



# Understanding Revelation

8 Bible Studies for Community Groups  
or Personal Study

# REVELATION: STUDY ONE

## Christ the giver of grace: - a tonic for hard times.

### 1. OUR STARTING POINT; - “JUST ANOTHER BOOK OF THE BIBLE”.

- NOT addressed to our curiosity, thus becoming like science fiction or a book for those Christians who are very clever with numbers and calculators.
- HOWEVER, like any other book of the Bible, this is the word of God, written to guide and help Christians in their service of Christ. It was designed to inform and instruct not to hide and make mysterious.

### 2. The life background to the book of Revelation.

- Written in last decade of first century to Christians wherever they were in Roman Empire.
- The forces of paganism (Largely the Roman Empire and associated pagan religions recognised and tolerated by the Romans) were at their peak.
- Persecution of Christians was awful. By this stage it was;-
  - Highly organised and sanctioned
  - Vicious - all ages tortured and brutalised beyond imagination
  - Capital crime just to use the name Christian)
  - Obligation of all to practice the state cult of emperor worship (a mark of political loyalty not to do so was treasonable and resulted in loss of all political and social rights and property)
  - Obvious economic consequences - people literally starved to death.
- So, what would you want to know as a Christian in such awful circumstances?
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  - >
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Revelation was written to answer questions precisely like these. In lots of ways the question Christians are asking today are just the same. Therefore, we can see the immediate relevance of the book.

## **2. Let the book speak for itself; - prologue and epilogue.**

**Note** that it is called “The Revelation” (singular). There is only one message conveyed and illustrated in various ways.

**Look at 1:1-8.** What are we told in plain language?

➤ Verse 1

➤ Verse 2

➤ Verse 3

➤ Verse 4-8

**Look at 22:20-21.** What similarities to prologue are obvious?

The prologue and epilogue “frame” the whole book. All that lies within this frame, though it, at first, might seem foreign and irrelevant to us speaks of Christ and his complete victory over Satan and his helpers. Therefore, we must read it and take it to heart that we might know the promised blessing.

There is nothing new in this book, which has not already been said in the rest of Scripture, but it deals with the same issues in a particular way and with a great deal of splendour and

unlike political cartoons of our own day). Many are illusions to Old Testament sacrificial and temple forms.

The important thing is that it enabled people, such as John, to speak of things which otherwise they could not speak about due to human limitations (How do you describe God, or his throne room, or the New Jerusalem?)

### [c] Picturing the drama of the entire Gospel Age.

**The theme** of Revelation is the victory of Christ and his church over the Dragon (Satan) and his helpers. Things are not what they seem to us believers here on Earth.

**The structure** of revelation is a series of scenes or dramas or sections, each of which run parallel to each other, in that each covers the entire gospel age (from Christ's first to second coming). There are so many things happening in "the last days" that John is forced to describe the period from one aspect and then from another and then from another.

*"Revelation is no mere appendix to the collection of letters which makes up the bulk of the New Testament. it is in fact the last and grandest of those letters. As comprehensive as Romans, as lofty as Ephesians, as practical as James or Philemon, this "letter to the Asians" is as relevant to the modern world as any of them."*

M. Wilcock

### 3. Pictures and words; - understanding the style of Revelation.

The Greek word for Revelation is **Apocalypse**, which has the idea of lifting the lid to expose something previously hidden. John has been given the privilege of seeing "the other world" or perhaps more accurately, seeing this world from a different perspective.

But how does a man, limited by his humanness describe what defies description because it is so big and so different?

**EXERCISE ONE:** You are suspended right over the centre of the Royal Easter show in such a way you can see everything there is to see. Describe what you see!

**EXERCISE TWO:** Describe "electricity" to a New Guinea national from a remote tribe just

contacted by white man. (Indebted to Don Carson)

**[a] Apocalyptic is a precise style of literature.**

It was common in period from 200bc to 200ad. It would have been easily understood by readers in John's day. It assumes the readers know the keys to unlock the pictures or interpret what is said.

**[b] Which is full of symbols and allegories.**

Symbols and pictures are extensively employed for realities taught. (Personalities in form of animals and beasts, historic events in form of natural disasters, colours, precious stones, symmetry and numbers)

Images are not arbitrary but from a set stock which delineated certain things.

# Revelation: study two

## Christ and his beloved church

### Revelation 1:9 - 3:22

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#### Recap:

- Christians under pressure and the church under attack.
- Understandably, there are big questions in the minds of the believers.
- In such a situation what is needed to 'calm and comfort and steady the nerves' of the Christians?

**Think:** What is the key to coming to terms with a chronic illness or restoring stability and confidence into a troubled marriage?

- P \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ could be used to describe the whole message of Revelation. The object of the book is to produce 'patient endurance' among the believers in the face of apparently unrestrained evil.

#### Structure of revelation:

- Most commentators recognise a symbolic structure (with many variations within) of **seven big scenes**, each breaking down into seven sub-scenes.
- Each of these scenes in a sense addresses one of the big concerns in the minds of the believers.
- The meaning of the book is not dependent on the accuracy of these suggested structures, so don't get hung upon it and don't try to press them too far.

