

Good Word Schedule
The Book of Revelation
January, February, March, 2019

1. **The Gospel from Patmos**—*December 29–January 4*
2. **Among the Lampstands**—*January 5–11*
3. **God’s People in Cities**—*January 12–18*
4. **The Enthronement of the Lamb**—*January 19–25*
5. **The Seven Seals**—*January 26–February 1*
6. **The Sealed People of God**—*February 2–8*
7. **The Seven Trumpets**—*February 9–15*
8. **Satan, A Defeated Enemy**—*February 16–22*
9. **Satan and His Two Allies**—*February 23–March 1*
10. **God’s Everlasting Gospel**—*March 2–8*
11. **The Seven Last Plagues**—*March 9–15*
12. **Judgement on Babylon**—*March 16–22*
13. **“I Make All Things New”**—*March 23–29*

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The Book of Revelation

General Introduction

This study guide is meant to accompany the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School lesson for the 1st Quarter of 2019. Except for a longer first lesson, the format of this guide follows a similar pattern for each week's lesson: an introduction to the topic, a short discussion on several verses or a bullet list of concepts for a passage, followed by questions in bold type. Please read through the Biblical passages, and then prayerfully consider the bolded questions. Perhaps you'll find better questions that should be asked, and answered!

The book of Revelation deserves far more time than one quarter of study, but it is my desire—and no doubt that of Sabbath School Lesson contributors (and my professors) Ranko Stefanovic and Jon Paulien!—that you'll learn principles to help you study Revelation in more depth, more carefully, and with more excitement than before this quarter. It is also my hope that you won't fear Revelation, but instead further discover and experience the hope it offers in Jesus!

May the God who gave John the *Revelation* illumine your study by His Spirit as the consummation of Christ's atoning work draws near!

Brant Berglin
December, 2018

Opening Question

What sort of emotions does the last book of the Bible, Revelation, evoke in you?

Introduction

Most people think of Revelation as a book about the last days including mythical beasts, end-time plagues and destruction, or “Babylon” and “Armageddon.” More than a few of my students note emotions like fear, apprehension, or disgust when they think about the book or its message; perhaps that describes you as well. Yet Revelation calls itself an “unveiling” or “disclosure,” and not of end-time events. It is *a revealing of Jesus Christ*. The lesson this quarter appropriately recalls this fact, and we must keep it in mind throughout our study. The book is the story of Christ’s atoning work for His people, beginning with John’s first century Christian community until our day, and even until the end of Christ’s atoning work. It is the story of Christ “going to prepare a place for us” (see John 14) through the Christian age until He puts an end to the sin problem, and restores the earth to the Eden it was intended to be.

A typical approach to Revelation is to study a few passages trying to find parallels for the symbols within history (reading the newspaper or internet headlines for clues). But Revelation is a “whole” book, that is, it’s written as a story, a narrative. It has characters, actions, a plot, settings, props, and a very satisfying conclusion! In order, then, to better understand the *story* of Revelation, I recommend reading the entire book through in one sitting, perhaps even aloud. It will take about 2 hours, but is well worth your time. The result will be the ability to see the big-picture of this great story. It will provide a framework within which to place the various sections of the book, some of which are quite familiar to us, but rarely seen in their broader Great-Controversy context. We tend to approach Revelation in a piece-meal way, with some passages given much more emphasis without noting how each passage connects to the overall flow.

Why do you think people often spend more time on some passages of Revelation than others? What passages do Adventist Evangelists tend to focus on? Are there passages you avoid?

Sources

A quick read through Revelation reveals that John uses a couple main sources for his imagery:

- Jewish Apocalyptic literature: writings that have a similar flavor to Revelation were already in vogue in Israel during the days of Jesus and John. These had an effect on the theology of Israel, especially concerning the Messiah’s reign and Jewish expectations.
- Greco-Roman Mythology: Revelation’s symbolism and amalgamation of beasts would not be a surprise to the Gentiles living in the Roman empire. The story of a coming king who destroys the monsters is a familiar narrative to these people.
- Christ’s first Advent: After the ascension of Christ, the disciples would have wanted to know where Jesus was and His work. John is answering the questions, “where is Jesus now, and what is He doing?” Without a doubt, John’s experience with Jesus was the most dramatic event in his life, and of course Revelation has Jesus as a central character.
- The Old Testament: If one does not know the Hebrew Scriptures, Revelation will remain a mystery. Though it never quotes the Old Testament, every chapter has allusions to concepts, places, people, events, or institutions in the Old Testament. With the original

context of those stories, Revelation's reader will see how God uses Israel's history to show what is happening in the world today and what will happen in the future. Revelation suggests through its structure and themes that history repeats itself, and Christian Religious/Spiritual history also repeats itself.

How noticeable are these sources in Revelation? What does it say about how God communicates the about Jesus to the 1st Century? And to today?

Methods of Interpreting Revelation

Most scholars of Revelation fall into one of four main schools of interpretation:

- Preterist: Believe Revelation was written for and about John's day. It is commentary on the struggles of the first-century church with Rome, what it meant to live as a follower of Jesus in a time and social/political environment hostile to people of faith in Jesus. For most preterist scholars, Revelation is not prophecy, and many preterists are not believers in God. Form them, Revelation is just literature from the author's (maybe not even John the disciple's) imagination, and mirrors Christianity of the 1st or 2nd century. Many commentaries are written from this perspective.
- Historicist: Revelation is prophecy that describes the flow of history from John's day until the end of this current age. Though many Christians in the 1800s were historicists, as were most of the reformers, there are few true historicists left today, due in part to the failed predictions of William Miller and the great disappointment. Adventists hold that most of Revelation functions this way (though there are some minor disagreements, as we may see).
- Futurist: Chapters 1-3 describe the history of the Christian church (a historicist approach), but from ch. 4:1 and onward, it describes events to take place after the rapture of the church, during a literal time of 7 years of tribulation. Many evangelicals take this perspective, as do books like *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *Left Behind*.
- Idealist: Revelation is given in order to point out the general struggle between good and evil, both in our personal lives, and in culture more broadly.

Sanctuary Structure of Revelation

Both Paulien and Stefanovic, using Kenneth Strand's work from several decades ago, have shown that Revelation's cycles of seven are all introduced with a scene from the sanctuary. There are:

- candlesticks (ch. 1) before the seven churches (chs. 2-3)
- a throne (chs. 4-5)—a possible allusion to the table of showbread—before the seven seals (chs. 6-7)
- the altar of incense (ch. 8) before the seven trumpets (chs. 8-11)
- the ark of the covenant (ch. 11) before the dragon's war and the seven angels of the great harvest (chs. 12-14)
- an end of priestly intercession (ch. 16) before the seven last plagues and the fall of Babylon (chs. 16-19).

At the conclusion of Revelation in chs. 21-22, there is no longer any temple. If the temple was given, according to Exodus 25:8, so that God could dwell among His sinful people, then it's abrogation must mean that Christ's intercession is done, and people now live with Him. The sanctuary shows the ongoing plan of Salvation and Revelation follows this pattern.

The Text:

Revelation 1:1-3

This introductory section is a “prescript” and sets the stage for the book. It describes the “line of communication” in giving the Revelation. Though John writes it in the 3rd person (refers to himself as “John” and “he”)

Who all is involved in transmitting the Revelation of Jesus Christ?

What is the relationship between the “testimony of Jesus” and “as much as he saw”? How does verse 2 help us understand the “testimony of Jesus”?

Revelation 1:4-8

This section reads much like the introduction to other New Testament and Greco-Roman Letters. John’s immediate audience would be Greco-Roman congregations in significant cities in what today is Western Turkey. The greeting is a three-fold greeting. It is from God, the existing one and the one who is “coming back,” (Greek: *erchomai*, meaning “to come”) not just the one who “will exist in the future.”

