

**The Anglican Church
in the Diocese of Trinidad & Tobago**

Theme:

*The Spirit Speaks to the Church Today - The
Revelation to John*

A Bible Study for 2021



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DIOCESAN BIBLE STUDY 2021

THE SPIRIT SPEAKS TO THE CHURCH TODAY – A SURVEY OF REVELATION

INTRODUCTION

The Revelation to John has been one of the most perplexing books in the scriptures. Its cryptic language and dramatic imagery have stirred both terror and fascination in the hearts and minds of many believers. The letters to the Churches, the description of the throne room, the battle between good and evil and the end-times prophecies have been used by many an eager evangelists to warn the faithful about the importance of securing their place in God's Heaven. In faith, this Lent and beyond we will take a preliminary journey through this awe inspiring and perplexing book.

The authorship, historical context and style of writing are important elements for anyone who desires to hear and understand what the Spirit is saying to the Church. The Book of Revelation was one of the last to be added to the Canon of Scripture because of its difficult language and perplexing imagery. The prologue (1:1-3) identifies that God is the source of the revelation, which Jesus Christ shares with his servants through John, so they will become aware of "what must soon take place." John testifies to the word of prophecy he received from Jesus Christ and makes the point: "blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." John offers several descriptions of Christ as he shares the vision, which comes to him, while he is in exile on the island of Patmos experiencing suffering for the Kingdom with patient endurance. Traditionally, scholars believe the apostle John, son of Zebedee (Mt 10:2; John 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8) to be the author. However, there is a school of thought led by Dionysius' (an African bishop) who posited in the 3rd C that it is was written by John a priest whose name appears in other ancient writings.

The dating of the book has also been a source of debate. The two periods identified have been the latter part of Nero's reign around A.D. 54-68 or the latter part of Domitian's reign around A.D. 81-96. The consensus has been around A.D. 95. The common feature of both periods is the reality of severe persecution for Christians and the enforcement of emperor worship as the rule of law. John's missionary activity in the region and his refusal to participate in emperor worship led to his exile to the island of Patmos.

There are some key words or concepts related to the genre and content of the Book of Revelation. It is an **Apocalypse** – a revelation or vision or disclosure of divine mystery intended to inspire and reaffirm hope in the divine. Its content is **Apocalyptic**, which is descriptive of cosmic or heavenly realities and not necessarily revelatory. Additionally it is **Eschatological** dealing with end times or final things. As an apocalypse, we know Christ commissioned the vision with its dazzling images that provoke fear, mystery, awe and some uncomfortable even disturbing feelings. It is not definitive, there is no interpreter nor any clear concrete interpretation or solutions to human problems. As an apocalypse, it can help reduce despair in the face of human contradiction, be an antidote to pessimism and offer insight to unfathomable human problems.

In its apocalyptic and eschatological dimensions, the content is sometimes suggestive of political issues found in successive generations or tied to definite historical events. It requires that we resist the temptation to decode whether by reconstructing the specific historical context or distilling the past, present and future. This writing requires us to hold several things together – images, text, one’s own social location and the action of the Holy Spirit (an interplay of text, context and imagination).

A word on interpretation. There have been four main ways of interpreting the Book of Revelation. The first is called **Futurist** - a straightforward account of the end of the world (eschatological and prophetic) linked to Daniel, Ezekiel, 1 Thes 4:16. The second is the **Preterist** interpretation – focused on the first century context with the view that most of the events described have already taken place. The third is **Historicist** - suggesting that Revelation is an interpretive lens for pre-Christian and post Christian history. It offers a gateway to greater understanding of both human and divine reality. Those who hold this hermeneutical perspective associate the prophecies with actual historical events and associate images/beings with historical persons or societies. The fourth is the **Idealist** view – the images and prophecies are a description of the struggles of the spiritual journey: images of the soul’s journey with God and the struggle between good and evil. There is no attribution of historical or future meaning to the book’s content.

