

Revelation Unwrapped



Revelation 21:2, by artist Pat Wagner

Six studies from
the Bible's finale!



Six Studies from Revelation

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Introduction – Unwrapping Revelation

While Christians ought to always maintain that the Bible is clear enough for us to gather the main lines of God's message, it is true that some bits are a little trickier to understand than others. The Bible's final book, *the Book of Revelation*, is one such section. This book details the type of vivid imagery we'd expect from a Hollywood block-buster full of special effects; scenes depicting wonderful worlds beyond our imagination switch to scenes with horrible beasts bent on destruction. What are we to make of it all? Christians have come up with plenty of different options as to this book's message; the dazzling array of interpretations can be just as confusing as the imagery itself!

In the studies that follow, the following principles have been kept in mind as guidelines to help us understand what this wonderful book is getting at.

1. Revelation is Apocalyptic

Apocalyptic literature was a popular style of writing in the ancient world. Its influence can be seen in certain parts of the Old Testament, like the second half of Daniel and the opening chapters of Ezekiel. Revelation is a fully-blown example of this genre. The key to reading this style of writing is to know that *it's not literal!* The scenes are not real depictions, the numbers are not real amounts, and the beasts and figures are all representations. Apocalyptic writers wrote in a kind of code, with numbers and colours and characters all conveying a deeper meaning.

Having said this, it would be a mistake to think that this book doesn't talk about genuine realities, it's just that these realities are only spoken of using very heavy imagery. Of course, for people used to reading this type of writing the book would not have been nearly as mysterious as it is to us. They would have known what all the images represented, and would have been able to point to experiences in their own time which they felt were explained by what they were reading.

At the bottom of each study I've included a guide explaining the some of the imagery used in that week's passage.

2. Revelation is non-linear

It would be a mistake to read Revelation from beginning to end and conclude that all the events take place in chronological order. It is better to think of revelation as being like a sports broadcast. Sometimes the same event is replayed from various angles, and sometimes different parts of the action are shown from different parts of the field. On other occasions a replay might be shown from much earlier in the match, or from another match altogether! Yet each segment is shown in sequence on the screen during the broadcast.

3. Revelation isn't restricted to one age or realm.

Some might assume Revelation is all about what is going to happen in the future at the end of the world. And yes, *some* of what Revelation covers has to do with that. But sometimes the focus is on things that have *already happened* (e.g. chapter 12 seems to be about the birth of Jesus), and sometimes it's about things that are happening *right now* (ch. 6:1-11). As such Christians of every era find that Revelation explains things that have happened in their own experience. Likewise, the action isn't limited to one location. Through apocalyptic imagery we are shown what is true in heaven (e.g. ch. 4) as well as here on earth (e.g. ch. 13).

4. Revelation focuses on the gospel of Jesus

Despite all the wonderful pictures that are brought to mind by this book, its central concern remains something that should be familiar to all of us; the gospel (or message) about who Jesus is and what he has done for us. It follows that when reading this book, the best question we can ask is not "which event is this referring to?" or "what time is being spoken of here?" but rather "what aspect of the gospel is this passage addressing?"

I hope with these four principles in mind you are blessed by your reading of this wonderful part of God's word!

Study 1 - Unwrapping History

Rev 1:1-20

1. From what you know or have heard already, what do you think the book of Revelation is about?
2. Read Rev 1:1-3. What is a 'Revelation'? How does this describe the purpose of the book? Where does this revelation come from? Who is it for? Why should we study it?
3. Read Daniel 7:13-14, then Read Rev 1:4-7. In these verses, what is being said about a) Jesus' death, b) Jesus' authority?
4. What are Alpha and Omega (v8)? What is Jesus claiming for himself in this verse?
5. Read vs 9-11. Why is John on Patmos? Was John's experience unique? See 2 Tim 3:12.
6. Read from verse 12 to the end of the chapter. Who is it that John sees? How do you know? What is it that is being communicated about him?

7. What insight does v19 give us when reading the rest of Revelation?
8. How does this vision of Jesus inform our view of history? How is this vision “a blessing to those who hear (or ‘see’) it?”
9. Pray that our view of the world might be informed by this vision of the victorious Christ.

Know Your Apocalyptic Imagery!

