

The Book Of Revelation.

Week 3

Chapters 1 to 5

Chapter 1, Johns vision begins

Chapters 2 & 3, Letters to the 7 churches

Chapters 4 & 5, Johns vision of the Throne room

As we delve into the book of Revelation, we want to begin at Chapter 1 with a sense of awe.

This is one of the few places in the bible where we get a real picture of heaven and the level of praise and worship to God, going on all the time, around the throne of God.

The first five chapters of the book of Revelation set the scene for the judgement events. In chapter 1 John falls in fear as though dead, when he meets Jesus, so awesome is His appearance. In chapters 2 and 3, there is warning of severe judgement for many of the churches.

In chapters 4 and 5, the holiness and power of God is made manifest in thunder and lightning around the throne.

It is not to say that the age of grace and forgiveness is over, for many are saved during the end days, and this is only by God's grace. However there is no doubt, as you read these initial chapters, that time is running out, judgement day approaches, and both the Father and the Son are seen in their full glory and power.

These are not chapters to be missed, for they set the tone for the rest of the book.

Chapter 1. The Vision.

The very first verse in the chapter gives us the immediate meaning and purpose of the book: "The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place."

This book is about future events, those same events described by Jesus in Matthew 24. As these events unfold, we see a more complete picture of Jesus. The gospels, present Jesus as the saviour and healer, here we see Jesus as the King of Kings, the leader of Heaven's armies, the one who strikes the nations, and finally the judge of mankind.

The vision itself given to John, on the island of Patmos, starts with this promise in verse 3.

"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written, for the time is near".

Does this mean that there is special blessing for those who just reads the words of the book of Revelation aloud?

More likely it applies to those who choose to read this book to others, to make known the revelation of end times to the church, to speak aloud this prophecy in the hearing of others. The one who does this will be blessed.

Those who hear the words of the book of Revelation will also be blessed. But notice, not only hear, but also take to heart. The one who considers these words seriously, in the fear of God, will be blessed. It is when you meditate, understand and believe the words of this book that you will be blessed.

As we move closer to the end times, God is calling us more than ever to embrace and disseminate its message.

It is a book promising great trouble and judgement. How could that bless you? Simply by causing repentance, so that at judgement day you would be counted a sheep and not a goat, in the end time harvest.

Remember evil King Manasseh of 2 Chronicles chapter 33. It was only when he was captured by the Assyrians, hooked through the nose and shackled that he repented with all his heart. In his distress, he humbled himself. And it says that the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.

In the same way let your heart turn fully to God as you consider the awful events that are about to begin on Earth. God is seeking new Manasseh's!

Then we read John's cry in verse 7. "Look he is coming with the clouds".

Pre-tribulation rapture adherents will claim that this is an account of John seeing Jesus return to receive his church in the air, to take them to heaven for seven years, later to return with them to defeat the antichrist. There are two problems with this claim.

John is not in narrative mode in verses 4 to 8. Rather, this is a short greeting to the churches, and a short song of praise to God the father and God the Son. Within this praise, John shouts out the final result of the end time period. Jesus will return, and everyone will see him, and the nations who did not believe will mourn because of Him.

If in fact this was an account of the pre-tribulation rapture, how could the nations of the world continue in their deceit, how could the antichrist continue to deceive people into persecuting Israel and the church, if they had already seen Jesus, and mourned because of Him?

The title of Jesus in this chapter, "Coming on the Clouds," is directly drawn from both Old and New Testament texts, depicting Him as the cloud rider. Numerous Old Testament

verses, such as those in Exodus, Daniel, Psalms, and Isaiah, as well as passages in Matthew, Acts, and 1 Thessalonians, use this language and title.

For example, Psalm 68:4 states, "Sing to God! Sing praises to His name. Exalt Him who rides on the clouds, His name is Yahweh, and rejoice before Him.". From the very beginning of the Book of Revelation, we see a revisiting of Old Testament imagery. The entire book continues to echo these themes as we progress through it.

Verse 12. I turned around to see the voice that was talking to me. And when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a Son of Man.

We learn later that the seven lampstands are the seven churches to whom this book is written. The point to take home here is this. Jesus is amongst us. He stands with his church. He is not far off, busy with celestial matters.

