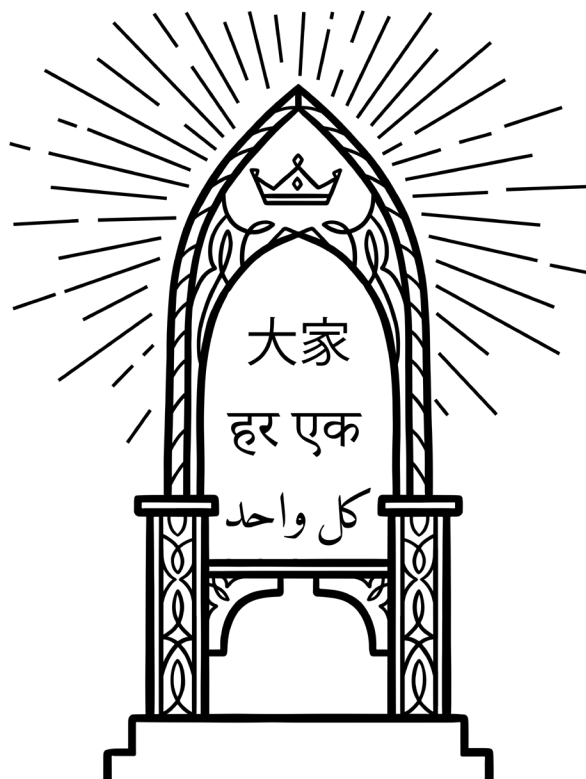


PHYLCIA MASONHEIMER



ALL NATIONS, TRIBES, PEOPLE, & TONGUES

EXPLORING THE HOPE OF CHRIST
REVELATION STUDY

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The Goal of This Study

Welcome friend! I'm so excited you're diving into the book of Revelation! So many Christians are intimidated by this book. If our relationship with Revelation had a Facebook status, it would be "it's complicated."

My goal in writing this study is to change that relationship status to "in love." Okay—maybe I won't go that far! But I would be thrilled if you came away from your study of Revelation with a newfound appreciation of and JOY in the text. I've seen how much fear and anxiety believers experience regarding eschatology (end times theology). After teaching through Revelation to college students, I found myself wishing for a Revelation resource they could use to continue their own study of the book. This Bible study will walk you through Revelation and educate you on the different eschatological viewpoints—without jamming one particular view down your throat.

To do this, I focused on a very simple format. Rather than tell you what to think, I invite you to answer questions about the text and think critically on your own. I add historical context and commentary on some of the more difficult passages, but the rest is up to you! Read the verses. Follow the cross references. Take time to pray. If you're used to being told what to think,

this might be new for you. Consider this your introduction to inductive study of the Bible. You'll leave this book (I hope!) with greater confidence in your study skills.

A second distinctive of this study: there is no timeframe. We considered framing this as a 10, 12, or 20-week study, but our team determined that a study timeframe can actually inhibit the freedom to stop and start as your life allows. It can also put unnecessary pressure on the student to finish quickly, which takes away from the learning process. Instead, this study breaks Revelation down by chapter. You can take as much time as you need to complete each one.

It's very important to read the introduction to the study before you begin. This is where I lay out the different eschatological viewpoints, which you can refer back to as you study Revelation.

My best tip as you begin: Do not attempt to read Revelation like a transcript of chronological events. It is not a linear timeline, and reading it as such will only cause confusion and frustration. Also, try to refrain from overanalyzing the details. Apocalyptic literature (the genre of Revelation as well as portions of Daniel) utilizes sweeping analogies, repetitive patterns, and vibrant imagery. The details are not secret codes we need to figure out; God isn't hiding His truth from us. Ask for the Holy Spirit to open your eyes, come to the text prayerfully, and look for the clear principle in the passage for that day.

I hope this study is challenging, fulfilling, and interesting—just like Revelation itself! I'm so excited for you and this journey into *All Nations, Tribes, People, and Tongues: The Hope of Christ in Revelation*.

Phyllicia Mazonheimer



Summary of Eschatological Views

Over the course of church history, scholars have attempted to interpret and explain the content of Revelation (and portions of Daniel) so the church has a better understanding of God's heart for the end times. In the 2,000 years since Christ's ministry, we've seen many books written to explain this difficult text! Through those books (and more recently, articles and podcasts) four eschatological viewpoints emerged.

"Eschatology" is just a fancy word for theology of the end times. As scholars studied the Bible through the lens of other Scripture passages and the context of their culture and time, they arrived at theological frameworks to explain what we see in John's revelation.