7 : God, eternity, perfection

White : conquest, rule

Study 2 - Unwrapping God's glory

Rev 4:1-5:14

1. When was the last time you truly praised something or someone? Perhaps a performance? Maybe an achievement by someone you know? What leads us to offer praise?

2. Read Rev 4:1-5. What do we learn about God from the imagery used in these verses? What are we reminded of from the Old Testament? (see Gen 9:12-15, Exodus 19:16-19).

3. Read Rev 4:6-11. According to these verses, what is the purpose of creation? To put it another way, what reason do these verses give for glorifying God?

4. Move on to Rev 5:1-5. In the ancient world, Roman wills were written on both sides and sealed with seven seals. What kind of things do wills contain? What needs to happen for a will to be effective? Why might John be upset when there is no-one to open the scroll?

5. How does the imagery change between vs 5 and 6? What does this tell us about Jesus?

6. Read from v 7 to the end of the chapter. What is the Lamb able to do that no-one else can? What enables him to do this?

7. Why is praise offered to the Lamb?

8. What motivation lies behind your own praise and worship? Does it line up with the praise and worship here in Rev 4 and 5?

9. Are we ever in danger of overlooking the work of Christ on the cross? What place does this work have in God's throne room?

10. Spend some time praising God and giving him glory along the lines presented here in Rev 4 and 5.

Know Your Apocalyptic Imagery!

4 : the earth, God's creation

24 : God's people from every age.

1000 : A great number or a long period

10,000 : an extraordinarily large number or group or long period

Throne : authority

Eye : knowledge

Horn : power

Study 3 - Unwrapping Humanity

Rev 6:1-7:17

1. “I believe that the basic attribute of mankind is to look after each other” – Fred Hollows. How realistic is this point of view?
2. Read Rev 6:1-8. What human experiences are described as the first four seals are opened? Where do we see this happening today?
3. Read 6:9-11. What segment of humanity is described here? What encouragement is to be found in these verses?
4. Read 6:12-17. What day is being described? How is this day a fitting conclusion to what we’ve read so far in the chapter?
5. Move on to 7:1-4. Why is the programme of judgment stopped?
6. Read 7:9-10 and draw what you see. Make sure you depict the different characteristics that are described. Share your drawing with the group.

Revelation 7:9-10

7. What do these verses teach us about the nature of the church?

8. Read v11 through to the end of the chapter. As God's people, what can we look forward to?

9. How can humanity become truly glorious? Pray that more and more people might learn the truth about the human condition and about how we can truly reach our potential.

Know Your Apocalyptic Imagery!

Red : violence, terror

Black : famine

Pale (a kind of greyish green) : death

144,000 : A number so big it's hard to conceive. Embracing every member of God's people who has ever existed, now and in the future.

Study 4 - Unwrapping God's Enemy

Rev 12:1-13:10

1. What is the biggest threat to Christian faith today?
2. Read Rev 12.1-9. What imagery is used here to describe the woman? Who might she be?
3. What about the identity of the dragon?
4. What light do these verses shed on the Christmas story?
6. What do vs 10-12 teach us about the Devil? Why ought we be wary of him? How can we triumph over him?
8. What do verses 13-17 teach us about the Devil's intentions?
9. Read 13.1-10. What is the relationship between the dragon and the beast? What does it tell us about the Devil's methods?

10. What effect does the beast have on people? Who is the beast violent towards?

11. Who might the first readers have associated with the beast? Who or what might be acting as a beast today? What should we do in response?

12. Pray for “patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people”

Know Your Apocalyptic Imagery!

12 : God’s people, either OT (12 tribes) or NT (12 apostles)

Beast : human authority in service of the dragon

42 months (1260 days) : a little unclear, but amounts to 3.5 years (half of seven, so a figure less than eternity). The idea is perhaps a limited—as opposed to an eternal—amount of time.

Unwrapping God's Judgment

Rev 19:11-20:15

1. What was the most decisive victory (or defeat!) you have ever been a part of? Whose side were you on?

2. Read Rev 19:11-16. How does this vision compare with what John sees in 1:12-16? Who is being depicted here?

3. Read 19:17-21. What is the Beast's goal (v19)? What is the outcome? Does it seem quick or prolonged? How do these verses encourage you to remain faithful to Jesus?

4. What does v21 tell us about how God's enemies are to be defeated? How does this inform our ministry as a church?

5. Read 20:1-4. This chapter has caused much confusion for Christians. What ought we remember about apocalyptic literature at this point.