For the purpose of this bible study, we will explore the Book of Revelation in three main sections. The first section – The Spirit Speaks to the Churches. The second section – The Throne Room and the Battle. The third section – The Consummation. We

will look out for repeated key words, phrases and images as we stretch our imagination, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest what the Spirit is saying to the Church today in our 21st Century Caribbean context.

We encourage you to make this your personal study. Moreover, we urge you to use the Diocesan Bible Study 2021 in your bible study groups or ministry groups at Church, in your homes, with your family and friends, with colleagues at work and in your neighbourhood. Each week there will be a subtheme, a biblical text, additional reading, a brief commentary, questions for discussion and/or reflection, a practice activity and a prayer.

Over the next seven weeks, we will discuss:

1. The message to Ephesus and Laodicea (2:1-7; 3:14-22)
2. The message to Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis (2:12- 3:6)
3. The message to Smyrna and Philadelphia (2: 8-11; 3:7-13)
4. The Prophetic Revelations I (The Throne in Heaven and the Seals, Chapters 4-7)
5. The Prophetic Revelations II (The Trumpets and the Angels, Chapters 8 – 12)
6. The Prophetic Revelations III (War in Heaven, Chapters 13 – 17)
7. The Final Consummation (Chapters 18-22)

Share your insights on the various diocesan social media platforms, in the Anglican Outlook, and in your parish WhatsApp groups. Write a blog, journal, create a small group, whatever you choose - participate in this study of the Book of Revelation and be inspired to a renewed hope and a deeper faith and experience the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in your personal life, in your relationships, and in the Church.



The Outline of a Module for Each Week

Sub-theme

Opening Prayer

Bible Reading

Commentary

Questions for discussion and/or reflection

Spiritual practice / Activity

Additional Reading or Bible References

Closing Prayer

WEEK 1 – THE MESSAGE TO EPHEBUS AND LAODICEA (2:1-7; 3:14-22)

OPENING PRAYER: Merciful God, we believe you respond to those who are penitent. We acknowledge that we have lost our zeal and passion for you and that we have become lukewarm. We are sorry. Rekindle in us the fire of your love and so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations and so control our wills that we will be dedicated to you and continue in your service with patient endurance. We ask this through the one who is the Alpha and Omega, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.



“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands: ‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false...But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen...’ And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin^[OEG] of God’s creation: ‘I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot.’¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Revelation 2: 1-2, 4-5; 3: 14-17

COMMENTARY

Ephesus was a wealthy, diverse and important commercial and political centre in the Roman province of Asia and served as the capital city of the province and famous for its temple to Diana. Ephesus was also an important Christian centre and the base for

Paul's ministry. Paul founded the Church at Ephesus on this third missionary journey and later asked Timothy to serve as their pastor. The Church in Ephesus was John's home church known for its patient endurance, genuine good works and sound doctrine. Despite the many commendations, their passion for Christ waned and the angel urged them to repent and return their first love and to their earlier works. While the Ephesians lost their zeal for Christ and were in need of revival, the Laodiceans were luke-warm and self-satisfied. They receive the most severe criticism. The angel had nothing positive, for which to commend them. The city of Laodicea was a profitable trade centre. They manufactured a highly valued eye ointment and enjoyed a flourishing garment industry. Many of the believers focused on their worldly wealth, spiritual pride and their personal needs and desires. Their prosperity gospel suggested that God was pleased with them evidenced by their success. They were blind to their spiritual poverty, tolerating a hybrid worship of materialism and Christ and thinking they were almost perfect.

1. What is the description of Jesus given in each message?
2. What commendation does each church receive?
3. What indictment or charge does each church receive? What is each church expected to do?
4. What promise or word of comfort does each church receive?
5. In what ways do you see these issues reflected in your personal / spiritual life and in the Church today?

PRACTICE: 1. Reflect and journal about the descriptions of Jesus and your connection to him. What will be the focus of your repentance? What will it take to get you energized and willing to stand for Christ? What does patient endurance look like for you?