### SCENE ONE: GETTING PERSPECTIVE ON CHRIST'S CHURCH.

#### Jesus: Lord of his church (1:9-20)

- **Glorious.** Note repetition of imagery from Old Testament. This repetition gives emphasis and has the same effect as underlining or highlighting. Clearly, Jesus is God and maintains control of God's church exactly as he has done from the start of time.
- **In the midst of his church.** The number seven implies God and eternal perfection. Jesus is in direct contact with his church that is scattered across the

world but from the perspective of heaven is completely safe and secure and under Christ's care and control.

- **Nothing more central to him than his church.** The heavenly beings are devoted to his church but they are all held together by Christ giving a picture of absolute centrality and safety and permanence.

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**Nothing has changed**

**"In the world"** apparently weak and defeated and we suffer. **"In the Spirit"** (v10) eternal, victorious and we reign with Jesus.

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### **Jesus among his churches in the world.**

Note the recurring pattern of each letter.

- Name of congregation
- Description of Christ. Note how each description is part of the original description in 1:9-20. Each description is perfectly suited to the problem in each congregation, suggesting Christ is perfectly equipped to meet the needs of his church wherever it is meeting.
- Statements describing the state of the congregation.
- Command
- Promise

Points to symbolic or stylised letters. That is, they are addressed to real congregations at the time, but they are also meant to represent the sorts of things that happen in churches everywhere.

### **[1] Satan will use Christians to get at Christ. (2:1-7)**

- Don't ever think that zeal for the truth and intolerance of evil is ever a substitute for 'your first love', Christ. Doing what's right without proper motivation of affection for Christ is never enough.
- Christ is concerned about 'evil' in the church especially when it comes from poison within (2:1)

### **[2] Satan will use tradition and religion to get at Christ. (2:8-11)**

- Trouble and persecution will come from those who claim to be God's people and who appeal to long traditions, but are really working against Christ.
- Christ knows what it is to suffer and he guarantees the suffering of his people is limited because of his resurrection and defeat of Satan. (2:8)

**[3] Satan will use the pressure of pagan society. (2:12-17)**

- Christians are in danger of being seduced by the values of society leading to compromise and blatant disobedience. Further permissive societies are very hard on those who won't fit in, leading to severe persecution.
- But it is Christ who has the real power in society, not the popular opinion or the Roman Emperor (2:12)

**[4] Satan will use sex and lust to get at Christ (2:18-29)**

- Don't succumb to immorality and compromise by those who appear to be God's people but actually preaching a completely new message that destroys God's people. This would be the equivalent of spiritual adultery and impurity.
- Jesus is concerned for purity in his church and will judge all immorality and those who lead his people astray. (2:18)

**[5] Satan will use image and reputation to get at Christ. (3:1-6)**

- Don't be fooled by a veneer of life, or the world's approval on your congregation, or having the approval of other congregations. These are not the measure of what is flourishing and active and healthy.
- Christ see through the reputation and image because he knows his church intimately (3:1)

**[6] Satan will use comfort and peace in the congregation to get at Christ. (3:7-13)**

- Christ finds no fault with this church. They have been faithful and going well. But persecution is about to hit them unexpectedly and they aren't prepared for it because life has been so easy.
- Christ has set his favour on the believers, true covenant people in the line of David. So, Christians take heart. (3:7)

**[7] Satan will use the lure of prosperity to get at Christ (3:14-22)**

- Don't succumb to professing Christ as the supplier of all your needs, while really chasing after them in wealth and career and prosperity. Beware the hypocrisy of claiming to be "Christ-made" people while really thinking you are "self-made" people.
- Christ will reveal the truth about them. They are in a frightfully dangerous



position unless they repent. (3:14)

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Maintain the perspective that the church in the world is like a tapestry. From one side (heaven) it is perfect and beautiful. From where we are at present it is a mass of tangled threads and loose ends.

Satan will try anything to get at Christ. While he causes real trouble in Christ's church it is Christ who has the last word as he actively cares for and controls his church.

Christ is not surprized or caught out by these realities and is perfectly equipped to deal with them. Therefore Christians should be comforted and confident and careful to seek Christ's approval as being that which really matters.

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# Revelation: study three

## ***Our future rests securely in the hands of God***

### **Revelation 4 - 7**

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#### Recap:

- Remember it's God's word, meant to be understood in a daily living context!
- Expect its teaching to be consistent with the rest of the NT!
- Remember it is full of symbols and pictures not meant to be taken literally.
- Remember it is a series of parallel dramas, each showing the whole span of history but from a different angle or perspective.

#### 1. "Remember....and ....expect": The normal encouragement of Scripture.

The general thrust of God's word is that Christ's people and Christ's church will experience mixed fortunes throughout history until he returns and "wraps up the world". Each generation will see, with slight variations, a recurring pattern of persecution and suffering as Christians in a very uncertain world. (John 3:19-20, 1 Pet 1:3-9, 2 Pet 3:3-15, 2 Cor 1:3-11, Rom 5:1-8, 2 Tim 4:16-18)

In the light of this Christ's people are constantly encouraged to remember how things really are and expect God's care into the future.

So, when Revelation 4:1 - 8:1 talks about what the future holds for Christ's church in the world we should expect the same pattern of encouragement.

