

The Revelation

Discipleship Bible Study – Fall 2020

The Village Church of Rancho Santa Fe

Lesson Eight – Week of November 1

Revelation 17:1 – 20:15

INTRODUCTORY NOTES – Structure/Outline of Revelation

1. Chapters 4 – 18
 - a. The main series of visions given to John that illustrate the terrible woes that will befall the world as a prelude to the final defeat of all evil, assured in Jesus' victory already won through his death and resurrection
2. Chapters 19 - 22
 - a. Visions of the final redemption and restoration of God's Kingdom, especially as seen in the establishment of the Holy City of God – New Jerusalem

DETAILED NOTES

1. Chapters 17 & 18 – Summary
 - a. The final “act” in the great conflagration that signals the defeat of evil
 - b. The fall of “Babylon”
 - c. Note:
 - i. In opening chapters, Christ speaks to 7 earthly cities
 - ii. In middle chapters, Christ defeats evil city of Babylon
 - iii. In last chapters, Christ ushers in heavenly city of New Jerusalem
2. Chapter 17
 - a. John taken to “wilderness” – place of perspective for People of God
 - b. Vision of Babylon/Rome
 - i. Woman on Beast
 - ii. Rome – city which has dominion
 - iii. Rome – not “Mother Roma” but a harlot – idolatry!
 - iv. Seated on Many Waters – originally Babylon on Euphrates, now Rome on “waters” of commercial seagoing economy and of Sea Monster/Chaos
 - v. Fornication – accepting Rome as the primary point of orientation for life
 - vi. Mystery – not a puzzle but an insight revealed by God's prophets
 - vii. Beast – chaos, Rome, Caesars, was/is/is to come = parody of true God
 - viii. Note – John fears Christians will surrender to a power who is already defeated, but his vision “removes the cover” (literal meaning of “apocalypse”) so the reality of the thing is revealed (revelation!) about who truly is God and who is not!
 - c. Seven Kings – fallen, living, yet to come, etc.
 - i. Different ways to date John's reference to actual Roman emperors

- ii. We cannot totally decipher, but 1st century hearer/readers of Revelation obviously knew about whom John was writing
- d. Defeat of Evil
 - i. 17:12-14 – beast defeated by Lamb
 - ii. 17:15-18 – beast devours woman – evil is “self-destructive”

3. Chapter 18

- a. Celebration & Lament of the Fall of Babylon
- b. Final scene in the eschatological woes
- c. Language taken from OT laments, dirges, taunts over destruction of evil cities
- d. WHY Babylon falls:
 - i. Idolatry & Blasphemy (harlot, fornication) – breach of 1st Commandment
 - ii. Violence, especially that against Jews & Christians – blood of saints (rule by violence is itself condemned)
 - iii. Self-Glorification – hubris – pride
 - iv. Wealth of the few who live off the poverty of the many
- e. Lament – (verses 21-23)
 - i. Not everything about Rome was “evil”
 - ii. Sorrow for the loss of music, art, bride/groom – good things of culture
- f. Christian Response to the Fallen City
 - i. Fight Rome? Not possible for a powerless minority
 - ii. “Fight” with same self-sacrifice as the Lamb
 - iii. Only God can truly fight and win – we wait and watch
 - iv. Yet...Christians are called to...
 - 1. “Come out” – (v4) – resist values of Idolatrous City
 - 2. “Rejoice” – (v20) – hope in God’s final judgment of all sin & evil that leads to renewal of all creation

4. Chapter 19:1-10

- a. Beginning of the last major section of letter/book
- b. A vision of the transcendent God/Christ
- c. Note: worship in heaven and worship on earth are similar
- d. “Salvation to God” – recognition that God has always been God – contrary to outward appearances on earth
- e. Worship celebrates the mighty acts of God, not our pious feelings (E. Boring)
- f. Marriage image – God/Christ is Groom, Israel/Church is Bride – a relationship!
- g. Angel Worship – (v10) – polemic (argument) against angel worship & idolatry