ADDITIONAL READING: Acts 19:1-20, 23-41; 20:17-38; Ephesians 1; 3:14-21; Luke 11:14-28; Proverbs 3:11-12

CLOSING PRAYER: Almighty God, help me to remember that pleasing you is more gratifying than temporary self-satisfaction. Keep your passion alive in me that I may love you above all else and seek to serve you faithfully to the end, Amen.

WEEK 2 – TO MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM, THYATIRA AND SARDIS (2:12- 3:6)

OPENING PRAYER: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created and You shall renew the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may become aware of our idolatry, our lack of self-discipline, our compromise and our materialism, repent and return to a closer walk with you through Christ Our Lord, Amen.



“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword: “I know where you are living, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication... “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze: “I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols ...“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead.

[OB]

COMMENTARY

The messages to these three churches reveal a catalogue of spiritual pitfalls for individuals and the church alike. All three cities have strong reputations, one as a centre for religious observance, one for its lucrative purple dye and textiles industry and one for its precious stones, material possessions and wealth.

Despite their wealth, they are poor in the Lord. They have been caught in the snare of idolatry, self-sufficiency, materialism and false prophesy. The mention of Balaam and Jezebel, like Nicolaitans in a previous message, represent those ideologies that are a source of distraction and deception that lead believers astray – away from Christ and

His truth. The mention of Satan's throne, a reminder that Satan's dwelling place is on the earth, reinforces how easy it is for believers to become distracted or confused if they are not holding fast to Christ. Who are the Balaams and Jezebels among us today? What is their message?

Antipas represents those who are faithful witnesses – those who patiently endure even to the point of martyrdom. These are saints who stand firm in the truth of Christ, they do not deny their faith and they persevere in faithful service to Christ. Can we identify any such saints among us today?



1. What is the description of Jesus given in each message?
2. What commendation does each church receive?
3. What indictment or charge does each church receive? What is each church expected to do?
4. What promise or word of comfort does each church receive?
5. In what ways do you see the charges reflected in your personal / spiritual life and in the Church today?

PRACTICE: 1. Reflect on and journal about what makes these messages uncomfortable for you.

2. Write a prayer with praise, thanksgiving, confession, intercession and petition based on these verses.

ADDITIONAL READING: 1 Kings 16: 29-34, 18:1-15, 19:1-9, 21: 7-29; Number 23 – 24, 25: 1-3; Hosea 1-3; Matthew 24; Acts 15:18-21, 16: 11-15; 1 Corinthians 8; Hebrews 12:14-17;

CLOSING PRAYER: Merciful God, grant me the courage to desire you above all else, to commit to maturity in faith, the will to pursue it and the grace to encourage others in the way that leads to life. Amen.

WEEK 3 – THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA AND PHILADELPHIA (2: 8-11; 3:7-13)

OPENING PRAYER: Most holy one, grant us the grace to be aware when we are wavering and to remember that serving you is more fulfilling than searching after riches or self-centred ambitions. Strengthen us to stand firm in the face of persecution and to be bold in the proclamation of the gospel for the sake of your Kingdom. Amen.



“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life: “I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. ... “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens: “I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Revelation 2:8-10; 3:7-8

OBJ

COMMENTARY

Smyrna was a wealthy port city known for its devotion to Rome and its pagan gods. Paul may have founded a church there while on his missionary journey to Ephesus (Acts 19:10). The consequence of their faithfulness to Christ was material poverty and constant persecution by the Jews and Romans who asserted their control and disdain for the Church.

The city of Philadelphia was thirty miles inland from Sardis. The Church founded there was made up of a small group of poor Christians who rich in God’s eyes because of their faithfulness and their witness.