He is where he is needed most. He is where he wants to be. Right now, although Jesus is sat at the right hand of the Father in Heaven, by his Holy Spirit, He is here among us to help us, empower us and guide us.

Verse 16. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Here are more symbols, but they are all interpreted by the text. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. Why is it significant that Jesus holds the seven angels in his right hand? The right hand represents intention and action. When Jesus holds something in his right hand, it means that He will use it for his purpose.

To summarize, the angels of these churches are positioned by Jesus to act and do his will. They are not passive angels, but their position in the right hand of Jesus shows that they will accomplish the will of God, in bringing many to repentance.

What about the double-edged sword? This is the word of God coming out of Jesus's mouth. It is double edged because for those who believe and repent there will be salvation, whereas for those who doubt or hate his words, there will be eternal damnation.

Similarly in Matthew chapter 21 Jesus describes himself as the stone that the builders rejected, which will become the cornerstone. Then he says "Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces (or humbled), but anyone on whom the stone falls will be crushed (or destroyed).

This same Jesus will either bring you to humility or destruction, depending on your response to him. That is the double-edged sword.

Chapter 2 and 3. The Letters To The Churches.

Theologians debate as to whether the seven churches are physical churches in the area which is now Turkey, or whether they represent different church ages, or different church denominations. The text does not suggest any symbolism. As far as John was concerned these were physical churches in Asia Minor.

The main thing is to recognize that these letters will be especially significant in the end times leading up to Jesus's return, as the same sins will dramatically increase on earth. Therefore, a diligent study of these letters and their warnings is crucial.

Instead of doing an in-depth study on each church and each letter, we will focus on the rebukes from the letters, as the main message is the urge to repent of our ways.

The church in Ephesus who left their first love. Chapter 2 verses 1 to 7.

Despite their labour and perseverance, and their discernment of false apostles, and their hatred of the deeds and doctrines of the Nicolaitans, there is one problem. They have left their first love. Maybe they have forgotten to worship their saviour.

Maybe they have neglected to dance as David danced. One thing is for sure, you worship the one you love. So if this church has left their first love, then evidently their worship has been reduced to formality.

Perhaps they now love ceremony, traditions and rituals. There is no spontaneity. Jesus's warning is clear. Repent or I will remove your lampstand.

The church in Pergamum who held to the doctrine of Balaam and to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Chapter 2 verses 12 to 17.

2 Peter chapter 2, tells us what the doctrine of Balaam is. False prophets! They will use every trick in the book, fabricating stories, seducing the unstable, experts in greed. They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam, son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. Interesting to note that they were once on the straight and narrow, which makes their deception ever more subtle.

These are so called ministers who care only for their own success, and with each passing year they wander further and further away from the heart of God. The key ingredient of the doctrine of Balaam is the love of money. They may start off encouraging you to depend on God for provision, but they end up claiming that you must give to them, or else lose out on God's blessing.

Twisting scripture to manipulate the vulnerable, this would appear to represent the extreme elements of the prosperity message. Remember the rich man and Lazarus. On the other side of eternity, it was Lazarus who was blessed. Proverbs chapter 11 verse 4 says "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death".

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans teaches that since we are under grace, we can sin whenever we want, and it will be forgiven. This was the approach Paul was so adamant not to be accused of, although he majored on grace. In Romans chapter 6 verse 15 Paul says "Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?"

God forbid!". The Nicolaitans taught compromise, and we must be on guard, because there are modern churches today proclaiming the same thing. Beware of leaders whose own life models compromise, and in order to justify their behaviour, teach that sin is not a big deal, and encourage the church to do likewise.

But we don't need a compromised leader to help us follow the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. All we need is a stronghold of a secret sin, a seared conscience, and soon we convince ourselves that so long as we are not hurting anyone, it will all be OK, if we ask God to forgive us.

God does not give grace to those who confess sin, He gives grace to those who humble themselves and repent. James chapter 4 verse 6 says "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble". Maybe it is a form of pride to think that we can obtain God's grace by continually cycling through a habitual sin and confess cycle.

Maybe there has to be genuine repentance, to receive God's grace.

The church in Thyatira led by Jezebel. Chapter 2 verses 18 to 29.