#### 2. Some symbols and their meaning:

Seven	Not the entirety but the essence of the thing
One thousand	an indefinitely large number
Twelve	Linked with tribes of Israel (OT) and Apostles
Four	Represents God's world (the four corners, winds,etc) and God's awesome presence in his world.
Lion	Nobility
Ox	Strength
Eagle	Speed
Man	Wisdom, intelligence
Lamb	Weakness, helplessness
Horn	Power
Eye	Knowledge, omniscience
Right hand	Authority
Wings	Reverence, humility, modesty

### 3. SCENE 2: OUR WORLD VIEWED FROM HEAVEN (Revelation 4:1 - 8:1)

Suffering as a part of Christ's church;- What to remember and what to expect! 4:1b

Chapters 4 & 5 are like **THE SETTING** (in Heaven) against which **THE DRAMA OF HISTORY** (chapters 6 & 7), focussing on its impact on Christ's people, is played out.

**THINK:** What would you want to know if you were a soldier going into a major battle against the enemy?

What would you need to be encouraged and reassured as you faced the future in a cruel, uncertain world, where it appears Christians are attacked on every side?

**NOW APPLY SOME OF THIS TO REVELATION 4-8:1** (See next page)

#### 4. To ponder:

**Rev 4.** God is not a warm and cuddly grandfather figure as often presented today. He is an awesome, fearsome and even distant or remote.

**Rev 5.** The emphasis here must be the emphasis of our evangelism. **NOT:-** incarnation, fellowship, being green, being happy or user friendly **BUT** the cross and the atonement and present rule of Christ in his world.

The whole of history is effected for and governed by Christ's love for his Church and the Father's determination to bring that church to glory.

**Rev 6/7.** The succession of woes which will sweep to and fro across the world throughout the course of history, are not the signs of the end of the age and of Christ's return but simply the commonplaces of history.

**5. NEXT WEEK - CHAPTERS 8:2 - 11:18** (Scene three: seven trumpets of warning for the

world.)

**SCENE TWO: Suffering as part of Christ's church:- What to remember and what to expect (4:1b)**

The set

**Remember the throne and the king that rules the universe. (Chapter 4)**

God, the Commander-in-Chief is;

# Supreme Monarch (2)

# Majestic (3)

# Awesome (4)

# Fearsome (5a)

# Separate/Distant(4,5b-8a)

**Remember the universe is governed in the interests of Christ's Church.(Ch5)**

# Focus of all worship & praise (8b-11)

*Heaven*

**Remember where the real power is, given the normal pattern for God's people will be trouble. (Chapters 6&7)**

## **Christ, the Field Commander's credentials;**

### **# Unchallenged authority in heaven or earth**

- The scroll (1)
- The tears of despair (2-4)

Challenge  
Silence

### **# The Powerful Lamb (5-7)**

### **# The explosion of praise and joy (8-14)**

- Harps
- Prayers
- New song of redemption by angels
- Whole universe joins in praise of God for his work of creation and redemption.

## **The drama of history**

### **The “soldiers” on the ground will know;-**

Seal 1. Conquest

Seal 2. Strife

Seal 3. Scarcity

Seal 4. Senseless Death

Seal 5. Persistent suffering & Persecution

**THEN;-** Seal 6. The end will come

Chapter 7 is a reassuring ‘zoom lens shot’. Despite all this suffering and trouble God’s people are secure [sealed] and God’s purposes are continuing to be worked out by Christ as planned.

Seal 7. Silence -covers events which follow the end of history. To be treated in a later scene.

**Revelation: study four**  
**THERE IS A LIMIT TO GOD'S MERCY;**  
**REBELLION IS PUNISHED.**  
**Revelation 8:1 - 11:18**

**Recap:**

**Remember** if you are finding new and complex prophecies and events in Revelation, not mentioned in rest of Scripture, chances are you have the wrong interpretation.

**Scene one:** Getting a big perspective on Christ's church in God's world. Christ is busy governing and caring for his church wherever it is in the world and whatever the problems experienced.

**Scene two:** Suffering will be the normal pattern for Christ's people the church. But remember who is in control and expect God's purposes to work out exactly as he planned.

**2. The next question?**

"We are greatly encouraged to hear that Christ is busy caring for and protecting his church (scene one) in a world which is hostile to Christ and his people and determined to be rid of them (scene two). We understand that suffering and terrible persecution will be the normal pattern for Christians."

But why . . . . .

**3. Scene three: The unbelieving world will answer for attacking Christ's church.**

**[a] Introduce another perspective for Christ's church.**

- Yes, suffering and persecution will be the normal pattern for Christ's church throughout history (Scene two: Rev 4:1 - 8:1)
- But never think that as Christians we are on our own. Christ hears every prayer offered by his people (8:2-4). Prayers that Christ's name might be honoured rather than despised; prayers for perseverance and faithfulness in face of persecution; prayers of longing for heaven from those tired of a hostile world.
- More than hear our prayers Christ is, even now, acting to vindicate his people and punish wickedness (8:5) The trumpet of God's warning is sounding in our world at this very moment condemning all those who oppose God to an incomparably awful end.