Of the seven churches, these two churches are the only ones to be spared criticism and condemnation. Both churches were severely persecuted and both churches received significant promises – ‘the crown of life’ (2:10), ‘to not be hurt at all by the second death’ (2:11), to be spared ‘from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth’ (3:10). While their perseverance and steadfastness in faith, their richness in spiritual gifts, their strength, faithfulness to Christ and evangelical witness are highly commended, they are both warned that more persecution will come but they are urged to remain faithful and steadfast, holding on to what they have so no one takes their crown, nor lose the honour of becoming a pillar of God’s temple, nor become vulnerable to rejecting salvation.

The church in Smyrna and Philadelphia remind us that like the crucified Christ we follow, we too are fragile and the resurrection is source of our hope (2:8, 3:7).



1. What is the description of Jesus given in each message? How do they impact you?
2. What commendation does each church receive?
3. What warning does each church receive? What is each church encouraged to do?
4. What promise or word of comfort does each church receive?
5. In what ways does the current Anglican Church in Trinidad embody/reflect the characteristics of these two churches? How does your personal / spiritual life reflect those attributes?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE / ACTIVITY: Think about your strategies of resistance, write down which practices have worked well? Which practices no longer serve you? Name and pray for Christians experiencing persecution and hardship, not only those abroad but those right here among us.

ADDITIONAL READING: file: <https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/study/16/>

CLOSING PRAYER: Grant, Lord that we may be faithful to you without turning aside, worship you without growing weary, serve you without failing, diligently seek you, happily find you, and forever possess you, the one and only God, blessed, forever and ever. Amen.



WEEK 4 – THE PROPHETIC REVELATIONS I (THE THRONE IN HEAVEN AND THE SEALS) (4:1 – 7:17)

OPENING PRAYER: Holy Father even in these times, we pray for those Christians who face persecution in various parts of your world. May you give them patience in their sufferings and strength in their faith, that you, Lord will never desert them, but will bring them to salvation. These mercies we ask through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.



⁹ After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ They cried in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ¹¹ And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹² singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

Revelation 7: 9-12^[10]

COMMENTARY

It is important in studying the prophetic revelations in this section of the Book of Revelation to consider why John wrote to the seven churches in Asia Minor.

In the writings in the Old Testament, apocalyptic revelations came usually through dreams or visions, in which the coming events are symbolized by strange figures, the meanings of which are sometimes disclosed by angelic messengers, who are sent for that particular purpose. John followed a similar formula. There is always the danger therefore, that these strange occurrences and symbols may be interpreted subsequently, in ways that were not intended by the authors. Such misinterpretation is clearly possible and may be prevalent with respect to the Revelation to John.

Thus, several commentators state that many have distorted the Book of Revelation by changing its interpretation into a search for the details of present and future events. They argue that it is very inappropriate to literally force the content of Revelation, out of its historical and symbolic context, to explain contemporary events, geography or culture. This is not to suggest that the Book of Revelation is not true. Instead, it is to

suggest that the book could be interpreted more like the parables of Jesus. Perhaps Jesus was telling a true story in the “Parable of the Prodigal son and his brother”, but that is not the point of the parable. It was presented by Jesus for a different purpose and its truth is immaterial. Similarly, we must always bear in mind the purpose for which the Book of Revelation was written and be on guard for improper interpretations of the Book.

In Revelation 4:1, following Christ's messages to the seven churches, John states that he was told that the rest of the Revelation would describe what else must take place. He is immediately shown heaven in verse 2, the divine throne in verse 3 and what is around the divine throne in verses 4 to 9.

Then in Chapter 5, John describes his vision of a sealed scroll written on the inside and on the back. The first series of seven seals enclose the scroll. On the scroll is written an account of the events that are about to take place. The opening of these seven seals therefore reveals the coming sufferings of the Church. The risen Christ is referred to as the Lamb, the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David and He is said to be the only one who is worthy to “take the scroll and open its seven seals” (Revelation 5:9).

In Chapter 6, when the Lamb opens the first seal, a white horse appears, and its rider is given a crown and goes out to conquer. Three other seals are opened, and three more horses appear — a red one, a black one, and a pale green one. These four horses and their respective riders are given authority to among other things to “kill with the sword, famine, and pestilence and by wild animals of the earth” (Revelation 6: 3-9).