In the pages that follow, we'll explore the four primary ways of understanding apocalyptic literature and interpreting eschatology. You'll likely be familiar with at least one of them!

HISTORICAL PREMILLENNIALISM

Historical premillennialism is called such because it was the primary view during the first centuries of the church, and because it believes the millennial reign is yet to come (thus the

use of the prefix “pre”). This millennial (1,000 year) reign will not be spiritual, but will be an actual physical reign of Christ in Jerusalem.

Historical Premillennials believe references to Israel are largely symbolic—that they refer to all believers in covenant with Christ. These believers are thought to be the “true Israel.” Ethnic Jews who place faith in Christ are part of this covenant (the Church) but Israel as a nation violated its covenant with Christ and is only part of Christian eschatology insofar as they repent and believe like Gentile Christians.

The tribulation on earth will refine the church and usher in the Second Coming. This view fell out of favor toward the 5th century when Augustine and other Greek-influenced church fathers favored a more spiritual interpretation.

AMILLENNIALISM

The most significant thing to note about the amillennial view is this: the millennial reign of Christ is not a literal, physical reign, but the symbolic reign of Christ in the hearts of believers. This reign continues from Christ’s ascension after the Cross until His Second Coming. Persecution (tribulation) occurs for all of church history while Christ reigns within the Church. All of this will be brought to justice in the end of days.

References to Israel are considered symbolic of the whole church: Old and New Testament saints.

This view was popular in the 5th century and was held by many Reformers in the 1500s, including Luther and Calvin. Saint Augustine is also believed to have been amillennial or possibly postmillennial.

POSTMILLENNIALISM

Perhaps the most optimistic of the views, postmillennialism

suggests the millennial reign represents a period of time in which the Church preaches the gospel throughout the whole world—and the world responds! Most of the earth will submit to Jesus and become part of the kingdom of God. After this millennium, in which the gospel grows and the world improves, Jesus will return and judge the living and the dead.

The millennial reign is spiritual rather than physical. Much like amillennials, postmillennials believe the “thousand year reign” is in the hearts of believers and the work of the Spirit. The resurrection of Revelation 20 is a spiritual one.

This view was suggested early in church history by Joachim of Fiore, but was popularized in the 1800s as missions work spread throughout the world. It declined in popularity after the First World War.

DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

The view most Christians are familiar with today is dispensational premillennialism, which was dramatized in the famous *Left Behind* book series. *Left Behind* took many liberties with this view, but some of what was written rang true with dispensational theology itself. “Dispensationalists” take a literal view of Scripture, interpreting numbers and imagery as actual numerals instead of, or in addition to, symbols of spiritual truths (e.g. a literal seven year persecution rather than seven as a symbol of complete or long-term persecution).

What makes dispensational premillennialism distinct is its view of Israel. While the other three views see Israel as fulfilled in or by the Church, dispensationalists believe all references to ethnic Israel refer to an actual, physical land for the Jews. Another distinctive is the rapture. The concept of a “taking up” of the Church—whether silently or with a trumpet sound—before or during the tribulation is a doctrine specific to dispensational premillennialism. It is not found in the other three views.

The millennial reign is a literal thousand years of King Jesus in Jerusalem. This will occur after a seven-year persecution, before which the Church is raptured out of the world. Israel will receive its land and there will be a great battle (Armageddon) to finalize Christ's victory.

This view originated with John Nelson Darby in the 1800s and spread widely in the early 1900s due the work of C.I. Scofield and the Scofield Reference Bible. It has been the popular view among evangelicals since.

WHAT VIEW DOES THIS STUDY HOLD?

All Nations, Tribes, People & Tongues is not promoting any one particular view. You will see notes suggesting different interpretations throughout this study. I used scholars from all four persuasions in the writing of it. The goal is for you to prayerfully study Revelation for yourself and determine which view you find most persuasive.

In this study I included the meaning or interpretation of common Revelation symbols. This is intended to act as a study aid. This was an intentional choice, and a literal reading can be held alongside a symbolic one. In fact, with apocalyptic literature the most literal reading often IS symbolic. For example, when it says "the Lamb had seven horns," the horns can represent the spiritual truth of "complete power" and also a literal seven horns, if that's your view. The symbolism within Revelation is an important part of understanding the themes, so these were included even though they do not align with all interpretations.

Are you ready? I hope so! Let's dive in!



Revelation 1

READ REVELATION 1 IN ITS ENTIRETY.

Revelation opens with an introduction to the author, John. We know a little about John from the other books he wrote—the gospel that bears his name, as well as the letters 1-3 John. He wrote more of the New Testament than any of the other twelve disciples at about 5% of the New Testament. He is perhaps best known for how he refers to himself in his gospel, as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Let’s learn a little about him!

