare and contrast with 20:11–15?

11. What are the practical implications of the vision? How does it affect you?

21

THE HOLY CITY JERUSALEM

The holy city Jerusalem is also the “Bride, the wife of the Lamb” (21:9). In visionary imagery, the ideas of the city and its inhabitants fuse together. Here we have a visionary representation of the saints and their communion with God in consummate realization. Rejoice!

A. Read Rev. 21:9–21.

1. Who introduces the vision? Whose authority is behind him?
2. How is the central piece in the vision described by the angel doing the introduction?
3. What are the main characteristics of the city, according to 10–11?
4. What does the city symbolize? [Hint: see the interpretation in verse 9.]
5. What architectural features are described in verses 12–14?

6. What connections do these features show with people? With the OT? With the NT?
7. What is the shape of the city, according to verse 16? What is the significance of this shape? [Hint: what was the shape of the Most Holy Place in the temple of Solomon? See 1 Kings 6:20.]
8. Not all translations show it, but the measurement of the outside lengths in Rev. 21 is given in stadia, a stadium being about 607 feet or 185 meters or a little over a tenth of a mile. Each dimension for the city is 12,000 stadia or 1380 miles. (Pretty large for a single city!!) What is the symbolic significance of the number 12,000?
9. The wall is measured at 144 cubits, a cubit being about 1 1/2 feet or 18 inches. What is the symbolic significance of the number 144? [Hint: where have you seen the number earlier in Revelation? Rev. 14:1, 3; 7:4.]

10. What do the jewels (verses 19–20) show about the city? [Hint: look at 4:3 and Ex. 28:17–21, and 28:2! Also, Heb. 8:1–2. The specialized names for different kinds of jewels were not as fixed in the ancient world as they are among mineral specialists today. Given this variation, the two lists, Ex. 28:17–20 and Rev. 21:19–20, are basically the same, though in different order.]

11. What strikes you about the appearance of the city?

B. Read Rev. 21:22–27.

1. What role do God and the Lamb have in the city?

2. What is special about the light for the city? What is the significance of this for our hope?

3. Why do you think the city has no temple? [Hint: what would a temple be for? To house the symbolic presence of God.]

4. What comes into the city? What stays out?

5. What does the in and out say about the nature of the city?

6. What is the practical value of this vision for us? [Hint: what do you hope for? What is the relation of your hopes, including short-range hope, to this hope? How should your own hopes be refined by meditation on this vision?]

22

THE GARDEN PARADISE AND CONCLUDING EXHORTATIONS

Rev. 22 consists of two major sections. Rev. 22:1–5 is a final vision of the consummate dwelling of God with man (21:3), using imagery partly based on the beginning of things in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2). Rev. 22:6–21 has concluding exhortations, based on the whole book, and includes a further explanation of the source of the prophecy and John’s role in receiving it and passing it on (22:6–11). Rev. 22:6–21 therefore divides itself naturally into two smaller portions, 22:6–11 (about John and the reception of the revelation) and 22:12–21 (exhortations focused more on the reader).

A. Read Rev. 22:1–5.

1. Who are the chief figures in this passage?
2. Who or what is at the center of the scene?
3. What analogies are there to things at or near the beginning of the story—creation?
4. What contrasts are there with earlier parts of the book of Revelation?

5. What is cause for hope and encouragement?

6. How would this passage encourage those under oppression in persecution?

7. What is the relation of God to the people?

8. What is most encouraging to you?

9. How could you look differently at yourself and your life in this world, because of this passage?

B. Read Rev. 22:6–11.

1. Who are the chief actors?
2. What do we learn about the role of John?
3. What do we learn about the authority of the message?
4. What do we learn about worship?
5. What promises are given?
6. What is the meaning of the instruction not to seal up (verse 10)? [Hint: see Dan. 12:4, 9.]

7. What is the fundamental polarity between two types of people (see verse 11)?

8. What do we learn about the book of Revelation as a whole from this passage?

C. Read Rev. 22:12–21.

1. Who is the source of promises (verse 13)?

2. What is the fundamental polarity between two types of people (verses 14–15)?

3. What is the specific invitation (verses 16–17)?

4. What main warning is given (verses 18–19)?

5. What is its relation to earlier similar language? [Hint: see Deut. 4:2; 12:32.]

6. How does the book as a whole close off (verses 20–21)? How does the closing fit with the rest of the book?

7. How is the book designed to impact its readers? in information? in exhortation? in warning? in encouragement?

8. How does it impact you?

9. How does the book transform your understanding of God?

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