The seven-fold, or perfect, Spirit of God is as much a source of Grace and Peace as is the Father and the Son. The exact nature of the Spirit isn’t argued in Revelation, only that the Seven Spirits of God are before His throne. Revelation’s symbolic use of the number seven should cause us to hesitate before assuming there are literally 7 Spirits of God. It is perhaps noteworthy that the Spirits are mentioned before Christ.

The gifts are also from Jesus who died and rose again. These references place the courtyard ministry of the Jesus-as-priest in the past for John. Jesus has already died as the sacrificed lamb, and risen again as the waters of the laver fittingly represent—the cleansing of water like baptism and rising to newness of life.

Vss. 7-8

The cloud allusion recalls Jesus’ words in Matthew 24 and his ascension in Acts 1. The return of Christ is a theme that bookends Revelation, found in ch. 1 and 22 along with a reminder in ch. 16. Here, a special resurrection may be alluded to, those putting Christ to death now rising to see Him taking his place as King of Kings and Lord of Lords

Why do you suppose all the nations of the earth would mourn when Christ returns?

Closing Comments

The book begins like a letter, but moves quickly into the visionary experience common to the Old Testament prophets, and even more in harmony with Daniel’s intense visionary experience (like Jewish apocalyptic material).

Opening Question

Have you ever had a dream that was so meaningful to you that you wrote it down and shared it with others later?

Introduction

We're told throughout the New Testament that the Spirit of God works in the Body of Christ—the Church—and that Christ loves His church and leads it. Revelation 1:9–3:21 shows just how intimately Jesus is involved in keeping the light of the church burning in the world as a witness for Him, for that is what the imagery of the Lampstands seeks to show us.

The Text:

Revelation 1:10

The commentary affirms Saturday as the “Lord’s day” John was referring to. Without question, Jesus is the “Lord of the Sabbath.” The book of Revelation’s overarching theme from the Old Testament prophets, however, suggests that John’s visionary experience is a fulfillment of or climax to the “Day of the Lord,” the prophetic time of judgement, vindication, and redemption for God’s people and destruction of their enemies. (see Isaiah 13:6-9, Ezekiel 30:3, Joel 1-3, Amos 5:18-20, Obadiah 1:15, Zephaniah 1:2-18, and Malachi 4:5 for specific use of the term)

In what ways does Revelation parallel the specific prophecies of the Day of the Lord given in the passages above?

Revelation 1:11

Revelation was originally sent to seven literal congregations in once-thriving cities of Asia minor, with specific instructions and information about their spiritual condition, appropriate for their 1st century context. Christ’s command to John here is to write “what you see” (visions), but as we’ll see later, he records what he hears (auditions), as well as some of his own actions.

If Revelation was originally written to literal congregations, to what degree would their first-century understanding of Revelation be an aid in interpreting the book? How might it be a hindrance?

Revelation 1:12-18

The risen Christ is characterized several ways in these verses, some from Daniel 7, and each is repeated in one of the seven churches. This suggests that certain aspects of character or figure are more important to those churches and their specific situation. The lesson well points out that Christ is able to meet each church where it is. Jesus is also sufficient for each church.

One important result of this application of the character of Christ to individual congregations is that we also today find aspects of God or His son that mean more to us, or make more sense than others. At various times, God may present himself to me more like a loving or

disciplining father; at others, as a comforting friend; at other times He's a teacher or guide, or even as a judge.

Of the various pictures of Jesus in ch. 1, is there one that means more to you than the others?

The clothing imagery of the "one like a son of man" is that of a daily-ministering priest, wearing a robe with a golden sash, probably a blue robe symbolizing the law of God (rather than white like as we typically picture, probably), and the candlesticks among which he walks is the first "introductory sanctuary vision" before a series of *seven*, in this case the seven churches. Christ is doing the work of a priest walking among candlesticks making sure the light of the church continues to burn. The daily work of the priest was to trim the wicks (like John's pruning analogy from John 15), fill the lamps with oil (perhaps the Holy Spirit; see the 10 virgins in Matthew 25), and keep the sanctuary lighted.

This passage also reveals the close tie between heaven and earth; as Jesus walks among candlesticks in the heavenly Sanctuary (on the "south" side, not coincidentally), He is also on earth walking among the candlestick-churches who are now to be the "light of the world." (Matt 5:14)

If keeping the church's testimony lit and burning in the world is the work of Christ, what is my role in cooperating with his priestly ministry?

Closing Comments

The introductory vision of Christ sets the stage for the rest of the book. Images of Christ here will appear later in Revelation. Chapter 1 concludes in vs. 19 with John again being commanded to write what he has seen (the vision of Christ), the things that are (the messages to the churches), and the events that happen after the churches are reprovved and encouraged. What a prophetic adventure it will be for both John and us!

Opening Question

Is parental discipline a positive or a negative experience?

Introduction

The fact that the seven churches are written to congregations in significant cities of Asia Minor shows that their presence and witness there was important to Christ. But the messages to the seven churches show a significant amount of literary importance, as well. They also reveal the general trend of Christianity throughout time via sequential epochs or movements.

All seven churches follow a similar pattern:

1. Statement: "To the angel of the church in [the city of] _____, write"
2. Picture of Christ from chapter 1
3. Confirmation that Christ knows their deeds
4. A Statement of what he has against them (except the 2nd and 6th churches)
5. Encouragement and/or a call to repentance and increased faithfulness
6. Promise(s) to the one who overcomes
7. Statement: "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches"

In general, the churches are ordered according to their faithfulness with Ephesus being most solid and Laodicea in the worst condition. At the same time, Jesus offers an increasing number of promises to each church as their spiritual condition declines, much like a parent might offer increased incentive to a wayward or delinquent child, in hopes of their reform. The only exception to this increasing number of promises is the church in the most dire need of reform: Laodicea, the final church. But their promise is the most significant—to sit on the Throne with Him as He overcame—as all other promises come in its wake.

The Text:

Revelation 2:1–3:22

There isn't space or time to examine every church in detail in this study guide, but a few notes on each church must suffice.

1. *2:1-7*: Ephesus (modern archaeological site *Ephesus*) – Overall, a good church, faithful and have tested false apostles. But they've lost their initial passion and love (either for Christ or each other, perhaps both). The solution for them is not to change their emotions, but their actions. Agape love isn't about feelings, but kindness and loving treatment of others, especially enemies. It's noteworthy that a failure to repent means their lampstand is removed, and implied is that God may have another to put in its place, reminiscent of Jesus' parable about the vineyard in Matthew 21:33-44.

2. *2:8-11*: Smyrna (modern *Izmir*) – Like Philadelphia, this church has nothing for which they must repent, but their future will be filled with difficulty and they must be prepared to remain faithful. Their time of tribulation is to be short—prophetically only 10 day!—but this doesn't

make it less trying. They receive a crown of life, and are hurt by the second death if they overcome.

3. 2:12-17: Pergamum (modern *Bergama*) – This congregation has a “Balaam” in their midst, who, after attempting to curse Israel for Balaak the Moabite (see Numbers 22–24) seems to have led them into idolatry and sexual immorality. These sins may be literal for Pergamum, but Revelation later applies both of these symbolically to worship of the beast and man-made systems or beliefs, and to illicit relationships between state powers and religious organization. The Nicolaitans comes from two Greek words: nikao=to overcome/conquer, and laos=people. Thus the Nicolaitans held a belief that overcame the people; more about them scholars do not know with any surety. Their promise is a new name, a white stone (possibly related to acquittal in a court setting), and some of the hidden manna, reminiscent of that which was “hidden” in the Ark of the Covenant.