6. According to vs 4-5, when does the 1000 years begin (see also Eph 2:4-7)? Read through to v10. What happens at the end of the 1000 years? How would you describe the Devil's defeat?

7. According to 20:7-10, what happens at the end of the 1000 years? How would you describe the Devil's defeat?

8. Who faces judgement in vs 11-15? On what account are they judged?

9. Do these verse teach salvation by what we do? Why or why not?

10. How might we as Christians today respond to these chapters? Think of three things, and pray that God might empower you to live them out.

Study 6 - Unwrapping the age to come

Rev 21:1-22:21

1. Have you ever heard a vision statement that is truly inspiring?
2. What does John see in Rev 21:1-2? Who is usually describes as a bride in the Bible? What does this suggest is represented by the Holy City?
3. How is this conclusion established by vs 3-8? What about 9-13? How does this focus compare to our usual thoughts about the age to come?
4. Read 21:15-21. How long is 12,000 stadia (check your bible's footnotes if it has them)? What distance would this have meant to an ancient person? What does it say about God's Holy City?
5. What is significant about all the precious stones? See Gen 2:11-12 and Exodus 28:15-21.
6. Read 21:22-27. What is significant about a city bathed in perpetual light? See Gen 1:1, John 3:19-20).

7. Read 22:1-5. How does this scene compare with Gen 2:8-9. Is it true to say that the age to come will be a return to the Garden of Eden?

8. How often do you meditate over God's vision and promise of the age to come? What difference to our discipleship would it make to keep on revisiting this vision?

9. Read 22:6-21, and list the different responses to this vision that are called forth from us. Which responses have you already adopted? Is there one in particular that you are lacking?

10. Share some new insight about the book of Revelation that you have learnt from this series of studies. Pray that the truth of Revelation might stay with us and always guide us to choose faithfulness to the Lamb every time we are challenged.

Leaders' notes

Study 1 - Unwrapping History

Rev 1:1-20

1. From what you know or have heard already, what do you think the book of Revelation is about?

Most will think it's about the disastrous end of the world. Perhaps also ask "What about the word 'apocalypse'?" But answers like "it's about what is really happening in the world, even right now" or "the gospel" are also true; the 'end' of all things is only part of it.

2. Read Rev 1:1-3. What is a 'Revelation'? How does this describe the purpose of the book? Where does this revelation come from? Who is it for? Why should we study it?

A revelation is when something is brought to light, revealed, made known. This book is revealing something that is ordinarily hidden, ie the reality of what is going on in heaven and in our world, now and in the future, even though we cannot see it.

3. Read Daniel 7:13-14, then Read Rev 1:4-7. In these verses, what is being said about a) Jesus' death, b) Jesus' authority?

Daniel speaks about Jesus as the Son of Man, the one who is given authority before the Ancient of Days (God the Father). Jesus death frees us from sin to serve God (v5-6). Note also those who killed Jesus will see him as King (v7). His death was not a final defeat. Jesus' authority is all pervasive.

4. What are Alpha and Omega (v8)? What is Jesus claiming for himself in this verse?

The first and last letters of the ancient Greek alphabet. He is the beginning and the end (the a-z), the Lord of all history and all things.

5. Read vs 9-11. Why is John on Patmos? Was John's experience unique? See 2 Tim 3:12.

Because he has been persecuted for preaching the word and testifying about Jesus. No, this is not unique; note what Paul says in 2 Tim 3:12.

6. Read from verse 12 to the end of the chapter. Who is it that John sees? How do you know? What is it that is being communicated about him?

John sees Jesus. Verse 13 'like a son of Man' gives this away, as does v 18. White is symbolic of victory. He rules the churches (seven lampstands and stars). Even though people tried to kill him (and are killing his followers), he remains victorious on a scale unimaginable.

7. What insight does v19 give us when reading the rest of Revelation?

The book is not only about the end of all things, it's about the period of time from Jesus death and resurrection onwards, including what is happening today!

8. How does this vision of Jesus inform our view of history? How is this vision "a blessing to those who hear (or 'see') it?"

Behind history is standing one who will remain victorious and alive forever and ever. Politicians and media commentators speak about being on 'the right side of history', but they mean human history, which is the history of the humanly strong and powerful; those who win whatever cultural battle we are facing at the moment. The 'right side of history' is actually that which is aligned with the ultimate victor, Jesus.