**[b] A word about method in the book of Revelation.**

- How are events sequenced in the book of Revelation? Specifically, how does **scene three** (the trumpets of warning) fit with seal 6 from scene two? Does what follows in the text (chapter 8-11) follow chronologically in the sequence of events?
- **Rule 1;** Use the text and pattern of Revelation itself.
  1. Scene two (seals 1 -5) showed us events which are true at any given time in history rather than a particular linear sequence of events.
  2. Both the seventh seal and the seventh trumpet finish at the same place - in heaven - after the destruction of the world.
  3. The vision of chapter 7 comes after seal 6 (6:12-17) in the text but must come before it in real time.
  4. Likewise trumpet 4 (darkening of light) cannot be ahead of seal 6 in real time, even though it comes later in the text.
- **Rule 2.** Use other Scripture as a control for interpretation (Matthew 24-25)
  1. Christ is answering the question of 24:3b - what are the signs of his coming? Verse 4 he is concerned they will be led astray on this question and so, presumably, gives both a comprehensive and clear answer. So, we may take these two chapters as Christ's "Master-plan" for his return.
  2. If the trumpets describe events after Christ's return, then there must be a real time gap between 24:30 (his appearing) and 25:31 (judgement). BUT, Christ gives no hint at all of this.
  3. Do the trumpets describe events accompanying Christ's return? Christ's return brings a total destruction of the world and then eternity, which accords with seal 6 followed by seal 7. This does not allow for the partial destruction of the trumpets either during the Second Coming (Parousia) or after it.
- These facts would suggest we should not try and make scene three follow after scene two in real time in history. Rather we are meant to see Scene three as a parallel perspective to those already mentioned in scenes one and two. That is, scenes one, two and three are all happening at the same time in the world but are different ways of looking at the situation for Christ's church.
- That is the two scenes are two sides of the one coin. Put in terms of encouragement to the Christians both then and now, John is saying . . .
- "As you suffer and face persecution and see wanton destruction of Christians simply because they are Christians by those who hate Jesus and his cause and his people, remember the coin of history has two sides and that we can expect

God to act in our interests. Christ misses nothing that happens to his beloved people and the wicked people who dare to attack and harm his church will be punished. His warning is current and unless they repent the warning will become their judgement.”

- *“The breaking open of the seals shows what will happen throughout history up to the return of Christ, with particular reference to what the church will have to suffer. The trumpets, starting again from the same point, and also declaring what will happen throughout history up to and including the return of Christ, proclaims a warning to the unbelieving world.”*

*Wilcock, P88*

The normal pattern for God’s people as a whole will be suffering and trouble (chapters 6 & 7)

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Seal 1: Conquest

Seal 2: Strife

Seal 3: Scarcity

Seal 4: Senseless death

Seal 5: Persistent suffering and persecution

THEN:-

Seal 6: The end will come

#### **Chapter 7 - a great zoom lens shot!**

A mighty angel proclaims the security of God’s people. (1-3)

A great multitude around God, praising him. (4-12)

Those who are saved, do emerge from suffering  
to enjoy eternity with Christ, just as he promised (13-17).

Seal 7: Eternity and silence to think about God’s majesty

Though the suffering is inescapable, God’s people do not accept it meekly. The Church in the world is always praying that **Christ’s cause might be vindicated** and that **unbelievers will no longer treat God’s name like dirt** and that **justice might be done.**  
(Cf 5:8, 6:10, 8:3)



But at the same time, God's majesty is shown as he warns, punishes and finally damns

those who will not repent before God. (chapter 8 -11)

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➤ **Mankind will suffer indirectly** for their rebellion

**Trumpet 1:** Disaster will come from the earth

**Trumpet 2:** Disaster will come from the sea

**Trumpet 3:** Disaster will befall the resources of  
immediate life

**Trumpet 4:** Disaster will befall the resources of the universe.

➤ **Men will suffer directly** for their rebellion (8:13)

**Trumpet 5:** Unrelenting terror and torment

**Trumpet 6:** Massive destruction and death

#### **Chapter 10-11:14. A great zoom lens shot!**

A mighty angel gives God's people a reassuring message (10:1-7). God's word has thundered in his world far beyond we can ever know, so that every chance for repentance has been given. The next event in God's calendar will be trumpet 7

Though the gospel is sweet it brings bitterness to the life of Christians (10:8-11). But they are all secure and accounted for as God's temple (11:1-2)

The Church's witness is unquenchable, untouchable and invincible, though it will suffer periods of apparent reverse and defeat (11:3-14).

**Trumpet 7:** Eternity - God displays his majesty, damning those who would reject him.

There is a limit to God's patience and perseverance with sinful mankind. **The prayers of God's people are heard and answered comprehensively.** Wickedness does not escape judgment. Justice is done. Our righteous anger for God's cause is vindicated. While we suffer as Christians remember the fate of unbelievers is incomparably awful besides ours.



# Revelation: study five

## Suffering as Christians:- The cause behind the cause.

Revelation 11:19 - 14:20

Recap:

John has given God's people three important facts or truths or perspectives (each represents a scene of the unfolding drama) to hang onto in face of tough times.

**Scene one:** Getting a big perspective on Christ's church in God's world. Christ is busy governing and caring for his church wherever it is in the world and whatever the problems experienced.