4. 2:18-29: Thyatira (modern *Akhisar*) – If Pergamum allowed Balaam, Thyatira is worse, as they are a divided church. They are on the right track mostly, but they are tolerating Jezebel, a symbol of the Sidonian princess-wife of Ahab who led the entire northern 10 tribes into worship of Baal, God of storm, and whose worship included sexual immorality and sacrificial rituals. Was there a specific woman, or is it symbolic for this congregation of a larger movement? It’s difficult to know. But the parallel in the broader history of the church appears to be the rise of the beasts in ch. 13 and Babylon the great in ch. 17 whose actions are the same—false worship and immorality. This church is the longest message by far. But God is patient with both the church and “Jezebel.” Four promises to overcomers in Thyatira!

5. 3:1-6: Sardis (modern city Sart, and archaeological site *Sardis*) – This church is alive in reputation only. While a good reputation is better than gold (see Prov. 22:1), it must be based on reality. And the reality is Sardis is dead. The advice for those who are spiritually dead is to remember the message already given, and to do what they know is right. The warning of Christ’s coming as a thief reminds of Matthew 24, and Jesus’ warning that nobody knows the day or the hour of His return. This church that learns to confess Christ anew will find that Jesus confesses their name to the Father and the Angels.

6. 3:7-13: Philadelphia (modern city *Alaşehir*) – This church is presented an open door by the one who has power over opening and shutting. The only negative part of this congregation is their relative powerlessness; but opportunity is given to them to burn brightly for Christ. An indication in this church of a time of testing to come on the “whole world” suggests the messages to the churches have meaning beyond the 1st Century alone. This church escapes the time of testing, but how do they escape it? The text doesn’t say. Once again, the urgency of Christ’s coming is given, now closer than ever.

7. 3:14-22: Laodicea (modern archaeological site *Laodicea* near Hierapolis) –

Situated near the city of Hierapolis, the cities are fed by hot springs whose water would be transported via pipes to the masses, where the water arrived tepid, and often bad-tasting. The Laodicean congregation believes they have everything they could want, but lack what they need most: an accurate perception of themselves, and their naked condition. Without the truth about themselves, they are helpless to get the aid they really need. But Christ has now fulfilled His promise of coming (see Sardis and Philadelphia), and does so intimately inviting to a covenant

meal together. This message reminds us that Christ doesn't force a response from His church; He invites and woos and pleads. The action belongs to us.

How do you view Christ's discipline of the church? Is it encouraging to you, or does Christ's knowledge and intimate connection with the church feel intrusive? (Compare also Hebrews 12:1-12)

Closing Comments

The final promise of the series given Laodicea (3:21), to sit on Christ's throne as He overcame and sat with His father on His throne, is a transition to chapters 4–5 where we see Christ overcome and join His Father on the throne. The promise is fulfilled to the saints in chapter 20 during the millennium.

Opening Question

What is an ideal worship service in your mind?

Introduction

The Throne Room scene in Rev. 4–5 forms the introductory sanctuary vision for the seven seals in 6:1–8:1. If Christ was in the candlesticks of the heavenly sanctuary in ch. 1 before the seven churches, and later see him at the altar of incense in chapter 8 just before the seven trumpets are blown, scholars like C. Mervyn Maxwell and others have suggested the throne here be seen as a parallel to the “table of showbread,” that is, the “throne of Grace” mentioned in Hebrews 4:15-16. This throne is where Christ gives bread to those in time of need, just as King David was fed with bread from this this same table in his great time of need. Christ is the bread that came down from heaven, the true bread, and thus it is fitting that His ascension to the throne because of His sacrifice fits Him for this role as His saints go through difficulty as they are sealed by God. Also of note, God’s throne was on the “sides of the north,” (Isa. 14:13) the same compass-point as the table in the sanctuary.

The Text:

Revelation 4:1-11

Four living creatures and 24 elders worship *One* seated on the throne. Although not named, the One is praised for His creation and sustaining everything that exists. This chapter is one of unbridled praise through the chants and repetition of these beings who recall God’s mighty acts in the past. They also announce the three-fold holiness—the separateness, uniqueness, or specialness—of the One.

Identities of the 24 elders is much speculated. They wear “stephanos” crowns, that is, crowns of victory (as opposed to diadems, the crowns of royalty) suggesting they have been redeemed from earth along with white robes, which in Revelation suggest garments to those overcoming sin by the blood of Christ. Other scholars believe them to be representatives of unfallen worlds.

The 4 living creatures represent the highest orders of earthly beings: the king of beasts, the lion; the king of the air, the eagle; the king of domestic animals, the ox; and humans, who have responsibility and dominion over all.

This chapter is clear that only one being sits on the throne. At the end of ch. 5, there will be two.

The One seated on the throne is constantly worshipped for His creation. How does this idea of creation of the world fit into modern scientific theories of earth’s origins? Why might such a picture of God be needed today? What does this view of God as creator do for us personally?

Revelation 5:1–14

A scroll in the hand of the One seated on the throne is in center frame. A scroll sealed with seven seals is most likely a covenant or will or testament. John's emotional reaction to it being sealed up shows how significantly it relates to the prophet himself. The fact that the only being worthy of opening it has overcome through death solidifies the case that this is a will, showing who will overcome, that is, who is sealed with God's name.

Christ is here pictured as a conquering lion, reminding Jewish readers of the Lion from Jacob's prophetic blessing of Judah in Genesis 49:9-10. However, rather than overcoming through violence and teeth/claws, the lion is sacrificed like a lamb. What John hears—the lion—and what John sees—the lamb—are two complementary aspects of Christ's nature. The overcoming King of Judah does so through His own death. This makes him worthy to take the throne with His Father.

Praise now echoes in a new song because of Jesus' worthiness to open the scrolls; He has bought mankind with His precious and infinitely valuable blood, people from everywhere and of every kind. Verse 12 has a seven-fold song of praise to Christ. The song culminates with every created thing giving glory to both the one on the throne and the lamb together. Both are worthy of honor and human worship.

Which image of Jesus is more meaningful to you—the lion or the lamb?

What kind of events must happen for every creature, even sinful ones, to give glory to Jesus Christ?

Closing Comments

God is worshipped for creation, and the lamb is worshipped for his redemption of humanity. These twin characteristics are also represented in the 4th commandments found in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Exodus 20:8-11 asks Israel to remember the Sabbath because of creation; Deuteronomy 5:12-15 enjoins the Sabbath on Israel because they were slaves and God brought them out. In Revelation, these twin aspects identify the God who alone is worthy of worship; no counterfeit can claim the ability to create the material world and all life from nothing, and no so-called God has ever given his own life to save His beloved creation.

Opening Question

What is the most difficult situation you've gone through in your life?

Introduction

As the Lamb breaks the seals of the scroll in heaven, events correspond that appear to affect people on earth. The first four are tied to one another through the horsemen imagery; the fifth and sixth trumpets prepare the way for an interlude in chapter 7 that reveals the 144,000 sealed saints of God. The seals conclude in 8:1.

Horsemen are also found in Zechariah's prophecy (1:7-11) who patrol the earth. These horses here, however, do not find the earth a peaceful place, but instead bring conflict, famine, and death.

The Text:

Revelation 6:1-8

1. The first seal breaks and a rider on a white horse overcomes. The word for overcoming here is the same as that used for the Lamb in ch 5, and the congregations in chs. 2-3 who are asked to overcome. The white horse further suggests the purity of the experience, and the bow suggests a back-line role in battle, rather than a front-line position. Ellen White in *Acts of the Apostles* foretells that the first disciples "would go forth conquering and to conquer." (A.A. p. 23). This suggests that the white horse represents the experience of the early church and its conquests against the kingdom of Satan. But the church is still a *militant* organization against Satan's kingdom, and the rider still goes out. Perhaps it describes your individual experience, too.

2. The second seal reveals a fiery horse, and a rider with a sword who takes peace from the earth. Jesus' words in Matthew 10:32-39 come to mind here: "I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword." In response to the conquering of the early church, the fires of persecution began to burn. James the brother of John was "put to death by the sword," and Stephen was stoned. Though armed with internal peace from Christ, externally, the church faced persecution. This experience has continued throughout time, and continues in many places in the world today. When individuals make a choice for Christ, the result is often familial division, and ostracizing from friends. Thus this describes a first-century event, a historical experience, and a personal one.