Jesus says "You allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality". You may wonder what exactly this means. Are we talking about a female pastor who brazenly seduces her flock into taking part in sexual immorality? Or is it more subtle than that?

Could it be any pastor who models sexual compromise, who promotes ungodly standards for the church? The consequence for this church is severe. Jesus says that those who commit adultery with Jezebel will be made to suffer intensely. This could be speaking of both spiritual and physical adultery.

For a church that is commended for works, love, service, faith and patience, this is such a tragic end. Let us make sure we don't end up in the same boat through sexual compromise.

The dead church in Sardis. Chapter 3 verses 1 to 6.

In Revelation 3 verse 1 Jesus says "you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead". This is the church who was once Spirit filled, but now, according to verse 2, is about to die. This is the sleeping church. Jesus says, wake up! Strengthen what remains! Remember what you received. Hold it fast and repent.

Furthermore, Jesus says "If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief". This is talking of his return. If this church does not wake up, their experience of the end times will be similar to that of the world.

Panic ...

Confusion ...

The Lukewarm church in Laodicea. Chapter 3 verses 14 to 22.

The most memorable rebuke from Jesus is given to the lukewarm church. Jesus says "I will vomit you out of my mouth, because you are neither hot nor cold". You say that you are rich and wealthy, and have no needs, yet do not realize that you are wretched, poor, blind, miserable and naked. Happy in their comfort.

The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches have grown up around them and choked the word of God sown in their hearts, making it unfruitful. But wait, there is a way out of this mess. Jesus gives three distinct instructions to the lukewarm church.

1. Buy from me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich. In other words, exchange your worldly wealth for eternal wealth. How do you do that? Proverbs 19 verse 17 says, "He who gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will pay back what he has given". In other words, stop serving mammon, and start serving God. Stop trusting money, and start trusting God.
2. Buy from me white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed. White garments speak of purity, righteousness and holiness. The saints of heaven are clothed in white. Here is the question. How could we use our money to purchase purity?

Maybe in this case, Jesus means to exchange something other than money. Our time could be the currency. Spend your time worshipping God, understanding his righteousness, and pursuing purity. You will find eventually that you are clothed in white.

3. Anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. Again Jesus is talking of spiritual things. There is no man made ointment that can help you to discern correctly. What is this eye salve then? It is the word of God, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Those who are older will know that in order to see clearly, you don't need better eyes, you just need more light. When you have plenty of light, you don't stumble over obstacles, you don't walk off the path, and you see your destiny. Remember Jesus's words in Matthew 7 verse 14. Small is the gate, and narrow is the road that leads to life, only a few find it.

These warnings are serious, but listen to Jesus's words. As many as i love, i rebuke and chasten. Surely Jesus knows above all, our need to repent and follow him more closely.

In summary, it is important to note from all the letters that even the first churches, established in the first century and led by the disciples, quickly fell away from the truth and succumbed to various sins.

This highlights that any believer can easily stray if not vigilant, even with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This serves as a sobering reminder of the need for constant diligence and faithfulness in our spiritual journey.

Chapter 4. The throne in Heaven.

Verse 1.

Then I heard a voice like a trumpet saying "Come up here and I will show you things that must take place after this". Some pre-trib adherents may say that this verse shows John being caught up in the rapture, which happens ahead of the tribulation period.

But when you look at Matthew 24 verse 31 it is clear that the elect are gathered at the return of Jesus, after all the events of the tribulation period.

We can try to imagine what this experience was like for John, as the description is incredibly powerful and awe-inspiring. Heaven is full of worship, with beings continuously repeating, "Holy, holy, holy." To be in such a place where nothing becomes monotonous and pure worship prevails, must be an extraordinary experience.

The vision describes a place of immense beauty and colour, mentioning a rainbow that shines brightly. This heavenly realm is so far removed from the current condition of the earth, that comparison seems futile. We should look towards the worship described in heaven as a benchmark for the worship we offer here on earth.

The 24 thrones.

On these thrones were seated 24 elders who wore crowns of gold. Who are these elders? There is no concrete answer, however Jesus did indicate that in the regeneration, the 12 disciples would sit on 12 thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus was talking of his earthly reign, however it makes sense that those who sit with him in heaven will also sit with him on earth. Who are the other 12? We can only guess, but a selection of Old Testament figures who walked close to God would seem a fair guess.