Read the following passages:

Mark 3:17

Matthew 4:21-22

Galatians 2:7-9

Luke 9: 28-29

Mark 5:37

Matthew 26:36-46

John 20:2-9

Write what you learned about John:

Read Revelation 1:1-7. In Judaism, the number seven represents Creation, good fortune, and completion. In contrast, the number six “falls short” of seven, representing decay and incompleteness. John begins his letter with an address: “Grace and peace to you.” Read verses 4 and 5. What three persons does he indicate are the source of this greeting?

Read Isaiah 11:1-3. Knowing that seven indicates completion/perfection, what might the ‘seven spirits of God’ be in reference to? (v. 4)

Read Revelation 1:8-16. In verse 8, God refers to Himself as “the Alpha and the Omega.” These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. What is He saying about Himself?

Verses 9-11 start the address to the “seven churches in Asia.” These were real churches with real problems in John’s day, and they were represented by the seven golden lampstands. These churches were not the only ones to struggle, but their condition was representative of something that could apply to any body of Christ.

Read Matthew 5:14. Why might each church be represented by a lampstand?

In the next few chapters we will learn more about these churches individually. Let’s learn a little context about them before we do:

EPHESUS

A wealthy port city and center of trade, Ephesus was best known for its temple to Artemis (also called Diana) and the cult following for the goddess there. It was the center of trade routes by land. We learn more about what was happening in Ephesus in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. John is believed to have pastored here before his exile to Patmos.

SMYRNA

Similar in size and importance to Ephesus, Smyrna called itself “the First City of Asia in beauty and size.” It is believed that Polycarp, a disciple of John, pastored a church here and was martyred for his dedication to Christ.

PERGAMUM

This city was located on a hill overlooking a huge valley. Because of this distinct geographic location, Pergamum was made the Roman capital of Asia. As the capital, Pergamum became a center of emperor worship, alongside worship of the god of healing, Asclepius (who took on the form of a serpent). The most common name for Asclepius was Asclepius Soter, or Asclepius the Savior—an obvious affront to Christian sensitivities. Christians would have been required to offer tokens of loyalty as a public testament to Caesar’s godship. The reference to “Satan’s throne” may refer to the altar to Zeus at the highest point of the acropolis.

THYATIRA

Thyatira was situated in a valley with vulnerable fortifications. The Roman army was kept here to protect those vulnerabilities. It was also a trade center known for metallurgy and dyed cloth. It is of note that most crafts and trades were connected to guilds centered around a specific god or goddess (we see this in Acts 19, in Ephesus). Christians in these trades would be in a difficult position when the guild required worship of the associated god.

SARDIS

A former capital city, Sardis had been on the downturn until the Romans restored it. Like Thyatira, it was a trade center, and it was surrounded by land routes. Sardis was particularly known for the production of black wool, and it was the first city where gold and silver coins were minted.

PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia—which means “brotherly love”—was founded by a king of Pergamum about 200 years before John wrote Revelation. But in 17 AD an earthquake nearly destroyed both it and Sardis. The city was small, so it is believed the church there was small too. Because it was surrounded by vineyards, the cult of Dionysus was prominent.

LAODICEA

This city was built by Antiochus II. Because of the peace Rome brought to Asia, Laodicea quickly became a city of enormous wealth. Like Sardis, Laodicea’s main production was wool. Most importantly though was the neighboring mountain where a spring was believed to produce healing waters. Though it started out hot, the aqueduct transporting the spring water to Laodicea resulted in lukewarm mineral water—a fact that is referenced in John’s letter to the city.

Read verse 13. John describes Jesus as “one like a son of man.” This is a reference to Daniel and also a title Jesus used for Himself in the gospels (particularly John and Mark).

Read Daniel 7:13-14. How is the Son of Man described?

Read Revelation 1:17-20. Who is speaking in these verses?

Who do the seven stars represent?

The word for “angels” in this passage is the Greek angelos. This word is often used to refer to heavenly messengers, but it can also be used for human messengers of God.

Read Matthew 11:10. Who does the word “messenger” (angelos) refer to here?

Because John is writing a letter directly to these individual “angels,” the most likely interpretation is that the “messengers” were actually the bishops, or pastors, of the seven churches.

Review Revelation 1 and comment on the following:

- John’s intention in writing this book (v. 1-3)
- How Jesus is described (v. 4-8)
- The seven lampstands and what they represent (v. 9-13)
- The Son of man: how is he described? (v. 14-19)
- The seven stars: what do they represent? (v. 20)

What do you learn about God from this passage?