3. The third horse—a black one—carries a rider who bears a scale. The color black is ominous, the color of darkness and night. The scales apparently measure barley and wheat, which sell for astronomically high prices: a day's wages (a denarius) for enough seed to make one loaf of bread. The scales and measurement recall Jesus' words in Matthew 7:2: you will be measured by your standard of measure, and judged by your standard of judgment. Wheat and barley, the main source of food for Israelites, becomes scarce, perhaps a parallel to the Word of God becoming rare, either literally or lived out. Historically, when the fires of persecution failed to quell the growing ranks of the conquering church, the Word of God was taken from people. The Great

Controversy has an entire chapter called “an era of spiritual darkness” that describes the results of taking scripture from people during the dark ages.

4. The fourth horse is commonly called “pale,” but the Greek is “chloros,” or “green.” Its rider is named death, suggesting the greenish-color is the color of a Jewish or Roman dead body. As grotesque as the imagery is, it gets worse. One fourth of the earth dies by four means, which just happen to be the covenant curses from God for Israel’s disobedience. The result of removing God’s word brings spiritual death. Thus God’s people die by persecution and the rest die spiritually.

To what degree do the seals parallel your own personal Christian experience? Have you noticed that when you experience victories in Christ that life around you can get harder rather than better?

Revelation 6:9-17

5. The fifth seal recalls the story of the death of Abel. As his blood cried out from the ground because of an unjust death at the hands of his brother, so these “souls under the altar” are pictured as sacrificed and their blood poured out at the base of the altar (Deut. 12:27). Since the life is in the blood, the symbolic life is demanding the covenant-keeping God to keep His promise take care of them. They ask Him how long before He acts, before He judges their murderers and avenges their wrongful deaths. A similar question is asked about God today: if God is good and loving, and all-powerful, why doesn’t He end suffering of the innocent? The answer isn’t a great one—“here’s a white robe, and you must wait a while.” The good news is that there is a final number past which God will not allow things to proceed.

6. The sixth seal brings heavenly events that recall the Old Testament Day of the Lord and signs given by Jesus that would precede his coming. These were fulfilled in a partial way at the death of Jesus with darkness and an earthquake, followed by the pouring out of God’s Spirit as Peter notes in his sermon in Acts 2 (quoting Joel’s prophecy). But the language here goes beyond that of the crucifixion. The stars fall, the sky recedes, and the earth is altered. Many scholars note the language parallels immediate signs of the judgment and/or second coming. The focus here is on the wicked, rather than the righteous under the 5th seal. Their fear of the God they have wronged is clear, and they conclude with a question: who can stand in the presence of an angry God and an angry lamb (a humorous picture if taken literally)? Chapter seven will answer their question as it shows people “standing” in the presence of the lamb.

Why is it so hard to wait for God to bring justice? What is it about suffering that we seem unable to bear up against? How can God make amends for the suffering of innocent people?

Closing Comments

As Christ breaks the seals on the scroll, the people of God go through a spiritual experience that, though it may end in their physical deaths, leads to their own personal sealing experience. Chapter 7 will give us a glimpse of this sealed multitude.

Opening Question

Does God have a specific number of people He wants to save?

Introduction

Chapter 6 concluded with a question: The day of God’s wrath has come and who is able to stand? Chapter 7 answers this question with a special group, featured several times in the book, who follow the lamb wherever He goes.

This chapter functions as a literary interlude between the 6th and 7th seals. A similar structure will be seen in the trumpets where an interlude falls between the 6th and 7th trumpets and shows God’s two witnesses.

The Text:

Revelation 7:1-8

The winds of strife do not blow on the earth until the saints of God are sealed. The timing of the “winds” may parallel the bowl plagues of ch. 16. God’s people have been marked as His own before the fall of Babylon and Christ’s return.

A typical question is whether the 144,000 is a literal, limited group or symbolic of a larger collection of souls. The latter seems to be the case for a number of reasons. First, why take this number literally in a book filled with symbols? Second, John doesn’t “see” the 144,000, he only hears the number according to vs. 4. Third, the precision of the numbers from each tribe are too exact to fit a literal group. Fourth, if the number is literal, then the race—Jewish—should also be taken literally, as should their tribal association. Fifth, they should also be literal virgins, since later in the book we read that they have not “defiled themselves with women.” Sixth, the 10 northern tribes of Israel no longer even exist today, thus these tribal distinctions have lost their meaning.

Two original tribes are missing from this list: Ephraim and Dan. Both became centers of idolatry and brought the judgements of God on themselves in the form of invading nations around them. Added back in is Joseph and His Manasseh.

Revelation 7:9-17

If John only “hears” the number sealed, he’s in for a surprise when he turns around. There before him is a great multitude that cannot be counted, and they’re not just Jews, either! God’s sealed saints are people made up of every nationality, language-group and geographic location on earth. Like the souls under the 5th seal, these are clothed in white. If they are the same group, the picture is a beautiful one: they are literally resting in their graves, but figuratively, they are already pictured as present with Christ because of their faithfulness. If it includes more than just the souls under the altar, then it means that those who are sealed by God follow the lamb by faith and are accounted as citizens of Heaven even now.

The metaphor of Jesus as good shepherd with people as His sheep is here reversed: human people follow the Lamb wherever He goes now. His victory and Salvation for them is the theme of their praise.

John cannot answer the angel's question as to their identity, so the angel explains: these have come through the great tribulation. It is this phrase that often gives the 144,000 an end-time identity. Jesus' mention of an unmatched time of trouble in Matthew 24 appears to be a reference to tribulation that occurs after the fall of Jerusalem, but does it extend to the dark ages? To a final tribulation? Both? This tribulation is definite: "the" great tribulation. Either way, God's people survive an experience that parallel's that of Jesus Christ. They have trusted the lamb perfectly and have white robes because of His shed blood for them. Now, they reap the blessings of communion with God in language that foreshadows chapters 21-22 and the earth made new.

Does it make a significant difference if this group is literal or figurative? Have you ever hoped you could be part of this group?

Revelation 8:1

7. Chapter 8 begins with the 7th seal, but in reality it would have been better to place the 7th seal in chapter 7. This seal is short: there silence in heaven for ½ hour. What does this signify? Is the time literal, or symbolic for prophetic time or for just a short while? It must be remembered that with the opening of the 7th seal, the book can now be opened. If it contains the scroll of who will inherit life or a picture of God's plan of salvation, then the silence is perhaps in anticipation of its contents and the reading of those who will reign with Christ.

Closing Comments

God's sealed saints have the sign of God in their foreheads. This placement suggests the mental assent to God's plan for them, and is congruent with the new covenant promise that God would write His law on their hearts and minds. These people belong to God and are associated with Him.

The sealing process likely requires tribulation in order to develop this kind of Christ-centered character, as Hebrews 5:8 says that even Jesus learned obedience through His suffering. We may not treasure trouble, but we can thank God for it as Paul says in Romans 5:3-5: "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Opening Question

How do people respond to a God who is pictured as a judge of evil?

Introduction

If the seven seals show the sealing process of God’s people, the language of the trumpets appears to be that of judgment. How God responds to evil in the world places God’s actions in direct examination of both humans and beings from unfallen worlds. The Great Controversy in some ways hinges on this issue. Is God just and righteous when He deals with sin in His way that is both ultimately loving and ultimately authoritative and final?

The trumpets are structured like the seals: the first four are related through fractionally-numbered destruction and short length while the last three are considered “woes.” Just as there was an interlude between the 6th and 7th seals, there is an interlude between the 6th and 7th trumpets. **Warning:** the trumpets are perhaps the most difficult passages in Revelation to interpret historically, especially the 5th and 6th, and there is much disagreement even among faithful Adventists over their meaning. It is vital that we catch the big picture here, and allow room for disagreement on the details.