The vision is a blessing because it shows us where truth and strength really reside, and is an encouragement to remain loyal to Christ despite the various pressure we encounter.

9. Pray that our view of the world might be informed by this vision of the victorious Christ.

Study 2 - Unwrapping God's glory

Rev 4:1-5:14

1. When was the last time you truly praised something or someone? Perhaps a performance? Maybe an achievement by someone you know? What leads us to offer praise?

The aim of the study is to catch a glimpse of why God is glorious, and therefore why it is we should offer praise.

2. Read Rev 4:1-5. What do we learn about God from the imagery used in these verses? What are we reminded of from the Old Testament? (see Gen 9:12-15, Exodus 19:16-19).

The throne communicates God's authority, as do the jewels (think of Queen Elizabeth's crown jewels). The rainbow is a reminder of God's faithfulness in his promise of Gen 9. Lightning and rumbling of thunder reminds us of God's power displayed in Exodus 19. The clear sea of glass is an image of peace, very different to how the sea is depicted in the rest of the Bible – as a scary tumultuous place.

3. Read Rev 4:6-11. According to these verses, what is the purpose of creation? To put it another way, what reason do these verses give for glorifying God?

Creation is there to give God glory; God ought to be glorified because of what he has created. See Psalms 19, 104. Romans 1:20. Ask people whether they feel this way when they get out into nature. Don't spend too much time on this, because their heart of worship is in the following chapter

4. Move on to Rev 5:1-5. In the ancient world, Roman wills were written on both sides and sealed with seven seals. What kind of things do wills contain? What needs to happen for a will to be effective? Why might John be upset when there is no-one to open the scroll?

Wills contain inheritances and blessing from one generation to another. The will needs to be read and executed. John is upset because unless this scroll is read and acted upon the inheritance promised to God's people will go uncollected.

5. How does the imagery change between vs 5 and 6? What does this tell us about Jesus?

Jesus is spoken of as a lion, then as a lamb. It shows that his victory was achieved through weakness.

6. Read from v 7 to the end of the chapter. What is the Lamb able to do that no-one else can? What enables him to do this?

The lamb is able to open the scroll on account of his death. His death enables the promises of God to be distributed to his people.

7. Why is praise offered to the Lamb?

Because of his success in 'purchasing for God members of every tribe and language and people and nation'. Note the praise of the whole creation is focused on the lamb. This is worship's high point in the book, even more grand than the worship of the chapter before.

8. What motivation lies behind your own praise and worship? Does it line up with the praise and worship here in Rev 4 and 5?

Sometimes we worship because of how it effects us. But here worship is a response to who God is and what he has done, in particular the work of redemption by Jesus blood.

9. Are we ever in danger of overlooking the work of Christ on the cross? What place does this work have in God's throne room?

Sometimes our wonder and worship of God stops with the content of chapter 4. We praise God because of his power in creation, but Revelation wants us to focus in on Christ and his blood as the reason for worship. Sometimes churches can loose the focus on the cross, it becomes an embarrassment, or too familiar, or the need for good works takes the limelight, but ch 5 reminds us that it is the central topic of conversation in God's throne room, the most important event in all reality.

10. Spend some time praising God and giving him glory along the lines presented here in Rev 4 and 5.

Study 3 - Unwrapping Humanity

Rev 6:1-7:17

1. “I believe that the basic attribute of mankind is to look after each other” – Fred Hollows. How realistic is this point of view?

Fred Hollows was an Australian eye surgeon known for his good works among the world's poor. His point of view is common enough; people can have a remarkably positive view of humanity. But when watching the news on TV, how many good news items appear?

2. Read Rev 6:1-8. What human experiences are described as the first four seals are opened? Where do we see this happening today?

First seal: white horse representing victory. This is the victorious conquering of human leaders. Of course, victory like this results in many casualties. Second seal: red horse representing violence; humans are killing each other. Third seal: black representing famine. Not just the natural causes of famine, but the human corruption that make natural famines even worse. Note verse 6, these are exorbitant prices, yet the rider wants to maintain luxuries such as oil and wine. The image here is of some enjoying privilege while others are made to suffer. Fourth seal: pale representing death, the end result of the first three seals.

The activity described in these verses has both a human and divine nature. On one level this is human violence, but there is an element of God's hand as well, for the scroll has come from God (5:1). God is issuing judgment on sinful humanity through human agents, and he remains in control of the situation.

