



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

New Testament Survey

Lesson 38 – The Revelation of Jesus Christ to John

The Book of Revelation

The last book in the New Testament is different from all other New Testament books. It is not a book of history, such as the four Gospels and the book of Acts. It does not contain apostolic teaching and encouragement like the letters of Paul, Peter, John, and the brothers of our Lord, James and Titus. The book of Revelation is a book of prophecy like the Old Testament books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, and Zechariah. It is a book of visions, symbols, pictures, and numbers. It is filled with quotations from and references to the Old Testament – more than any other New Testament book. This book is called the Revelation of John, but it is more exact to call it the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John.

Towards the end of the first century the Roman Emperor was Domitian. He was the first of the emperors to demand that people worship the emperor. Christians could not go along with that, and their refusal resulted in severe persecution. Many Christians lost their lives; this was the age of the martyrs. The apostle John was not put to death, but he was exiled from Ephesus to the island of Patmos.

It was while John was on this island in 95 or 96 AD that he received the overwhelming visions he wrote about in Revelation. John wrote down what he saw and heard as God revealed it to him. The purpose was to strengthen the Christians of his time and of all times in their struggles against persecution. We are to gain the assurance from these visions that no matter how bad things look in this present world, the risen Lord is still in control. The ultimate victory over Satan and over all evil belongs to Christ and His Church of believers. At a time when things seem at their worst Christ will return in triumph; God's people will enjoy eternal bliss, and God's enemies will go down to in the lake of fire in absolute defeat.

Three things were prevalent in John's world: false teachers, harassment by the Jews, and persecution. But John assured his readers then and now: Do not be afraid, all of you who trust in Christ; you are on the winning side.

The book was originally addressed to seven congregations in the province of Asia. The book can also be divided into seven visions and the number seven also applies to many of the episodes within the seven visions, such as the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls of wrath.

Read the entire book of Revelation, if possible. If you have questions, do not hesitate to ask them.

Revelation 1:1-8: Introduction

“The revelation of Jesus Christ ... to show His servants ... things which must shortly take place” (v. 1).

**“To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood ... to Him be glory”
(vv. 5-6).**

Revelation 1:9 – 3:22: The First Vision – Christ with His Church – The Seven Letters

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (v. 1:11).

John saw the Christ in glory, who said: **“I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore” (v. 1:18).**

Letter 1 to Ephesus – still orthodox, intolerant of false teaching but:

“I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (v. 2:4).

Letter 2 to Smyrna – orthodox, severely persecuted, poor in material things

“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (v. 2:10).

Letter 3 to Pergamos – a good start, Antipas a faithful martyr, now tolerant of false teaching

“You have those who hold the doctrine of Balaam ... also ... of the Nicolaitans” (vv. 2:14-15).

Letter 4 to Thyatira – good things, but tolerant of the false teaching of Jezebel

“You allow that woman Jezebel ... to teach and seduce My servants” (v. 2:20).

Letter 5 to Sardis – a dead church with only a living name, only **“a few names”**

“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments” (v. 3:5).

Letter 6 to Philadelphia – orthodox and faithful, victims of Jewish hatred

“You ... have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (v. 3:8).

“Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (v. 3:11).

Letter 7 to Laodicea – an indifferent church, neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm

“I will vomit you out of My mouth – as many as I love, I rebuke” (vv. 3:16, 19).

Revelation 4:1 – 8:1: The Second Vision – The Seven Seals in a Scroll

The Vision of the Throne of God

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (v. 4:8).

The Vision of the Lamb and the Scroll with Seven Seals

“The Lion of the tribe of Judah ... has prevailed to open the scroll” (v. 5:5).

"You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe" (v. 5:9).

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom" (v. 5:12).

The First Seal – a King riding on a white horse, conquering

The Second Seal – a man on a red horse with a sword

The Third Seal – a man on a black horse with a balance in his hand

The Fourth Seal – death riding on a pale horse

The Fifth Seal – martyrs in white robes who died for their faith

The Sixth Seal – an earthquake, the beginning of God's judgment on the earth

"The great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (v. 6:17).

An interlude giving assurance to God's people

"A great multitude ... clothed with white robes" (v. 7:9).

"These ... washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (v. 7:14).

"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (v. 7:17).

The Seventh Seal – leading to the Third Vision

Revelation 8:2 – 11:19: The Third Vision – The Vision of the Seven Trumpets

The prayers of the saints (Christians) rise up to God.

The First Trumpet – hail and fire mixed with blood: God's judgment on sin

The Second Trumpet – a mountain burning with fire thrown into the sea

The Third Trumpet – the great star Wormwood fell from heaven: Satan deceiving the world

The Fourth Trumpet – the sun, moon, and stars darkened

"Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth!" (v. 8:13).

The Fifth Trumpet – smoke coming from the bottomless pit, also an army of locusts; Woe 1

The Sixth Trumpet – an army of horsemen from the East; Woe 2

An interlude giving assurance to God's people

Two witnesses of Christ die, but are raised up, and ascend into heaven.

The Seventh Trumpet – the voices of victory in heaven. Woe 3

"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord" (v. 11:15).

Revelation 12:1 – 14:20: The Fourth Vision – The Battle between the Woman’s Seed and the Dragon

“She (the Church) bore a male Child (Jesus) who was to rule all nations” (v. 12:5).

“The dragon stood before the woman ... to devour her Child as soon as it was born” (v. 12:4).