The Text:

Revelation 8:2-6

The introductory sanctuary scene here is the altar of incense. Its proximity to the Ark of the Covenant already suggests judgment, and the prayers of the saints mixed with the incense call a response from God that appears to be just that—judgements on the earth. These limited trumpet “plagues” have parallels in the world-wide final plagues in chapter 16. Likely these trumpet judgments come in response to the souls under the altar asking how long before God judges and avenges their blood. The answer is that God has been providing periods of judgement throughout Salvation History, decisive moments in history that have called for decision.

Trumpets are given to the angels. This recalls the feast of trumpets that preceded the Day of Atonement, giving Israel 10 days to prepare themselves for Israel’s most solemn festival, one in which personal introspection and self-denial led to repentance and trusting the blood of the lamb and the work of the priest on their behalf.

Another important event where trumpets were blown was at the fall of Jericho. Trumpets blown announced the fall of the city, and the redemption of Rahab and her family within.

What other events can you recall in scripture where trumpets are blown and what is the significance of those events?

Revelation 8:7-9:21

While Stefanovic in the Sabbath School lesson does an admirable job explaining the big picture of the trumpets with the space allowed, the real challenge is in showing the many allusions in the trumpet-texts and how they inform Revelation. Jon Paulien’s doctoral dissertation entitled “Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets” is 500 pages of explanation of how these

allusions function. Stefanovic lists some of the verses, but very little explanation on how these verses contribute to Revelation. I would recommend each trumpet be studied with the Old Testament firmly in mind.

Here are a few of points to remember when interpreting the trumpets:

1. The end of the sixth trumpet may indicate a time when all decisions have been made for God, but no indication is given before this that these plagues are to be seen as final events. They should be understood as occurring throughout history starting with John's time.
2. And yet, the trumpets mirror the plagues in ch. 16 to a degree; the plagues are a final judgment of God based on what He's done in the past.
3. We should consider that these plagues come because of the cries of the saints under the 5th seal. They are covenant responses by God to His hurting people, not arbitrary angry outbursts.
4. The fractional numbers throughout the first four seals suggest localized events, not worldwide. These are limited in range, scope, and duration.
5. The destruction isn't literal. God loves His creation, of course, but the trees and grass and rivers aren't the focus; Revelation isn't an ecological treatise. Rather these are symbols for people, systems, and philosophies.

Why does God use such destructive language to describe these events? Does fear play a role in our response to God? Shouldn't a God of love approach His erring people with an attitude of generosity and kindness?

Revelation 10:1-11:14

This section is the interlude following the 6th trumpet—"woe". The angel of ch. 10 parallels an angel in Revelation 12 with similar wording. John is commissioned to eat a little scroll that was sealed, but is now opened, reminding readers also of Ezekiel's commission to prophesy to stubborn Israel (Eze 2-3). Early Adventists saw their own experience in John's commissioning where the little book was Daniel—the message of Christ's return was sweet to the Millerites, but the disappointment when He didn't come was bitter. But as John was commissioned to preach again, so Adventists went back to Daniel and realized there was more to do.

The two witnesses in ch. 11 are God's final testimony to the world before the 7th trumpet blows. Ellen White's commentary on this passage in *The Great Controversy* suggests the two witnesses are the Old and New Testaments during the time of the French Revolution. Others have suggested that the Olive Tree/Lambstand language (alluding to Zechariah) should also include the Holy Spirit as one of the witnesses to God. Either way, what happened during the French Revolution and its attitude toward Scripture is becoming a world-wide apathy toward spiritual things in these last days before Christ sets up His Kingdom.

God will not leave the world without a witness to His character and love. What is your role in His last-day witness to the world? How do you share His transforming grace and resurrection power to others?

Revelation 11:15-18

The 7th trumpet—the final woe!—is the establishing of God’s kingdom. God’s Kingdom is wonderful news to His people, but horrible news to His enemies. The reign of God and His Messiah appears to parallel the conclusion to Revelation.

Verse 18 is the hinge-verse to the entire book of Revelation. It concludes the 7 trumpets series and introduces the 2nd half of the book with a summary of its content.

What will God’s kingdom look like in reality? Can you imagine what God will be like as our King and the entire Kingdom made of faithful citizen-subjects?

Closing Comments

The seven trumpets are God’s response to the prayers of His covenant people. He hasn’t forgotten them even in their distress. He is also not abandoning his enemies, but is seeking to get their attention. He’s tried using kindness and graciousness, but they haven’t responded to that method. The trumpets seem extreme, and maybe they are; God will go to any lengths within his righteous character to bring people to Him, or at least guide them to make a decision for or against His Kingdom.

Opening Question

Is there ever a “good war”?

Introduction

Adventists have spent more time on Revelation 12-14 than most Christian faiths. These passages are familiar in many of the details, but the big picture is sometimes lost sight of. Here is a great war between Satan, pictured as a dragon, and the people of God. In this war, Satan gets two allies forming a false trinity with him. They seek the worship and status that belong to God alone. Adventists have been correct in pointing out how Satan will impersonate God and His Son; chapters 12-13 reveal him doing exactly that!

Fortunately, God also has his three-fold messengers who set the record straight about God. The deception need not catch people unaware, nor leave people ignorant of the truth.

The Text:

Revelation 11:19

As we’ve followed the high-priest by faith through the sanctuary, we come now to the Ark of the Covenant. This was only seen on the Day of Atonement, the great day of Israel’s judgment and the cleansing of the camp from sin in the temple. The good news of this event is that it parallels the Judgement scene in Daniel 7:9-14, 22-27. The judgment is good news because it decides who deserves to reign, removes the beast’s power, and establishes God’s people as co-rulers with Christ!

How does Leviticus 16 describe Israel’s judgement experience on “Yom Kippur”?

Revelation 12:1-9

The imagery here and the “signs” or symbols introduce the dragon and a woman and a male child. We should have Genesis 3:15 firmly in mind where these three occur first in Scripture. The fulfillment of a coming deliverer and the dragon’s enmity against God’s people is the centerpoint of this passage.

After the male child escapes the dragon’s grasp and the woman runs, there is war in heaven. Many Adventists have believed this to be a pre-creation war in heaven. But the context suggests this is another phase of God’s struggle with Satan. Jesus Christ casts Satan from his place as “prince of this world,” fulfilling John 12:31. Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection won Him a victory that restores to Him Adam’s lost place as having dominion over earth. Christ is the victor over Satan, and now the war extends to heaven. Michael is most likely another title for Christ as “arch-angel,” or ruler over the angelic hosts, and he displaces Satan (see Satan at the council of God in Job 1).

How central is the gospel and the cross to your Christian experience? How many different ways can you think of that Christ’s death on the cross addresses the sin problem, and reveals the character of God?

Revelation 12:9-17

Satan is called “the accuser.” The act of accusing others begins with Satan and those who continue to do so are His followers. He has been exiled to earth for his last hurrah.

The saints of God aren’t powerless against Him, but it isn’t by their own efforts that they overcome or conquer. They are given two weapons: the blood of the lamb, that is, faith in Christ’s completed sacrifice for them and victory over Satan, and their own testimony about what God is doing in them through His transforming grace. Here is seen the power of justification by faith, and sanctification by faith. Salvation is God’s work through and through, and though we’re a part of it, the power will always be of God and His Spirit in us. But let it sink in: there is victory for the people of God because of Christ! They’ve come to love Christ more than their own lives; this is the character of God’s remnant people.