**Scene two:** Suffering will be the normal pattern for Christ's people the church. But remember who is in control and expect God's purposes to work out exactly as he planned.

**Scene three:** The unbelieving world will answer for attacking Christ's church. Christ misses nothing that happens to his beloved people. His warnings against the wicked people who dare to attack and harm his church are already evident in our world. Unless they repent warnings will give way to final judgement and destruction.

Christians now know that they can expect suffering and persecution as the normal pattern of life and have been shown great comforts to get them through such suffering and persecution. But no doubt many were still wondering why it has to be like this?

**Scene four:** The underlying cause of the hostility and suffering which will fall upon the church in the drama of history is the rage of Satan against Christ. But his rage is only his death-throes since he is already defeated.

To Think about:

- What has caused the church her greatest difficulties in the last few decades?  
  
Totalitarianism? Secularism? Tribalism? Religiosity? Post-modernism?
- We need to learn to understand our world **theologically** (Satan is cause behind the cause) rather than simply **historically** (focussing on particular events or people).

The opening overture of the scene - 11:19

The overture before a dramatic production sets the overall tone for the whole drama. So in this scene, which will deal with some very bleak and awful issues and realities, we have an overture of unbelievable power and beauty to set the tone for the whole drama of history.

**Heaven** must be the sphere of spiritual reality (since war and evil are present)

**God's temple** must symbolise where God really is (his presence in the whole creation)

**The Ark of the Covenant** symbolises God's promise to rescue his people from sin and suffering and bondage to Satan.

## 12:1-17

### Satan's forlorn rage

Though already defeated by Christ and knowing he only has little time left *rages* against Christ's Church, within his limited sphere of influence and with limited impact.

**The drama of history from a human perspective. (1-6)**

**A woman** - but an incredible woman!

- moon = dominion, sun = radiance, stars = vastness, pregnant (Is 26:17) about to bring forth
- NOT Mary, but v17 symbolises the mother of the church.

**A dragon**

- red = murder/mayhem, 7 heads = universal wisdom, 10 horns = universal power, 7 crowns = assumed authority
- Satan, verse 9

Verse 4, Satan was waiting for birth of Jesus in order to destroy him. (and continues to be true for all who are converted). Verse 5, it appears he is winning as Jesus is killed and the church, verse 6, flees into the wilderness. But this is God's plan for his people and the place where they are cared for.

**The same drama from Heaven's perspective. (7-12)**

What appears to Christians in the world to be a titanic struggle with Satan having the upper hand is really a "no contest". Not only has Christ dealt a knock-out blow to Satan (v9) but God's people also overcome him (v10-11). Satan's rage is explained by the fact he knows his time and influence are both severely limited and he is already defeated (v13-17).

## 14:1-5

### Christ's absolute control

As Satan works to brutalise and deceive God's people and counterfeit God's work, the reality is that Christ is firmly in control and his people are completely secure as they have always been.

The whole scene is dominated by praise and gladness in heaven (v5).

The lamb (v1) has absolute victory over the dragon and continues as the powerful ruler of the universe for his special people.

The Lord has marked his people (v1) and knows exactly who is his. They are in God's place (v2) an oasis of delight in a very bleak worldly landscape.

They are singing (v3). Their singing is unstoppable (like rushing waters) and powerful (reverberates around heaven like thunder) and foot-stompingly happy (harps). They sing their own special song of redemption (a new song).

They are characterised (v4-5) by loyal service of Christ (as opposed to spiritual adultery) and are a wonderful testimony to the changing power of Christ and are noted for their truthfulness (as opposed to deceit and counterfeit)

But Christ doesn't work alone. He has his hosts of heaven actively doing his will and making Christ's presence felt in every area of the world.

#### Three heralds - 14:6-11

**The first angel** repeats God's command for all men to **fear him and worship him** (6-7).

**The second angel** announces that paganism (spiritual adultery as symbolised by Babylon) is about to be brought down (8).

**The third angel** visualises the awful, endless torment awaiting Satan's followers.

History is happening just as God said it would. He has given countless warnings to people in the world, now he is moving to punish them in eternity.

The beast may think he is powerful and may appear to have the upper hand, but the lamb threatens eternal torment as fear him!

#### Two harvests - 14:14-20

The picture of harvesting symbolises Christ gathering his redeemed children (14-16).

The picture of gathering represents the horrendous, crushing action of God at the end of the age, as people feel his full wrath (17-20).

God's partial judgments seen in our world have been awful enough, but God's wrath in undiluted strength crushes the nation until the blood forms a pool 320 km long - horrendous nature of God's wrath!

**Notice** that as with the other scenes we start and finish at the same point. This is another perspective to be viewed in parallel with the



# Revelation: study six

## One more time: Remember, rebellion will be punished by God!

### Revelation 15-16

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#### 1. THE STORY SO FAR:

Clearly revelation is not arranged or tied together **chronologically**. The whole vision is comprised of several scenes portraying parallel themes in which each successive scene adds more detail to some aspect of a previous scene. It is like your children telling you of some event at school. The complete picture is only gathered when all the individual stories are put together because each tells a part of the whole.

**Again and again** we are told that God is in control of his world and that Christ is constantly working for the sake of God's redeemed people, the Church.