What principle about God or humanity impacts you today?



Revelation 2

READ REVELATION 2 IN ITS ENTIRETY.

Read Revelation 2:1-7. Each letter begins with a different description of the One sending it and ends with a promise for “the one who overcomes.” Read verse 2:1. How is the sender described?

Knowing what the stars and lampstands symbolize (pg. 13, 16), what does this description indicate about Christ?

Jesus points out seven positive attributes of the church at Ephesus. What are they? (v. 2-3)

He follows this with one complaint. Where was Ephesus failing? (v. 4)

Read verse 5. How could the church at Ephesus remedy their love?

What consequence would come if they did not change? (v. 5)

Jesus concludes with another encouragement for Ephesian righteousness. What did the Ephesians hate that Jesus also hated? (v. 6)

THE NICOLAITANS

The Nicolaitans were a heretical sect of Christianity. Some believe the sect was founded by the deacon Nicolaus mentioned in Acts 6, who was from Antioch and was ordained by Peter. The sect held to a form of antinomianism: what we do in the body has no bearing on our spiritual lives. It's "eat, drink, and be merry!" with little to no regard for holy living. Paul debunks antinomianism in 1 Corinthians 6. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-20.

What argument was the church at Corinth using to defend their sexual immorality?

Why are Christians called to pursue holiness with their bodies?

Church father Irenaus described the Nicolaitans this way:

"The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John, [when they are represented] as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." (*Adversus haereses*, i. 26, §3)

Can you think of a modern parallel to the Nicolaitans? Describe below:

Read verse 7. What is promised to “the one who conquers”?

Read Revelation 2:8-11. How is the sender of the letter to Smyrna described? What did He accomplish? (v. 8)

What three things is the church at Smyrna experiencing? (v. 9)

In verse 9, Jesus tells Smyrna they are poor, but they are also rich. Read Matthew 6:19-20. What might Jesus be saying?

What three things is the church at Smyrna going to experience?
(v. 10)

Read verse 11. What is promised to “the one who conquers”?

Read Revelation 2:12-17. How is the sender of the letter to Pergamum described?

Review the description of Pergamum. What might Satan’s throne represent?

Jesus commends the church at Pergamum for what action? (v. 13)

What two things does Jesus hold against the church? (v. 14-15)

What two practices are particularly condemned? (v. 14)

BALAAM

When we hear the name Balaam, we usually think of a talking donkey. But there's more to the story than a very vocal ass. There are powerful themes related to Balaam that run all the way through Scripture and find a particular crescendo in the book of Revelation.

Read Numbers 22:1-6. Why was Balaam called by Balak, king of Moab?

In Numbers 22:7-21, Balaam takes money to act as a prophet (his first sin). Then, knowing that the Lord would not will him to curse Israel, Balaam doesn't just entertain the idea—he continues the conversation with Balak. God comes to Balaam personally to dissuade him from taking action (v. 9). Though Balaam rejects Balak's offer in word, he invites Balak and all his emissaries to stay the night so he may "know what more the Lord will say" (v. 19). In other words: Balaam wants his way—and God gives it to him.

Read Numbers 22:20. What does God say to Balaam?

Read Numbers 22:22-30. What does the donkey see on the road?

How does the donkey respond?

How does Balaam respond to the donkey?

Balaam had a personal sin that led to a corporate sin for Israel. Look up the following passages: Jude 1:11 and 2 Peter 2:15-16. What was Balaam's motivation?

Spoiler alert! Balaam's attempts to curse Israel fail miserably (Numbers 23). But later on we learn that Balaam found a new way to accomplish Balak's evil scheme. Read Numbers 25:1-3. What were the people of Israel doing? (v. 1-2)

In verse 2, the word "they" refers to the women of Moab. What specifically did these women do to the people of Israel?

Jump forward to Numbers 31:7-9 and 31:15-16. Why was Moses angry with the men of Israel?

Israel experienced an incredible plague because of their Baal worship, a worship plotted by Balaam and initiated by the deceitful women of Moab. This combination of sexual and

spiritual adultery is what John refers to in Revelation 2:14. It's also a parallel to the practices of the Nicolaitans.

Even though we know how Balaam's story ends, we're not done with him yet. Let's pick up back in Numbers 22.