When the Lamb opens the fifth seal, John is permitted to look upon: “the souls of those who have been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they have given” (Revelation 6:9). In the midst of their distress, they cry out: (Revelation 6:10) *“Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long, will it be before you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?”* They are each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, as more souls are about to be added to their number.

Chapter 6 ends with the opening of the sixth seal and John's vision of the impending disasters soon to be inflicted upon the world, such as earthquake, gales and falling

stars. Such is the magnitude of these disasters that “the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.’” (Revelation 6:15-16)

In Chapter 7, (7:1-8) the scene changes, and four angels representing the four winds of heaven are told to hold back these winds and the damage to the earth and sea, until “the servants of our God” have had seals placed on their foreheads. John then reveals the number of those who are sealed. John hears the number as 144,000, made up of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Then in 7:9-17, John describes “... a great multitude that no one can count” of those persons, who have come out unscathed from the “great ordeal”, with robes made white in the blood of the Lamb. They worship God day and night and they are sheltered and provided for by the Lamb, as their shepherd. The Lamb “... will guide them to the springs of the water of life and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:17b)



1. What are the desirable qualities or merits of the opener of the seven seals?
2. How and why is such a joyful view of heaven presented in sections of these chapters?
3. Is there a message to the Church today in: “joy in the face of calamity”?
4. How would you compare the 144,000 and the “great multitude that no one can count” with respect to salvation?
5. How relevant is this question today? - “Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge the inhabitants of the earth?”

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE / ACTIVITY: Every day for this week please devote a period of time to stop, meditate on, and be amazed at the wonderful works of God.

ADDITIONAL READING: Mark 13:24-27

Patrick Comerford (2009) "The Book of Revelation (1): an Introduction" <http://www.patrickcomerford.com/2009/02/book-of-revelation-1-introduction.html>

CliffsNotes "Summary and Analysis: The Book of Revelation" <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/n/new-testament-of-the-bible/summary-and-analysis/the-book-of-revelation> (This article gives a strictly preterist interpretation.)

CLOSING PRAYER: "Sovereign Lord, holy and mighty I pray that you will so order my life that I will be among the great multitude robed in white who will be guided by the Lamb of God to the springs of the water of life. Amen."



WEEK 5 – THE PROPHETIC REVELATIONS II (THE TRUMPETS AND THE ANGELS) (8:1 – 12:17)

OPENING PRAYER God our heavenly Father give us such knowledge and command of your laws and your Word, that we will have the strength to fight against the devil, his angels and all other forces of evil, so that we can fashion our lives, according to the example of your Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.



And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Revelation 12:7-9^[OBJ]

COMMENTARY

At the beginning of Chapter 8, the opening of the seventh seal by the Lamb, plunges heaven into silence. Then a second series of seven (this time) angels are given seven trumpets. Another angel announces the presence of the seven angels on earth, through thunder, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Then the sounds of the trumpets blown by the first four angels announce such physical catastrophes as giant volcanoes, the turning of the sea into blood, poisoning of rivers and the darkening of the sun and the moon, as well as the falling of the stars from heaven. Then in Chapter 9, the blowing of the fifth trumpet by the fifth angel causes a plague of locusts like scorpions of the earth, who are instructed not to damage green plants nor those with the seal of God on their foreheads, but to torture, but not kill others. Chapter 9 ends with the blowing of the sixth trumpet and the unleashing of two more plagues on earth, so that through the three plagues a third of human kind are killed.

Chapter 10 presents a curious story about a mighty angel and a little scroll. This angel puts his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the earth, and utters in a mighty

voice, among other things, that there will be no more delay. All things are drawing to a final conclusion and at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the mystery of God will be fulfilled. Then John is given authority to resume his prophecy about “many peoples, nations, languages and kings” (Revelation 10: 11).