**Again and again** God's people will be caught up in suffering and persecution and trials and afflictions because they live in a world that is basically hostile to God.

**Again and again** God's judgements and wrath will be seen in our world and felt by those who oppose God, but in spite of these rebellious man refuses to repent.

**Again and again** this conflict between the Church and the World points to a more fundamental struggle between Christ and Satan, who although already decisively beaten still rages against Christ's Church and pretends he has unlimited power and authority.

#### 2. WHERE TO FROM HERE:

Since **scene four** dealt with very bleak and awful issues, we can well imagine the Christians wondering in their hearts if Satan really is as defeated as they have been told. His impact on their daily lives sure didn't feel like that of a defeated enemy.

Therefore, very graciously God, in **scene five** reaffirms the reality that wrath and judgment will follow evil and impenitence as surely as night follows day. This means that the most frightening aspect of the Revelation so far is preceded and followed by the same reassuring message that God's judgment will surely fall on all Satan's followers.

#### 3. THE ANSWER IN BRIEF (summarizing chs 15-16)

**Again and again** in the history of the world and all around us where people continue to refuse to bow before God, his final wrath is seen as death plunges them into the angry hands of the very God they refused to acknowledge. All the while God's saved people are totally secure.

#### **4. SCENE 5 IN DETAIL:**

**15:1-8 another overture to get things rolling** (Note how it corresponds to 11:19)

[1] God's people are totally secure. (1-4)

These verses are laden with symbolism to do with Israel and the Exodus and song of Moses. (God's people standing by the sea celebrating their redemption and seeing God's destruction of Pharaoh and his forces that dared to take on God and despise him.)

Just as then, so now for Christ's people. I.e. a picture of God triumphing over "the beast" and God's people praising him for it.

[ii] God's inescapable wrath (5-8).

Tent of meeting - (Ex 38:21, 33:7, 40:34-35) place of God's presence and glory  
Full bowls - unmitigated character and fierceness of God's wrath.  
Wrath of God who lives forever and ever - everlasting wrath that doesn't diminish with time.

#### **(16:1-21) THE BOWLS OF WRATH REVEALED.**

These plagues (15:8) continue the symbolism of Exodus, begun in chapter 15, and particularly the Plagues in Egypt prior to the Exodus.

Those who "have lived in Babylon", who have adopted the philosophy and lifestyle of "the beasts" opposed to God and Jesus, those who have refused to heed the warnings of the gospel must now take the consequences.

**Bowls 1-4** (parallel the trumpets 1-4 in chapter 8:7-13).

Earth, Sea, Rivers and Sky will all be used by God as means of bringing death and judgement on those who oppose God.

Natural man's response is to recognise God's power and presence and control of his world, but only to blaspheme God and not to repent.

Natural man, who claims to control his physical world and claims to be able to use it to advance his own position is "bitten" by it as it, in picture language rises up to share in God's judgement of this arrogance.



### ***What a picture of the sinfulness of sin!***

#### **Bowl 5 (parallels trumpet 5 in chapter 9:1-12)**

The “kingdom of the Beast”, the world organisation of society and government and lifestyle and behaviour without reference to God, is thrown into disarray.

That is, godless society which claims to be a viable alternative to God’s ways is shown to be incapable of the task and the disarray vindicates God and God’s patterns, even though natural man can only curse God for his misfortune.

#### **Bowl 6**

Christians have stumbled over these particular 5 verses and Armageddon and have allowed them to interpret the rest of Revelation and the New Testament.

But let’s use that which is clear to interpret that which isn’t - so come back to this bowl.

#### **Bowl 7 - The world is no more, parallels trumpet 7**

Thunder, lightning, earthquakes, hailstorms, all of which symbolise God’s presence and activity in his world.

The great city (Babylon) representing natural man’s world, which has seen total defeat and wholesale destruction on a massive scale, will now be erased completely leaving only eternity. (Note that if verse 16 is future, the final bowl brings the statement, “it is done” i.e. no future battle, all that remains is for God to “roll up” this universe.

Those who blasphemed God in this world are shown to continue to do just that in Hell

#### **WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF BOWL 6?**

1. Since the whole section to this point in time parallels the previous section of the trumpets, then it follows that

1. The meaning of these verses have something to do with mass destruction and death.
2. It will refer to something which occurs again and again in history.
3. It may well be identifiable at certain times in history.

2. **Symbolism is still present.** All commentators agree that Euphrates symbolises the

source of evil (perhaps tied back to garden of Eden and Satan's first appearance) and that the Dragon is Satan and that the **Beast** and **False Prophet** are agents of Satan and that **Frogs** symbolise what is vile and despicably unclean.

However, when it comes to the **kings** and the **day of the Lord almighty** and Armageddon, many commentators become **rigidly literal**. They take it to mean that several eastern or Asiatic nations (evil) will unite against the forces of good, in the last great conflict of history, involving over 2 million troops (9:16), in Northern Israel, which will be ended only by the return of Christ and the hosts of heaven.