Read Numbers 22:31-35. Who is standing in Balaam's way? (v. 31)

The Angel of the Lord is a recurring character in the Old Testament. You'll know He is not the same as a regular angel because his name is preceded by "the" and is usually capitalized ("the Angel," not "an angel"). Let's look at a few other places He reveals Himself. Look up the following passages and write down where the Angel is or what He is doing:

Genesis 16:7-8

Genesis 22:15-18

Exodus 3:2

Judges 6:11-12

If you were to read these passages in their larger context you would see that the Angel of the Lord is often present with or alongside Yahweh Himself. Their identities are, as Dr. Michael Heiser puts it, “blurred together.” Read Exodus 23:20-22, then look at Dr. Heiser’s thoughts below.

“There’s something strange about God’s description of Moses that tells us that this is no ordinary angel. This angel has the authority to pardon sins or not, a status that belongs to God. More specifically, God tells Moses that the reason this angel has the authority is “my name is in Him” (v. 21). What does this curious phrase mean? Moses knew instantly. Anyone thinking of the burning bush incident does as well. When God told Moses that his name was in this angel, he was saying that he was in this angel—his very presence or essence.”¹

Who is Dr. Heiser implying the Angel of the Lord might be?

The word for Old Testament appearances of Jesus is “Christophany.” Can you think of any other places we see Jesus in the Old Testament?

1 HEISER, M. S. (2019). Unseen realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the bible. In UNSEEN REALM: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the bible (pp. 141-143). Bellingham, WA: LEXHAM PR.

Read Numbers 22:23 and Numbers 22:31. What is the Angel of the Lord holding in His hand?

Go back to Revelation 2:12. What is the sender of the letter to Pergamum holding in His hand?

Read Revelation 2:16. What prevents us from following in the steps of Balaam?

Read verse 17. What is promised to the one who conquers?

Read Exodus 16:32-35. What was put inside the ark of the covenant?

“Hidden manna” may refer to a Jewish legend regarding the manna stored in the Ark. According to a Jewish source:

“Our sages tell us that “when King Solomon built the Holy Temple, knowing that it was destined to be destroyed, he built a place in which to hide the Ark, at the end of hidden, deep, winding passageways.” Ultimately, 22 years before the destruction of the First Temple, King Josiah hid the jug of manna together with the Ark in that special hidden passage. According to tradition, it is still hidden there, waiting to be rediscovered with the advent of Moshiach.”²

Read Revelation 2:18-29. How is the sender of the letter to Thyatira described?

What four things does Christ admire about the church at Thyatira?

What one thing does Christ have against the church? (v. 20)

2 Sherpin, Y. (2018). What Was the Manna? Retrieved 2021, from https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4463795/jewish/What-Was-the-Manna.htm

Read 2 Kings 9:22. What did the original Jezebel do to Israel?

What might this mean for the “Jezebel” of Thyatira?

What parallels do you see between Jezebel and Balaam?

Read v. 20-24. For what should the church repent, and for what should it be encouraged?

Read v. 26-29. What is promised to the one who conquers?

What do you learn about God from this passage?

What principle about God or humanity impacts you today?



Revelation 3

READ REVELATION 3 IN ITS ENTIRETY

Read Revelation 3:1-6. How is the sender of the letter to Sardis described?

What do the seven spirits of God represent?

Read Isaiah 11:1-3. List the seven ways the Spirit is described:

Review: What do the seven stars represent?

In all the previous letters, Jesus had something good to say about the church before He addressed their sin. What is different about His letter to Sardis?

What was the sin of Sardis? (v. 1-2)

What was the solution to their sin? (v. 3)

Jesus warns that Sardis must “wake up” because He is coming like a thief in the night. Look up the following passages. What is meant by this analogy?

Matthew 24:42-44

2 Peter 3:10

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3

What is promised to the one who conquers? (v. 5)

Read Revelation 3:7-13. How is the sender of the letter to Philadelphia described? Read Isaiah 22:20-25.

Eliakim was a trusted servant of King Hezekiah. This verse references him in a dual prophecy both for Eliakim and for the future “government bearer,” Jesus Christ. Read verse 8, then look up Isaiah 9:6-7.

Compare this promise about the Messiah to what is said about Eliakim. What same imagery is used?

How does the fact that the government is on the shoulders of Christ comfort you today?

THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

In Revelation 3:9 Jesus, through John, condemns those who “say they are Jews but they are not.” Scholar Justo Gonzalez states that this may be a reference to Jews who have rejected Christ, or more likely, Christian Judaizers who insist that Christians must follow Jewish ritual law in order to be saved.

Read Galatians 5:1-12.

The entire book of Galatians was written because the Galatian church had been deceived by people requiring Jewish law observance in addition to salvation by grace. Circumcision was a sign of God’s covenant with Israel. Paul is saying that the Gentiles (non-Jews), who are saved by grace, need not circumcise themselves to please God.