Chapter 11 begins by announcing the grant of authority to two witnesses to prophesy for 1260 days wearing sackcloth and also to have awesome powers to cause destruction. These saints are then killed by the beast, in the same great city where their Lord was crucified. However, they are refused a decent burial. Then, after three and a half days, God raises them from the dead and takes them to heaven, in a cloud. Meanwhile on earth, at the same time, an earthquake kills thousands of the enemies of God.

Chapter 11 ends with the blowing of the seventh trumpet which ushers in worship in heaven. “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.” (Revelation 11:19)

Chapter 12 begins with a pregnant woman crying out in the agony of birth. The great dragon called the Devil and Satan tries to snatch her son as he is born, but God rescues the boy and he is taken to His throne. This vision affirms the great hostility between God, the Church and Satan.

Then war breaks out in heaven between the great dragon and his angels and St. Michael and his angels. St. Michael and his angels win the war and Satan and his angels are thrown down to earth. On earth, Satan attacks the woman again, but this time she is rescued by people here on earth. However, the great dragon goes away to continue his war against “... the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12: 17b)



1. What is the significance of the Ark of the Covenant being in the temple in heaven?
2. Some commentators suggest that the eating of the little scroll symbolises John acquiring all of the information contained in the scroll. What does this action mean to you?

3. Some commentators suggest that the sounds of the seven trumpets blown by the seven angels are to warn humankind of the impending wrath of God. Why do so many people despite similar warnings refuse to heed God's word?
4. How would you describe angels and their ministry?
5. Do you believe that the COVID-19 plague is a warning to humankind by God?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE / ACTIVITY: Meditate on the two witnesses and the similarity of their experience to that of Jesus Christ. Do you also anticipate an experience of death, resurrection and ascension to heaven?

ADDITIONAL READING & BIBLE REFERENCES: Bel and the Dragon (Daniel 14): 23- 42

CLOSING PRAYER: Holy and immortal God we thank you that we can turn to you for help to overcome the forces of evil. Give us the humility to know that we cannot overcome the enemy on our own, but we need you, O God, every day and in every way. Help us therefore we pray. Amen.



WEEK 6 – THE PROPHETIC REVELATIONS III (WAR IN HEAVEN) (13:1 – 17:18)

Opening Prayer:

Sovereign Lord, help us to remember that you reign victorious and that the power of the evil one will not prevail. Strengthen us to resist and withstand every attempt of Satan to destroy us or gain control over your world. As we turn to you we offer our prayer in the name of son JESUS Christ who with you and the Holy Spirit live and reign forever. Amen



And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them.'

Revelation 14:13 [OBJ]

COMMENTARY

In Chapter 13, the evil one Satan, makes a supreme effort to destroy the righteous and gain mastery over the world, through two beasts. Commentators suggest that, similar to the Book of Daniel (Daniel 7:7- 8), John utilizes the same symbol of a beast, to describe a wicked ruler, who tries to prevail over the holy ones of God and gain their kingdom. Daniel had a vision of a symbolic, great and terrible beast that has ten horns. In like manner, in John's vision, the first beast also has ten horns and in the preterist interpretation of Revelation, this beast is said to represent the Roman emperor.

John seems to suggest that Satan was trying to accomplish his purposes through the Roman emperor as evidenced by the cruel persecutions that were being inflicted upon Christians. As John states: "In amazement the whole earth followed the beast" and worshipped him and Satan, while the beast blasphemed God's name and those who dwell in heaven. The "whole earth" of course, excludes those saints, whose names are written in the "book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered" (Revelation 13:3-8).

Then John sees a second beast and this beast performs signs that are used to deceive the inhabitants of the earth. This beast is often referred to as the Antichrist. John is quite specific in his identification of the one symbolized by this beast. He says: "This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is 666." (Revelation 13:18) This beast caused "...both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or on the forehead" (Revelation 13:16).