“Her Child was caught up to God; ... the woman fled into the wilderness” (vv. 12:5-6).

“The great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan” (v. 12:9).

Although the dragon was defeated, he continued waging war against the woman and her seed.

“The dragon ... persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child” (v. 12:13).

“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (v. 12:11).

The dragon now does his work through the two wild beasts (Chapter 13)

The first beast **“was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies” (v. 13:5).**

“It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them” (v. 13:7).

The second beast **“deceives those who dwell on the earth by ... signs” (v. 13:14).**

“The number of the beast ... is 666” (v. 13:18).

An interlude of visions giving comfort to God’s people:

“A Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand” (v. 14:1).

“These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (v. 14:4).

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on” (v. 14:13).

Revelation 15:1 – 16:21: The Fifth Vision – The Seven Bowls of Wrath and the Church’s Final Victory

The First Bowl – a Foul and Loathsome Sore

The Second Bowl – the Death of Sea Creatures

The Third Bowl – The Waters Became Blood

The Fourth Bowl – The Sun Scorching Men with Fire

The Fifth Bowl – The Beast’s Kingdom in Darkness and Pain

The Sixth Bowl – The Drying Up of the Water, and Frogs Coming Out of Mouths

The Seventh Bowl – Thunders, Lightnings, Earthquake, Hail

Revelation 17:1 – 20:15: The Sixth Vision – Christ’s Victory over Babylon and All Evil

“These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them” (v. 17:14).

“Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons” (v. 18:2).

“Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice” (vv. 19:6-7).

“I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened” (v. 20:12).

“Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (v. 20:15).

Revelation 21:1 – 22:7: The Seventh Vision – The New Heaven and the New Earth

“There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain” (v. 21:4).

“He ... showed me the great city, holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God” (v. 21:10).

“There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination” (v. 21:27).

“There shall be no more curse. ... They shall see His face” (vv. 22:3-4).

Revelation 22:8-21: Conclusion

“Surely I am coming quickly.” “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (v. 22:20).

Prevalent Wrong Interpretations of Revelation

The mistake many people make with respect to Revelation, is to start with Revelation and come up with ideas of how it is to be understood, and then they try to make the rest of the Bible fit their interpretation of Revelation. The proper way is to study the rest of the Bible first, determine what the Bible says from clear statements, and then fit the visions of Revelation into what the Bible clearly teaches. One should not allow what one thinks the visions of Revelation mean to alter the clear statements of Scripture found elsewhere.

For example, based on what is written in Revelation 20, some Bible teachers claim that there will be two bodily resurrections from the dead: a bodily resurrection of believers before a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, and then another bodily resurrection of all the dead after this period of a thousand years. But Jesus taught clearly in John 5:28-29 that all the dead will rise from the dead on the same day; there will not be two bodily resurrections but only one.

Also, the idea of a thousand-year reign of Christ over a kingdom on this earth is contrary to Jesus’ plain words to Pontius Pilate that Jesus’ kingdom is not an earthly kingdom (John 18:36). We are not to understand the millennium (thousand years) of Revelation 20 literally,

but rather it denotes the time between Jesus' first visible appearance in the Holy Land and His second coming. We are living in this millennium at the present time.

The use of numbers in the book of Revelation is clearly symbolic. For example, the number of believers is listed as 144,000. This is 12 (sons of Jacob, Old Testament) times 12 (Jesus' apostles, New Testament) times ten times ten (the number of completeness – the Ten Commandments) to equal 144,000; this equals the total number of all believers in Christ from the beginning to the end, both before the birth of Christ and after the birth of Christ, all of them one holy Christian Church. It is a false interpretation to take this number literally and claim that only 144,000 will be saved and go to heaven.

There are many theories in the world and in various churches as to how Revelation should be understood. We must be on our guard against being deceived into believing something that is contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture elsewhere. It is not wrong for a Christian, even a Christian teacher, to admit that there are some details in Revelation that he does not fully comprehend. But the main theme of Revelation is plain: God and His believers will triumph over the devil and all his hosts. There is no better book for us to contemplate as we look ahead to the glories of the new heavens and the new earth promised by our Lord to all those who trust in Him.

Questions

1. What makes the book of Revelation different from most other Bible books?
2. What significance does the number seven have in Revelation?
3. Which of the seven congregations were most faithful to the Lord? Why?
4. Which were most unfaithful to the Lord? Why?
5. Who was the only one able to open the scroll with seven seals?
6. List some of the names given to Jesus in the book of Revelation.
7. What is the only way we can stand as holy in the presence of God?
8. How does Revelation describe the new heavens and new earth?
9. Who is the dragon of Revelation 12?
10. List some of the characteristics of the two beasts.
11. What is meant by the book of life and the lake of fire?
12. What will not be present in the holy city of Jerusalem?
13. Why must we reject the notion of an earthly kingdom ruled by Jesus for a thousand years?
14. What is the main theme of the book of Revelation?
15. Why is Revelation a good book to read in times of persecution?

Postface

This concludes our survey of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Remember that the central teaching of both Old Testament and New Testament is Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior of the world. Jesus Himself said that the Old Testament testifies of Him (John 5:39). The purpose of the New Testament was stated by the apostle John in speaking of his own Gospel: **“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”** (John 20:31). And he wrote in his letter: **“This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life”** (1 John 5:11-12).