Look at Galatians 5:6. What does Paul say counts the most?

Read Revelation 3:9-11. What does Jesus celebrate about the church in Philadelphia? What does He promise to do for them?

What is promised to the one who conquers? (v. 12-13)

Read Revelation 3:14-22. In this final letter, how is the sender described?

Amen is a statement of affirmation. It is confirmation to a spoken truth. The most direct meaning is “so be it.” It can also be translated “surely” or “truly,” such as when Jesus would say to His disciples, “Truly, Truly I say unto you...”

Knowing this, what does Jesus mean by calling Himself “the Amen?”

Read verses 15-16. What does the lukewarm water represent?

Read verses 17-18. What three things does the church of Laodicea claim to be?

What five things does Jesus say they actually are?

What does Jesus counsel them to do about their condition? (v. 18)

Why does He counsel them to do this? (v. 19)

Read verse 20. Look up Luke 12:35-37. How are the bridegroom's servants depicted by Jesus?

Go back to Revelation 3:8. What kind of door did the Philadelphians have?

Read 3:20 again. What kind of door did the Laodiceans have? Think about your own heart: is it open or closed to the leading of Christ? Why or why not?

What is promised to the one who conquers? (v. 21-22)

What do you learn about God from this passage?

What principle about God or humanity impacts you today?



Revelation 4

READ REVELATION 4 IN ITS ENTIRETY.

Chapter Four gives us our first glimpse of the throne room of God. This is meant to be a glorious glimpse! There are precious jewels, thrones, white garments, crowns, fire, glass, and wild creatures around the throne. John must have been quite overwhelmed just trying to describe it for us! As you read, think about the utter holiness of God's presence.

Re-read Revelation 4:1-6. In verse 1, who is the "first voice?"

Read verse 3. What three jewels are mentioned?

John describes the One on the throne as having the appearance of “jasper and carnelian.”

Jasper is a stone with high quartz content most often found in hues of red, yellow, or brown. In this context it is most likely red, given that it is aligned with carnelian. Carnelian, also called Sardius, was in the priest’s ephod (jewel studded breastplate) along with Jasper. It also is red. Verse 3 also mentions a rainbow.

Read Genesis 9:12-17. What does the rainbow symbolize?

This rainbow was a particular color. How does John describe it?

Read Exodus 33:20. Why might John use simile to describe God’s appearance?

In 4:4, John describes 24 elders on 24 thrones. What might the total number 24 represent? (Think: what peoples were gathered in numbers of 12 in the Old and New Testaments?)

Read verses 5-6. Now read Exodus 20:18-19. What parallels do you see?

Read verses 6-8. What did each of the four living creatures resemble?

Read Ezekiel 1:4-14. Write down three additional characteristics of these living creatures:

Read verse 9. What is the purpose of these creatures?

Read Isaiah 6:1-4. What parallels to Revelation 4 do you see?

The living creatures represent the greatest of each animal “realm”: the ox is the greatest of land animals (or was perceived as such for the sake of agriculture), the eagle is the greatest creature of the sky, the lion is the greatest of predators, and the man has dominion over them all. These four represent the fullness of God’s creation worshipping Him in glory!

The 24 elders cast their crowns at the feet of the reigning King and sing a doxology to the Lord. Write their song below (v. 11).

Look at Colossians 1:16-17. This was written by Paul before John wrote Revelation, but what similarities do you see?

Rewrite the doxology in your own words:

What stood out to you in Revelation 4?

What principle about God or humanity impacts you today?



Revelation 5

READ REVELATION 5 IN ITS ENTIRETY.

Read Revelation 5:1-5. What is God holding in His hand? How many seals are on it? (v. 1)

Why do you think John weeps when no one can open the scroll? (v. 3-4)

Scholar Justo Gonzalez notes that John weeps because the plan of the Lord cannot be opened and fulfilled. The world cannot experience the fullness of God's will unless the Worthy One opens the seals.

Who do the elders proclaim worthy to open the scroll? (v. 5)

Read Revelation 5:6-10. What was standing in the throne room? Describe it here. (v. 6)

In apocalyptic literature (and in Jewish literature as a whole) horns represent power. Earlier in this study we talked about how the number seven represents completion. What does this indicate about the slain Lamb having seven horns? (v. 6)

The Lamb also has seven eyes. The “eye” represents the spirit, and seven eyes together can represent the complete, or Holy, Spirit. How does verse 6b confirm this?

In verse five, we learned the only One worthy to take the scroll is the Lion of Judah. In verse seven, the Lamb takes the scroll.