The dragon’s anger leads him against the woman, God’s church. She hides in the wilderness, which we’ll see again later. When the dragon can’t hurt her, he goes after her offspring (we’ll see offspring of a woman in ch. 17 later). They are defined by “keeping” to God’s commandments and “having” the testimony of Jesus. The new covenant relationship is once again in view where God writes His law in their minds and hearts so they keep it naturally. The “testimony of Jesus” in Revelation is also the “spirit of prophecy” and “all that John saw” in his visionary experience (1:3). The gift of prophecy which both John and the Angel possess is a mark of God’s last-day people where God pours out His spirit on all people. Should expect more than just one person to have this gift? Joel 2 suggest so. . .

Do you ever suffer with feelings of inadequacy because of Satan’s accusations? How does Christ’s victory over Satan alleviate those feelings? What evidence have you seen of His resurrection power working in you that you might share with someone else as a testimony to His love and grace?

Closing Comments

We are entering on the final phase of the great controversy. Chapter 12 goes back to the birth of Christ and shows in war-language the struggle people have with Satan. The good news is Christ’s victory!

Opening Question

Have you ever fallen for a scam?

Introduction

Chapter 13 is a favorite of Adventist evangelists because of its power to convince people of the historical accuracy of prophecy and the abhorrent record of the church-state power of Rome. But there is much more to this chapter, especially in regards to the impersonation of Christ in the last days and the efficacy of Satan’s counterfeit in the war for peoples’ allegiance.

The Text:

Revelation 13:1-10

The beast out of the sea is the first of the Dragon’s two allies. This beast looks just like the dragon, suggesting it’s a close relative. Because of the beast’s makeup of animals from Daniel 7, and similar characteristics to the little horn, it’s natural to suggest this beast is the church-state power of Rome during the dark ages. However, it has a last-day revival, and will give its power to another who carries out the final steps of this war.

There are many parallels between this beast and Jesus Christ, but in a way that shows the beast is a parody or impersonation of Christ.

- Both have 3.5 year “ministry”
- Both receive a fatal wound (death)
- Both have that wound healed (resurrection)
- Both are called “blasphemers”
- Both receive a throne from their “father”
- Both point back to the one who sent them

This beast is an attempt to replicate Christ on earth. And while many Adventists focus on the Vatican and Rome because of this Beast, perhaps it would behoove the church to keep reading in Revelation and be more concerned with the beast out of the earth, the one who actually makes life difficult at the end.

Why does Satan think his impersonation of Christ might actually work? What opens people up to being deceived, and how might God’s people prevent the “accuser” from winning our allegiance?

Revelation 13:11-18

The Dragon’s second ally comes out of the earth, is lamb-like but inherently dragonish. If the beast out of the sea was an impersonation of Christ, this beast is false Holy Spirit. It does signs and miracles, and even calls fire down from heaven (recalling Acts and Pentecost), points people back to the first beast (as the Spirit teaches about Christ and His words), and gives “breath” to the image of the beast, the same word for “Spirit”. This beast gives a mark just like the Holy Spirit seals God’s people (see 2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13, 4:30). Thus we see a false trinity

arrayed against God's people, attempting to deceive those who dwell on the earth, and to gain the homage and worship that are due to God alone.

While calling fire down from heaven has been God's specialty in the past (see Mount Carmel and Elijah against the prophets of Baal, and the Pentecost experience), this time, God's allies are able to pull off the miraculous signs and wonders. Here is a significant warning to God's people: you cannot trust your senses! What you see, taste, hear, feel and touch can be manipulated; your senses aren't trustworthy guides of the power behind the sign. John and Paul exhort us to "test the Spirits to see if they are of God." (1 Joh. 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:19-22)

Historicist scholars have suggested, agreeing with Ellen White's interpretation, that this beast will find fulfillment in the United States when it sets up an image to the sea-beast, and require homage through a false sign of allegiance related to God's law (usually considered a false day-of-rest). To this point, the U.S. has not done this. However, with the eroding of constitutionally-recognized individual rights (in favor of societal safety/political conformity), more centralized governmental power over the last several decades (especially since 9-11), and an increase in political polarizing and in-fighting, such a fulfillment isn't near as unlikely as it might have seemed even 30 years ago.

What are the differences between this beast's character and that of the Divine Trinity? How does this beast act in ways that are not at all like the God of heaven?

How can people know the difference between the counterfeit and the true?

Closing Comments

The Image of the beast recalls Daniel 3 and the image there that was 66 cubits wide and 6 cubits high. There was a death decree for failure to comply, and the three Hebrew servants of God were marked by their refusal to bow. It was clear who were God's and who were not. The "mark of the beast" clearly is related to man, since the 6th day is the day of humans' creation. Worshipping that which is man-made, as Daniel 3 reiterates over and over (the image that Nebuchadnezzar "set up"), is always a false substitute for worshipping the Creator and Redeemer, especially when enforced by a death decree!

Opening Question

Question

Introduction

If this section was introduced with a sanctuary vision (11:19), then we expect a series-of-seven to follow, as has been the pattern throughout the book. Some point to the seven plagues of ch. 16, but there is an intervening sanctuary vision in ch. 15, and a series-of-seven in ch. 14 that some people miss: seven angels! Adventists often focus on the “three angels’ messages”, and well we should, but we often fail to see the others that follow. The seven angels are bracketed on both sides by scenes of God’s sealed saints (14:1-5 and 15:1-4). The heart of Revelation is all about God’s call to His people to come out of Babylon and to be part of His wheat crop, ripened by the sun, ready for harvest.

The Text:

Revelation 14:1-5

As in ch. 7, the 144,000 are now pictured. Their placement here, following the mark of the beast and those who follow him, is a counterpoint to the dragon’s war and the masses of earth who fall for his deceptions. God has a faithful remnant who won’t buy in to the beast’s kingdom, though it costs them their lives.

In what way is this group similar to the great multitude/144,000 in ch. 7? In what new ways is it described, and how do these pictures reveal it’s “experience” with the beast, and the threats associated with not receiving the mark/worshipping the image?

Revelation 14:6-13

The three angels’ messages could easily take an entire quarter of study on their own. Here, we can look at the fundamental issues the raise, and how we can best hear and internalize the messages.

1. The first angel’s message (14:6-7) – This angel carries the everlasting good news. The word “gospel” (Greek: *euangellion*, “a good report”) was used for the birth of a king or emperor, someone to carry on the kingly line. Thus the birth of Jesus is called in Mark’s narrative, “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God.” The everlasting Good News, then, is that God’s son will reign forever. This is wonderful because with the announcement of the fall of Babylon, there will never be another affront to Christ’s rule.

God deserves glory because the “hour of His judgment” has come. The Greek text allows God to be both the “one judging” and the “one who is judged.” Both fit here, and most likely, both happen at the same time As God judges between those who are part of His Kingdom and the kingdom of the beast, His approach is going to be questioned. Is He a just judge? Is He fair? Righteous? Consistent? Law-abiding? These are all the questions that Satan raised against Him,

and which the book of Revelation takes great pains to answer. In the final chapters, God's character will be vindicated through His just approach to judgment.

The command to "worship Him who made" is as close to a quote from the Old Testament as we'll see in Revelation, and it recalls the 4th commandment. Surely the concept of "resting on the 7th day" as a sign of allegiance and an act of worship to the creator is still important to God's people. In many places we've replaced the command to "rest" with the idea of "go to church." While corporate worship was a tradition of both Paul and Jesus, let us remember that the command is to "rest from our labor." Sometimes our weekly worship services are more work than they are rest, and we justify it by saying the priests in the temple are exempt. Once again, Jesus is the model here. He did good on the Sabbath day, spent time with His disciples out in the wheatfields, healed, taught, and called the Sabbath a delight, not just for Himself, but for others, too. Finally, the mention of "streams of water" recalls the flood, where God re-created the earth.

Why would God chose something like the Sabbath as a sign of His relationship with His people? What is so unique about this command that it can reveal God's sovereignty and set God's people apart from those who are not?