5. Chapter 19:11-16

- a. Beginning of 7 Visions that are the absolute final events of history – (return of Christ, last battle, binding of Satan, thousand-year reign, defeat of Gog/Magog, last judgment, New Jerusalem)
- b. Mighty Warrior on White Horse – Risen Christ

- i. NOT like other Warriors!
 - ii. Conquers through His own death
 - iii. Sword is Word of God (himself)
 - iv. To rule also means “to shepherd”
 - v. This is WHO is at the end of history (therefore, don’t worry about the “what”)
- c. Second Coming of Christ – 3 Different/Complementary Images
 - i. Christ came & never left (Holy Spirit)
 - ii. Christ came, left, comes back in special moments/needs
 - iii. Christ is in heaven but coming back

6. Chapter 19:17-21

- a. Context: Primeval battle between The Deity & The Chaos Monster
- b. Theological impact – rebellious humanity is defeated/redeemed by Creator
- c. Contrast – heavenly banquet (prefigured by communion) or grisly “meal” of birds eating flesh of enemies of God

7. Chapter 20

- a. Binding of Satan (v 1-3)
 - i. 2 backdrops in ancient thought – evil either imprisoned or finally defeated
 - ii. Note: Hint of redemption of all – Satan is “deceiver of the nations” – once his power is ended than all “nations” (Gentiles, too) will see the truth of God
- b. The Millennium (v 4-6)
 - i. Backdrop – Jewish apocalyptic expectation of renewal of this earth
 - ii. Note the history of Christian fascination/exaggeration of this one small piece of Revelation!
 - iii. Focus is not on the time period, but on the function of Faithful Martyrs of Christ who will be his Priests on earth – worshiping God and pointing the rest of the world to Him
 - iv. What about the “actual” 1000 years?
 - 1. John – never meant to be objective, propositional, chronological
 - 2. 2 Contexts: (both represented/fused in Revelation)
 - a. Prophetic expectation of “this-worldly” fulfillment of God’s purposes
 - b. Apocalyptic expectation that this world was too far gone and would be “replaced” by another
 - 3. “Two” resurrections – necessary to bridge 2 understandings of “what happens to/on earth at the end”
- c. Gog & Magog (v 7-10)
 - i. Note: v3 where Satan “must” be released, John’s device to incorporate tradition of Gog/Magog into final end stories
 - ii. Ezekiel 38 & 39 – Gog, prince of Magog – another image of evil personified

- iii. Note: God defeats this “evil” too
- d. Last Judgment (v 11-15)
 - i. The only judgment scene in Revelation
 - ii. Everyone (all the dead of all time) is there!
 - iii. Two Books
 - 1. Book of “deeds” – we are responsible for what we do and God will judge accordingly!
 - 2. Book of Life – not about deeds, but about grace, ie, who God saves despite what is written about them in the first book!
 - iv. Note: Main point is that Death & Hades themselves are destroyed
 - v. Note: the power of Death itself dies, death that enslaves us in the next life as well as in this life (death as the agent of evil/Satan)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to John in Revelation, Rome—and by extension, all human empire—is captive to the force of Satan. How do you see this true (or not) in the 21st century?
2. Idolatry, violence, pride, and greed are all condemned in Revelation and seen as ultimately self-destructive forces. How does this spiritual dynamic play itself out in your life? In the lives of whole communities?
3. Assuming that modern culture/empire is no different now than it was in John’s day, how can 21st century Christians live in the modern world and yet remain faithful to Christ?
4. How does our modern worship connect us with the ancient church and with the worship that is continuous in heaven? How does this support and encourage you?
5. The “two books” in the final judgment scene depict both human responsibility and God’s grace as crucial considerations in “where we go” when we die. Which “book” do you think is the more important?
6. Revelation pictures the Church as “priests” of God. How are you a priest?
7. Revelation pictures the Triumphant and Risen Christ who conquers by his death as the Word and Lamb of God. If we follow this Christ (and emulate him), then what does this say about how you and I (individually and together) live out our lives in the cosmic struggle between good and evil (God and Devil)?

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Leader: The Rev. Dr. Jack W. Baca

Sources:

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