

AP 35

Revelation - Ἀποκάλυψις, Apocalypse

The Greek word “apocalypsis” literally means “revelation.” At the time of the early church, apocalyptic writings were common. Apocalyptic writings had a typical timing and style. They were written in times of crisis; they described the battle between good and evil; dreams and visions provided insight into the future; and the faithful would be rewarded in the Messianic kingdom - which is coming soon. Apocalyptic writers always believe they are at the end of time.

The Revelation of John was unusual in that the named author is alive and the apocalypsis was written in the form of a letter. Who John of Patmos was is the first subject of debate in the book. Arguments are made that it is John the apostle, but arguments are made for other Johns as well. Debates about interpretation of the Revelation of John have been ongoing throughout the history. Rather than pick one - or five - interpretations, this overview will focus on themes of the book and how they can apply to us, independent of the original intent of the letter.

The crisis addressed by this apocalypsis is believed to be the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE followed a few emperors later by the rise to power of Emperor Domitian (81 CE). Domitian was the first emperor to require Christians to worship him as a self-proclaimed God. A cult for emperor worship was established at Ephesus and imperial cult activities took place in all seven cities to which letters are included in Revelation. Revelation is written as a reaction to the accommodation of the emperor’s demands, e.g., “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.” (1 Peter 2:13-14) Revelation’s message is to resist the demands for worship of the emperor and accept persecution and martyrdom instead. Revelation is also written for encouragement of Christians. A second key theme throughout Revelation is the time of Christ’s return is soon and the cult of the emperor will be destroyed.

Revelation begins with a vision and letters to the angels (literal translation of “angel” is “messenger”) of the seven churches in Asia. These letters in the letter have a very typical sound to them. The theme of the letters is to wake up, repent, return to the pure practice of faith in Jesus and you will soon be victorious. The remainder of Revelations recounts three other visions - of the throne room of heaven; great signs in heaven; the fall of Babylon and the new Jerusalem - final apocalyptic battle. It concludes with an epilogue.

Sunday Revelation 1:9-19; 3:1-21 (spotlight verses 3:14-18)

For Reflection: If Jesus had given John a letter for our church, what do you think it might say? (We the people, not a building, are the church!) What might His encouragement have been? Where may He call for changes? After 2000 years, should we still be prepared for Christ’s imminent return?

Lagniappe: Luke 12:35-40

Monday Revelation 4-5 (spotlight verses 5:9-13)
For Reflection: Prayer - dialogue with God - is at the heart of worship. "ACTS"¹ is sometimes used to help structure our prayers and worship. Thinking of "ACTS," how is prayer/worship in heaven different from that on Earth? Consider what that means for you - and all others for whom Christ died.

Lagniappe: Philippians 2:9-10

Tuesday Revelation 6
For Reflection: If the first four seals are viewed as God's warning of what sin can cause², what is the message about the urgency of sharing the gospel, of repentance (change of direction) at a significant scale, and of loving our sisters and brothers as ourselves - wherever they are? Where is God calling you to be the change you want to see in the world?

Lagniappe: Matthew 24:4-8; 36; 42

Wednesday Revelation 7 (spotlight verses 7:9-14)
For Reflection: What insight does this provide on the nature of God and heaven? What is John told determines those who are sealed after enduring the tribulation? In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prays, "Thy kingdom

¹ ACTS - Adoration (of the awesomeness God); Confession (of our sins to God); Thanksgiving (for the things our awesome God has done); and Supplication (requests of help for ourselves or others)

²I am taking author's privilege to make comment about this vision as a scientist. The breaking of each of the first four seals releases one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Consistent with the Biblical character of God, I believe the four horsemen to be a warning of preventable catastrophes that humans (rider) and their technologies (horses) may bring on humankind as a whole - at a global level. These include conquest (war); removal of peace (civil unrest); unjust economy with inflation; and famine, pestilence, and wild beasts.

Consistent with John's vision, Jesus foretold a time of wars, famines, earthquakes, and persecution of Christians. Every century someone sees four horsemen. There have been hundreds of predictions of the end of the world. So many, in fact, that a book has been written on the subject: *A History of the End of the World* by Yuri Rubinsky and Ian Wiseman (1982). As you may have guessed, none of the predictions have yet been right.