Chapter 14 begins with an extremely joyful and happy vision when John says: "Then I looked, and there was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion! And with Him, 144,000, who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" and they were singing a new song before the throne. Further details are then given about the nature of these "first fruits for God" (Revelation 14: 3-5).

Then John has a vision of three angels, who proclaim three important events that would affect the Church in the time of the Antichrist:

- The first angel announces that the hour of God's judgment has come and calls for people to give God glory;
- The second angel speaks about the destruction of the kingdom of the Antichrist: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great" (the symbol of Rome in the preterist interpretation).
- The third angel speaks about the suffering prepared for the Antichrist and his followers, that is, "eternal fire", where they will forever be destroyed.

Chapter 14 ends with "the harvest of the earth". First, the good crop of the harvest is reaped by the Son of Man with a golden crown on his head. Then with a sharp sickle, another angel from the temple of heaven harvests the remainder of the vintage. This second harvest however receives the wrath of God and is destroyed.

In Chapters 15 and 16, the third series of seven and the second set of seven angels appear - seven angels with seven plagues which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended (Revelation 15:1). Each angel is carrying a bowl, the content of which symbolizes the wrath of God. When the first angel pours out his bowl upon the earth, foul and evil sores grow on the men who bear the mark of the beast and who worship

its image. When the second angel pours out his bowl on the sea, the sea turns to blood and everything living in it dies. A similar disaster occurs when the third angel pours his bowl into the rivers and springs. Other disasters follow when the remaining angels empty their bowls each one with increasing pain and suffering. Babylon is specially targeted in the seventh plague which is subjected to an earthquake, such as had not occurred, since people were upon the earth: “God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath.” (Revelation 16:19b)

Chapter 17 continues the denigration of Babylon: “Babylon the great mother of whores and of earth’s abominations” (Revelation 17: b). Babylon is also portrayed as a woman drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of witnesses to Jesus”. Babylon is further described as the great city that rules over the kings of the earth. In the context of John’s time, and the preterist interpretation, this great city could only be the city of Rome.



1. Why do the faithful in heaven offer prayers and praises to Almighty God?
2. Why do you believe God continues his great favour toward the 144,000?
3. Compare the second beast to the character described in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Do you believe both passages refer to the same individual?
4. How can the Church empower us to deal with the deceptions of Satan and his angels?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the separation of Church and State?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE / ACTIVITY: Meditate on this passage and then reflect on whether it applies to you and your life:

“What a desirable view! Who would not do his/her utmost and accept all suffering, in order to obtain this destiny, to be around the Lord, be united with Him, and not depart from Him forever?”

ADDITIONAL READING & BIBLE REFERENCES: 2 Thessalonians 2:1- 12, Daniel 7: 19- 22

Keith Mathison, The Preterist Approach to Revelation — The Unfolding of Biblical Eschatology, Ligonier Ministries. <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/preterist-approach-revelation-unfolding-biblical-eschatology/>

CLOSING PRAYER: Holy Father we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit as our guide and counsellor along this perilous journey to eternal life. We pray also for all the saints who have departed this earth. We pray that all our names are written in the book of life of the Lamb to be with you for eternity in paradise. Amen.



WEEK 7 – THE FINAL CONSUMMATION (THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION)

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father we give you thanks for your revelation to John, help us to reflect on his message and by it be inspired to face up to all our challenges. Lord, continue to lead us through the difficulties we experience and keep us faithful always to the path you have set before us, we ask these things through Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen.



2 I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. ²I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. ³I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, “Behold, God’s dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away.” Revelation 21: 1 - 4 [OBJ]

COMMENTARY

The Revelation of John remains one of the most controversial and misunderstood books in the Bible but at its core, behind all the imagery (frightening as that imagery may be to some persons) there is a straightforward message. The message is this... in spite of all of the challenges and trials you are encountering know that God is in control, seated on the throne and because of that “fact” there is a strong basis for **HOPE**. While “HOPE” is not a word that we usually associate with Revelation, it is ultimately the point of what John sees.