Ask the group for some modern-day examples. This is one place where we see Revelation speaking into every age. Is God judging humanity through the terrible events we see on the news? Quite possibly! But it's too difficult to interpret each and every event in this way for sure.

3. Read 6:9-11. What segment of humanity is described here? What encouragement is to be found in these verses?

These are those humans who retain belief in God's word and maintain a true testimony. Despite the mess that human beings find themselves in, these people have kept their belief in God, even though they have been singled out for a particular type

of suffering. Encouragement is found in God not being blind to their faithfulness, and in him promising a final victory (note white robe)

4. Read 6:12-17. What day is being described? How is this day a fitting conclusion to what we've read so far in the chapter?

It would seem that this is the day of judgment that is being described (Note especially v17). The imagery here is the same in other NT passages where it seems that Christ's return is being spoken of (Matt 24:29-30). This is fitting end to what has gone before because it shows that God is not indifferent to the suffering that we humans can inflict upon one another; he will bring justice to bear upon those who take advantage of others (note who is included in v15).

5. Move on to 7:1-4. Why is the programme of judgment stopped?

To place a protective seal on God's faithful people. Maybe ask about the significance of 144,000. It simply means a very VERY large number of believers. Jehovah's Witnesses believe this number to be literal.

6. Read 7:9-10 and draw what you see. Make sure you depict the different characteristics that are described. Share your drawing with the group.

A chance for those who are more artistically inclined to engage with a piece of the Bible. You should always feel free to include activities like this even when the study doesn't call for it!

7. What do these verses teach us about the nature of the church?

It is multinational in scope; no room for racism in the church! Also reminds us of the importance of world mission. The church is ultimately victorious (note the white robe again), despite its weak appearance. Note the reason for worship in v10 is the salvation won for us by Christ (as we saw last week).

8. Read v11 through to the end of the chapter. As God's people, what can we look forward to?

God's protection as part of his family (spreading his tent v 15); no hunger or thirst, no suffering, eternal life (living water v 17).

9. How can humanity become truly glorious? Pray that more and more people might learn the truth about the human condition and about how we can truly reach our potential.

By washing our robes in the blood of the Lamb. This is the path to the best type of human existence possible. Without this, we are left with a destructive and pitiful human nastiness.

Study 4 - Unwrapping God's Enemy

Rev 12:1-13:10

1. What is the biggest threat to Christian faith today?

The idea behind this study is to recognise that the Devil is always at war against the church. As appropriate you may like to make references to verses like Eph 2:2, Eph 6:12, 1 Peter 5:8,

2. Read Rev 12.1-9. What imagery is used here to describe the woman? Who might she be?

The crown of 12 stars leads us to have God's people in mind. While we may be tempted to think of Mary, her character doesn't quite fit all that is described here. Jesus was a member of the Israelite nation, of the tribe of Judah, a descendent of David. In this way God's people have 'given birth' to him.

3. What about the identity of the dragon?

He is red in colour, meaning he is a violent figure. Verse 9 leaves us with no need to guess. The dragon is the Devil.

4. What light do these verses shed on the Christmas story?

Here we hear the truth behind the killing spree of Herod (Matt 2). It was the Devil who was at work through Herod, trying to kill Jesus as an infant. Like God, the Devil works through human agents, and does so even today (see Eph 2:2).

6. What do vs 10-12 teach us about the Devil? Why ought we be wary of him? How can we triumph over him?

He is in the business of accusing Christians of wrong doing; he has been expelled from Heaven; he seeks to cause havoc here on earth. We triumph over him by trusting in the blood of Jesus and by maintaining our testimony in Christ. This will keep us from claiming victory over us in the long run.

8. What do verses 13-17 teach us about the Devil's intentions?

He wants to destroy God's people (1 Peter 5:8). If we are defining the Woman as God's people, then v 17 may seem a little confusing. Perhaps the best way to understand this is to see the woman as representing the first generation of Christian believers after Christ, a generation that experienced much persecution under various Roman emperors and their deputies.

9. Read 13.1-10. What is the relationship between the dragon and the beast? What does it tell us about the Devil's methods?

The dragon has commissioned the beast to do his work (v2). This tells us that the Devil uses agents other than himself.