Scientists now "see" four horsemen and, for the first time in recorded history, each horseman, astride the product of man's progress, arrives with the power to impact the entire Earth. In *Scientific American* (September 2010) an article appeared: "Risk Analysis: laying odds on the apocalypse." One important note: prior to the industrial revolution, the odds of all of the human-caused apocalyptic events at a global level had a probability of zero. Now global nuclear war with extensive devastation within hours is possible. Runaway global warming was given one in two odds in the next 200 years. Global warming is one factor among several that makes famine and increased food insecurity a likely outcome. Killer pandemic was given a one in two odds in the next 30 years. A decade after the article, we see the potential impact of social media on civil unrest globally, and the potential for global economic inflation and disruption.

come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.” In light of this chapter, how can the church conform to God’s will as it is in heaven?
Lagniappe: Isaiah 49:10-13

Thursday Revelation 11:15 - 12:17³ (spotlight verses 11:15; 12:12)
For Reflection: These verses reflect celebration of the victory of Christ over Satan that is complete in heaven and will be won on Earth in later chapters. Where do you feel the tension between Christ’s victory over sin and death on the one hand, and a world in which evil and suffering is so strong and Christ’s expected immanent return of the first century has not happened after two millennia?
Lagniappe: Psalm 2:10-12

Friday Revelation 19⁴ - 20⁵ (spotlight verses Revelation 20:12-15)
For Reflection: Consider what it would be like to be called before God, confident that, through Jesus, your name is written in the book of life. Consider what it will be like for those whose choices have not arisen from a new life in Jesus. How, in these modern times, can we effectively reach out to those who really need the good news of Jesus so their names will be in the book of life?
Lagniappe: Daniel 7:9-10; Luke 10:20

³ You may recognize these verses - they are included in the Hallelujah Chorus (Handel). Others of the verses call to mind “A Mighty Fortress is our God” - a powerful hymn of faith. Yet, in Revelation, these songs of faith come after great war in heaven where Satan is cast to Earth, and before prolonged tribulation and Satanic rule on Earth.

⁴ Revelation 8 - 18 is a highly symbolic description of a spiritual battle in heaven and Earth between God and His forces and Satan and the forces of evil. Revelation 12:9 says Satan “leads the whole world astray.” Satan waged his war against “those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.” Satan conquered and ruled over “God’s holy people” (Revelations 13:7). Babylon the Great, the ruling authority during this Satanic rule was “a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit” (Revelations 18:2). This culminates in the gory victory dinner when Satan is overthrown (Revelations 19).

⁵ John’s vision includes a final judgment in which the dead are judged by their deeds recorded in books, matching with the judgement described in Matthew 25:31-46. However, John’s vision also includes a book of life in heaven in which are written the names of those acceptable for heaven, which corresponds to obedient followers of Jesus (Luke 10:20 and Philipians 4:3). Romans 10:9-10 says: “Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” But Jesus said: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord, ’will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” See also Ephesians 2:4-7. Faith in God’s saving grace yields forgiveness and a new life that seeks to align with the will of God.

Saturday

Revelation 21:1-8; 22:12-20⁶ (spotlight verses: Revelation 22:12-14)
For Reflection: Think about why the almighty God, creator of all that is, visible and invisible, would establish a new covenant with His blood as the once and for all time sacrifice to forgive the sins of all who accept this gift.

Lagniappe: Matthew 24:10-14; Hebrews 10:10-18

⁶We understand that being washed in the blood of the lamb means to accept that we are forgiven and made acceptable for heaven by the blood Jesus shed in His death on the cross. Very soon after Jesus death (70 CE), the temple was destroyed and sacrifice by Jewish priests for the forgiveness of sins has not been possible since. They seek atonement through study of the Torah (Old Testament), and, in place of sacrifices, service of the heart through prayers, and giving charity and of one's self. Yet they ask God in prayer, when He will be back in the temple so sacrifice can resume. We trust in Jesus blood as atonement for our sins, with no further sacrifices necessary.