2. The second angel's message (14:8) – Though we haven't even been introduced to Babylon the great yet in Revelation's narrative, this angel announces its fall. How appropriate that the kingdom of Satan and his city—a counterfeit of God's holy city—is so insignificant to God that it is fallen before it ever even arises.

3. The third angel's message (14:9-13) – Mostly a warning, the third angel pleads with earth's inhabitants not to worship the beast or receive his image. The first and third messages show that worship is a central feature of Revelation's righteous and wicked; both worship, but only one side is worthy of homage, praise, and loyalty.

Worshipping the beast brings negative consequences. The "tormented forever" language here is unmistakable, but it helps to remember that Revelation is symbolic. Also, New Testament language about how to treat one's enemies helps make sense of this language. In Romans 12:18-21, Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21-22 for the ideal on how to treat one's enemies. The principle is graciousness and kindness, and by so doing, it heaps burning coals on their heads. The kindness of an enemy is torment, and God's eternal graciousness in giving what his opponents want most is tortuous. The smoke of their torment also parallels in a negative way the incense prayers of the saints that rises to God. But with the wicked, the smoke rises forever because they aren't offering prayers in humility.

The third angel's message is the final warning to a perishing world, the last pleading of God to accept His mercy and love. Once again, the righteous are shown faithful keeping God's commandments and possessing the faith of Jesus ("in Jesus" and "like Jesus had" are both possible here).

Why do you suppose Revelation uses such harsh language in its warnings? What do the images of torment and suffering suggest about the depth of the spiritual issues at stake and their seriousness? Do you think a softer, gentler message would be more effective?

What is our role in making sure these messages are proclaimed to a dying planet?

Revelation 14:14-20

The two harvests suggest a time of dividing, much like the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. The harvester of the righteous is Christ himself and the first harvest is implied to be wheat, while an angel reaps a second harvest of grapes (of wrath). Revelation 19:15 says it is Jesus, however, that presses out the winepress of God's wrath. While some consider this the 2nd coming language, it may also describe the ripening of God's people under the 3rd angel's messages before the final judgment, while the ripening of the grapes experience the gathering described in Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). Jesus' parables related to growing wheat are certainly applicable here, such as the sower and the seed, and the harvest language in the feasts of Passover and Pentecost.

These two harvests suggest there are only two types of people spiritually. Are you comfortable with this idea, that there is not a lot of gray area? What would be the dividing line between these two groups? What makes each group unique?

Closing Comments

Chapter 14 is a counterpoint to the Dragon's war and his allies in chs. 12-13. God has a last-day people and message, and desires that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance. God's messages even have a counterfeit in chapter 16 under the 6th plague, as we'll see. But God won't let Satan's propaganda win out.

Opening Question

Should we consider natural disasters on this earth “acts of God”?

Introduction

Revelation 15 pictures the saints of God, and introduces the seven last plagues and the fall of Babylon. The plague motif here recalls God’s people in Egypt and their deliverance, as well as their exile in Babylon and deliverance there (referenced in the 6th plague). The plagues are a final preparation for the deliverance of God’s people in the language of His deliverance in the past. If you know *how* God has rescued in history, you will see him doing it again.

The Text:

Revelation 15:1-8

Once again, the Most Holy Place (temple of the tabernacle of the testimony) is open, but now angels are coming out, and nobody can enter it. This suggests that the priestly intercession is complete, and that as the priest came out of the temple with blood to finally rid the temple of sins gathered through the year, so Christ has finished his atonement for the sanctuary.

God sends the plagues as a response to His final judgement, and they fall on the seat of the beast and his throne. There were 10 plagues in Egypt; the first three fell on the whole land, including Goshen and God’s people. But after this, the next seven fell only on Egypt, or God made an allowance for all to be saved from it (10th plague).

Throughout both Old and New Testaments, this idea is presented, but many don’t accept an angry God who is supposed to be all love. How do you reconcile these two ideas? How would you describe God’s “wrath” or “anger”?

Revelation 16:1-11

Unlike the seals and trumpets, we do not see a lengthening of time before the last seal or trumpet (almost like God is delaying the end in His mercy). These continue one after the next. The word for “bowls” here is the same as that used in 5:8 to describe the bowls filled with incense which are the prayers of the saints. The final judgements of God poured out, then, are related to the prayers of God’s people; perhaps another reference to the 5th seal.

1. Those who receive the mark of the beast receive a painful “mark” or sore. Thus the sore is directly related to the mark, showing that if you receive the mark of the beast, it’s really a painful thing.
2. The sea in Revelation represents the people of earth, and now everything is turned to blood. The blood of the saints was spilled, now in the 2nd and 3rd plagues turn all liquid to blood.
3. The fresh water, representing spiritual life, is now undrinkable, too. Verse 5-7 explain why God gives blood to drink, and also a clue as to how to understand these plagues more broadly: God is giving the people what they have asked for, only now they see it in its true light. Much like Israel crying out for meat in the wilderness and God giving them so much

quail it “came out their nostrils,” so God is giving the wicked exactly what they want. They’ve wanted blood to drink, so God is giving it to them. Everything is now blood!

4. As in Ezekiel 7-9, where Israel was worshipping the sun with their back to the temple of God, we now see that the sun that people have worshipped is made too strong for humans to handle. It scorches them. They asked for the sun (a hint of the “Sun-day”?) and now they get it in abundance and it scorches them.
5. Verses 9-10 show the beast’s kingdom itself falling into darkness. They have taken the light of God away, and now their own kingdom is shown to be nothing but emptiness. There is no light or truth in it. It causes people much pain.
6. The 6th plague is a fascinating one. The drying up of the River Euphrates, the support for the city of Babylon, recalls Cyrus’—called a “messiah” in Isaiah—capture of Belteshazzar’s (grandson of Nebuchadnezzar) throne by diverting the river under the city. Cyrus was the King that let Israel go back to their homeland, and so will Christ when He comes back. We see three frogs mimicking the three angels in ch. 14 summon people to war. The final battle of “Armageddon” isn’t a war for oil in the Middle East or a battle for an earthly kingdom; the word comes from “har”=mountain, and “Megiddo”=the city at the base of Mt. Carmel. This is the Elijah battle with the prophets of Baal, that is, the final showdown to decide who is god and worthy of worship. In 1 Kings 18, however, God rains down fire; here, fire will probably come from the False Prophet (see Rev. 13), and will deceive many. Embedded parenthetically in this plague is a reminder of Christ’s return, a call to Laodicea: stay awake and stay clothed!
7. The final plague brings the fall of Babylon just as Jericho fell at the last trumpet call.

What evidence do you see for interpreting the plagues . . . literally? . . . symbolically? What does God gain by sending the plagues, from which nobody repents? How does this event parallel Pharaoh’s response to God, when the text says that both Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and that God hardened his heart?

Closing Comments

These final plagues are good news for the people of God because they prepare the way for His coming. With Babylon’s fall, God’s people are finally free from the clutches of evil.

Opening Question

Should we rejoice when a criminal is brought to justice?

Introduction

Revelation 17-18 show the fall of Babylon, the arch-type enemy of God. Beginning with the tower in Genesis 11, that region and that attitude have symbolized opposition to God throughout the Old Testament. Babylon becomes the nation that harasses Israel, steals the vessels from their temple, ravishes their city, and takes them exile. Babylon is also the tool that God uses to punish His people. But God has people in Babylon—sometimes even the King of the pagan city himself!—and so the message is given to “come out of Babylon” before it falls, because fall it will.

The Text:

Revelation 17:1-18

Without question, this is a difficult passage, and the angel’s explanation doesn’t seem to give a lot more help initially. Stefanovic provides a helpful perspective, but a point worth considering here is that John is taken in vision into a wilderness, and he sees a woman. We saw the woman who birthed the Messiah (the church, then) in ch. 12 flee to a wilderness, and she has children. But now the woman in the wilderness isn’t dressed with sun and moon and stars. Now she looks like royalty and acts like a prostitute. She has children—daughters—who are also prostitutes. The language parallels that of Israel when she went astray in the Old Testament and God called her a prostitute. Certainly this imagery must be included in the identity of Babylon the Great. The fallen and apostate religious aspect is central to her reign of terror and drinking the blood of the saints.