10. What effect does the beast have on people? Who is the beast violent towards?

The beast is successful in charming and gathering the whole world as his followers. He is violent towards God (by verbal blasphemy), and against his people by waging war against them.

11. Who might the first readers have associated with the beast? Who or what might be acting as a beast today? What should we do in response?

One theory is that the first readers would have readily identified the beast as the Roman Government, who under Nero and Domitian persecuted the church (the second beast of chapter 14 could easily be the regional governors who carried out Rome's business on the Empire's edges). Revelation is telling us that this persecution was in fact the Devil's work.

Given that the Devil is still active, it follows that every generation has its 'beasts'. Wherever there are human powers who persecute Christians and enforce an ungodly agenda, there the Devil is working through his human agents. Note 13:8 doesn't leave any room for neutral ground, you either worship the beast or have your name in the Lamb's book of life.

Our response? Maintain our faithfulness, even if it means death! Might be worth discussing how we humans often give up our faithfulness for much less; the Devil doesn't have to work too hard to defeat us it seems!

12. Pray for “patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people”.

Unwrapping God’s Judgment

Rev 19:11-20:15

1. What was the most decisive victory (or defeat!) you have ever been a part of? Whose side were you on?

Maybe a sporting event, maybe a political election. Perhaps (and this might need to be dealt with sensitively) a member of your group has actually been in a real military battle. One aim of this study is to comprehend the decisive nature of Christ’s ultimate victory and judgment; it will be complete and comprehensive.

2. Read Rev 19.11-16. How does this vision compare with what John sees in 1:12-16? Who is being depicted here?

The vision is similar, note the eyes like fire and the sword coming out of the figure’s mouth. As in chapter 1, it isn’t hard to see that this figure is Jesus (esp vs 13, 16).

3. Read 19:17-21. What is the beast’s goal (v19)? What is the outcome? Does it seem quick or prolonged? How do these verses encourage you to remain faithful to Jesus?

The beast’s goal is to gather people to make war against Jesus and his followers. However, it is a forlorn hope. The call to the birds in vs 17-18 before the battle indicates that the outcome is predetermined. The battle is no epic, all that is reported is that ‘the beast was captured’.

These verses remind us that siding with the beast is one sure way to end up on the ‘wrong side of history’ No matter what the beast is able to achieve in this life, the end result is defeat. It is worth maintaining our faith in Jesus.

4. What does v21 tell us about how God’s enemies are to be defeated? How does this inform our ministry as a church?

We note that it is by the word of Jesus that the enemies of God are defeated (note the sword comes out of Christ's mouth). Thus preaching the Gospel is the way to do battle with the Devil. For some churches this is not enough, they seem more interested in casting out demons and conducting special prayer sessions aimed at ridding people of spiritual forces. Could such an approach actually be playing into the Devil's hand, given that it overlooks the battle plan presented by Revelation?

5. Read 20:1-4. This chapter has caused much confusion for Christians. What ought we remember about apocalyptic literature at this point?

It's a genre heavy in metaphor; the 1000 years are not literal! They are simply symbolic of 'a long period'.

6. According to vs 4-5, when does the 1000 years begin (see also Eph 2:4-7)? Read through to v10. What happens at the end of the 1000 years? How would you describe the Devil's defeat?

The 1000 years begin when the souls of those who have died in Christ were first raised to be with him in heaven. The rest of the New Testament speaks of this as having already occurred (Luke 23:43), having begun when we place our faith in Christ (Eph 2:4-7).

Verse 5 is difficult, and makes it seem as if only the martyrs exist with Christ after death in this age, while the rest of us wait. But 1 Thess 4:13-14 reads as if the spirits of all believers are with Christ until the day of their physical resurrection. How then to make sense of verse 5? Place it in the context of the vision here in ch 20. In this vision there are only martyrs and those who worship the beast – it's not meant to be a comprehensive statement of all possible experiences of life after death. Like those who die in Christ peacefully, the martyrs will reign as spirits with Christ until the final resurrection, while as those who die worshipping the beast will not have this privilege. Verse 5 is simply John giving a 'heads-up' as to how this particular vision would pan out in vs 11-15, ie "I next saw those worshippers of the beast who were killed after the 1000 years were over; they too were raised and judged".