The four living creatures.

These angelic beings or cherubim, have six wings each and they are full of eyes. One is like a lion, the second like a calf, the third like a man, and the fourth like an eagle. Endless speculation could be made on the significance of each cherub, but suffice to say, they lead the worship around the throne.

So although they appear strange and frightening, we need not fear, as their sole purpose is to worship God, and maintain the joy and liberty of his presence.

Chapter 5. The Lamb takes the scroll.

Verse 1.

Then i saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

When God holds something in his right hand, it represents intent and power. God is about to do something almighty with this scroll, and make no mistake, it is according to his will. We look at the extreme suffering that will be unleashed when the seals are open, and ask "How could this be God's will?". But the time is short, judgement day is coming, God is looking at the eternal picture, and he is earnestly looking for souls who will repent and come home to the Father. Like the prodigal son, many people will not repent until their situation becomes dire.

Verse 4.

So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.

Why did John weep so much, knowing that the opening of the seals would release such devastation? Maybe he did not know. But maybe John knew, and sensed that the earth was so full of sin, that unless the seals are opened, sin will have its way and consume the whole population. John was desperate to see God's judgement released, because it is only through judgement that justice comes.

Justice will be the final outcome when at last Jesus rules the nations. Only then will there be fair government. However even in his just rule there will be grace and mercy. Isaiah chapter 16 verse 5 and 6 say this. In love, a throne will be established, in faithfulness a man will sit on it, one from the house of David, one who in judging seeks justice, and speeds the cause of righteousness.

Verse 5.

But one of the elders said to me "Do not weep. Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seals".

When John looked for the lion, he could only see a slain lamb. This is Jesus. The lion and the lamb. The picture of the victorious warrior who judges sin, and the merciful sacrifice who makes a way for sinners to be forgiven, if they repent. Why is Jesus the only one who is worthy to open the seals?

Because as awful as the events of the seals are, they contain mercy. Many will not be killed during the seal judgements, and anyone who turns to him will be saved. As he opens each seal, the severity of the circumstance will force many to fall on his mercy and cry out to be

saved. Were it not for these seal judgements, many more people would have sleep walked into hell.

Verses 9 to 10. The Song of the Elders.

After Jesus takes the scroll from the right hand of God, the 24 elders fall down before the lamb, and sing a new song of praise, declaring that it is only by his blood they have been redeemed. It is not through any of their own holiness and righteousness that they are qualified to sit on these thrones.

This is humbling stuff, for we know that the disciples led lives of selfless sacrifice, and yet, even for them, it is only by the redeeming blood of Jesus that they qualify for heaven. Then they finish the song with this line. "And we shall reign on the earth". You can only draw a couple of conclusions from this.

1. The elders or John are simply over excited and coming out with poetic nonsense.
2. In God's plan, there really will be a Millennium reign once Jesus returns to Earth, and as Jesus promised in Matthew, the elders really will sit on thrones with him and rule over the tribes of Israel.

Friends, we need to accept that the Bible is not full of poetic rubbish. Instead it is our minds that are so full of vain imaginations that we are unable to grasp the wonders of God's plan. We so easily accept that Jesus came to earth as an immaculately conceived baby. Even non christians will accept this biblical account.

But we find it so hard to believe that He is soon coming back to rule the world as a physical King, over all other kings of the Earth, and yet the Bible says so.

May we understand the severity of the opening of the seals, and also understand that these seals are being opened as an act of mercy. God could leave the world to carry on sleeping until judgement day arrives. But he loves us too much to leave us sleeping.

From these chapters and verses, we must grasp the majesty of what is unfolding heaven. Heaven is a very real dimension, where Jesus is currently on the throne, waiting to return to earth for His bride.

What Do You Think?

Do you understand the 7 churches to be historical church periods, current church streams, or actual churches in Asia-Minor?

Which of the 7 churches do you identify with the most?

How are the judgements to the 7 churches relevant to us?

How do we feel about Jesus returning as our righteous judge?

How can we be overcomers?

How can we remain on the narrow road?