Based on this, we see that the Lion is actually a Lamb. What is the significance of this?

How does the throne room of heaven respond to the Lamb's authority? (v. 8)

The fullness of the Old and New Testament saints, all the creatures of the earth (represented in the four living creatures), and the prayers of saints dead and alive fill the throne room with glory. Can you imagine how beautiful this would be? This glory is expressed in a doxology, or hymn, sung by the elders and saints. Write out the hymn below (v. 9-10):

According to the hymn, what did Jesus' sacrifice accomplish?

Read Revelation 5:11-14. Who begins singing the glory of the Lord according to verse 11?

How many are there?

What seven things does the host of heaven declare Jesus worthy to receive?

What creatures worshipped the Lamb according to verse 13-14?

What does this holistic worship say about how we should worship today?

How do the principles in this passage affect you?



Revelation 6

Revelation six introduces us to the first of three visions. According to Dale Griffin's Lutheran study on Revelation, these visions cover the same ground from three different perspectives: first the seals, then trumpet blasts, then bowls of judgment.

READ REVELATION 6 IN ITS ENTIRETY.

The scroll containing God's will and judgments is in the hands of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. Because of His authority and sacrifice He is able to open the seals. Chapter six depicts the opening of each of these seals and the introduction of "the four horsemen of the Apocalypse" who proceed from the seals. If you're picturing a scroll with seven seals across the front, instead picture a scroll where each seal unrolls it a little more, revealing more of God's judgment as it opens.

The horsemen depicted in the first four seals are representative of a type of judgment unleashed on the earth. Keep in mind that these may be interpreted either as past events (preterism, often found in amillennial and postmillennial interpretations) or as future events (premillennialism). They can also be understood

as “dual prophecies,” referring to events in the first century and types of events to come. As you read, keep in mind the big picture: God is reconciling all things unto Himself.

Read Revelation 6:1-2. After the living creature shouts “Come!” what proceeds from the first seal?

Describe the rider of the first horse.

What was the rider’s mission?

Read Revelation 6:3-4. What proceeds from the second seal?

Describe the second horse. What color is it? What might this represent?

What is the rider's mission?

Read Revelation 6:5-6. What color horse proceeds from the third seal?

What is the rider holding in his hand, and what might this represent?

What strange thing does the voice say about grain, oil, and wine?

Before we talk about what this means, what's your guess?

At the time John was writing Revelation, most land was farmed by prominent landowners who were most concerned with making a profit. The most profitable products in larger cities were oil and wine, and thus much of the land was dedicated to these crops. Under the reign of Emperor Domitian, this led to a scarcity of grain and barley—essential foods for the poor. Domitian attempted to limit the landowners with an edict, but an uprising caused the edict to be revoked. The voice in Revelation points out this cultural imbalance of justice (the rider is carrying scales). Based on a modern wage of \$15 an hour, a quart of wheat would cost \$120! This was far beyond what the poor could afford and was a breach of justice in the eyes of God.

Read Revelation 6:7-8. What color horse proceeds from the fourth seal? Who is riding it?

Who follows the rider?

Hades reappears later in Revelation, but it's also mentioned throughout the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes it is

translated hell, other times (and in other translations) retains the term “Hades.” Look up the following verses. Write down what you learn about Hades:

Matthew 10:28

Luke 16:23-24

Acts 2:27

Read Revelation 6:9-11. What do we see when the fifth seal is opened?

Why were these souls slain? (v. 9)

What do they ask God to do? (v. 10)

What is God's response? (v. 11)

Jesus repeatedly predicted that His followers would be persecuted. Look at His words in the following passages; what does He say will happen?

Matthew 24:9

Mark 13:9-13

John 16:1-4

Read Revelation 6:12-17. What six things happen to the universe when the sixth seal is opened? (v. 12-14)

What kinds of people hid themselves from this judgment? (v. 15)

What did they wish would happen rather than face God's judgment? (v. 16-17)

As we move through the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments it can be easy to think God is angry, to the point we forget about or question His love. But God's love and grace exist because He is just and holy. Without His justice—calling evil to account—there would be no need for grace. Without judging evil for the wreckage it creates in human lives and hearts, we could not fully experience love. God's love and justice are not opposites; they are two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other.

As you read these judgments, think of the evil and heartbreak you see on the news. War, bloodshed, abuse, molestation, deceit, corruption: God's judgments call ALL of these to account. Both the preterist (Revelation is past) and the premillennial (Revelation is future) can agree that God's template is one of loving justice. He makes right the wrongs of sinful man.