In the midst of brutal persecution from the Roman imperial power and facing the continuing denouncement of the Jewish community from which they have become more and more disconnected, John writes to help those who will hear his words understand why they must take heart and stand firm even in the midst of all that is happening to them. The Lamb as Saviour will complete the work begun on the cross and the culmination, the fulfilment of all things will come when everyone least expects it. All that is evil will be cast down and the heaven and the earth will be renewed, restored, remade. Those who have been faithful will receive the reward of their perseverance, a place in the presence of the LORD in the midst “of the great multitude that no one could count” that worships God night and day.

We are invited by John to sing “Hallelujah” while still here below to join the chorus

that sings in the presence of God eternally. It helps us to recognise that even as the final enemy death has been conquered by Jesus's resurrection that all other things are subject to the one who sits on the right hand of the Throne of God. Through the use of the following; the Breaking of the Seven Seals (Chpt 6- Chpt 8:5), the Blowing of the Seven Trumpets (Chpt 8:6 – Chpt 11), The Woman, The Child and the Dragon (Chpt 12), The Two Beasts(Chpt 13), The Seven Last Plagues (Chpt 15 & 16), Babylon the Great(Chpt17 – Chpt 19), John takes the Church through an examination of the struggles that persons are facing in real life world situations. However what is of critical import is the battle is not even. The Ancient of Days has conquered all and all things will in the end be subjected to Him and subject to His dominion.

“And I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth”, words that signify that all that harms will have been conquered and laid aside. John writing, in exile, cut off from the main community, is by God's inspiration reminding them that their suffering and struggle shall not be in vain. The renewal of all things will put God's stamp, as it were, on everything and 'IT WILL BE GOOD'. God will be the centre of all things, the very LAMP that lights the New Jerusalem. As we face our troubles, struggles and trials, let us catch John's vision and continue to heed Paul's advice to give God thanks in all things.



1. What images in Revelation inspire you to trust God in hard times?
2. When you think of the Second Coming of Jesus what emotions does it stir up in you?
3. How do you understand Jesus' preaching of the kingdom to relate to the New Heaven and the New Earth?
4. How do you believe that your daily walk with God connects to the Kingdom that is to come?
5. What things in your life give you hope?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE / ACTIVITY: Read the Revelation of John with fresh eyes as a message that speaks to struggle and hope. Think about ways you can live by the principles of God's Kingdom in your daily life.

ADDITIONAL READING: 1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 18, Revelation 21: 1 - 7, Isaiah 11

CLOSING PRAYER: Almighty God, grant us the grace to choose the power of love when we face our struggles and trials. In you, O Lord, we live and move and have our being, you have made us for yourself, in your own image, we ask you to help us to be faithful to your will and to that image as we go about our daily tasks. In all things, help us to be thankful for your grace and to understand the hope we have in you that we may indeed come to the joy of your presence. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Conclusion

The letters to the seven churches remind us that context is critical in any theology or biblical interpretation. The word always becomes flesh in a particular place and at a particular time and when we pay attention to that particularity one is better able to hear and interpret what the Spirit says to the Churches. We are invited to pay attention to the weakness and fragility of Smyrna and Philadelphia as well as the complacency and compromise of Laodicea and Pergamum.

The content of the letters make for uncomfortable reading as they offer us a reflection of church life and a portrait of human failings: loss of our first love, persecution, compromise, true and false prophecy through a lack of self-discipline, fragments of hope through the lure of materialism. However, we are reminded that though the above is displeasing to God, weakness, fallibility and resistance are opportunities for strength and to hear God's invitation to repent and return.

The theme that runs throughout is the need for endurance. We must develop habits of resistance to evil in order to endure. Apocalypse offers a converted sense of history so that one might see in every event not only the reality of death but also the Word of God; not only the demonic and the dehumanizing but also the power of the resurrection; not only the portents of apocalyptic doom but also hope for oneself, for the Church and for one's society.

May God grant us the grace to find ourselves in Him.

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