Stefanovic likewise is helpful in explaining the end-time alliance between Babylon and the Beast. The sexual language is hard to miss here, but the point is the affair is both an abomination and brings bad results for God’s people.

In the end, the woman is hated (think Absalom and his sister Tamar), and the kings of the earth turn on her. In Ellen White’s description of this scene in the Great Controversy, the deceived masses turn on their religious leaders after they realize their error. It is a chilling reminder of how serious it is to think for ourselves, to study the Word of God personally, and not to take someone else’s theories as gospel without prayerful examination.

Do you see a joining of religious thought with secular power today? Without resorting to conspiracy theories, do you see how it might happen in our day, or might there be obstacles in the way of this kind of alliance that would mirror the Dark Age church-state power?

Revelation 18:1-24

The final scenes of Babylon’s fall in Revelation seem to be an amalgamation of prophecies from Isaiah (see ch. 47), Jeremiah (chs. 50-52), and Ezekiel, not just about Babylon,

but also of Egypt and Tyre. Each of the major prophets groaned over these wicked cities' roles in Israel's distress, and each spoke about the cities' fall.

Revelation looks at the fall of Babylon from two perspectives: first, that of the Kings of the Earth who grew rich from their relationship with her. Their response is one of loss, grief, and lament. The second perspective is that of the righteous and heaven in verse 20-24; it is the sound of rejoicing because all that Babylon has stood for—the nation that harassed and leveled Israel, Jerusalem that slaughtered prophets and crucified Jesus, Rome that murdered the apostles, the Papacy that massacred saints and reformers, and an end-time confederacy that will do the same—this Babylon is finally destroyed once and for all.

Is it appropriate to rejoice over Babylon's fall? If Babylon isn't a literal city, but is a system of opposition to God that has killed His people, does it better explain the rejoicing here, and at the beginning of ch. 19?

Closing Comments

The fall of Babylon is the final opposition to God's people's deliverance. The people of earth recognize her as the charlatan that she is, masquerading as Christ Himself. Her deceptions are unmasked. Those who have followed her will recognize in the true Messiah the rightful King, even though they refused to receive a love of the truth (2 Thess. 2) when they had the opportunity. This event is both sad and joyous. The closing scenes of the great controversy are playing out, and Christ is about to come and get His people.

Opening Question

What does a perfect world look like to you?

Introduction

This lesson attempts to take in chapters 19-22, a huge amount of material. It can be broken down into a couple parts:

Chapter 19 with the two suppers. One is desirable to be a part of; the other? Not so much. In this chapter, we see Christ come to get His bride as the hero on a white horse and vanquish his enemies, the conclusion to every good novel or movie.

Chapter 20 is all about the millennium and the events that immediately precede and follow it. There is a sense of finality to the judgment here with the lake of fire.

Revelation 21-22 presents a world that takes the Old Testament prophecies of restoration and expands them. Take for instance Isaiah 65 where there is still death hinted at in the restored world and compare it with Revelation where even death is abolished. The hopes of ancient Israel and God’s modern Israel (the church) are fulfilled in the final restoration. A New Heavens and New Earth restores Eden to God’s people.

The Text:

Revelation 19:1-10

Verses 1-5 seem to be a continuation of rejoicing over the fall of Babylon from ch. 18. The moral question remains if it is right to rejoice over someone else’s suffering. . .

Verses 6-10 speak of the first supper—the marriage supper of the lamb. A challenge presented here is the identity of the bride. God’s bride in the Old Testament is his people, and in several places, Ellen White says the same, but in ch. 21, the bride is the New Jerusalem. If the city is also symbolic of the “people”, then there isn’t a problem here. But who, then, are those invited to the marriage supper if not the people of God? Is this the distinction between God’s final generation who go through the great tribulation who constitute His bride, and the rest of the saved who are invited? Difficult questions, and maybe no easy answers. The good news is that we’re all invited to the marriage supper of the lamb.

John’s worship of the angel is surprising; he’ll do it again in 22:8. But it indicates how easy worship is, and how carefully we must guard against false worship.

God uses marriage language between himself and His people. What makes such imagery or metaphor so meaningful for us? What kind of intimacy does God wish to have with us?

Revelation 19:11-21

Jesus is now pictured as the conquering warrior, the “Word of God” (a phrase only used in the gospel of John and here, suggesting the same author), and the king of kings who wears many diadems.

The second supper is the “great supper of God” where the wicked, probably those who perish at His 2nd Coming because of His word (the sword from His mouth), are “fed to the birds.” The imagery is grotesque, but signifies the victory of Christ in saving his bride from the evil hordes.

How do you compare the picture of the meek and lowly Jesus of the gospels with this image of a conquering King at war? Does the picture of Jesus cleansing the temple contribute to this picture?

Revelation 20

This chapter alone might take several lessons, but here might be pointed out that God’s conclusion to the great controversy includes both the resurrection of the righteous at Christ’s coming, and a second resurrection. The wicked are raised, and I cannot help but think that the questions of the saints—what if they were given just *one* more chance?—may be answered by this resurrection. They are certainly given the autonomy to be deceived by Satan one last time, and though their decisions have been sealed previously, they are now made evident by the attack on the Holy City, that is, the “camp of the saints.” This language suggests the city and the people are the same.

The great white throne judgment in this chapter judges those not found in the book of life by their works. This is a fearful judgment, because unlike the righteous whose lives are hid in Christ and He stands in their place in the judgment, the wicked have no such advocate. They have only their own works to recommend or convict them. The sad conclusion is inevitable.

How important is it to make Christ’s righteousness and His declaration of ours through faith our daily confession and action? How does it feel to know that Christ has offered you His perfect life and death, that by believing/trusting in what He has done for me, I need not fear judgment?

Revelation 21-22

The last two chapters of Revelation allow our imaginations to run wild. No more pain, nor more sorrow, no more death. No separation between God and His followers. The plan of salvation is concluded, and there is no need for a temple any longer because there is no more sin. Exodus 25:8 is fulfilled—let them build me a sanctuary that I might dwell among them. God and His people are one.

The holy city is a materialistic “prize” for some Christians. But the language suggests we take the city symbolically as well. It is shaped like cube—the same shape as the most holy place in Solomon’s temple, and 12,000 stadia on a side, reminiscent of the 144,000 only larger (12,000 x 12,000=144,000,000 square stadia). The foundation of the apostle’s names recalls the “living temple” of the church with Christ as the chief cornerstone. The “adornment” of precious stones and gold is her beauty for her groom.

The city has a river running through the center and a tree growing there, much like Babylon (Euphrates river and the hanging gardens in the center) suggesting that this is the REAL city of which ancient Babylon attempted to be a sad, earthly copy or counterfeit. But this time, the city will last forever. Inside the city is the Tree of Life, recalling Eden, and the river flowing

from the very throne of God recaptures Jesus' promise to the woman at the well, and the Israelite visitors to Jerusalem on the feast of Tabernacles (Dedication) in John 10.

Will you be disappointed if you find out that the New Jerusalem is a symbol of God's church? Do you wish for a golden mansion, or is living in intimate proximity to our Savior enough?

Closing Comments

Revelation closes with a three-fold call: "behold I am coming soon." The book began with these words in 1:8 and now concludes the same way. Adventists of all types have been awaiting Jesus' return ever since He came the first time, and ascended after His resurrection. But perhaps this is why Revelation was given; God longs to be with us even more than we long to see Him, and He wants us to know what He's doing in the meantime.

Maranatha—come Lord Jesus!