William Barclay put it this way:

“It is from the wrath of the Lamb that people flee. Here is paradox: we do not readily associate wrath with the Lamb but rather gentleness and kindness. But the wrath of God is the wrath of love, which is not out to destroy, but even in anger, is out to save those whom it loves.”¹

In Summary:

What does this passage teach you about the heart of God?

1 William Barclay, *The Revelation of John Vol. II*

How does it change how you see the world?



Revelation 7

Chapter seven is like the eye of a storm. In it we see a great cosmic pause; like a deep breath before diving into the sea. This chapter seems like an “interlude” between judgment narratives, but it’s important to acknowledge the style of literature and not to “read Revelation like one reads a television program, to know exactly what comes next.”¹ If we make the mistake of reading too literally (not acknowledging authorial intent and genre) we can draw conclusions that are not in the text. So far, we’ve seen complete chaos unleashed with the sixth seal (in Jewish literature the falling of the stars is an indicator of utter cosmic chaos). Now we see a picture of God’s sustaining power for those He has sealed for Himself.

READ REVELATION 7 IN ITS ENTIRETY.

Read Revelation 7:1-3. Four angels hold back the winds “so that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.” This is a vivid picture!

1 Justo Gonzalez, *Three Months in Revelation*, pg 64

What do think the earth would be like without any wind?

What does the fifth angel command to be done before further judgments ensue?

In ancient cultures, slaves were often marked or sealed so they could be identified with their master. We see this later with the “mark of the Beast.” Here the seal is applied to the servants of God Himself, identifying them with Him. This is also a parallel to the Exodus, where the children of Israel marked their doors with blood.

Read Exodus 12:4-11. What did Israel have to do in order to be “passed over?”

Read Revelation 7:4-8. How many people were sealed?

The 144,000 can be viewed one of two ways: as a literal, face-value number, or as a symbol of a greater spiritual concept. We will look at both ideas.

In the more literal, largely premillennial view, the Israelite tribes will receive a physical land in Christ's millennial reign. Each of those tribes will be represented by these 12,000 members. According to dispensationalist Henry Morris, each tribe will be headed by a New Testament apostle. He also suggests there are so many of them because they will take turns serving their nation and tribe.

In the spiritual interpretation—largely held by amillennial theologians—the number 144,000 represents the whole of God's people: twelve for the tribes of Israel, twelve for the apostles (leaders of the church), and 1,000 for completeness. These groupings represent the completed people of God.

There is also an interpretation which says 144,000 is a spiritual representation, not of Israel and the church together, but of the complete gathering of faithful Jews—those who put their faith in Christ. This view looks forward to Revelation 7:9-17, which mentions a multi-ethnic gathering in contrast to the distinctly Jewish group in Revelation 7:1-8.

Whichever interpretation is held, the concept here is God's protection of His own. Persecution is promised—but the seal is also a promise, an assurance that God will see His people through.

God promises to watch over His own even when they face trial and persecution. Read the following passages. What does God promise to do for His people when they suffer?

1 Thess. 5:23-24:

2 Thess. 3:1-4:

1 Peter 1:3-5:

Jude 24-25:

The seal of God on His people is an important promise, one we can't skim past. Before we move to the second half of Revelation 7, it's worth considering the significance of this seal. In Christ, we are "marked" with His sacrifice, His identity. We are united to Him. This is so much more than an emotional decision! Justo Gonzalez invites us to ask some pointed questions:

"Do you belong to God, and do you act as one who belongs to God? Or are you rather your own owner, doing what you find most pleasurable and convenient, and serving God only when it suits you? Does your church belong to God? Or are there some members who believe that because they give more or because they attend more frequently or because they have been members for a long time, the church belongs to them? What would it mean to be a church sealed with the name of God?"²

2 Justo Gonzalez, *Three Months in Revelation*, pg 64

Take some time to think and pray about these questions, then respond below.

Read Revelation 7:9-17. What four characteristics does John use to identify the “great multitude?” (v. 9)

The white robes and palm branches were recognized symbols of victory (Roman conquerors wore white to celebrate their victorious conquests). Since the crowd is wearing white, the assumption is that the victory belongs to them. Yet what do they say in their victory cry? (v. 10)

What is the response of the heavenly host? (v. 11-12)

How did the crowd come to be clothed in white? (v.14)

Read Genesis 15:5. How was God's promise to Abraham fulfilled in the great multitude?

In verse 15, both the saints and the Lord take action. What do the saints do, and what does God do?

What seven things are promised to the great multitude for remaining faithful through suffering? (v. 16-17)

How do these promises encourage you today?