### **3. Armageddon or Hill of Megiddo has precedent in Old Testament history.**

In Judges 4-5, Deborah is the inspiration for Israel to rise up and defeat the immensely superior Canaanite king (4:3 & 5:8). In her song of praise she recognises that it was God alone who brought them such victory and who completely destroyed their enemy because he had dared to resist the lord of hosts. That great event happened at Megiddo (5:19)

**Thus, Armageddon represents every event when God suddenly reveals his power and totally defeats his enemy and delivers his people miraculously and completely.**

So, **bowl 6** pictures periods and times in history (the great day of the Lord Almighty) when God acts decisively to defeat in battle his enemy Satan and all Satan's agents (no matter how kingly and powerful they may look and no matter how determined they are to dispose of God and his people)

Many times in the history of God's people already there have been **types of** Armageddon and no doubt there may be similar times in the future (11:7-14) when god acts miraculously to restore the fortunes of his people when it looks as if they will be completely crushed in this world, **but the ultimate Armageddon has to be Calvary.**

In the meanwhile God's people ought not to be focussed on some day in the distance, but ought to expect Christ's return any time and be ready for it. CF. 2 Peter 3

# Revelation study seven

## Satan's cronies get special attention

### Revelation 17:1 - 19:10

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Throughout the Revelation John “revisits” things already mentioned and elaborates on them. In scene 4 (chapters 11:19-14:20) we are introduced to some formidable enemies of Christ responsible for the suffering Christians experience in the world.

**The dragon (Satan)**

**Babylon the whore** [collective image for the sea beast (antichrist) and land beast (false prophet/religion) and those associated with them (carrying the mark of the beast).]

**14:8** Satan's cronies experienced in the godless system and godless people called “the world”

**16:19** Babylon represents man's natural world, civilization hostile to God. As God's wrath comes to a climax ‘the great city’ collapses and is destroyed.

So important are these in the overall drama that the Lord shows John separate scenes in his vision to confirm their certain and total destruction.

#### SCENE 6: Beauty and the beast - A tale of two ladies

**The whore tries to steal the show!**

**Chapter 17**

- The nature of “the other woman” described (1-6).  
She is a gawdy prostitute promising much delivering nothing but grief.
- She is exposed as the great counterfeiter and usurper (7-18).  
Don't underestimate her - she is seductive and attractive and deadly!

**The whore is completely destroyed.**

**Chapter 18**

- She tries to convince everyone of her permanence and beauty, but she is only a ‘toilet’ about to feel God's fury (1-20)
- While appearing to be the essence of life and worth, the whore is really a murderer of those who are truly alive and truly worthwhile (21-24)

**The beautiful lady triumphs.**

**Chapter 19:1-10**

- Heaven rejoices as the ‘proper woman’ takes her rightful place in the world.  
She is at the centre of heaven, hand in hand with her lover finally enjoying their marriage.
- The “other woman”, the whore is totally destroyed securing complete deliverance and freedom for the “real woman” to come to the fore as always intended by Christ.

**The scene closes**

Notice it closes not only with a great crescendo in Heaven, but it also closes with a very emphatic assurance that “**These are the true words of God**” (v9).

- What is their significance?
- Look at John's response to this in v10.

**Scene 6 in detail: “I've got seven things to say to you, my people”**

### Word one: Don't underestimate the seductive power of "the whore" (17:1-6)

- Described in gaudy imagery suitable for a prostitute.
- She is influential (1,2) but evil (2). She is seductively attractive (4) and brazen (5) and uninhibited in her 'lifestyle' (6)
- Babylon, the whore represents all in "the world" that allures, tempts, seduces and draws people away from God. The world is powerful in its appeal. Its message is attractive and on the surface it is convincing. The 'cup' she offers suggests elegance and finery and sophistication. But in reality it contains all the "porneia", all the things that drug people and turn them away from service of God.

### Word two: A brilliant career exposed as a sham (17:7-18)

Babylon and "antichrist" work together.

Antichrist (symbolising evil empires and anti-Christian movements trying to squeeze God out of his own world) "gives legs to" the whore who covers anti- Christian lifestyle with a cloak of seductive passion.

- **The beast "was, now is not, and will come again."** The whore deliberately attempts to mimic Christ (cf 1:17-18). She returns again and again in new forms but essentially the same.
- **In John's context it is the Roman Empire (v9).** But it will be around long after Rome has gone (v11). An eighth king - a future anti- Christian movement essentially the same as Rome will appear and will share the same fate. But impossible to identify. *John doesn't want us to focus on "who" but on "what" and on its guaranteed destruction in spite of apparent power and permanency.*
- **Strife will arise between godless institutions and the godless people who fostered them in the first place (15-18).** Their essential nature means they eventually turn on themselves and bring their own destruction. When the world achieves the very thing it wants (society and rule without God) they find it so corrupt and unacceptable and unsatisfying they rebel against the very thing they have spent a lifetime creating.

Notice: The first two words are spoken, as it were, in the world. The next five words are direct from heaven and from "a greater authority".

"We know what it is like to be the bird held by the glittering eye of the snake. That is why the spell needs to be broken by an even greater authority." (Wilcock)

### Word three: The whore doesn't deliver on her promises (18:1-3).

- Just like a prostitute she is really only interested in your money and what she wants.
- She and all associated with her are done for!