7. According to 20:7-10, what happens at the end of the 1000 years? How would you describe the Devil's defeat?

At the end of 1000 years the Devil is destroyed. Again, his defeat is no contest. Even though the number of people he has recruited are "like sand on the seashore" (v8), their end is simply and quickly described in half a verse "but fire came down and

deceived them.” Note also God’s judgement here seems to be motivated by love for his people (end of v9).

7. Who faces judgement in vs 11-15? On what account are they judged?

Note all walks of life are judged here. Just because one is rich in this life and another is poor doesn’t mean that either will get to by-pass the judgment of God. They are judged according to their works.

9. Do these verses teach that we are saved by what we do? Why or why not?

People are judged by works, but note there is more than one book! Books that record all our deeds are enough to send people to hell, but there is another book that can save us, the Lamb’s book of Life. Salvation is found in the Lamb and his sacrifice for us. This is enough to cover our life of bad deeds. But if we are not in the Lamb’s book then our poor deeds are all we have, and they’re not enough. In fact we will be condemned by them. So no, these verses don’t teach us that we are saved by our works. We are condemned by our works, but saved by Christ’s action for us. Those who have faith in Jesus have their name in the book of Life.

How can we be sure our name is in the Book of Life? Look at Rev 3:1-5; Keeping the words we have received from God and repenting in light of them.

10. How might we as Christians today respond to these chapters? Think of three things, and pray that God might empower you to live them out.

Things might include: a renewed urgency in light of God’s judgement, a renewed commitment to the ministry of the word, a renewed concern for evangelism given the permanency of God’s judgment.

Study 6 - Unwrapping the age to come

Rev 21:1-22:21

1. Have you ever heard a vision statement that is truly inspiring?

In business speak, a vision statement is a picture of the future that a company or organisation wants to achieve. The purpose of this study is to catch a glimpse of the future that God has in store for us, and to be motivated by what we see!

2. What does John see in Rev 21:1-2? Who is usually describes as a bride in the Bible? What does this suggest is represented by the Holy City?

He sees a Holy City coming to earth. Usually it is the people of God who is described as a bride. The city represents God's people, not a physical reality.

3. How is this conclusion established by vs 3-8? What about 9-13? How does this focus compare to our usual thoughts about the age to come?

Note the repeated claim that God is now with his people (v 3, 7). Note also the imagery of 12 tribes and 12 apostles (v 12, 14). The focus here is on the relational reality that will manifest itself in the age to come, not necessarily the physical realities (although, these are something to look forward to as well). Often we are obsessed with physical things: how we look, what we eat, what we wear. Often relational things take a back seat. We can carry this focus over into our thinking about the age to come. But the focus here is the opposite.

4. Read 21:15-21. How long is 12,000 stadia (check your bible's footnotes if it has them)? What distance would this have meant to an ancient person? What does it say about God's Holy City?

About 2,200 km, which would have been the length of the known world to the average ancient person living on the Mediterranean. The City fills the known universe! God's people will fill the earth; the command of Gen 1:28 will be finally fulfilled!

5. What is significant about all the precious stones? See Gen 2:11-12 and Exodus 28:15-21.

Precious stones were symbolic of God's good creation in Genesis, and also they formed part of the breastplate for the high priest in the temple. Both the garden in Genesis and the temple were places where God dwelt. This age to come will have God find his final dwelling place among his people.

6. Read 21:22-27. What is significant about a city bathed in perpetual light? See Gen 1:1, John 3:19-20).

Darkness symbolised chaos and evil. These things will be banished from the age to come.

7. Read 22:1-5. How does this scene compare with Gen 2:8-9. Is it true to say that the age to come will be a return to the Garden of Eden?

Note in Genesis there was one tree of life, in the age to come they will be plentiful. It is not true to say the age to come will be like the garden; it will be even better!

8. How often do you meditate over God's vision and promise of the age to come? What difference to our discipleship would it make to keep on revisiting this vision?

Remember that this vision was written for people who were suffering persecution. How might we benefit from it?

9. Read 22:6-21, and list the different responses to this vision that are called forth from us. Which responses have you already adopted? Is there one in particular that you are lacking?

Keep the words of prophesy (v7, 18-19), worship God (v9), continue to do what is right (v11), wash our robes (v14), receive the gift of the water of life (v17).

10. Share some new insight about the book of Revelation that you have learnt from this series of studies. Pray that the truth of Revelation might stay with us and always guide us to choose faithfulness to the Lamb every time we are challenged.