**Word four: Don't become "intimate" with the whore (18:4-20).**

- "Mucking around with" the whore will have disastrous consequences because all associated with her lifestyle will be caught up with her destruction.
- Mixed images are used. The whore is the essence of humanistic society made famous by cities like Sodom, historic Babylon, Tyre (a commercial empire) and Rome and . . .

**Word five: The whore is completely destroyed (18:21-24)**

- The apparent life and happiness and activity and industry of world society is contrasted with;-
- The reality that the whore is a murderer of the truly alive and truly active and truly worthwhile and truly happy.

**Word six: The multitudes of heaven are in party mode (19:1-4)**

- They are celebrating his complete victory over evil.
- They celebrate the completion of his plan of salvation.

**Word seven: From the throne of heaven itself (19:5-9).**

- Praise God
- The right woman takes her place beside Christ. Notice the contrast in her dress and character with the whore (17:3-6)

**"These are the true words of God."**

- They might not happen today, but they will happen. Trust them.
- In the midst of a cruel world and ongoing suffering there can be exuberant praise and thankfulness as we anticipate "the wedding breakfast" which is about to happen.

**Next week: The final showdown - "A tale of two cities" Revelation 19:11- 22:20**

# Revelation study 8: A final slideshow of the drama of history. Revelation 19 -22

19:11-16

Christ destroys those who resist his rule and authority.

**His victory is absolutely sure.**

Notice the stunning list of characteristics describing Christ.

19:17-21

**Those who appear to rule but who really oppose God are already summoned to**

**a banquet put on by God**  
But it is not the wedding banquet. It is their own destruction with nobody even to bury them with honour - The most despicable end.

20:1-10

The progress of the gospel is unstoppable because, v1-3

**Satan is already defeated.**  
Christians will still face periods of awful persecution. But Satan's time is only brief. His reality is

**Looming eternal torment**  
Applied in full **on the day of judgment** at Christ's return.

**CHRIST THE CONQUERING KING** - always has ruled and always will rule history.  
One day "soon" he will bring history to a close.



20:4-6

The damsel in distress (19:1-10) has been rescued by her Knight in shining armour.

**The church is absolutely secure**

20:4b-5

**Christ's people are the real rulers** of the world even now.

**Christ's people already enjoy** the richness of life in Christ over a long indefinite period (1000 years)

**In the marriage banquet.**



20:12b

**The day of judgement is a non-event for Christians.**

Their names are already in the lamb's book of life.

### **Rev 20:11-15**

Every person who lived contrary to their knowledge of God, in every generation of people since the world began, will then face **Eternity apart from God.**

They get what they deserve and what they wanted all along- to be free from God.

NB: 4 verses describes this.

### **Rev 21-22**

Every person who has sought to honour and serve God and Christ will face

**Eternity with Christ.**

They get what they don't deserve.

Notice 48 verses describes eternity for Christ's people.

# WHAT WILL PRECEDE CHRIST'S RETURN?

- REVELATION
- CHAPTER 20

Traditionally Christians have got “hung up on” the concepts in this chapter and have ~ created all sorts of fanciful scenarios from it. **WHY?**

1. **The six previous scenes** are recognised as being **highly symbolic** and also covering the whole of history in a **non-sequential** way. But Christians often take this passage literally (even to the point of insisting that figures like the 1000 years, used before in a symbolic sense is now to be understood literally) and also as presenting the **sequence of events in time** which will precede the coming of Christ.

2. **THE BINDING OF SATAN** (cf Luke 11:21, Col 2:15, Heb 2:14) is consistent with Satan's defeat through his death and resurrection (the plundering of the strong man's house). The age of the gospel/salvation from Christ's first coming to his second is the time when Satan is unable to deceive the world and so prevent the spread of the gospel.

3. **THE LOOSING OF SATAN** (of Rev 11:7-10 ; 2 Thess 2:1-12) is not to be seen as chronologically following his binding. Rather the two will happen simultaneously as in previous scenes. The “short time” symbolises the temporary nature of the times of apparent reversal of fortunes for the gospel and is in contrast to the 1000 years, a long indefinite period only ended by Christ's return.

4. **THE FIRST AND SECOND RESURRECTION** is consistent with other Scripture which pictures conversion as “rising from the dead spiritually” (Eph 2:1-5 etc), hence the first resurrection and bodily resurrection thus would be the second resurrection.

5. Likewise the **SECOND DEATH** is physical death which as Paul states in 1 Cor 15 has no power over the believer because Christ has defeated death. However, for the unbeliever the second death is equated with the lake of fire and this fits - ie. Hell!

6. Is it possible that the efforts and study which has gone into chapter 20 has robbed us of the awesome truths that surround this chapter, namely;

- > **History is Christ-dominated** - in the **past** Satan was defeated, in the **present** Christ rules and his Church is ever growing, and in the **future** Christ will wrap up history, destroy those who oppose him and enter into eternity with his blessed people.

- > **Our future is Christ-dominated** - We are secure. We can be bold in evangelism knowing that the cause of Christ will not be halted by those who oppose him. We need to be sure our names are in the Lamb's book of life, for that is our only hope of salvation.

- > **Our affections are Christ-dominated.** - After such a vision who would not want



to serve and honour such a great king, and share in the heartfelt longing, “come Lord, come”.

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